

8-2018

Borders, Territories, and Ethics: Hebrew Literature in the Shadow of the Intifada

Adia Mendelson-Maoz

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/purduepress_previews



Part of the [Jewish Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mendelson-Maoz, Adia, "Borders, Territories, and Ethics: Hebrew Literature in the Shadow of the Intifada" (2018). *Purdue University Press Book Previews*. 12.

https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/purduepress_previews/12

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Borders, Territories, and Ethics

Shofar Supplements in Jewish Studies

Zev Garber, Editor

Los Angeles Valley College

Borders, Territories, and Ethics

Hebrew Literature in the Shadow of the Intifada

Adia Mendelson-Maoz

Purdue University Press
West Lafayette, Indiana

Copyright 2018 by Purdue University. All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.

Cataloging-in-Publication data is on file with the Library of Congress.

Paper ISBN: 978-1-557-53820-8
ePDF ISBN: 978-1-612-49535-4
ePUB ISBN: 978-1-612-49536-1

Front cover painting, *Mt. Canaan #2*, 1992, courtesy of artist David Reeb

Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix
Space, Borders, and Ethics	x
Overview	xix
<i>PART 1 In the Heart of Darkness</i>	<i>1</i>
CHAPTER 1 On a Hot Tin Roof	5
On Distancing	7
On the Roof	9
Intimacy—Down from the Roof	16
Animalism	21
Conclusion	24
CHAPTER 2 No Luck	27
Shooting and Crying	30
Moral Luck	33
Circumstantial Moral Luck	34
Constitutive Moral Luck	39
CHAPTER 3 The Third Eye	45
A Palestinian Legend	50
The State of Exception	57
From Stereotype to Grotesque	58
<i>The Smile of the Lamb</i> and Abjection	61
The Living Dead in <i>The Intifada Tales</i>	64

Human Organs in <i>Letters of the Sun, Letters of the Moon</i>	67
On Storytelling	72
<i>PART 2 Does Literature Matter?</i>	75
CHAPTER 4 A. B. Yehoshua and the Moderation on the Left at the Turn of the Millennium	79
Fathers, Sons, and the Myth of the <i>Akeda</i> in Yehoshua's Works	80
Two Kinds of Sacrifice	87
On Winds and Responsibility	94
The Larger Picture	96
CHAPTER 5 Orly Castel-Bloom between the Two Intifadas	101
Dolly's World	102
The Mother and the Map	103
Illness	111
From the Anatomy of the Body to the Anatomy of Death	112
From <i>Dolly City</i> to <i>Human Parts</i>	117
Castel-Bloom's Moral Compass	118
CHAPTER 6 Terrorism and the Face of the Dead Other	121
On Levinas and Otherness	122
The Encounter	124
The Face of the Other	128
The Responsibility to the Other Who Is Dead	133
A Call for a Different Ethics	140
CHAPTER 7 Dismantling Borders: A Female Perspective	145
The Rhizomatic Space	147
Nomadic Art	157
Deterritorialization and Femaleness	164
Epilogue	171
Notes	175
Bibliography	205

Acknowledgments

This book was written at the Open University of Israel, my academic home, and at Harvard University between 2015 and 2016, where I spent a one-year sabbatical. I am grateful to the Open University Research Authority for providing initial funding for this project (grant number 37056), and to my colleagues at the NELC Department at Harvard University.

This book was written with the assistance of several people. I would like to express my gratitude to Tom Kellner, who worked with me closely, throughout this project, with great diligence and intelligence that came across so clearly in her reading and editing, thoughts and ideas. I would like to thank Tamar Gerstenhaber for translating the literary excerpts from Hebrew to English while preserving the complexity of the Hebrew source, and to the book's English editor, Esther Singer, for her practical attitude and thoughtful comments. I would like to thank the reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

I thank my colleagues and friends at the Department of Literature, Language and Arts at the Open University of Israel for their support and friendship, and in particular Tammy Amiel-Houser and Mei-Tal Nadler for fruitful discussions during the last few years, and Tzahi Weiss and Galia Benziman for their advice. Finally, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my family, my parents and brothers, my partner and my children, for their encouragement, inspiration, and love.



Early versions of chapters 4, 6, and 7 appeared in the following publications: “The Bereaved Father and His Dead Son in the Works of A. B.

Yehoshua,” *Social Jewish Studies* 17.1 (Fall 2010): 116–40; “The Face of the Dead Other—A Levinasian Reading of Contemporary Israeli Novels by A. B. Yehoshua and Shifra Horn,” *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory* 46.3 (2016): 395–423; “Borders, Territory, and Sovereignty in the Works of Contemporary Israeli Women Writers,” *Women’s Studies* 63.6 (2014): 788–822. I thank all the publishers for their permission to reprint.

Introduction

The citizens of Israel have no clear concept of a border. Living this way means living in a home where all the walls are constantly moving and open to invasion. A person whose home has no solid walls finds it very difficult to know where the next home “begins.”

