

Writing Nature in Hebrew Literature: An Ecofeminist Reading.

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Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

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Abstract

Nature in literature is often seen as a given, either a simple backdrop, or a means to reflect back some aspect of character, plot or theme. Yet, ecofeminists show, the construction of nature put forward by the literary hegemony has an effect on the way in which we conceptualise both our relationship with the natural world, and our relationships with one another. Indeed, the oppression of the human 'other' and the domination of the natural 'other' have their origins in the very same source, and work to reinforce, legitimise and naturalise one another. In this thesis, I analyse Hebrew literature, putting nature at the forefront. In doing so, I extract three competing but supposedly complementary modes of viewing nature by the Zionist hegemony: as 'barren wilderness', as a 'lover' or 'bride', and as a 'mother'. Paying attention to the gendered associations implicit in all three of these modes, I use Karen Warren's 'Logic of Domination' as a conceptual key to investigate the interplay between gender, nation and nature in modern Hebrew literature. In doing so, I uncover an underlying tension in the threefold Zionist reading of nature, one which threatens to undermine the very model of the man-nature relationship that it creates. The Zionists wished to rescue the land from its perceived state of abandonment, barrenness, and abuse via their mastery and cultivation of it, to redeem it through 'conquest of the wilderness'. Yet in doing so, I argue, they did not truly redeem nature from its fallen state, but simply re-imprisoned it in new chains of their own making: those of the hegemonic Zionist discourse. Nature for and of itself was not truly seen, but merely co-opted to serve the 'redemption' of the Jewish nation. Reading Meir Shalev's *The Blue Mountain (Roman Rusi)* and other texts through an ecofeminist lens, I investigate the workings of this layered discourse, and its implications both for nature and for Zionism's other 'others'.

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1. Nature in Hebrew literature: A Paradox

“We are woman and nature. And he says he cannot hear us speak.”¹

Nature for the Zionist is the beloved towards whom they have longed in the centuries of diaspora, the damsel in distress calling out to be saved by her Jewish hero-knight, the blushing maiden to conquer through devoted work and songs of seduction. And yet she is also naked, angry and depraved, shrieking out of the wilderness, launching unhinged attacks on those who attempt to tame her, seductive, tricky and manipulative, a whirlwind of chaotic passion and chasm of barrenness, death and destruction. And that is still not all: nature is also a mother, selfless, endlessly generous, belly swollen with fat fruits always ready to harvest, breast engorged with milk, and bursting with new life, a gentle riot of nurturing creation.

These three feminine personifications of nature are rarely – though not never – explicit, yet they permeate Zionist conceptions of the land of Israel and the natural world contained within her from the private diaries of the early pioneers right through to works of modern literature. Each of these is familiar, comfortable, it seems almost to be a cliché, a natural, obvious way of relating to nature. And yet they also appear to be opposites: Nature is barren yet fertile, balanced yet chaotic, nurturing yet destructive. She is both an inviting, timid lover begging to be seduced and mastered, and a sexually voracious yet hostile, uncontrollable witch.

So much scholarship on Zionism deals with uncovering paradoxes and tensions inherent within it, yet this great paradox of nature remains largely unexamined – is nature a nurturing mother, a seductive bride, or a barren and wanton whore? How can these three strands co-exist together? It is clear that in spite of the heavy emphasis the Zionist movement placed on the ‘return to nature’ and cultivation of the land, and in spite of an implicit awareness and perpetuation of these three threads by Zionist writers and thinkers, they were not considered to be contradictory, but rather complementary. That is to say, despite its strong tendency towards navel-gazing, a problematisation of this three-fold conception of nature did not materialise in mainstream Zionist thought in the same way that a problematisation of other Zionist conceptions (such as the relationship with the indigenous Arab population) did.

¹ Susan Griffin, *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1978, p. 1.

This begs the question, then, of why our ideas about nature, and why those found in the threefold Zionist reading of nature in particular, are so resistant to analysis. The source of this lack of introspection can be found, I would like to argue, at least in part in the power of this appeal to the feminine. If nature is a woman, the associations bundled up with the concept are bolstered by those connected with women, and these too are beset by the same tension: in a patriarchal conception, woman is at once whore, lover and mother, and can oscillate between these three personas according to how well they fit the model of what the social hegemony wishes to project onto them.

Notably, when we lay out the three prominent ways of reading nature in the Zionist conception – as Barren Wilderness, as Lover/Bride and as Mother Land – we find that despite the important differences between what each of these three modes tells us about nature, there is a key similarity. While each strand appears to pull in different directions, leading towards different conclusions as to the ‘nature’ of nature and how it should be approached by the Zionist (implied male) subject, they are all agreed on one thing: Nature is a woman and she is defined by her relationship to man.

I would like to argue that this paradox, though touched upon in passing by other scholars, is one which deserves a thorough analysis, spanning as it does ecological and gendered concerns. It is my central claim that the Zionist conception of their environment, though a fundamental building-block of the ideology, was fraught with tensions and contradictions from the very start. In a society for which forging a relationship with the natural landscape was of supreme importance, which taught its children to ritualistically explore and cultivate *yedi’at ha-arets* (‘knowledge of the land’) and frequently likened its native born to wild plants, ‘redeeming’ the land nonetheless – paradoxically and unproblematically – required subduing, controlling and changing it, often beyond all recognition. Here we uncover a central irony in the Zionist nature narrative – in setting out to release this ‘damsel in distress’ from her chains of servitude and neglect, the pioneers simply forced her into new chains of their own making. Redemption as they conceived of it required the renewed subjugation of the very thing they wished to redeem.

1.1. Scope and Tools of This Thesis

In this thesis it is my intention to outline three separate strands in the Israeli reading of nature, and to analyse the ways in which they work together. In doing so, I will draw heavily on contemporary scholarship on space, gender and nationhood not in order to revolutionise their findings, but to uncover a subtle gendered paradox beneath the surface which links these studies together, and which puts the often marginalised or taken for granted nature at the centre.

In this study, I use the words 'nature', 'land' and 'landscape' in an interrelated way. This is of course not to say that these concepts refer to the same thing, and I will disentangle their meanings here.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'nature' as follows:

The phenomena of the physical world collectively; esp. plants, animals, and other features and products of the earth itself, as opposed to humans and human creations.²

The first thing to note here is that nature is generally conceived in opposition to humanity and the creations of humanity. Moreover, it is conceived in terms of body, corporality. It is the physical side of things to which humans add mind, abstraction, and art. Often contained within this distinction is a hint of denigration, nature is 'just' the physical, the 'ground' out of which the higher can be constructed. Of course, this is not because body is inherently inferior to mind, but because this is the way we have laid out our conceptual framework. This point will become key in the ecofeminist analysis I introduce later. Another aspect of the word's common usage that is of relevance to this study is the sense of nature as alive, as pertaining to the cycle of birth and death. However, for now we should note that 'nature' refers not just to living things but also beyond that, encompassing weather, geological processes and physical features of the landscape, but generally *excludes* the human.

When talking about Israel, it is 'land' – in the sense of a territorially bound place of spiritual or national identification – that is the primary focaliser through which nature is encountered. That is, the natural 'content' of the space, which encompasses both flora and fauna, physical geographical features and environments such as mountains, rivers, swamp and desert, and natural weather events such as rain, drought and *hamsin*, is subsumed into the loaded category of 'land', a place towards which to yearn, with which to identify, or which master and change. As we shall see, 'land' can also often implicitly include the people living in that space, whether its Jewish 'natives' or the indigenous Arab population. I use the word 'land', then, to talk about the interplay between the physical elements of nature and the symbolic or other meaning applied to it. Moreover, the term 'land' adds a territorial, or bounded layer onto the more general concept of 'nature'. In a general sense, when Zionists related to nature, it was in most cases a localised relation to 'land', with the bounded territorial meaning, and not to a more globally interconnected environment. Relation to non-Israeli landscapes/environments, where they appear in Israeli literature, generally have a 'there-versus-here' meaning, in which an immigrant deals with a tearing of identification with their place of

² "nature, n." in OED Online, Oxford University Press, 2020. Retrieved 4/2/21 from www.oed.com/view/Entry/125353.

birth and the new land, or where non-Israeli natural landscapes are used to say something about Israeli ones.

Similarly, 'landscape' relates to 'land' and 'space', highlighting the inanimate aspects of nature. Where 'space' can reference any interplay between the symbolic- and physical-spatial (e.g. a cityscape), 'nature' is generally held in opposition to the human. While this is a distinction which may be problematised, the hegemonic conception of 'nature' encompasses aspects of but is not limited to the hegemonic conception of 'space', 'place' or 'landscape'. Importantly, it also incorporates living elements, which must necessarily be recognised as more than simply what is projected onto them by the hegemonic narrative.

Though nature and land have played a very central role in Zionist movement, it is surprising to find that they have not been that heavily discussed in literary scholarship, nor do they appear as major themes that often in Israeli literature. Why, when the entire thrust of the movement was predicated on the 'return' to the land and 'oneness with nature', did nature itself feature as a topic so rarely? My argument is that nature was not seen for itself so much as a symbol of Selfhood or Otherhood. That is, the 'return to nature' was not really the point, so much as a mirror to the true transformation the Zionist movement sought, which was the return to *nation*. This is certainly not to say that the Zionists did not have a strong emotional reaction to nature/land. Diary entries and accounts of pioneers show a true obsession with and desire for physical bond with the land which was at times even quasi-sexual.³ But this all-consuming passion was not always thematically echoed in their literary texts, particularly prose. Why is this? I will argue that it is because a way of organically relating to nature had not been fully worked out yet. Land was a muse, an inspiration, a direction to move towards and a source of identity, however there was very little concrete content embedded in the Zionist concepts of 'land' and 'nature'. What, exactly, were they to identify with? What would a nation living in an authentic relationship with its homeland look like? I argue that nature was pursued primarily as a symbol, and hence was not really 'seen' for itself but only for what it represented about the national Self.

The study uses an ecofeminist lens to explore the paradox outlined above. Though the term 'ecofeminist' suggests the privileging of the lens of gender in order to read nature, it in fact privileges an intersectional reading which takes into account the interrelatedness of structures of

³ Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011, p. 101.

domination. The goal of ecofeminism is to unlock our understanding of nature as a topic by examining how it intersects with gender and other hierarchical power relationships.

Since my focus is on hegemony and the means by which the twin pillars of domination of nature and woman are formulated, interwoven, distributed and maintained, it is my general aim to uncover the ways in which nature is read and used in mainstream Zionist thought. For much of Zionist history, this therefore refers to the hegemonic Zionist strand which arose out of the Labour Zionist kibbutz movement, and privileges the narrative and perspectives of a fairly small, elite group of pioneers. In doing so, I am of course leaving much out, in particular the perspectives of marginalised groups such as Arab-Israelis, non-Zionist migrants, and other, non-hegemonic strands of Zionist thought such as Revisionist Zionism. It is important to be aware that the Zionism to which I refer is not a monolithic, static entity, but a living ideology which contains within it many, oft-times contradictory, strands and individual perspectives. The nation that it projects is a complex, fluid, difficult to pin down 'imagined community'. Moreover, this particular strand of Zionism – indeed, even Zionism as an ideology – does not and has not ever necessarily constituted the view of the majority. Nonetheless, it has succeeded in shaping the discourse about nation and environment, and as such binds a large part of the associations that arise when we say 'Zionism' or even 'Israel'. The reading of nature contained within the Zionist conception, then, requires grappling with within that cultural context, whether that grappling is performed in order to uphold, modify or reject.

The scope of the thesis is fairly wide, investigating the hegemonic Zionist reading of nature for each of the three strands I have uncovered, and then considering how this reading has been adapted or criticised in more recent literary texts. I do not purport to provide a comprehensive study of nature across the entire span of modern Hebrew literature, but rather to explore in greater depth some recurring themes: nature as barren whore/demon, nature as lover/bride and nature as mother.

This study will focus on literature. While this is of course not the only means by which Israeli culture can be examined it is a rewarding one. This is both due to the unusually high status of literature in the Zionist movement, which persists to the present day – Israel has one of the highest reading rates in the world⁴ – and the means by which literature can capture not just the conscious but also the subconscious, that it weaves a narrative structure but also is a means of exploring and subverting narrative hegemonies.

⁴ Smadar Lavie, 'Blow-Ups in the Borderzones: Third World Israeli Authors' Gropings for Home' in Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (eds), *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996, p. 59.

To centre this thesis in a deeper, longer reading, I use Meir Shalev's fascinating, vibrant and complex novel *The Blue Mountain (Roman Rusi, 1988)*. The aim of doing so is to show that, even though these themes are not necessarily explicitly present, they lurk deep within the national consciousness and to engage with the question of nature and ecology requires engagement with these three tropes. I have chosen this particular novel because it straddles the middle ground between the construction and deconstruction of the Zionist hegemonic relationship with nature – it both perpetuates and mocks the myth of the pioneer and their relationship with the land, and both captures the Israeli enchantment with nature down to the smallest detail (e.g. the life cycles of insects) and uncovers some of the underlying tensions and disappointments involved in the man/land relationship. The novel explicitly concerns itself with narrative and – somewhat unusually – foregrounds the villagers' relationship with nature as a theme.

Now, having said that ecofeminism does not limit itself to the matter of gender as a key to reading nature, the three themes that I have drawn out of the Zionist reading of nature all hinge on gender as a major aspect: the land is consistently coded feminine, regardless of whether she is viewed in a negative or positive light. Reading nature as feminine is not something unique to the Israeli context, but overwhelmingly common the world over. Why are nature and the feminine conceptually bound together? An ecofeminist approach teaches us that the answer is the Logic of Domination, and it is with this as a conceptual key that I approach this thesis.

1.2. Ecocriticism as a Theoretical Field

Ecofeminism is a branch of ecocriticism, a relatively new field of literary studies, widely agreed to have had its formal origin with the founding of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment in 1992, though its influence far precedes this. Ecocritics have as their common motivation “a commitment to environmentality from whatever critical vantage point”,⁵ and a shared belief that environmental change must come in dialogue with the humanities, since it is here that we can investigate the construction of cultural narratives. In this respect, ecocriticism can be seen as a challenge to the prevailing influence of post-structuralism, advocating for the need to “keep one eye on the ways in which ‘nature’ is always... culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists”.⁶

⁵ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 11.

⁶ Greg Garrad, *Ecocriticism*, Oxford: Routledge, 2004, p. 10.

A common accusation levelled at the school is that it lacks focus, and it is true that it is at times confusingly broad. Indeed, it has proved remarkably difficult to reach consensus on even a general overarching definition of what 'ecocriticism' means. Nonetheless, a commonly recognised definition is that of Cheryl Glotfelty:

Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.⁷

The core argument of ecocriticism is that this debate is of such great importance because our definition of nature is not just an academic question of categorisation, but has direct and far-reaching consequences on how we relate to the real-world environment around us. Therefore, since literature as a major art form – and of particular prominence in the formation of the cultural discourse in Israel⁸ – is one of the principal channels of propagating such a definition, an investigation into the dominant model of human-nature relations in modern Hebrew literary texts can shed new light on the environmental dynamic in Israel, thus illuminating the processes behind everyday decisions which affect the environment such as town planning, agricultural policy, the agenda of preservation groups, and even individual choices of leisure pursuit or purchasing habits.

Moreover, the investigation of the construction of the human-nature relationship can shed light not just on how we view the world around us, but also on how we view ourselves. In the Zionist case, Diaspora Judaism was criticised for its perceived disconnection from nature and the detachment it engendered between the Jew and his physical environment. While this was, of course, partially a cultural construct in itself, such a conception greatly informed the Zionist narrative of its relationship to nature, which projected a reciprocal relationship of mutual desire and need onto the environment of the Land of Israel aimed at a fundamental negation of this perceived disconnect. Thus, an ecocritical analysis of literature can illuminate how Zionism constructed narratives about itself as well as its environment. Indeed, it can be instrumental in the shift towards analysing humans not as separate entities looking upon nature from without, but as at once both *part of* and *distinct from* their environment.

Though ecocriticism is a rapidly expanding school of literary criticism, it does not prescribe its own unique set of critical tools in the same way as Marxist or feminist criticism. Instead, it is deeply interdisciplinary, borrowing the methods of these schools and others in a manner which mutually

⁷ Cheryl Glotfelty, 'Introduction' in Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (eds), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, London: University of Georgia Press, 1996, p. xviii.

⁸ Shai Ginsburg, *Rhetoric and Nation: The Formation of Hebrew National Culture, 1880-1990*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014, p. 7.

enriches both disciplines. One of the major strands of ecocriticism, which I will demonstrate to be particularly germane to the Israeli context, is ecofeminism.

This thesis may be seen as, if not a resurrection of ecofeminism, then an addition to the argument for its continued relevance and usefulness as a critical tool to examine the intersection between gender and nature in this age of increasing ecological crisis. Most of the key ecofeminist scholars mentioned here were active in the 1980s and 1990s, a period in which there was an explosion of interest in looking at nature from a gendered perspective. It is at this time that most of the core texts of ecofeminist scholarship were written, work which continues to inform discussions of nature viewed through the lens of gender to this day. Towards the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, however, ecofeminism fell out of fashion in academic circles, and its quiet revival a decade or so later remains underrepresented in broader discussions of ecocritical thought.⁹ Indeed, Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche point out that ecocritics have often underplayed the importance of any form of ecofeminism in the development of modern ecocriticism.¹⁰ They speak to the need to bring feminism and ecocriticism back into a productive dialogue with one other, without a feminist approach to nature being received as an interesting, but ultimately marginal, addendum to mainstream ecocritical studies. I wish to promote the case here, then, for ecofeminism as not only a stepping stone towards modern environmentalist discourse, but a valuable means of reading nature in literature in the present day.

The primary cause of ecofeminism's fall from favour was the accusation of essentialism levelled at it by other feminists.¹¹ Such a criticism certainly may have some basis in the ecofeminism of Vandana Shiva or of many Radical Feminist writers.¹² However, scholars such as Val Plumwood and Carolyn Merchant were indeed very conscious of the dangers of essentialising 'women' as inherently 'close to nature', or 'woman' as a binary category which defines the experience of half of the world's population. Admittedly, these scholars were writing primarily from a white, Western, middle class perspective. However, I believe the ecofeminist paradigm of the Logic of Domination, as I outline it

⁹ Charis Thompson and Sherilyn MacGregor, 'The Death of Nature: Foundations of Ecological Feminist Thought', in Sherilyn MacGregor (ed), *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, p. 49.

¹⁰ Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche, 'Introduction: In Dialogue with Nature: New Ecofeminist Approaches to Early Modernity', in Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche (eds), *Ecofeminist Approaches to Early Modernity*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 10.

¹¹ Charis Thompson, 'Back to Nature?: Resurrecting Ecofeminism After Poststructuralist and Third-Wave Feminisms', *Isis*, 97:3, 2006, pp. 505-512; Niamh Moore, 'Eco/Feminist Genealogies: Renewing Promises and New Possibilities', in Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 19-37.

¹² For a classic example of an essentialist view of the woman/nature connection, see Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, London: Zed Books, 1993.

in the following section, is well suited to an intersectional application. Nonetheless, the fear of being branded essentialist dissuaded many of those who continued to work in the area of gender and nature at the turn of the millennium from explicitly labelling themselves ecofeminists, even though their work resonated with, and drew influence from, these earlier ecofeminist texts.¹³

The gradual return of interest in ecofeminist thought has been performed against the backdrop of the discourse of the Anthropocene, the supposed 'Age of Man' in which we now live, a period of geological time in which human activity is the dominant influence on the environment. Giovanna Di Chiro criticises this discourse as part of the masculinist urge to colonise and claim nature for the Self, casting Man as the centre of creation, its master, destroyer and saviour:

As one of the most recent framings of Universal Man, the construction of the neologism Anthropocene assumes that the Anthropos at the root of the term has no sex, gender, class, or race.¹⁴

She quotes the keynote speech given by a science writer at the 2014 annual conference of the Association for Environmental Science and Studies – “We have to accept ourselves, flaws and all, in order to move beyond what has been something of an unconscious, species-scale pubescent growth spurt, enabled by fossil fuels in place of testosterone” – presenting the “unconscious sexism in equating the naturalness of human and masculine exceptionalism in the repeated telling of the Story of Man” in this analogy as a failure to engage with the lessons of ecofeminism.¹⁵

This is, of course, not to completely deny the Anthropocene, or other models of examining our environmental impact, as a useful means of looking at our place in and representation of nature. In *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism*, Mary Brydon-Miller and Anne Inga Hilsen describe the relationship between the many different branches of ecofeminism through the metaphor of a 'confluence' in which tributaries and streams flow together in response to the global ecological crisis.¹⁶ I believe this metaphor is just as applicable to ecocriticism in general, and that ecofeminism has a valuable part to play in that discourse *alongside* other modes of ecocritical analysis. To that end, the topic of this thesis echoes and continues developments in the last two decades of

¹³ Noël Sturgeon, *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 167.

¹⁴ Giovanna Di Chiro, 'Welcome to the White (M)Anthropocene?', in Sherilyn MacGregor (ed), *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, p. 490.

¹⁵ Di Chiro, 2017, p. 490.

¹⁶ Mary Brydon-Miller and Anne Inga Hilsen, 'Exploring the Confluence of Ecofeminism, Covenantal Ethics, and Action Research', in Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 95-108.

ecocriticism as a whole, expanding the field of study beyond the anglosphere to international literatures, and melding ecocritical theory with postcolonial analysis.

1.3. What is Ecofeminism?

Ecofeminism is a blending of critical tools and terminology from feminist criticism with the environmental focus of ecocriticism. It argues for a deep synergy and interrelation between the construction of ultimately oppressive narratives about women and the construction of similarly oppressive narratives about nature. Ecofeminists such as Carolyn Merchant¹⁷ and Val Plumwood¹⁸ point to the fact that women are often represented as closer to nature in order to undermine their rationality, symbolically relegating them to the animal world and thus justifying masculine patronage. Conversely and parallelly, nature is often described in overtly feminine language in order to defend man's subjugation of it.

Of course, there are many schools of feminist thought and many schools of ecological thought, hence many ways of looking at nature through the lens of gender and gender through the lens of nature. At its most basic level, however, ecofeminist scholarship shares the understanding that the domination of the feminine and the domination of nature are related to one another, and investigation of the two together can shed light on what can be done to ease their oppressive force for both parties.

One approach has been to acknowledge the close connection between women and nature that permeates our narrative framework and to affirm rather than deny it. This Radical Feminist position stems from a reduction of the feminine to the body – the situating of womanhood in the physical characteristics which allow for birth and child-rearing and their concurrent exclusion from matters of the mind. Their argument reverses this logic used to suppress women: Women are not inferior due to their occupation with matters of body, but derive their power from it: they are the bringers of life, in sync with the phases of the moon, the cycle of the seasons, and other mystic feminine forces of nature to which men do not have access.¹⁹ A more sophisticated working of this argument posits that although there is nothing inherent to women's bodies that brings them closer to nature, the experience of menstruation, childbirth and breastfeeding in an androcentric world may bring them

¹⁷ Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

¹⁸ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London: Routledge, 2002 [1993].

¹⁹ Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Meta-ethics of Radical Feminism*, London: Women's Press, 1978; Susan Griffin, *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1978.

into a different relationship with nature which is more sensitive, attached, and emotionally invested.²⁰

However, though this is a position with which the term 'ecofeminist' has historically been associated, such an approach suffers from the rigidity of its assumptions – it does not really challenge the oppressive binary organisation of hierarchies of power, but rather just reverses the upper and lower poles: 'woman', 'nature', 'emotion', 'place' and 'body' are now invested with greater value than 'man', 'civilization', 'reason', 'history' and 'mind'. It therefore does nothing to deconstruct the framework used to enforce the structural oppression of one set of concepts, as well as nothing to disentangle the dubious association of concepts on each side with one another: *is 'man' to 'woman' as 'reason' is to 'emotion'?*²¹ While a reassessment of the 'lesser', dominated, elements such as 'woman' and 'nature' is welcome and necessary, then, it seems unlikely that this is best achieved without first disentangling one from another.

An influential theory of the mechanism by which structural oppression is carried out is Karen Warren's two-step 'Logic of Domination'.²² Women and nature are first identified as dangerous 'Others', something outside of culture and thus in a sense 'non- or sub- human'. In identifying these entities as potentially destabilising threats to (masculine) humanity, the 'Logic of Domination' thus dictates the necessity of subordinating them to male/human control. The identification of 'woman' with 'nature' in this narrative thus strengthens the logical justification of their mutual subjugation. For this reason, modern ecofeminist criticism seeks to deconstruct the dualistic logic upon which this narrative is built, which neatly and uncompromisingly divides between 'male' and 'female', 'human' and 'nature', 'reason' and 'emotion', 'mind' and 'body' and 'civilised' and 'primitive'.²³

The Logic of Domination is a conceptual framework – “a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape, reflect, and explain our view of ourselves and our world”²⁴ – which ecofeminist scholars argue is prevalent throughout the western world and even beyond. This conceptual framework is based on dualisms, such as man/woman, nature/culture, and mind/body. These are both exclusive (what is of the mind is not of the body) and oppositional (they are characterised by difference rather than complementarity, pulling in competing directions rather

²⁰ Ariel Salleh, 'Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Eco-Feminist Connection', *Environmental Ethics* 6:4, 1984, pp. 339-45.

²¹ Catherine Roach, 'Loving your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation', *Hypatia* 6:1, 1991, pp. 46-59.

²² Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters*, Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

²³ Plumwood, 2002, p. 43.

²⁴ Karen Warren, 'Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections', *Environmental Ethics* 9:1, 1987, p. 6.

than being two parts of the puzzle working together for the same end).²⁵ Not only this, but the categories are logically sorted onto a hierarchy, with a 'dominator' and a 'dominated'. Those with the higher 'dominator' value are treated as morally superior to those with the lower 'dominated' value. For example, 'reason' is superior to 'emotion'.²⁶

The table shows a subset of such dichotomies relevant to our study of the hegemonic Zionist narrative on nature:²⁷

Dominator	Dominated
Male	Female
Culture	Nature
Civilised	Primitive/Wild
Human	Animal
Reason	Emotion
Production	Reproduction
Public	Private
Subject	Object
Mind	Body

Figure 1: Table of common 'dominator/dominated' pairings.

In each case, these value judgements show an androcentric and anthropocentric bias: 'reason' is greater than 'emotion' because it is consciously performed by man; 'civilization' is greater than 'nature' because man has 'added' to the 'givenness' of nature, building a 'something' out of its chaotic 'nothing'.

Warren lays out the logical premises on which this Logic of Domination are built as follows:²⁸

²⁵ Val Plumwood, 'Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy and the Critique of Rationalism', *Hypatia*, 6:1, 1991, pp. 3-37.

²⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1975.

²⁷ based on those listed in Plumwood, 2002, p. 43.

²⁸ Karen Warren, 'The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism', *Environmental Ethics* 12:2, 1990, p. 324.

(A1) Humans do, and plants and rocks do not, have the capacity to consciously and radically change the community in which they live.

(A2) Whatever has the capacity to consciously and radically change the community in which it lives is morally superior to whatever lacks this capacity.

(A3) Thus, humans are morally superior to plants and rocks.

(A4) For any X and Y, if X is morally superior to Y, then X is morally justified in subordinating Y.

(A5) Thus, humans are morally justified in subordinating plants and rocks.

(B 1) Women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical; men are identified with the "human" and the realm of the mental.

(B2) Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to ("below") whatever is identified with the "human" and the realm of the mental; or, conversely, the latter is superior to ("above") the former.

(B3) Thus, women are inferior to ("below") men; or, conversely, men are superior to ("above") women.

(B4) For any X and Y, if X is superior to Y, then X is justified in subordinating Y.

(B5) Thus, men are justified in subordinating women.

Though the Logic of Domination is best viewed as an interconnected web of associations held together by mutual reinforcement, it is important to recognise that it is through an appeal to *reason* that moral superiority is established in this account. Such an argument is backed up by earlier feminist scholars such as Hélène Cixous, who found the source of women's oppression in the Cartesian dualism between mind and body.²⁹

Though Karen Green challenges the idea that domination of the less mentally sound/capable by the more mentally sound/capable is inherently oppressive, arguing that it is possible for a person to hold power over and override the wishes of another person without it constituting oppression (e.g. a

²⁹ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Paula Cohen and Keith Cohen (trans), *Signs* 1:4, 1976 [1975], pp. 875-893.

parent mandating a bedtime over a child, against that child's will)³⁰, Amy Goff-Yates points out that the Logic of Domination posits both *moral* superiority (the intrinsic value of the dominator is greater than that of the dominated, and hence they are justified in their oppression) and speaks to the formation of *structural* oppression rather than specific acts of oppression³¹. Unlike in the case of a parent overriding a child's desire to stay up all night playing games, the justness of the domination of women and nature is derived not just from their capacity to carry out rational judgement but from the superior *worth* of man, which is predicated on his supposed affinity with other elements on the dominator side, such as reason, civilization, and creativity.

This dualistic distinction, which severs male from female, mind from body, and rationality from instinct, has been recognised by feminist scholars since Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan,³² who both argued from the inclusion of women within the rational; for women to "transcend" their bodies and become "'culturally' as well as 'biologically' creative".³³ These Liberal feminists rejected the special connection between 'woman' and 'nature' while implicitly accepting nature as inferior to civilization by focusing on redrawing the boundaries of the rational such that they were inclusive rather than exclusive to women. Though these scholars tackle the source of the oppression of *women*, then, they still exhibit anthropocentrism in that they assume the inherent moral superiority of mind over body, culture over nature. Conversely, The Deep Ecology movement, a competing school of ecocriticism, has come under criticism from ecofeminists for attempting to tackle anthropocentrism without tackling the androcentrism with which it is bound.³⁴

However, the innovation of ecofeminism is to explicitly lay out the means by which this association contributes not just to the oppression of women (the patriarchy), but also to the domination of nature (naturism). Not only this, but Warren's establishment of the conceptual framework of the Logic of Domination has contributed to the clarity of the investigation into hierarchies of power and oppression by explicitly situating this oppression of woman and nature in the larger framework of structures of oppression, or as she calls them, "isms of domination", for example sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism and naturism.³⁵

³⁰ Karen Green, 'Freud, Wollstonecraft, and Ecofeminism: A Defense of Liberal Feminism', *Environmental Ethics* 16, 1994, pp. 117-134.

³¹ Amy Goff-Yates, 'Karen Warren and the Logic of Domination: A Defense', *Environmental Ethics* 22:2, 2000, pp. 169-181.

³² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (trans), London: Vintage, 2010 [1949]; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, London: Penguin, 1963.

³³ Elizabeth Spelman, 'Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views', *Feminist Studies* 8:1, 1982, p. 112.

³⁴ Plumwood, 1991.

³⁵ Karen Warren and Jim Cheney, 'Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology', *Hypatia* 6:1, 1991, p. 181.

The Logic of Domination serves not only to group together dominator and dominated groups, linking their natures together and thus reinforcing the logic of their oppression by rendering them all inherently inferior, but also posits the subordination of the inferior as morally just.³⁶ It is this moral judgement that renders nature, women, indigene, etc, *lesser* – of lower intrinsic value in their own self, and thus open for – even in *need of* – domination by their opposite. It is perhaps this awareness of the means by which narratives about nature empty it of value in and of itself and subordinate it to the needs of man which is the most important contribution ecofeminism can make to ecocriticism. Murphy compares this assumption that the value of nature is derived from what it can offer to humans as equivalent to justifications for rape.³⁷ The concept of ‘rape culture’ perhaps can be extended beyond the patriarchy to other forms of domination – it is a pervasive, structural oppression which sees one party not as an autonomous self but a resource for the other to use. In this sense, the ‘dominated’ is viewed as an instrument, a nurturing vessel by which the dominator side can function (as body is the vessel for the mind, woman is the vessel for man, performing the supportive, corporal, and private sphere related tasks which allows man to have the freedom to pursue higher matters of the mind: abstractions of science, politics and art). Similarly, nature is the nurturing vessel from which humankind can extract the resources needed for civilization to thrive, develop, and abstract. Nature and the feminine are ‘the ground’ from which more sophisticated forms of life can support themselves.

The art theorist Suzaan Boettger again links the domination of nature and women with the privileging of the rational and manmade over the natural:

Traditional archetypes of “woman” associate her with “nature” conceived of as capricious and irrational . . . in contrast to the identification of masculine qualities with things “manmade”: aspects of culture that are reasoned, or socially mediated. The latter have been valued more highly because they are constructed intentionally and are further removed from primal nature.³⁸

This clearly opens the door to a very instrumental understanding of nature, which sees it primarily as something meant to be pressed into the service of humans. The intricate interconnected consciousness of animal, plant and ecosystem is viewed primarily in the sense that it serves the needs of the human Self, whether materially or spiritually/ideologically. Even warnings of ecological

³⁶ Warren, 1987.

³⁷ Patrick Murphy, ‘Introduction: Feminism, Ecology, and the Future of the Humanities’, *Studies in the Humanities* 15:2, 1988, p. 87.

³⁸ Suzaan Boettger, ‘In the Missionary Position: Recent Feminist Ecological Art’ in Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven (eds), *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1994, p. 253.

fragility and looming crisis are often couched in this language, pitched in terms of what humans will lose or how specific changes will impact on our way of life (arguments from loss of potential sources of medication, farmable land, animals which humans find attractive or tasty, endangerment of species with national symbolic value, and so on).

When we look at the dualisms established by scholars, we are struck by the deep power that they have over our conceptual understandings – all that which is associated with the masculine on one side, all that which is associated with the feminine on the other. Since the feminine, dominated side is structured around ‘givenness’ and the masculine, dominator side is structured around transcendence (going beyond ‘givenness’), this creates a sense of domination as the natural way of things. Man takes the raw materials of woman and extends it beyond the bounds of nature to art – female birth (reproduction) gives way to male artistic creativity (production), female beauty of the body (aesthetically pleasing physical features, ideally given by genetic luck rather than ‘trickery’ such as make up, etc) gives way to male beauty of the mind (using that muse to create great art). The web of associations established by the Logic of Domination, then, sets up a simultaneous conflation and opposition between childbirth and artistic creation, between female procreativity and male creativity.³⁹ Humanity takes the raw materials of nature and carries it beyond the bounds of corporality, instinct and amorality.

Such structuring of power relations is predicated on the call to nature, based on the assumption that nature equals givenness. Therefore, to call any human thing ‘nature’ is to deny its humanness, and to deny its right or ability to transcend nature. For example, a belief that crops up often in western history is that women are incapable of appreciating higher art,⁴⁰ incapable of transcending the bodily realm and pursuing abstract thought, being a self-reflecting subject rather than an object. These power structures are relational – woman is dominated by man, but dominates nature. A white woman might be portrayed the natural dominator of a black man, thus entitled to the fruit of his extracted resources, and more rational, objective, and capable of abstract thought and public leadership, even if she is the natural dominated of a white man, and as such inherently irrational, subjective, and capable only of presiding over material concerns. The same is true of other mediators of power such as class, sexuality and religion. These come together to form a web of inter-connected associations which mutually reinforce the subjugation of other categories. For example, both women, black men and gay men are often associated with perverse sexuality – an

³⁹ Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse’, *Feminist Studies* 13:1, 1987, pp. 49-82.

⁴⁰ Monique M. LaRocque, *Decadent Desire: The Dream of Disembodiment in A Reboours, the Picture of Dorian Gray and L'Eve Future*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 94.

over-the-top obsession with the body, irresponsibility, and lack of control over one's 'base' instincts – leading to calls to exercise control over their sexual behaviour. Similarly, calls to control nature derive from its lack of reason and 'base' corporality; it too is destructive, chaotic and immoral to leave unchecked. Again, the source of domination lies in a binary separation between mind/body and reason/nature, which assumes that the transcendent superiority of one gives it not just a right but a moral duty to control the other.

Again, we can see that the power of the model of the Logic of Domination derives from its ability to draw a connection between multiple forms of oppressive relationship, multiple 'isms of domination'. In particular, there is fertile ground for studies which draw on the common ground between ecocritical and post-colonial studies. It is noted that these gendered and anthropocentric assumptions interact in colonial narratives with racial hierarchies, rendering the colonised 'less masculine' and part of the 'given ground' nature, as well as at times irrational, violent and degenerate, a conception which is often internalised by the dominated indigenes.⁴¹

even anti-colonial nationalisms tend to be structured patriarchally, configuring the woman as the embodiment of tradition and mother of the nation which needs to be protected by militarized masculine men.⁴²

For Warren, dualisms themselves are not *inherently* oppressive, but become so only when they are imbued with this sense of the moral superiority of one side and thus their right to control the other: "without a Logic of Domination, a description of similarities and differences would be just that—a description of similarities and differences."⁴³ However, for other scholars, it is dualistic thinking itself that already forms the ground by which hierarchy thence oppression is an inevitable consequence.⁴⁴ Certainly, the establishment of exclusive and oppositional binary pairs does invite comparative judgement, which in turn invites value judgement.

Adding onto this understanding, the dualisms underpinning the Logic of Domination can be seen as a means of defining Self, where the implicit Self is the 'master' who encompasses the features of dominator (white, cis, straight, upper class, Western, male, etc). Against this, the dominated side constitutes the side of the 'other', the not-Self from which the identity of the Self is constructed.

⁴¹ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989.

⁴² Ty Kwika Tengan, '(En)gendering Colonialism: Masculinities in Hawai'i and Aotearoa', *Cultural Values*, 6:3, 2002, pp. 239-256.

⁴³ Warren, 1990, p. 323.

⁴⁴ Ynestra King, 'Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature/Culture Dualism', in Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein (eds), *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1990.

Again, then, the dominator side is constructed out of and transcends the dominated side. The human is part of nature but transcends it by the formation of civilization, science, politics and art, while man is born of woman, but transcends her by passing over from the private realm of the home to the public realm of cultural and economic production. Though one derives from the other, they are hyper-separated with reference to the moral superiority of that which distinguishes them.

However, the dominated is not equally consulted in the makings of these hierarches but assumed, generalised, imbued with the opposites of those characteristics which the dominators wish to claim for themselves. Their definition is based on:

a fundamental imposition, or a mapping of the self onto the other. That imposition occurs at the level of reduction; that is, the self tends to impose his reductive knowledge of the other onto that being, as opposed to creating a space for mutual interaction.⁴⁵

Thus 'animal' in the human/animal dualism is a category encompassing the entire animal kingdom other than the human, as if there is something meaningful that connects all animal life that not only excludes but is in opposition to that which characterises the human. Similarly, the othering of woman makes her a depository for all that which man wishes to distance himself from:

because what is other does not have identity in its own right, it often acts as an empty space to be ascribed whatever meanings the dominant group chooses. Thus women are frail not strong, emotional not rational, yielding not virile, so that masculinity can be defined as those positive qualities... by seeing women as other to themselves, as not-men, men can read into 'femininity' whatever qualities are needed to construct their sense of the masculine. So, a mythicised 'Woman' becomes the imaginary location of male dreams, idealizations and fears.⁴⁶

The construction of the Other, performed without regard for the plurality of voices within that Other, is an important means by which the power of the dominator is created and maintained:

The establishment of normalcy (i.e. what is accepted as "normal") through social- and stereo-types is one aspect of the habit of ruling groups ... to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology. So right is this world view for the ruling groups that they make it appear (as it does appear to them) as

⁴⁵ Sarah Reese, 'Call and Response: The Question of the Human/Non-Human Encounter' in Alfred Kentigern Siewers (ed), *Re-Imagining Nature: Environmental Humanities and Ecosemiotics*, Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2014, p. 239.

⁴⁶ Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 14.

"natural" and "inevitable" - and for everyone - and, in so far as they succeed, they establish their hegemony.⁴⁷

Powerfully, a woman who does not fit the stereotype assigned to 'woman' does not invalidate the stereotype, but is defective, an aberration. A man who does not adequately master is no 'true' man at all. Through establishing these categories which determine group inclusion, the structure becomes in a sense unfalsifiable, pre-exiling all those who would challenge its claims. This allows the stereotype to perpetuate itself without the need to resort to force.⁴⁸

However, this relational dependency between dualistic pairs is a denied dependency.⁴⁹ That is, it is created by a hyper-focus on the points of difference between the dominator and dominated, and their extrapolation into a logical hierarchical relationship. However, the logical foundation of this relationship is presented as natural and inevitable, the points of difference being essential and of foundational importance.

Because of the activeness of the dominator side, compared to the passiveness of the dominated, it is not enough for this difference to be defined, it must also be regularly performed. The master must assert mastery, must act to transcend, or risk falling into the corporal, passive givenness of the dominated realm.

Another of the ways in which the connection between the feminine and the natural is promulgated is in the use of gendered language to describe un-inherently gendered nature.⁵⁰ For example, sexual imagery is often used to describe working the land ('to penetrate virgin soil'), while natural imagery is often used to describe sex and pregnancy ('to plant his seed', 'the fruit of her womb'). The value of a landscape and a woman is sometimes determined by the degree to which it is 'fertile' or 'barren'. Women are often referred to using animal terminology, and where this takes place it is generally for the purpose of demonstrating their moral inferiority. This is not to say that animal terminology is not used for men, or that it always has negative connotations, but that it is used as a tool to justify the suppression of women just as the feminisation of nature is used as a tool to justify its domination.

⁴⁷ Richard Dyer, 'Stereotyping' in Dyer, Richard (ed), *Gays and Film*, London: British Film Institute, 1977, p. 30.

⁴⁸ Mary Talbot, 'Gender Stereotypes: Reproduction and Challenge' in Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff (eds), *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp. 468-86.

⁴⁹ Plumwood, 2002.

⁵⁰ Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, New York, NY: Continuum, 1990.

1.4. Relevant Scholarship in Israel Studies

Ecocritical research has received an explosion of interest outside of Israel in recent years, due to the growing relevance of ecological matters in the news cycle and cultural consciousness, as well as an expanding critical awareness of the integrated nature of structures of domination. However, in terms of Israeli literature and cultural studies, ecocritical approaches are only just beginning to make an impact. Though structures of oppression have been well fleshed out with regard to human-on-human relationships, our anthropocentrism is another bias which requires careful analysis, and which has the potential not just to offer new perspectives on the ecological issues of the day, but also to reflect back on our understanding of other unequal power relationships.

In this context, the Israeli case is one which may have particular value and interest, given the unique historical circumstances of the Zionist movement's development (the relationship with the land began as an artificially constructed one from a self-consciously outsider perspective, but was nonetheless perceived as one of *recovery* rather than discovery), as well as its heavy emphasis on nature and land. As noted, my reading reveals a core paradox at the centre of the hegemonic Zionist man/land relationship, a conflict which may not have been perceived as such by its proponents, but nonetheless I analyse to be a source of persistent, unresolved tension in the Israeli imagination through to the present day.

Since this thesis is intentionally interdisciplinary, I will now briefly touch on each of the relevant areas of scholarship in Israel: existing ecocritical studies, feminism and gender, narratives about place and space (including work on specific environments, locations and species in the Zionist network of symbols), and the controversy about the degree to which Zionism can be said to be a colonialist project.

1.4.1. Ecocriticism

Edna Gorney is currently one of the few scholars to bring ecofeminism to a book length study in Israel Studies.⁵¹ She uses it to examine the debate around the draining of the Hula swamp, arguing that the discourse of both those who advocated for the exploitation of nature and those who advocated for its protection was governed by the same structure of domination, centred around a

⁵¹ Edna Gorney, *Bein Nitsul Le-Hatsala: Te'oria Ecofeministit Shel Yahasei Teva', Tarbut Ve-Hevra Be-Yisra'el*, Haifa: Pardes, 2011.

rigid dichotomy between the realms of 'human' and 'nature'. Hannah Boast,⁵² Joanna Long,⁵³ and Carol Bardenstein⁵⁴ have conducted similar projects, analysing the use of natural imagery in Zionist discourse from a broadly postcolonial and ecocritical perspective. However, these isolated applications of aspects of ecocritical analysis have largely been focused on non-fiction texts, national ceremony, and popular media rather than literature. In addition, many of these works have taken the form of comparing Israeli Jewish natural imagery with that of their Palestinian counterparts, usually with a positive skew towards the Palestinian treatments as more correct, more in tune with nature or more 'native'. As such, they at times fall into the trap of reinforcing rather than challenging the 'ecological native' trope, in much the same way as some early-wave ecofeminists positivised but did not challenge the equation of women with nature.⁵⁵

Avidov Lipsker brings ecology and literature together from a different perspective, that of cultural ecology.⁵⁶ Though expressly literature focused, however, this study engages with ecological systems primarily as a metaphor for cultural systems, that is, as a new way of understanding the processes governing the creation of 'living literature'. The core thesis of this approach is that environments shape literature no less than they do the development of particular leaf forms, digestive systems or social structures. Though an interesting area of comparison, which supports the idea of humanity as part of nature rather than extrinsic to it, this form of analysis is inward focused, dealing with the construction of human culture itself – how it is shaped by its surroundings – rather than outward focused, dealing with the ways in which it engages with its environment – how its surroundings are symbolically shaped by it.

In the realm of literary studies, Dan Misheiker uses an ecocritical approach to analyse the depiction of animals in the works of Agnon.⁵⁷ An ecocritical approach is also utilized by Giulia Miller⁵⁸ and Hannah Boast⁵⁹ to discuss Yosef Berdichevsky's 'The Red Heifer' ('Para Aduma', 1906) and

⁵² Hannah Boast, 'Planted Over the Past': Ideology and Ecology in Israel's National Eco-Imaginary', *Green Letters* 16:1, 2012, pp. 46-58.

⁵³ Joanna Long, 'Rooting Diaspora, Reviving Nation: Zionist Landscapes of Palestine-Israel' in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, 34:1, 2009, pp. 61-77.

⁵⁴ Carol Bardenstein, 'Threads of Memory and Discourses of Rootedness: Of Trees, Oranges and the Prickly-Pear Cactus in Israel/Palestine', *Edebiyat* 8, 1998, pp. 1-36.

⁵⁵ Garrad 2004, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Avidov Lipsker, *'Ekologia Shel Sifrut Be-Shanot Ha-Shloshim Ve-Ha-'Arba'im Be-'Erets-Yisrael*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006.

⁵⁷ Dan Misheiker, 'Lo al ha-Adam Levado: Iyun Ekologi ba-Sipur "Mazal Dagim" me'et Shai 'Agnon', *Ayin Gimmel* 1, 2011, pp. 94-122.

⁵⁸ Giulia Miller, 'Reviewing Modern Hebrew Literature Through a Green Lens: An Ecocritical Reading of Mica Yosef Berdichevsky's "The Red Heifer" ("Para Aduma", 1906)', *Green Letters* 18:2, 2014, pp. 185-193.

⁵⁹ Hannah Boast, 'Hydrofictions: Water, Power and Politics in Israeli and Palestinian Literature', PhD thesis, University of York, 2015.

contemporary Israel and Palestinian novels about water, respectively. However, such an analysis remains a rarity in the general context of literary studies in Israel.

1.4.2. Space and Place

A related area which has received much more attention in Israel Studies is space. Much scholarship has gone into investigating the understanding of space and place in the modern Israeli conception, and into the ways in which they have been used to perform, shape and delimit national identity. This application of a conceptual framework of space, a kind of ‘sacred geography’ for the Zionist hegemony, derives out of work by geographers and philosophers⁶⁰ who sought to re-conceptualise the notion of ‘space’ beyond the physical as something relational, symbolically-loaded and dynamic – something not just found but created, ‘imagined’.

A central concern in this regard is the establishing of the difference between ‘place’ (*makom katan*) and ‘Place’ (*makom gadol*), which we will explore in greater depth within the following chapters. This idea was brought to Israeli scholarship by Zali Gurevitch and Gideon Aran in their highly influential study ‘On Place’.⁶¹ They argued that the traditional Jewish conception of ‘Place’, which maintains a tension between the perspective of insider and outsider, was preserved in the Israeli conception, leaving a tension between the land of Israel as a symbolic site of longing and return (*makom gadol*) and the land of Israel as a physical place in which its inhabitants already actually existed and carried out their day-to-day lives (*makom katan*). Ironically, with all the Zionists’ obsession with a return to the physical aspect of place – “to make the place a taken for granted totality, to harmonise self, place and world”⁶² – is it with a symbolic space that they continued to primarily engage, with Place as somewhere beyond, rather than physically embodied and native.

⁶⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans), Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

⁶¹ Zali Gurevitch and Gideon Aran, ‘Al ha-Makom’, *Alpayim* 4, 1991, pp. 9-44.

⁶² Zali Gurevitch and Gideon Aran, ‘Never in Place: Eliade and Judaic Sacred Space’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 87, 1994, p. 145.

A notable body of work has sprung up regarding the role of place in delimiting Israeli identity. A large portion of this relates to specific locations or environments such as the kibbutz,⁶³ forest,⁶⁴ desert,⁶⁵ and sea.⁶⁶ These studies provide great insight into the means by which the Zionist movement projects meaning onto the symbolic landscape, that is, the way that it construes space as a reflection, projection or antagonist of nation, and thus delineates the borders of how an individual citizen-subject may approach and interact with the natural and physical space around them.

What I intend to add to these considered studies of specific environments or natural symbols in the Zionist conception is the illuminative role that a gender- and nature- focused reading can play in uncovering and developing these themes, a reading which I believe adds depth to the above studies of place, and which also highlights the extremely fraught symbolic-loading of the Zionist reading of the landscape, and the ways in which this erases and overwrites the actual landscape itself. In other words, my aim is to enhance this research by placing a sharper spotlight on use of gender as a tool of imposing the Self onto the Other of nature. Moreover, in investigating the 'imagined', one must not lose sight of the fact that we are also imagining something that is really there, that nature is not *only* what we imagine it to be, or the stories we tell about it, but an entity in its own right.

1.4.3. Feminism and Gender

Just as the aspect of 'space' has been well investigated in Israeli context, so too has the aspect of gender in a broader sense. A considerable body of scholarship looks at the role of gender in Israeli society, dismantling the Zionist myth of gender equality, and examining the way in which gender and nation intersect. This includes an observation of the particular difficulties women face in entering the male dominated canon of Hebrew literature, as well as the gender-mediated role of the military in shaping Israeli identity and power structures. Motherhood, too, has come under the lens as both a source of identity and marginalisation for Israeli women. Tied into these theories on gender is work

⁶³ Nurit Kliot, 'Place Identity of the Israeli Kibbutz', *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 3:1, 1982, pp. 112-121.

⁶⁴ Yael Zerubavel, 'The Forest as a National Icon: Literature, Politics, and the Archeology of Memory', *Israel Studies* 1:1, 1996, pp. 60-99; Carol Bardenstein, 'Trees, Forests and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory' in Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe, Leo Spitzer (eds), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999, pp. 148-168.

⁶⁵ Ranen Omer-Sherman, *Israel in Exile: Jewish Writing and the Desert*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006; Yael Zerubavel, 'Desert and Settlement: Space Metaphors and Symbolic Landscapes in the Yishuv and Early Israel Culture' in Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (eds), *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008b, pp. 201-222.

⁶⁶ Hannan Hever, 'The Zionist Sea: Symbolism and Nationalism in Modernist Hebrew Poetry', *Jewish Culture and History*, 13:1, 2012, pp. 25-41.

on the structuring of masculinity in Israel, uncovering the integral part this masculine ideal has played in formulating the concept of the national Self. These studies highlight the importance of gender in the study of nation-building by situating the Zionist movement itself – as a turn towards nationalism – in the growing unrest about the perceived absence of Jewish masculinity.⁶⁷

As noted, the Zionist foundation myth, which privileges the experience and ideas of the ‘pioneers’ of the socialist/Labour Zionist kibbutz movements, features gender equality as an important part. Supposedly, the kibbutz experiment brought about a revolution which cut through not just class divides, but the gender divide too, with women freed from the ‘shackles’ of child-rearing by a communal system which eliminated the public/private boundary and rendered them equal and productive members of the community. Certainly, the kibbutz members’ ideas were progressive for their time, and to attack them as oppressive to women without considering the general context of women’s rights of the period is unfair. However, kibbutz life certainly did not manifest true gender equality, as has been demonstrated by multiple scholars.⁶⁸ For the most part, women were not freed from the bulk of domestic child-rearing and homemaking roles, but merely did these within the more communal structure of a kibbutz setting. If the Zionist movement was all about courting and conquering the land, women were largely left out of this discourse both symbolically (due to the feminine gendering of the land and masculine gendering of her conquerors) and practically, largely being marginalised in decision-making processes and doing relatively little actual ‘land-working’. Also, it is worth remembering that the kibbutz movement itself was even in its heyday a tiny fraction of Yishuv members, and most immigrants were families who carried forward the gendered role divisions of the societies in which they were raised.⁶⁹

Against the backdrop of national pride in the perceived gender equality of the founding members of the State, it is ironic to note that feminist scholars argue modern feminism has barely established a foothold in Israel.⁷⁰ Though individual struggles against specific instances of gender inequality are

⁶⁷ Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry Before the First World War* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997a; Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2007.

⁶⁸ Judith Buber-Agassi, ‘Theories of Gender Equality: Lessons from the Israeli Kibbutz’, *Gender and Society* 3:2, 1989, pp. 160-186; Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui, ‘From Revolution to Motherhood: The Case of Women in the Kibbutz, 1910-1948’ in Deborah Bernstein (ed), *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992, pp. 211-234; Marilyn Safir, ‘Was the Kibbutz an Experiment in Social and Sex Equality?’, in Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Safir (eds), *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*, New York, NY: Pergamon Press, 1991.

⁶⁹ Deborah Bernstein, ‘Daughters of the Nation: Between the Public and the Private Spheres in Pre-State Israel’ in Judith Baskin (ed.), *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998, pp. 287-311.

⁷⁰ Erella Shadmi, *Lachshov Isha: Nashim ve-Feminizm be-Chevra Gavrit*, Jerusalem: Tzivonim, 2007.

received in the media, more general feminist struggles are not well taken up by the public, who generally buy the myth that gender equality is already achieved.⁷¹ Moreover, the ever-present matter of national security has a tendency to relegate the importance of gender issues (e.g. equal opportunity in the military, civil marriage and divorce rights) to the status of 'minor issues' or 'distractions', even amongst women.⁷² It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that feminist movements in Israel have a large Anglo-American component and tend to take their cues from developments in American feminism.

When it comes to the study of gender as a critical tool with which to analyse topics in literature, sociology etc, feminist questions began to receive an explosion of interest in Israel from the 1990s onwards. In a literary context, the overwhelmingly masculine orientation of the canon has been discussed in the context of both an explicit and a structural marginalisation of female writers and poets. Not only did they struggle against gendered expectations placed upon them, but they also struggled to find their place in an environment which demanded the land be approached as a lover, and expected each generation of young writers to perform an oedipal overthrow of their literary 'fathers'.⁷³ In particular, in the context of the masculinist creation of the (male) 'new Hebrew', in which literature played an important role, the place of women in the literary canon was unclear – how could a woman forward the nationalist goals of the movement through literature?

Additionally, analysis of female characters in texts written by prominent and celebrated Israel authors such as Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua finds women frequently presented as 'others'.⁷⁴ That is, there is a tendency to write female characters as outer shells lacking coherent internal worlds, who function only as symbols for the theme/direction of the story, or as body-focused, promiscuous, amoral, unthinking and destructive beings.⁷⁵ Particularly, they are often used as channels by which

⁷¹ Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui, 'Women in Israel: The Social Construction of Citizenship as a Nonissue', *Israel Society Science Research* 12:1, 1997, pp. 1-30; Hannah Safran, *Lo Rotsot Lihiyot Nechmadot: ha-Ma'avak al Zehut ha-Bechira le-Nashim ve-Reshito shel ha-Feminizm ha-Chadash be-Yisrael*, Haifa: Pardes, 2006.

⁷² Yael Yishai, *Between the Flag and the Banner: Women in Israeli Politics*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997; Ruth Halperin-Kaddari and Yaacov Yadgar, 'Between Universal Feminism and Particular Nationalism: Politics, Religion and Gender (In)equality in Israel', *Third World Quarterly* 31:6, 2010, pp. 905-920.

⁷³ Hanna Naveh, 'Leket, Pe'ah ve-Shikhecha: ha-Chayim Michuts la-Kanon' in Izraeli, Dafna (ed), *'Al Min, Migdar ve-Politika*, Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uchad, 1999, pp. 49-107; Wendy Zierler, 'Chariot(ess) of Fire: Yokheved Bat-Miriam's Female Personifications of Erets Israel', *Prooftexts* 20:2, 2000, pp. 111-138; Michael Gluzman, *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

⁷⁴ Esther Fuchs, *Israeli Mythogynies: Women in Contemporary Hebrew Literature*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987.

⁷⁵ Dvir Abramovich, 'A Woman-Centered Examination of the Heroines in the Stories of Amos Oz', *Women in Judaism* 6:2, 2009a, pp. 1-15; Nehama Aschkenasy, *Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986; Yael Feldman, *No Room of Their Own: Gender and Nation in Israeli Women's Fiction*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999.

the author presents and rails against perceived problems in Zionism or in society.⁷⁶ Most importantly, these scholars argue that women as autonomous subjects, as both private and public 'Self's, are marginalised and excluded in the Israeli literary canon. A number of feminist scholars have made efforts to recover and re-establish the position of female writers, such as Rachel, Yocheved Bat-Miriam, Devorah Baron, Amelia Kahana-Carmon in literary scholarship.

In both the realm of literature and beyond, motherhood is a particularly major concern, this being a central force of ambivalence for Israeli women pulled between feminist ideals and the overwhelming societal pressure to perform the expected role of mother.⁷⁷ Maintained partially to fight a war of demographics,⁷⁸ the Israeli obsession with motherhood has been called a 'cult of fertility'⁷⁹ and is a key element in perpetuating the hostility towards feminism prevalent in Israel: "Israelis generally perceive feminism as an attack on the family and therefore a threat to the Jewish national need to biologically reproduce the Jewish people".⁸⁰ In this context, motherhood is generally recognised to be a Jewish woman's most important contribution to the collective, her sacrifice of body and career in the name of raising children the core of what defines her position in society and her femininity.⁸¹

Tied into concepts of motherhood is the central role the military plays in shaping Israeli social discourse and hierarchies. Again, despite the patriotism-inspiring illusion of equality established by iconic images of female soldiers, women have been marginalised by military forces from the beginning, generally being kept from combat roles and positions of prestige.⁸² Legally and culturally, their roles as mothers and wives are prioritised over their roles as citizen-soldiers.⁸³ Orly Lubin examines the gendered nature of the interplay between military service and motherhood, demonstrating that the site of the woman's body is not intended to sacrifice itself in combat, but to perform a cyclical rebirth of the national subject under the threat of military death:

Left behind, her womb symbolically emptied of her son-soldier and filled with her lover-soldier, the woman becomes the axis of the ritual taking place every day, every minute of

⁷⁶ Anne Golomb Hoffman 'Bodies and Borders: The Politics of Gender in Contemporary Israeli Fiction' in Alan Mintz (ed) *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*, London: Brandeis University Press, 1997, pp. 35-70.

⁷⁷ Michal Rom and Orly Benjamin, *Feminism, Family, and Identity in Israel: Women's Marital Names*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 55.

⁷⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'The Jewish Collectivity and National Reproduction in Israel', *Khamsin* 13, 1987, pp. 60-93.

⁷⁹ Lesley Hazelton *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myths*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1977.

⁸⁰ Jessie Montell, 'Israeli Identities: The Military, the Family and Feminism', *Bridges* 2:2, 1991, p. 105.

⁸¹ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'The Bearers of the Collective: Women and Religious Legislation in Israel', *Feminist Review* 4, 1980, pp. 15-27.

⁸² Stuart Cohen, 'Towards a New Portrait of the (New) Israeli Soldier', *Israeli Affairs* 3:4, 1997, pp. 77-117; Dafna Izraeli, 'Gendering Military Service in the Israeli Defense Forces', *Israel Social Science Research* 2:1, 1997, pp. 129-67.

⁸³ Nitza Berkowitz, "Ezrachut ve-Imahut: Ma'amadan Shel Nashim Be-Yisrael' in Yoav Peled and Adi Ophir (eds), *Yisrael: Mi-Chevrach Meguyeset le-Chevrach Ezrachit*, Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute, 2001, pp. 206-243.

the army service: the ritual of replacing the narrative of battle and death, of violence and wounds, with a narrative of continuity, of family tranquillity, of stitching the wounds of the torn body and of the torn-apart family, of returning home, and of desire. The narrative of desire, then, and the narrative of constituting a family which is its supposed culmination, are subservient to the military narrative, to the narrative of conquest, thus both reflecting and maintaining it.⁸⁴

We will return to this connection of the feminine with cyclicity, rebirth and the body later, but note here that woman is linked to the home, a passive object of longing, and her role in the nation is a removed one: to give birth to and mother future soldiers, and to be the muse for which those soldiers will fight. As such, she mirrors the way in which the land and its natural contents are conceived – as the ‘ground’ of material from which the conscious, acting national Self is born, and out of which they shape their world. In this symbolic framework, then, women and nature have little agency nor value in and of themselves, but only as they reflect back the goals and identity of the masculine Self.

In addition to the uneasy role the military plays in feminist thought, with some fighting for greater inclusion and others criticising its emphasis on security as inherently perpetuating of oppressive ideas about gender roles, an important issue in gender studies in Israel is the question of how gender intersects with race, ethnicity and social background. For example, Mizrahi feminism emerged out of the sense of mainstream liberal feminism in Israel being dismissive of the ways in which Mizrahi identity has an impact on experiences of oppression, and the marginalisation of the specific gendered issues relevant to Mizrahi women.⁸⁵ Similar charges of marginalisation within the feminist movement have been made on behalf of Arab-Israeli women, and religious Jewish women. Again, this echoes developments in the American feminist movement, which demonstrates an increasing awareness of the need for intersectionality, and understanding that not all women’s experiences are the same. Recent work on feminist issues places emphasis on how other forms of ‘othering’, and other cultural contexts, interact with gender to inform each woman’s (and man’s) individual experience of gender and the patriarchy.

⁸⁴ Orly Lubin, ‘“Gone to Soldiers”: Feminism and the Military in Israel’ in Hannah Naveh (ed), *Israeli Family and Community: Women’s Time*, London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003, p. 166.

⁸⁵ Henriette Dahan-Kalev, ‘Tensions in Israeli Feminism: The Mizrahi Ashkenazi Rift’, *Women’s Studies International Forum* 24:6, 2001, pp. 669-684; Pnina Motzafi Haller, ‘Datiyut, Migdar u-Ma’amad be-‘Ayarah Midbarit’ in Yossi Yona and Yehuda Goodman (eds), *Ma’arbolet ha-Zehuiyot: Diyun Bikorti be-Datiyut u-ve-Chiloniyut be-Yisrael*, Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute, 2004, 316-346.

1.4.4. The Colonialism Debate

With the growing emphasis on intersectionality, it becomes increasingly important to analyse how groupings of power relations interact with each other. Another element of scholarship which has received much attention in the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism*⁸⁶ is the extent to which Zionism can be said to be a colonialist movement. This is a subject that has proved inflammatory and remains controversial within the broad field of Israeli scholarship, not to mention society at large. Given the importance of the 'security situation' in Israel, the continued relevance of such study on real life in Israel and the territories makes it both important and difficult to untangle.

While some scholars level the charge of settler colonialism at Zionism due to its dispossession of indigenous land and resources,⁸⁷ others argue that to use such a loaded term is unfair and dismissive of the uniqueness of the Israeli situation. Instead, they argue that the Jews were themselves an oppressed people, who did not come to Palestine with the intent of extracting indigenous resources in a colonialist-imperialist framework, but rather as refugees towards the place they considered home.⁸⁸ For these scholars, the focus of the Zionist movement was inwards, on transforming its members into 'new Hebrews', and not outwards, and therefore it is overly reductive to see their relationship with the Arab population in colonialist terms. However, while there certainly are some aspects of the Zionist project that do not fit the usual paradigm of settler colonialism, for example, the lack of external 'homeland', and the focus on 'return' rather than the newness of the settled territory, over-reliance on the exceptionalism of the Zionist case ignores the very real similarities between the narratives and structures of settler colonialism and the development of a Jewish homeland in Israel.

Regardless of the terminology used, it is clear that multiple lines of structural oppression are in place with regard to Arab citizens of Israel as well as those living in Israeli occupied territories. Many feminist and post-colonialist scholars draw a connection between the oppression of the Palestinians

⁸⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, NY: Vintage, 1979.

⁸⁷ Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983; Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labour, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Ilan Pappé, 'Zionism as Colonialism: A Comparative View of Diluted Colonialism in Asia and Africa', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107:4, 2008, pp. 611-633; Gabriel Piterberg, 'Deconstructing the Zionist Settler Narrative and Constructing an Alternative' in Hani Faris (ed), *The Failure of the Two-State Solution: The Prospects of One State in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, New York, NY: IB Tauris, 2013, pp. 113-129.

⁸⁸ Avi Bareli, 'Forgetting Europe: Perspectives on the Debate about Zionism and Colonialism', *Journal of Israeli History*, 20:2, 2001, pp. 99-120; Gideon Shimoni, 'Postcolonial Theory and the History of Zionism', *Israel Affairs* 13, 2007, pp. 859-871; Selwyn Ilan Troen, 'De-Judaizing the Homeland: Academic Politics in Rewriting the History of Palestine', *Israel Affairs*, 13:4, 2007, pp. 872-884.

and oppression of women in Israel, noting the existence of related structures of discrimination.⁸⁹ However, these structures of oppression are not necessarily equal or linear but rather constitute a network of multiple axes of power (Warren's 'isms of domination'), "produced through a variety of both contradictory and mutually reinforcing discourses, practices and social structures"⁹⁰ such that most individuals experience them as complex interplay between dominator (for example, Jewish, heterosexual) and dominated (for example, female, Mizrahi, working class) poles.

1.5. The Direction of This Thesis

Against this backdrop of multiple Israeli 'isms of domination', then, I would like to add the ecological. Reading into scholarship on the oppression of women in Israeli society and the domination of nature in Israel, I am struck at the similarities in how the Zionist hegemony navigates between hyper-investment in the symbolic value of woman and nature, with their themes of revolution and utopia, and the reality of continued repression, taking for granted, reducing to body. Alon Tal⁹¹ shows how the history of the Zionist approach to the environment is a tale of both dedication to nature as an ideal, commitment to ecological research and innovation, and high degree of public engagement with nature on one hand, and great pollution, development, habitat degradation and over-population on the other. Feminist scholars talk of the dichotomy between how women are portrayed in the national mythology – as equal, empowered members of society, tough militarily fighters, citizens fully engaged in public life – and the reality for many women in Israel, who suffer from systemic oppression on many fronts – lower wages, oppressive legal practices such as the maintenance of religious marriage customs which preserve an unequal balance of power, societal and religious restrictions on expression, physical appearance and life aspirations, and so on. Both exhibit an assumption on the part of the hegemony of the right to control and commandeer the resources, physical body, and destiny of the 'dominated', and its symbolic semi-deification of the dominated *in and only in* its oppressed/mastered state. This thesis sets out with the aim to

⁸⁹ Nahla Abdo and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Palestine, Israel and the Zionist Settler Project' in Nira Yuval-Davis and Daiva Stasiulis (eds), *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class*, London: SAGE, 1995, pp. 291-322; Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Politics of Women's Resistance*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996; Hanna Herzog, "'Both an Arab and a Woman': Gendered, Racialised Experiences of Female Palestinian Citizens of Israel', *Social Identities* 10:1, 2004, pp. 53-82; Nada Elia, 'Justice is Indivisible: Palestine as a Feminist Issue', *Decolonization* 6:1, 2017, pp. 45-63.

⁹⁰ Karen Dugger, 'Changing the Subject: Race and Gender in Feminist Discourse', in Benjamin P. Bowser (ed), *Racism and Anti-Racism in World Perspective*, London: SAGE, 1995, p. 145.

⁹¹ Alon Tal, *Pollution in a Promised Land: An Environmental History of Israel*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

investigate these connections, and what they mean for the way in which woman and nature are conceptualised in Israel.

2. Barren Wilderness

“The desert, a mirror for those who look into it.”⁹²

As we have seen, the Zionist conceptualisation of the man-environment relationship can be divided into three interrelated but superficially conflicting strands:

- 1) ‘Barren Wilderness’
- 2) ‘Lover/Bride’
- 3) ‘Mother Land’

Let us explore the first of these, ‘barren wilderness’, in detail, before moving on to the questions of this apparent paradox’s origins, why it was one of the few aspects of the movement not problematized by the majority of Zionist thinkers, and how Meir Shalev’s *The Blue Mountain* uses this trope to dissect some of the assumptions of the hegemonic Zionist narrative.

This way of imagining the nature-man relationship is characterised by the conception of nature as an antagonist, a powerful destructive force, an opponent which must be fought and tamed. In this conception, the forces of nature are a direct threat to the survival of mankind, the nation, the individual, or the particular social group in question. As we have shown, this aspect relates to the Logic of Domination by casting nature without human intervention/mediation as threatening, immoral, destructive, uncaring, and unreasoning. In other words, this view sees the non-human world as in need of human control, not just for the good of human security, but even as a kind of moral imperative, a redemption of that which does not possess the means to redeem itself.

This is not a conception which is unique to Zionism nor to the modern world. Indeed, the archetype of wild nature and its association with malevolent forces, black magic, sin and transgression can be traced back through human history, and many have indeed recognised it as one of the dominant modes of thinking about nature in much of recorded Western thinking.⁹³ Prominent technological historian Lynn White famously – and controversially – linked this idea back to the Bible, citing the Judeo-Christian Fall story and the subsequent spread of the concept of dominionship as the source

⁹² Yehuda Amichai, ‘Songs of Zion the Beautiful’ in *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (trans and eds), Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2013, p. 106.

⁹³ Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991.

of this distrust for ungoverned, untamed, uncontrolled nature.⁹⁴ Nature as a wild desert, uncultivated by man, is the antithesis of the harmonious orderliness of the Garden of Eden, a moral vacuum against which man must struggle in order to reassert his original position of divine-granted authority. A mirror of man's sinfulness and thus distance from God, the wilderness of nature is also explicitly feminine in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Consider the figure of Lilith, and also the matter of Eve's surrender to the will of the snake- the mythical representative of the destructive seductiveness of the 'call of the wild'. The biblical narrative clearly sets up the woman as a natural intermediary between man and nature, trapped between the two both in the hierarchy of power, and in temperament. Already half wild, her unpredictability, dangerous charm and absence of reason is precisely that which causes the downfall of man and descent into 'wilderness'. Therefore, the need to control the excesses of woman and of nature are bound together in this tradition. The effects can be widely seen in Western history, from the demonisation of witchcraft to suppression of female sexuality and resistance to women in the workplace, all framed within the wider context that, as closer to nature, female power unchecked will lead by blind passion and emotion towards danger and sin, dragging humanity down deeper into the 'wilderness'.

Alongside conflating the feminine and the natural, this paradigm (paradoxically) also widens the gap between human and the natural. As White and his supporters argue, "The creation sets the human being apart from nature, advocates human control of nature, and implies that the natural world was created solely for our use."⁹⁵ However, though much of the academic discussion of this dynamic has been centred around Western/Judeo-Christian contexts, as many critics have pointed out, this is an attitude that is prevalent all over the world, and can be seen as a theme in many religious origin stories, mythologies and didactic folk tales, to a greater or lesser extent. Indeed, the idea seems to cut to the core of human nature. Nature as a source of corruption, inherently inferior to culture – and the feminine as corrupting due to its closeness to nature – appears to be a near universal underlying assumption of human power structures:

Left to its own devices, pollution (for these purposes grossly equated with the unregulated operation of natural energies) spreads and overpowers all that it comes in contact with ... culture (i.e. every culture) at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct

⁹⁴ Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis', in David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (eds), *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1967], pp. 7-14.

⁹⁵ Peter Harrison, 'Subduing the Earth: Genesis 1, Early Modern Science, and the Exploitation of Nature', *Journal of Religion*, 79, 1999, p. 86.

from but superior to nature, and that sense of distinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform – to “socialize” and “culturalize” – nature.⁹⁶

In Israeli literature, the ‘wild hostile nature’ strain must be understood in the context of the Zionist ideological relation to the land as a whole. Relation to the natural environment in Israel is a nationalistic act in the Zionist conception. From the beginning, notions of a ‘Jewish land’ with a fundamentally Jewish character, related to by its inhabitants in a Jewish way, were at the centre of the Zionist project to transform its adherents from weak, passive, unrooted *luftmenschen* – Diaspora Jews – into strong, self-sufficient ‘new Hebrews’ at one with their land. Working the land was considered the antidote to all the problems which Jews had suffered in exile, where their lack of contact with their ‘proper’ national environment was believed to have atrophied their national spirit: Weakness and sickliness could be turned into strength and vigour by hard agricultural labour, feminine passivity could be converted into virile activity by the heroic act of ‘redeeming’ the land, and abstraction and lack of rootedness could be negated by forging an intimate knowledge of, dependence upon, and love of the land of Israel.

2.1. Imagination and Reality

This gave rise to two core and interconnected problems. Firstly, the land was not receptive to their vision. That is, it did not welcome the Zionist migrants with open arms. When the mostly European Zionist migrants arrived on the shores of the country for the first time, they were confronted with a landscape vastly at odds with the ‘land of milk and honey’ they had been expecting. The semi-arid Middle Eastern climate seemed to them a barren and empty wilderness which did not match the biblical descriptions of a lush and fertile paradise, which their European background had taught them to associate with dense, verdant forests and an abundance of flowing water. Similar negative attitudes to desert landscapes have been recorded in American literature written about the Wild West, the pioneering spirit again being employed to ‘master’ the unpromising natural environment and bend it to the will of the settlers.⁹⁷ Theodor Herzl’s famous utopian novel, *Altneuland* (1902), reflects this disdainful perspective on the natural landscape of Palestine, uncultivated by Jewish hands:

⁹⁶ Sherry Ortner, ‘Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?’, in *Women, Culture, and Society*, M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974, p. 72-3.

⁹⁷ John Rennie Short, *Imagined Country: Society, Culture and Environment*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 19-20; Barney Nelson, *The Wild and the Domestic: Animal Representation, Ecocriticism, and Western American Literature*, Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2000.

The lowlands were mostly sand and swamp, the lean fields looked as though burnt over ... The bare slopes and the bleak rocky valleys showed few traces of present or former cultivation.⁹⁸

This was a very common attitude not just in Jewish circles but also in the writing of non-Jewish visitors to the area in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mark Twain, for example, called it a “desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds.”⁹⁹ The word ‘desolate’ occurs frequently in these accounts, conveying a sense of emptiness, dirtiness, and backwardness. Although Ella Shohat cautions against erasing Mizrahi experiences by treating the European Zionist perspective as a single, unified default¹⁰⁰ – and the attitude described above is certainly a typically Orientalist one which would not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the local born or immigrant Arab Jewish population, or even all of those who had migrated from Europe – this element formed a crucial part of the hegemonic reading of the landscape in the Yishuv period. The consensus was that, in its current state, the promised land was distinctly unpromising.

This passage from Moshe Smilansky’s ‘Hawaja Nazar’ (1910),¹⁰¹ where the protagonist views the River Jordan for the first time and realises that it pales “to a piddling trickle” in comparison to the grand river Volga to which he had linked it in his imagination,¹⁰² illustrates the sense of disconnect and alienation that this engendered for many European Zionist migrants:

Out of the brakes and thickets on the left of our way a stream of water gleamed before our eyes as it left its hiding-place and immediately vanished again... I looked at my comrade... My companion said nothing, but became white as death, while his eyes bespoke deep pain... I knew he was searching for something that could never be found. And I knew that his spirit would never again know rest.¹⁰³

There was a fundamental disconnect, then, between the ideal of the promised land promoted by the Zionist movement and the actual physical land which they saw in front of them.

According to Avner de-Shalit, the first migrants responded to this by going into a state of denial, continuing to engage primarily with the romanticised ideal rather than relating to the environment

⁹⁸ Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land*, Blondheim, David Simon (trans), Berlin: Hofenberg, 2015 [1902], p. 28.

⁹⁹ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1869, p. 488.

¹⁰⁰ Ella Shohat, ‘The Invention of the Mizrahim’, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29:1, 1999 pp. 5-20.

¹⁰¹ Moshe Smilansky, ‘Hawaja Nazar’, in I. Lask (trans), *Palestine Caravan*, London: Methuen, 1935a [1910], pp. 145-181.

¹⁰² Shai Ginsburg, *Rhetoric and Nation: The Formation of Hebrew National Culture, 1880-1990*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014, p. 99.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Ginsburg, 2014, p. 99.

around them as it truly appeared to them.¹⁰⁴ This romantic strain was popular in some contemporary forms of European discourse and focused on nature as a nurturer, giving form and meaning to nations through their interaction with it. In it, “Human beings seek to merge harmoniously with nature while transforming it into an environment.”¹⁰⁵ Nations can learn about themselves through interaction with nature, and a successful, morally good society comes about by embracing the ‘natural order’. Ishak Schnell contrasts this to the Classical mode of interpreting nature, as something inferior to be risen above. Elements of the romanticising strain are certainly apparent in texts written about the Land of Israel from the Diaspora, most notably Avraham Mapu’s *Love of Zion (Ahavat Tsion, 1853)*, often referred to as the ‘first Hebrew novel’.¹⁰⁶ Innovative in its blending of European romantic prose conventions and a biblical setting, the historical novel was immensely popular among the Jewish population of Europe, and its vivid (if imaginary) depictions of the Land of Israel and autonomous Jewish life within it inspired many a Zionist ideologue. In *Love of Zion*, Mapu (1808-1867), a Lithuanian maskil who himself never visited Israel, romanticises the land as bounteous and just, ordered and responsive, happily serving the inhabitants. The most important theme running through the novel is justness: things are as they should be and everything has, understands and respects its place. Where there is morality, there is natural harmony. While this romanticising strain was important to the developing narrative with regard to the environment (as we shall discuss in chapters 3 and 4), however, as Alon Tal shows, the land as an alienating, hostile place was given voice to right from the start alongside and even within these romanticising narratives.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, journal entries from early pioneers seem to express this view almost universally. It is notable that little akin to *Love of Zion’s* depiction of the landscape as a great garden can be found in the literature of the early pioneers.¹⁰⁸ Rather, their romantic elements tend to take the form of exoticizing the wilderness and its Bedouin inhabitants, a kind of performance of nativeness, which simultaneously glorifies and denigrates its sources of inspiration, projecting a fundamentally ambivalent attitude towards the natural landscape and its inhabitants. It should be emphasised that this romantic attitude was clearly Orientalist in origin, adopting selected elements from the Bedouin and the landscape they inhabited as picturesque embodiments of an imagined

¹⁰⁴ Avner De-Shalit, ‘From the Political to the Objective: The Dialectics of Zionism and the Environment’, *Environmental Politics*, 4:1, 1995, pp. 70-87.

¹⁰⁵ Izhak Schnell, ‘Nature and Environment in the Socialist-Zionist Pioneers’ Perceptions: A Sense of Desolation’, *Ecumene*, 4:1, 1997, p. 73.

¹⁰⁶ Avraham Mapu, *The Love of Zion and Other Writings*, Joseph Marymount (trans), New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2006 [1853].

¹⁰⁷ Alon Tal, ‘Enduring Technological Optimism: Zionism’s Environmental Ethic and Its Influence on Israel’s Environmental History’ in *Environmental History*, 13:2, 2008a, pp. 275-305.

¹⁰⁸ Although such depictions based around the model of biblical utopia can be found in the works of some writers, such as Zeev Yavetz, see Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 28-32.

‘biblical’ authenticity, rather than the result of any non-mediated contact with a neighbouring culture.¹⁰⁹ The writer Moshe Smilansky (1874-1953) is typical of this genre. Born in modern day Ukraine, Smilansky immigrated to Palestine in the 1890s and became an agricultural worker in Rehavot. The political views reflected in his writing balance a preoccupation with manual labour as a source of Jewish national redemption, and the importance of peaceful coexistence with the Arab population. His work features an array of Bedouin characters which straddle the line between brave, authentic objects of emulation and primitive and rash objects of reproach: “an exotic figure, full of mystery, intrigue, impulsive violence and instinctive survival ... at once a bold victor and a vulnerable victim of political power struggles and inimical surroundings.”¹¹⁰ Smilansky and his peers’ Jewish characters self-consciously take on the role of ‘new Bedouins’, copying their style of dress, mannerisms, and so on in an attempt to prove their ‘nativeness’. In this form, which echoes the discourse of some colonialist settler movements, the ‘wildness’ of the landscape has a regenerating effect on the pioneer by awakening their latent will to power. Through this, they take their ‘natural’ place in the landscape, transforming it into an ‘environment’ by harnessing and guiding its power.

Taking this idea further, some even argued for the Jewish origin of the Bedouin.¹¹¹ In Hemda Ben-Yehuda’s (1873-1951) story ‘The Farm of the Sons of Reikhav’ (‘Chavat Bnei Reikhav’, 1903),¹¹² for example, the protagonist searches among the Bedouin for a lost Jewish tribe. The Bedouin’s ‘authentic’ relationship to the land is presented in naïve terms – “those savage brothers of us preserved our land for two thousand years”¹¹³ – in order to bridge the gap between Jewish exile and return. Such a narrative utilises folk history in order to appropriate the lived experience of the indigenous population, rendering them little more than living placeholders which justify Jewish presence on the land as good and natural.¹¹⁴

In ‘Hawaja Nazar’, Smilansky explores the limits of the ‘Hebrew Bedouin’ trope, revealing some of the inconsistencies upon which it is built. Though the protagonist is a typical early Zionist hero, more at home riding horses through the desert in keffiyehs and committing acts of heroism than the Bedouins themselves, the story shows his ‘nativeness’ to be only a shallow performance, and calls into question the true extent of his ability to connect with and integrate himself to the natural

¹⁰⁹ Itamar Even-Zohar, ‘The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine: 1882-1948’, *Studies in Zionism* 2:2, 1981, p. 173.

¹¹⁰ Warren Bargad, ‘The Image of the Arab in Israeli Literature’, *Hebrew Annual Review* 1, 1977, p. 55.

¹¹¹ Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, p. 186.

¹¹² Hemda Ben-Yehuda, ‘Chavat Bnei Reikhav’ in Yafa Berlovitz (ed), *Sipurei Nashim Benot ha-Aliya ha-Rishona*, Tel Aviv: Tarmil, 1984 [1903], pp. 43-77.

¹¹³ Ben-Yehuda, 1984, p. 77.

¹¹⁴ Yael Zerubavel, ‘Memory, the Rebirth of the Native, and the “Hebrew Bedouin” Identity’, *Social Research* 75:1, 2008a, p. 322.

landscape. Lazar ultimately drowns himself in the river and is symbolically reunited with the land. the Jewish cemetery refuses to bury him due to his not being circumcised, and the river carries him away, which the narrator declares to be his most fitting resting place. Though this in part symbolises a rejection of the religious tyranny of diaspora Judaism and the creation of New Hebrews at one with their environment¹¹⁵ – and certainly fits into a long line of heroic tales of Zionists who died for their land¹¹⁶ – Shai Ginsburg points out that the story leaves the idea of the possibility for national transformation ambiguous.¹¹⁷ Lazar forges a lasting connection with the land, overwriting his love for his Russian homeland, only through death and destruction. An unbridgeable gap remains between the ideal of the land and the reality, between the natural world the New Hebrews wanted to connect to and the natural world out there which appeared both wild and threatening and stunted and pathetic. Though Lazar proports to love the Jordan more than the Volga, it is not the river itself that his love is directed towards but the name of the river in Hebrew: “How beautiful that word is, J-o-r-d-a-n! ... How fine is its sound.”¹¹⁸ There is a biblical significance to his drowning while crossing the River Jordan, a symbol of taking possession of the Land of Israel. In only being able to relate to a proxy, a symbol rather than the land itself, the Jewish immigrant fails in his quest to break out of the diasporic chains and become a New Hebrew.

Yosef Haim Brenner’s (1881-1921) novella, *Nerves (Atsabim, 1910)*, hints more directly at the same lacuna on which the national endeavour seemed to be built. One of the key figures in Hebrew letters, Brenner was born in Russia and immigrated to Palestine in 1909. Though a committed Zionist and great innovator of the Hebrew language, his writing is suffused with doubt as to the likelihood of the project’s success and awareness of the contradictions inherent in the ideology. An enduring theme in the text is the tension between the biblical and the foreign – the first line sets up the competition between the words ‘acacia’ and ‘mimosa’ – and anxiety about language’s ability to bridge the gap between the migrant and the natural world – “A bird whose Hebrew name neither of us knew flew brilliantly by.”¹¹⁹ Through naming the native flora and fauna in Hebrew, the Zionists could exert a bond and a relationship of ownership over it. Yet the natural world was rich and teeming with unnamed life, an empty map of a foreign land. The wilderness in its unnamed state is a source of anxiety precisely because without language to describe it, it cannot be accounted for and

¹¹⁵ David Biale, *Culture of the Jews: A New History*, New York, NY: Schocken, 2002, p. 1036.

¹¹⁶ Yigal Schwartz, *The Zionist Paradox: Hebrew Literature and Israeli Identity*, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014, p. 118.

¹¹⁷ Shai Ginsburg, ‘Bein Safa le-Erets: ‘Khawaja Nazar’ le-Moshe Smilanski’, *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 20, 2006, pp. 221-235.

¹¹⁸ Smilansky, 1935a, p. 154.

¹¹⁹ Yosef Haim Brenner, ‘Nerves’, in Alan Lelchuk and Gershon Shaked (eds), *Eight Great Hebrew Short Novels*, Hillel Halkin (trans), New York, NY: New American Library, 1983 [1910], pp. 35-66.

laid claim over. Thus even beautiful and pastoral natural scenes such as that described carry within them the threat of disordered and unwelcoming wilderness. They are wilderness not because of any physical aspect of their being but precisely because they are unknown, unclaimed, and therefore un-Jewish. In his 1911 essay 'The Genre of Eretz Israel and its Accoutrements' ('Ha-Janer ha-Erets-Yisraeli ve-Avizareyhu'),¹²⁰ Brenner recognises the irony by which the pressure to subordinate literary description to the needs of Zionist national ideology only served to widen the gap between image and reality in relating to the Land.

Behind this anxiety we can see a decline narrative, which played an important role in allowing the pioneers to continue holding both ideas about the land simultaneously – it was both a 'barren wilderness' and a place of biblical promise. If the promise was still latent underneath the apparent barrenness, it could be recovered, and the wilderness was in this sense an illusion, a mask. Moreover, it was in their power to change it.

This complex Zionist reaction to the natural landscape of the Land can be compared to that experienced by settler colonisers in many Western colonial discourses. As Joanna Long notes, projection of Euro-centric natural aesthetics onto foreign landscapes and their inhabitants "express[es] the coloniser's estrangement from that place and its people, whilst also expressing an affinity that subdues this very strangeness."¹²¹ As such, the partial glorification of the wilderness as an exotic 'other' serves as justification for transforming, conquering, and taking possession of that landscape. It sets up an opposition between the Self and the Other that demands to be bridged, allowing the Zionists to simultaneously view the landscape as an empty terra nullius at the very same time as it was the ancestral homeland of the irredentist Zionist project.

The physical character of the landscape undeniably presented difficulties with the realisation of a modern European nation – a model which the Zionist sought to emulate – such as that laid out in Herzl's *Altneuland*. The dusty heat, lack of good roads, prevalence of desert or semi-desert landscapes, etc – as well as the hostility of many local inhabitants – all made interacting with the environment physically challenging for the early pioneers, and they gave expression to this aspect through the idea of 'civilizing' a land which was in some sense lacking, desolate, and empty.¹²² Moreover, unlike many other pioneering societies where the mastery over the wilderness dialogue saw a gradual shift towards respect for and then adulation of the 'wild',¹²³ this idea continued to

¹²⁰ Yosef Haim Brenner, *Ketavim* 3, Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Me'uchad, 1985, p. 569-578.

¹²¹ Joanna Long, 'Rooting Diaspora, Reviving Nation: Zionist Landscapes of Palestine-Israel' in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, 34:1, 2009, p. 66.

¹²² Neumann, 2011, p. 79.

¹²³ See for example Margret Atwood's analysis of Canadian literature in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Toronto: Anansi, 1972.

feature in Zionist natural discourse long after the external wilderness ceased to be a legitimate threat to the Zionist project.

Part of this was due to the centrality of the discourse of conquering the wilderness in the Zionist origin story. Yael Zerubavel points out that the very name used to describe the pre-state period – ‘the Yishuv’, or settlement period – is indicative of the central role the opposition between nature – the non-Zionist space – and civilisation- nature tamed and shaped in the Zionist image – played in the construction of a Zionist identity and its continued power in asserting and defining Israeliness.¹²⁴

2.2. To Build and Be Built

The second core problem was that the people themselves – regardless of the strength of their Zionist convictions – often found themselves wracked with doubts and struggled against their ‘internal nature’ – supposedly the sick, weak, distorted diaspora-corrupted root cause of all their problems – which made them crave home, the satisfaction of personal desires and the comforts of modern life. Not only did emotion make them yearn for a past life, reason told them that the project was doomed to failure, that their work and self-sacrifice was in vain, and that they should go home or emigrate to the USA. Around 40% of those who immigrated to the area during the Second Aliyah left the country, and many others committed suicide.¹²⁵

For those who stayed, the creation of a relationship with the natural land was of such vital importance in the discourse that the motivation behind many of these suicides was often framed in terms of a failure to relate to, and triumph over, the land.¹²⁶ Many felt that the land was rejecting their attempts to love it. This was likely in part a projection of their own ambivalence towards the landscape, in which they had to suppress their repulsion from the very thing that they ideologically declared their love, connection and attraction to. Psychological studies show that it is common to glorify and romanticise that which causes anxiety.¹²⁷

As Val Plumwood notes, the narrative of mastery:

¹²⁴ Yael Zerubavel, ‘Desert and Settlement: Space Metaphors and Symbolic Landscapes in the Yishuv and Early Israel Culture’ in Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (eds), *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008b, p. 216.

¹²⁵ Neumann, 2011, p. 112.

¹²⁶ Neumann, 2011, p. 113.

¹²⁷ De-Shalit, 1995, p. 74.

results from a certain kind of denied dependency on the subordinated other. This relationship of denied dependency determines a certain kind of logical structure, in which the denial and the relation of domination/subordination shape the identity of both the relata.¹²⁸

The intangible survival threat that these internal urges created, then, and the need to exert control over them, was projected outwards onto the surroundings, and assuaged by the ability to exert control over the tangible external survival threats that the environment threw up, such as lack of water, violent weather, disease and agricultural pests. Asserting mastery over that which it was 'natural' to master – the external environment – the early Zionist migrants transformed themselves into 'natural masters', who as such could be masters over their own fear, longing and doubt.

Not only did control over this external 'falling away from the ideal' aid in gaining the upper hand over internal voices of dissent on an individual level, it also had the effect of cementing a greater bond of responsibility between members of the society. It must be noted that Zionism was never a monolithic entity, and at all stages of the development of the state, migrants arrived for a multitude of reasons, only some of which had any relation to hegemonic Zionist ideology. Shaping the Jewish migrants as masters over the environment, a 'natural' grouping characterised by the quality of mastery was established. Thus, domination of nature can be seen as part of a greater process of establishing power structures and consolidating nationhood/group belonging, one which simultaneously enlists support to its cause and delegitimises those who did not follow the call. Controlling and shaping the landscape was a means of promoting group belonging, and also a physical sign of the influence of the Zionist ideology to its detractors, a propaganda tool which indisputably communicated its success at "control[ing] the forces of history and creat[ing] a ... "normal nation" with a clear geographical and historical mission."¹²⁹ We will return to this idea of taming 'external nature' as a proxy for taming 'internal nature' – or otherwise domination of nature as a proxy for domination of society – later in this chapter.

2.3. Technological Optimism

Both of these problems together were important driving factors in the development of the overwhelming narrative of transformation at the centre of the Zionist project. A famous pioneering

¹²⁸ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London: Routledge, 2002 [1993], p. 41.

¹²⁹ Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy*, London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, p. 114.

slogan, 'to build and be built', illustrates the dynamics of this narrative. Unlike other nationalist movements, with which Zionism shared much of the discourse of a nation fundamentally tied to its homeland,¹³⁰ the link between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel was not a given. Estranged from the land with which they had identified (for thousands of years), the romanticising of its landscape was – greater than in any other context – the romanticising of an imaginary landscape. Not only was the modern Jewish idea of the Land of Israel constructed in an environment totally alien to it, with limited access to it as a physical space, those who migrated to the region experienced it not as natives, whose relationship with the environment was organically rooted in childhood memories, etc., but as aliens, for whom all those memories had been established in a landscape which they thus both felt an emotional and aesthetic draw to and yet ideologically did not consider themselves fully part of. As a result, national identification with the surrounding landscape had to be constructed artificially. For this reason, the idea of transformation (in Zionist terminology *hagshamah*, or 'crystallisation, actualisation') – the bridging of the gap between what was symbolically there and what was actually there – was much more inbuilt to the Zionist national movement than in most other cases. Though, for example, the idealisation of innocent peasant life in artistic works of European separatist movements did inspire some adherents to seek a closer relationship with the land, these works performed a largely symbolic, nostalgic role, looking back with a romantic eye to a mythical past.¹³¹ In other words, in the European national movements which Zionism took influence from, the relationship between the nation and its land was evident enough for it to be sufficient to construct an idealised past relationship to the land, without the need to reconcile the disconnect between the imagined landscape and the physical landscape. By contrast, the Jewish relationship to the Land of Israel was not sufficiently self-evident. For this reason, the Zionist case involved transformation as a vital, core aspect – it was not enough to imagine a utopic, Jewish environment situated in a timeless past, it had to actually be physically manifest in the present. Not only did the pioneers need to 'build' a suitable environment which could validate their national claim over the land, they had to 'be built' by that environment as its 'natives'.

In the quest to build the society (and selves) they wanted, which was mandated on building the surrounding environment they wanted, nature in its 'pure' form – or moulded into the image of

¹³⁰ Hevda Ben-Israel, 'Zionism and European Nationalisms: Comparative Aspects', *Israel Studies* 8:1, 2003, p. 92.

¹³¹ Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision*, Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1991.

others – was the enemy. It would not go down without a fight. And any complacency would bring it right back to the surface again, along with the question of legitimacy of power.

The hegemonic Zionist response to the physical disparities between the imagined promised land and the reality of the local landscape was to reconceptualise the myth as no less a true representation of the biblical landscape, but one currently trapped under a disguise or curse, imprisoned beneath the current ‘barren wilderness’ (*midbar shemama*) as a result of its long-term severance from the redeeming influence of a relationship with its rightful Jewish inhabitants.¹³² This point will be explored in detail in the next chapter. The ‘wild’ elements of the actual landscape, then, were not regarded as part of its unique nature and beauty – as they were in much of the American nature writing on which early ecocriticism focused¹³³ – but rather as a wrong to right, some sort of noble challenge for the pioneer ‘knights-in-shining-armor’ to overcome in order to prove themselves worthy and win back the land’s favour.

S. Y. Agnon’s (1888-1970) short story ‘From Foe to Friend’ (‘Me-Oyev le-Ohev’, 1941)¹³⁴ illustrates this dynamic well. Agnon is the Hebrew language’s only Nobel prize winning author. An immigrant from Galicia, his work focuses on the tension between traditional Jewish life and Jewish identity in the modern world, often attempting to build a bridge between the two.

In ‘From Foe to Friend’, the protagonist repeatedly attempts to build his house on a hill, his work each time destroyed by the mocking King of the Wind, until finally he succeeds in building a house strong enough to withstand even the strongest of winds. In doing so, he wins the respect of the once antagonistic wild force, thereby transforming it into a soft, caressing, gentle breeze that comes to visit the narrator in his garden. The story, then, can be seen as an allegory of “man’s conquest over nature”,¹³⁵ and, more specifically, of the Zionist taming of the ‘desert wilderness’¹³⁶ and uncovering of the latent promise beneath. This is not to say that the story sees nature as one dimensionally negative or simplistically, passively submissive to the protagonist. Certainly, the wind retains some degree of independence to roam elsewhere and the agency to choose to spare the protagonist’s property. But it is its clear sense of restoring things to their proper place in the hierarchy which makes this such an alluring allegory for the Zionist enterprise. The planting of trees in order to

¹³² Yoram Bar-Gal, *Propaganda and Zionist Education: The Jewish National Fund 1924-1947*, Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003, p. 158; Zerubavel, 2008b, p. 205.

¹³³ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995; William Cronon, ‘The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature’, in William Cronon (ed), *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, London: Norton, 1996, pp. 69-90.

¹³⁴ S. Y. Agnon, *Me-Oyev le-Ohev ve-Od Sipurim*, Jerusalem: Schocken, 1992 [1941].

¹³⁵ Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968, p. 278.

¹³⁶ Dov Sadan, ‘Beinenu Le-Veinam’, *Mi-Bifnim* 21, 1959, pp. 249-259.

neutralise the effect of the wind in the story echoes the guiding JNF (Jewish National Fund, an international charity set up in 1901 to fund the purchase and settlement of land in Palestine) principle that nature itself was the best tool to conquer nature: “trees were not to be the casualties of modernisation but the harbingers of it, through which ‘the harmony of natural creation’ might be restored.”¹³⁷ Trees were a key tool by which the Zionists harnessed the ‘barren wilderness’ to their own discourse. They ‘naturalised’ nature by remoulding it in the image of its Jewish settlers, all while appearing timeless, apolitical, natural.¹³⁸ As Shaul Cohen notes, trees, with their almost universally positive associations, are “a particularly profound and powerful tool for reaching people and binding them to the status quo”,¹³⁹ their self-embodying ‘naturalness’ effectively suppressing the question of what came before. In such a way, even in transforming nature beyond all recognition, the pioneers could view themselves as working *with* nature and *for* nature rather than against it. In this worldview, nature had value only when it reflected and served the purposes of the Jewish incomers, who were working hard to improve it. Nature in pure, untamed form was in this sense both dangerous and infantile, like a child struggling against the attempts of its parents to care for it; like an injured beast caught in a trap, flailing and hissing at its rescuers.

2.4. The Moral Imperative

Underlying the Zionist view of the man-nature relationship, then, was a sense of something that in its current, natural form was broken and dangerous, in need of Jewish influence to correct. Not only did the concept of ‘barren wilderness’ apply to the desert landscapes so alien to the European migrants’ aesthetic values, but to any natural space unmastered by Jewish hands. As such, there was a moral value ascribed to unmastered nature, and a moral imperative to take possession of it. As Schnell notes, use of the term ‘wilderness’ in pioneering discourses extended beyond the physical sense of arid or uncultivated landscapes, to incorporate a sense of psychological estrangement and anxiety. In this sense, ‘barren wilderness’ could mean any “bewildering and uncontrolled, frightening place.”¹⁴⁰ In Eliezer Smoli’s (1901-1985) settlement novel *The Frontiersmen of Israel (Anshei Bereshit, 1933)*, for example, a family settles in an area already fertile and forested. When other pioneers cast doubts on their ability to survive in the “desolate desert”, then, it is not the physical quality of the

¹³⁷ JNF document, quoted in Long, 2009, p. 66.

¹³⁸ Long, 2009, p. 63.

¹³⁹ Shaul Cohen, *Planting Nature: Trees and the Manipulation of Environmental Stewardship in America*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004, p. 167.

¹⁴⁰ Schnell, 1997, p. 73.

landscape that renders it so, but its lack of Jewish character.¹⁴¹ Establishing and consolidating control, of nature and of the self, was key to the Zionist goal of creating a nation of ‘new Hebrews’.

At the centre of this dynamic is the Zionist adoption of what ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant refers to as an environmental Recovery Narrative.¹⁴² According to this framework, history had brought the Jewish nation to its lowest point – exiled from the land to which they were bonded, and mentally and physically crippled by centuries of life among alien and hostile gentile societies – and it was now their role to break out of this state of decline and create a new, better society by creating a new, better relationship with nature.

As we have noted, their conception of nature was split between the negative – the ‘barren wilderness’ as a place of danger, spiritual lack and moral degeneracy – and the positive – nature as a beautiful and yielding ‘bride’ or ‘lover’, and as a fertile and nurturing ‘mother’. Merchant borrows the medieval distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* to elucidate a similar difference between two conflicting but related conceptions of nature in the typical Western Recovery Narrative:

The Recovery Narrative undoes the Fall. Here Eve is fallen nature – wild land, barren desert, impenetrable forest. Civilisation is “the end of nature”; it is nature natured, *natura naturata* – the natural order – nature ordered and tamed. Nature is no longer inchoate matter endowed with a formative power (*natura naturans* – nature as a creative force); it is the civilised natural order designed by God. The unruly energy of wild female nature is suppressed and pacified. The final happy state of nature natured is female and civilised – the restored garden of the world.¹⁴³

In this way, nature in itself – *natura naturans*, or ‘nature natur-ing’ – is akin to ‘Fallen Eve’, something which is at once the mouthpiece and the victim of Satan, the serpent, or evil.¹⁴⁴ It cries out for a masculine energy to redeem it, while at the same time as trying to subvert and fight against that rescue’s assault on its power as a creative force. Its wild, savage immorality is key to its power as an invigorating life force, but it is also why it must be tamed.

For this reason, these three different conceptions of nature can be contained together without dissonance in the Zionist ideology, since ‘barren wilderness’ refers to nature outside of Zionist

¹⁴¹ Zerubavel, 2008b, p. 204.

¹⁴² Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1980, p. 126.

¹⁴³ Merchant, 1980, p. 126-7.

¹⁴⁴ Merchant, 2003, p. 21.

influence – it is the ‘before’ state of nature later harnessed to the Zionist cause, or else part of a natural world beyond the symbolic borders of the Zionist project and therefore not subject to redemption.

This casting of the natural world as something degenerate and in need of restoration is crucially similar to that seen in colonial narratives, part of the reason why Zionism has sometimes been accused of being a form of Western colonialism. In *Reinventing Eden*, Merchant points to the Recovery Narrative as the justification story behind the westward movement in American history, citing references from American literature across this period that show its ideological association with the Judeo-Christian Fall narrative, a natural return to that which was lost.¹⁴⁵ This association is if anything stronger in the Jewish case, the land in question being the very land from which their ancestors were supposedly exiled. Return is thus already imbued with symbolic associations of ascent – to emigrate to the Land of Israel is to make *aliyah*, or to ascend. On the Jewish mythic-symbolic map, the Land is the centre of the world, the point towards which centuries of prayer and longing have been focused. ‘Returning’ it to its former glory, then, is the starting point towards returning to the garden of Eden, or in secular terms returning to a situation in which all is in its right and natural place in the world. It is the first step in undoing the double exile of the Jewish symbolic conception of space – from the garden of Eden and from the land of Israel – that has been the result of the nation’s failure to rise to its moral duty, and the cause of its supposed sick state.

While the comparison to Western colonialism is complicated by the fact that the Zionist pioneers viewed themselves as *returning natives* rather than morally superior incomers, their use of nature to legitimise their settlement is certainly reminiscent of a particular kind of colonialist discourse: settler colonialism.¹⁴⁶ This form of colonialism does not treat the land and its indigenous population as a source of goods and labour, a rich resource to exploit for the benefit of the colonisers Western countries of origin, but rather as a new homeland of their own. In this version of colonialism, indigenous populations are either ignored or treated as direct competition. As such, “invasion is a structure not an event”,¹⁴⁷ taking the form of gradual appropriation of the role of ‘native’, with the ultimate goal of total replacement of the indigenous population’s claim over the land. In other words, the settlers impose themselves onto the landscape by creating a hierarchical structure of power which privileges their own narrative and delegitimises that of the competing ‘other’.

¹⁴⁵ Merchant, 2003, p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel*, London: Verso, 2008.

¹⁴⁷ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, London: Cassell, 1999, p. 2.

As we have seen, the Zionist pioneers tended to view the land as empty – ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’¹⁴⁸ – despite their interaction with the indigenous population. It was a ‘terra nullius’ not because there were no people living in it, but because those people did not impose the same framework of power over the nature, and thus were not understood to have either bond with the land, nor a sense of their own nationhood. In particular, the native inhabitants’ failure to fully master nature is used as proof of Zionist right to do so. As Sandra Sufian notes:

Under the terra nullius principle, applied particularly in colonial contexts, if the land was not being cultivated, then by Western standards it was considered as not being properly used.

Those who could, therefore, cultivate the land has the right, if not an obligation, to do so.¹⁴⁹

This attitude can clearly be seen even in the work of Zionist environmentalists, agronomists and geographers. For example, Yehuda Karmon’s account of the draining of Hula wetlands in the 1950s describes the situation beforehand: “the harsh conditions and diseases have created a uniform type out of all the inhabitants ... weak in body and spirit, helpless against the forces of nature.”¹⁵⁰ This was not just a fringe view but a central cornerstone of the Zionist reading of the land, a natural counterpart to the centrality of the working the land motif, which relies on viewing the land prior to Zionist arrival as something degraded and sad, with its great potential unfulfilled. According to this narrative, the Palestinian system of *fellahin*, small scale farmers working the land, did not work to overcome the destructive power of nature, but simply gave into it, working around whatever nature threw at them like opportunistic, foraging animals. Nur Masalha collects descriptions from key Zionist figures, describing the native inhabitants that the pioneers encountered as like “the rocks of Judea ... obstacles that had to be cleared off a difficult path,”¹⁵¹ and “beasts of the desert, not a legitimate people ... not a nation but a mole that grew in the wilderness of the eternal desert.”¹⁵² Their passivity meant that they had little impact on the land, and the land had little impact on them – it was not a ‘homeland’, but merely an incidental dwelling place. This allowed the Zionists to view

¹⁴⁸ Though this slogan is primarily associated with Christian supporters of Jewish nationalism, Anita Shapira (in *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force 1881-1948*, William Templar (trans), Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999 [1992], p. 42), argues it to have been common in Zionist circles in Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and Neumann (2011, p. 48) cites an abundance of similar expressions in the writings of members of the Second Aliyah, such as this from a Labour Battalion member in 1931: “The *halutz* came to settle a desolate land ... Everything is being done from the beginning, there is not yet anything to destroy and there is no one to fight against.”

¹⁴⁹ Sandra Sufian, *Healing the Land and the Nation: Malaria and the Zionist Project in Palestine*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 46.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Edna Gorney, ‘(Un)Natural Selection: The Drainage of the Hula Wetlands, An Ecofeminist Reading’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9:4, 2007, p. 468.

¹⁵¹ Chaim Weitzman, quoted in Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948*, Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992, p. 17.

¹⁵² Avraham Stern, quoted in Masalha, 1992, p. 30.

the land as pure nature – empty raw material that was theirs to mould – and the Palestinians as part of that backdrop, raw material that could be moulded and managed to fit the environment its ‘natural masters’ sought to create. Their failure to master the nature landscape in a manner consistent with Western understanding negated any claim of ownership they had over it, since they had not performed their natural role, and thus were not understood to have made a claim at all.

In the words of Mary Louise Pratt, this dominant attitude to the indigenous population derives from the typical lens of “a European male subject of European landscape discourse – he whose imperial eyes look out and possess,”¹⁵³ one which assumes a binary distinction between nature and culture and predicates the value of nature on its usefulness to culture. Where nature is not ‘used’ to the fulness of its potential, then, it is assumed that there is no culture, or that all attempts at creating culture have failed.

Even when the Palestinian hostility to this ‘gift of civilization’ was acknowledged, their supposed association with nature was used to delegitimise their objections. Much as the ‘King of the Wind’ in Agnon’s story was depicted as at first hostile to the pioneers but eventually growing to cherish and respect them, the Palestinians’ supposed closeness to nature stripped them of the autonomy to know what was best for them, and their right to construct their own narrative. Thus, Karmon’s claims that true progress in the Hula draining was only possible after the establishment of the State of Israel, which “simultaneously removed all artificial barriers,”¹⁵⁴ demonstrates the prevailing viewpoint that, paradoxically, in belonging to the side of raw nature, the Palestinians presented an ‘artificial’ barrier to the ‘natural’ advancement of civilisation and progress. Their ‘natural’ role, like that of nature itself, was to be passive recipients, not hostile antagonists.

This is not to say that this process was a conscious, calculated one. Although, as we have noted, the ‘white man’s burden’ was a recurring legitimising theme in colonial narratives, in the Zionist case it is fair to say that the Arabs were not a focus of the movement. That is, unlike some colonial narratives which put the focus on their educating, civilising role, teaching the natives to live a ‘moral’ life, the focus of the Zionist movement was inwards, on transforming the nature of its Jewish participants, rather than outwards. Thus any ‘civilizing’ effect was merely a side effect, and the Arabs, where noted, were more an annoying obstacle to overcome – like malaria, drought, *hamsin* – than a recognised target of transformation. They were outside the boundaries of the Zionist space, their villages blank spaces on the map between Zionist settlements. Meron Benvenisti writes of the continued mutual erasure of the spaces of the ‘other’ on the mental map of both Jews and Arabs in

¹⁵³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Gorney 2007, p. 468.

the area: “We were, of course, aware of the presence of Arab neighbourhoods, but they had no place in our perception of the homeland.”¹⁵⁵ This fact has been used by many scholars to discredit the idea that Zionism was a colonialist enterprise at all,¹⁵⁶ but whatever the validity in this point, for our purposes it seems clear that the movement shares enough in common with the hegemony building process of settler colonialist societies that such a comparison is useful.