—DAVID GROSSMAN¹

I came from a place of Zionism, from a place of the realization of dreams, which is supposed to be full of meaning. A place with no emptiness. A place filled with myths, vocations, missions. But there is something utterly paradoxical here. Fifty years have passed, and this state still does not have any borders. They weren't marked. People don't know where the line is, where it is dangerous, and then we wonder why people walk in strange directions.

—ORLY CASTEL-BLOOM²

David Grossman, an iconic Israeli writer, outspoken peace activist, and bereaved father, describes the Israeli situation through the concepts of home and borders, while depicting the abnormality of both the Israeli state and the Israeli identity. Israel was founded as a home for the Jewish people; however, in the aftermath of several wars since the establishment of the state and its complex military and security circumstances, this home lacks stable borders. This lack of borders creates an intense and continuous sense of insecurity and fear on both sides of the presumed line. Borders are the subject of Orly Castel-Bloom's passage as well. In her sarcastic style, Castel-Bloom, one of the leading female authors in Israel, admits that she

was raised on the love of country and its ideology, but finds it difficult to pursue these ideals in a state where the borders are not defined.

Both Grossman and Castel-Bloom refer to borders to make more general observations on the “Israeli condition.” In their view, borders are not only geographic locations or points, but also a major factor in Israel’s cultural and political identity, and a source of malaise. In their works, as in others, the geographic abnormality of a state without stable borders is both a reality and a metaphor for confusion, contradiction, fear, and aggression. This state of affairs also deviates considerably from the humanist ideals that were the cornerstones for the establishment of Israel in 1948, in the wake of the Holocaust.

Space and borders are the main topics of this book, which focuses on contemporary Hebrew prose written in the shadow of the Occupation and the Intifadas from 1987 to 2007. It explores the relationship between ethics and space, and illustrates the symbolic role of borders, or the lack thereof, as a key leitmotif. Israeli literary representations of the Occupation and the two Intifadas raise immensely important moral questions that include, but are not limited to, militarism, humanism, national identity, the citizen-soldier duality, Zionist education, the acknowledgment of the Other, the nature of the State of Israel as a democracy, and the sovereignty of the subject. In these literary-ethical inquiries, space is a major player in its own right. The political situation immediately following the 1967 war, which resulted in redefinitions of Israel’s borders and made the Occupied Territories a liminal zone under martial law, was accompanied by a sense of great strength and pride. Today, however, this situation constitutes the core of what is perceived by many as the tragedy of contemporary Israeli society. My main argument is that in Israeli literature, this ambiguity in the concept of Israeli borders articulates the pathology of the Occupation, substantially as well as metaphorically, while creating a twilight zone that captures the inherent tension between the Zionist humanistic legacy and the heavy price of ruling over the Palestinian population. This introduction provides a background to what I consider to be the prime sources of Israeli abnormality and presents an overview of the main theoretical perspectives of space and ethics discussed in each chapter.

Space, Borders, and Ethics

National borders and identity are the foundations of the modern nation-state. Borders are generally considered part of the territorial building

blocks of the state, while constituting a national identity is viewed as a facet of nation-building. Adriana Kemp suggests differentiating between borders and identity in terms of hardware (border) and software (identity), and underscores the cultural and ideological importance of a border that exceeds its formal role of land.³

In the Israeli context, the land is both a state and a home.⁴ In the aftermath of the 1948 War of Independence, Israel applied the principle of territorial sovereignty to its land; it employed rhetorical and institutional mechanisms that generated commitment to guarding the borders and strengthening traditional bonds with biblical Israel after millennia of diaspora.⁵ Shaping a space as a national territory is clearly not solely a Zionist idea. National movements use sets of mechanisms to create commitment and belonging to specific areas, and to instill love and loyalty to a land. However, the case of Israel is different, since most of its citizens were not born there, but came from various countries, and they made Palestine-Israel their homeland while shaping the new territory in the spirit of their national inspirations.

The Six-Day War in 1967 introduced the new concept of the Green Line that divided the State of Israel from the Occupied Territories in the West Bank.⁶ This was the turning point that destabilized the equation between nation and territory. Prior to 1967 there seems to have been a consensus that Israeli space has already been defined and charted.⁷ Numerous researchers concur that there was no public debate on a change in the borders at that time.⁸ Michael Feige notes that in 1967, only a few weeks before the war broke out, the right-wing Israeli politician and journalist Geula Cohen asked David Ben-Gurion, one of the founders of the state and the first prime minister of Israel, and at that time a member of the Knesset (parliament), what he would say to his grandchild if he asked him to define the borders of his homeland. Ben-Gurion did not hesitate: "I would say to my grandchild today: the borders of your homeland are the borders of the State of Israel as they are today."⁹ Feige claims that Ben-Gurion's answer was not at all rare at the time.