For the pioneers, the Arabs were part of the ‘barren wilderness’ because they were not part of the narrative of transformation. Nonetheless, the reducing of natives to the level of animal is a typical process by which the Logic of Domination is propagated in settler colonial discourses. By creating a difference between “orders constructed as systematically higher and lower,” and reinforcing these by emphasising the similarities between those regarded as lower – in this case Nature and the Palestinian – these orders are perceived as belonging to “different kinds ... and hence not open to change.”¹⁵⁷

In *The House of Rajani* (*Achuzat Dajani*,¹⁵⁸ 2008), Alon Hilu (1972-) takes an ironic approach to investigate how this common Zionist trope legitimises the protagonist’s takeover of their land.¹⁵⁹ The novel is narrated through the journal entries of an early Zionist ‘pioneer’, Isaac Luminsky (Haim Margalio Kalvarisky in the original Hebrew), and the young son of a wealthy Arab landowner, Salah Rajani (Dajani in the original), a sensitive child who sees visions of the future in which his estate and country will be taken over by Jews. Hilu, a Sapir prize winning novelist, became a centre of controversy when this second novel was published. *The House of Rajani* was a bestseller, but also received angry accusations of attempting to defame figures of Israel’s historic pioneering past.

Luminsky’s narrative is that of a typical pioneer and projects deeply misogynistic and colonialist attitudes. His depiction of women as sneaky and irrational echoes a typical settler colonialist technique of reinforcing of power structures by linking women and natives to the animal world, and thus undermining their right to be taken seriously as autonomous moral agents:

¹⁵⁵ Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, p. 71.

¹⁵⁶ Avi Bareli, ‘Forgetting Europe: Perspectives on the Debate about Zionism and Colonialism’, *Journal of Israeli History*, 20:2, 2001, pp. 99-120; Selwyn Ilan Troen, ‘De-Judaizing the Homeland: Academic Politics in Rewriting the History of Palestine’, *Israel Affairs*, 13:4, 2007, pp. 872-884; Zeev Sternhell, ‘In Defence of Liberal Zionism (In Review of Piterberg’s Returns of Zionism)’ in *New Left Review* 62, 2010, pp. 99-114.

¹⁵⁷ Plumwood, 2002, p. 48.

¹⁵⁸ The names of the protagonists, which in the Hebrew original were based on the real-life pioneer Haim Margalio Kalvarisky and the wealthy Palestinian Dajani family, were changed in translation due to threats of a lawsuit.

¹⁵⁹ Alon Hilu, *The House of Rajani*, Evan Fallenberg (trans), London: Harvill Secker, 2010 [2008].

there is no way of understanding women absolutely, for their minds are as fickle and fraudulent as those of cats, creatures who cannot be governed or bridled and are subject to their own whims and caprices, who will learn your desire and do precisely the opposite.¹⁶⁰

Like ungoverned nature, an ungoverned woman is dangerous because of her perceived lack of morality. With this polarity – nature and feminine dangerous/civilization and masculine corrective – clear, Luminsky's attack on the masculinity of the Arab landowner is a direct attack on his right to control the land: "His expression was feminine and feeble, his eyes watery as a mad dog's."¹⁶¹ Moreover, the Arab's perceived failure to appropriately master his woman –

Slowly I have come to realise that love between men is a known phenomenon among Arab men. That is because this nation, at one time among the most fearless on earth, has grown weaker from generation to generation, entrapped in the flimsy, poisonous webs woven by its spidery women so that now its sons have lost all semblance of manliness, for the marrow of life has been sucked wholly from their bodies.¹⁶²

– both takes its weight from and reinforces the argument that the Palestinians were not true a nation as they failed to master the land.

Luminsky describes the potential of the estate with emphasis on the point that its current owners were not taking appropriate advantage:

The grounds of the estate were densely populated with fruit trees too closely congregated, and tall weeds grew besides them. Juicy fruit hung from the trees, shiny with colour, but much was rotten and still more had fallen and lay rotting in muddy puddles, prey for hordes of fruit flies.¹⁶³

The great bounty of the land is manifest, but going to waste. The passivity of the male populace, their leaving a woman in charge of the estate, and their failure to fight against the incursion of nature in its wild form, allow Luminsky to relegate them to the backdrop on which to project his own plans for utilisation and mastery over nature. In not conforming to Western ideals of masculinity, they thus leave a power vacuum which it is only just for the civilised, virile Jew to step into. This image of the Arab as a passive bystander, observing Jewish feats of transforming the landscape, is typical of settler Zionist art and writing the Yishuv period.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Hilu, 2010, p. 57.

¹⁶¹ Hilu, 2010, p. 86.

¹⁶² Hilu, 2010, p. 88.

¹⁶³ Hilu, 2010, p. 47.

¹⁶⁴ Zerubavel, 2008a, p. 330.

However, Hilu disrupts the directionality of the Arab characters' reduction to 'part of the natural order', by giving voice to the Arab 'other' through the boy Salah Rajani. Not only does this grant the reader an insight into the internal world of an Arab character, thus forcing resistance to Luminsky's collapsing of all the Arab characters into a passive collective, but it also forces the (implied Israeli Jewish) reader to pay attention to the workings of the Logic of Domination by showing its application in the opposite direction. Just like Luminsky, Rajani delegitimises Jewish claims on the land with use of animal-like descriptions:

the Jews will already have conquered much of the land, and they will have sunk their talons and seated themselves on their hind haunches smeared with excrement, and the land will become contaminated with their filthy skin and their ugly souls.¹⁶⁵

The echoes of instantly recognisable anti-Semitic Western tropes depicting Jews as sickly, dirty semi-beasts here serves to call the reader's attention to the way in which the Zionist narrative uses similar tropes to assert their own 'natural order', this time with themselves at the top. Indeed, Yochai Oppenheimer notes that the novel makes regular use of animal imagery to describe all characters, both Arab and Jewish, destabilising the typical order of a pioneering narrative.¹⁶⁶ In the post-colonialist tradition, Hilu's faux-journal account points to the lack of binary opposition between the two groups – each at times takes on the 'typical/natural' qualities of the other.

Ultimately, the settler protagonist is forced to recognise the genuine connection between the indigenous Arab inhabitants and his estate, his attempts to avoid 'seeing' them by blending them in to the backdrop of the natural landscape having failed through his personal connection with individuals among them. What he previously dismissed as their childish backwards superstition, their sighting of a genie who walks the orchard taking revenge on any who would cut down the trees there, becomes a reality once he can no longer ignore this point:

the trees closed in on me from every angle and direction... the orchards lined up in whole battalions, their roots serving as legs and feet, their branches now hands for beating and lifting, and they chased after me in earnest, to bring about my demise, and it was as if the entire estate was bewitched, producing genies and spirits at every juncture and vomiting me out.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Hilu, 2010, p. 161.

¹⁶⁶ Yochai Oppenheimer, "'How Bound the Arab Is to His Land": The House of Rajani and the Limits of Zionist Discourse', *Prooftexts* 32:3, 2012, p. 391.

¹⁶⁷ Hilu, 2010, p. 262.

His planting of a Zionist symbol – the eucalyptus tree – over a Palestinian symbol – the citrus orchard – fails to simply erase the Arab claim over the land, which ‘vomits him out’ as his moral basis for legitimising his takeover of the estate falters. However, the novel’s conclusion is ultimately ambivalent. Luminsky, like many Zionist figures who criticised the movement’s blindness to the Palestinian conflict of interest while continuing to uphold beliefs that reinforced the hegemonic Zionist worldview, continues to devote his life to the contradictory goals of land purchase and rapprochement with the Arabs.

In such a way, the Zionist project built a narrative in which the Palestinian inhabitants were othered and reduced to the level of nature, just as nature itself was othered and treated as in need of Jewish help and control. These two binary oppositions – man/nature and civilised Jew/primitive Arab – fed into one another, reinforcing each other’s position as a fundamental truth. The concept of the civilised, masculine, hardworking Jew transforming nature, and the weak, feminine, passive Arab subsisting in nature became entrenched through this system of mutually reinforcing associations, such that they came to seem obvious and inevitable. In both cases, this was accomplished not simply through negative, but also positive descriptions. A romantic, pastoral attitude to the Palestinians painted them as living in harmony with nature, and therefore a model of ‘authentic nativeness’ which could to some degree be admired and learnt from. From here derives the idea of the Bedouin as a link to the imagined biblical past, and the *fellahin* as a model of the idyllic farming lifestyle to which the Jews needed to return as an antidote to urban living.¹⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the very same associations reinforced the classical attitude, which denigrated the Arab as part of nature and thus inferior, something to be controlled, transformed, or pushed outside the boundaries of Jewish space.

In parallel to, and sometimes in conflict with, the socialist Zionist call to ‘return to the land’ in the 1920s and 30s, an increasingly influential strand of Zionist ideology lauded Tel Aviv as a centre of ‘New Hebrew’ living, representative of the ideal of civilized, European, secular, national Jewishness. Though seemingly at odds with the heavy focus on the pastoral exemplified by the kibbutz movement and the writing of A. D. Gordon, Tel Aviv grew rapidly as a centre and – even though urban life in Europe was tied to the supposed ‘sickness’ of diaspora Judaism – most were proud of the city as an example of what Jewish labour could create – something from nothing, a different kind of conquering the wilderness, more palatable for the mainstream than taking up the rough, arduous life of an agricultural labourer.¹⁶⁹ Though a source of some ideological debate, such a conflict of

¹⁶⁸ Zerubavel, 2008a, p. 319.

¹⁶⁹ Yossi Katz, ‘Ideology and Urban Development: Zionism and the Origins of Tel Aviv, 1906-1914’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 12:4, 1986, p. 404.

values – seeing urban life as diseased in the diaspora and transformative in Israel – did not seem to be contradictory in mainstream Zionist thought, which lauded technology and development as key to the healing of the Jewish people. Meir Dizengoff explicitly linked the two versions of ‘conquering the wilderness’ together: “Through the conquest of the Jezreel Valley on the one hand and the construction of Tel Aviv on the other, the Jews proved that they are capable of that important work fundamental to civilization.”¹⁷⁰ As something itself planted by a labour of love and cultivated from nothing, the city too participated in the myth of civilization versus nature, of nature as a powerful force which must be fought against and overcome, an enemy outside and a proxy for the enemy within.

Though the figure of the socialist kibbutznik remained the guiding emblem of the Zionist mastery of nature, praising the establishment of Tel Aviv became an increasingly important mode of promoting of this narrative, particularly in poetry. Key works from the likes of Avraham Shlonsky (1900-1973) and Nathan Alterman (1910-1970), in the words of Barbara Mann, “treat the city as a mytho-poetic site of conflict between culture and the natural elements.”¹⁷¹ The two poets belonged to a symbolist school which rebelled against the conventions of the leading poetic figures of the previous generation, towards a vivid form of poetic expression more rooted in the contemporary language.

Such an endeavour was often couched in the terminology of battle. An Alterman poem written to accompany a 1934 film on life in Palestine, for example, contains the line: “Wake up, O sand, because cement is attacking you/ stone and cement/ a hand full of iron/ a path is paved/ a city sings a song.”¹⁷² Shlonsky’s ‘Facing the Wilderness’ (‘Mul ha-Yeshimon’, 1929), is perhaps the starkest iteration of this trope.¹⁷³ Much like in Agnon’s ‘From Foe to Friend’, a natural force is personified as a hostile entity attempting to destroy the civilised order which the protagonist has created. In this case, a *hamsin*, personified as the God of the Wilderness, rises up to wreak revenge on the city that has overpowered the wilderness, transforming the shifting, formless sand dunes into something fixed and managed. Tellingly, the final verse links the hostility of the land directly to that of its Arab inhabitants:

Now I knew: the wilderness

Wails a prayer of vengeance in the night

¹⁷⁰ Meir Dizengoff, quoted in Maoz Azaryahu, *Tel Aviv: Mythology of a City*, Syracuse NY, Syracuse University Press, 2007, p. 42.

¹⁷¹ Barbara Mann, ‘The Vicarious Landscape of Memory in Tel Aviv Poetry’, *Prooftexts* 21:3, 2001, p. 353.

¹⁷² Natan Alterman, quoted in de-Shalit, 1995, p. 76.

¹⁷³ Avraham Shlonsky, ‘Mul ha-Yeshimon’ in *Ktavim*, Vol. 2, Merhaviva: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1954a, p. 228.

And from afar,

Above the mighty dome of the mosque: a crescent-moon moves

Like a hatchet.¹⁷⁴

As Mann notes, “Shlonsky’s poem marks the turning away from a vision of the Yishuv, and of Tel Aviv in particular, as an intimate, pastoral community, and the following years witnessed a tremendous development and expansion.”¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the poem perpetuates the explicit link between the Arab and nature, hinting again at the existence of alternative narratives of place, and delegitimising them by connecting them to the threat of the wilderness. Not only are they thus as formless and void as the ‘empty’ sand dunes that existed before the construction of Tel Aviv, but they are also equally a threat to the existence of the ‘formed’, heroic and morally positive city/Zionist state. Thus, the poem works to bridge the gap between the ideological Zionist idea of ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’ and the unavoidable reality of the existence of a native population with genuine ties to the land. It allows the reader to both see and unsee the Arab – to acknowledge their claim to an alternative map of the landscape whilst emptying it of value. If the landscape of the Arab is that of formless desert, then he – like the God of the Wilderness – resists the Jewish conquest whilst at the same time crying out for it – it is, in a sense, for his own good, as it reforms the violent, animal-like tendencies of his nature, offering him civilisation. This is certainly a typically colonialist viewpoint, although the Arab here is less the target of this supposed civilising process than the Jew himself.

Notably, unlike in the works of some earlier writers who approach the Bedouin with the ambivalent attitude of something at once more authentic and more primitive, the Arab is painted as an inevitable source of conflict here, something which the Zionist settlement must master and control rather than simply ignore or selectively borrow from. Likewise, although the poem recognises the existence of an alternative Arab claim, it erases its historical basis. The city is at once new and timeless, emerging out of the *yeshimon* (‘wilderness’), the word a clear reference to the ‘formless void’ in Genesis from which God creates the world. It is thus a forcible secular attempt to create a ‘new Eden’, erasing the diaspora. All that went before it is relegated to the realm of prehistory, and the indisputable physical presence of the city takes on a moral value. The force of the binary Logic of Domination is clearly displayed here: the ‘natural’ moral superiority of the city, civilisation, and the Jew can only be achieved by reference to the ‘natural’ moral inferiority of nature, indigenous culture and the Arab. By linking these ‘morally inferior’ things together with one another, and by claiming an

¹⁷⁴ Avraham Shlonsky’s ‘Facing the Wilderness’, translation from Barbara Mann, *Space and Place in Jewish Studies*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012, p. 67.

¹⁷⁵ Mann, 2012, p. 67.

inherent danger in their unrestrained form that does not submit to being defined by its otherness, their subordination is shown to be necessary and right.

2.5. The Bewitching Other

The projection of the national psyche onto the land continues to be a theme in the work of writers who came of age after the establishment of the State of Israel, the so-called 'Statehood generation'. Chief among these is Amos Oz (1939-2018), perhaps (alongside S. Y. Agnon) the most internationally celebrated author to write in Modern Hebrew. He was born Amos Klausner to a right-leaning Zionist family in Jerusalem, but became a Labour Zionist and left to join a kibbutz at the age of 14. His prolific output, beginning with the 1965 collection of short stories *Where the Jackals Howl*, focused particularly on the themes of kibbutz life, family discordance, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. He was an outspoken advocate for a two-state solution and an end to violence against the Palestinians, although he continued to support military actions that he considered defensive or necessary. Like many others of the so-called 'New Wave' of writers who began to publish in the 1960s, his work focuses on the conflict between the individual and the collective, privileging the individual. Without challenging the validity of Zionism itself, he criticises what he perceives to be its authoritarian, tyrannical excesses.

In the work of Amos Oz, nature is presented in a highly stylised form which is less a realistic depiction of reality and more a mirror into the inner world of the writer/protagonist/nation. Nature for Oz, then, is a projection of the 'wilderness' within, or a fertile means through which to explore some of the conflicts inherent within Zionism. In his writing: "man becomes much more important than land as the originator of meaning and the imposer of that meaning on it ... The elaborate expressionism also seeks to separate man and land and put distance between them by piling up words that constantly remind readers of the author's existence, that is, the existence of a subjective point of view."¹⁷⁶

In Oz's work, the sphere of nature is frequently a place of chaos, immorality and threat: "Slyly the new day concealed its purpose, betraying no hint of the heat wave that lay unfolded in its bosom."¹⁷⁷ For all the characters' pioneering spirit – they are often kibbutz members – there is a

¹⁷⁶ Yaron Peleg, 'Writing the Land: Language and Territory in Modern Hebrew Literature', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12:2, 2013, p. 300.

¹⁷⁷ Amos Oz, 'The Way of the Wind', in *Where the Jackals Howl, and Other Stories*, Nicholas de Lange and Philip Simpson (trans), London: Chatto and Windus, 1981a [1965], p. 39.

distance and fundamental distrust between them and the land which seems to beat at the gate of their self-imposed sanctuary of order, threatening its cosy orderliness.

In one of his most famous stories, 'Nomad and Viper' ('Navadim ve-Tsefa', 1965), "the kibbutz enterprise is seen as a dream of overweening rationality, an attempt to impose near geometric order on the seething chaos of the natural world."¹⁷⁸ The story takes place against the backdrop of the threat of an encroachment of migrating Bedouin – agents of the wild desert – across the boundary of the kibbutz. Imagery of water tells their progress in the language of a natural disaster, one which can leak through barriers and under fences, something threatening in its ability to change shape to fit its surroundings:

Dark, sinuous, and wiry, the desert tribesmen trickled along the dirt paths... they meandered along gullies hidden from town dwellers' eyes. A persistent stream pressed northwards, circling the scattered settlements.¹⁷⁹

Running alongside this, the theme of covertness, darkness, and sneakiness is palpable. The nomads' sheep attack the fields like a plague of locusts.

The incursion of the Bedouin into the neat borders of the kibbutz is both threatening and animates its inhabitants. The use of the imagery of flooding echoes this split in response: it is destructive but at the same time in the context of the surrounding drought there is a sense that it might quench some kind of latent thirst. There is an air of a foreboding but irresistible power which emerges from suppressed elements within:

This isn't a simple struggle between opposite forces, but a struggle between two worlds, each of which includes the same contradictions; the civilised person contains wild instincts (*yetsarim*), and the world of nature isn't just a world of threatening instincts but also a world that is significant, real and attractive.¹⁸⁰

Certainly, the protagonist, Geula, is attracted towards the 'wilderness' even as she is repelled by it. The story sets out a sexual play of power between an Arab man and a Jewish woman in the orchard of her kibbutz. It at once repeats and subverts the story of the Garden of Eden. Geula, whose name ironically means redemption – is ultimately rejected both by the kibbutz, the Arab and the land. Both Geula, the woman, and the unnamed Bedouin, the Arab, are agents of dangerous sexual power and trickery that seduce the other side to cross the boundary and allow destruction and immorality to be

¹⁷⁸ Robert Alter, *Modern Hebrew Literature*, New York, NY: Behrman, 1975, p. 331.

¹⁷⁹ Amos Oz, "Nomad and Viper," in James A. Michener (ed), *Firstfruits: A Harvest of 25 Years of Israeli Writing*, Nicholas de Lange (trans), Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973 [1965], p. 365.

¹⁸⁰ Nurit Gertz, *Amos Oz: A Monograph*, Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1980, p. 93.

unleashed upon them. The power of the wilderness draws Geula in only to once again cast her out of the 'promised land'.

Feminist scholars have dissected the problematic aspects of the depiction of female sexuality here, particularly her attempts at seducing the Bedouin shepherd and then crying rape when he refuses her advances, as well as the indication that this imagined rape causes her sexual pleasure.¹⁸¹ In this context, the uneasiness around boundaries and attraction towards their fringes is heightened by the fact that Geula is trapped between two sides of the Logic of Domination, at once performing the role of the dominant – the civilized Jew against the uncivilized Arab – and of the dominated – the passive, weak woman against the virile, strong man:

Geula comes to realise that, in a strange way, the Bedouin is her double. Both are outcasts, unattractive and unattached, and both seethe with unfulfilled erotic desires. The recognition that the physically revolting nomad, in his primitive existence, is a reflection of her own raging, uncontrollable self, fills Geula with nausea.¹⁸²

The snake too, a proxy for the Arab, is both a source of attraction and fear. It bites Geula and she passively allows the poison to spread through her body in seemingly orgasmic pleasure while at the same time lamenting her imagined rape:

A tender pain penetrated her bloodstream and soothed her whole body ... A shudder of pleasure rippled over her skin ... Now she could listen to the sweet wave sweeping through her body and intoxicating her bloodstream. To this sweet wave Geula responded with complete surrender."¹⁸³

The trio Arab-woman-snake seem to merge together into one overlapping category of victim-oppressor. Meanwhile, the angry young men of the kibbutz, whom the narrator states Geula would usually have been able to calm down, go out with weapons to drive away the nomads. Geula's embracing of the dark sides of her nature seems to lead the kibbutz members down dark path to the destruction of order and morality.

In another narrative which draws a parallel between female sexuality and the wilderness, the protagonist of Oz's novel *My Michael* (*Mikha'el Sheli*, 1968), the Jerusalemite wife of a geologist,

¹⁸¹ Dvir Abramovich, 'A Woman-Centered Examination of the Heroines in the Stories of Amos Oz', *Women in Judaism* 6:2, 2009a, p. 5-6.

¹⁸² Nehama Aschkenasy, 'Women and the Double in Modern Hebrew Literature: Berdichewsky/Agnon, Oz/Yehoshua', *Prooftexts*, 8:1, 1988, p. 125.

¹⁸³ Oz, 1973, p. 385.

projects her own feeling of being trapped – in her marriage, in her role as a woman, in her Israeliness – onto the landscape:

I too can sense secret forces restlessly scheming, swelling and surging and bursting out through the surface.¹⁸⁴

Her descent into claustrophobic, boredom-induced fantasy projects a deep anxiety and sense of siege which reflects the position of the Jewish state as something threatened by entities at its borders and perhaps even within. Her dreams repeatedly feature the motif of two Arab childhood friends who oscillate uneasily between friend/enemy and sexual partner-sexual abuser. They provoke a fascination in her which is shaped by anxiety and fear, at times attraction and at times disgust. They are explicitly animalised:

Theirs is a language of simple signs: light touches, hushed murmurs ... A road crossed in a crouched leap. Their movement approaches a weightless glide ... They sense sound in their skins, in their soles and their palms, in the roots of their hair.¹⁸⁵

The sounds of their threatening movements merge with those of threatening nature – the jackal, which howls in the night. Their destruction at the end of the novel is at her bidding, as she uses these destructive fantasies to escape from her powerlessness in her real life. The protagonist too, then, is part of the ambivalent pull towards the boundaries of Zionist discourse. Nature, the feminine and the Arab all merge together in this dream-state of sexual degeneracy and destructive power, creeping in silent accord ‘like a man and woman at love’ to ambush and blow up the water tower of a Zionist settlement. In the aftermath, the desert emerges, its empty open spaces a relief after the stifled tension of the preceding passage:

The shade of the lonely carob up the hill ... A star. The massive mountain range.¹⁸⁶

The effect of this return to the ‘barren wilderness’ leaves the reader with an uneasy mix of psychological relief and profound disquiet.

The jackal is a recurring symbol in Oz’s work, ever present in the liminal spaces where the reach of the Zionist hegemony is threatened. It is a synecdoche of the desert, of the hostile wilderness just beyond, which can easily encroach the permeable borders and destroy all that which the Jewish inhabitants have created. The animal has biblical associations with death and destruction – in Jeremiah, the destroyed Jerusalem was prophesied to become “a habitation of jackals.” As such, it

¹⁸⁴ Amos Oz, *My Michael*, Nicholas de Lange (trans), London: Chatto and Windus, 2001 [1968], p. 187.

¹⁸⁵ Oz, 2001, p. 215.

¹⁸⁶ Oz, 2001, p. 216.

represents “the threat constantly in the wings, waiting to pounce and tear”.¹⁸⁷ It appears especially at dusk, where the border between light and darkness starts to become permeable, and even benign, inanimate objects become “vibrant with venom.”¹⁸⁸ For Oz’s characters this is ambivalent, at once offering the chance to escape the stifling certainty of the day, the Zionist ideology, and thus possessing great attraction, but also providing great danger, which is an existential threat: “we cannot see the jackals as they spring out from their hiding places.”¹⁸⁹ For all the enticing freedom his shifting and unstable borders seem to promise, and for all his unease with overly reductive blind ideology,¹⁹⁰ Oz’s work “invariably affirms the need for a border and for its impermeability to ward off this seepage.”¹⁹¹ His characters are victims of both the authoritarian fear of the dangers beyond the border, and the dangerous forces that lurk beyond the borders themselves. Oz on one level attacks the idea of Zionist border expansion, a hot topic for the young Israeli state, through his thematic focus on border anxiety and the Zionist settler narrative’s obsession with warding off that which lies beyond. However, his work continues to uphold the very same distinction between ‘civilisation’ and ‘wilderness’ on which this narrative is structured, thereby “creating a fatalistic vision of a bifurcated world stalled in permanent division between a dull and uninspiring ‘modern’ zone and an adventurous but chaotic and disordered ‘non-modern’ one.”¹⁹² For Oz, the two remain ‘natural’ opposites, inevitably if sadly locked in conflict with one another by virtue of their intrinsic characteristics.

Like Oz, A.B Yehoshua (1936-) is preoccupied with the wilderness as a space of transformation in his work. Yehoshua was born in Jerusalem to a well-established Sephardi family. His internationally acclaimed writing probes the question of Jewish identity in the modern world from a Zionist, but self-critical, perspective. Alongside Oz, he is a leading figure of the so-called ‘New Wave’ of Israeli fiction which began publishing in the 1960s. Coming of age at a time when the Israeli state was already established and secured, these writers began to shift the focus of their literary investigations to the private and the individual rather than the collective and the national.

¹⁸⁷ Leon Yudkin, ‘The Jackal and the Other Place: The Stories of Amos Oz’, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23:2, 1978, p. 331-2.

¹⁸⁸ Amos Oz, ‘Where the Jackals Howl’, in *Where the Jackals Howl, and Other Stories*, Nicholas de Lange and Philip Simpson (trans), London: Chatto and Windus, 1981b [1965], p. 7.

¹⁸⁹ Oz, 1981b, p. 7.

¹⁹⁰ Ranen Omer-Sherman, *Israel in Exile: Jewish Writing and the Desert*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006, p. 62.

¹⁹¹ Karen Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012, p. 36.

¹⁹² Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 148-9.

Just as Oz's characters are drawn towards the wild even as they are repelled by it, Yehoshua explores the wilderness as a place of escape from the excesses of the Zionist hegemony. His concern is not with undermining the value of the Zionist cause itself, but rather examining the use of the wilderness discourse in the Zionist consolidation of power over its citizens, or, more generally, with the methods authoritarian systems use to frame their superiority as part of the natural order, and thus suppress challenge or meaningful self-inquiry. His protagonists typically undergo a kind of existential crisis, while their antagonists are typically "the representatives of abstract authority systems who present themselves as redeeming agents of a superior moral order but are, in reality, blunt instruments of social control."¹⁹³ As such, these authority systems are shown to sustain and even perpetuate the very existential crises that they claim to solve. This is not to say that Yehoshua's work is anti-Zionist, since he was writing within a Zionist framework. Rather, his work – like that of Oz – can be seen as a call for continued self-analysis within the movement in order to rein in its most damaging, centralising, authoritarian tendencies. It expresses distrust for moralising elements which present the Zionist 'truth' as essential and immutable.

Gilead Morahg reads Yehoshua's heavy use of the wilderness as "the symbolic arena in which the dehumanizing influence of transcendent authority is most powerfully exercised"¹⁹⁴ as a deliberate decision to dissociate from the particular context towards the universal. However, the loadedness of the Zionist conception of wilderness – while it is certainly possible to point to parallels with other Western ideologies – is unavoidable, and certainly outside of the Western context the concept of wilderness as a moral vacuum calling to be conquered is far from universal. Yehoshua was writing in a time where the policy of 'making the desert bloom' was a core part of the national consciousness, and had been a key aspect in the attempt to integrate the influx of Mizrahi refugees into the narrative by settling them in isolated areas of the country. The wilderness was an established site of the transformation between old 'Jew' and new 'Hebrew', the place where a modern Israeli identity was shaped through confrontation with hostile, spiritually invigorating forces of nature. Indeed, such a process is a secular reimagining of the biblical conception of the desert wilderness as a place of biblical punishment and exile, on one hand, and the 'mythical national melting zone'¹⁹⁵ in which the national collective is formed, on the other. In this sense, then, his use of the already well-established symbol forces a political reading even where the context is timeless mythological, as such situating the Zionist case within the wider context of nation building.

¹⁹³ Gilead Morahg, 'Facing the Wilderness: God and the Country in the Fiction of A. B. Yehoshua', *Prooftexts* 8:3, 1988, p. 314.

¹⁹⁴ Morahg, 1988, p. 314.

¹⁹⁵ Yigal Schwartz, *Ha-Yada'ata et ha-Arets Sham ha-Limon Pore'akh: Handasat ha-Adam u-Machshevet ha-Merchav ba-Sifrut ha-Ivrit*, Or Yehuda: Kinneret-Zmora Bitan-Dvir, 2007, p. 402.

In 'The Yatir Evening Express' ('Masa ha-Erev Shel Yatir', 1959),¹⁹⁶ the isolation and loneliness of a remote village built in the wilderness leads to the intentional derailing of a train. Bleak and forgotten (*yatir* means 'superfluous'), buffeted by the desert winds, the train that passes through daily without stop is their one glimpse of the outside, and potential to be noticed. After having struggled to build the village in the wilderness, the villagers are suspended outside time and history, and destruction is their only way to break through the existential weariness that they suffer from. By a dramatic undoing of the narrative of creation out of the wilderness, the villagers attempt to breathe new life into the narrative, to connect with the drama as a way of truly participating in it and trying to solve their recurring problem of still feeling outside of time and place. Yehoshua seems to argue that the disconnect between the narrative and reality creates a dangerous situation in which the hegemonic narrative cannot serve the needs of the people, but crushes them under the weight of its expectations.

However, Nehama Aschkenasy reads another allegorical layer into the story. She argues that it echoes the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, with the village a hellish version of the Garden of Eden that "seems sleepy and calm yet it is restless and anxiety-driven."¹⁹⁷ Ziva, taking on the role of the modern day Eve, persuades the passive protagonist to commit the sin of intentionally derailing the train while deflecting responsibility from herself onto the stationmaster. The irony of her name, meaning 'brightness', and its couching in imagery of darkness and storm, reinforces her role as the agent of the wilderness. Through her sexuality, promised to the protagonist if he bends to her will, she is able to undermine his morality, and plunge everything back into primordial chaos. The story establishes the feminine as a cosmic force of chaos and destruction. As such, just as we have seen with Oz's fiction, it continues to uphold the distinction between dualisms such as masculine/feminine, civilization/wilderness, rational/instinctive, moral/immoral, even as it decries some of the effects of doing so.

2.6. Affirmation of the Wilderness

While questioning some of the effects of the Zionist hegemony, then, writers such as Oz and Yehoshua continue to operate under the binary categories of the Logic of Domination. Though they

¹⁹⁶ A.B. Yehoshua, 'The Yatir Evening Express', in *The Continuing Silence of a Poet: Collected Stories*, Marsha Pomerantz (trans), Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998a [1959], pp. 141-162.

¹⁹⁷ Nehama Aschkenasy, *Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, p. 72-3.

speak of a forbidden attraction towards the 'other' side, that side is still the side of darkness, danger, chaos.

However, though the 'barren wilderness' mode of looking at nature generally assigns it a negative value, there is a strand within the Zionist wilderness narrative in which it is affirmed as a positive source of power, respect and vitality. Yael Zerubavel analyses the concept of 'desert' in the national consciousness, showing that, running alongside the idea of it as empty, chaotic and immoral, a space lacking in Jewish content and therefore value, is a parallel strand, reading the desert as a space of spiritual awakening *by virtue of* its very Otherness:

The desert's location, away from the settled and cultivated center of the country, made it possible for youth to reenact the scheme of transitional rites noted by Arnold Van Gennep, and following him, Victor Turner: rites of passage typically involve venturing outside of the home sphere into an alternative space in which the familiar social order is suspended to allow for the experience of change; the process is completed by the return to the home base in a transformed identity and status. By taking these trips into the desert and facing the challenges they presented, Hebrew youth found help in reshaping their identities as natives and reaffirming their membership in the Yishuv society. The excursion to the counter-place thus served as a way to re-experience the significance of the civilized space as the homeland.¹⁹⁸

This approach harks back to the biblical idea of the wilderness as a liminal place in which the individual could encounter God, be judged, or undergo a process of transformation.¹⁹⁹ Even in the Bible itself, expressions of nostalgia and longing for the spiritual revitalisation of the wild landscape can be found, for example Jeremiah's recalling the days of Israel's 'youth' in the desert, and Hosea's hope for the day God will bring the nation back into the wilderness in order to renew the covenant.²⁰⁰ A similar interpretation can also be found in American, Australian and Canadian wilderness writing: The wilderness is the boundless space that you immerse yourself in in order to reaffirm your place in the bounded space of civilization.²⁰¹ To do so in the Zionist context, then, is to re-enact the process of conquering the wilderness, an act which allows the participant to

¹⁹⁸ Zerubavel, 2008b, p. 213.

¹⁹⁹ Zali Gurevitch, 'The Double Site of Israel', in Eyal Ben-Ari, and Yoram Bilu (eds), *Grasping Land: Space and Place in Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997, p. 212-3.

²⁰⁰ Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Desert*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, p. 64.

²⁰¹ Cronon 1996; Kylie Crane, *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Narratives: Environmental Postcolonialism in Australia and Canada*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

symbolically take part in the national myth long after the original wave of settlement and consolidation of power has been completed.

Of all Israeli authors, it is S. Yizhar (1916-2006) who most strongly embodies a positive reading of the wilderness as a space outside of Zionist control. S. Yizhar is the pen name of Yizhar Smilansky, born in Rehavot in 1916 into a family of writers, most notably his great uncle, Moshe Smilansky. Alongside a political career which saw him elected to the first Israeli parliament in 1949, Yizhar is widely recognised as one of the most important writers in the Hebrew literary canon. Though he began publishing in the 1930s, it is his detailed, sensitive literary depictions of the 1948 War of Independence – eulogising his fallen contemporaries and developing the mythology of those who fought for the realisation of the Zionist dream, while also outlining the moral cost paid, and the tension between the sensitivity of the individual and the duty of the collective – which marked him out as a leading representative of his generation.

Often described as the first native sabra Hebrew writer (born in, and representative of the native culture of, the Land of Israel), it is unsurprising that Yizhar's work prominently displays his closeness to and knowledge of the land. Shaked describes his long, detailed descriptions of the minutiae of the natural world as a "lingual occupation of the landscape."²⁰² Yet his attitude towards the landscape is not quite one of simple native appreciation of the homeland, as we will explore in later chapters. Rather, his work deals with the limits of knowledge of the land, and his greatest fascination is with the space where nature becomes unknowable, unbound, unmasterable.

His 1963 short story 'The Runaway' ('Ha-Nimlat'), for example, tells the story of a runaway horse from the perspective of a young child:

Which way would he turn? Would he head for the sand-dunes or break through to the south and keep on till he reached his native land, the birth place of his Arab pedigree. His ancestors were calling him, his blood surging, back to his origin, his stamping ground, to his free existence. Far from all ownership. He was running and whinnying in a world of his own. Running, running alone. Unconfined. Beyond all orderliness and law. He no longer belonged to anything or anybody. He wasn't mine and he wasn't yours and he wasn't his; he wasn't anybody's. He simply wasn't. The only thing he belonged to was his own lone running self out there in the vast openness, his own swift, solitary flight."²⁰³

²⁰² Gershon Shaked, *Ha-Siporet ha-Ivrit 1880-1980*, Vol. 4, Tel Aviv: ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uchad, 1993, p. 208.

²⁰³ S. Yizhar, 'The Runaway', in Shemuel Yeshayahu Penueli and Azriel Ukhmani (eds), *Hebrew Short Stories: An Anthology*, Yosef Shachter (trans), Tel Aviv: Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature and Megiddo Publishing Company, 1965 [1961], p. 23.

The horse at once symbolises the Zionist return to the land of their ancestors, their striking out for freedom and breaking free from the chains of oppression to live as masters of their own lives, and, paradoxically, the escape of nature from the oppression of its Zionist owners. The child's naïve viewpoint, identifying with the escaping horse rather than his pioneer parents, allows the reader to recognise the essential similarity between the two power structures: the European one with the Diaspora Jew as the mastered 'other', and the Zionist one with the horse/nature/Arab as the mastered 'other'. As Assis puts it:

Ostensibly, this is a Zionist horse returning to the nature from which he had been taken, to the land of his forefathers, but this land of the forefathers is not satisfied with the kind of nature offered by the Zionist village. On the contrary, for the horse, the village represents the conquest of nature, from which he is trying to escape. The return to nature is therefore represented as a move that has not and that cannot be completed: When humans return to nature, they domesticate it; nature is consequently always beyond the village, someplace else.²⁰⁴

The story seems to suggest a natural break between the perspective of Yizhar's native generation and that of the immigrant generation that raised them. Identifying with the horse, the narrator does not fear wild nature but relates to it: "he wants not to control nature (symbolized by the horse) but to let nature enchant him."²⁰⁵

Yizhar's obsessive, almost ritualistic description of the natural environment seems on one hand to represent a declaration of ownership and belonging. Yet despite his cataloguing of every insect and thorn, the effect is not to impose himself on nature but to distance himself from it. His work speaks to the inability of language to capture the essential truth of the natural world, and also the particular glory of nature, which is at once tangible and transcendent.

Yizhar, like Oz and Yehoshua, takes an ambivalent approach towards the Zionist mainstream, making the limits of Zionist discourse a central theme in his writing while simultaneously pursuing a political career within the very same Socialist Zionist movement that promoted the 'conquering the wilderness' narrative he decried. Nitsa Ben-Ari notes that this 'inside-outsider' position was not entirely new in the Zionist literary canon, having also been held by Yizhar's idol, Brenner.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Amit Assis, "'His Ancestors Were Calling Him Back to His Origins": Zionism and the Poetics of Space in the Early Work of S. Yizhar', *Prooftexts* 36:3, 2018, p. 394.

²⁰⁵ Assis, 2018, p. 395.

²⁰⁶ Nitsa Ben-Ari, 'Hero or Antihero? S. Yizhar's Ambivalent Zionism and the First Sabra Generation', in Mark LeVine and Gershon Shafir, (eds), *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2012, p. 86.

Nonetheless, in his life as an MK (Member of Knesset), Yizhar was also committed to nature preservation, which he framed less in terms of habitat preservation and biodiversity, and more in terms of the spiritual human need for open space:

It is impossible to live without some open vistas that have not been transformed by the hand of man. It is impossible to exist in place where everything is organized and planned unto the last detail ... A land where winds cannot blow unobstructed – will be a hotel, not a homeland.²⁰⁷

Suppression of the wilderness – in a direct inversion of the dominant conception of the wilderness as a moral vacuum – is in this view a bar to mental and spiritual health of the populace. For Yizhar, the encounter with that which lies beyond and realisation that it is profoundly unreachable is an important part of relating to nature.

Like Oz and Yehoshua after him, his work comes from within the Zionist canon to look at the dangerous excesses of the Zionist worldview without overturning the very framework itself. Once again, the theme of boundary is employed to denote that which is beyond the domain of Zionist ideology, and an encounter with it is recognised as vitalising. Though Yizhar presents the wilderness as a great unknowable space, his recognition of the tension between this view and the mainstream Zionist narrative is not enough to fully challenge his Zionist convictions. Rather, he simply sets the two alongside one another, in much the same way that his famous protagonist's anxiety about the Arab evictions in *Khirbet Khizeh* (1949) does not prevent him from participating in the very same activity that he condemns as immoral.²⁰⁸

Just as Hannan Hever shows Yizhar's oscillation between total alienation and total identification with the Palestinian 'other' in *Khirbet Khizeh* serves to absolve his protagonist of his guilt for passively cooperating in an act of moral injustice, either totally erasing Palestinian suffering or fusing it into the narrative of Jewish suffering,²⁰⁹ Yizhar's expressions of sadness over the loss of natural 'wild' spaces also oscillates between identification with and 'othering' of the land, thus ultimately absorbing that sense of loss into the moral space of the Zionist discourse, and serving as a means to bridge the very gap which it presents as unbridgeable. In other words, Yizhar's respect for the unreachable otherness of the land paradoxically allows him to 'conquer the wilderness' by becoming a true 'native', seeing the native landscape for what it truly is rather than filtered through an

²⁰⁷ Speech to Knesset, June 1962, quoted in Tal 'Space Matters: Historic Drivers and Turning Points in Israel's Open Space Protection Policy', *Israel Studies*, 13:1, 2008b, p. 125.

²⁰⁸ S. Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck (trans), Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2008 [1949].

²⁰⁹ Hannan Hever, *Hebrew Literature and the 1948 War: Essays on Philosophy and Responsibility*, Leiden: Brill, 2018.

ideology born in the diaspora. His giving voice to nature as an unknowable, positive force is thus for him not necessarily a challenge to the Zionist narrative, but a natural progression of it, the end goal of 'naturalisation' which immigrant generations – "those who go around in long sleeves, waving pale hands, shouting 'land, ' land' and cannot tell a clover from alfalfa"²¹⁰ – were only able to artificially emulate. However, the remnants of settler discourse are still apparent in his work.

Yizhar's much acclaimed later novel, *Preliminaries (Mikdamot, 1992)*,²¹¹ written after a gap of three decades from the literary scene, takes a more contemplative, allegorical approach to examine the Zionist settlement story. Written from a broadly autobiographical perspective, it recounts the story of the birth and coming of age of a child in the Yishuv, who functions as a synecdoche for the developing Zionist enterprise as a whole. The novel begins like a creation story, with first only light, then abstract shapes, then an empty landscape in which concrete features gradually solidify. As the child grows up the world around him develops too, filling in the empty spaces with increasing detail, building a mythological Zionist 'something out of nothing'. For all this spread of light and goodness, however, there is always a sense of danger lurking behind the scenes, a threat of disintegration and return to the original nothingness. The child's pioneer parents and community are engaged in an epic struggle to impose meaning and control over the natural landscape:

If you just let them this hillside and the next rise will remain as they have been from time immemorial, if the whole man does not marshal all his resources against them, and all the more so the new Jew in the new Land.²¹²

Yet the narrator is ambivalent about the development ethos, the sense of a righteous struggle against the natural elements, going on around him. He voices his parents' discourse of conquering the wilderness, but with an air of detachment and even irony. In the defining incident of the first section of the book, the child naively pokes at a wasps' nest and gets stung. This event is presented as the inevitable retaliation against the pioneers' invasion into the land "where he has no right to push in", the struggle of nature to shrug off the "clothes of concrete and cement" being imposed on it. Moreover, it foreshadows later depictions of Arab resistance to the settlement project. At the same time, Yizhar stresses the innocent motivations of the pioneers until it resembles a propaganda slogan:

be this stranger as little as he may, and free of all malice and totally innocent, and be it his father who is plowing full of faith, innocently sitting his child down on the quiet earth that

²¹⁰ *Days of Ziklag*, quoted in Assis, 2018, p. 400.

²¹¹ S. Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, Nicholas de Lange (trans), London: Toby Press, 2007 [1992].

²¹² Yizhar, 2007, p. 46.

tolerates its wound seemingly without protest, one innocent father and one innocent child dressed in white clothes that his mother made for him, a little too big."²¹³

The over-repetition of the word deliberately destabilises its meaning, presenting it instead as a useful excuse to hide behind in order to avoid internalising the lesson the wasp attack has taught.

Increasingly, Yizhar's author-narrator reads and identifies with the land's hostility to the Zionist project's incursion on it:

Maybe this land doesn't want us at all, really. Because we came here to make changes that it doesn't want. It doesn't want any Herzl Forest. It doesn't want any citrus groves on a sandy clay hill. It doesn't want the sandy clay to change at all, but to be left as it is, including this miserable halfa, and for this dried-up halfa covered in white snails to continue to cover this hillside, with all kinds of miserable thistles, that may be centaurea, and that is precisely the beauty that we are incapable of comprehending: that what has been created here over a thousand years or perhaps two thousand years is wiser, more right and true, and even more beautiful than anything that might occur to the impatient minds of all those who change everything here only because they have strength, a lot of strength, and limited intelligence or none at all, even though they might have every kind of book in the world."²¹⁴

In pitching the encounter between nature and civilisation as an epic battle, as if it is part of something timeless and essential, Yizhar sets the two in innate opposition to one another. He recognises the use of power and theory to justify the superiority of civilisation over nature. But in doing so he simply reverses the value judgements, raising nature above civilisation, without challenging the language of the Logic of Domination: Rather than a chaotic moral vacuum in need of human redemption, it is a moral vacuum "untouched by base, troublesome human actions."²¹⁵ The 'wilderness' as a space characterised by a lack of meaningful content is revised from a negative to a positive value, but this central defining characteristic is unchallenged:

even the plain behind ought to remain huge and empty, without anything on it, hardly even any dust, only it alone, gigantic, open and empty, without anything on it, no tree no shade and no road, only perhaps a few flocks of sheep here or herds of goats there scattered unnoticed, swallowed up in the total infinity, or perhaps also a low-built Arab village, that

²¹³ Yizhar, 2007, p. 88.

²¹⁴ Yizhar, 2007, p. 86.

²¹⁵ Yizhar, 2007, p. 232.

changes nothing in it and does not compel it to change in any way, and on which the passage of time leaves no trace.²¹⁶

What is more, just as we have seen in texts which justify the development narrative by reducing the indigenous inhabitants to part of the backdrop, for Yizhar the Arab villages do not disturb the 'emptiness' of the wilderness. Just like the pioneers, Yizhar does not 'see' the Arabs as belonging in the realm of civilisation, but places them on the same side as nature, part of the raw material of the natural world from which it is possible for the Jewish migrants to construct an environment, passive and timeless. Their actions can have no effect as their very agency is denied. As Gabriel Piterberg notes, even when he questions the value of imposing civilisation onto nature, then, "this questioning ... is the ultimate confirmation of Yizhar's settler consciousness, for it shows time and again that in his vision Palestine really had been in a state of nature, and the Zionist settlers truly were transforming it into civil society."²¹⁷ Thus, even in affirming the value of wilderness at the expense of civilisation, he uses the same definition and associations of 'wilderness' as the Zionist hegemony that he argues against. His words are reminiscent of the 'noble savage' myth, and are in line with similar trends in early feminist and ecological scholarship to destigmatise the traits associated with the 'dominated' side without questioning the source of their associations with one another.²¹⁸ Though Yizhar can be said to have gone far towards developing an ecological consciousness in Hebrew literature, then, his work still bears the hallmarks of the Logic of Domination.

2.7. The 'Barren Wilderness' in *The Blue Mountain*

In Meir Shalev's debut novel *The Blue Mountain (Roman Rusi)*,²¹⁹ Zionist narratives are portrayed and parodied in a manner which undermines the very symbolic framework which it pretends to adhere to by drawing attention to the act of constructing the framework itself.

Meir Shalev (1948-) was born in the founding year of the Israeli state in one of the Zionist movement's most symbolically loaded regions, the Jezreel Valley. A large, fertile inland plain in the north of the country, the Jezreel valley was an important agricultural centre, and became the site of the first *moshav*, a cooperative agricultural settlement similar to a kibbutz, in 1921. Brought up in this *moshav*, Nahalal, Shalev's childhood was seeped in the stories of the older generation's

²¹⁶ Yizhar, 2007, p. 86.

²¹⁷ Gabriel Piterberg, 'Literature of Settler Societies: Albert Camus, S. Yizhar and Amos Oz', *Settler Colonial Studies* 1:2, 2011, p. 23.

²¹⁸ Plumwood, 2002, p. 27.

²¹⁹ Meir Shalev, *The Blue Mountain*, Hillel Halkin (trans), Edinburgh: Canongate, 2004 [1988].

pioneering feats, including the famous draining of the malarial swamplands, and his novels reflect a fascination with this Zionist 'folk' mythology which is at once admiring and mocking.

Shalev represents a generational shift from the children to the grandchildren of the pre-state generation of pioneers, and his criticisms of Zionism come from a place if not exactly outside, then beyond Zionism, which is to say, from beyond the Zionist 'end goal' of establishing a Jewish state, at a point in history where that dream was already achieved and secure. Though Shalev is politically left-leaning, his work lacks the ideology-dismantling critical force of many other writers of his time, such as Orly Castel-Bloom. Rather, his innovation is to read the Zionist myths *as* myths, and to use them as the basis for spinning stories which say something about the present and future. His later novels continue to explore similar themes, with colourful village settings, larger than life characters, magical realist touches, and an emphasis on inter-generational relationships, asking the question of how to reconcile the mythological Zionist past with the contemporary reality of Israel as a powerful modern state.

The Blue Mountain is Shalev's first novel, and catapulted him to national recognition, winning critical acclaim and becoming a bestseller. It is set in a fictionalised version of Nahalal, and is informed by a loving nostalgia for the place coupled with a keen eye for the absurdities of village life and the pompous narrative of national redemption that it participates in. The bestseller was published in 1988 amid a dynamic cultural climate in which the stronghold of the hegemonic Zionist narrative was weakening and dissident voices were beginning to be heard. Politically, the Labour Zionist hegemony had given way to new, more diverse political voices, and academically the decade had seen the publishing of historical scholarship which challenged the Zionist narrative. In literature, post-modernism and post-structuralism were beginning to emerge. *The Blue Mountain* appeared as a compromise between the two extremes of response to the cultural climate – against both radical deconstructionism which dismantled the narrative and left no space for any new narrative to emerge, and radical conservatism which stubbornly adhered to the hegemonic narrative against all conflicting evidence. In its absurdist juxtaposition of the environment as viewed from the inside, through the eyes of the pioneers, and the environment as viewed from the outside, from the 'detached' perspective of the reader – framed as a myth, a story and thus with unclear boundaries between reality and construction – the novel hints at the inappropriateness of retaining these myths as 'history' in the modern setting, and even goes as far as to argue that it is these very myths that stand in the way of what the Zionists pioneers wanted to achieve, namely a sort of union with the land.

As noted, the novel is set in the Jezreel Valley, one of the first areas to be settled by the pioneers of the Second Aliyah. The draining and settlement of this area remains a potent symbol of the success of the national project against all odds, functioning as a synecdoche for the wider concept of 'conquering the wilderness'. In this context, the potential resurgence and revenge of the swamp is a threat which underpins the whole novel, as told through the naïve eyes of Baruch, the grandson of one of the three founding fathers of the *moshav*.

Reflecting its place in the national consciousness at large, in *The Blue Mountain*, the swamp is used as a symbol of the wild, empty, untamed and unredeemed land which existed before the Zionist project. Though physically a mere fact of the past, drained in the 1920s, the swamp remains as a constant presence in the collective consciousness of the villagers, who continue to be haunted by fear of its reappearance:

Beneath the chequered carpet of ploughed field, stubble and orchard, waiting for the first signs of Doubt, growled the most legendary beast of all, the great swamp imprisoned by the founders.²²⁰

The result of this repeated motif is an atmosphere of tension and siege, a constant suggestion of the fragility of the position of the villagers – and the Zionist project as a whole. All the work of the villagers at 'redeeming the land', the protagonists fear, could at any moment be eradicated, and the land returned to the 'barren emptiness' it was before the pioneers subdued and controlled it. For this reason, the necessity of maintaining strict control over the environment, and thus themselves as one pole of the reciprocal 'to build and be built' axis, is maintained. Yet this very siege-like mentality, we see, rather undermines the narrative of breaking the land out of her chains. Since the villagers must repress the wild vitality of the land for fear that it will overwhelm their work, they must maintain tight control over it, and thus they in fact merely enchain it in a new set of chains of their own making, that is, the Zionist narrative.

In the climactic passage of the novel, as if unable to take the disconnect between the swamp in the collective imagination and the swamp as a real feature of the landscape, the museum curator Meshulam takes it upon himself to recreate the swamp in reality. This direct reversal of the pioneering narrative is conducted in the very name of its preservation, to teach those who attempt to deconstruct the 'barren wilderness' mythology a lesson. This passage is based on the real-life publishing of controversial scholarship which questioned the extent of the swamps in the Jezreel

²²⁰ Shalev, 2004, p. 16.

Valley in 1983.²²¹ However, contrary to the aims of Meshulam, the enduring representation of nature as an antagonist is shown to be absurd and out of joint with reality, in which it has already been tamed and arranged into neat fields by the villagers. The offending (recreated) 'swamp', far from being the harbinger of doom and destruction, proves a petty nuisance which is ultimately mopped up by a mad old housewife. As such, the 'wild' side of nature is shown not in fact to be a serious threat to modern Israel, and the paranoia that the villagers show over manifestations of 'wild' nature is revealed as over-controlling and dichotomising.

Due to the structuring of the novel on layering of myths, however, it is not just the current interpretation of the wilderness threatening to make its way back the second the villagers let their guard down, but also the original interpretation of antagonistic wilderness as a massive untameable force that it put into question here. This is not to say that the author supports the idea that there were no swamps or that the difficulties the pioneers faced and sacrifices they made were not real – indeed, the author of the Jezreel swamp study believes Shalev to be fundamentally hostile to his work.²²² Rather, he draws our attention to the representation of the 'empty', 'barren' swamp as the baseline of history in the Zionist narrative.

Meshulam's resurrection of the swamp is closely linked in the narrative with Pinness' loss of faith in some of his Zionist convictions, and his growing focus on the history of the area before the start of the pioneering narrative. Unlike in the narrator's historical narrative, which begins with the birth of the village out of the drained swamp, in Pinness' new conception the pioneers are a mere transient speck on the historical landscape:

'Meshulam is convinced that it was the founders of the village who drove away the cavemen and the swamp flora and poisoned the mastodons and the cave bears before weeding the crabgrass and planting vegetables. He thinks the earth just sat here waiting for them, trembling like a bashful bride.

'And for whom? For whom? Waiting for whom?' chanted the old teacher in a thin, mocking voice. Towards the end of his life he had mastered all the subtleties of sarcasm. He understood now how easily the earth shook off whatever trivial images men cloaked it in. 'Why, it's nothing but a tissue of poor fictions anyway, the earth!' he exclaimed. 'A thin crust beneath which is nothing but pure selfishness, a speck of dust at the far end of a minor galaxy.'

²²¹ Yoram Bar-Gal and Shmuel Shamai, 'Bitsot Emek Yizra'el: Agada ve-Metsi'ut', *Cathedra* 27, 1983, pp. 163-179.

²²² Yoram Bar-Gal, 'Sof ha-Derekh: al ha-Mavet ba-Yetsira u-va-Tarbut', *Historia ve-Te'oria* 18, 2010, p. 2.

‘The earth cheated on us,’ Piness informed me with a salacious smile. ‘She wasn’t the virgin we thought she was.’²²³

In such a way, Shalev draws attention to the process of narrative construction by which the land prior to the Zionists’ presence on it is construed as an empty and formless waste, hinting at both the existence of other, competing narratives and of the environment itself as an entity beyond narrative, and not fully defined by human imposition of values. By consciously paying attention to both the construction of discourses about nature and the real presence of nature itself beyond the discourse, Shalev shows, we can both be attentive to the essential truth in the discourse – e.g. that there were swamps and malaria – and avoid being carried away by excessive adherence to the great narratives that were spun around them – e.g. their association with the fight for redemption. In such a way, without denying the inevitability of narratives or reducing them all to flatly interchangeable post-structural units which negate the possibility of saying anything meaningful about nature – we can keep in check destructive narrative excesses.

This negation or suppression of the pre-Zionist history of the land, the novel implies, goes hand in hand with the negation or suppression of the ‘animal urges’ of the villagers. Ideologically close to the land and dismissive of the artifices of civilization, they nonetheless impose strict social rules upon themselves and the other inhabitants. When Riva marries and is sent a trunk of luxury items by her rich Ukrainian family, she is sternly told that she must either surrender the entire trousseau to the village committee or leave and never return. So seriously do the inhabitants take the incident, that it is spoken of in the same breath as malaria outbreaks and locust infestations as one of the great existential threats of the village’s early history, and treated like a biological hazard:

‘That was one of the first trials we were put to.’ ... Riva’s trunk lay interred at such depths that only a hydraulic plough could have unearthed it.²²⁴

Yet this absurd burial of that which threatens the hegemonic power structures in the village reveals them to be no less real and rigidly fixed than those of the Russian bourgeoisie that they denigrate. The constant petty bickering of the villagers contrasts with their lofty convictions and highlights the absurdity of their vision of revolutionising human nature, whilst continuing to bear witness to the impressiveness of what the pioneers did manage to achieve.²²⁵ In other words, Shalev shows the narrative of transformation to be essentially an illusion, since the control over external nature that it achieved did not result in any fundamental change in the ‘internal nature’ of its proponents.

²²³ Shalev, 2004, p. 275.

²²⁴ Shalev, 2004, p. 269.

²²⁵ Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005, p.140.

Socio-environmental philosopher Max Horkheimer discusses the relationship between the 'domination of nature' and the 'domination of human nature'.²²⁶ In his view, the drive for mastery over nature is derived from the drive to preserve and secure society from the intrinsic irrationality of human social structures and the inevitability of social conflict. In the words of his follower, William Leiss:

The more actively is the pursuit of the domination of nature undertaken, the more passive is the individual rendered; the greater the attained power over nature, the weaker the individual vis-a-vis the overwhelming presence of society.²²⁷

In the social context of competition and cooperation the abstract possibilities for an increase in the domination of nature are transformed into actual technological progress. But in the ongoing struggle for existence the desired goal (security) continues to elude the individual's grasp, and the technical mastery of nature expands as if by virtue of its own independent necessity, with the result that what was once clearly seen as a means gradually becomes an end in itself.²²⁸

In other words, just as Meshulam's performance of re-conquering the swamp, and Baruch's 'working the land' in his pioneer burial business are ridiculous and shallow re-enactments of a dialogue of mastery which has lost its ties to its true value/meaning, the villagers continued obsession with self-denial as an ultimate value – despite its irrelevance to the current reality of an established settlement in an established country – highlights a valorisation of denial of the desires of the individual which has become detached from its original purpose (the Zionist re-imagining of what it is to be a Jew and forging of a socially cohesive nation out of a diverse input of Jews from all over the world), and instead become an endless cycle which traps the inhabitants in an outdated social code and series of squabbles and subversions reminiscent of a shtetl.

Leiss reiterates, "as a result of its internal contradictions the objectives which are embodied in the attempted domination of nature are thwarted by the enterprise itself."²²⁹ In this case, the freedom of living 'like any other nation' is thwarted by the inhabitants' ongoing obsession with closeting themselves away from anything that could potentially challenge their way of life. The spatial dynamics of the novel present this village, a synecdoche for the Zionist project as a whole, as a kind

²²⁶ Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, 2013 [1947], Redditch: Read Books, p. 55-6, 98-99.

²²⁷ William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994, p. 155.

²²⁸ Leiss 1994, p. 152.

²²⁹ Leiss 1994, p. 154.

of garden of Eden, cut off from the rest of the world by the 'blue mountain' of the novel's English title:

Like a huge wall, the mountain screened us from the city... from all that was vanity and seduction.²³⁰

Not only does the mountain shield the village from the sea, in Israeli literature frequently used as a symbol of the Diaspora or openness to the wider world,²³¹ however, it also 'protects' them from the reality of the fully realised dream of Jewish nationhood, the very thing the efforts of the founders were in aid of establishing. In other words, the boundaries of their world trap them in a sort of prison of their own making, 'protecting' them from the incursion of all that which they cannot control: the 'wild' excess, immorality and individuality of the city, the expansive unknowability and destructive power of the sea, the unharnessed potential of the natural world beyond the boundaries of the village.

The response to this obsession with suppressing nature, according to Horkheimer and Leiss, is the inevitable 'revolt of nature', "the rebellion of human nature which takes place in the form of violent outbreaks of persistently repressed instinctual demands."²³² Uri, with his string of inappropriate conquests, is a vector for the 'revolt of nature' among the villagers. His sexual encounters with the married women and daughters of important figures in the village take place at the top of the village water tower, accompanied by an animalistic howl into the night, "I'm screwing Lieberman's granddaughter!"²³³ These acts and the uninhibited, vivacious cry that accompanies them stand in direct opposition to the ascetic morals of the village.²³⁴

In the mind of Pinness, these outbursts, "a battle cry of decadence, of mean hedonism, of individualism run wild" are directly related to the "devilish laughter of the hyena",²³⁵ and thus "Doubt and Despair, the loss of faith and the sowing of confusion."²³⁶ The ritualistic recitation of the names and provenance of the women involved is at once irreverent to the village's own Zionist narrative, mocking its excesses, and also participant in the very same narrative, inscribing the names of these women in the history. A strong theme in feminist Israeli writing is the manifest facade of the

²³⁰ Shalev, 2004, p. 121.

²³¹ Hannan Hever, 'The Zionist Sea: Symbolism and Nationalism in Modernist Hebrew Poetry', *Jewish Culture and History*, 13:1, 2012, pp. 25-41.

²³² Leiss 1994, p. 161.

²³³ Shalev, 2004, p. 1.

²³⁴ Yaron Peleg, *Israeli Culture Between the Two Intifadas: A Brief Romance*, Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 2008, p. 13.

²³⁵ Shalev, 2004, p. 2.

²³⁶ Shalev, 2004, p. 113.

socialist commitment to equality between the sexes in the pioneering Zionist settlements. Women in kibbutzim were largely assigned to traditional women's jobs like laundry and childrearing,²³⁷ rather than the national work of 'building and being built' by physical labour on the land. As such, their contribution to the Zionist project was frequently side-lined. The name of the founding fathers' group, 'Feyge Levin's Workingman's Circle', is steeped in irony due to Feyge's limited active inclusion in the workings of the group and ultimate sacrifice of her life, seemingly due to the exhaustion of producing children and supporting her founding father husband, who won her by drawing straws.

The ritual of Uri's night-time cries allows the women involved – "whose monotonous lives had taught them to seek excitement even beneath the hairy leaves of pumpkins ... those poor turkey hens in their darkrooms"²³⁸ – to be part of the great narrative of their grandfathers. The liminality of the space – up in the air, at night, blurring the boundaries between animal and human, wrong and right – echoes the role of the wilderness in the biblical imagination as a temporary chaos in which to immerse oneself in order for one's place in society to be reaffirmed. As such, these women's trysts with Uri show both a playful irreverence for the pioneering legacy while also performing a fond tribute to and continuation of the same mythology.

Animals, both wild and tame, have a strong presence in *The Blue Mountain*, with some even assuming the role of characters in their own right, with moral values and inner worlds. However, those animals most closely associated with 'wilderness' tend to be portrayed in a negative light.

Ecocritics like Serpil Oppermann argue that closer attention to the body and culture of an animal can enrich our understanding of the narratives that we form about that creature.²³⁹ In other words, the process of narrative building does not occur just by the imposition of human interpretations on natural entities, but in dialogue with the physical being and the way that it interacts with its environment, including us. Therefore, we should read matter and discourse in conjunction rather than "writing matter and meaning into separate categories";²⁴⁰ narratives are not incidental, but form in dialogue with the entities which they involve. The negative associations of the hyena with ideological failure in the novel, then, do not occur in a vacuum but stem from a narrative tradition influenced by the habits of the creatures themselves. For example, their strategy of playing dead

²³⁷ Lesley Hazleton, *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myths*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1977; Marilyn Safir, 'Was the Kibbutz an Experiment in Social and Sex Equality?', in Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Safir (eds), *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*, New York, NY: Pergamon Press, 1991.

²³⁸ Shalev, 2004, p. 241.

²³⁹ Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino, *Material Ecocriticism*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014.

²⁴⁰ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglements of Matter and Meaning*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, p. 25.

when under attack, even when their aggressor is an animal that they could easily overwhelm, such as a dog, has lent them a reputation for cowardice,²⁴¹ while their nocturnal nature and diet of mostly carrion – at times rumoured to extend to the digging up of corpses from graveyards²⁴² – has invited associations with treachery and immorality.

For this reason, as we have already seen, the hyena is used in the Bible as a symbol of a city's fall from grace, its return to the state of ruin and chaos as a result of divine punishment.²⁴³ Reading these passages from an ecofeminist perspective, then, the hyena is used as a wild animal to symbolise the moral 'descent' of the citizenry, from the poles of 'urban, civilised, reason, moral' to 'natural, primitive, emotion, animality'.

In the Zionist case, in keeping with the general project of subversion of religious values from abstract reason to 'natural' physicality, this hierarchy between the urban and natural poles is often reversed, with 'natural' taking the position of moral and spiritual ascendancy and 'urban' being its negative 'other'. However, as Shalev shows, this change does not entail a real subversion of the hierarchical poles that ground the environmental discourse, resulting in a mere surface affirmation of the value of nature. As we have seen, nature is not fully to be trusted, but rather threatens at any point to reassert itself and overcome the civilised world. For this reason, at any point where nature does not seem to fit their discourse of a natural bond between the Jew and his land but offers a potentially antagonistic physical presence, the same hierarchical polarities snap back firmly into place. We can see this in the narrative role that the hyena plays for the villagers, schoolteacher Piness in particular:

The hyena was... a messenger unleashed from the worlds that lay beyond the wheat fields and the blue mountain. Several times a year since the founding of the village the old teacher had heard its clear, mocking bark ring out from the nearby wadi, and a shiver had run down his spine.

The hyena's bite was highly dangerous. Some of its victims were so badly infected that they sowed penicillaria in autumn and pruned their vineyards in summer. Others took leave of their senses and became doubters, cynics, even turncoats, forsaking the land and drifting off to the city, or else dying or even leaving the country.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Reginald I. Pocock, *Fauna of British India: Mammals Volume 2*, London: Taylor and Francis, 1941, p. 73.

²⁴² Adrian Burton, 'Hyena High Jinks', *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 14:6, 2016, p. 344.

²⁴³ David Bryan *Cosmos, Chaos and the Kosher Mentality*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 115.

²⁴⁴ Shalev, 2004, p.2.

Pinness' uneasiness seems to stem from the hyena's habit of living on the threshold of habited spaces such as farms, between the 'civilised' realm and the 'wild', 'natural' realm. Frequently crossing between these boundaries 'covertly' under the cover of darkness, the hyena thus threatens to annul the rigid hierarchy between the two.

Likewise, as Rami Kimchi notes, the mole threatens the village's security by transgressing vertical boundaries:²⁴⁵

Outside, he tripped over a molehill subversively dug in the garden.²⁴⁶

It thereby symbolically opens up a point of access between the imaginary swamp below and the village above, its body presenting a very visual representation of the hierarchy we have just discussed. The civilised village sits above hostile nature, primitive and subversive, locked in a constant battle for supremacy. For this reason, the villagers advocate for the imperative to subdue nature, to restrict its freedom of movement and divide it into rigidly separated spheres. However, Pinness' immediate abstraction from charging the mole with the petty transgression of plotting to trip him up to associating it along with the hyena with full-scale sabotage of the Zionist project highlights the absurdity of this grand narrative. Drawing attention to the disconnect between the image of the creature and the actual figure of the creature, which, though a minor agricultural pest, in the context of Pinness' garden is a cosmetic annoyance at most, Shalev thus shows the irrelevance of the concept of unco-opted, unmastered nature as a threat to the survival of the national movement.

Not only does Shalev's novel draw attention to the manner by which the Zionist discourse projects its own fear and anxieties outwards onto the animal kingdom and natural world, hence shaping our perception of them and thus our relationship to them, it implies that this very act undermines the core goal of the Zionist enterprise – to become one with nature, and thus to be 'naturalised'. The use of creatures such as hyenas and moles highlights the pioneers' alienation from the wider environment which surrounds them and, indeed, even the very ground upon which they stand.

²⁴⁵ Rami Kimchi, 'Bein Shnei Kefarim: Chevdelim be-Ofi Itsuv Merchav ha-Kfar be-Arabeskot ve-Roman Rusi ve-Mashma'utam', *Dappim* 19, 2014, p. 90-1.

²⁴⁶ Shalev, 2004, p. 2.

3. Lover/Bride

“She is naked—steaming with mist and dung / Demanding and puffing in her heat / A field.”²⁴⁷

Now we have looked at the ‘barren wilderness’ aspect of our three-faceted conception of the land in the Zionist hegemonic narrative, let us turn to the second aspect: the ‘lover/bride’. In contrast to the overwhelmingly negative characterisation of nature found in the ‘barren wilderness’ mode, this mode is part of the ‘positive’ side of the feminisation of nature, along with the land as ‘mother land’. The ‘lover/bride’ aspect encodes notions of purity and desire. Importantly, this desire is reciprocal: unlike the ‘barren wilderness’ mode of nature, which is hostile to Zionist mastery, the ‘lover/bride’ mode craves it. There is also a sense of union and partnership, but only in the stratified terms of master (in Hebrew *ba’al*, which also means ‘husband’) and helpmate. Much as traditional heterosexual marriage has been criticised by feminist scholars for reinforcing gender roles – a socially-encoded binary division which sees men and women as possessing essentially different qualities and strengths²⁴⁸ – the Zionists ‘union’ with the land was to take place very much on the terms put forward by the Zionists, who saw the relationship between them as bound by strict, ‘natural’ divisions.

As we have seen, the decline and recovery narrative taken up by the Zionist hegemony allowed them to see the land both as what it was and what they wanted it to be simultaneously. In other words, it allowed them to reconceptualise the existence of the land in a state of ‘barren wilderness’, occupied by indigenous populations, and bearing no resemblance to the biblical ‘land of milk and honey’ of their imaginations, without stopping them from seeing it as *naturally* theirs, *naturally* fertile and green, *naturally* Jewish in character. To this end, they conceptualised the land as a kind of damsel in distress figure, a poor fallen woman who had been abandoned by her rightful master, kidnapped and abused by illegitimate others, and was in need of rescue by her true beloved.

Part of the power of this characterisation lay in its co-opting of religious imagery, presenting the condition of the land as a mirror of the condition of the Jews in exile. As such, for the Zionist pioneer, even though previous generations of Diaspora Jews had been unable to physically master the Land of Israel, they were still inexorably bound together as spiritual soulmates. This fact allowed

²⁴⁷ Avraham Shlonsky, ‘Harei At’ in *Ktavim*, Vol. 4, Merhavia: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1954b, p. 33

²⁴⁸ See for example Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, London: Penguin, 1963; Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (trans), London: Vintage, 2010 [1949].

them to abrogate the existence of the Arab 'other' in the land – seeing them as individuals or symbols while unseeing them as a collective- and in such a way to preserve the idea of the land's 'purity', or moral goodness, by rendering the 'mastery' of all other claimants illegitimate – both because she was already betrothed to the Jewish people and because they were failing to master her properly, or to treat her as a 'wife' should be treated.

Against this personification of the land as a 'damsel in distress', mistreated by her unlawful captors, abandoned, enslaved and laid to waste, the Zionists saw themselves as 'redeemers' who would rescue her from her chains and restore her to her former glory. The slogan 'healing the land and the nation' (*havra'at ha-'am ve-ha-arets*) exemplifies the typically reflexive mode of action involved.²⁴⁹ 'Redemption', then, entailed the restoration of that which was right and proper to its due position in the universe, thereby reflexively 'redeeming' both the land of Israel and the Jewish people at once from the shackles of separation, and the corrupting influence of being foreign in one's own home. A typical example of this discourse of redemption of the feminised land can be seen in the famous 'Morning song' ('Shir Boker', 1932) by Nathan Alterman:

From the slopes of Lebanon to the Dead Sea,
We will pass over you with our ploughs,
We will plant for you and build for you,
We will beautify you greatly.
We will clothe you in a robe of concrete and cement
And lay out carpeted gardens for you,
Upon the redeemed land of your fields
The grain will ring out joyously.²⁵⁰

To the land stripped 'naked' and bare, sexually humiliated by her captors for whom she is not a counterpart but merely a physical object to be used, the pioneer comes as a knight in shining armour to save his beloved, 'clothing' her nakedness and reviving her feminine beauty and fertility. Notably, this understanding of a 'redeemed' nature does not seek to return it to an 'untouched', pristine state, but rather valorises nature as under the control of man. Her happiness and beauty are

²⁴⁹ Sandra Sufian, *Healing the Land and the Nation: Malaria and the Zionist Project in Palestine*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 30.

²⁵⁰ Nathan Alterman, 'Shir Boker', on 'zemereshet' (translation mine). Retrieved 15/3/21 from www.zemereshet.co.il/song.asp?id=156&artist=36.

dependent on her ability to serve man successfully, providing space and resources for construction, horticulture and agriculture.

The characterisation of the landscape of Israel as not only a beautiful woman – imagery that has a long history in the Jewish tradition, where she was at times anthropomorphised as the bride of god, and later associated with the Shekhinah²⁵¹ – but as a damsel in distress in need of rescue, was motivated by the disconnect between the constructed environment and the actual physical environment. As the last chapter has shown, though the Zionist pioneers established an ideology based on the necessity of the ‘negation of the Diaspora’ (*shlilat hagalut*), their aesthetic values remained very much influenced by those prevalent in their European countries of birth. As American ecocritic Tom Lynch remarks with regard to the similar landscape aesthetics of the western American pioneers, “the new place is always a flawed version of England. And the more the new landscape deviates from England, the more flawed it will seem.”²⁵²

In such a way, the dominant aesthetic coloured the physical landscape ‘degenerate’, ‘barren’ and ‘empty’, thereby inspiring the construction of a new narrative which bridged the gap between the ideal and the actual. As we have seen, the Zionist discourse achieved this by subordinating the actual to the ideal, reconceptualising the physical environment as a disguise, or a curse, which concealed the true nature of the landscape. Only if they could succeed in forging a physical relationship with the land via cultivation and settlement of her soil would this curse be undone.

This transformative imperative took on a strongly sexualised aspect in the Zionist narrative. This line from the diary of a pioneer is typical of the discourse:

And as my seed proliferates in her bosom and the sweat of my brow drenches her stiff neck, my soul is bonded to her forever.²⁵³

In their drive to negate the abstraction of the diaspora, the pioneers revelled in a cult of the physical, of the touch and smell of the soil mingling with the sweat of their brows.²⁵⁴ Indeed, even the promotion of ‘homeland’ studies in schools, *yedi’at ha-arets* (‘knowing the land’), bore an echo of the sexual, hinting at the biblical sense of ‘knowing a woman’ (*yedi’at isha*).²⁵⁵ By this analogy, the feminine land could be ‘conquered’ by the physical imposition of the ‘self’ onto her ‘otherness’, just

²⁵¹ Barbara Mann, *Space and Place in Jewish Studies*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012, p. 20.

²⁵² Tom Lynch, *Xerophilia: Ecocritical Explorations in Southwestern Literature*, Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2008, p. 31.

²⁵³ Quoted in Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011, p. 56.

²⁵⁴ Neumann, 2011, p. 56.

²⁵⁵ Meron Benvenisti, *Conflicts and Contradictions*, New York, NY: Eshel, 1989, p. 19.

as sexual 'knowing' involved the 'conquest' of the empty but fertile space of a woman's body by man's physical transgression of her boundaries. Again, then, the discourse of mastery and possession of the land is tied into the symbolic amalgamation of 'woman' and 'nature' noted by ecofeminist scholars. Bound to one another by virtue of this imagined innate synergy, the sexualisation of the land thus served to justify the subjugation of both woman and nature to the needs and desires of man, by mutually reinforcing their position as a naturally grouping with the recognisable role of being dominated.

However, in this case, the hegemonic Zionist narrative exalted the land to such a high degree that it became not only associated with, but a substitute for the relationship between man and woman.²⁵⁶ The landscape was imagined as a bride or wife, and romantic relationships were sacrificed before this altar:

The absence of references to sexual relationships [in the writings of the pioneers] is remarkable given that the writing does not lack expressions of desire. On the contrary, it is steeped in such language. Yet this desire is directed at the land of Israel.²⁵⁷

Through its association with femininity and therefore its need to be mastered, the Zionists validated their subduing, developing, and domesticating of the natural environment in order to demonstrate their ownership of it.²⁵⁸ Meanwhile, pioneering women, while in theory equal partners, were doubly debarred from the discourse, alienated even on the kibbutz from the pursuit of a relationship with nature by the assignation of traditional women's jobs like laundry and childrearing,²⁵⁹ and displaced from the woman's role in the husband-wife relationship by the male pioneers' symbolic union with the land instead. Once again, even where the shared association appears on first glance to be positive (for example, linking the beauty and desirability of nature and woman), the very same patriarchal conceptual framework serves to "sanction the twin exploitations of women and nonhuman nature."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ David Biale *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America*, New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992, p. 187.

²⁵⁷ Neumann, 2011, p. 31.

²⁵⁸ Edna Gorney, *Bein Nitsul Le-Hatsala: Te'oria Ecofeministit Shel Yahasei Teva', Tarbut Ve-Hevra Be-Yisra'el*, Haifa: Pardes, 2011.

²⁵⁹ Marilyn Safir, 'Was the Kibbutz an Experiment in Social and Sex Equality?', in Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Safir (eds), *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*, New York, NY: Pergamon Press, 1991, p. 253.

²⁶⁰ Karen Warren, 'The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism', *Environmental Ethics* 12:2, 1990, p. 126.

3.1. The Promised Bride

The peculiar Jewish view of space, already apparent in the Bible and developed more in exile, sees the land of Israel not as a simple, self-evident homeland but one which must be won and earned. In other words, while in many forms of nationalism the nation's relationship with their homeland is a 'given', and indeed this very 'givenness' usually forms the 'natural' basis on which the nation is declared, the Jewish conception is always shifted. The Jewish connection with the land of Israel is not that of a 'native' born, but that of an outsider, and the relationship is built not automatically, but earned by a process of entering, literally or metaphorically, into that land and making it theirs.²⁶¹ In their famous paper 'On Place', Zali Gurevitch and Gideon Aran show that a traditional Jewish conception of space always involves a fundamental gap between the Jew and the land, instead centring around the text as a spiritual focal point.²⁶² As such, the tradition puts emphasis "on leaving as a counterpoint to arrival, on exit to resist nativity (the 'taken for granted'-ness of place), and on presence as but a trace of absence."²⁶³

As we shall explore in the next chapter, the Zionist project sought to reorganise this relationship more along the lines encoded in typical Western forms of nationalism. However, this disconnect between nativism and the Israeli reading of space remains embedded in the national discourse,²⁶⁴ and, indeed, the conception of the land as 'promised', viewed from the perspective of an outsider and always rescindable, runs counter to this aim despite its centrality to the 'lover/bride' mode of reading nature. This paradox captures the tension inherent in the movement which sought to break from traditional Judaism while simultaneously using it to legitimise its claims on the land.

The personification of the land as a female lover to be courted was certainly not a new innovation but rather a continuation and secularisation of the dynamic already found in the Bible. The direct relation of the land, as a passive and acquiescent party to be governed by man, to the woman has even found its way into Jewish legal texts, for example tractate Kiddushin in the Babylonian Talmud speaks of the way in which women can be acquired for marriage by reference to the acquisition of a field (b Kiddushin 2a-b).²⁶⁵ Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues that the potency of the femininity of the land

²⁶¹ Zali Gurevitch, 'The Double Site of Israel', in Eyal Ben-Ari, and Yoram Bilu (eds), *Grasping Land: Space and Place in Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997; Mann 2012.

²⁶² Zali Gurevitch and Gideon Aran, 'Al ha-Makom', *Alpayim* 4, 1991, pp. 9-44.

²⁶³ Zali Gurevitch and Gideon Aran, 'Never in Place: Eliade and Judaic Sacred Space', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 87, 1994, p. 137.

²⁶⁴ Yigal Schwartz, *Ha-Yada'ata et ha-Arets Sham ha-Limon Pore'akh: Handasat ha-Adam u-Machshevet ha-Merchav ba-Sifrut ha-Ivrit*, Or Yehuda: Kinneret-Zmora Bitan-Dvir, 2007.

²⁶⁵ Wendy Zierler, 'Chariot(ess) of Fire: Yokheved Bat-Miriam's Female Personifications of Erets Israel', *Prooftexts* 20:2, 2000, p. 112.

as a symbol of longing derives from the fact that Jewish men “can express their love directly to this female figure in a way that they cannot have toward the remote, invisible, and masculine God.”²⁶⁶ Certainly, this Zion-as-lover motif finds rich expression in those forms of Jewish literature which use the erotic as a mode of devotion, for example the works of Yehuda Halevi (‘Zion, Will You Not Ask’), Shalom Shabazi (‘The Love of Hadassa’) and, most famously, the Song of Songs.

The poetry of writers such as Nathan Alterman and Avraham Shlonsky can be seen as a direct descendant of these kinds of works, setting up an opposition between their male subjects and feminine nature which, whether they treat it as lover or mother, they view as an object of devotion and care from which they can derive sustenance. While the feminine in the religious texts above was generally a symbol of the relationship between God/man or the exiled Jewish man/the love of God in Zion, however, Shlonsky and other Zionists emptied out the role of the divine, the triangular God-Man-Land schema giving way to a bipolar Man-Land one, which claimed to devote love to the land itself, rather than as a symbol for something else. In courting the land, praising its beauty and taming its wild passions, both the male subject and the female land are enriched. Yet despite the reciprocal enrichment imagined by the speaker, the directionality of action is notably one way, the imposition of the Zionist idea of how nature should be onto the land. Moreover, “Female figures are present in this poetry primarily to serve and nurture the male poet's mission and gratify his desires.”²⁶⁷ Rather than desire being derived from the land itself, it is imposed onto the land from outside, her suitor assuming that she will be a mirror for his desires even when she struggles against him. Shlonsky's poetry reflects the gendered binary grouping that sees the ‘dominating’ side as inherently active and the ‘dominated’ side as inherently passive.

His poem, ‘You are Hereby’ (‘Harei At’, 1947) refers to the traditional groom's vows by which he is married during a Jewish ceremony: “you (feminine) are hereby sanctified unto me...”, but the bride in the poem turns out to be not a woman but the land of Israel herself:

They will come, your plowers will husband you/ and they will establish in you a seed for crops.²⁶⁸

In Chana Kronfeld's interpretation, this poem alludes to Shaul Tchernichovsky's ‘You Are Hereby Bewitched Unto Me’ (‘Harei At Mekusemet Li’, 1929), which contains a similar overturning of the meaning of the religious ceremony and its direction towards nature, while also overturning

²⁶⁶ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Transformation of Pagan Myth*, New York, NY: The Free Press, 1992, p. 178.

²⁶⁷ Wendy Zierler, 2000, p. 112.

²⁶⁸ Avraham Shlonsky, ‘Harei At’ in *Ktavim*, Vol. 4, Merhavia: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1954b, p. 33.

Tchernichovsky's pantheistic 'nature as religion' philosophy, instead raising up labour as the ultimate value.²⁶⁹ The poem starts by outlining the land's nakedness and 'wild-looking' hair, yet by the end she is 'overflowing unto me with abundance.'²⁷⁰ Through labour is she redeemed, and their union brings satisfaction and fulfilment for both parties. However, while the land is depicted as a receptive partner, "puffing in her heat", it is the male speaker who enacts, while the female land is acted upon, spoken about almost exclusively in passive voice. Moreover, although focalised through the speaker, it is the national collective that will 'husband' her.

This is not to say that the Zionists saw the land as a totally passive or unwilling object of their desire, rather, while the directionality of longing was reciprocal, the directionality of *action* was all on the side of man: in the Zionist imagination, she cried out for them to come and redeem her as much as they longed to be redeemed by once again taking possession of her. Though they were both reciprocally shaped by the relationship, it was only man 'winning' in gaining power over the land that constituted a positive outcome, while the land 'winning' in fending off their attempts to woo her constituted a loss for both parties. The same dynamic is captured in Carolyn Merchant's reading of Western culture as a story of recovery from the Fall:

The valence of woman is bad. The end valence of nature is bad. Here men become the agents of transformation. They become saviours, who through their own agricultural labor have the capacity to recreate the lost garden on earth.²⁷¹

Since the Fall story proves that giving agency to both the feminine and the feminine nature leads down towards chaos and sin, it is the *duty* of man to control and guide both of these elements towards good, to recover the Edenic state in which everything exists in balance. This can be seen in analogy to the typical process of patriarchal courtship, in which the man acts to woo the land, taking set back or rejection as a sign to try harder, and acquiescence as a sign of success. The end state is reached when the land acknowledges the reciprocal relationship and accepts its role as the passive partner in it. In this framework, then, no response of the land to its suitor can disprove the suitor's belief that they are 'meant to be'. Thus, for all its seeming hostility in the 'barren wilderness' mode, belief in the central affinity between Jew and land could be maintained.

This view was given voice to in the idea that the land was holding off from giving forth fruit/fertility/etc until once again reunited with her rightful owners. This idea in part helped to

²⁶⁹ Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996, p. 106.

²⁷⁰ Shlonsky, 1954b, p. 33.

²⁷¹ Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 133.

explain the disparity between the 'land of milk and honey' of their imagination and the reality that the migrants were faced with, as well as abrogating the existence of the indigenous population. In an extreme form of this conviction, Meir Shalev recounts a tale about the draining of the Hula wetlands, in which a Dutch expert touring the site warned that the peat in the ground was highly unstable and liable to cause problems:

Then the JNF hydrologist stood up, hit the table with his fist and declared: 'Our peat is Zionist peat. Our peat will not do damage.'²⁷²

Similarly, a popular Zionist textbook for children contained a story in which four springs chose to poison their own waters into malaria-infested swamps so long as the Jews were absent from the land. Only when the Jews returned did they lift this curse and return harmony to the natural landscape.²⁷³ As such, in the Zionist imagination, despite expressions of the land's resistance to settlement, it was in a sense an active partner, voluntarily choosing to tie itself to its Jewish masters.

A related tradition in the Zionist imagination was the reading of the land as text. For example, in Shlonsky's poem series 'Gilboa' (1927),²⁷⁴ rabbinic tradition is invoked to subvert the directionality of symbolism; instead of mystical pathways of meaning in which text and land point towards aspects of divine revelation (*remez-drash-sod*, 'symbolic, homiletic, esoteric'), Shlonsky advocates for *p'shat*, the 'plain meaning' of the land, reading it as what it is rather than merely as an allegory for something else. This reflects the Zionist imperative to break from the textually focused traditional Judaism, where meaning is derived through reading scripture, and to return to an imagined biblical physicality, entering into a direct, unmediated relationship with the land. Such physicality was considered essential to the project of 're-rooting' the Jewish people, converting them from *luftmenschen* to 'a nation like any other', in a 'natural' relationship with their homeland. Moreover, and contradictory to this stated aim of transforming from the 'People of the Book' to the 'People of the Land', the reading of the land-as-text participated in the deletion of other claims on the land by acting as a direct link between the modern-day landscape and that of the Bible.

However, the focus on land-as-text also has another facet, that which denotes the enduring relationship between the land and the Jew. In this sense, relating to the land as text treats it like a marriage contract, written in the land itself. It expresses a physicalisation of esoteric practice – the

²⁷² Quoted in Alon Tal, *Pollution in a Promised Land: An Environmental History of Israel*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, p. 97.

²⁷³ Yael Zerubavel, 'Desert and Settlement: Space Metaphors and Symbolic Landscapes in the Yishuv and Early Israel Culture' in Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (eds), *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008b, p. 206.

²⁷⁴ Avraham Shlonsky, 'Gilboa' in *Ktavim*, Vol. 2, Merhavia: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1954, pp. 9-46.

land itself is not a proxy by which to devote oneself to God, but the object of devotion in and of itself. In the Bible, the land is contracted to the Jewish people via a covenant with God, a covenant which was severed by the Jewish people's later misbehaviour. This covenant was written on the literal body of the (male) Jew through circumcision. The Zionist enterprise, then, is in part a secular reimagining of this marriage contract: the Jew proves himself to the land by working it, thus their union is inscribed on the body of the Jew by his labour, becoming a muscular 'new Hebrew', and on the body of the land through its beautification and fertilisation.

This quasi-spiritual covenant between the Zionist and the land of Israel is parodied in Orly Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City* (*Doli Siti*, 1992).²⁷⁵ A provocative and unconventional post-modernist writer, Castel-Bloom (1960-) was born in Tel Aviv to a French-speaking Egyptian family. Her uncompromising and original work attacks the hegemonic narrative on matters of gender, race, ideology and more, shocking and thrilling readers with her idiosyncratic prose, grotesque characters and dystopic visions of a dysfunctional and monstrous Israel.

In *Dolly City*, Castel-Bloom's insane protagonist literally carves a map of the land onto the back of her infant son, in a distorted echo of both the biblical covenant and its Zionist reimagining as a covenant between Jew and land. Yet the meaning of this sign is broken: instead of a symbol of devotion, it points merely towards violence and cruelty; instead of representing a cure for the 'sickness' of the diaspora, it is not only a symptom of the mother's sickness but renders the child physically and mentally scarred too. Similarly, the novel presents an Israel which bears no relation to the 'national collective shaped through working the land' of the Zionist imagination. Dolly lives in a sprawling, disjointed, faceless urban space in which there is no sense of community or cohesive identity. Though a homeless elderly man spouts a pastiche of Gordon-esque rhetoric, there is no salvation in nature. The one green space mentioned in the city, the botanical gardens, is bombed by the motiveless enemy despite the citizens senselessly flocking to it for sanctuary.

Castel-Bloom presents this obsession with the bond between land and nation as a symptom of sickness rather than the cure. In fact, it may even be the cause.²⁷⁶ In one particularly telling passage, Dolly links her madness to the destabilising effect of the political 'other' within the border of the national 'self':

Beyond any doubt, madness is a predator. Its food is the soul. It takes over the soul as rapidly as our forces occupied Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip in 1967. After madness

²⁷⁵ Orly Castel-Bloom, *Dolly City*, Dalya Bilu (trans), London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997 [1992].

²⁷⁶ Todd Hasak-Lowy, 'Postzionism and its Aftermath in Hebrew Literature: The Case of Orly Castel-Bloom', *Jewish Social Studies* 14:2, 2008a, p. 93.

takes over and settles in the territory of the human mind, the mad cows come into the picture. All they know how to do is eat, so they stuff themselves sick and lay the fields to waste. And if a state like the State of Israel can't control the Arabs in the territories, how can anybody expect me, a private individual, to control the occupied territories inside myself?²⁷⁷

Though at first Dolly associates madness with the occupying army, at a jarring point in the middle of her analogy it is suddenly transferred to the occupied Arab, the 'mad cows' which threaten to multiply out of control. The dominating army, then, are charged with both causing and controlling the madness. The threatening uncontrollability of the Other is a projection of the lack of control felt by the Self,²⁷⁸ an interpretation which in turn feeds back, serving to legitimise the original imposition of control. This same breakdown in the logic of cause and effect informs Castel-Bloom's criticism of the Zionist hegemony's victim complex – and its incompatibility with the drive to 'negate the diaspora' – more generally:

Dolly City, a city without a base, without a past, without an infrastructure. The most demented city in the world. All the people in Dolly City are usually on the run. Since they're always running there's always someone chasing them, and since there's someone chasing them, they catch them and execute them and throw them into the river.²⁷⁹

The monstrous, enemy 'other' here is a product of the inhabitants' own creation, an offshoot of the definition of their own identity, devoid of any cohesive motivation. The need to control it, then, stems not from any inherent hazardousness about it, but from the backwards-derived logic of the projected ideology. Dolly's perverse narration retains the rigid binarism of the Logic of Domination in a desperate attempt to project meaning onto the world, yet her madness completely breaks down the stability of its referents, revealing its basis in subjective imagination rather than in objective reality.

3.2. Rebuilding the Masculine

Studies on nationalism as a cultural phenomenon have shown the binarism found in the Logic of Domination to be an integral feature of nation building more generally.²⁸⁰ That is to say, just as the

²⁷⁷ Orly Castel-Bloom, 1997, p. 95-6.

²⁷⁸ Ari Ofengenden, 'Language, Body, Dystopia: The Passion for the Real in Orly Castel-Bloom's Dolly City', *The Comparatist* 38, 2014a, p. 261

²⁷⁹ Orly Castel-Bloom, 1997, p. 76-77.

²⁸⁰ George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

dominator is constructed by reference to its dominated 'other', the nation is constructed by reference to what it is not: the Jew, the feminine, the gypsy, the homosexual, etc. The implied masculine Self exists in dichotomy with – and indeed takes its very identity from – its implied Other. This 'othering' derives from the attempt to produce group solidarity out of a non-homogenous source, constructing a 'national identity' in an otherwise disparate grouping of people by reference to visibly obvious 'outsiders'.²⁸¹

As has been well discussed, in the European fin de siècle context in which Zionism was born, the Jew and the woman were mutually painted as 'others', sharing qualities intrinsic in their nature which make them a danger to national life:

The true conception of the State is foreign to the Jew, because he, like the woman, is wanting in personality, his failure to grasp the idea of a true society is due to his lack of a free intelligible ego.²⁸²

This 'natural' affinity encompassed physical, intellectual and moral qualities. The Jewish (male) body was frequently characterised as "aged, weak and effeminate", and "given specific bodily features and measurements to demonstrate their difference from the norm,"²⁸³ while his character was denigrated as passive, feeble minded, and sexually degenerate. The association of the Jewish male with femininity even extended to a long-repeated myth that he menstruated.²⁸⁴ Such characterisation was a direct attack on the legitimacy of Jewish participation in the national public space, as it marked them out as an intrinsically 'other' class of beings with an intrinsically inferior set of talents and proclivities. Since "modern masculinity symbolized the norm, [its] enemies were assumed to be the enemies of established society."²⁸⁵ The Jew and the women, lacking normative masculine qualities, were thus not in possession of the mental ability or spiritual right to attain the political power and personal agency entrusted to the masculine national subject.

That Otto Weininger, quoted above, was himself of Jewish background shows the extent to which this message was internalised by many Jews in Europe. Indeed, it is from the fight for the right to be considered a part of civilisation rather than its enemy that the Zionist movement took its starting point. In other words, its proponents did not in general seek to overturn the Logic of Domination, but merely to rebuild it with themselves on the side of domination rather than its Other. 'Negation

²⁸¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 66.

²⁸² Otto Weininger *Sex and Character*, London: Heinemann, 1906 [1903], p. 307.

²⁸³ Mosse, 1996, p. 70.

²⁸⁴ Irven Resnick, 'Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses', *The Harvard Theological Review* 93:3, 2000, pp. 241-263.

²⁸⁵ Mosse, 1996, p. 80.

of the diaspora', then, was not a rejection of Western ideals of civilisation but rather an internalisation of them, an annexation of the dominating pole of the Logic of Domination for themselves via the 'negation of femininity':

To a not inconsiderable extent, the project of these Zionists (known as political Zionists) was to transform Jewish men into the type of male they admired, namely, the ideal "Aryan" male. If the political program of Zionism was to be a nation like all other nations, on the level of reform of the Jewish psyche it was to be men like all other men. The Zionist catchphrase, *kekhol hagoyim*, "like all of the nations," thus has a double meaning since in its popular acceptance it would have meant rather "like all of the (male) gentiles."²⁸⁶

It is unsurprising that for all its talk of radical revolution, Socialist Zionism carried with it much cultural baggage, and in particular this inferiority complex born of being on the wrong side of the Logic of Domination for so long. In the words of Marx himself, nationalists might "make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."²⁸⁷ As such, both western Orientalist and traditional Jewish elements carried through even in the most experimental forms of pioneer settlement. Nitsa Ben-Ari shows that the sexual revolution, aimed at equality of the sexes and the subversion of traditional gender roles and monogamous relationship norms, largely failed,²⁸⁸ while a recurrent theme of many a first-generation immigrant writer – e.g. Brenner, Reuveni, etc – was alienation, a sense of failure to break free from the diaspora and from the perceived weakness, femininity and rootlessness of their race. These writers noted that the community was trapped between tradition and revolution, and that it could not break free completely from the influence of traditional Jewish values – indeed, these were sometimes also valuable. For example, the figure of the self-reflecting intellectual writer became important, partially taking the mantle of 'secular Zionist prophet', but partially as a release for these internal tensions.

Even S. Y. Agnon – who stands alone amongst writers of the period for his extensive use of the theme of erotic love in place of 'love for the land' – deals with the identity crisis Zionism both arose from and created in Jewish masculinity. Hollander shows how his work preached that "individual

²⁸⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997a, p. 277.

²⁸⁷ Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire Of Louis Bonaparte', New York: NY: International Publishers, 1963 [1852], p. 12.

²⁸⁸ Nitsa Ben-Ari, 'Puritan Translations in Israel: Rewriting a History of Translation in Charting the Future of Translation History' in G. Bastin. and P. Bandia (eds), *Charting the Future of Translation History*, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2006a, pp. 164-179.

renunciation of attraction to feminine-tinged weakness could yield masculine health and benefit women and children incapable of such renunciation.”²⁸⁹ However, his writing also allowed for and promoted elements of traditional Judaism as a gateway between ‘sick’ diaspora Jewish life and new Zionist masculinity, as a way to soothe the individual and bind them together with their community, and as a way to soften the excess of both mentalities. Philip Hollander shows Agnon to be hostile to the idea of importing gentile masculine strength as an ideal wholesale to be of value to the solving of the crisis in masculinity he saw.²⁹⁰ Indeed, his work counters the mainstream Zionist emphasis on a return to the physical, and instead focuses on the written word as a source of continuity and redemption – as the *word* rather than the *place* as the new locus of the Jewish national revival.

However, this rival redirection of the locus of ‘new Hebrewism’ from working the land to working the pen – not a fringe view for the self-consciously intellectual movement – was no less based on an androcentric and essentialising foundation. Indeed, with its privileging of Jewish interaction with civilisation over nature in their search for identity, it rests on the binary opposition between the two. Moreover, as we shall see later in this chapter, the Zionist literary canon was exclusionary to women as much as, if not more so than, the Labour Zionist mode of New Hebrewism, not least because of its abstraction of the binary Logic of Domination. Indeed, the very adoption and promotion of Hebrew – traditionally gendered masculine, the language of the Scripture and of the patriarchs, over Yiddish, traditionally gendered feminine, language of the home²⁹¹ – itself speaks to the masculinist ideology of the ‘new Hebrew’ movement. This dichotomy can be seen in the representation of Yiddish as the ‘mother tongue’ and Hebrew as the ‘fathers’ tongue’, echoing and reinforcing the private-public binarism.²⁹² Female pioneers, who often had a limited grasp of the language due to their lack of education opportunities in Hebrew, were thus doubly excluded, both practically and symbolically rendered outsiders. The rivalry between engaging with *nation* through writing literature and engaging with *nature* through working the land is thus a false one, the two working together to build the hegemony of the Zionist dominator.

Indeed, engagement with nature as a partner to be wooed remained not an adjunct to but a fundamental driver of the creation of the new Hebrew man. A central irony of the Logic of Domination is that the dominating pole, in this case the masculine, is formulated only by reference

²⁸⁹ Philip Hollander, *From Schlemiel to Sabra: Zionist Masculinity and Palestinian Hebrew Literature*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019, p. 37.

²⁹⁰ Hollander, 2019, p. 42.

²⁹¹ Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997.

²⁹² Hanna Naveh, ‘Leket, Pe’ah ve-Shikhecha: ha-Chayim Michuts la-Kanon’ in Izraeli, Dafna (ed), *‘Al Min, Migdar ve-Politika*, Tel Aviv: ha-Kibbutz ha-Me’uchad, 1999, p. 50.

to its 'other', the feminine. In this sense, it is dependent on the feminine for its own identity, and thus an attack on the feminine is simultaneously an attack on the masculine. Butler links this dependence of the male cluster of traits on the female cluster of traits with the physical body in Western discourse:

This figuration of masculine reason as disembodied body is one whose imaginary morphology is crafted through the exclusion of other possible bodies.²⁹³

Given that a core goal of the Zionist movement was to prove the Jew as capable of masculine dominance, then, it is no surprise that they sought a counterpart to their hyper-masculinity in a hyper-feminised land. To this end, the land, as an existing symbol of the feminine element to which the Jews longed, was not just something to identify with, but to conquer, to actively assert dominance over in order to prove oneself worthy. As scholars have noted, masculinity in the traditional sense has been seen as something which must be conferred, earned, something which needs to be continuously renewed by action.²⁹⁴ Failure of action will render the man 'effeminate', while being acted against will render the man 'emasculated'. It is only through asserting and maintaining dominance that masculinity can be created, whereas femininity is the passive into which one might inadvertently slip.²⁹⁵ Masculinity is thus a highly precarious notion, propped up only by constant reference to the otherness of the Other – there can be no masculinity without constantly performed dominance over femininity.²⁹⁶ Emptied of autonomous significance, the natural and the feminine are conversely defined by their opposition to masculinity, they are the fodder by which masculinity is confirmed, irrelevant in their own right.²⁹⁷ The female body, and the body of nature, is the lack into which the male need to prove his own masculinity is projected. Only by holding up a mirror to the new Jewish (male) national subject is nature relevant, does it require representation at all.

For this reason, as we have already seen, the language used to refer to the process of developing a relationship with the land was heavily militarized: 'conquest', 'penetration', etc. Formalised displays of violence, and in particular the ability to fight for one's country, are often a key ingredient in

²⁹³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, New York, NY: Routledge, 1993, p. 49.

²⁹⁴ Joseph A. Vandello et al, 'Precarious Manhood', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, 2008, pp. 1325-1339; Jennifer Berdahl et al, 'Work as a Masculinity Contest', *Journal of Social Issues* 74:3, 2018, pp. 422-448.

²⁹⁵ Matthew Ezzell, 'Healthy for Whom? Males, Men, and Masculinity: A Reflection on the Doing (and Study) of Dominance', in C. J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges (eds), *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, inequality, Continuity, and Change*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 188-197.

²⁹⁶ Michael Schwalbe, *Manhood Acts: Gender and the Practices of Domination*. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 2014.

²⁹⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Gillian C. Gill (trans), Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1985 [1974].

shaping the national subject,²⁹⁸ and the Zionist movement was from the very start keen to prove their ability to take part in such displays of dominance: "Almost any 'respectable' violence that Jews would turn to would restore their dignity and honor, their masculinity."²⁹⁹

Expressions of political power, control over the land, over their bodies, mastery of their own fate: all were important to the reestablishment of Jewish masculinity. As Ariel Hirschfeld points out, the association of militarism with masculinity is encoded in the very language, with *lehitgaber* ('to overcome/strengthen'), *gvurah* ('heroism'), and *gavriyut* ('masculinity') all sharing the same root.³⁰⁰ The feminine, then, was all that which their heroism fought for and triumphed over, the natural Other of the strong masculine Jew. In particular, this gendered attitude can be seen in the manner by which the national discourse over the Holocaust was manifest in the early statehood years, as a kind of national shame which happened not to the 'masculine', militarily and physically strong, in control 'us', but to the 'effeminate', weak, passively controlled 'them'.³⁰¹ This 'othering' of Holocaust survivors can be read as a self-preservation technique, restricting in-group identity only to those who embody the ideals of masculine empowerment, rather than those who counter the idea of Jews/Israelis/Zionists as natural 'dominators'. Set against the backdrop of the Six Day War, the peak of Israeli masculinist, militarised heroism, the International Booker-winning leftist writer David Grossman's (1954-) *The Book of Intimate Grammar* (*Sefer ha-Dikduk ha-Pnimi*, 1991) represents a challenge to this simplistic gendering of the public/private sphere through the fetishization of the masculine body.³⁰² The child protagonist, Aharon, suddenly stops growing just before his bar-mitzvah approaches: "his refusal to grow communicates resistance to a concept of masculinity that is inescapable at a moment of tense militarization."³⁰³ On the cusp of entrance onto the stage of public life, becoming 'a man', Aharon instead retreats deep into the realm of his own private imagination.

Similarly, the militarised imposition of Self onto Other implied by the Zionist concept of 'redeeming the land' comes at a cost to both man and nature. The fetishizing of the femininity of the land requires a masochistic effort of 'devoted' labour to subdue her and keep her in the desired fertile, submissive form. This means, as we have seen, that 'redeeming the land' is more about *suppressing*

²⁹⁸ Joane Nagel, 'Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21:2, 1998, pp. 242-269; J. A. Mangan, *Manufactured Masculinity: Making Imperial Manliness, Morality and Militarism*, London: Routledge, 2014.

²⁹⁹ Boyarin, 1997a, p. 288.

³⁰⁰ Ariel Hirschfeld, 'Gvarim be-Gvarim,' in *Mishkafayim* 22, 1994 pp. 9-15.

³⁰¹ Ronit Lentin, *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah: Reoccupying the Territories of Silence*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2000.

³⁰² David Grossman, *The Book of Intimate Grammar*, Betsy Rosenberg (trans), New York, NY: Riverhead, 1995 [1991].

³⁰³ Anne Golomb Hoffman, 'The Body of the Child, the Body of the Land: Trauma and "Nachträglichkeit" in David Grossman's "To the End of the Land"', *Narrative* 20:1, 2012, p. 45.

nature than about freeing it. The anxiety involved in conquest is thus not resolved but perpetuated, its process is never completed. Moreover, as we will shortly explore, the suppression of nature also entails the suppression of *human* nature, that is, 'base' bodily desires such as sex, comfort, privacy and personal fulfilment.

Nonetheless, the sustained importance of the military to Israeli national life has meant such values continue to be meaningful in the modern day.³⁰⁴ The shaping of fit, tough masculine bodies prepared to sacrifice themselves for the national cause via military service continues to inform the Israeli construction of the ideal body, even if physically working the land is less common.³⁰⁵ As Ben-Ari notes, however, the role of military service in shaping identity functions in opposite directions for men and women, with men acquiring both social and symbolic capital, and women being relegated to supporting roles in the army, this marginalisation then replaying in civilian life as less prestige and social contacts for their future career.³⁰⁶ Indeed, "the fact that the army's influence permeates almost all spheres of Israeli life makes it one of the central mechanisms reproducing gendered inequality and establishing gendered identities."³⁰⁷ It is the 'natural' masculinity of the military as a space which informs this process.

Tied into this veneration of masculine military might, the land's struggles against the imposition of Zionist values were generally taken not as a sign that she did not welcome their advances, but rather that she wanted them to try harder to 'win' her, or that she was foolishly acting against her own best interests. This language of violent sexual conquest sees the inherent aggression as a positive thing, a sign of masculinity. In personifying the land as a bride/betrothed/lover, they set up the need to take possession of her, mastering her and forming a natural 'partnership' by which the benevolent Jew decides what is right for the land.

In Shlonsky's famous poem 'Toil' ('Amal', 1928), a paean to agricultural labour, the 'mastery' of the land is carried out in violent terms more reminiscent of rape than consensual sexual union. Here, "the earth undergoes confinement, binding, and harnessing by the pioneer."³⁰⁸ Sand dunes struggle against the bit thrown into their mouth by the workers' labour, and ultimately they are subdued only

³⁰⁴ Tamar Mayer, 'From Zero to Hero: Masculinity in Jewish Nationalism' in Esther Fuchs (ed), *Israeli Women's Studies: A Reader*, London: Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 98.

³⁰⁵ Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002.

³⁰⁶ Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Masks and Soldiering: The Israeli Army and the Palestinian Uprising', *Cultural Anthropology* 4, 1989, pp. 372-389.

³⁰⁷ Hanna Herzog, 'From Gender to Genders: Feminists Read Women's Locations in Israeli Society', *Israel Studies Forum* 20:2, 2005, p. 75.

³⁰⁸ Ari Ofengenden, *Avraham Shlonsky: An Introduction to His Poetry*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014b, p. 41.

by the 'fists' of settlement: "Like huge fists lying down on the sands:/ Houses houses houses."³⁰⁹ This violent sexual conquest negates the voice of the land itself by forcefully overlaying it with their own narrative – that in spite of its protests, the land wants them. The roles of the two are sharply delineated even as they are portrayed as natural partners. Labour too, in Shlonsky's worldview, inflicts hardship and pain on the delicate hands of the pioneers, whose Jewish bodies are not used to taking the role of master-plower-impregnator. His work expresses the masochistic desire common amongst pioneers to suffer for the land, to sacrifice in order to build the new Hebrew in their old-new land, and to throw themselves into hard labour in order to prove their masculinity and provide for the land so it can adequately perform its nurturing feminine role. Yet the ironic result of this privileging of dominance as an expression of love for the land, and of imposing the desires of man onto the consciousness of nature, was to "supress nature in order to create something more natural."³¹⁰

This valuation of technology and science in regard to nature – the supremacy of technologically mastered nature over 'natural' nature – can be read as a natural consequence of such gendered relation to the land. Carolyn Merchant, in her pioneering book, *The Death of Nature*, explores the role of gender in the growth of technology.³¹¹ She shows the development of the modern scientific and technological age to be linked to a reimagining of the relationship between man and nature in the West, from the previously dominant 'mother nature' image of nature as nurturing and humanity as part of the 'organism' of nature, to the 'machine' image of nature, as something at odds with and inferior to civilisation, and thus morally in need of domination. Nature was a 'machine' in the sense that it was no longer conceived as a living entity, but rather 'dead', an inanimate body made up of smaller parts (atoms, particles, waves, physical laws), and therefore a passive body which required man/civilisation to control it.³¹² In this sense, the Zionist love of technology and promotion of technological transformation of the natural landscape can be seen to be not fundamentally at odds with their desire to 'return' to nature, or their professions of love for the land. Rather, for these Zionists, technological mastery was a demonstration of the degree to which she was loved and valued, her natural resources being as effectively extracted/commandeered/used as possible. This relationship is inherently gendered, with nature the passive feminine body waiting to be plundered and humankind the masculine investigator, probing and discovering her secrets, taking possession of

³⁰⁹ Avraham Shlonsky, 'Amal' in *Ktavim*, Vol. 2, Merhavia: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1954a, p. 14.

³¹⁰ Eric Zakim, *To Build and Be Built: Landscape, Literature, and the Construction of Zionist Identity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, p. 183.

³¹¹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1980.

³¹² Merchant, 1980, p. 193.

them and co-opting them to its needs and its vision. Zionist technological optimism, then, can be seen as another product of their desire to participate in this process of Western scientific imperialism, based on the dualistic power structure of the Logic of Domination.

It should be noted that although women were included in the socialist Zionist project as 'equals', and though signs of 'femininity' in women were frowned upon due to the masculinist and the socialist tendencies of the movement, they were honorary men only when they kept quiet and performed the jobs allocated to them, rather than when they tried to play a meaningful role in shaping the discourse.³¹³ For example, even at the peak of the kibbutz movement in the 1920s, women were almost entirely absent from policy-making bodies within the Histadrut.³¹⁴ As Michael Gluzman argues, the two Socialist Zionist goals of making Jews masculine again and bringing about gender equality were inherently in conflict with one another, the first being predicated on a gender essentialism necessarily at odds with the upending of traditional gender roles.³¹⁵ In structuring their relationship with the environment in terms of the Logic of Domination in order to legitimise their settlement of it, they reinforced the subjugation and inherent inferiority of the feminine. Similarly, the desire for 'partnership' with the land did not entail paying attention to the needs of the natural environment itself, but merely its overlaying with the needs of the pioneer.

Furthermore, the 'masculinisation' of the Israeli Jewish woman only went as far as *symbolically* taking up the image of workers or soldiers, and in both the kibbutz and military they were pushed to the margins, largely given homemaking, nursing, childrearing, and other supportive roles.³¹⁶ Their newfound roles were handed down entirely on male terms, rather than new gender relations being created by equally changing men and women, and a gendered distinction between the masculine public and feminine private realm as a default remains encoded into Israeli society even into the modern day.³¹⁷ Again, this is not to say that they did not have the intention of creating a more gender equal society, or even that they were not fairly progressive for their time. Certainly, the

³¹³ Rose Levinson, *Death of a Holy Land: Reflections in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*, Plymouth: Lexington, 2013, p. 69.

³¹⁴ Dafna Izraeli, 'The Women Workers' Movement: First Wave Feminism in Pre-State Israel' in Deborah Bernstein (ed), *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992, p. 203.

³¹⁵ Michael Gluzman, *Ha-Guf ha-Tsiyoni: Le'umiyut, Migdar ve-Miniyut ba-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Chadasha*, Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Me'ukhad, 2007, p. 105.

³¹⁶ Anne Bloom, 'Women in the Defense Forces,' in Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Safir (eds), *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*, New York, NY: Pergamon, 1991, pp. 128-3; Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui, 'From Revolution to Motherhood: The Case of Women in the Kibbutz, 1910-1948' in Deborah Bernstein (ed), *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992, pp. 211-234; Susan Sered, *What Makes Women Sick? Maternity, Modesty and Militarism in Israeli Society*, London: Brandeis University Press, 2000.

³¹⁷ Hanna Herzog, *Gendering Politics: Women in Israel*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999.

gender revolution was considered by many socialist Zionist pioneers as part of the general revolution of social roles and institutions. Rather, the emphasis on rebuilding 'masculinity' left women sidelined, invisible. And, of course, this marginalization of the feminine was even more pronounced in more conservative branches of Zionism, such as Revisionism, for whom recovering 'authentic' masculine power was the overriding goal of the movement.³¹⁸ In this sense, for all its talk of social revolution, the Zionist hegemony, like other nationalist movements, served to "reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by the nationalist discourse."³¹⁹ In carrying over this traditional framework of gender roles, along with the related association of essentialist racial, heteronormative, natural, etc characteristics, they preserved and reaffirmed the same structures of power-building described by the Logic of Domination, simply recategorizing certain specific elements within the hierarchy to place the heterosexual Ashkenazi Jewish male at the top. Interestingly, Susan Sered's hypothesis that the reason Israeli women are proportionally more likely to be 'sick' – with relatively low life expectancies and physical and mental health issues compared to their Western European counterparts – is due to their debarment from the cultural and political hegemony³²⁰ echoes the very same discourse of 'sickness' and disempowerment – and lack of control over their own bodies – expressed by Jewish men at the turn of the last century.

In later years, the continued valuation of masculinity can be seen in the sabra (*tsabar*, literally meaning 'cactus', denoting a healthy, vigorous, native born embodiment of the Zionist dream) archetype, the mantle-bearer to the earlier concept of the 'new Hebrew'. The use of the 'cactus' as a symbol of the native Israeli, 'growing wild on the land',³²¹ clearly mirrors the masculine ideal: practical rather than beautiful, self-reliant with its own inbuilt defence mechanism, and sustained by its own strength to overcome the harsh environment. The image of the sabra himself (always coded male) combines military elements with the stoicism and rough manners of the male ideal. His mastery of the land is a matter of calm acceptance of the natural order of things, rather than the neurotic, mediated longing characterised by Jews born in the diaspora.

Punching a hole in this constructed masculine ideal, Yaakov Shabtai's (1934-1981) critically acclaimed *Past Continuous (Zikhron Dvarim, 1977)*³²² explores the frustration and insupportability of

³¹⁸ Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy*, London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, p. 113.

³¹⁹ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20, 1991, p. 433.

³²⁰ Sered, 2000.

³²¹ Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, p. 4.

³²² Yaakov Shabtai, *Past Continuous*, Dalia Bilu (trans), Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1983 [1977].

the highly structured hyper-masculine roles contained within the sabra archetype. Though it was the first and only of his novels to be published during the Tel Aviv author's lifetime, *Past Continuous* is often claimed as the first novel to be written in vernacular Hebrew, and it made a major impact on the Israeli literary scene. Written as a long, stream-of-consciousness block of text, broken only by an advert for a muscle building machine, Shabtai foregrounds the search for meaningful masculinity in his novel with reference to this symbol of the masculine national body, of Zionism's success at building 'Jews with muscles'. In its hyper-inflation of the characters attempts to be masculine, the novel draws into focus the extremely limiting and fragile notions on which it is based, particularly, as we have shown, on the notion that masculinity can only be defined by reference to its Other, 'that which is not feminine'. The lack of boundary between the characters belies the mode of hyper-separation which characterises this binary logic, while their attempts to assert dominance over the women in their lives fails to bring a sense of meaning or fulfilment to their lives.

Notably, the novel is set in Tel Aviv, aligning itself away from the spiritual centre of the Labour Zionist movement: the kibbutz, or human-controlled 'nature'. While, as we have discussed, the city with its 'new' credentials has always been a rival Zionist icon, the novel does not place redemption on labour in any sense, nor on the conquest of nature by civilization. The three protagonists' wander the streets of Tel Aviv in search of meaning that always eludes them, challenging the notion of the native-born sabra male as the antidote to diaspora rootlessness. For all its status as the locus of the conquest of the land, the city has not been able to prevent the characters from feeling in exile – they are estranged both from the modern city itself, and from their fathers' generation of 'proper' pioneers. The weight of the pressure to conform to the masculine pioneering ideal is intense and crippling, preventing the characters from achieving anything meaningful of their own –

The sons do not perform a critique or offer an alternative ideology—instead, the critique is embedded within the ideology itself. Flaws are not presented in contrast to a more effective way of life, nor is a clear redemptive future prescribed. The ideologies of the past are inescapable and essential to the present while at times are also unbearably painful and traumatic.³²³

The masculinist discourse of hegemonic Zionism thus has a negative impact on male, female, and nature alike, severing man from woman and woman from nature in favour of the man-land relationship, and trapping man and nature in a story of conquest which cannot ever be completed. The redeemed 'lover/bride' is always in danger of being lost to the 'barren wilderness', and thus

³²³ Saul Noam Zarrit, 'Ruins of the Present: Yaakov Shabtai's Anti-Nostalgia', *Prooftexts* 33:2, 2013, p. 260.

even when nature is well 'husbanded' and the nation is secure, man cannot rest without fear of it all slipping away.

3.3. The Damsel in Distress

As their lover, or 'other half', the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the Jews had a direct effect on the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the land. The effect of the failure of the Jews in the diaspora to assert their masculinity and take their rightful place as dominator, husband and master over the land, then, was the *cause* of the sorry state they found her in in the last chapter. Just as the Jews' masculinity was compromised, thereby destroying their spiritual potential and happiness, the land's femininity was compromised, thereby destroying her happiness. As a result, she was both defiled and humiliated, and sulky and temperamental, lashing out like an injured wild animal at her rescuers. The Zionist response was a call to arms, a battle to save the land from malignant forces and neglect. There was a focus on 'beautification', seducing her by hard labour as Jacob won Rachel, and thus 'winning' the right to master her. As such, the 'barren wilderness' mode of seeing nature, as something degenerate, barren and immoral, was not viewed as in conflict with the 'lover/bride' mode of seeing nature. Rather, the latter was the direct result of the former: the land was fallen and only the revitalised Jewish male could redeem her.

As we have already noted, the Zionist case was unusual in that the birth of nationalist sentiment took place not within the homeland, but from without. In this sense, then, to an even greater extent than normal, it was necessary for them to create their own 'imagined community', from which they could draw a sense of legitimacy and shared identity.³²⁴ The process of nation-building relies on traditions that are painted as natural and timeless, despite their subjective or artificial foundations.³²⁵ Nature was particularly important to this process as it provided a link to the shared biblical past. Not only this, but as we have already noted, the physical landscape possessed an unusual power to reinforce and stabilise national mythology in the minds of its participants.

Christopher Tilley explains this process:

When a story becomes sedimented into the landscape, the story and the place dialectically help to construct and reproduce each other. Places help to recall stories that are associated

³²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

³²⁵ Anthony D. Smith, 'The Nation: Invented, Imagined, or Reconstructed?', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20, 1991, pp. 353-368.

with them, and places exist (as named locales) by virtue of their employment in a narrative. Places, like persons, have biographies inasmuch as they are formed, used and transformed in relation to practice. It can be argued that stories acquire part of their mythic value and historical relevance if they are rooted in the concrete details of locales in the landscape, acquiring material reference points that can be visited, seen and touched.³²⁶

The interaction between Zionist discourse and the landscape, then, can be seen as the construction of a kind of 'sacred geography' for the new secular nation state. Physically tangible, these places could no longer merely be read as theoretical constructs; they were demonstrably there, and thus solidified the story of their telling, while crushing alternative explanations of the past by weight of the manifest present. As Doreen Massey puts it, "if the past transforms the present ... so too does the present make the past."³²⁷ Engagement with the natural landscape allowed the Zionists to "weave historical memory into the spatial configuration of nationhood."³²⁸

Moshe Shamir's (1921-2004) *Under the Sun (Tachat ha-Shemesh, 1950)* presents the narrative of the Zionist courtship and conquest of the land through the person of the personified woman 'Balfouria'.³²⁹ Shamir is typical of the 'Palmach generation' who fought in the War of Independence and commemorated the 'heroes' of the war in their writing. A staunch Zionist, he fought in the Palmach (an elite underground army which resisted the British Mandate and, at least symbolically, played a decisive role in the War of Independence) and was involved in politics, first for the left-wing party Mapam, and later the expansionist right-wing 'movement for Greater Israel'. Just as his most famous work commemorates his brother Elik's death in the War of Independence, *Under the Sun* draws on Shamir's own autobiographical experiences, glorifying sabra life.

As Ben-Ari shows, the text draws the link between 'knowing' the land and 'knowing a woman', and sets up a dynamic in which the active masculine desire of his protagonist is fulfilled by taking physical possession over the passive feminine land, personified by the woman 'Balfouria':³³⁰

Balfouria, I need you, I want you, you're mine. The simplest logic in the world, the logic of a tree, the logic of the earth. I need, therefore I get.³³¹

³²⁶ Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments*, Oxford: Berg, 1994, p.33.

³²⁷ Doreen Massey, 'Places and their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal* 39, 1995, pp. 187.

³²⁸ Maoz Azaryahu and Aharon Kellerman, 'Symbolic Places of National History and Revival: A Study in Zionist Mythical Geography', *Transactions: Institute of British Geographers* 24:1, 1999, p. 111.

³²⁹ Moshe Shamir, *Tachat ha-Shemesh*, Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1975 [1950].

³³⁰ Nitsa Ben-Ari, *Suppression of the Erotic in Modern Hebrew Literature*, Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 2006b, p. 87.

³³¹ Quoted in Ben-Ari, 2006b, p. 87.

This line sets forward the Logic of Domination as the natural order of things, rooting it in apparent unbiased 'reality', 'the logic of the earth'. As Long points out, the danger in the appeal to nature is in its apparent objectivity,³³² based on its supposed logical opposition to civilisation – nature is not constructed but in its raw state is 'pure', unbounded and impervious to argumentation. Edward Bruner and Phyllis Gorfain demonstrate that this apparent effect extends even to sites of historical importance such as Masada, the fixing of Zionist mythological narratives to specific points on the landscape helping to cement their meaning: "To attach such a mutable story to such an immutable site makes use of a device to fix meaning, to lend stability to authority and interpretation."³³³

If nature simply exists, however, it is both a source from which the building blocks of civilisation can be built, and something which can be improved by these higher orders of thought and structure. As such, it cries out for its own subjugation, being the atomic form of existence, the basic raw materials from which man had been mandated to construct his fulfilling world.

Shamir's speaker's repetition of his own desires as justification for his 'conquest' of the land/woman Balfouria is a performance of the masculine ideal, taking an active role, owning rather than suppressing his desires, and asserting his right to dominate through his own force: "I have to be in everything."³³⁴ In order to possess her, he places emphasis on 'knowing' her. As we have seen, the double meaning of this root, *y-d-*, derives from the equation of knowledge with power/mastery. To 'know' a woman is to have 'conquered' her, to have transferred her from holding a position of power – evoking desire/longing – to a position of submission – losing 'purity' and thus social value as an object of desire for other men, and thereby rendering herself dependent on her 'knower'. For feminist scholar Catherine MacKinnon: "the eroticization of dominance and submission *creates* gender ... Sexualized objectification is what defines women as sexual *and as women* under male supremacy."³³⁵

This sexualisation of the land is therefore a means to claim rightful ownership. In Jewish tradition, penetrative sex is one of the ways by which a man can legally claim a wife. While the Zionist pioneers

³³² Joanna Long, 'Rooting Diaspora, Reviving Nation: Zionist Landscapes of Palestine-Israel' in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, 34:1, 2009, pp. 61-77.

³³³ Edward M. Bruner and Phyllis Gorfain, 'Dialogic Narration and the Paradoxes of Masada', in Stewart Plattner and Edward M. Bruner (eds), *Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society*, Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1988, p. 72.

³³⁴ Quoted in Ben-Ari 2006b, p. 87.

³³⁵ Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses in Life and Law*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 50.

tended not to see the land of Israel as virgin and innocent, yet neither did they see it as an already inhabited space; rather, they saw it as pregnant with ancient historical import and memories that would remain unredeemed if Jews did not cultivate the land, erect houses, establish industry and pave roads.³³⁶

Like Merchant's 'Fallen Eve' metaphor,³³⁷ the 'barren' land of the Zionist imagination bore the scars of sin, but mostly she was sinned upon, broken by abandonment by her Jewish lover, and forced to degrade herself in a relationship with the occupants of the land who did not know how to treat her with respect. The non-virginity of the land meant that she was already betrothed to the Jewish people, allowing them to emphasise the weight of history while ignoring the centuries when she was outside of Jewish influence.

Again, Shamir uses his position to both see and unsee the Arab, acknowledging the land's objective 'non-virginity' while delegitimising his claim to mastery:

I know this piece of land of mine, I know it better than any unwashed Arab born here with his forefathers hundreds of years ago, because I was born here with my forefathers three thousand years ago. Men like me don't ask too many questions. The world belongs to men like me, absolutely. They take, and that's it.³³⁸

Once again, Shamir juxtaposes the masculinity of his New Jewish brethren, 'men like me', with the passive Arab, whose presence on the land is nothing more than an accident of birth. True 'knowing', he implies, requires an erotic taking possession of the land by deep contact with it, a constantly renewing act of domination. By touching the body of the land, "penetrating deeper and deeper into it" until he knows it so well he can "show you every point, every land fold, every canyon and every hut" by touch with his eyes closed, his protagonist earns the right to call the land his. He has gone through a greater journey to woo her than his Bedouin love-rival, walking "thousands of kilometers here", worked harder to prove his worth, and 'knows' the land better, and therefore it is rightfully his.

For the Zionist pioneer, then, physically manifesting their presence on the land performed three key functions: 1) It reaffirmed their masculine prerogative to dominate by providing a 'natural' opposite to be dominated, 2) It unlocked the feminine potential of the land, enriching their national prospects

³³⁶ Eyal Chowers, *The Political Philosophy of Zionism: Trading Jewish Words for a Hebraic Land*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 139.

³³⁷ Merchant, 2003, p. 21.

³³⁸ Quoted in Ben-Ari, 2006b, p. 88.

with resources and prestige, and 3) It annulled the Arab claim to the land by reinforcing the continued validity of their biblical relationship, which pre-dated any other claims.

As we have seen, the advent of post-Zionism led to a re-examination of some of the binary distinctions on which the movement was built in literature. In particular, some authors questioned the role of hyper-masculinity as a means of asserting Israeliness, problematising the relationship between the dominating masculine subject and his dominated feminine others, including nature.

Though many of his earlier stories remain trapped in an understanding of the feminine as the natural 'other' to the masculine protagonist or implied masculine reader, A. B. Yehoshua's later works, in particular *Mr Mani (Mar Mani, 1989)*,³³⁹ which Anne Golomb Hoffman calls "an antifable of gender and nationalism,"³⁴⁰ challenge this construction of the national "I" in opposition to its Other. Written in the form of fragmented scraps of dialogue, the novel moves backwards in time as if in search of meaning, yet for every layer of totalising myth that it deconstructs, it finds another no more or less compelling layer of totalising myth. As such, it forces the reader to recognise pre-Zionist constructions of meaning and power in relation to the land, while steadying them against the assumption that these meanings are themselves any more a 'true' representation of the natural order. Presented as a series of one-sided conversations without the corresponding responses, the novel encourages a reading "in the counter-direction" to the hegemonic narrative.³⁴¹ In particular, it presents a fundamental deconstruction of the Zionist hyper-masculine I, and hence hints at the deconstruction of its hyper-feminine others, such as woman, land, and Arab.

The deconstruction of the Arab as stable 'other' takes place in the figure of the Nazi officer, Egon Bruner. Echoes of physical, personal and professional similarity between Egon and the member of the Mani family fighting in the Lebanon War in the previous section set up a link between the Nazi-Jew and the Israeli-Arab relationship. In occupied Crete, Egon looks to the land as the source of pure, natural, clean and righteous civilization, the birthplace of the superior Aryan race. For Egon, the Jew is a degenerate contaminant, polluting the Aryan body, and an infection in the "pure and uncontaminated ... blue womb" of the land which is their natural birth right and heritage.³⁴² This harks back to the European anti-Semitic structuring of the Logic of Domination, which paired Jews with the 'dominated' side of the binary and which decried social movements which promoted their tolerance and inclusion in the public national sphere as opening the door to chaos and destruction.

³³⁹ A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr Mani*, Hillel Halkin (trans), London: Halban, 2012 [1989].

³⁴⁰ Anne Golomb Hoffman, 'The Womb of Culture: Fictions of Identity and Their Undoing in Yehoshua's *Mr. Mani*', *Prooftexts* 12:3, 1992, p. 246.

³⁴¹ See Nitsa Ben-Dov (ed), *Ba-Kivun ha-Negdi: Kovez Mechkarim al Mar Mani Shel A. B. Yehoshua*, Tel Aviv: ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uchad, 1995.

³⁴² Yehoshua, 2012, p. 177.

Notably, as we have already seen, this sense of unnaturalness was often conveyed through the image of sexual degeneracy, destabilising Greco-classical norms of physical and moral purity by corrupting the physical body. In part, this was connected to the Jewish alignment with the exotic, othered East, the threat beyond the border of structured Classical good, and especially expressed in the practice of circumcision, which rendered the male Jew and the male Arab in a disturbing intermediate category between 'male' and 'female'.³⁴³ This supposed contamination of the 'natural' order of things by the Other, Yehoshua shows, is used by Egon as a scapegoat for Nazi failure to live up to its dreams of national purity, even in the supposed birthplace of civilization:

How could we possibly purify ourselves in the ancient womb of our ancestors, as old Gustav Koch desired, with a lot of beastly Jews running around and demanding with their typical insolence to be our partners here too, to share our most primeval myths ...³⁴⁴

Yet the reader is forced to confront the fact that the Zionist movement has used very similar reasoning and imagery to other the Arab as the contaminating element standing in the way of their own 'return to the national homeland'. Moreover, they must observe the link to Zionist ideology in the Nazi's conception of nature as *human nature*, an echo of nation which must be mastered and mobilised against the Other:

What is nature if not character, both human and national, which can be described and changed ... Why, didn't Hitler himself speak of *the danger of the Jew in each one of us*?³⁴⁵

In drawing a link between the Israeli soldier and the oppressing Nazi rather than his oppressed victim, Yehoshua foregrounds the instability of the ideological hierarchy in which the Jew is both victim and dominator. He shows that the Zionist co-option of the very same Logic of Domination used by the Nazis to dehumanise the Jews has come at a great cost, turning the Israelis into the very thing that they sought to escape: totalising oppressors, controlling their 'other' in an attempt to return their homeland to a mythological pure, Edenic state. The novel thus calls into question the entire process by which we evaluate validity. Though Yehoshua once again stops short of condemning Zionism totally, he warns of the damaging effects of taking it to excess, of the authoritarian tendencies to which such totalising ideologies lead. He thereby:

³⁴³ Daniel Boyarin, "'This We Know to Be the Carnal Israel': Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel," *Critical Inquiry* 18, 1997b, pp. 474-505.

³⁴⁴ Yehoshua, 2012 p. 172.

³⁴⁵ Yehoshua, 2012, p. 178.

demonstrates the devastating consequences of extending the life of a nation beyond the territorial boundaries that define its singularity and imposing its presence on the unwilling population of another nation.³⁴⁶

As Hoffman points out, watching the same themes and processes being employed backwards causes their power-building attempts to break down on encountering another's claim to totalising truth:

Through a reading of recurring errors, the reader becomes aware of the repeated return to the site of the female body that produces the never-to-be-completed or stabilized theorizing of the womb.³⁴⁷

If the image of womb recurs through the text as one through which attempts at structuring hierarchies of meaning are made, but ultimately escapes being entrapped in one winning structure of meaning, we can read the text as a demonstration of the ultimate failure of the Logic of Domination to capture an objective 'reality', or to project a simple 'good'.

The very title of the novel disrupts the simple gendered structuring of the theory of womb, the surname of the family 'Mani' evoking the word 'mania' – 'hysteria', a connection which is explicitly referenced in the novel.³⁴⁸ This feminine coded word, which equates the ownership of a womb to madness, emotionality and irrationality, here breaks traditional gender boundaries and characterises the entire family and in particular the eponymous Mr Mani(s). Here we are forced to think of the anti-Semitic connection of Jews with femininity and even physical menstruation. Thus, the text forcibly reverses the Zionist negation of femininity, returning the male Jew to the position of 'other' and breaking the binary distinction between the new Jew and representations of his Other: woman, land, Arab.

Amplifying this imagery of the breakdown of the stable positions of Self and Other, the repeated confusion around lineage created by the repetition of character names, and theme of confusion around parenthood, serves to disrupt the continuity of the imagery of masculine virility. Yehoshua thus mocks the paradox by which this traumatic mode of hyper-separation, the detachment from/repression of the Other itself entails a detachment from the very process of procreation by which the new sabra can be created.

³⁴⁶ Gilead Morahg, 'Borderline Cases: National Identity and Territorial Affinity in A. B. Yehoshua's *Mr. Mani*', *AJS Review* 30:1, 2006, p. 173.

³⁴⁷ Hoffman, 1992, p. 253.

³⁴⁸ Yehoshua, 2012, p. 151.

Dan Miron concludes that the juxtaposition of this lack of continuity with heavy emphasis on themes of virility and lineage undercuts all claims of narrative continuity and forces the reader to critically analyse the processes that go into the construction of narratives as well as the inevitable existence of competing counter-narratives.³⁴⁹ Yosef's nativist ideology, which rests on the suppression of the Arab 'other', constructing Jewish identity by nature of their true and uncontested ownership of the land, designates any counter-narrative of an Arab relationship with the land something which must be violently quashed. It thus shows the narrowness – and ultimately the weakness – of an ideology based on the suppression of all others, and the negative effects this has both on dominator and dominated party.

By contrast, the second Yosef Mani, whose view is discussed in the third section of the novel, represents an outlook more aligned with that of Yehoshua himself, which “repudiates both the fetishization of the land and the readiness to impose ethnic exclusivity on it.”³⁵⁰ He proposes empathy for the Arabs and an understanding of the Arab narrative perspective in which the Jews are foreign invaders to their native land, tempering the violent suppression of this narrative with the proposal of a fair division of territory. However, the Arab remains the 'othered' party, and the space between the two conflicting narratives is solved by strict separation between the territorial claims of the two parties. Though a more empathic, humanist approach, then, Yehoshua ultimately continues to uphold binary division through his support of strict delineating boundaries between the Self and Other.

A more complete process of destabilisation occurs in Shulamith Hareven's (1930-2003) *Thirst: The Desert Trilogy (Tsim'a'on: Shelishiyat ha-Midbar, 1983)*.³⁵¹ Hareven fled to Israel from Poland at the age of ten, and was the first woman to be inducted into the Israeli Academy of the Hebrew Language. Though a Zionist, she showed an interest in marginalised voices, and was a strong advocate of the Peace Now movement as well as exploring feminist themes in her writing. Here, the de-centering process which forces the reader to confront the existence of other, competing narratives of belonging and of connection to the land is carried out through the use of 'marginal', characters to narrate biblical stories. Using perspectives that the biblical narrative would have 'othered', such as that of a Gibeonite seer, the series approaches the formative story of Jewish becoming-nation – the journey through the desert wilderness and conquest of the land – subverting its universalising, 'naturalising' force. Giving voice to group outsiders while denying voice to group insiders, Hareven succeeds in pointing out the brutality of the centralising force, subverting the

³⁴⁹ Dan Miron, 'Me'acharei Kol Machshava Mistateret Machshava Acheret', *Siman Keriah* 21, 1990, pp. 153-77.

³⁵⁰ Morahg, 2006, p. 179.

³⁵¹ Shulamith Hareven, *Thirst: The Desert Trilogy*, Hillel Halkin (trans), San Francisco, CA: Mercury, 1996 [1983].

meaning behind the narrative of the national collective and collapsing it into the personalised, fragmented meanings of individuals. In such a way, the reader must unavoidably confront the biblical narrative as the 'narrative of the victors', or an expression of power for the 'dominating' side of the binary. With all the focus on the 'ancestral land', then, we are forced to remember that the land, too, has a voice and existence outside of that which we project onto it.

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, the liminal space of the desert, with its central characteristic 'lack' of form, structure and morality, is the perfect place in which to examine themes of nation building. In this 'neutral', 'timeless' context, then, the novel's repeated points of resonance with modern day conflict are jarring, for example, this passage where the description of the Hebrews bears unmistakable resemblance to that of Palestinian workers searching for work in Israel:

The Hebrews had multiplied greatly and not all of them could find work in and around Raamses. They descended on the province, innumerable flocks of men and women who stood long hours in the sun, or sat in the shade of the baked-brick walls, looking for work. The Egyptians would come, take the five or ten of them that they needed, and drive the rest off. For a while they would vanish; yet soon they were back again, mute in the fly-ridden sunlight, waiting, more of them every year. There was no getting rid of them.³⁵²

The novel thus deconstructs the boundary between Self and Other, encouraging the reader to read the nation-building process of the Bible – and hence also in the modern day – “in a counter direction”. Hareven's work stands as a feminist rebellion against the Hebrew canon which emphasises a specifically masculine tradition of biblical analogy, from which women were traditionally excluded.³⁵³ Moreover, the process of decentring the familiar biblical narrative undermines the modern imposition of a voice onto the land by the Jewish hegemony: “What if the Hebrews came and what if the Hebrews went? The mountain would remain as always.”³⁵⁴ Far from inextricably bound to the Jewish people and craving their presence, the land is shown to be indifferent, remaining healthy and vibrant even outside of their occupation, and their relationship with it brief and meaningless in the grand scheme of things. She thus both undermines the traditional patriarchal power of the 'father tongue' by subverting its content for her own uses, and uses this 'outsider' perspective to develop counter-narratives in a more general sense, drawing

³⁵² Hareven, 1996, p. 7.

³⁵³ Yael Feldman, “'A People That Dwells Alone'? Toward Subversion of the Fathers' Tongue in Israeli Women's Fiction”, *AJS Review* 28:1, 2004, pp. 83-103; Ranen Omer-Sherman, “'In the Sinai of Knowledge': Narrating the Old/New Jewish Nation in Shulamith Hareven's 'Thirst: The Desert Trilogy'”, *College Literature* 31:1, 2004, pp. 126-146.

³⁵⁴ Hareven, 1996, p. 101.

attention to the existence and validity of other readings, even when it comes to the most foundational of national myths, the myth of the promised land.

3.4. Sublimation of Desire

In reconfiguring the Jewish (male) body, the Zionist project paradoxically promoted the value of virility while denigrating sexuality as expressed in personal relationships. As Rina Peled notes, while the literature of the first and second aliyot does contain depictions of erotic love between men and women, the ethos of socialist Zionism soon made such expressions taboo even in real life.³⁵⁵ A distraction from collective values, romantic love was typically seen as a dangerous form of individualism, a bourgeois throwback that could threaten the nation building process. To openly display romantic affection was seen as a betrayal of the Zionist project. This was done consciously in many socialist Zionist circles, who used the Freudian slogan “sublimation without repression” to promote the idea that while sexuality was natural and creative and should not be repressed, it should instead be channelled into a “higher” cause: building the nation and conquering the land.³⁵⁶

Of course, even in its heyday, the vast majority of pioneers did not subscribe to any radical labour Zionist program of sexual liberation or eradication of monogamous personal relationships. However, the idea of the sublimation of erotic desire towards the land shaped the prevailing cultural attitude towards expressions of sexuality and of gender roles.³⁵⁷ In the same way, the collectivist ethos of secular Zionism permeated into the broader discourse, such that to challenge this model by openly prioritising the wants and needs of the individual rather than the collective remained a grave social sin right through to the 1980s and 90s, and even beyond. Associated with the ‘private’ zone, women were often shut out of the discourse and distrusted as constituting a tempting ‘otherness’, asserting a deviant sexuality which threatened the collectivist status quo, and showing interest in material and personal things above the value of the national collective. Conversely, the iconic Israeli citizen was depicted as a masculine sabra, sacrificing his body to the military collective, and re-devoting his sexual and romantic energy towards the land.

³⁵⁵ Rina Peled, *Ha-Adam ha-Chadash Shel ha-Mahapekha ha-Tsionit: Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir ve-Shorashav ha-Eropeyim*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2002.

³⁵⁶ Ben-Ari, 2006a, p. 184.

³⁵⁷ Sharon Halevi, ‘The Premier Body: Sarah Netanyahu, Nava Barak, and the Discourse of Womanhood in Israel’, *NWSA Journal*, 11:2, 1999, pp. 72-87.

Expressing sexuality towards the land was the only non-subversive way of asserting sexuality precisely because it was feminine but not personal. Self-control and sacrifice were a major part of the cult of masculinity, with untampered sexuality therefore being the domain of the feminine and the orientalist Other. It is telling, then, that sexuality as a theme is largely absent from Israeli literature in the period from settlement to the 1980s, and that where such themes do occur, the subjects are often Arabs, women or Mizrahim. Deviant sexuality is a feature of the 'other' and a major justification for their domination for the greater good of society.

In the works of Moshe Shamir, for example, women are presented as a temptation which needs to be overcome, a distraction from the Zionist project to bond with the land. In *He Walked Through the Fields* (*Hu Halakh ba-Sadot*, 1947), Uri and Mika represent opposite forces which are fundamentally in conflict with one another.³⁵⁸

Uri is active, independent, energetic, principled, devoted to the community, courageous, and physical. His girlfriend, Mika, is passive, dependent, and incapable of forging ties with the kibbutz community. A Holocaust survivor, she does not seem to understand the political implications of her desire to return to her homeland.³⁵⁹

While Uri is an embodiment of the sabra archetype, working towards the national cause, Mika represents betrayal, subversion, vice. It is she who tries to prevent Uri from answering the call to serve the national cause: "This means that you are already leaving... Uri, I don't want you to go and I am telling you not to."³⁶⁰ In succeeding in detaching his romantic attachment from Mika and devoting himself instead to nation and land, the novel presents Uri as a heroic figure, an archetype which had a pervasive hold in the national mythology.

This particular detachment from romantic love is widespread in the writing of the first generation of 'sabra' authors. The representation of women in Yizhar's writing, for example, is noticeably flat and sexless. Lacking specific traits or personality, they represent the idea of domesticity, comfort and companionship rather than being individual objects of desire: they could just as easily be "Shoshanah or maybe Zehava and perhaps even Ruthie."³⁶¹ Though still 'other', Yizhar's women are less sexual objects than domestic objects. His protagonists often struggle to relate to the women around them as objects of romantic attachment rather than sisters. By contrast, his descriptions of the natural landscape are lush, effusive and exhaustive, constituting what Yaron Peleg calls a

³⁵⁸ Moshe Shamir, *Hu Halakh ba-Sadot*, Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1972 [1947].

³⁵⁹ Esther Fuchs, 'The Enemy as Woman: Fictional Women in the Literature of the Palmach', *Israel Studies* 4:1, 1999, p. 219.

³⁶⁰ Shamir, 1972, p. 218.

³⁶¹ S. Yizhar, 'Be-Terem Yetsi'a', in *Shiv'a Sipurim*, Tel Aviv: ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uchad, 1977 [1948], p. 20.

“linguistic husbandry” of the land.³⁶² Just as Alterman promises to beautify the land in a dress of concrete and cement, Yizhar courts her with the beautifying effects of language, thereby attempting to prove his worthiness and devotion. Though his nature imagery is rarely explicitly erotic, the focus of the protagonists’ emotional conflict is displaced towards the land.

David Maletz (1899-1981) explores the problematic effects of this sublimation for society in ‘The Last Concert’ (‘Ha-Kontsert ha-Acharon’, 1947).³⁶³ Born in Poland, Maletz was one of the founders of Kibbutz Ein Harod, and his writing is notable for its realistic and intimate portraits of kibbutz life. Here, he describes a kibbutz setting in which intense erotic and personal frustration is directly related to the community’s violent ‘conquest’ of the land:

In these settlements boys and girls lived close together, young, joyful, fresh. In those first years, the years of first addiction to the land’s desolation, in the first dedication to the desert fields, fertilizing them, filling them with seed, these young people built a rampart around themselves, barrier upon barrier. Fences and hedges. The cry of blood choked within the veins.

There were nights, feverish with fire ... when a boy would toss and turn in his hard bed, his temples beating. With pounding heart he listens to the suppressed sighs of the girl who has no rest in her bed, next to his. The girl’s breasts seemed to be pricked by pins, til she cannot take it any longer. Her hands clutch the mattress. Her feverish legs tighten to exhaustion.

And the strangled sobs buried in her bones burst out and shake her.³⁶⁴

The juxtaposition between the erotic devotion of the kibbutzniks to the land and their intense sexual frustration explicitly paints one as the consequence of the other. In devoting all their love and productive energy to subduing the land, they create a barrier which shields them from all distractions, making fulfilling interpersonal relationships an impossibility. Though Maletz stops short of total condemnation of the idolisation of the land in socialist Zionist thought, he highlights the high personal cost paid by rigid adherence to its principle of sublimation.

Even as later generations begin to question the binary divide between personal and communal, the association of the feminine with the private and the sexual remains strong. Esther Fuchs notes, for example, that while Amos Oz’s male characters are governed by a “variety of psychological drives”,

³⁶² Yaron Peleg, ‘Writing the Land: Language and Territory in Modern Hebrew Literature’, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12:2, 2013, p. 298.

³⁶³ David Maletz, ‘The Last Concert’ in Richard Flantz (ed), *Until Daybreak: Stories from the Kibbutz*, Tel Aviv: Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, 1984 [1947].

³⁶⁴ Quoted in Ben-Ari, 2006b, p. 96-7.

his female characters seem almost exclusively “controlled, consumed, defined by” their sexuality.³⁶⁵ Indeed, they are still frequently the source of the breakdown of Zionist values in his work, though the author treats this breakdown as broadly inevitable and ambivalent. This echoes a general tendency in both the writing of female characters by male authors and the reading of female authors by male critics to reduce women to their ‘otherness’, and to rely on the “smug assumption that a woman’s biological difference sets her apart, that she is essentially inferior.”³⁶⁶ This othering allows the ‘dominant’ Zionist male to build and reinforce their concept of masculinity.

As such, the reinforcement of the connection between femininity and both deviant sexuality and national destruction feeds into the notion that the nature in its ‘wild’ state needs controlling by the masculine national subject. If, as we have seen in the last chapter, the feminine is considered naturally headed towards chaos, man is charged with projecting order onto it for its own good. The masculine thus takes the role of dominator not as a result of an arbitrary seizing of control, but as a result of the true nature of things. Masculine domination equals goodness, calm, balance, while feminine domination, or even neutral equality, is a slippery slope in which everything unravels into chaos and sin. This is certainly not a notion unique to Zionism, but rather a useful general myth on which structures of domination can be easily built by tapping into subconscious cultural connections and biases. While in-system individuals can point to the generality of the myth as evidence of its truth and naturalness (see for example Jordan Peterson for a recent popularist iteration of this argument), an ‘external’ (as much as possible) analysis shows such an argument to be circular, ultimately saying nothing more than ‘the status quo exists and therefore is good’. The Logic of Domination thus presents a convenient tool on which to structure hierarchies of power which perpetuate themselves with minimal input.

Amos Oz’s *To Know a Woman* (*Lada’at Isha*, 1989) can be read as the fallout of sublimating love for a woman towards the land.³⁶⁷ The typically sabra protagonist, his daughter and his wife all devote their efforts to repressing emotion, to cultivating ascetic rationality. They live like monks, and aggressively regulate expressions of emotion in themselves and each other. Conforming to this ideal, however, renders them personally isolated even from those they are closest to.

When his wife dies under mysterious circumstances, Yoel throws himself into cultivating the garden of his rented house. Struggling to assert control over his surroundings, and to shape it in the image

³⁶⁵ Esther Fuchs, *Israeli Mythologies: Women in Contemporary Hebrew Literature*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987, p. 62.

³⁶⁶ H. R. Hays, *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil*, New York: Putnam, 1964, p. 17.

³⁶⁷ Amos Oz, *To Know a Woman*, Nicholas de Lange (trans), London: Chatto and Windus, 1991 [1989].

he desires for it, allows him to gain a position of mastery he felt lacking in his life and relationship: "he "knows" the garden as he never knew the woman who was his wife."³⁶⁸

His ambivalent relation to nature clearly mixes elements of both alienation and desire:

Very soon, a bristly darkness, a thick, humid, coat of ferns closed around him. Gripped by claustrophobia, he began to trample on branches, to flail, to kick out and the dense foliage, which simply absorbed his kicks; bending stems and twigs, scratched all over, panting hard, his clothes covered with burrs and thorns and dry leaves, he seemed to be sinking in the folds of thick, soft, twisted, dark-green cotton wool, struggling with strange pangs of panic and seduction.³⁶⁹

His decision to change tack from planting exotic garden ornamentals to planting native fruit trees echoes a similar tension in the Zionist movement between natives – associated with the authenticity of the bible but also the existent Arab population – and non-natives, especially 'pioneer' plants like eucalyptus- associated with the immigrant and his successful, quick adaption to the land, and with technological and western progress. Yoel's embracing of native species reflects the sabra ideological shift towards true 'nativeness', while simultaneously being rigid and prescriptive. These plants evoke the bible but trap the Zionist in a specific framework:

His Eden is not intended to be a setting for love, or any other potentially destructive emotion, for that matter. To the contrary, it is intended to be a bulwark against such emotions, which he associates with the madness that so fascinated his wife and that presumably led to her death. Alone in his garden, Oz's Adam surveys the outside world and its attendant chaos – the Jerusalem that stole his wife, the Tel Aviv that lures his daughter, their neighbour's house that bewitches and seduces him – with foreboding, wishing only to enclose himself in a rigid, ideologically significant order that might redeem him.³⁷⁰

His 'return to nature' is not really a return to nature, but an imposition of hierarchy governed by the suppression of all his other desires. It is thus an expression of the Zionist hyper-masculinist drive to negate all forms of weakness in order to reassert their position at the top of the Logic of Domination. In such a reading, the garden functions as a synecdoche for the land of Israel, itself a small prison against the threat of the outside world, in which the 'other' lurks in order to bring about chaos and destruction. Yoel's aim is to suppress a true encounter with the 'other', to suppress his own

³⁶⁸ Karen Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012, p. 58.

³⁶⁹ Oz, 1991, p. 235.

³⁷⁰ Grumberg, 2012, p. 60-1.

failings and weaknesses by only engaging with that which he can control. Similarly, the Zionist encounter with nature is shallow and unfulfilling for either party precisely because it entails no true attempt to 'know' the Other, but only imposition of control.

Yet though writers of the Statehood generation rebelled against their fathers' generation by questioning the obsession with the collective, public realm at the expense of the private internal life of the individual, their resurrection of desire, or its redirection from the land as a symbol of the national collective to the woman as a symbol of the national private was not complete. Rather, the feminine remained othered, the not-I that needed to be struggled against. Where earlier generations had linked the feminine to the dangers of the private realm, Statehood writers such as Oz reimagined the feminine as the mouthpiece of the tyrannical collective, and thereby continued to define the masculine protagonist as a martyr in opposition to femininity. Though this single binary pair in the Logic of Domination was reversed, then, no shift was made to the general system of binary oppositions:

instead of challenging the Otherness which typified Palmah mythognynies, most of the male authors of the Generation of Statehood preferred to replace the old dichotomy (public/private) with new ones (spirit/matter; culture/nature) that still favored the masculine.³⁷¹

In particular, female sexuality took a central role in characterising the dangerous otherness of women. Oz's women are repeatedly depicted as preying on male sexual weakness, including this particularly striking example from *Black Box* (*Kufsa Shchora*, 1987):

You recognised an insect that was out of its mind at the smell of a female in heat. I didn't have a chance. You are stronger than I am, in the same ratio as the sun is stronger than snow. Have you ever heard of carnivorous plants? They are female plants that can exude a scent of sexual juices over a great distance, and the poor insect is drawn from miles away into the jaws that are going to close around it.³⁷²

Through their sexuality, they are powerful, and yet lacking in any humanity or morality, thus the potential destroyers of both masculinity and nation.³⁷³ Man is thereby forced into taking responsibility for the national good even if that responsibility crushes him under its weight. Without the imposition of male control and guidance, woman "is at bottom a glut of instincts, a beast with

³⁷¹ Fuchs, 1987, p. 15.

³⁷² Amos Oz, *Black Box*, Nicholas de Lange (trans), London: Chatto and Windus, 1987 [1986], p. 91.

³⁷³ Dvir Abramovich, 'Feminine Images in the Writing of Amos Oz', *Melilah: Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies* 2, 2009b, pp. 1-20.

only a superficial and misleading human veneer."³⁷⁴ In 'Where the Jackals Howl' ('Artsot ha-Tan', 1965), Galila seduces Damkov, forcing him into incestuous depravity, without any motive beyond narcissistic sensuality.³⁷⁵

more often than not, what served as an allegorical substitute for what many of the New Wave authors saw as a degenerating society were gyniconologies of mad, materialistic, and hedonistic women bent on the destruction of the male protagonist, or the national Self.³⁷⁶

As such, though the precise configuration of Logic of Domination was modified slightly to fit the new worldview of the Statehood generation, its status as a conceptual framework in the discourse remained unchallenged. Likewise, erotic desire when not modulated through land or nation continued to pose an existential threat to the fragile masculinity of the national Self.

3.5. The Creative Feminine

As we have seen, the specifically masculine encoding of the 'new Hebrew' revolution left women out of the discourse, rendering them third wheels:

they were interlopers in the relationship between the male pioneers and the land. The only way they could participate in this relationship was through a proxy, a husband or son who will guard and tend the land.³⁷⁷

The Jewish female became the insider-outsider that the Jewish male had been in the diaspora, straddling the dominator-dominated lines. Their role in service of the collectivist ethos of Zionism was to be mothers, to produce the new generation of sabras, and to take care of the private sphere such that it did not distract the men from the public collectivist national one.³⁷⁸ In this context, female sexuality was explicitly dangerous, as it challenged the male direction of eros towards the land.

In writing their own relationship with the land, then, female writers were at a considerable disadvantage, alienated by the heavily gendered structuring of the mainstream Zionist rendering of

³⁷⁴ Esther Fuchs, 'The Beast Within: Women in Amos Oz's Early Fiction', *Modern Judaism* 4:3, 1984, p. 319

³⁷⁵ Amos Oz, 'Where the Jackals Howl', in *Where the Jackals Howl, and Other Stories*, Nicholas de Lange and Philip Simpson (trans), London: Chatto and Windus, 1981b [1965], p. 3- 20.

³⁷⁶ Fuchs, 1987, p. 14.

³⁷⁷ Sharon Halevi, 'The Premier Body: Sarah Netanyahu, Nava Barak, and the Discourse of Womanhood in Israel', *NWSA Journal*, 11:2, 1999, p. 80.

³⁷⁸ Halevi, 1999, p. 81.

the man/land relationship, a structuring which also debarred them from fully participating in the discourse of the national Self.

In this context, Esther Raab's (1894-1981) poetry represents an important attempt to co-opt and redirect the eroticisation of nature beyond the context of masculine conquest. Raab was born in Petach Tikva, and is sometimes referred to as the 'first sabra poet'. Her poetry is frequently preoccupied with the 'wild' natural landscape of the country, which she describes with an eye for minute detail and in a mood of dynamic vitality. Her work is also concerned with the place of women in both the creative realm and within collective society at large, a subject which clearly pressed heavily upon her as an intelligent woman in a patriarchal setting. As such, the dense language of her poetry deliberately blurs and obscures gender lines.

In 'A Thistle Breached the Loam' ('Parats Kimosh ba-Chamra', 1930), Raab weaves a dense, erotically-charged scene of wild nature, which plays with but ultimately displaces the simple gender binary of the Zionist sexualisation of the nature:³⁷⁹

Though the poem's opening contains an echo of the biblical "land of milk and honey," the milk of this land is neither produced by, nor for the benefit of, anything but the land itself.³⁸⁰

Raab's sublimation of eros towards the land is not in service of the national goal of 'conquering the land', but rather an expression of personal autonomy and reaffirmation of the land's autonomy beyond human control.³⁸¹ The dense, ambiguous syntax blurs the line between subject and object, resulting in an image of nature as entirely self-supported. The effect of the poem, then, is to reintroduce the agency of the land, its ability to assert itself as a complete subject without reference to the masculine Jewish 'I', and its inherent creative power. It is not a mere mirror for its masters through which they can affirm their identity and fulfil their destiny, but self-actualised and self-governing. In nature poems such as these, Raab treads the line between employing the traditional connection between wild nature and erotic, slightly dangerous sexuality and undermining them by severing the typical order of hierarchy, bracketing the human out of the natural without the descent into chaos, destruction or degeneracy.

Relatedly, her nature poetry not only advocates for the non-dependence of nature, but also draws on the hegemonic connection between land and woman only to disrupt its meaning: If nature is creative rather than simply reflective, active rather than simply passive, self-governing rather than

³⁷⁹ Esther Raab, 'Parats Kimosh ba-Chamra', *Kol ha-Shirim*, Tel-Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1988, p. 18.

³⁸⁰ Barbara Mann, 'Framing the Native: Esther Raab's Visual Poetics', *Israel Studies* 4:1, 1999, p. 249.

³⁸¹ Hamutal Tzmir, *Be-Shem ha-Nof: Le'umiut, Migdar, ve-Subyektivit ba-Shira ha-Yisra'elit bi-Shanot ha-Chamishim vaha-Shishim*, Beersheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006.

chaotically destructive, then so too is the feminine not limited to being the 'other' of the masculine master. The natural imagery in these poems can be read as a metaphor for her own position as a writer – creative, autonomous, and defiant of the gender norms imposed upon her, which pigeonhole her work into a single layer of personal meaning. They beg to be read both as a critique of the national obsession with sexually conquering the land, and as a response to being personally othered, in both a national and personal context, and also a celebration of a natural world which bears no relation to either the national or personal.

Raab's complex use of wild nature as a space to run to, an 'outside' for the claustrophobic social expectations on her as a woman to conform and submit to masculine dominance, to be 'domesticated', reflects the Logic of Domination which 'others' wild nature, while paradoxically calling for its end. In poems such as 'Thus Will You Love Me' ('Kakha Tohaveni', 1930), Raab's narrative 'I' calls out to the masculine reader, begging for her need for independence and autonomous creative power to be recognised.³⁸² The speaker consciously chooses not to submit to typical male-female relations which relegate her to the domestic, private realm, the subordinate Other to the masculine Self, which she associates with the 'open space' of uncultivated nature, that which is beyond social construct. Yet she still hopes that her lover will accept her terms, allowing her both personal autonomy and social belonging. This reflects the writers' complicated relationship with the Logic of Domination, which she experiences as oppressive, and the 'in' group, which she both runs away from and longs to be a part of.

Though she associates her 'otherness' with that of nature while continuing to desire human contact, however, Raab goes beyond desiring to simply be absorbed into the dominating pole:

The speaker's ability to move freely, to stay outdoors, and to be in a productive and rewarding contact with the space is not presented in the poem as a manner of gaining ownership of the land; it is perceived *as a land in itself* and therefore as a property to fight for.³⁸³

In other words, Raab sees an essence of freedom in the wild feminine archetype of the land, resulting in the urge not to separate one's identity from otherness, but to release it from its suppressed subordination and give respect to its difference. She calls for a loosening of the rigid binaries of the Logic of Domination, acknowledging the existence of the Self in Other and the Other in Self.

³⁸² Esther Raab, 'Kakha Tohaveni, *Kol ha-Shirim*, Tel-Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1988, p. 33.

³⁸³ Dana Olmert, 'Eucalyptus Trees, Ars-Poetica, and Feminine Manhood in the Early Poetry of Esther Raab', *Hebrew Studies* 53, 2012, p. 291.

Barbara Mann, in her discussion of literary criticism's debarring of women from the mainstream discourse, analyses a passage written by the poet and writer Broides as an example of the specifically gendered way in which writing nature in Hebrew was discussed by canon builders:

The strangeness of the Mediterranean landscape is a common enough theme in Hebrew literature written in Palestine during the early decades of the century. What is striking in this passage is the presence of the "partition" [mechitza], the physical divider which separates men and women in a traditional Jewish house of prayer. The implicit connection throughout the essay between "woman" and "land" which is grammatically gendered female in Hebrew, is focused here through a familiar image from the religious domain. A mechitza separates men from women, but actual women, especially women poets, are nowhere to be found in this exclusive relationship between the land and her male Hebrew bards. For Broides, the task of overcoming this mechitza – of singing "from within the land and not about it" will be accomplished only gradually, as a result of "curing the sickness in us." Healing is found "in this earth [where] a root is liable to grow deeply and widely and nurse the breast-of-life from eternal sources." In Broides's scenario, the only role available to women is a passive one – either represented metonymically by their "breast of life," or suggested and immediately effaced, muffled by their symbolic association with the land."³⁸⁴

Zionist sublimation of desire away from the female towards the land had the male explicitly coded as the desirer, which impacted the formation of the literary canon itself. Sublimation took the form not just of minimising sexual romantic relationships in favour of eroticised worker-land relationships, but also of bracketing out the female altogether. Only as an honorary man could the Jewish woman participate in this dialogue, and then only by following in the shadow of man, a pale imitation of his longing for the land. Concomitantly, nature itself could only be heard when overdubbed with the voice of the Jewish male, only as an echo to his call.

In the literary realm, this exclusion from the masculine-encoded canon was worsened by the emphasis on transmission of inspiration from father to son (whether in the form of emulation or rebellion).³⁸⁵ As outsiders to this chain of transmission, individual women, such as Rachel, Raab, etc, were often recognised as talented writers in their own right but debarred from taking part in the collective process of building a national literature.³⁸⁶ That is, in the literary hegemony there is a

³⁸⁴ Mann, 1999, p. 242.

³⁸⁵ Alan Mintz, *"Banished from their Father's Table": Loss of Faith in Hebrew Autobiography*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989; Michael Gluzman 'The Exclusion of Women from Hebrew Literary History', *Prooftexts* 11:3, 1991, pp. 259-278.

³⁸⁶ Yael Feldman, *No Room of Their Own: Gender and Nation in Israeli Women's Fiction*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999.

tendency to view female writers in bubbles – as individuals – rather than as engaged in a dialogue with past or future writers. For example, Esther Raab's influence on Nathan Zach was often minimised by critics. This othering of female writers, their dismissal as something supplementary, insignificant to the national canon, continues to be a problem even in more recent times, even in those who praise the quality of individual female writers' work. For example,

The tendency of Amalia Kahana-Carmon's defenders to apologize for the high visibility of female characters and her critics' charges concerning her allegedly limited scope are based on a literary tradition which identifies universality with masculinity.³⁸⁷

This extreme othering pushes the female writer outside of the realm of talking about and shaping national topics, including the nation's relationship with the land. As Kahana-Carmon (1926-2019) herself puts it, this leaves the aspiring female author in the position of at most being allowed

to be a complementary phenomenon and a helpmate alongside the mainstream of the literature. [She is allowed to be] a partner — yes, but not the thing itself.³⁸⁸

As such, even where the national discourse of the man-nature relationship is upheld in a female-authored text, and much more when it is challenged, the author's connection to nature is often read as personal, rather than symbolic of a greater national meaning.

Kahana-Carmon was born in Palestine and served in the Palmach as a radio operator. Despite this, and the fact that she began writing in the 1950s, critics have generally excluded her from the 'sabrah' or Palmach generation exemplified by the likes of S. Yizhar and Moshe Shamir, on account of the fact that she wrote more about the inner worlds of women than the 'collective' worlds of men.

As Esther Fuchs shows, Kahana-Carmon's depiction of romantic love falls neither on the side of euphoria (as love for the land) or catastrophe (as love for a woman in many works of the Statehood generation – which followed after the Palmach generation – in particular).³⁸⁹ Rather, she depicts love from her female characters' perspective as something both redeeming and disappointing, promising but unreachable:

In her romantic subplots, those subplots lack the element of reciprocity which makes up the traditional romantic mythos. It is not simply that her stories deal with the mythos of unrequited love, but that the participants in the romantic event seem to emote at cross-purposes, at the wrong time, at the wrong place, whenever their partner seems least

³⁸⁷ Fuchs, 1987, p. 88.

³⁸⁸ Quoted in Fuchs, 1987, p. 4.

³⁸⁹ Fuchs, 1987, p. 97.

interested, aware, or accessible. The romantic encounter is atomized into unstable moments of attraction, paralysis, and flight to an extent which renders questionable the implied solidity or stability of such ideas as 'relationship' or 'love.' ... In the final analysis, the romantic moment emerges in these stories as illusive. Its powerful impact derives from the heroine's awareness of her feelings rather than from the knight's performance. The celebration of what emerges as not only painful but also as transient and illusory may best be described as Amalia Kahana-Carmon's "antiromantic romantic story."³⁹⁰

Kahana-Carmon's work can thus be read as a subversion of the trope of the feminine as a damsel in distress, her subjectivity sublimated to the narrative of male seduction and conquest. Rather, the focus is placed on the effect that romantic love has upon the female Self, autonomous from and irreducible to the masculine Other. Though this does not explicitly touch upon the feminisation of the land, the focus on the failure of romantic love to conform to the established model, and especially on the failure to truly listen to the Other to which the Self professes devotion, destabilises the narrative of reciprocity between masculine writer and feminine land.

Nonetheless, Kahana-Carmon herself has expressed frustration with the critics focus on the romantic aspects of her work, which she once declared 'not the point'.³⁹¹ Importantly, her most famous story, 'Ne'imah Sasson Writes Poems' ('Ne'ima Sasson Kotevet Shirim', 1966), centres around the desire of a female writer to enter into the domain of the male literary canon, to be allowed access to the national, collective Self.³⁹² Until relatively recently, critics have largely tended to focus on the romantic aspect of the story, Ne'imah's unreciprocated infatuation with her teacher, at the expense of its ars poetic theme. Yet it is her teacher's failure to accept and respond positively to her erotic, personal poetry towards him that precipitates her switch towards prose which instead sees her teacher as a model of inspiration:

He changes from being an erotic object of longing to being an object of both gender and poetic identification, in a way that enables Ne'imah to rearrange the hierarchy upon which their relationship has been based and to establish it anew as a dialogue of mutual recognition.³⁹³

³⁹⁰ Fuchs, 1987, p. 97.

³⁹¹ Quoted in Tamar Merin, 'The Secret that Makes a Hero of the Weak: Intertextuality and Cross-Gender Identification in Amalia Kahana-Carmon's Early Prose', *Nashim* 25, 2013, p. 90.

³⁹² Amalia Kahana-Carmon, 'Ne'ima Sasson Kotevet Shirim,' in *Bi-Khefifa Achat*, Tel Aviv: ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uchad, 1971, pp. 131-151.

³⁹³ Merin, 2013, p. 97-8.

The negative reaction to her personal poetry awakens Ne'imah to the culture's allergy to romance and emotional themes, as well as the role the focus on romance as a feminine occupation plays in suppressing the female voice. However, her decision to interact with the masculine canon does not entail total submission to its authority, but is in itself a source of promise, a way to subvert its masculine modality from within.³⁹⁴

Oh, if only I hadn't written the poems, I said in my heart, and through my tears I could not stop myself, the name of a play I saw once on the notice board came to mind: *The Taming of the Shrew*. And a record album in a shop window, with a drawing of a whip garlanded all around with roses. I was seized with the panic of a sudden realization—as though I had been pulled up by the roots of my hair and wafted to a different level—and already pulses of light struck my eyes: I have said it. The secret which makes a hero of the weak. I knew it. I always knew. How come I didn't know that I knew . . . The light which once began to shine through, as soft as the wild moon, grows ever brighter, blinding.³⁹⁵

Borrowing from the male canon, then, the female writer can co-opt the power of the Hebrew language, with all its rich biblical and literary illusions, and is thus free to interact with them on her own terms. She no longer submits to her place, the romantic-personal, but rather lays claim to the subjective and projecting Self. Yet to do so is not to totally reject the romantic, indeed, as Yael Feldman shows, the uniqueness of Kahana-Carmon's work compared to her contemporaries (e.g. Yizhar, Shamir, Oz, Yehoshua) is in "combining the ability to love a man ... and creative susceptibility in a female character ... defying the traditional opposition between the two capabilities."³⁹⁶ Her protagonists are not cold, heartless women, but thoughtful and empathetic, while seized by a creative urge. Kahana-Carmon rejects the binary opposition between feminine emotion and male rationality, the feminine private and the male public. Her novels restore in the literary female "a mind of her own,"³⁹⁷ and in doing so, provides an outlet by which nature, too, may be seen as subject rather than object, may be interacted with in a way which does not conform to that expectations established by the masculine hegemony. Breaking down the opposition between 'positive' femininity', which submits to male desire and imagination, and 'negative femininity', which opposes it, or pursues modes of being and self-definition outside of that projected onto it by the man, Kahana-Carmon challenges the notion that only nature built 'in the image' of the Zionist is valuable.

³⁹⁴ Merin, 2013, p. 103.

³⁹⁵ Translation from Merin, 2013, p. 103.

³⁹⁶ Feldman, 1999, p. 102.

³⁹⁷ Feldman, 1999, p. 102.

Like Kahana-Carmon, Ruth Almog (1936-) received praise for the technical quality of her writing while simultaneously having the meaning of her work marginalised, othered, and her relevance to the canon questioned. Gershon Shaked's description in his influential overview of Hebrew literature is typical of the critical response to her work:

The political and social issues in [Almog's] writing seem less significant than the personal problems of the women-protagonists who vacillate between their fathers and their reflections in their partners.³⁹⁸

Again, works which thematise romantic love from a feminine perspective are dismissed as individualistic and thus of little importance, supplementary to the general canon of works of national importance. Yet Almog clearly goes beyond the specific; her characters' struggles are not only relevant to the characters themselves, with no societal weight, and it is belittling to make this assumption. Rather, a feminist reading of her work which does not make this assumption uncovers a text rich with metaphor which speaks of a general search for identity which relates to the place of the individual in the collective just as much as works by, for example, Amos Oz.

Despite being born in Palestine, Almog projects a sense of not belonging in the land in her work, often featuring European settings as a mode of escape from the gendered pressures of the hegemonic man-land relationship. Her self-consciously feminist writing demonstrates a sensitivity to modes of oppression and regularly returns to the theme of emotionally unavailable male lovers and fathers. Though her earlier work was well received in the 1980s and 90s, and particularly well dissected by feminist scholars, its complexity and significance to the Israeli literary canon was only slowly acknowledged over time.

Like Kahana-Carmon, Almog's novels themselves make the process of creative writing and its value to society an explicitly realised theme. For Mira in *Dangling Roots* (*Shorshei Avir*, 1987), for example, the meaning and value of art is predicated on its social relevance, and true art is formed 'in the counter-direction':

where freedom is lacking, art can preserve the spirit of freedom only by negating nonfreedom.³⁹⁹

Writing, for Mira, is an answer to the overbearing weight of the Logic of Domination and its oppressive categorisation of acceptable behaviour and discourse. The title of the second section of the novel, "Madness is the Wisdom of the Individual", reflects the self-conscious marginality of her

³⁹⁸ Gershon Shaked, *Ha-Siporet Ha-Ivrit 1880-1980*, Vol. 5, Tel Aviv: Keter, 1998, p. 366.

³⁹⁹ Ruth Almog, *Shorshei Avir*, Jerusalem: Keter, 1987, p. 355.

position. That same 'hysteria' that corrupted the Mani family in *Mr Mani*, that marked the Jew out as a dangerous 'other' in Western European nationalism, and that characterises ungoverned nature in the 'barren wilderness' mode, is alluded to here as an emblem of the counter-narrative – 'madness', with all its gendered implications – is the appellation which inevitably meets the individual who goes against the Logic of Domination imposed by the cultural hegemony. This is the means through which their narrative is silenced, pushed outside the realm of normative discourse. To not accept the Logic of Domination is to challenge rationality itself, and thus strips you of that which makes you human. Just as Mira is conscious of her own marginal perspective and its social affinity with madness, she draws a parallel with her humanist grandfather, Levdovi, who was delegitimised by his Zionist contemporaries for espousing the view that Zionism's treatment of the Arabs was inherently immoral and ultimately likely to destroy the spiritual wellbeing of both parties, being dismissed as mad, persecuted, and eventually banished from the community. In this way, Almog hold up a mirror to the authoritarian tendencies of the collective, itself a 'madness' which enshrouds its followers and closes them off from alternative narratives.

Moreover, the prevalence of tales of romantic disappointment and failure so prevalent in Kahana-Carmon and Almog's stories cannot be read outside the cultural context of the 'sublimation of desire'. With Israeli men's first love and loyalty being towards land and nation, the Israeli woman is left out of the picture. This, coupled with the stoic masculinism that the culture promotes, leaves them isolated and, the novels suggest, destroys their ability to form meaningful fulfilling relationships, thus failing to fulfil the Zionist dream. Dripping with a self-centred obsession with self-preservation which results in a failure to acknowledge the counter needs of the Other, Almog's male characters are the damning end result of the Zionist hegemony focus on the need to suppress the Other for the sake of privileging the Self.

In Rachel Feldhay-Brenner's words, Almog's work probes the question of

what happens to the Israeli "I", which defined itself in opposition to the suppressed histories, when these very histories penetrate the boundaries of the Israeli collective singularity.⁴⁰⁰

Mira in *Dangling Roots* is rootless because the Zionist aim to create a new Jew rooted in mastery of the landscape had pushed her to the margins, leaving her 'dangling', searching for a place in the rigidly defined social hierarchy. The village has pushed her family out because of the opposition of her grandfather to their suppression of the needs of Arab 'other', yet this repressed history

⁴⁰⁰ Rachel Feldhay Brenner, 'Reflections Of/On Zionism in Recent Hebrew Fiction: Aharon Megged's "Foiglmán" and Ruth Almog's "Dangling Roots"', *Shofar* 13:1, 1994, p. 73.

continues to damage the villagers ability to relate to Mira even before she was a threat to their narrative: thus the very suppression perpetuates the problem. The novel suggests that these roots based on exclusion of the 'not-I' are themselves shallow and rot the morality and the personal happiness of the community built on them.

Similarly, in *Death in the Rain (Mavet Ba-Geshem, 1982)*, the protagonist's cruel, emotionally closed off ex-partner is forced into an epiphany when tasked with editing an anthology of other peoples' stories.⁴⁰¹ Forced to contemplate narratives beyond his own, he begins to reflect on the origins of his own narrative/identity, and reaches the realisation that it is the totalising power of the pioneering ethos pushed upon him that has corrupted and narrowed his relationship with the world:

His father's fanatical subscription to the Zionist idea of the exclusively Jewish cultivation of the land made him renounce Arab labor while subjecting his wife and sons to the excruciating toil of farming. Old Licht's narcissistic identification with the land, whose "conquest" became his *raison d' être*, engendered his sons' hatred toward him and obliterated emotional connections among other family members. The recollections of this formative early period lead Licht to an understanding of the extent to which he inherited his father's emotional callousness and how his father's formative model imprisoned him in a universe of his own. Even if only momentary and fleeting, Licht's confession of his longing for love at the conclusion of his book attests to the success of Elisheva's undertaking.⁴⁰²

The totalising force of the 'lover/bride' mode of seeing the land not only crushes the nature, the Other, under its weight, but also the Self. Sublimation of desire towards this one-sided relationship with the land, founded only on the terms of the dominator, damages his other relationships too.

Likewise, in *The Inner Lake (Ha-Agam ha-Pnimi, 2000)*, Margarita, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, is convinced by her miserable, aggressive romantic encounters that represent a militarised and transactional understanding of male-female relationships that she will never find fulfilment on Israeli soil.⁴⁰³ In a direct reversal of the Zionist 'negation of the Diaspora' narrative, she emigrates to the German village her family left behind. In this critique of the macho militarism so dominant to the Israeli hegemony and its stunting of the individual development of emotional maturity which considers the Other along with the Self, Almog presents the Logic of Domination as the source of the

⁴⁰¹ Ruth Almog, *Mavet Ba-Geshem*, Jerusalem: Keter, 1982.

⁴⁰² Rachel Feldhay-Brenner, 'The Woman-Artist in Ruth Almog's Fiction: Her Formation and Engagement with the World', *Hebrew Studies* 49, 2008, p. 186.

⁴⁰³ Ruth Almog, *Ha-Agam ha-Pnimi*, Tel Aviv: ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uchad, 2000.

inevitable death of the Zionist dream, for her 'othered' characters, and even for those on the dominant side of the binary. As Mira puts it in *Dangling Roots*:

How can we escape, elude, save ourselves from the erosion ... of self-deception? We have eroded, chewed away the value of life to create the value of hope.⁴⁰⁴

For Mira and Levdovi, the Logic of Domination and its suppression of all other narratives is destructive for both sides of the binary.

3.6. The 'Lover/Bride' in *The Blue Mountain*

In *The Blue Mountain*, the fetishizing of working the land, of physically penetrating and merging body fluids with it, is set in stark contrast with the lack of romance between the founding pioneers themselves – the narrator's grandmother and founding mother of the *moshav*, Feyge, is voted the wife of Mirkin by a committee meeting in which the three founding fathers draw lots.

The sacrifice inherent in this weird misdirection of sexuality towards the environment rather than each other is demonstrated by the figure of their firstborn son, Avraham, whose childhood composition of a poem where the sexualisation of the land is used as an allegory for sexual feelings of longing between a man and a woman is severely admonished, not because of his inappropriate age, but because of his subversion of the directionality of longing. In the scathing words of the reporter from the Movement:

The village's first child, Avraham Mirkin, recited a poem of uncertain nature having no clear relevance to our national situation or goals.⁴⁰⁵

The character thereafter becomes serious, monastic and almost mechanical in his devotion of himself to physical agricultural labour, as if in penance for his betrayal of the land and the narrative of husbandry over it.

This is not to say that Shalev's fictional Nahalal is chaste. To the contrary, from the very beginning of its history it is full of illicit love affairs, love-struck pining and outrageous sexual exploits. But the air of moral failing is persistent: it is still to the Committee that all such affairs should really be put, and it is the collective and the land that are expected to be the primary sources of devotion. And the land certainly does have their devotion: the tenderness with which tiny details are described, with

⁴⁰⁴ Almog, 1987, p. 354.

⁴⁰⁵ Shalev, 2004, p. 83.

which every fruit is harvested, and every infected branch lovingly healed by the hands of the pioneers, is plainly evident. Genuine knowledge of and love for the minute details of nature is the enduring sense the reader takes from the novel. However, all this comes at a cost.

This cost is most obvious in the figure of Feyge, who is the sacrificial lamb for the pioneers' sublimation of love for the land. In fact, as we later discover, it is not even love for Feyge herself that is directed towards the land, but really her husband's love for Russia and his ex-lover Shulamit. Doubly overlooked, Feyge is forced into the role of honorary man, but with none of the true responsibility nor place in the narrative that this might be expected to entail. Feyge's tale is presented as a tragic one, one part of the failure-by-success of the cult of masculinity and the project of sublimation: she dies because she is 'short of love'. Her character lays out the tragedy of the female pioneer, the failed attempt to be an equal part of the grand Zionist narrative, and her subsequent demotion to a footnote, a bit player in the grand romance between man and the land. Although the 'Feyge Levin Workingman's Circle' is named after her, this is treated as a joke:

The historians never took the Feyge Levin Workingman's Circle seriously ... Perhaps it suffered from its name. What serious scholar would write a dissertation on an organisation with a name like that?⁴⁰⁶

The marginalisation of women was frequently bemoaned in the diaries of female pioneers, who found themselves pushed towards traditional 'women's work' even as they participated in the socialist Zionist revolution:

My secret dream: a new-old land, a commune, and inside it a creative woman working hand in hand with the men ... and here you are, you have arrived. How many times did you curse that day ... on your flesh you have felt the results of the exploitation and prostitution of lofty ideals ... You see the commune and the fate of women in it – the fate of a domestic servant as always, only instead of a small cooking-pot – a big one, instead of 'my child' – 'our children', and the same endless laundry.⁴⁰⁷

In this context, Feyge is a legend among the women of the surrounding communes precisely because of her exceptionality:

⁴⁰⁶ Shalev, 2004, p. 35.

⁴⁰⁷ Quoted from an anonymous Kibbutz Kineret member's letter to a friend in Rachel Elboim-Dror, 'Gender in Utopianism: The Zionist Case', *History Workshop Journal* 37, 1994, p. 111.

Legends circled among the women of the Valley about Feyge Levin, the first female pioneer to do the work of men and to be loved by three of them, who waited on her hand and foot, immunised her with their sweet blood, and washed her dirty clothes.⁴⁰⁸

Yet this equality is illusory and founded in cruelty. Even when she is ill, Mirkin continues to force her to carry big blocks of ice for the ice box. She sacrifices both her body and her health for the movement, but gains little true respect back from the other founders.

This mythologization and deification of sacrifice – especially sacrifice of the body – is a major part of the masculinist pioneering narrative:

For the halutzim, where there was pain, there was the Land of Israel.⁴⁰⁹

Women, struggling to be taken seriously as equals, to include the gender revolution in the national revolution, often internalised this message of transformation of the body for the national cause.⁴¹⁰

Feyge shows that this sacrifice of the body for women so often took the form of childbirth, at once often the only way they could participate meaningfully in the public discourse and the thing which kept them from performing the more valued public jobs. Ultimately, even Feyge, the exceptional woman pioneer on which the local myth of the *halutza* is built lives a miserable life and is destroyed by her marginalisation.

Meanwhile, her husband's sublimation of his love towards the land is itself shown to be a further sublimation – of his love towards the woman he left behind in Russia (and perhaps even Russia itself):

He wallowed in sands and swamps like an animal to get rid of the smell and touch of her; he tried to purge her from every orifice of his body, rooting her out with the long steel wires of memory. But her skin shimmered at him in the pear petals and from the flank of the blue mountain.⁴¹¹

Yet his attempt to erase his personal love for Shulamit/Russia through devotion to the land is unsuccessful. The Hebrew title of the novel, 'Russian Novel', has a double meaning, also suggesting 'Russian romance', a subversion of the directionality of longing *towards* the diaspora. Tellingly, it is the arrival of Shulamit in Israel that causes Grandfather Mirkin to start abandoning his agricultural

⁴⁰⁸ Shalev, 2004, p. 104.

⁴⁰⁹ Neumann, 2011, p. 138.

⁴¹⁰ Jullie Grimmeisen, 'Halutzah or Beauty Queen? National Images of Women in Early Israeli Society', *Israel Studies* 20:2, 2015, pp. 27-52.

⁴¹¹ Shalev, 2004, p. 246.

role,⁴¹² reversing the order of Zionist values by suggesting the primacy of romantic love over love for the land. Her arrival is another swamp, but once which cannot be so easily mopped up by Meshulam; the success of the Zionist project is undermined by the inevitable failure of the sublimation of desire towards the land. The villagers are powerless to stop this failure because it comes from within them, the suppression of their own very nature.

On and even more fundamental level, the title works as an ironic joke because the idea of a romance in Hebrew literature is so contrary to the prevailing norms. The novel is like a Russian novel because it allows the personal to be foregrounded. This kind of private love story is directly foreign, it does not belong in Hebrew literature, thus it can only be rationalised as “straight out of the pages of a Russian novel.”⁴¹³

Similarly, the novel’s title points to the broader failure of the project to ‘negate the diaspora’. With their constant pettiness and intrigue, the inhabitants of the *moshav* continue to act as if they are still in the shtetl, i.e., as if they never really left Russia. For all their nature worship, the ‘new Hebrews’ are a lot more similar to the ‘old Jews’ than they would like to think. Tellingly, it is an ‘outsider’, the Mizrahi Busquilla, who points this out to Baruch. Detached from this context of sublimation, Busquilla sees village life for what it really is:

What’s all this earth, earth, earth stuff all the time? It’s enough that we come from it and return to it. In between a man needs to rest.⁴¹⁴

Rob Baum also alludes to this point when he points out that the supposed ‘oneness with nature’ that the villages imagine for themselves is flawed, with the workings of the village still fundamentally founded in cruelty:

despite the principles, love, and great joy of the Founders, the land of milk and honey is depicted as a foul place, built on the drained malaria swamps in which German children have died. Honey comes from bees, those hierarchical workers who slave (like these Founders) for a common queen. Milk is the produce of cows raped by a single bull; in Hobbsian terms, their calf children live horribly short lives and in their final moments are cruelly abused by the “lorry drivers” who lead them to slaughter. Work is defined as the only true good; thus, the cut of masculinity grows as quickly as the fruit of the field, and those who cannot

⁴¹² Yael Zerubavel, ‘Revisiting the Pioneer Past: Continuity and Change in Hebrew Settlement Narratives’, *Hebrew Studies* 41, 2000, p. 218.

⁴¹³ Shalev, 2004, p. 248.

⁴¹⁴ Shalev, 2004, p. 296.

manage hard labour in those fields are despised. The Watchman cares more for his arsenal than his community, and comrades hunger for their neighbours' spouses.⁴¹⁵

Of course, nature herself is cruel, but the villagers' attempts at improving it by controlling it are of questionable value when they cannot even control themselves.

Shalev's novel cuts through the aggrandising Zionist mythology, the overarching narrative of transformation and redemption, and highlights its shortcomings and the limits of its power. Pinness, the old schoolteacher who goes through a process of disillusionment, from being the most vehement supporter of land-worshipping Zionist ideology to dismissive of the entire enterprise as a colossal failure, links the failure of the Jews to conquer even themselves to the false over-valuing of conquering nature:

Long accustomed to the stench of saints' bones and the gross feet of pilgrims and legions, this vulgar earth must have split its sides laughing at the sight of us pioneers kissing it and watering it with our tears of thanksgiving, possessing it in a frenzy, thrusting our little hoes into its great body, calling it mother, sister, lover. Even as we ploughed our first furrows and planted our first crops, as we weeded, drained swamps, and cleared thickets, we sowed the seed of our own failure ... We may have drained the swamps, but the mud we discovered beneath them was far worse. Man's bond with the earth, man's union with Nature – is there anything more regressive and bestial? We raised a new generation of Jews who were no longer alienated and downtrodden, a generation of farmers linked to the land, a society of the grossest, most quarrelsome, most narrow-minded, most thick-skinned and thick-headed peasants! ... There is no such earth ... And there is no such lover either.⁴¹⁶

For late in life Pinness, nature is unknowable and uncaring; it is still beautiful, but detached from sublimation to the Zionist narrative. Ultimately, Shalev shows, the land cannot redeem the Jews, nor can the Jews redeem the land. 'Sticking their little hoes into her', they remain irrelevant little ants on her surface in the grand scheme of history. Pinness' role in the novel is to uncover the suppressed history beneath the Zionist narrative, to open up to the spaces beyond, to take nature veneration and love for the land to its natural end and see not just the parts of the lands' history and present that relate to the Jews but also that which relates to others and to nature itself.

⁴¹⁵ Rob Baum, 'Gender Dystopia on the Kibbutz: From Plato to Marx', in Adam Goldwyn and Renee Silverman (eds), *Mediterranean Modernism: Intercultural Exchange and Aesthetic Development*, New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 299.

⁴¹⁶ Shalev, 2004, p. 246-7.

Coupled with the novel's dissection of the Land-Jew coupling as a grand myth which has overstretched itself, and its undermining of the concept of 'redemption' in itself, the novel shines a light of the problematic understanding of masculinity which the Zionist hegemony carries within itself. We have already seen how this plays out with regard to Feyge and the female pioneer, but it has just as traumatic an effect on the figure of Levin, Feyge's brother. Soft-skinned, physically weak, but hard-working and intellectual, Levin represents the 'silent majority' of Jewish migrants, even in the heyday of socialist Zionism:

Levin's resentment speaks for the true majority of the founders of the Jewish state, who were not farming pioneers but industrious and self-sacrificing men and women who furthered the national cause in many other ways. Yet the ideological prestige of the return-to-the-soil banner was so powerful that anyone associated with it was enviably thrust onto center stage.⁴¹⁷

Despite his meaningful contribution to the movement, to village life, and his status as an original pioneer – who stayed in the land of Israel where so many failed – he is offered little to no prestige as he does not work the land. Levin himself voices his frustration at the arbitrariness of this hierarchy:

You people never had any appreciation of plain ordinary work. You were too busy acting your great Theater of Redemption and Rebirth. Every plowing was a return to the earth, every chicken laid the first Jewish egg after 2,000 years in exile. Ordinary potatoes, the same *kartoffelakh* you ate in Russia, became *taphuchei adamah*, "earth apples", to show how you were One with nature. You had your pictures taken with rifles and hoes, you talked to the toads and the mules, you dressed as Arabs, you thought you could fly through the air.⁴¹⁸

The denigration of Levin reveals the limitedness of the Zionist conception of masculinity. Failing to live up to its hegemonic realisation, Levin's delicate constitution means he is given all the women's jobs. His inability to master the land makes him unfit for the title of new Jew, and thus leaves him semi-female. Resultantly, he is lower in status even than the mule, Zeitser, who not only gets more respect than Levin because of his ability to do physical labour, but is awarded a full pioneer's pension. When the two get into a brawl, the villagers even hint that, if necessary, they would choose Zeitser over him. The central irony here, however, is that Levin has really done a lot more for the Zionist movement than Zeitser, having faithfully dealt with the managerial side of the *moshav* for decades and even having once "fixed the pens of Gordon and Brenner". Moreover, though the mule

⁴¹⁷ Alan Mintz, *Translating Israel: Contemporary Hebrew Literature and Its Reception in America*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001, p. 223.

⁴¹⁸ Shalev, 2004, p. 94-5.

represents all that masculinist Zionism values well – being tough, hard-working, and single-minded – they are also by nature infertile. Reading the nature of the animal itself into the text, we can see the folly in misplacing values too far towards the ascetic to the detriment of planning for the future, especially future generations. As Pinness hints, the pioneers “never thought they would grow old”. The cult of masculinity – and particularly doctrine of sublimation – does not really leave room for the reality of an aging, enduring community.

In an even more exaggerated send-up of the Zionist cult of masculinity, the figure of the watchman, Rilov, pokes fun at the militarised hyper-masculinity of the Shomer and other para-military groups. Detached from the historical context of any real conflict or danger, Rilov’s strange behaviours and logic are revealed to be simply buffoonish. In his old age, he is a tourist attraction, riding around on his horse in the manner of a ‘Hebrew Bedouin’:

They don’t understand that the poor old codger climbs up there and rides around for two days at a clip because he’s too embarrassed to ask for help to climb backdown again.⁴¹⁹

He is an object of ridicule, disliked by most, and confined to self-imposed isolation in his septic tank with his weapons, stashed away from no-one, and sworn to pointless secrecy by his military code which has nothing to do with how the village lives. Even the nature of his death is kept secret by his family, for no discernible reason. The novel shows this hyper-masculinity as a relic of the past, no longer relevant for the current situation.

Meanwhile, the new generations are a disappointment to the villagers, breaking the promise of what they hoped to achieve. Both Uri and Baruch are seen as a betrayal of their grandfather’s pioneering legacy:

“one in Death and one in Love. The necrophile and the nymphophile.”⁴²⁰

Each of these equally represents a denial of pioneer values. While Baruch makes a mockery of the ideal of husbanding of land and wrecks its fertility by turning it into a cemetery, Uri makes a mockery of the self-discipline and erotic repression of the earlier pioneers, prioritising his individual needs and desires over those of the community. Baruch is on the outside the perfect representation of the sabra dream: physically large and imposing, he is collectively minded and venerates the settlement’s mythology:

⁴¹⁹ Shalev, 2004, p. 322.

⁴²⁰ Shalev, 2004, p. 243.

The details of his own birth, name, childhood, dreams, and desires, come late in the novel, just as the personal wants of kibbutz members are meant to do, subservient to the collective, politically based “family.”⁴²¹

However, though he is capable of working the land and certainly thoroughly ‘knows’ it, he nonetheless does not redeem it, or ‘make it bloom’, but rather fills it with death. He is also remarkably passive, “more a metaphor than a man, more a character in a novel than an actor in the world.”⁴²² His actions are not his own, but merely an embodiment of his grandfather’s wishes, trapped by the legacy and expectations of the past. His ‘knowing’ the land seems to not only result in his own celibacy, but in the land’s infertility too.

The novel brings the reader’s attention to the process of storytelling in building and maintaining national power structures. As Edward Bruner and Phyllis Gorfain note, each telling of a national story “not only expresses power but also creates it.”⁴²³ Shalev’s protagonist is so wrapped up in the telling of the Zionist mythological past that he does not live his life. He is entirely an extension of his grandfather’s motives and emotional world, he tells his story but adds nothing to it, and as his grandfather’s Zionism begins to collapse, so does Baruch’s world of associations become warped. His obsession with the national narrative prevents him from attaining its goals – he is not a new Hebrew, but a passive receptacle of the past. In laying bare the process of myth building, the novel invites the reader to analyse the shared pre-conceptions on which it is based, to acknowledge the ways in which it has used the binary Logic of Domination in order to progress its aims.

The jealousy of the villagers over the land and the anxiety that they feel about any movement across its axes, any attempt to cross the boundaries between ‘civilisation’ and ‘wilderness’ – thereby undoing the domestication or sublimation of the land to their narrative – demonstrates the shallowness of the apparent reciprocity between man and nature. If this is indeed a relationship, it is an abusive one. Structured according to the Logic of Domination, with a conceptual framework that maintains the ascendancy and right of domination of the Zionist human male over the non-human and the female, this discourse in fact necessitates an aggressive imposition of control in order to maintain the poles separate and distinct from one another.

The association of the less dominant poles with one another is mutually reinforcing of their continued domination by the more dominant poles. Thus, as we see in *The Blue Mountain*, the natural environment of the land of Israel is both personified as woman, a weak and passive object

⁴²¹ Baum, 2016, p. 296.

⁴²² Baum, 2016, p. 296.

⁴²³ Bruner and Gorfain, 1984, p. 59.

gratefully rescued from her primitive wilderness by the masculine Zionist collective subject, under the hands of which she responds with enhanced fertility – enticingly scented blossom, ripe fruit, and constantly flowing milk – (the ‘lover/bride’ or ‘mother land’), and as an emotionally unstable, wild, animalistic force, threatening to overturn the successes of the Zionist project (the ‘barren wilderness’).

Here we uncover a central irony in the Zionist nature narrative – in setting out to release this ‘damsel in distress’ from her chains of servitude and neglect, the pioneers simply forced her into new chains of their own making. The centrality of the Logic of Domination to their understanding of nature led them to see any diversion from the controlled, domesticated, ‘civilised’ environment of their construction as a threat. Meanwhile, the obsessive drive to control leads them to impose rigid modes of acceptable behaviour onto themselves, aggressively policing their own and one another’s conduct, and ultimately setting themselves up for failure.

4. Mother Land

“Man is but the image of his native landscape.”⁴²⁴

The final aspect of Zionist environmental discourse hinges on another feminine personification, though one seemingly in conflict with the sexualised land as a bride, that is, the concept of ‘Mother Nature’. As we have seen, nature in Zionist discourse has been gendered as feminine in order to award her both a positive and a negative valency: She is both the destructive, manipulative and chaotic Lilith of the ‘barren wilderness’ mode, and the demure damsel in distress of the ‘lover/bride mode’. We have seen that these positive and negative associations are largely conditioned by the power relationship between man and nature, that is, the ‘barren wilderness’ mode is characterised by lack of mastery by man, and functions as the pre-taming ‘acting out of the shrew’, while in the ‘lover/bride’ mode nature is redeemed *through* her submission to man. The ‘mother land’ aspect takes this one step further, affirming the end result of mastery by evoking the balanced natural harmony of the garden of Eden, or the ‘land of milk and honey’ of the pre-exilic Land of Israel. It also takes the appeal to nature to its most fundamental end, appealing to what may be the most primal of human relationships, the relationship between a child and its mother. Just as motherhood in a patriarchal society may provide a woman with a sense of purpose and her own sphere of agency, the ‘mother land’ mode returns nature to an active role, giving her her own ‘stake’ in the Logic of Domination. If nature is a mother, she is the nurturer and shaper of man, with whom she shares an unbreakable bond, and thus she is deserving of respect and protection. However, once again, this stake, and right to active participation and protection, is in a sense illusory, the relationship still being carried out very much on man’s terms. Motherhood elevates, but also relegates; it gives a woman a role and sense of purpose, but it corners her deeper into her established gender role, cementing her place on the hierarchy. As we shall explore, a similar uneasy blend of enhanced respect and enhanced subjugation exists within the ‘mother land’ mode of looking at nature.

Perhaps the primary goal of the Zionist movement was its pursuit of nativeness. Its vision of the land as mother (*‘moledet’*, ‘homeland’, derives from the root ‘y-l-d’ and thus connotes ‘that which has given birth to us’) can be seen as a rebellion against the religious Jewish understanding of place, in which the notion of full nativeness to the Land of Israel by virtue of birth was – even in the bible – rejected in favour of the symbolic outsider, whose special relationship with the Land is a function of

⁴²⁴ Shaul Tchernichovsky, *‘Ha-Adam Eno Ela’*, *Shirei Sha’ul Tchernichovsky*, Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1968, p. 71.

their special relationship with God.⁴²⁵ In the Zionist narrative, inspired by other European national movements (including the anti-Semitic discourse that often accompanied them), this lack of a permanent, uncomplicated connection with a national homeland was reconstrued as the central problem of the Diaspora Jewry and the source of all their current and historical woes. Without this nurturing, supportive, spiritually enriching relationship with the mother land, a Jewish man could not hope to restore himself to 'normative' masculinity. For this reason, Zionists aimed to become "a nation like any other", that is, to be defined by a relationship with the environment into which they were born which was 'natural', innate and unquestionable.⁴²⁶ As such, the first-generation migrants attempted to mould themselves, and most importantly their 'native'-born children, into the shape of the landscape, treating her at first as a surrogate mother in the hope that their relationship would become 'naturalised'. A line from a Shaul Tchernichovsky poem, "Man is but the image of his native landscape", demonstrates the working of this paradigm shift well: the 'mother land' replaces the biblical "image of god" as the template which gives human beings both their form and meaning.

However, as we have seen, the Middle Eastern landscape that they encountered did not fit the narrative of a promised land of milk and honey. As a result, not only did the pioneers feel it necessary to mould themselves in the shape of the land, but also to mould the land in the shape of themselves, i.e. the ideal which they constructed for it. Indeed, the natural landscape that the early pioneers encountered was not only construed an 'unfit mother' due to its physical barrenness, it was also deemed morally unfit due to its unwillingness to sacrifice its independent desires for the sake of its Zionist lover-child. The Labour Zionist slogan, 'to build and be built',⁴²⁷ illustrates the reciprocal nature of this idea of a fall from the ideal structure of domination and subsequent imbalance of the natural order of things. The pioneers saw themselves as coming out of exile for the last time, finally transforming themselves into new Hebrews, 'born' of the land by fact of being shaped by it and having merged with it physically. In order to realise this, it was important for the land be engaged with, worked, and therefore 'built' and transformed too. As such, while the fallen Jewish man was built in the image of his homeland, his fallen homeland was just as much built in the image of man. The barren shrew had to be tamed and taught to submit to the needs of her 'natural' dominator, while her barrenness had to be transformed into fertility by the act of penetration and insemination by her appropriate husband. Within the paradigm of the Logic of Domination, then, this process

⁴²⁵ Yigal Schwartz, *Ha-Yada'ata et ha-Arets Sham ha-Limon Pore'akh: Handasat ha-Adam u-Machshevet ha-Merhav ba-Sifrut ha-Ivrit*, Or Yehuda: Kinneret-Zmora Bitan-Dvir, 2007, p. 13.

⁴²⁶ Zali Gurevitch and Gideon Aran, 'Never in Place: Eliade and Judaic Sacred Space', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 87, 1994, p. 145.

⁴²⁷ Explored in depth by Eric Zakim, *To Build and Be Built: Landscape, Literature, and the Construction of Zionist Identity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

completes a Zionist recovery narrative, restoring the man/nature balance through a natural progression from 'barren wilderness', through 'lover/bride' to 'mother land'. The land of Israel is redeemed through engagement with man and is tamed by motherhood. She is transformed from sinfully being of and for herself to selflessly devoting herself to her Jewish master and son. In such a way, her motherhood paradoxically makes her virginal by cementing the ideological relationship between Jew and Land in 'natural' reality, thereby deleting all other claims to both the land and the structuring of power relations.

4.1. The Authentic Jew of the East

We have discussed the Orientalist attitudes of the Zionist pioneers with regards to the way in which they related to the landscape as something wasted under the ineffective dominion of the indigenous inhabitants. However, though this negative view of the East was widespread and informed the mainstream Zionist view of both the land, the natives, and themselves, it was moderated by a positive side. That is, though the Jews saw themselves as bringers of civilisation, natural masters by virtue of their connections with the West, they also viewed themselves as the true representatives of the East. Internalising European tropes which were suspicious of the Jews supposedly dual loyalties, they saw themselves as half-Eastern, and, following Jewish religious tradition which maintained a strong sense of presence-in-absence with regard to the Holy Land,⁴²⁸ considered themselves in spite of their foreign birth to be in some sense *more* native than the natives. As such, the East held both positive and negative value in this system: it was a site of authenticity, freedom, and self-discovery, at the same time as it required western intervention. Its inhabitants were brothers, models of authentic interaction with the land, at the very same time that they were a symptom of the land's sickness and barrenness. It should be noted that the Zionists set themselves in opposition not just to the Arabs but also to the British mandate powers, who represented pure Western civilization and imperialism in the East: with a foot in both worlds, it was the Zionists who were the most legitimate heirs to the land's fertile eastern promise.

As we have already explored, particularly in the early days, the Arab played a double role in the Zionist vision. They were both a model of authenticity to emulate, and a problem to solve. As a model of 'true native' behaviour, they were seen as primitive, close to nature, and therefore representative of a biblically authentic way of living and interacting with the land. Conversely, and

⁴²⁸ Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 4.

paradoxically, they were not viewed as a cohesive people at all, but a collection of individual beings, wretched, cruel to nature, and imposters on the land which had been biblically promised to the Jews.

In this context, it is perhaps surprising that when the pastoral mode was taken up in the Yishuv, it often focused not on Jewish settlements, but on Arab subjects. A well-studied example is the 'Nativist' school of Jewish painting in the 1920s, which adopted a deliberately folksy style with bright, primary colours and simplified shapes. These works are notable for their focus on the landscape of the land of Israel, and on Arab villages or Bedouin figures, or even settled Arab cities, at the expense of the new Zionist settlements. This seems counter-intuitive in a society which was so proud of its modest settlements, agricultural developments, and technological innovations, and which largely ignored the existence of the Arab as part of the imagined national space. However, these paintings performed the role of recasting the Arab presence on the land as a blank state, one which was situated in and part of nature, and thus part of the raw material from which the Zionist project could be built. The Arab as a subject in and of themselves was not seen at all. Rather, a recurring image was that of the Arab as viewed from behind, walking along a road. As Manor points out, this image has the implicit viewer as the outsider.⁴²⁹ From this detached viewpoint, then, "The experience of the insider, the landscape as subject, and the collective life within it are all implicitly denied".⁴³⁰ In other words, in seeing the Arab only as part of nature, these works stripped them of their humanity. They could hence become part of the 'mother land', nurturing the Jewish nation by teaching them how to be native, without having a relevant human claim over the land of their own. Similarly, I would posit that the image of the Arab on the road fed into the idea of the Arab as of unfixed abode, of travelling through the homeland but never truly settling there, at the very same time that these paintings alluded to the Arab as an authentic native.

Such an approach can be seen as a continuation of the western colonialist mode of approaching indigenous groups not as self-reflecting subjects, but as natural objects:

The primitive or aboriginal dweller on the land (the "pagan" or "rustic" villager) is seen as part of the landscape, not as a self-consciously detached viewer who sees nature for its own sake as the Western observer does.⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ Dalia Manor, 'Imagined Homeland: Landscape Painting in Palestine in the 1920s', *Nations and Nationalism* 9:4, 2003, pp. 533-554.

⁴³⁰ Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984, p. 26.

⁴³¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness', *Critical Inquiry* 26:2, 2000, pp. 193-223.

According to the Logic of Domination, unable to separate themselves from nature, the indigenous Arabs are viewed as not fully human and thus debarred from the dominator side of the binary. For the Zionist, this mode of looking at the Arabs allowed them not only to mentally align themselves with the masculine dominators of European nations that they wished to become, but also, as the last chapter has shown, reversed the moral dilemma of conquering a land which was already inhabited – not only was it not immoral to remove something which had never properly made its presence as human dominator felt, but they were actually doing the natural landscape a favour.

However, as these paintings show, the Arab did play a role in shaping the Jewish interaction with the natural environment. The image of the Arab, if not the Arab itself, was as a missing link which connected the Jews to authentic place that these works invoked:

The image of Palestine as portrayed by these artists was of the country as a kind of memory, a place to yearn for and to love from a distance. Presenting these images through established artistic conventions and dressed in a respectable moderate modern style made possible the realisation of the imagined homeland in their pictures as a believable ‘reality’ without abandoning the ideal.⁴³²

Similarly, a craze for appropriating Bedouin cultural symbols such as wearing keffiyeh, riding horses through the desert and ritualised preparation of food and drink,⁴³³ allowed the Jewish migrant to participate in, and hence claim their own stake in, the ‘authentic’ Orient. Like a settler colonial system, in which “the establishment of a society thus implies the denial that a society already existed”⁴³⁴ while simultaneously plundering from an idealised image of the indigene as an authentic native,⁴³⁵ the Zionist movement at once denied the existence of previous civilisations on the territory and used the native culture and expertise to mould their own nativeness, ‘in the image of their homeland’.

Such identification with the Arab as a subject is mediated through the ‘mother land’ mode of viewing nature. Emphasising Jewish identification with and familial connection to their Arab ‘brothers’ allows them to function as a focaliser through which two thousand years of Jewish absence can be erased from the symbolic space of the land. As brothers who share the same

⁴³² Manor, 2003, p. 551.

⁴³³ Yael Zerubavel, ‘Memory, the Rebirth of the Native, and the “Hebrew Bedouin” Identity’, *Social Research* 75:1, 2008a, pp. 315-352.

⁴³⁴ Carole Pateman, ‘The Settler Contract’, in *Contact and Domination*, Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008, p. 39.

⁴³⁵ Ben Dibley, ‘Telling Times: Narrating Nation at the New Zealand International Exhibition 1906-7’, *Sites* 34, 1997, pp. 1-18; Andrew Lattas, ‘Nationalism, Aesthetic Redemption and Aboriginality’, *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 2:3, 1991, pp. 307-324.

mother, identification with the Arab allows the linear space of history to be replaced with the cyclical timeless space of nature. This is due to their indigenous absorption into the realm of nature and exclusion from civilisation – while the West is a tale of progress, the East is one of timeless stagnation, myth, and bounty. Through such (partial) merging of their identity with the Arab, then, the Zionist could at once escape the distance created by civilisation and find themselves within nature, and reduce the Arab to a flat image that they can continue to overlay with themselves upon reasserting distance.

Donald W. Meinig notes that landscape is constructed as a ‘cultural image’,⁴³⁶ reflecting that which the individual or nation wishes to see in it. As *part of* – and not a distinct subject upon – the landscape, the Arab, like the land, is likewise only seen in so far as they reflect back the image that the Zionist projects onto them. To this end, the setting out of the landscape through art and literature, including the Arab as part of the natural space – the raw materials out of which an identity could be forged – laid the groundwork for the shaping or ‘reclaiming’ of tradition, the basis upon which in-group identity could be established. It allowed the Zionists to take stock of the elements available to them and to determine which aspects were part of the Other, and so either to be ignored or demonised in the ‘barren wilderness’ mode, and which were part of essential Jewish character of the Land or the East, and so to be used to ‘build’ themselves into the ‘new Hebrews’ they wanted to become.

Aligned with tradition and nature – the feminine mode of organic reproduction rather than masculine artificial construction – Zionist incorporation of aspects from Arab tradition and identity diverted attention from the essential artificiality of the Zionist enterprise, which transplanted pioneers from their mostly urban western European homes into the alien landscape of underdeveloped Palestine.

It must be noted that this invented nature of tradition is not unique to the Zionist situation, but rather a core feature of tradition in and of itself:

Tradition, usually said to be received, is in reality made, in an unceasing activity of selection, revision, and outright invention, whose function is to defend identity against the threat of heterogeneity, discontinuity and contradiction.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁶ Donald W. Meinig, ‘Reading the Landscape, an Appreciation of W. G. Hoskins and J. B. Jackson,’ in Donald W. Meinig and John Brinckerhoff Jackson (eds), *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 195-244.

⁴³⁷ Francis Mulhern, ‘English Reading’, in Homi K. Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 253.

In every case, hegemonic structures must determine what fits the definition of tradition and what lies outside it. The appeal to nature, of which the Arab is in this case recognised as part, involves an appeal to authenticity, organicness and timelessness. It thereby undercuts the inventedness of the tradition by suggesting an underlying thread of continuity, a 'just so' quality which transcends historical reality. However, the Zionist case is perhaps unique for the high levels of self-awareness the shapers of the tradition had as to its constructed nature. The strength of the movement's appeal to nature, then, can in part be seen as a way of compensating for this artificiality, of bridging a gap between imagined tradition and established reality.

In Yishuv literature, too, a naïve, deliberately folksy and traditionalist genre of storytelling developed which featured either the Arab or the Jew-as-Arab as a subject. Probably the most famous example is Moshe Smilansky's *B'nei Arab* collection, which uses the Arab Bedouin as a vitalising mirror for the reanimation of the Jewish nation in the masculinist image. In these works, the Bedouin world is presented in a series of purposefully exaggerated, colourful tales of bravery, violence, and power, as an example of how a Jew living unafraid and undominated in his own land might look. It hence provides the Jewish reader with "wishful possibilities of his own self-renewal as a deghettoized, liberated, natural human being".⁴³⁸ In this regard, this romanticising strand which emphasises rather than denying the link between the Jew and the 'Orient', can be considered a form of sub-altern counter-narrative, mimicking Western antisemitic discourse in order to subvert its meaning.⁴³⁹

Though these tales capture a romanticised Eastern vitality designed to inspire some element of latent promise and personal identification in the Jew, however, the Bedouin is never an uncomplicatedly positive model of emulation. Rather, they are depicted as emotional, primitive and rash, and hence dangerous. This inherent cruelty and lack of civilization can be particularly keenly seen in the Bedouin characters' treatment of their women. For example, Yitzhak Shenhar's (1902-1957) 'As Grapes in the Desert' ('*Ke-Anavim Ba-Midbar*', 1945) sets up the exotic Arab beauty, Aziza, as a tragic figure, forced by her family to marry an older sheikh, the man she loves killed by her brothers for being a member of a rival tribe. Similarly, Smilansky's 'Latifa' (1906) contrasts the exotic beauty of the young Latifa with her father's cruel beatings and insistence on marrying her off to an inappropriate spouse, taking a position of ambivalence which "despite his closeness to the Arab ... is that of a superior, criticizing values he sees as primitive."⁴⁴⁰ Thus Latifa is a model for both the

⁴³⁸ Warren Bargad, 'The Image of the Arab in Israeli Literature', *Hebrew Annual Review* 1, 1977, p. 56.

⁴³⁹ Susannah Heschel, 'Revolt of the Colonized: Abraham Geiger's *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a Challenge to Christian Hegemony in the Academy', *New German Critique* 77, 1999, p. 64.

⁴⁴⁰ Gila Ramas-Rauch, 'Moshe Smilansky: Utopia and Reality', *Shofar* 7:3, 1989, p. 9.

promise of the Orient, with her beauty, vitality and fertility, and a mirror to the civilised superiority of the Jews:

“Hawajah, is it true that your folk take but one?”

“But one, Latifa.”

“And your folk do not beat their women?”

“Nay. How shall one beat the woman whom he loves and who loves him?”

“Among you the maidens take those they love?”

“Assuredly.”

“While us they sell like beasts of burden.”⁴⁴¹

Failure of the Bedouin to show due respect towards women echoes their inability to perform the role of caretaker and dominion over the natural environment. The figure of the Arab woman as a wretched victim served to temper the masculinist urge to power contained in these stories with the reminder of civilised restraint. She is often used as vector for presenting the essential difference between Arab and Jew, even as the body of the text works towards affirming their essential kinship. In other words, the Arab is shown as unfit for the responsibility that comes with the position of dominator. The image of the Bedouin serves a double role here, illustrating how masculinist independence can aid in the Zionist goal of self-determination and self-mastery, while also showing the Bedouin themselves to be unsuitable for that role. The fatal flaw of the East was its lack of civilization, and its inhabitants feminised inability to exert self-control and emotional restraint. The Jews, by contrast, constituted both Semitic natives and civilised westerners. Identification with the Bedouin, then, allowed them to reclaim the East as their own site of identity, writing themselves over the Arab as true natives. Such tales did not really seek to understand the Arab as a subject, but rather to seize control of the mythological Orient.

This pastoral image of the Arab, which plays on their nativeness and connection to the mother land as a pathway for Jewish nativisation, declined as relations with the indigenous population deteriorated, but continued to occasionally pop up in literary works. A standout example is Yizhar’s ‘The Prisoner’ (‘Ha-Shavui’, 1948).⁴⁴² This well-studied story opens with a peaceful natural scene populated only by an Arab shepherd, described in richly detailed, evocative language which sets him

⁴⁴¹ Moshe Smilansky, ‘Latifa’ in I. Lask (trans), *Palestine Caravan*, London: Methuen, 1935b [1906], p. 267.

⁴⁴² S. Yizhar, ‘The Prisoner’ in Joel Blocker and V. C. Rycus (eds and trans), *Israeli Stories: A Selection of the Best Contemporary Hebrew Writing*, New York, NY: Schocken, 1962 [1949], pp. 151-174.

up as at one with his environment, as part of nature and outside of the workings of history. In contrast, the Israeli soldiers who go on to ambush, detain and torture him are depicted as alien specks of ugliness, banality and immorality on the beautiful landscape, which they – bar the protagonist-narrator – do not even begin to try to understand, respect or admire. Unlike his comrades, the narrator sees the landscape not just in utilitarian terms as providing opportunities for camouflage, etc, but for its true beauty and life-giving qualities. Tellingly, the Arab is included within that sensitivity to the natural world. As a seemingly natural follow on to his ability to identify with both the soldier and nature, the narrator is later able to identify both with the soldier and the prisoner, and thus empathises with the prisoner's plight despite being seemingly powerless to actually speak out against it.

While this identification with the pastoral natural scene and with the Arab prisoner indicates the protagonist's superior sensitivity and moral compass, however, the depiction remains unidirectional. The shepherd has no voice of his own and is a passive agent blended into his surroundings. Though Yizhar's protagonist empathises with him, this empathy is less for the man himself than a general, representational one. It is a sensitivity to the loss involved in the creation of something – in the domination of the dominated, the dominated imposes itself on it and something in its aesthetic beauty or purity of value is lost. Nonetheless, this imposition continues seemingly unstopably, the loss and the cruelty seemingly inevitable. In other words, while the story criticises the morality of the Zionist movement for its conduct in the 1948 war, its narrative framing continues to perpetuate the logic of the movement. This ambivalence is typical of post-colonialist narratives. When the coloniser is forced into a position in which they identify with the colonised, they are confronted with the instability of difference. Homi K. Bhabha recognises this as a central feature of any coloniser/colonised relationship (and from this we can extrapolate, any dominator/dominated relationship):

colonial authority secretly – rather unconsciously – knows that this supposed difference is undermined by the real sameness of the colonized population. This unconscious knowledge is disavowed: sameness is simultaneously recognized and repudiated. Importantly, the tension between the illusion of difference and the reality of sameness leads to anxiety.⁴⁴³

In other words, an encounter with the Other leads the coloniser, or dominator, to reassess the space between the Self and the Other. In seeing the Self in the Other, the totalising boundaries between

⁴⁴³ David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 5.

them are temporarily broken down, and this glimpse of essential similarity serves to "disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities."⁴⁴⁴

In canonising such disruption, however, the Zionist discourse succeeds in re-integrating it to its message, taking the sting out of criticisms by co-opting them into the very fabric of the hegemony. In establishing a 'third space' between coloniser and colonised, Yizhar's work disrupts the simple process of binary imposition of power, with the Other imposing identification onto his protagonists and disrupting the morality of the colonising mission. However, it also provides the opportunity for the dominator to appropriate part of the experience of the dominated, allowing the two contradictory strains (the Arab/nature as inherently Other and the Arab/nature as inherently Self-like) to coexist within the same logical structure. It thereby returns morality to the side of the dominator – they do what they must do, what it is natural that they do, but they feel bad about it too, and care about the dominated.

Similarly, in *Preliminaries*, as the writer reflects back on his life story as a synecdoche for that of his nation, Yizhar presents an ambivalent reading of the Arab by use of the pastoral.⁴⁴⁵ In his discussion of what has changed from the 'good old days', he mourns the loss of the quaint Arab villages as part of the urban sprawl and capitalist development of the country's open spaces. However, in again bracketing the Arab into the space of 'nature' and out of the space of 'civilization', Yizhar denies them an individual human voice – his perspective is colonial/ that of the dominator in that he considers the Arab a class worth protecting but without its own agency. They are worth protecting in the same way that national parks are worth protecting, as pretty pictures or museum pieces which show the morality, justness, and benevolence of the ruling elite, and provide a visual reminder of how far the national project of 'redeeming the land' has come. Significantly, neither Yizhar, nor the other Zionist writers of his generation who expressed sadness at the loss of rural Arab villages from the landscape, mourn the concurrent loss of urban Arab spaces, which are almost uniformly negatively portrayed in Hebrew literature.

This is not a development unique to the Israeli context, with literature in 'New World' countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand exhibiting a similar tendency to romanticise the pre-existing indigenous cultures' supposed closeness to nature. In particular, this characterisation becomes apparent when nature is valued *above* civilization:

⁴⁴⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation', in Homi K. Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 300.

⁴⁴⁵ S. Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, Nicholas de Lange (trans), London: Toby Press, 2007 [1992].

Recent overtly environmentalist texts reflect this absolutist opposition between indigene-nature and white-technology, often with one or two white characters who go through a process of indigenization which leads them to swear allegiance to the holistic cause of indigenous ecology.⁴⁴⁶

However, though these texts switch the values of binary pairs such as coloniser/colonised, man/woman, and civilization/nature, they often continue to group them in a binary hierarchical fashion, carrying over the connection between colonised-woman-nature and coloniser-man-civilization without questioning its basis. This similar lament for an 'authentic' connection to nature already lost forever, focalised through the indigenous native, can be seen, for example, in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* or Grahame Webb's *Numunwari*. Yet such texts, like that of Yizhar, continue to situate the native *within* nature, and to contrast it to the white colonialist who imposes upon nature from without. Where nature is idolised as a nurturing, holistic mother, then, it still maintains its connection to the indigene. All three works depict a loss of innocence, a transformation from the balanced, 'garden of Eden'-like state of nature pre-settlement, to the 'unnatural' state of a modern national space. However, perhaps more insistently than any other case, the Zionist context places this 'Fall narrative' alongside the dominant 'barren wilderness' narrative of the native as corrupting/defiling/destroying nature as it should be. Yizhar and his contemporaries who look back on the Arab villages with nostalgia as an idealised 'natural' past are to an extent countering the Zionist redemption arc, which sees the state of nature improving as the state of the nation becomes stronger. Thus there is a push and pull movement between the pastoral 'mother land' and the dystopic 'barren wilderness'. This small Fall narrative, however, is undermined by being packaged and situated within the wider Recovery narrative of the Zionist story.

As such, Yizhar's work, for all its ambivalence towards the Zionist hegemony, ultimately reasserts the Zionist story. In designating the Arab part of nature, he denies the indigenous population their own narrative history. Instead, he absorbs them into the Zionist origin story. In this regard, it is telling that *Preliminaries* begins with a genesis of its own: the gradual separation of colours, then lines and shapes from the primacy of the orange light in a child's first memory. Yizhar's *Preliminaries*, as much as it is about the loss of a more naïve, natural past Eden, is a coming-of-age story in which the child's world, once totally enveloped by his mother, gradually becomes detached from her, as his horizons expand beyond her reach, and he becomes independent and able to master his own life. Just as a man may look back with nostalgia on his childhood days under his mother's care, Yizhar's

⁴⁴⁶ Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, London: MQUP, 1993, p. 36-7.

protagonist looks back at the landscape in its more 'primitive' form with a sense of loss and regret, but this does not diminish his part in the narrative of progress.

This lament both for the loss of natural spaces and for the 'unsullied' life of the authentic Arab may be read in post-colonialist terms as part of the formation of a hybrid identity on the part of the coloniser. This comes with some caveats. Firstly, we must reiterate that though there is some controversy about referring to Zionism as a colonialist enterprise – and certainly it is a unique case – it does bear some notable features which make this model a relevant and enlightening one to use. Secondly, though the bulk of discussion over hybridity has been with regard to the experience of the colonised, Bhabha and others have made it clear that hybridity is just as much a feature of the coloniser's experience. That is, though the traditional process of colonisation was imagined as unidirectional, with the colonising presence imposing their culture on the colonised victims,⁴⁴⁷ in reality it was more of a reciprocal, though not equal, process:

The interaction between the colonized and the colonizer does not just affect the colonized, but the colonizer as well. Thus, the colonizer sees himself in a space between two worlds, the world of the colonizer and that of the colonized.⁴⁴⁸

Thirdly, while in systems influenced by colonialism the identity of coloniser and colonised is generally uncontroversial, the Zionist case is complicated by the status of the Jew within Europe. As we have already discussed, the Jewish response to their othered position in European discourse can in itself be said to be that of the post-colonial subaltern, including "mimicry of the dominant Other and internalization of its deprecatory images of the Jew, issuing in sharp self-reproach and even blatant self-hatred".⁴⁴⁹ In fact, the very understanding of the Orient in Europe "has been formed, and continues to be formed in inextricable conjunction with Western perceptions of the Jewish people."⁴⁵⁰ This essential connection between Orientalism and Antisemitism, James Pasto argues, was largely overlooked in the original criticism of Said's *Orientalism* due to a desire to defend Zionism from association with the colonialist/orientalist perspective⁴⁵¹ – if Said's concept of Orientalism was overly simplistic/essentialising, then the subaltern position of the Jew could be

⁴⁴⁷ See for example Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Joan Pinkham (trans), New York, NY: Monthly Review Press 1972 [1955].

⁴⁴⁸ Faeze Rezazade et al, 'Colonizer's Double Vision in *Camp X-Ray*', *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 69:1, 2016, p. 52.

⁴⁴⁹ Gideon Shimoni, 'Postcolonial Theory and the History of Zionism', *Israel Affairs* 13, 2007, p. 861.

⁴⁵⁰ Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, 'Introduction', in Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (eds), *Orientalism and the Jews*, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005, p. xv.

⁴⁵¹ James Pasto, 'Islam's "Strange Secret Sharer": Orientalism, Judaism, and the Jewish Question', *Comparative Studies in Society and Religion* 40:3, 1998, pp. 437-474.

defended, whereas acceptance of the theory with regard to Jews meant acceptance of their dual position as dominator/dominated, depending on the context.

Transferring this sense of their own identity to Palestine, the Zionists continued to exhibit a double-consciousness, “this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others”⁴⁵² consistent with a sub-altern, dominated group, in that they saw themselves both as Westerners and Easterners, depending on the focalising viewpoint. From the perspective of the Europeans, after all, they were foreigners, a malignant infestation from the Orient that would hence undermine Western civilization. In response to this charge, the Zionists emphasised their European credentials, their essential civilised nature, and the *distance* between them and the Arabs. Concomitantly, to a Semitic audience they could use this very same connection to the East to legitimise their settlement of it – it was not an invasion if they were already of the same cloth. Therefore, they also emphasised their essential similarity to the Arabs, incorporating them into the Jewish experience as ‘brothers’ or simply overlaying their image with that of their biblical ancestors. The Zionist consciousness was hence already hybridised. As an oppressed, othered grouping, they self-consciously aligned themselves with the Arabs and the Eastern landscape at the same time as they sought to raise themselves above it.

While a Jew in Europe could speak of the Holy Land as ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’ without having to confront the reality of the missing Arab, for the Zionist pioneer present in the land it was not possible to avoid seeing the Arab completely. It was necessary then, to reconcile the conflicting truths with one another, to deal with the manifest existence of an indigenous population while denying it the status of collective entity:

it is precisely in order not to see the Palestinian that they are obliged to form a vision that conceals him. In short emptied of all otherness, the dreamed-of space is necessarily seen as Self.⁴⁵³

On one level then, the Arabs were brothers from the same mother: The biblical landscape of the exotic Orient. They represented continuity, and therefore enhanced the Zionist claim by proxy – if the land is still inhabited by those related to them, even in their absence, it still bears the mark of their race, a consistent chain which leads back to and eviscerates the distance from biblical times. On another level, the mother land was the mother of the Zionists’ children alone: it was they who took possession of her, who planted her with seed, who tended to her young saplings and harvested

⁴⁵² W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, London: Routledge, 2016 [1903], p. 10.

⁴⁵³ Uri Eisenzweig, ‘An Imaginary Territory: The Problematic of Space in Zionist Discourse’, *Dialectical Anthropology* 5, 1981, p. 282.

the fruit of their shared labour. In this configuration, nature's inherent 'mother-like' qualities supplement rather than contradicting her role as lover/bride for the Jewish people. The relationship is a partnership, one of personal commitment. The 'fathers' – pioneers and political and military leaders – love and protect the land and in return she gives them fruit. Importantly, the role of the mother land is double – she is both the mother of the Zionists (with the Arabs their brothers), and the mother of their children. This configuration allows a partial recognition of the reality of the Arab connection to the land, while reconstructing it on Jewish terms.

Orly Castel-Bloom's *Human Parts (Chalakim Enoshiyim, 2002)*⁴⁵⁴ pathologizes this connection between the Arab and nature, with the ever-present threat of intifada violence being mirrored and blended into a similar attack by the elements, as the country is constantly at siege from freak weather events. The novel, through linking one with the other, gives them both a senseless, motiveless quality which detaches the action from its meaning. The backdrop of political rebellion, which results in the constant threat of sudden, brutal death at the hands of a terrorist attack is reduced to the level of the 'natural' danger of bad weather (freak hailstorms, drought, an outbreak of the deadly 'Saudi flu'). Yet this abstraction draws attention to the dehumanising logic on which the connection between the Arab and nature is based, while also undermining the nurturing power of seeking to find a reflection of the Self in nature. The epidemic deaths, freak weather deaths and terrorism deaths are not an effect of one another but simply laid out alongside one another – connected but not integrated in a logical series. Therefore, the symbolism feels arbitrary, and the deaths resist absorption into a cohesive national narrative which can explain them away as part of an overarching redemption narrative. Similarly, the Israeli response to this rebellion of nature is not to rise up against the 'barren wilderness', but simply to shrug their shoulders, grit their teeth and try to carry on with their lives, as if resigned to the admonishments of an abusive parent. Far from a nurturing, symbiotic relationship with the mother land, this pastiche of the special connection between both the Jew and the Arab as children of the natural landscape makes nature cold, cruel and arbitrary in their image.

In a similar play with the natural elements, academic and novelist Hagai Dagan's (1964-) *The Land Is Sailing (Ha-Arets Shata, 2007)*⁴⁵⁵ has the entire Land of Israel detach itself from the Middle East and float away towards Scandinavia, in a clear refutation of the 'mother land' mode which sees the Jews as at one with their home in the authentic East. Instead of the Jews adapting to their land, the land is forced by their degradation of it to manually and traumatically adapt itself to them. Faced with its

⁴⁵⁴ Orly Castel-Bloom, *Human Parts*, Dalya Bilu (trans), Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 2003 [2002].

⁴⁵⁵ Hagai Dagan, *Ha-Arets Shata*, Tel-Aviv: Hargol, 2007.

natural spaces being taken for granted, deprioritised, and forgotten, the land seems in a last ditch cry for attention to attempt to evoke empathy and relevance for itself by mirroring the split self-image of its citizens as children of both the West and the East. As in *Human Parts*, the climate of the country is transformed from Mediterranean to an icy cold more in line with Northern Europe, as if in an attempt to mend this hybrid identity.

Breaking away during an earthquake just as the protagonist attends his kibbutz school reunion hoping to relive the 'good old days', the novel highlights the dangers in looking back through ideologically tinted glasses towards an invented 'mother land', and instead explores the modern search for identity. The movement of the land, though traumatic, is a source of hope to the inhabitants as it rips them away from their bloody history and claustrophobic geo-political space, raising the possibility for new beginnings. However, these new beginnings are in an environment totally transformed, begging the question of what it is, exactly, that anchors their connection to that particular piece of land. Instead of a fixed point for the new Jew to develop an autochthonous relationship with, the land is transformed into a 'wandering Jew' itself by force of their identification with it.

The novel thus pokes fun at the pioneering level of devotion to the land, showing it to crush the very thing that they loved by its own weight. However, it retains an optimistic, whimsical tone, evoking a vision of hope for a future which is not governed by the ideological heaviness of the past and the political heaviness of the present. The earthquake and subsequent displacement of the land shakes it up so that all its historical layers come to the surface at once, merge together, and release a heavy tension which is palpably felt by all its inhabitants, while the move to the northwest, across the purifying sea, to "where the streets are just streets and the houses are just houses and the landscape is just landscape"⁴⁵⁶ is cathartic for the inhabitants, echoing the central goal of the Zionist movement to escape their own otherness and become a 'nation like any other'. The idea of the 'mother land' as an enduring connection between the Jews and the natural landscape, then, with all its historical suppression and ambivalent relationship with the East, is shown not to bring about a release from their sense of themselves as Other, but rather to *perpetuate* it.

⁴⁵⁶ Dagan, 2007, p. 165.

4.2. Naturalising Nature

Nature, then, performed the role of 'bride' for the pioneer and 'mother' for their new transformed persona, the 'new Hebrew'. The Zionists attempted to perform a shift from outsider to insider, from a mediated to an innate connection with the land. This they did without abandoning the concept of their own specialness through their outsider status. In other words, the 'mother land' mode of viewing nature and the 'lover/bride' mode work to reinforce one another even as they contradict one another's truth claims.

In such a way, the three modes of viewing nature come together to form a complex and self-contradictory web of associations. The 'mother land' mode looks towards the imagined past and the imagined future while ignoring the contradictions of the present. The 'barren wilderness' mode looks at the current fallen state of the land, acknowledging and foregrounding Jewish absence to demonstrate the damage and lack of balance that it causes, at the very same time that the 'mother land' mode represses the existence of that absence: though the pioneers may have been born elsewhere, they were still the true natives and inheritors of the land. Meanwhile, the 'lover/bride' mode colours the 'barren wilderness' mode in a positive light, acknowledging the unsavoury current state of things but focusing on the promise of future redemption. In this schema, the 'mother land' mode is hence theoretically the most stable, as it effectively ignores any time in which the Jews and the land were not naturally entangled, and dismisses their decline in one another's absence as temporary and illusory. It is no surprise, then, that it is towards this model of man-land relationship that the Zionist project aimed. This preference was enhanced by contact with European national movements which promoted such an autochthonous relationship as the foundation stone of a good, natural and healthy nation.

By incorporating all three modes, then, the Zionist movement could simultaneously admit the lack of manifestation of the 'mother land' narrative in reality, while maintaining its truth at a higher level of signification: it was not that the model was wrong, but that some work was needed to return to this 'natural', 'true' state of things.

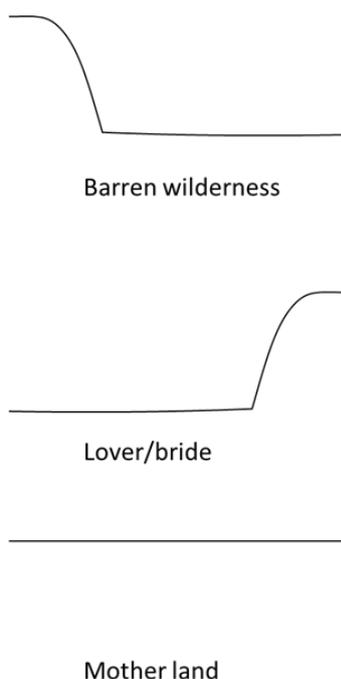


Figure 2: The structuring of 'moral goodness' in relation to nature in each narrative.

Each of these modes, we have already seen, was not conceived in a void but influenced and legitimised by preconceived notions of the man-nature relationship: The 'barren wilderness' mode constitutes a Fall narrative, hence the messianic discourse of Zionism. The 'lover/bride' mode can be considered a secularised reworking of the concept of the shekinah and Israel as the bride of God. It corresponds to the messianic promise of redemption. The 'mother land' mode is probably the least 'Jewish' of the three, since as we have previously discussed, Judaism has an atypical 'conscious outsider' understanding of space. Nonetheless, it represents the end state of these rise and fall narratives, a reaching of equilibrium. It is the state that is entered when everything is returned to its proper place, the messianic age.

In adopting the 'mother land' mode of nature, the Zionist movement could put forth their own version of history which foreshortened the gap in which the Jews were not in contact with the land. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his famous work *The Savage Mind*.⁴⁵⁷ talks of history as the modern western equivalent of myth in 'traditional', oral-based societies. In that they work to make unifying sense of shared experiences, history and myth are consolidating entities, reinforcing or condemning the present status quo with reference to an 'original', 'natural' state in which everything was in its place.

⁴⁵⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', *Journal of American Folklore*, 68, 1955, pp. 428-444.

National memory "gives permanence and solidity to a transient political form",⁴⁵⁸ that is, it cements it in the timeless space of myth. While the pioneers recognised the non-representativeness of the 'mother land' mode in their subjective personal experience, then, the mythologised national narrative of an ancient and innate Jewish connection to the landscape resonated at a higher level of signification, such that they considered it a national duty to work to render this 'truth' in external reality.

According to Lévi-Strauss, history works by blending competing narratives together until a single dominant hegemonic narrative is formed. This narrative is a simplified version of the narratives most fitting with the agenda of the hegemonic powers, and it shuts out competing narratives by force of its own 'objective' status. For Lévi-Strauss, these narratives are shaped out of the chaos of the multitude of individual subjective narratives by being synthesised into a series of binary oppositions, 'mythemes'. These mythemes (on analogy to phonemes, the units of sound that construct language) are the units of structure that are used to construct overarching narratives. Although his work is somewhat essentialising in that it posits a universal set of constants that shape our library of mythemes, his study uncovers the underlying similarity between many works of mythology, literature, and historical narrative, and, specifically, the binary distinctions on which they are fundamentally structured. These binaries can be either similar or different, but their truths can only be established by reference to one another, for example 'A so not B' or 'A so also B'. Therefore, individual units of history/myth/narrative only make sense when placed into a relational system with one another. Thus there is no meaning to 'man' without reference to 'woman', no meaning to 'homeland' without 'diaspora'.

In this construction, nature, as a 'naturalising' force, played an essential role for the Zionists as it manifested history in the present, actual space, 'proving' the objective veracity of its truth claims. The 'mother land' myth thus does not describe but *creates* objective reality. Notably, the Zionist movement pushed strongly for the conflation of history with space, the replacement of the idea of the Jews as 'people of the book' with the idea of the Jews as 'people of the land'. This 'land myth' is no less a myth than the 'history myth' of traditional Judaism, but has the advantage of its non-human, non-constructed, non-partisan associations being harder to deny.

While for Lévi-Strauss the structure of a myth itself remains constant, the content of the myth grows organically, strengthening with each retelling and modification, in the appearance of plurality. As such, the goal of myth/history is to "provide a logical model capable of overcoming a

⁴⁵⁸ Timothy Brennan, 'The National Longing for Form', in Homi K. Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 47.

contradiction".⁴⁵⁹ The construction of the Zionist relationship between man and nature – indeed the very intense focus on this element over virtually all others – lies in the attempt to reconcile the paradox we have uncovered: The Jews are both native and outsider, while the land is both mother and lover, fertile and barren.

The Logic of Domination's first target for domination, then, is the minds of its constructors themselves. In order to successfully acquiesce to the hegemonic narrative, one had to succumb to it in the face of its own self-contradictions, and deny the subjective evidence of one's own experience by synthesising it to the prevailing narrative. Lévi-Strauss is perhaps correct that the underlying structure of the system – what we are calling the Logic of Domination – remains even when the hegemonic narrative grows and develops over time to meet the new needs of the discourse, being the base on which power is consolidated and remaining remarkably resistant to overturning. However, it does not follow from this that the structure of the Logic of Domination refers to some fundamental external truth outside of the narrative. Rather, this process merely describes how totalising narratives are formed, it does not speak to a universal truth underlying them.

In a post-colonialist construction, the totalising structure of national myth belies the true nature of the nation, which is constantly shifting and changing:

“this open-yet-closed quality of the nation allows it to be both an imagined community and a historical process. Within the national space, people act in contestation.”⁴⁶⁰

In this sense, then, the Logic of Domination co-opts individual citizens to interact with the national narrative such that they both internalise it and project it onto others:

The people, like the nation, are a strategy: a rhetorical strategy. This double movement is that of pedagogy and performance, of certainties and anxieties, which always go together.⁴⁶¹

It is against this essential instability born out of the non-supremacy/stability of the totalising logic of the hegemony that fuels the projection of its narrative defensively outwards. That is, national memory, projected onto national space, performs the function of stabilising the un-stabilisable, consolidating the un-consolidatable.

Some modern novels have deconstructed the totalising logic of national narratives by consciously opting out of the synthesising process. For example, Oz Shelach's (1968-) *Picnic Grounds* (2003)

⁴⁵⁹ Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 443.

⁴⁶⁰ Rachel Evers, 'Counter-Narrating the Nation: Homi K. Bhabha's Theory of Hybridity in Five Broken Cameras', Honors Projects 14, 2014, p. 20.

⁴⁶¹ Huddart, 2005, p. 108.

explores the contemporary Israeli relationship with natural spaces through the medium of a novel told as a fragmented collection of short vignettes.⁴⁶² The stories relate to one another thematically and spatially but not in terms of time, character, or narrative content. While they do not count as counter-narratives in the sense that they arise from the dominating side of the paradigm rather than the dominated, they do share the post-colonialist approach to narrative. That is, they do not privilege one narrative over others, but rather lay them out side by side, allowing for a reading which accepts as valid multiple narratives and perspectives at once rather than trying to synthesise them into a definitive, hegemonic, canonical one. By writing in English rather than Hebrew, Shelach challenges the Israeli reader to step outside of their given narrative framework and view their own cultural assumptions from the outside. Moreover, though the novel does not directly present the voice of the Arab Other, blank pages and physical gaps in the body of the writing amplify their absence, forcing that absence to be acknowledged.

Shelach was born in Jerusalem, and completed his compulsory military service working as a military radio journalist during the first Intifada, an experience which began his process of disillusionment with the Zionist message. In 1998, he emigrated to the United States, and began to write in English about Israeli subjects, intending to free himself from the ever-present nationalist context of writing in the Hebrew language. He is harshly critical of the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians, and in his writing and political activism denounces the 'state of denial' that the state apparatus encourages its citizens to live in as to the dark side of the Zionist success story.

The novel presents a modern reality in which the Israeli forest has become an unquestioned part of the landscape and a hegemonic site for the individual citizen to relate to nature. As Hannah Boast notes, while in A. B. Yehoshua's implicitly referenced short story 'Facing the Forests', the protagonist and hikers using the footpaths are unaccustomed to the forest and see it as in some sense unnatural and un-Israeli (having to remind themselves they are not in Switzerland), in *Picnic Grounds*, the forest is so 'obviously' part of nature that even the ruins of Arab villages within it are treated as uncomplicatedly natural objects.⁴⁶³ For example, the 'square stones' used to shelter the fire in the first chapter may be deduced to derive from the remains of the Arab village Deir Yassin, yet the characters do not acknowledge this nor make reference to the famous massacre of the villagers there, a defining event of the Palestinian *nakba*. Even their obviously artificial shape does not deter the characters from reading them as natural.

⁴⁶² Oz Shelach, *Picnic Grounds*, San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 2003.

⁴⁶³ Hannah Boast, 'Planted Over the Past': Ideology and Ecology in Israel's National Eco-Imaginary', *Green Letters* 16:1, 2012, p. 51.

The novel's thematic focus on picnic grounds as a central point at which the encounter with nature takes place is telling. These clearings in the forest are often created by humans, and the paths and picnic/camping facilities offered direct the experience of the individual's encounter with nature to what the hegemony wants them to see. Shelach shows that Israel's policy of redesignating Palestinian ruins as picnic areas has paradoxically absorbed them into the natural. By making the forest a place of recreation – of the everyday encounter between nature and civilisation – they become part of the national self-image, and the Other is effectively disguised *by its very presence*.

If the Zionist return to the land of Israel represented a so-called 'return to history', the reconnection with the land allowed them to reframe this 'return' as inevitable and necessary, and to eliminate the time of absence as a brief pause, outside of true history, the movement of mythologically meaningful time. In the Zionist conception of time, the diaspora was an essentially atemporal, ahistorical state, and return to the land of Israel – and crucially control over it and themselves – was primarily a process of re-entering the world stage as a nation and historically consistent entity. Such a process, notably, saw a rise in realism, particularly among the first sabra generation, as they attempted to claim the supremacy of the Jewish relationship with the land by depicting the natural landscape and all that was in it as they 'really' were.⁴⁶⁴ By transforming the land from a symbol that did not really bear any connection to the actual physical thing that it took reference from to an actual physical place that could be interacted with, they could strengthen both their own identity and their place within the hierarchy of power.

4.3. Planted in the Soil of Their Homeland

For this reason, it is not surprising that special emphasis on children as connected to nature was a feature of both pioneer and sabra discourse. If nature is naturalising, children situate the 'mother land' myth in the here and now. The figure of the child and that of the land-as-mother work together, each moulded in the shape of the other, so they seem to obviously reflect each other, erasing memory of a time when that was not the case.

The use of trees in the process of nation building has been well-studied.⁴⁶⁵ In establishing a link between the national citizen and their national homeland, the act of planting trees enhances and

⁴⁶⁴ Todd Hasak-Lowy, *Here and Now: History, Nationalism, and Realism in Modern Hebrew Fiction*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008b.

⁴⁶⁵ Judith Tsouvalis, *A Critical Geography of Britain's State Forests*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Shaul Cohen, *Planting Nature: Trees and the Manipulation of Environmental Stewardship in America*, University of

stabilises group-belonging by providing a fixed point of identification, of family connectedness and investment in the future (since trees take a long time to mature and will be most fully enjoyed by future generations), and, particularly in more recent times, allow for participation in the discourse of environmentalism, the globalist recovery narrative of ‘saving the planet’.⁴⁶⁶

In the Zionist worldview, trees were a potent symbol of revival and recovery. Indeed, the widespread ‘reforestation’ projects of the JNF may be said to be one of the biggest and most iconic ways in which the movement shaped the landscape of Israel in its own image. Moreover, they have played a key part in propaganda efforts to encourage diaspora Jews to endorse Israeliness as the naturalised form of Jewishness.⁴⁶⁷ Drawing on the discourse of the British mandate, the JNF considered trees to be an important mobilising tool in the fight against the ‘barren wilderness’.

Typically of Zionism, however, the use of trees pulled paradoxically in two directions, towards the self-consciously artificial (‘lover/bride’) and towards the self-evidently natural (‘mother land’). JNF trees were planted in straight rows, watered and maintained, and labelled with plaques.⁴⁶⁸ They were often predominantly imported species, such as eucalyptus and Aleppo pine.⁴⁶⁹ They spoke of the non-nativeness of the Jewish pioneer, existing even where they were not welcome, persisting nonetheless. They were an expression of ownership, even violent mastery, and an imposition of an alien Western mode of scientific progress and order. Yet they also, in the very same breath, spoke to the eternal connection between the Jew and the land, and, by making the tree a proxy for the Jew, allowed the immigrant to become the rooted native by the process of transference. As the immigrant worked to plant a tree with their own strength and seed, they were proved an honorary native by virtue of their active role in ‘birthing’ new life in the land. The land was ‘mother’ because she passively nurtured both the tree and the Jewish child planted in her. Not only did trees function as a proxy to transform the alien into a native, they were also a display of the inherent sympathy between nature and the Jewish people – of how they could work together in harmony to create something neither one could achieve on their own. This partnership entailed both a sense of cooperation and hierarchy. Through planting trees and through employing new techniques and technology to make them grow in more diverse ecological conditions, the Jewish man laid his claim

California Press, Berkeley, 2004; Paul Cloke and Owain Jones, *Tree Cultures: The Place of Trees and Trees in Their Place*, London: Routledge, 2020.

⁴⁶⁶ Cohen, 2004.

⁴⁶⁷ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, London: HarperCollins, 1995, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁸ Carol Bardenstein, ‘Trees, Forests and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory’ in Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe, Leo Spitzer (eds), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999, p. 163.

⁴⁶⁹ Irus Braverman ‘Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine’, *Natural Resources Journal*, 49:2, 2009, p. 342.

on the land, and the land responded by performing a supportive, motherly, responsive role. As such, the ritual of tree planting could be said to delineate and propagate the appropriate 'natural' roles in the man-land relationship, modelled on the relationship between a mother and her husband-son.

However, the tree is a symbol not just of the child, but also their future promise as a strong, masculine new Hebrew man. It is as a physical body, undeniably present, rooted in the land and vigorously thrusting upwards from small seed to huge dominating presence, that the tree perhaps best embodies the Zionist vision. Trees take the role of soldiers by providing 'facts on the ground', strictly demarcating the boundaries of the nation.⁴⁷⁰ They physicalise the body of the Jew by acting as his proxy, as soldiers who defend the land, 'weapons of war' in the fight for the supremacy of the Israeli vision of the land.⁴⁷¹ In doing so they not only reflect his masculine strength and the immediacy of his physical body as an actor in the world, but actualise it through the hard physical labour of planting and managing the forest.

The success of the tree in doing so is related to the uniquely 'naturalising' ability of nature: "landscape effaces its own readability and naturalises itself,"⁴⁷² by virtue of its ability to invoke identification in the viewer. As a result of this capacity to evoke a pure, given relationship with the land, JNF plantings were often used to cover over the remains of abandoned and cleared Palestinian villages, reinforcing their reclassification as part of the fabric of nature, a resource to be plundered rather than a competing human narrative to challenge their own. Therefore, trees were used to effectively wipe clean the slate of the past: they could physically cover up all that which had come before, leading to a state of repression which was obscured by the timeless 'givenness' of nature.

The anxiety inherent in suppressing the voice of the Other as an integral part of constructing the voice of the Self is explored in A. B. Yehoshua's famous short story 'Facing the Forests' ('Mul Ha-Ye'arot', 1968).⁴⁷³ The protagonist, the updated 'wandering Jew' of the Israeli state, is stuck in a position of ambivalence, torn between identification with the trees he is tasked with guarding and with the Arab who is suppressed by them.

⁴⁷⁰ Joanna Long, 'Rooting Diaspora, Reviving Nation: Zionist Landscapes of Palestine-Israel' in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, 34:1, 2009, p. 73.

⁴⁷¹ Braverman, 2009, p. 319.

⁴⁷² W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Introduction', in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed), *Landscape and Power*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 2.

⁴⁷³ A. B. Yehoshua, 'Facing the Forests' in *The Continuing Silence of a Poet: Collected Stories*, Miriam Arad (trans), Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998b [1968], pp. 203-236.

For many scholars,⁴⁷⁴ the theme of 'Facing the Forests' is the repression of memory, denial of that which came before, or that there even *was* a before time. This can be seen as a necessary result of the 'mother land' narrative, which sources the Jewish connection to the land in the 'given', natural identification of birth. To fully endorse this mode, however, requires bracketing out the meaning of the other two Zionist modes of looking at nature, which rely on the distance or un-givenness between the Jew and the land. The foundation pioneering myth of the Zionist project – that the land was once empty of Jewish influence and colonised by Jewish outsiders – is hence at once both exalted and denied. This creates an inherent tension in the Zionist reading of nature.

'Facing the Forests' represents the resurfacing of the repressed memory and narrative of the Palestinian villagers, which had been overlaid by the oppressively silent and silencing Israeli forest; the eerie, maddening "silence, silence of trees."⁴⁷⁵ Planted over the Arab village, the monoculture pine forest 'naturalises' the landscape as simple, good, and eternal, denying the existence of any suffering or counter claim to the space. Yet 'Facing the Forests' speaks to the Israeli public's awareness that this timeless givenness is not truly the case, and fear that the naturalising power of nature will come undone (in this case by fire), forcing them to confront this uncomfortable truth.

The focus on the motif of the Crusades draws a link between the recent Jewish migration waves and these historic foreign invaders, crushing the Israeli insistence of a right to the Holy Land while also drawing attention to the historical layers lurking beneath the soil. It thus widens the reader's awareness of the gap between the Jewishness of the land and the centuries of past absence. As Renan demonstrates, repression of elements of the past is an essential feature in the construction of a national identity: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation".⁴⁷⁶ However, it is clear that the protagonist has *not* forgotten a time before the land was 'made Israeli'. Despite trees' connection to the 'mother land' mode of viewing nature and their symbolic status as proxy Jews, he is uneasy about the forest's presence in Israel at all, declaring it a foreign invader: "Since when do we have forests in the country?".⁴⁷⁷ He views the trees as suspicious, even malevolent entities, invading soldiers "erect, slim, serious; like a company of new recruits awaiting their commander."⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ See for example Yael Zerubavel, 'The Forest as a National Icon: Literature, Politics, and the Archeology of Memory', *Israel Studies* 1:1, 1996, pp. 60-99; Dan Urian, *The Arab in Israeli Drama and Theatre*, Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997; Yochai Oppenheimer, 'The Arab in the Mirror: The Image of the Arab in Israeli Fiction', *Prooftexts* 19, 1999, pp. 205-234.

⁴⁷⁵ A. B. Yehoshua, 1998b, p. 208.

⁴⁷⁶ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" in Homi K. Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁷ A. B. Yehoshua, 1998b, p. 204.

⁴⁷⁸ A. B. Yehoshua, 1998b, p. 215.

The short story can be read as a protest not just against the repression of the Arab, but against the repression of nature itself. That is to say, the text not only deals with the tree as a symbol by which memory of the Other is repressed, but also relates to the physical reality of the JNF planting on the land, and its rapid and dramatic transformation of the landscape. As we have already noted, the pine species which formed the majority of plantings and around which the story is based was already, by this point, a subject of muted controversy due to its potential non-nativeness and ecological destructiveness.⁴⁷⁹ In particular, JNF plantings of this species often form an aggressive monoculture which suppresses other plant life beneath it, depletes soil quality, provides a habitat for certain pests, and hence also decreases biodiversity in native fauna.⁴⁸⁰ As such, the pine tree in 'Facing the Forests' is both a potent symbol of the Zionist obsession with suppressing the past/the Other, and an ecological warning, flagging the negative effects of the Zionist approach of mastering the land by aggressively reshaping it according to its own vision.

The two readings, symbolic and ecological, work together and reinforce one another precisely because of the embeddedness of the symbolic relationship between the past form of the landscape – with its thorns, swamps and gnarled, sparse and haphazardly planted olive trees – and the Arab Other. Giving voice to nature beyond the three regulated Zionist modes discussed in this thesis thus also entailed giving voice to the suppressed Other, and vice versa.

However, Yehoshua stops short of giving equal valence to the Arab voice – not only is he muted by the Zionist narrative, he is muted by the author too. The Arab and his daughter are depicted as if they are almost an extension of the forest: they merge into the trees, move in silence as if at one with it, and in the case of the father are even literally mute. Moreover, there remains a deliberate element of ambiguity as to how the forest ultimately burns down: did the Arab and his daughter start the fire, or was it the *hamsin*? In other words, Yehoshua's Arab is as much 'at one with nature' as the typical Zionist indigene, and his role is ultimately little more than a symbolic image onto which to project the narrator's uneasiness with the ecological and historical positioning of the 'mother land' as the singular authentic, timeless Israeli space. As such, the burning down of the forest is more a release of the tensions inherent in the Zionist paradoxical double vision of nature than it is about the dominator/dominated relationship itself. The post-colonial 'double' quality of the text derives not from an authentic encounter with the Other, from which a hybrid identity is formed, but rather a projection of the internal struggle against the unsupportable, inauthentic narrative Self onto

⁴⁷⁹ Alon Tal, *Pollution in a Promised Land: An Environmental History of Israel*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, p. 85.

⁴⁸⁰ Tal, 2002, p. 94; Fernando T. Maestre and Jordi Cortina, 'Are *Pinus Halepensis* Plantations Useful as a Restoration Tool in Semiarid Mediterranean Areas?', *Forest Ecology and Management* 198, 2004, p. 311.

the mirror of 'nature'. The play of the story serves as a pressure valve, releasing underlying tensions in the Zionist reading of nature and the Other without goes as far as to really engage with their sources.

Again, despite the tensions we have underlined, these three modes of looking at nature were not generally considered to be in conflict with one another by Zionist sources, but rather three elements in a progression. Within the context of the Zionist aesthetic of recovering the 'barren wilderness' from its fallen state, the 'mother land' was the state to which it was destined: the restoration of balance, stability and harmony. This goal state thus linked the 'barren wilderness' and 'lover/bride' modes together: the first was nature unravelling into chaos, the second nature under the process of being rebuilt. The 'mother land' was the beginning and end state of nature, harmony and moral good restored. However, in its triumph of imagination over reality, the 'mother land' mode also hid the evidence of any corruption of moral good having occurred. It thus worked to secure the supremacy of narrative over observation, what should be over what has been.

It may be tempting to argue that the land-as-mother mode of viewing nature is one which gives nature the upper hand, as well as ensuring respect and devotion to her on the part of Zionist, in a way which runs contrary to the 'master and exploit its resources' narrative of the 'lover/bride' and 'control for its own good' mode of the 'barren wilderness'. However, this respect for nature is really only respect for nature as it mirrors the Self. That is, this element emphasising respect and harmony is enlisted as part of the trifecta for a reason, to legitimise control over nature in positive as well as negative terms. The creation of the 'mother land' is reliant on management by the hegemonic power to keep nature in the state that reflects the power that they project. Nature outside of the image of the hegemony is 'barren wilderness' not because it is actually barren, but because it is barren of their influence, while the 'mother land' is not intrinsically more fertile, but more fertile to their ideological vision. Transforming nature from barren to mother is the miracle produced by man's engagement with and control over the natural landscape. Therefore, the feminine land can only have positive valence when in accord with its human dominator. Similarly, a mother could traditionally only have positive valence when afforded the position of mother in the context of a traditional heterosexual marriage. Single – particularly unmarried – mothers, mothers who work outside the home, and women who chose not to be mothers are often denigrated by society as they do not conform to the Logic of Domination and are not primarily projections/extensions of the selfhood of any man.⁴⁸¹ Their fertility and sexuality are hence dangerous as they are unbound: they

⁴⁸¹ Carol Smart, 'Disruptive Bodies and Unruly Sex: The Regulation of Reproduction and Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century' in Carol, Smart (ed), *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood, and Sexuality*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 7-32; Gayle Letherby, 'Childless and Bereft? Stereotypes and

are not just the mirror for a projected Self but an autonomous Self of their own. Respect, then, is not given to the thing itself, but to the thing as far as it resembles Self.

This links into the idea of motherhood as the sacrifice of the Self for the Other. Motherhood has historically been viewed as noble precisely because it neuters the threat inherent in women's sexuality and 'redeems' it:

Victorians considered purity a crucial component in ideal maternity. Although mothers were necessarily women of some sexual experience, they were nonetheless often canonized as essentially virginal.⁴⁸²

This equation between motherhood and purity in Western consciousness is probably most clearly articulated in the figure of the Virgin Mary, but can also be found deeply embedded into the nationalist movements from which Zionism took inspiration, most notably German nationalism. For example, the symbolic mother of the German nation, Germania, is defined solely by her nurturing, self-sacrificing qualities and in direct opposition to the unhinged, selfish woman governed by her sexual appetite.⁴⁸³ Such a conception can be seen in the Zionist approach to the land of Israel, who, while not virginal, is a 'fallen woman' rendered chaste by their very sexual attentions, and redeemed by being returned to the position of mother for the Jewish nation.

The emphasis we have seen on trees, and their connection to motherhood in the cycle of life and death, constitutes a transformation of the Zionist understanding of time from linear to cyclical. The tree – symbolically connected at once to the masculine soldier-citizen fighting (and maybe dying) for the nation, and to the Jewish child born from the native soil – marks a shift from the linear fall/recovery narratives of the other two modes to the cyclical narrative of the 'mother land', which is endless, timeless, natural. The function of the 'mother land' as a circuit breaker for history in the Zionist conception, and the 'return' to the primacy of place, derives from the primal nature of the feminine. Along with the other elements on the dominated side of the binary, the feminine belongs to what Anne McClintock terms 'anachronistic space,' being conceived by the hegemony as set apart from the linear space of history, instead existing "in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of

Realities in Relation to "Voluntary" and "Involuntary" Childlessness and Womanhood', *Sociological Inquiry* 72, 2002, pp. 7-20; Charlotte Morris, and Sally R. Munt, 'Classed Formations of Shame in White, British Single Mothers', *Feminism and Psychology* 29:2, 2019, pp. 231-249.

⁴⁸² Sumner Holmes and Claudia Nelson, *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875-1925*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997, p. 2.

⁴⁸³ George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, New York, NY: Howard Fertig, 1985, p. 90.

human agency – the living embodiment of the archaic “primitive”⁴⁸⁴. This supposedly ‘cyclical’ nature of the feminine has even been used by some eco-activists hoping to promote a closer sensitivity towards nature by drawing attention to the cycles of influence inherent in the relationship between humankind and their surrounds.

However, in the Zionist case, the thrust of the valuation of cyclicity is not about the empowerment of disempowered groups such as woman, nature, etc, but rather about the erasure of linear history. While in the Logic of Domination man is associated with activity and building, with *production*, woman and nature are associated with either *reproduction* or *destruction*. Thus, while the ‘lover/bride’ mode is needed to manifest the Zionist dream of building a natural space which mirrors themselves, the ‘mother land’ mode is needed to deny the very artificiality of that construction. While an immoral and illegitimate society could theoretically be produced, nature in the popular understanding cannot be produced, but is a self-reproducing constant. Therefore, if society is reflected in nature, nature makes that society part of the timeless good, exterior to moral consideration (for what is natural is good).

Of course, these readings of nature are inherently contradictory. Nature is both redeeming and damning, a means to legitimate a culture and a means to deny the very existence of a competing culture. But it is the very deep comfort and ‘givenness’ of the mother figure that makes this configuration so powerful. ‘Mother nature’ is such a strong given, such a powerful symbol of the mystic feminine gift of life and continuation, and also of primordial chaos, that it is difficult to shift outside of this interpretation to assess its truth claims.

4.4. Always Elsewhere

Despite the ideological draw of the ‘mother land’, however, ‘natural’ identification with the land was beyond the power of the pioneer. The problem of nativisation was recognised by Yosef Haim Brenner,⁴⁸⁵ who saw the irony in the attempt to ‘return to history’ (deleting all diaspora history and creating a seamless bond between the Biblical Hebrew on the land and the modern Hebrew on the land). Though they dreamed of creating a given, mother/child relationship with the land, early Zionist attempts to construct a literature which reflected that dream were hampered by the lack of a model in reality on which to base it, while the lack of model was itself hampered by the failure of

⁴⁸⁴ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, New York, NY: Routledge, 1995, p. 30.

⁴⁸⁵ Yosef Haim Brenner, *Ketavim* 3, Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Me’uchad, 1985, p. 569-578.

literature to inspire by capturing an authentic way to interact with the land. Since the ideal of the man/land relationship necessarily came before the actual man/land relationship, it could necessarily not be rendered as uncomplicatedly autochthonous, but a symbolically far away space to which the pioneers, even living in the land itself, yearned as if in diaspora.

This tension was a major theme in the writings of immigrant generations, who juxtaposed their desire for a 'native' sense of belonging with their alienation from the land, and failure to transform it from space to place. Their connection to the landscape was 'vicarious', a relationship not of organic identification but mediated by an imagined, more vivid vision of nature than that manifest in reality. Thus, depictions of the 'wandering Jew' figure abound in literary depictions of settler societies. S. Y. Agnon's Yitzhak Kummer in *Only Yesterday* (*Tmol Shilshom*, 1945),⁴⁸⁶ for example, wanders from settlement to settlement seeking an authentic connection with the land which will bring him rest, but his search is unsuccessful. Similarly, Yitzhak Shenhar's 'Demilitarised Zone' ('Prazon', 1939)⁴⁸⁷ is a study of alienation from both land and society set against the backdrop of an ostensibly typical Zionist kibbutz.

Indeed, for all their ideological emphasis on returning to the land, nature is conspicuous in its relative *absence* from literature of this period, in part, most likely, because it was unclear exactly how an authentic 'mother land' relationship with nature might look. For example, in 1929, poet and writer Broides lamented the failure of his contemporaries to "sing from within the land and not about it."⁴⁸⁸ However, as Mann notes, his description of what *would* constitute 'singing from within the land' does not touch on any aspect endemic and inherent to the natural landscape itself: "there is not one element of Broides's description which could not have been produced just as easily in the diaspora."⁴⁸⁹ Rather, I suggest, his words speak to the lack of an established, authentically moving 'mother land' mode in the Israeli literary canon of the time. Without this mode of viewing the land becoming dominant within the hegemony, he seems to say, the Zionist project's aim to cement its 'new Jews' in the land is not complete.

For Zionist writers, the sabra generation thus represented a hoped for revolution in the relationship with the landscape, converting it from space to place, and from 'lover/bride' to 'mother land'. The native sabra could see her as she really was without this threatening their claim towards identification with her, due to the self-evident mother/child quality of their relationship. Nature in

⁴⁸⁶ S. Y. Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, Barbara Harshav (trans), Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 2000 [1945].

⁴⁸⁷ Yitzhak Shenhar, *Sipurei Yitschak Shenhar*, Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1960.

⁴⁸⁸ Barbara Mann, 'Framing the Native: Esther Raab's Visual Poetics', *Israel Studies* 4:1, 1999, p. 241.

⁴⁸⁹ Mann, 1999, p. 241.

its 'natural' form would thus present less of a threat since it would at this point be clearly inherently Jewish and they inherently 'Eretz Yisraeli'.

Representing this hoped for shift towards 'nativeness', the quintessential description of the sabra generation, deriving from the famous opening line of Moshe Shamir's 1951 novel *With His Own Hands* (*Be-Mo Yadav*), is that they are 'born of the sea'.⁴⁹⁰ This situation of their origin in the primordial nothingness of the sea indicates that they are not the products of the past, and are clean of Diaspora.⁴⁹¹ This is in accord with the desire to erase Jewish history and be reborn in primary, untainted connection with the place. In this conception, the sea has a double function, both as a break which disconnects the new mother land from the old land, and as an extension of the land, which reaches out towards the Jews in the Diaspora and connects to them, gathering them in. In this sense, the sea is a symbolic extension of the mothering function of the land of Israel: "The sea functions as nothing but a mirror-image of the territory."⁴⁹² It is both the 'other' to the land (and hence the 'new Jew') and a mirror to it.

However, being 'born from the sea' also displaces and alienates the sabra citizen from the land. While they look at the land as insiders due to being raised in it and may feel a more sensitive, innate connection to it, they also simultaneously look at it from beyond, from the very same outsider perspective as their parents. This mimics the double vision of postcolonial writing in that the sabra 'born of the sea' continues to see themselves as both subject and object, both integrated and detached from the way in which they are represented. In emphasising the disconnect between themselves and their parents, they also preserve an existential angst about their belonging to the land, about the true nature of the 'mother' that begat them. Elik's famous birth from the sea is mixed with two other mythical origin places in Shamir's novel: a cauliflower, and among the Bedouin wandering the desert. In each of these cases, this quintessential sabra's birth and parentage is displaced from their actual mother (who connects them to Jewish history and time), and onto the 'other', who represents eternity, primordial nothingness. However, in creating this switch in order to bind the sabra to the land by connection to the dominated, natural, primal side of the Logic of Domination, the continuity and primacy of motherhood as a bond of connection and identity is also disrupted. As such, the message of 'crossing over', the 'lover/bride' mode of viewing nature which sees it as something requiring a process of courtship and mastery rather than something always by

⁴⁹⁰ Moshe Shamir, *With His Own Hands*, Joseph Shachter (trans), Jerusalem: Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, 1970 [1951].

⁴⁹¹ Maoz Azaryahu, 'The Formation of the "Hebrew Sea" in Pre-State Israel', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 7:3, 2008, p. 254.

⁴⁹² Hannan Hever, 'We Have Not Arrived from the Sea: A Mizrahi Literary Geography', *Social Identities*, 10:1, 2004, p. 36.

its nature bonded to man, is maintained into sabra culture, rendering the 'mother land' mode something always only half achieved, something in process.

Reading Yizhar's *Preliminaries* alongside his earlier canon of work reveals a shift in the author's sense of his place in the space of nature. While, as we have seen, his earlier work is often read to consist of a nativist cult of land, in which he – in an oedipal overthrow of the immigrant pioneering generation – rejects the 'lover/bride' and 'barren wilderness' modes of viewing the land in favour of the 'mother land' mode, *Preliminaries* reveals an ostensible sabra child who still fits the role of the 'wandering Jew', even in the Land of Israel. This is not to deny that his experience of the space was not inherently different from his parents' – in the sequel to *Preliminaries*, Yizhar reiterates the typical gap between immigrant and sabra: "My father had a place rift in his life, while I am flat and without any rift."⁴⁹³ Rather, the protagonist spends his life moving from place to place, oscillating in and out of identification with his community and surroundings in a manner which prevents him from ever fully feeling "safely ensconced in a place he belongs to."⁴⁹⁴

For the more mature Yizhar, the Jewish failure to create an authentic Jewish space was behind the collapse of the Zionist dream. In other words, while his early work proclaims itself as the very 'singing from within the land', 'naturalised' mother/child relationship with the land the Zionists aimed for, his later work emphasises the disconnect, the failure to truly belong to the land. For Yizhar, this disconnect stems from the failure to reconcile the 'lover/bride' and 'mother land' modes, to replace the historically-governed recovery narrative with the cyclical, organic 'mother land' view of space:

this place is not like all those other places where year after year and generation after generation the olive harvest comes regularly in its season ... that ancient cycle of the year has no binding force here, it does not enter into the bloodstream of existence here, the eternal existence of this place ... everything that is here is all temporary and they are only pretending to be farmers, only temporary vineyards and temporary orange groves ... they all exist but not in the blood, not firmly grounded, nothing is solid here.⁴⁹⁵

Dan Miron unintentionally touches on the gendered implications of this gap, noting that "though they indeed 'conquer' and domesticate – i.e. make domestic, homely – the wilderness, they do not ultimately cultivate it as a home but rather develop it in the commercial sense of the word: buy it,

⁴⁹³ S. Yizhar, *Zalhavim*, Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1993, p. 50.

⁴⁹⁴ Dan Miron, 'A Late New Beginning' in Yizhar, S., *Preliminaries*, Nicholas de Lange (trans), London: Toby Press, 2007, p. 20.

⁴⁹⁵ Yizhar, 2007, p. 294-5.

sell it, make profit on it, move from one side of it to another, leave it, come back to it, exploit it deface and debase it, built it, destroy it.”⁴⁹⁶ Stuck in a perpetual ‘lover/bride’ mode which seeks to ‘tame the shrew’ of the land by objectifying and exploiting it, they fail to offer it true respect or acknowledge its external value or autonomy. Referencing the commercial structures of exploitation, which over time transform the land the narrator is standing upon from vineyard to orange grove to housing development, the inter-reliance of structures of domination – and lack of true value or permanence assigned to individual elements within the system – is laid bare.

Moreover, as we have already seen, even in Yizhar’s earlier works, the sense of connection to the land, though profound and native-like in his knowledge of and sensitivity to small natural details, is not that of simple mastery and control projected by the Zionist dream, but one which is bounded, which is always just beyond. It is unreachable and unmasterable in the fullest sense of the word. This may be read as not due to the land’s essential uncontrollability, but rather the need of man to not fully control land, to respect and give in to its ability to enchant and hint at that which lies outside. As such, the very process of othering the land – projecting it as an ‘other’ beyond the boundaries of the Self and in need of conquering – dooms this project from the outset. Yizhar captures the real failure of the cyclical ‘mother land’ reading of the relationship with the landscape from taking supremacy over the decline and recovery narrative of the ‘barren wilderness’ and the ‘lover/bride’. The very creation of this national ‘religion’ of land and nature worship necessarily puts a box around it, making it an inaccessible ‘other’ that could never fully be conquered, never fully reached. In the words of Amit Assis:

The Zionist passion for the land is transformed into a taboo on realizing this very passion. Being quasi-sacred the land must stay "elsewhere."⁴⁹⁷

This failure of the ‘mother land’ mode to assume primacy is a feature not just of the first generations born in the land, but extends into later generations too. Ehud Luz, in discussing Amos Oz’s tension between restlessness and his Zionist convictions, notes that “Their yearning for redemption makes it difficult for them to come to terms with their homeland as it is ... Wanderlust is the only ‘Jewish’ trait Zionism has left them.”⁴⁹⁸ Though this is not exactly what Luz was discussing, we can see in this quote the continuation and updating of the ‘lover/bride’ mode of viewing nature, which preserved the traditional ‘elsewhereness’ of the land and its status as a separate entity from the Jew, always

⁴⁹⁶ Miron, 2007, p. 26.

⁴⁹⁷ Amit Assis, “‘His Ancestors Were Calling Him Back to His Origins’: Zionism and the Poetics of Space in the Early Work of S. Yizhar”, *Prooftexts* 36:3, 2018, p. 408.

⁴⁹⁸ Ehud Luz, *Wrestling with an Angel: Power, Morality, and Jewish Identity*, Michael Swirsky (trans), London: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 257.

losable, and something which required constant movement towards and conquest of. With the centrality of their relationship with the land as a definer of identity, the conflict between the 'mother land' mode towards which they strove, and the 'lover/bride' mode by which they courted it, continued and became itself a source of identity if also angst for the sabra generation and beyond. That is, the internal tension between the land as Self and the land as Other was not just a pitfall but a core feature which defined Israeli identity. Thus, Oz's obsession with boundaries, and with the construction of the Self, is built up by attraction to the Other, the irresistible pull of the natural world which is not domestic, not mothering or nurturing, not build in his own image.

However, this very insistence on the 'otherness' of nature, as found in Oz and Yizhar's works, is indicative of the Zionist use of the Logic of Domination to establish boundaries between categories of thing in order to cement their position in the hierarchy and to legitimise structures of power. Though the 'mother land' paradigm works on one level to collapse the difference between nature and Jew, merging them into one another, as in the case of the symbolism between sapling and child, between cactus and native male Israeli, or between tree and soldier, it paradoxically also works to reinforce the boundary between nature and man, or the natural subordination of one to the other. When Yizhar cordons off an aspect of nature he designates as beyond representation, he sets aside a measure of respect for nature, but this is a respect that only serves to strengthen the position of the in-group from which nature is distinguished as the 'other'. That is, while nature is 'beyond the boundary', it is the space through which identity can be shaped by encounter with that-which-is-not. Therefore, when the strength of the in-group is high enough (i.e. the national imagined space of nature is close enough to the lived reality of that group's relationship with nature), even wild, unco-opted nature is a space where Zionism projects and amplifies itself by its very absence. Civilization follows on out of the primordial soup of nature, and hence, a symbolic conquest of nature can be carried out simply by acknowledging nature's unknowability.

4.5. Desert as Mother Land

The given 'mother land' mode of viewing nature did become more emphasised as time went on and native born 'sabras' began to form the majority. For example, this change can be seen in the shift towards native species, including the reclaiming of Palestinian-coded species such as olive, from self-consciously foreign 'pioneer' species such as eucalyptus. This turn towards a more simplistically nativist construction of the man-nature relationship can be seen as a rejection of the half-elsewhereness of their parents, the observed paradox of simultaneously seeing the land as both a

lover in need of seduction and a mother whose love and support is already an eternal given. Yet, as we shall see, the ritual of 'conquest' continues to play an important role in the formation of a relationship with the land.

Notably, later constructions of the native landscape attach more positive value to natural features previously designated as 'barren wilderness', such as the desert, thorns, wildflowers, and scrubland. They are the 'mother land' and not the 'barren wilderness' not because of any physical transformation in their nature, but because of their submission to the nation. That is, they reflect the national identity now where they did not before. For poet Yehuda Amichai, despite not being a native sabra, for example, the desert is a place of transformation, of fertility and vitality. It is a site of sustenance and inspiration:

I need the desert as part of my life. It is an intrinsic part of my experience, like day and night... I use it. It keeps me going... In the desert... experiences stay with you but they are translated into something larger, something more memorable. It provides a wonderful dimension of consciousness.⁴⁹⁹

But it is only when the Zionist hegemony has a stable enough control over the landscape that the wilderness can be read as uncomplicatedly positive: The desert is a good desert because it is a Jewish desert. Significantly, the literary affirmation of the 'barren wilderness' discussed in chapter 2 occurs largely when the initial period of conquest is over. That is, relation to the 'wilderness' of the land occurs when the threat from the 'more native' is neutralised or reduced enough that it can be easily denied. Once the Arabs are largely outside the borders of the Israeli controlled space, connection to the native space in its 'natural' form can be held up as proof of legitimacy, in contrast to the Palestinians living vicariously via an image of an imagined landscape they have not themselves been born into nor forged a self-evident personal relationship with. The return of the desert, now as a symbol of Jewishness, is hence a result of the 'facts on the ground' militarism of the Zionist movement. Emptied of threatening connection to the Other, it is now tied to the mother and not to the demon, whore or temptress. Its valence has shifted not by any actual change in its physical nature, but in the balance of power. As such, its femininity is now a blessing, being under the power/representation of the masculine Jewish nation, and not a curse.

Moreover, the difference between that designated 'nature' and that designated 'culture' now reinforces the narrative of their separation, of the conquest of nature by culture. As Orit Ben-David shows, hiking in the 'wilderness', in the Israeli consciousness, becomes a ritual allowing people to

⁴⁹⁹ Yehuda Amichai, quoted in Ranen Omer-Sherman *Israel in Exile: Jewish Writing and the Desert*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006, p. 63.

participate in this national story by making their own conquest over the timeless space of nature.⁵⁰⁰ As we have seen in our discussion of Shelach's *Picnic Grounds*, artificially constructed forests are read as 'nature' by the average citizen as strongly as desert or scrubland, reinforcing the victory of the naturalising 'mother land' mode in projecting its version of morally good nature onto the landscape.

In this context, it is important to note the continued interconnectedness of the concept of nature and the concept of nation in the Israeli consciousness. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), for example, is not an offshoot of the international green movement, but rather of the Palmach, and preserves this association between militarised conquest of the land and human management of nature.

As in the case of many post-colonialist settler societies, the SPNI continues to associate the 'native' with nature, and to appropriate 'native' modes of interacting with nature for their own gain, in a process which paradoxically undermines the very connection which it draws attention to, not only demanding participation in the long-standing Palestinian dialogue with the land, but transforming it into a Jewish one. Hence SPNI nature guides borrow from Arab culture due to its perceived closeness to nature. They sprinkle Arabic words into their speech and practice Bedouin customs like wearing keffiyeh, cooking pita and making coffee with a *finjan* or tea from herbs. They even tell Bedouin folk tales.⁵⁰¹ By casting the Arab – and specifically even Arab *culture* – as part of the fabric of nature, they are included in the pool of natural resources to which the Jew has a privileged right and shares a unique bond. Therefore, like nature, Arab culture has no consciousness of itself as a subject, but rather needs the Jew in order to interpret it and make it into a functional narrative. It is the Jewish adoption of Arab customs which gives them a meaning beyond their literal value, in the same way that it is the Jewish interaction with the feminine space of nature which gives it value. Nature is nothing without interpretation by man.

Not only does this serve to weaken nature by subjugating it to culture, it also serves to strengthen culture by echoing it in nature. In this context, interaction with the 'barren wilderness' of the desert/wild space, and the ability to see in it the fertility and promise of the 'mother land', is part of the process of developing and reinforcing an Israeli identity. The preservation of and respect for the desert (both the literal desert and the symbolic desert – i.e. any natural space in the country which is not harnessed to human enterprise) provides a space in which the conquest of land in the

⁵⁰⁰ Orit Ben-David, 'Tiyul (Hike) as an Act of Consecration of Space', in Eyal Ben-Ari and Yoram Bilu (eds), *Grasping Land: Space and Place in Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997, pp. 129-145.

⁵⁰¹ Ben-David. 1997, p. 132.

'lover/bride' mode can continue to be played out. Testing their ability to see themselves in the natural space of the 'wild' land, each participant in the narrative thus repeats the masculinist Jewish process of 'conquering the desert', converting her into the timeless 'mother land' and hence proving the eternal, unbreakable mother-child connection that they share to the rest of the land of Israel.

As Ranen Omer-Sherman discusses in his exploration of the desert as a space in Jewish writing, the desert is also a place to which writers critical of Zionism or the direction of modern Israeli politics have their characters retreat in order to assess their identity and position.⁵⁰² Escaping the boundaries of the nurturing 'mother' which is nature more obviously within the bounds of Israeli control, the desert provides a symbolic empty space from which to reflect and present a critique as if from the outside of Israeli consciousness. That is, the desert preserves the 'barren wilderness' mode, the sheer imposing otherness of nature, and harnesses it to subvert Israeli cultural narrative norms.

However, this again serves an integrating function:

When it brushes up against the nation's vast, unyielding spaces, Zionism undergoes a strange transformation, as if chastened by the greater epic of silence and emptiness. There, the desert gazes on its captivated Jewish subject with the same commanding gaze as the biblical imaginary, and the hapless Jewish soul, longing only to disengage himself from the unending violence and disillusionment, is captured by something far more powerful. With the re-emergence into national space, solidarity replaces solitude but a different citizen-subject materializes ... After grappling with a threatened loss of selfhood and the limits of being, the protagonist emerges, if not triumphant, with a sense of heightened awareness and conscience.⁵⁰³

Its very emptiness and nomadic timelessness, its resistance to integration into history or the movement of time and progress, serves the role of proving the land as the 'mother land' by preserving the natural landscape of the Bible in the here and now. Preserving and honouring it means preserving the 'authentic' feminine East in the midst of the incursion of the masculine nationalist and civilized West. In preserving a little of the Other in the Self, it transforms the Other into *part* of the Self, and therefore provides the only means to fully conquer it. However, the failure to fully integrate the Other into the Self preserves the tension between the two, leading to a never-ending process of approach and retreat, a march to a destination which by its nature can never be reached.

⁵⁰² Omer-Sherman, 2006.

⁵⁰³ Omer-Sherman, 2006, p. 168.

4.6. Deranged Motherhood, Estranged Land

As we have already touched upon, the Logic of Domination sets up a binary opposition between “the pregnant female body and the pregnant male mind.”⁵⁰⁴ Within this paradigm, which simultaneously privileges male endeavour by equation to civilization, and privileges civilization over nature by equation to the feminine, fertility and motherhood are utilised to ‘sweeten the deal’. Where the feminine and the natural are demonised in the ‘barren wilderness’ mode, and are demanded to submit in the ‘lover/bride’ mode, the ‘mother land’ mode balances the condemnation and suppression of those elements equated with the feminine, and provides a reason for those on the dominated side of the equation to buy into the system. Motherhood not only commands respect, but in the Zionist project was (and continues to be) afforded the status of national duty. It is hence the most important thing a woman can do for her country and her land: it is symbolically through her fertility, rather than through her public work, military service, or even direct working of the land, that the woman is redeemed and bound to the Israeli nation. As such, her primary connection to the nation is by proxy, via the promise inherent in her sabra sons. The privileged position of motherhood thereby offers the opportunity to gain social status and a personal value by conforming to the ‘natural’ role of the woman:

Their empowerment is accompanied by a powerful sense of belonging, of contributing to the collective, that also blurs the discriminating and oppressive dimensions of the gendered role division.⁵⁰⁵

While it should be noted that this situation is complicated by racial and class power dynamics (just as, for example, in the US black single motherhood brings a reduction in status and ‘purity’,⁵⁰⁶ or working class mothers are often forced outside the home as a source of cheap labour, and their fitness for motherhood called into question,⁵⁰⁷ Arab mothers are viewed very differently from Jewish mothers within Israel),⁵⁰⁸ motherhood is a source of status, identity and value for women which binds them to the status quo. However, adherence to the principles of righteous motherhood, which

⁵⁰⁴ Wendy Zierler, ‘Chariot(ess) of Fire: Yokheved Bat-Miriam's Female Personifications of Erets Israel’, *Prooftexts* 20:2, 2000, p. 114.

⁵⁰⁵ Hanna Herzog, ‘From Gender to Genders: Feminists Read Women's Locations in Israeli Society’, *Israel Studies Forum* 20:2, 2005, p. 76.

⁵⁰⁶ Rickie Solinger, ‘Race and “Value”: Black and White Illegitimate Babies, in the U.S.A., 1945-1965’, *Gender and History* 4:3, 1992, pp. 343-363.

⁵⁰⁷ Val Gillies, *Marginalised Mothers: Exploring Working Class Experiences of Parenting*, London: Routledge, 2006.

⁵⁰⁸ Nitza Berkowitz, ‘Motherhood as a National Mission: The Construction of Womanhood in the Legal Discourse in Israel’, *Women's Studies International Forum* 20:5, 1997, pp. 605-619.

advocates for a total sublimation of the ego and identity of the self in aid of that of the child, creates and enforces the dominated position of women on the hierarchy of domination.

Similarly, in the 'mother land' mode which became the dominant overt way of relating to nature for the Israeli state, the land's status as the mother for the Jewish people and the mother of their future offspring was the means by which she escaped the curse of the barren wilderness, by which she was no longer damsel in distress, but redeemed woman. The 'mother land' mode, then, both elevates nature to a position of respect and defines the terms under which it is useful and valuable, but also cements man as both the definer of her role and value and shaper of her means of redemption. It thus puts nature and land in a subordinate position to the needs of man, 'naturally' selfless and nurturing of man ahead of its own innate self-interest.

Of course, these associations are reinforced by the conflation between the feminine and nature. Where nature is the divine feminine, commanding respect and adoration due to her fertility, her nurturing of the Jew and her support of his work, the way by which woman can identify with the nation and define themselves as good citizens is through mimicking this model of the redeemed feminine. Similarly, the emphasis upon birth in Israel, which is in part a result of geopolitical concerns, including the need to provide 'facts on the ground' to skew the demographic make-up of an area in their favour, creates a situation in which motherhood remains the governing shaper of a woman's identity and place in society, and therefore reinforces the emphasis on planting the land (again reinforcing the connection between trees, children and soldiers), and on 'making her bloom' in ways which are not just aesthetically appealing or ecologically sustainable, but *productive* for the Israeli people, and *reflective* of their identity and vision for the future.

While the Zionist revolution was an attempt to render the 'mother land' the dominant mode of viewing the land, this configuration is supported by the many biblical and diasporic writings that relate to the Land of Israel as a nurturing mother who provides them with a restful, peaceful, plentiful place in which to fulfil their potential – whether that be via fulfilling the commandments of God, expanding the prestige and influence of the nation, or developing a stable Jewish masculine identity. Images of her hills as breasts are a particularly common trope, feeding the masculine Jewish artist with the nurturing milk of life, of stable identity and a sense of place and belonging which allows him to rise up and create. In this way, nature and the feminine are involved in the process of creation, in building up new structure, rather than just repeating organic structure, but only by proxy, by being the support network, the inspiring muse, or the providing raw materials out of which the Jewish man can construct his ideal world.

Wendy Zierler, in her discussion of the gendered nature of the Israeli poetic canon,⁵⁰⁹ reads into Avraham Shlonsky's poetry, for example, noting that his use of imagery evoking the life-giving power of feminine fertility – “behold your milk will flow / and my bones will drink the nectar of Genesis”⁵¹⁰ – constitutes a demand for service, for the appropriate fulfilment of her role as dominated side of the pair, while in other works, nature is not only ordered to serve, but her very place as nurturing, fertile creator is usurped by the poetic speaker who instead demands his creative mission be recognised as the central creative force driving the national spirit:

Behold here, my udders have also filled with milk, / The udders of man / And my flesh – an overflowing breast – rising / from the land.⁵¹¹

Here, Shlonsky sets himself up as rival to the land as a creative force. His words, however, serve less to give respect to nature and the feminine as a force of creativity, and more to draw a link between feminine reproduction and masculine production which only emphasises the difference between the two. Shlonsky considers feminine nature merely a source of sustenance for his creative will, and it is only through his co-opting of that power that he can transform it into something more transcendental. That is, his power lies in his ability to channel the lowest form of creation and build out of it the highest form, masculine art.

On a similar note, as we have already seen, Zionists tended to favour technologically enhanced nature over nature in its 'organic' form. There was a sense in which the natural world only had value when looked at through the prism of the effect it could have on man. Women and nature are associated with the body, the physical basis of life, the fundamentals, while man, associated with the mind, builds upon the support and resources the feminine and the natural provide in order to transcend them. As Susan Stanford Friedman shows, this mind-body dualism paints the feminine as passive incubators or vessels through which male potential is realised.⁵¹² It, once again, preserves the status quo in which masculine active domination is contrasted to feminine passive/supportive dominatedness, maintaining the positions of each via a call to natural order.

However, this sense of the feminine as honoured and honourable by the process of being mastered by man and bearing the fruits of his mastery has come under the lens of writers who challenge the apparent positivity of the 'mother land' mode of looking at nature/woman. Particularly with the spread of feminist thought and with the rising awareness of ecological issues which counter the

⁵⁰⁹ Zierler, 2000, p. 112-3.

⁵¹⁰ Avraham Shlonsky, 'Adama' in *Ktavim*, Vol. 2, Merhavia: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1954a, p. 27.

⁵¹¹ Avraham Shlonsky, 'Yizre'el' in *Ktavim*, Vol.2, Merhavia: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1954a, p. 37.

⁵¹² Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse', *Feminist Studies* 13:1, 1987, pp. 49-82.

prevalent Zionist concept of man interfering in the natural world being (by default) for good, the questioning of the foundations upon which the sabra relationship with the nature is built has led to a rise in the dystopic novel as a creative genre.

Orly Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City* (1992)⁵¹³ is perhaps the quintessential novel about Israeli motherhood, and one which has already been well-discussed. However, it also quite clearly reflects upon not only the mother-child relationship but the way in which this is bounded and distorted by the primacy and paradox of the mother-land relationship. The novel:

takes on the sacrosanct values of woman as mother and of nationality as rooted in the land and proceeds to subject them to grotesque inflation. The effect is a comic demystification of fictions of corporate identity that sustain ideologies of gender and nation.⁵¹⁴

Most famously and dramatically, the protagonist carves a map of Israel onto the body of her own son in an exaggerated parody of the Zionist drive to create a symbiotic connection between child and land. Such a grotesque physicalisation of this pressure upon Israeli mothers to shape their children into 'new Jews' at one with their land, while also raising them to willingly devote their lives to and potentially die for their country, demonstrates the immense suffering and sacrifice of selfhood that the strict imposition of the Logic of Domination places on all parties. The carving echoes a holocaust tattoo, reducing the child to a number, a thing, a body.

The novel also touches directly on ecological issues through the figure of Gordon. He is a parody of A. D. Gordon, the Israeli ideologue who preached an extreme form of unity with the land, a religion of nature in which man and nature merge and nurture each other, working together for a common goal. Some have even claimed that his ideas can be read as ecofeminist.⁵¹⁵ However, Gordon in *Dolly City* is a pathetic character who lives in an alternate reality, wandering around the urban horror-scape and injecting chlorophyll into his veins in order to become one with the plant life. Notably, Gordon is one of the few characters who take Dolly's hypochondriac concerns for her child's health seriously, recommending chlorophyll as the cure for all sickness. His concern for nature, the novel seems to imply, is a symptom of the same restless paranoia as Dolly's fear of sickness: the desire for a stable centre, a 'mother' from which to derive identity and meaning. Castel-Bloom thus points to the failure of the Zionist dream of 'becoming a nation like all others' via identification with the 'mother land', failure which derives from their inability to stop searching.

⁵¹³ Orly Castel-Bloom, *Dolly City*, Dalya Bilu (trans), London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997 [1992].

⁵¹⁴ Anne Golomb Hoffman, 'Bodies and Borders: The Politics of Gender in Contemporary Israeli Fiction' in Alan Mintz (ed) *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*, London: Brandeis University Press, 1997, p. 62.

⁵¹⁵ Enat Ranon, *Chayim Chadashim: Dat, Imahut ve-Ahava Aliyona be-Haguto shel Aharon David Gordon*, Jerusalem: Carmel, 2007.

Dolly herself is alone and seems to have no parents, while her son is a found child that she has adopted. Lack of 'rootedness' in the land to replace this innate 'mother/child' bond is thematised in the consistent breakdown of connections, the process of cause and effect, and the stability of time and place. There is a fundamental disconnect both between the mother figure, Dolly, and her son, and between the two of them and their surroundings, which are depicted as hostile, capricious and nightmarish. While her son does exhibit a connection of sorts to the land, the map on his back shifting to match the 1967 borders, it is a traumatic connection forged out of a traumatic, deranged form of motherhood. As such, *Dolly City* deconstructs the prevalent Zionist tropes of 'the land-as-mother' and 'motherhood as sacrifice', demonstrating the overwhelming pressure that this places on all parties, and the process by which it corrupts the very relationships which it holds dear.

Blending together Yizhar and Castel-Bloom's criticism of the inevitable capitalist dismantling of the Zionist dream, preying on these tensions inherent in the movement from the start, and the ecological concerns of the contemporary green movement, is Assaf Gavron's (1968-) dystopic novel *Hydromania* (2008).⁵¹⁶ Gavron is a successful Tel Aviv-based novelist who has previously worked as a journalist and in the hi-tech industry. Like in *Human Parts*, *Hydromania's* imaginary Israel is besieged both by extreme weather and security concerns. Military push-back from the Palestinians has caused Israeli refugees to flee to the few pockets of land (and floating rafts) still under Israeli control, and a global ecological crisis has caused a shortage of water which leaves the inhabitants entirely dependent on water companies and forbidden from harvesting their own. Against this bleak backdrop, the protagonist manages a communal village project to build a self-sufficient water source, under intense opposition from these corporate forces. Again, natural disaster and extreme weather events are used as a metaphor for the current Israeli experience of disconnect from the 'mother land' and a mentality of restless besiegement, projected into the near future. Once again, too, Palestinian presence in the Land of Israel is linked to barrenness, but it is not the Palestinians who are the real enemies here, but the globalist water companies who terrorise the population, keeping millions in a state of perpetual poverty and thirst. Despite this apparent foregrounding of the ecological over the Palestinian issue, however, Hannah Boast points out that water security is not just a hypothetical problem but one with modern-day relevance to Palestinians living in territories such as Gaza, whose water supply is controlled by Israel.⁵¹⁷ She convincingly argues that the lack of attention to this point by Israeli critics is typical of their failure to see the Arab population through anything but the Israeli gaze. Nonetheless, Gavron presents the conflict in *Hydromania* as

⁵¹⁶ Assaf Gavron, *Hydromania*, Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 2008.

⁵¹⁷ Hannah Boast, 'The Water Wars Novel', *Humanities* 9:3, 2020, p. 82.

primarily driven by competition for natural resources rather than an ideological one over who has greater right to a relationship with the symbolic 'mother land'.

Gavron's downtrodden female protagonist, it may be argued, links the uprising of the female and the ecological against control by the male and the totalising power systems of global capitalism, as well as the Israeli state. Heavily pregnant by her vanished husband, Maya brings together a whole village in the spirit of cooperation and small-scale local resistance, in much the style of the local social justice projects promoted by political ecofeminists. In taking control of the technological invention left to her by her husband, she develops and brings it to life, not just repeating his work, but expanding it into a greater, more cooperative vision. Her work can be read as an attempt to harness the Zionist vision for an equal, socialist society connected to nature in a way which is true to the actual content of the myth rather than as a means of consolidating unequal power structures. The project aims not to overthrow the corporations to become a major capitalist enterprise of their own, but rather to offer a quiet alternative, away from their monopolising power.

In the novel, the power of motherhood is linked to the power of building, rather than being passive and displaced from the development narrative. Maya's young child is a symbol of hope for the future, just as in the Zionist narrative, but rather than motherhood being disconnected from the woman and projected onto the land, as in the case of Elik 'born of the sea', it is the father who is absent, and the entire village that collectively takes on a parenting role. Maya's engineering project, far from a distraction from her true calling of being a mother, is linked to her growing stomach not oppositionally but complementarily, with her (traditionally feminine) *reproduction* of future generations and (traditionally masculine) *production* of social projects and community leadership reinforcing the value and success of one another. In other words, the reservoir project does not pay-lip service gender equality while simultaneously marginalising women as mothers first, citizen-subjects later, but is genuinely female-led. It is not only a way for Maya to escape the brutal oppression of the water companies, but also her husband's cruel side-lining of her and dogmatic, impractical idealism. Concurrently, nature is not invested with feminine symbolism. It is neither the mirror of the Self nor Other, but simply is, with all the challenges and the promise that that particular set of ecological circumstances entails.

All this notwithstanding, the novel ends on a disheartening note, with Maya eventually selling the project to the unstoppable corporations in exchange for a future for herself and her child. The ever-consolidating structure of power systems is shown to be self-perpetuating and resistant to attack. Ultimately, the novel calls for a replacement of the local preoccupation with the 'mother land' – a primarily ideological relationship with the land – in favour of a more joined together, compassionate

response to global capitalism and ecological fragility, which attempts to engage with the environment itself rather than nature/land as a symbol projected by hegemonic forces of power.

Roi Bet Levi's (1976-) *Imagine a Mountain (Harim Ani Ro'eh, 2014)*⁵¹⁸ also links consumerism and environmental degradation. Bet Levi is a former journalist and current head of Content and Media for the Israel Society of Ecology and Environmental Studies. His imagined Israel is on the brink of environmental and social collapse. Juxtaposed alongside this vision of ecological ruin caused by decades of pollution and over-consumption of natural resources, is a refutation of the Zionist recovery narrative via the story of the narrator's father's exploits prior to emigration to Israel. These disrupt the directionality of the Zionist discourse of an intractable love for and bond with the mother land, simply by repeating it in a new place: the Falklands. Delaying his actual emigration to Israel, the narrator's father instead carries out a pioneering fantasy in the islands from which he imagines 'the New Israel', a new start away from the corrupted man/land relationship of the past: "Here, in our new country, truth is more important than myth, and the future is more essential than the past."⁵¹⁹ By evoking the pioneers' love for the land and obsession with shaping a new future for the coming generation of 'new Hebrews', Bet Levi points out the direct contradiction between their words and the current hegemony's mythologizing of the pioneer past and obsession with evoking it. Far from a Zionist recovery narrative in which the present is a redeemed version of the corrupted past, it is the pioneering past which is looked back upon as a golden age of 'oneness with the land', while the Israeli future portends greater disconnect between man and land than ever.

The novel's dystopic narrative subverts the Zionist narrative of 'making the desert bloom', directly alluding to the ecological disaster that this apparent desire to care for and honour nature has caused. The dry, arid landscape that greets the protagonist's family when they arrive in Israel in the 1980s stands in stark contrast to the myths of 'draining the swamps' that they have been told is the job of any pioneer. Indeed, they find it hard to imagine that a swamp could ever have existed in such a place. This both references the ecological disaster of the swamp drainage policy and, most importantly, serves to sever the symbolic connection between the desert and the swamp: the barren wilderness is not read, in this case, as the non-presence of the Zionist Jew in the landscape, but as actual dryness and lack of ecological diversity, which, ironically, the policy of 'making the desert bloom' has caused rather than solved. The current ecological crisis, then, is for Bet Levi a result of the imposition of Zionist values on a land which did not – and never had or would – match the image they overlayed onto it. The ideology of closeness to and respect for the 'mother land', then, was

⁵¹⁸ Roi Bet Levi, *Harim Ani Ro'eh*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2014.

⁵¹⁹ Bet Levi, 2014, p. 394.

precisely that which led to their current alienation from it; far from seeing the land as a nurturing mother, the backdrop of the novel is deep social, economic and environmental disaffection.

These dystopic novels present the 'mother land' mode as a front for oppression. The land is not truly honoured, and the people are not truly comfortable in the space which they have transformed into a permanent home, but rather still restlessly seeking something that lies beyond, some form of authentic connection. Instead, the Zionist vision of 'mother land' is overlaid onto the complex reality of natural and human interaction in Israel, beating it into the shape which best fits the needs of the Zionist hegemony, but thereby suppressing or destroying elements of that which it claims to value above all.

4.7. The 'Mother Land' in *The Blue Mountain*

In *The Blue Mountain*, the concept of native children deeply connected to the 'mother land' is portrayed by imagery which downplays their biological parenthood in favour of symbols of natural fertility straight from the soil. Avraham is referred to as "the first fruit of the village", and the old school-teacher, Pinness (whose name resembles the Latin name of the pine tree that so iconically plants the Jew in the land), consistently refers to his pupils as 'saplings'. Conversely, Baruch's pioneering grandfather pampers and attends to his fruit trees themselves as if they were his offspring, thus blurring the line between the natural and human worlds.

The idea of a synergy between children and trees has an extensive history in the Zionist discourse, being heavily used by the JNF and later the State of Israel.⁵²⁰ Ceremonies in which children planted saplings representative of themselves conformed to and propagated the myth of an empty land being claimed and made to prosper, and were a very visual symbol of making roots in the new land.⁵²¹ What is more, saplings symbolised the 'old-new-land' of the Yishuv, being both young and tender, but also with the promise of becoming strong, mighty, and enduring over centuries.

However, as we have seen, the great afforestation project upon which this symbolism rested in the Zionist 'religion' was based not on a real ecological crisis but on a foreign aesthetically-based conception of 'good' nature, imposed from without by the European mentality of the pioneers.

⁵²⁰ See for example Zerubavel 1996; Carol Bardenstein, 'Threads of Memory and Discourses of Rootedness: Of Trees, Oranges and the Prickly-Pear Cactus in Israel/Palestine', *Edebiyat* 8, 1998, pp. 1-36; Long 2009.

⁵²¹ Tsili Doleve-Gandelman, 'The Symbolic Inscription of Zionist Ideology in the Space of Eretz Yisrael: Why the Native Israeli is Called Tsabar' in Harvey E. Goldberg (ed), *Judaism Viewed from Within and from Without*, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 260.

There is a central irony then, in the identification of the first 'native' Hebrew children, born on the soil of their homeland, and JNF forests, themselves alien impositions on the landscape. The Aleppo pines which made up the vast majority of the JNF planting rituals were falsely believed to be a common biblical species, but later found to have been rare throughout the region's history⁵²² and the spread of monoculture forests of these trees resulted in a great deal of habitat loss for indigenous plants and animals.⁵²³

Nonetheless, we must note, this tendency to blur lines between the human and natural worlds in the 'mother land' mode is superficially at odds with the Logic of Domination. Not only are the lines deliberately blurred by the Zionist mouthpieces of the novel – between human and nature, mind and body, subject and object – but the poles of domination are reversed, with nature being awarded the higher position. However, though the Zionist ideology presented in the novel bears some external trappings of A.D. Gordon's Labour Zionist 'religion of nature', it does not come close to dismantling the dichotomous dualisms, but rather only temporarily blurs the lines where it suits its discourse of nativeness, while returning again to the traditional hierarchies whenever the villagers' position of dominance is under threat, such as under the presence of the 'wild', unfettered nature of the swamp or the hyena.

Again, the temporary shifting of these poles is a function of the Zionist hegemony's unique image of themselves. Though self-consciously alien to the landscape and often alienated by it, they also considered themselves fundamentally native to it. As such, the pioneers' own identity constantly shifted between the poles of West/East, civilised (of abstract cultural systems)/primitive (of the land), and coloniser/colonised.

In *The Blue Mountain*, this fundamental failure to break away from the Logic of Domination is explored through an examination of some of the 'friendly' animals at work in the village. Unlike the 'foe' animals, which are mostly wild creatures who transgress the boundary between the village and its environment, the 'friend' animals are often domesticated creatures which exhibit social behaviour and produce something of value to humans which they are willing to sacrifice to them: the mule, the cow, and the bee. These populate the narrative space of the village, literally turning it into a land of milk and honey.

⁵²² Nili Lipshchitz and Gideon Biger, 'Past Distribution of Aleppo Pine (*Pinus Halepensis*) in the Mountains of Israel (Palestine)', *Holocene* 11:4, 2001, pp. 427-436.

⁵²³ T. Lehman and A. Perevolotsky, 'Small Mammals in the Conifer Plantations and Native Environment in Southern Mt. Carmel, Israel', *Mammalia* 56, 1992, pp. 575-585; Yoram Yom-Tov, 'Human Impact on Wildlife in Israeli Since the Nineteenth Century' in Daniel E Orenstein., Char Miller and Alon Tal (eds), *Between Ruin and Restoration: An Environmental History of Israel*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013, p. 65-6.

Throughout the novel, these creatures are presented as close to their human counterparts, with the lines blurred between them. Tsirkin's bees, for example, are emotionally sympathetic to his moods, and he himself develops a beelike manner and behaviour patterns. Similarly, the character of Zeitser, apparently just another pioneer, is only revealed to be a mule in the final third of the book. The pioneers deliberately blur the lines between man and animal in a kind of radical socialist structure which thus on one level suggests the collapse of the human/nature dichotomy in favour of one where the aims of both are in harmony and the nature of each is given full expression.

However, this is clearly shown to be a shallow change. The narrative conscripts nature to the service of the Zionist ideology rather than truly revealing an equal relationship. The animals are not seen on their own terms, but in fact dubbed with human voices. Let us take Zeitser as an example. The mule is in many ways an obvious choice for a Zionist idol in the animal kingdom. They are hard-working, tough, stoic and stubborn in their convictions. For example, a mule will disobey orders from his master when he believes there is danger, and when faced with a threat will often stand firm in the face of it rather than panic or retreat.⁵²⁴ Indeed, in many ways, it is Zeitser who of all the villagers most loyally adheres to the Zionist pioneering ethic. However, the revelation that he is in fact a mule suddenly pulls the rug from under the reader, as they are joltingly forced to reassess their prior judgements. All that which Zeitser does which the reader previously associated with extreme pioneering self-sacrifice and closeness with the land – living in the cowshed, being a strict vegetarian, ploughing in a ruler-straight line, etc. – is in fact perfectly within the normal behaviour for a mule. Thus, his Zionist credentials are called into question, and we in fact come to see him as a victim rather than adherent, as overdubbed with a pioneering narrative.

In such a way, the novel shows that the flattening of the human-nature poles in the Zionist narrative is in fact entirely performed on the surface level. Rather than blurring the two into one, the natural (at least that part of it that can be reconciled with Zionist ideals, that is benign or helpful to the project) is in fact conscripted to the human, and subordinated to it. This forced, one-sided union is shown to be destructive to both, as it is both oppressive to the humans left out of the new 'upper pole' – the urban, the intellectual rather than manually inclined, the non-Jewish – and to the natural, which is denied a voice of its own. As such, nature becomes a double victim, suppressed by the very dominant elements which claim to include it, and resented by the other oppressed groups as part of the structure of domination. Thus Levin, the storekeeper who is looked down upon by the other villagers for not working the land, despite being just as hard working and self-sacrificing as they,

⁵²⁴ Gail Damerow and Alina Rice, *Draft Horses and Mules: Harnessing Equine Power for Farm and Show*, North Adams, MA: Versa Press, 2008, p. 83.

eventually releases his festering resentment of the system of domination by attacking its weakest part, nature. He viciously assaults Zeitser, blinding him in one eye. Here too, perhaps, we can find echoes of the growing practice of Arab citizens protesting Israeli rule by burning forests.⁵²⁵

Likewise, the shallowness of the exaltation of 'Mother Nature' as an equal is demonstrated by the figure of Hagit, the prize dairy cow. She is killed and stuffed by Meshulam immediately that he gets his hands on her, despite the committee offering to give her a 'pension' for her old age, the symbol and posterity more important than her actual life. This echoes the real-life discourse of Zionist figures, who often elevated the importance of the narrative above the actual environmental reality. For example, the Minister for Agriculture responsible for the decision to drain the Hula swamp in 1958, soon recognised as an ecological catastrophe responsible for the endangering or extinction of numerous rare species, justified the project not by relation to the present environmental reality, but to that of the past:

I ... rule that the drying up of the Hula should be planned. The reason is that before the establishment of the State, if the patient had been in our hands, we would have eliminated the fever and done great.⁵²⁶

In other words, the importance of continuing the narrative of 'making the desert bloom' (*hafrahat hashemama*) exceeded relation to the contemporary environmental reality. The fact that the danger of malaria that made swamps so dangerous in the past to the survival of the movement had already been eradicated was beside the point, "the facts have changed, but not the story."⁵²⁷

The drafting of this cow into the pioneering narrative thus involved a complete negation of her as a creature. The comic grotesqueness of her body, "her famed udders dripping formaldehyde"⁵²⁸ undoes the symbol by detaching it from all that it stands for – rather than milk, a source of life, a symbol of prosperity and productivity, the cow now produces only poison. Uri, the irreverent 'voice of reason' in the novel, claims that the preservation of the cow was in fact nothing to do with Meshulam's historical work, but because "Hagit's udders reminded him of his mother",⁵²⁹ absent throughout much of his life due to her work as a functionary in the Movement. The symbolic replacement of the figure of the mother with that of 'mother nature' is thus rendered tragic and

⁵²⁵ Braverman, 2009, p. 325.

⁵²⁶ Pinhas Lavon, quoted in Edna Gorney, *Bein Nitsul Le-Chatsala: Te'oria Ecofeministit Shel Yachasei Teva, Tarbut Ve-Chevra Be-Yisra'el*, Haifa: Pardes, 2011, p. 86.

⁵²⁷ Gorney, 2011, p. 87.

⁵²⁸ Shalev, 2004, p.19.

⁵²⁹ Shalev, 2004, p.19.

illusory, resulting in a disconnect with both rather than some sort of mythical union with the environment.

The novel ultimately takes an ambivalent position, reiterating the Zionist myth of return to the 'mother land' even as it pokes holes in its grandiose pomposity. Shalev participates in the process of narrative building, looking back with some fondness and nostalgia on the 'lost' pioneering period in a way which partially reinforces its value as a model on which to build one's identity:

A heroic past, great men, glory ... this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more — these are the essential conditions for being a people.⁵³⁰

However, Shalev does so with a great awareness of his own subjectivity and of both the flaws and inconsistencies in the myth building process and the issues involved in projecting it into the future. His characters both identify deeply with and are disconnected from the 'mother land'; they both work together to create a community and constantly tear each other down with petty squabbles. Therefore, he walks the line between deconstruction and construction, drawing attention to the often inflated, oppressive and contradictory process of narrative building without denying the necessity of narrative or possibility of relying upon narrative for identity.

⁵³⁰ Renan 1994, p. 19.

Conclusion

“I closed my eyes, raised my hands, and felt Jupiter’s gravity pull at my fingernails and lengthen them.”⁵³¹

Feminist scholars have shown women to be “more frequently the subjected territory across which the boundaries of nationhood were marked than active participants in the construction of nations.”⁵³² In this thesis, I have demonstrated the Zionist use of *nature-as-woman* in order to consolidate their nation-building project. In this configuration, nature was both an object of intense focus and, paradoxically, ignored. That is to say, nature for and of itself was simply not seen outside of its co-option to the symbolic fabric of the Zionist project. This may seem ironic given the obsessive cries of ‘land!’ which accompanied the early pioneers, the almost pantheistic descriptive attention afforded to nature in the work of S. Yizhar, and the villagers’ total absorption in the lives of bees and fruit trees in *The Blue Mountain*. Yet I argue that it was this very obsession with forging a relationship with nature itself which blinded the Zionist project to nature, the weight of the concept in the Zionist symbolic framework obscuring its real-world existence outside of the narrative.

Viewing nature and land as feminine is not something unique to Israel but characterises western approaches to nature in general, an association which often *intensifies* when nation-building is underway.⁵³³ In other words, it is in opposition to masculine *nation* that feminine *nature* achieves greatest valence. Nature is thus always Other, always a mirror against which the nation projects its imagined Self. Its femininity achieves this goal due to the equation of woman with the ‘lesser’ pole of the Logic of Domination, the ‘ground’ out of which more complex, transcendent and abstract entities such as man and nation can be built. As we have seen, though nature is already conceptualised in such terms - as the ‘ground’ out of which the human can rise and create its morally superior world – even outside of its association with the feminine, its connection with the feminine is neither accidental nor trivial, but part of the interconnected web of associations that make up the Logic of Domination, and reinforce the dominated status of one another by their ‘natural’ connection to one another. In this configuration, the upping of the feminine personification of

⁵³¹ Dror Burstein, *Netanya*, Todd Hasak-Lowy (trans), London: Dalkey, 2013 [2010], p. 10.

⁵³² Catherine Hall et al, ‘Introduction: Special Issue on Gender, Nationalisms and National Identities’, *Gender and History* 5, 1993, p. 162.

⁵³³ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers 1630-1860*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

nature, as we find in the Zionist case, intensifies this process by drawing focus on a powerful interconnection – the moral inferiority of women and the moral inferiority of nature – allowing them to conflate and consolidate meanings. Woman is a site of desire, of longing, a muse towards which to turn, for which to fight, and which to overcome the defences of and conquer. Imagining land as woman, then, allows the masculine national subject to easily focus his desire and longing for land, or rather for projected nationhood, in a familiar figure of desire, and thus shape and intensify that very desire, and channel it towards the national target.

Where the Zionist case did differ from other nation-building processes was in its unique navigation between the typical settler colonialist establishment of a ‘new world’, which included establishing a relationship with a new kind of nature, and the Zionist conception of return to a pre-existing and distance-deleting relationship with the *old* nature. This said, it may be argued that other settler colonialisms often also contain a hint of this tension in the sense that they relate to the new environment as a chance to build a utopia and hence to ‘return to Eden’ (though this idea generally bears more in common with the Zionist recovery narrative than the ‘mother land’ narrative).

In this thesis I have uncovered three strands in the process of feminising nature in the Zionist nation-building project, each of which implies a different shaping of the moral trajectory of the man/nature relationship: the ‘barren wilderness’ mode, which suggests a Fall narrative (from moral high to moral low), the ‘lover/bride’ mode, which suggests a Recovery narrative (from moral low to moral high), and the ‘mother land’ mode, which suggests a cyclic relationship which, though it may wax and wane in terms of how it is expressed, is always at a steady moral high. Though these modes may appear to be contradictory, they were not seen as such by the Zionist pioneers, but rather as complementary, the superficial fall (exile) and recovery (return) narratives being merely a cover for the ‘true’ relationship with the land which was an eternally native, mothering one. Where the relationship with the land appeared negative, then, (such as when they encountered its aridness and perceived barrenness as morally bad, or when it appeared to rail against them and reject their imposition of their own ideals of how it should be onto it) this did not belie the legitimacy of their relationship with the land nor the positive valence of the land, but rather was a disguise, a curse, a perversion of the true relationship which was also in itself a blessing, allowing them to prove their devotion to the land through conquest. Similarly, the conquest of the land in the ‘lover/bride’ mode, though it appeared to imply newness, or a change in the nature of the relationship from negative to positive, did not constitute any actual change but merely uncovered what was already there, raising this dormant, suppressed connection to the surface and thus breaking the curse. In the hegemonic Zionist conception, then, it was possible for the nation to exist at once in both a continuous, stable ‘mother land’ state and in a flux state, oscillating between ‘lover/bride’ and ‘barren wilderness’. The

Zionist imagined landscape may be considered utopic, in that 'nature' within it is a 'placeless place' that exists primarily conceptually, despite being at the very same time physically present in the real world, out of reach from the Zionist narrative. In other words, it is both real and unreal, both seen and unseen.

However, despite this apparent synergy between the three Zionist strands of viewing nature, the success of the Zionist project in establishing a nation in the Land of Israel created a tension between the vision as imagined and the reality of that vision achieved. In simultaneously seeing themselves as natives in the land but also as conquerors in the process of mastering her, the Zionist reading of nature involved an unbridgeable gap by which they were always trying to get to a place that they had already arrived at. Success at reaching the stable timelessness of the 'mother land' mode was thus corrupted by memorialising how they got there: by a recovery and redemption mode which transformed from one state to another, and thus testified against the claim of a timeless and stable moral connection.

The three-stranded hegemonic Zionist reading of nature was heavily bound in the formation of the nation and thus ripe for deconstruction as the post-Zionist literary era came to prominence. This was performed with various degrees of explicitness from a variety of different perspectives, including the feminist (Amalia Kahana-Carmon, Ruth Almog, Shulamith Hareven), the post-modernist (Orly Castel-Bloom), the post-colonial (Alon Hilu), and the ecological (Assaf Gavron, Roi Bet-Levi, Hagai Dagan). However, the theme of nature as a means of critically engaging with the Zionist project is still not as prevalent as other problematised 'isms of domination' such as race, gender, and ethnicity, despite the prominence of the 'return to nature'/'love of the land' narrative in constructing Israeliness. Nature, it seems, holds such conceptual power as a 'given', apolitical entity that the discourse that surrounds it is shrouded in objectivity. The domination of the natural by the human, and its equation with the feminine, appear 'natural' enough that these conceptual ties perpetuated by the hegemony often continue to hold even when the Zionist project is questioned.

As we have seen, Meir Shalev's *The Blue Mountain* is somewhat unusual in that it explicitly thematises the Zionist relationship with nature. Shalev embeds his protagonist in the world of pioneering stories, having him spout typical pioneer 'love for the land' tropes while establishing a blend of fond closeness and ironic distance which undercuts their meaning. Baruch is an unreliable narrator, naïve, overly literal and obsessive. He is stuck in the past, in the narratives he has been raised on, and fails to fully exist in the present or to envision a future for himself. Yet his very fixation on the pioneering Zionist narrative is a subversion of its goal – for all his knowledge of and affection for the minutiae of local animal and plant life, Baruch is far from 'naturalised' in that his existence

indicates no shining future for the Jewish people. Instead, his land obsession has him plant dead pioneers in his farm-turned-cemetery, reversing the Zionist recovery narrative: Rather than the Jewish relationship with the land redeeming both parties and offering them identity, purpose and future, it cloaks it instead in death, ignoring the future in favour of looking back towards the mythical golden past. Clear parallels can be made to the process by which the Zionist narrative of the 'redemption' of nature simply succeeded in enclosing it in new chains. The very hyper-focus on land yokes the natural to the Zionist discourse so strongly that it becomes encased in a prison of Zionist signification and its value as distinct from that imposed from without is overwritten. Nature is thus seen only in as much as it mirrors the Self. Despite the influence of post-Zionist thought, this 'dominated' reading of nature – which sees it as in need of (Jewish) human protection but also control – remains a prominent undercurrent which shapes the discourse on nature in Israel.

With this tension laid out, then, it begs the question of what can be done to disentangle nature from its dominated and overlaid state in Hebrew literature. Is there a way to break it out of the chains the Zionists have imposed on it, to see beyond the mirror projection of the nation it has been transformed into to something more nuanced, more balanced, less subjugating? Is it possible to disentangle the natural 'other' from the human 'self' and still say something about nature at all?

Of course, to write about anything is to impose our own layer of interpretation onto it, and in this sense everything is 'imagined'. However, nature is also composed of autonomous things that exist in reality and are not fully created nor encapsulated by our conception of them. The difficulty is complicated by the semi-inorganic state of nature, and the inability of even its living components to enter into a dialogue with humans about matters of self-identity, narrative and signification. When it comes to 'dominated' human subjects such as women or indigenes, the existence of an autonomous Self beyond what the dominator projects onto it is more easily conceptualised, and their perspectives can be integrated into our understanding simply by listening to their voices, whereas nature does not have a voice of its own, and hence the attempt to combat naturism (at least on a theoretical plane) must come unilaterally from the dominator itself.

Furthermore, even in cases where the Other does have a human voice, it is not necessarily clear what form a new theoretical framework might take. The very concept of dualism runs deep, and a reading of nature or woman free from the totalitarian logic of dualism is therefore difficult to imagine. Indeed, Freya Mathews argues that it is not possible to fully escape the pull of dualism without escaping theory completely, that theory is itself underpinned by the assumption of dualism:

The primary relationship of domination entrained by the act of theorizing is that of subject versus object: the subject is inherently set apart from and above everything that can become

an object of theorization. Since the theorizing subject is inevitably human, the conceptual binary at the core of dualism is that of human versus nature.⁵³⁴

This means that any attempt to tackle the oppressive Logic of Domination must come from within system, using the very tools by which the Logic of Domination propagates in order to dissect it and rebuild a new narrative. To tackle dualism, then, requires a constant process of checking, re-focusing, and de-centring.

When we speak of disentangling projections of the Self from nature, we certainly do not mean isolating the human from the natural entirely. In order to negate dualistic thinking it seems necessary instead to privilege the *complementariness* of the elements defined in an oppositional relationship by the Logic of Domination. What the understanding of nature in Israel does unusually well is recognise the presence of the human in the natural, and not to attempt to bracket one from the other. However, this is often brought about by subjugating the natural to the human, rather than by giving valence to both. The heavy political and symbolic weight of 'land' is a barrier to obtaining this level of respect for non-ideologically overlaid nature, although perhaps we can find a trace of it in Yizhar's approach-retreat relationship with the natural world.

A promising approach is taken in Dror Burstein's (1970-) innovative book *Netanya* (2010). Burstein is a novelist, poet and translator and holds a PhD in Hebrew Literature. In this genre defying novel-cum-memoir-cum-work of popular science, Burstein laments the parochial 'land' obsession of Hebrew literature, which keeps its view of nature bounded, mastered, contained:

On that hard bench I realized that in all of Hebrew literature there isn't so much as a single mention of the astonishing fact that the movement of the continents, what we today call plate tectonics, and the formation of the moon are apparently the result of the very same event ... And without plate tectonics, according to Ward and Brownlee, we wouldn't be alive today. But even this fact, the essentiality of plate tectonics, which regulates the temperature on Earth, Hebrew literature has kept hidden, like a stinky sock. Authors stare up at the moon or down at the Earth and write about kibbutz folk settling the land, with accordions and hoes and, of course, firearms in their hands. In Hebrew literature, land is always either solid ground or property, fenced off and registered with the proper office, it's not rock liquefying at a temperature close to that on the surface of the sun. Which is all well and good, yet no one writes about plate tectonics, or the Cambrian period, or trilobites. How strange, I said to myself as I lay on the bench, that in Hebrew literature, and this includes the literature of the

⁵³⁴ Freya Mathews, 'The Dilemma of Dualism' in Sherilyn MacGregor (ed), *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, p. 65.

Hebrew Enlightenment, there isn't even a single trilobite. What am I talking about, you couldn't even find a saber-toothed tiger or a dinosaur or a mammoth in Hebrew literature, not even in the great works of Brenner or Gnessin, and not because they didn't know of their existence, either.⁵³⁵

In its narrow focus on the imposition of mastery onto nature, then, the Hebrew literary canon fails to see the grand picture, that is, how the natural world extends far beyond the spatial context of the land of Israel and indeed that of humanity itself (who are but a small speck in geological time). Not only that, but a myriad of natural processes are essential for every little detail of life to persist:

How flimsy our existence is, how many conditions must exist and must continue to exist over the course of millions of years so that a single flower or a single pencil or a single book might exist... Our existence on this planet hangs by a thread, every tomato and every onion is such an enormous miracle you could collapse with awe in a vegetable market.⁵³⁶

Burstein's reminder of the interconnectedness and dynamic nature of the natural world shines a spotlight on the blinkered perspective of the Zionist subsumption of nature to its grand pioneering narrative of conquest: where a Zionist reading might marvel at how Jewish labour brought about every tomato at the market, revelling in the process of readying the land, planting and tending to seeds, watering and feeding and harvesting the produce and bringing it to market, quite possibly told with lofty language rich in imagery of fertility and sexual conquest, Burstein sets this narrative within the much wider context of the interconnectedness of life on earth itself. In this narrative view, one cannot be territorial, and cannot succumb to the power of nationalist rhetoric steeped in the Logic of Domination, since Zionist labour is such a tiny sub element in the cosmic chain of events that brought about the existence of each tomato that it is almost insignificant. In the epilogue to his English translation of the novel, Todd Hasak-Lowy claims that Burstein explicitly views this book as an intervention in Hebrew literature, decrying "how little Hebrew literature has had to say about the "big picture" (i.e., absolutely everything)"⁵³⁷, outside of the Zionist preoccupation with territorially-specific land and nation.

Burstein's emphasis on cosmic interconnectivity fits into a potential ecofeminist restructuring of the human-nature relationship based on the analogy of ecosystems, or a relational understanding of things rather than a dualistic one. By re-emphasising relational, co-operative ways of looking at

⁵³⁵ Dror Burstein, *Netanya*, Todd Hasak-Lowy (trans), London: Dalkey, 2013 [2010], pp. 7-8.

⁵³⁶ Burstein, 2013, p. 10.

⁵³⁷ Todd Hasak-Lowy, 'Translator's Afterword', in Burstein, Dror, *Netanya*, Todd Hasak-Lowy (trans), London: Dalkey, 2013, p. 217.

nature, the urge to impose top-down narratives which divide concepts into categories, leading to dualism and the privileging of some categories over others, is tempered by a constant re-focussing on the bigger picture, an awareness of the inability to talk about things without talking about other things, to exist without relying on and relating to other things.

Similarly, Freya Mathews demonstrates that the concept of a blue whale cannot be adequately described without talking about krill: to do so makes sense in a strictly spatial-temporal sense, but not in a relational sense, because the entire body of the blue whale is a reference to krill.⁵³⁸ That is to say, the blue whale could not have come into existence in the world nor continue to exist in the world without the existence of krill as a food source, and its body itself, with its many adaptations and specialisations, is a testament to this relationship. Similarly, reason or the mind are not independent and transcendent of nature and the body, but part of an ecosystem of elements which all function together to form a complex system (and nor can they be assumed to be uniquely human). Nature is not, then, merely object, or body, but related to – though not integrated to – the human Self. Burstein's micro- and the rest of Hebrew literature's macro- contextual level – the Zionist projects' conquest of the land, creation of the nation, and continuation within the complex geopolitical reality of the modern Middle East – is both significant, real, present, and minute, transient, partial. The individual tomato in the market expresses through its body *both* this story, its own individual micro-story, and another, more cosmic tale. Nature features the human and our stories within it and transcends them at once, it is part of us as we are part of it:

the net enveloping me is the net enveloping everyone. The ends of my net are connected to the nets of every human being and of every thing... just as the universe of each person is my universe as well, just as the sun is part of the solar system but by the very same measure is part of a galaxy and a cluster of galaxies and the universe. I was not at the center of these things, but they had exerted their pulls on me just as I certainly had exerted mine on them.⁵³⁹

This conception is very similar to the ideas established by the Deep Ecology movement, which sought to root out the anthropocentric biases in our worldview and replace them with one in which everything in nature is connected and morally equal.⁵⁴⁰ However, unlike the criticism levelled at this school of philosophy,⁵⁴¹ an ecofeminist approach does not seek to erase difference and collapse

⁵³⁸ Mathews, 2017, pp. 59-60.

⁵³⁹ Burstein, 2013, p. 66.

⁵⁴⁰ Arne Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary', *Inquiry* 16:1, 1973, pp. 95-100.

⁵⁴¹ Val Plumwood *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London: Routledge, 2002 [1993].

everything into Self, but consciously attempts to cultivate a sense of ecosystem in which each individual element is both Self and Other, both connected and distinct, related yet different. Of course, to zoom out of the localised, nationalised preoccupation with a specific narrative or set of narratives about the human-nature relationship is not necessarily to eliminate structural inequality. However, this approach disrupts the Logic of Domination by putting the Self not at the centre but at the periphery. Self is present in the Other and Other is present in the Self, but also, Other does not take its identity primarily from Self, but rather from a whole web of connections that Self is only one aspect of. The identity that Self projects onto Other, then, is not totally illegitimate – it is still possible and necessary to construct narratives about things, and to define selfhood partially through an observance of difference – but this imposition of meaning is not all-encompassing, consolidating, dualistic, but relational, dispersed, de-centred.

At the end of *The Blue Mountain*, an equilibrium between past and present, narrative construction and deconstruction, appears to be reached. In the pioneer cemetery, fruit trees and wheat grow tall among the graves, blending memorial and future relevance. On a distant hillside, as Baruch's young family members look on, blooming wildflowers spell out the name of his long dead mother, ploughed out decades ago by her spurned childhood sweetheart, Liberson. The message is one of hope, of the interconnectedness of narratives, the mutual transience and significance of life and relationships, and of new beginnings that are neither a violent break from nor a surrender to, but springing out of – a re-centring, re-integrating, re-imagining of – the past and the stories it tells.

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