However, the concept of national territory altered dramatically after the 1967 war. The new territories encompassed major sites linked to the Jewish past and associated with strong biblical references such as Hebron, Nablus, Mt. Sinai, and the Western Wall of Herod's temple in Jerusalem. These sites, which were now accessible to Israelis, elicited a messianic drive to forge a Jewish nation within these wider borders corresponding to Jewish heritage. At the same time, because these territories were densely

populated with Palestinians who were not part of the Zionist enterprise and demographically threatened the Jewish majority in greater Israel, it was impossible to Hebraize or Judaize the territory (as was done for the 1948 borders).¹⁰ This new situation led to tensions between appropriation and estrangement; in other words, between the promise of the new land and the fact that it was impossible to turn it into an integral part of the state.¹¹ The outcome created an ambiguity in the concept of the Israeli borders and the entire space of the Territories.

Eyal Weizman suggests seeing the Territories as a frontier zone:

Against the geography of stable, static places, and the balance across linear and fixed sovereign borders, frontiers are deep, shifting, fragmented and elastic territories. Temporary lines of engagement, marked by makeshift boundaries, are not limited to the edge of political space but exist throughout its depth. Distinctions between the “inside” and the “outside” cannot be clearly marked. In fact, the straighter, more geometric and more abstract official colonial borders across the “New Worlds” tended to be, the more the territories of effective control were fragmented and dynamic and thus unchartable by any conventional mapping technique.¹²

A border presumably demarcates the “here” from the “there,” and “my country” from a “foreign country,” which can be hostile. However, Weizman maintains that the normative role of borders to concretize the state and differentiate between states has taken on a different role in the Israeli context, as can be seen by the different terms that illustrate its ambiguity such as boundaries, frontiers,¹³ checkpoints, separation walls, no-man’s-land, closures, fences, and barriers.¹⁴

Writers have noted that within the Occupied Territories, barriers and checkpoints were designed to create a division of the land, mainly to cut off the Palestinians from their land and to pose the Israeli soldiers as the “owners” of the space. This separation also refers to the binary oppositions of purity and impurity, similarity and difference, but, as Karen Grumberg maintains, “since ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ are easily shifted, the contours of the no-man’s-land between them become increasingly blurred, defying delineation.”¹⁵

In a book published in 2008, Adi Ophir and Ariella Azoulay emphasize the symbolic nature of borders and their psychological implications.

The Occupied Territories, they claim, are not “external” like some remote continent that can easily be ignored. They are “external” in the sense of a looming shadow: in order to feel normal, to resemble a free democratic society, the “external” must be repressed, and people must make immense efforts to prevent it from rising to consciousness. Parenthesized, forgotten, and denied, the Territories are nevertheless part of the Israeli identity.¹⁶

While the original 1948 borders were considered to justify the national struggle and elicited solidarity, the liminal region of the Occupied Territories, which has not been fully appended to Israel, violates the clear connection between the nation and the territory, hence complicating the national-Jewish identity and eliciting ethical debates. The juxtaposed spaces on the two sides of the Green Line create an apparent split between the declared national morality, which is based on the broad consensus of Israel as a democracy with Western and liberal values, and the oppression that Israel enforces in the Occupied Territories on the Palestinian people.¹⁷ While on the declarative level Israel has sought to establish an “enlightened occupation” (*kibush naor*), an oxymoronic phrase intended to preserve the moral facade of the country, these territories are in fact in a “state of exception,” to use the term of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben.¹⁸ They operate as a designated space employed by governments in times of emergencies and crises, where constitutional rights are restricted, suspended, and rejected as the result of an exceptional decree.¹⁹ However, although the “state of exception” usually refers to temporary (radical) actions, the rhetoric that repeatedly employs promises of “calmness” and “security,” actually defines it as an interim situation that can continue *ad infinitum*.²⁰

The Occupation of the West Bank, which began in 1967, remained remote to most Israelis for the next two decades. The First Intifada thrust this twilight zone into broader Israeli society in a dramatic and tangible way. The popular Palestinian uprising of the Intifada, in particular the fact that Palestinian civilians were involved in the rebellion and that it was the first time that Israelis, who were not soldiers, had heard the voices of the inhabitants of the Territories, all confirmed that the repression engendered by the Occupation was no longer possible. Yaron Peleg points out that “when the Intifada broke out, it acted like a sudden shock that revealed the large gap between words and actions, between the self-righteousness of Zionism, the magnitude of its hyperbole, and its ugly policies toward the Palestinians.”²¹

The outbreak of the Second Intifada (the al Aqsa Intifada) in 2000, after the failure of the negotiations led by Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat, sparked a second crisis. Terrorism and guerrilla warfare became commonplace, and terror attacks were carried out within the State of Israel. The Second Intifada constituted a different phase of the conflict, but it also brought to the surface the collective memory of the First Intifada. Though the Occupation itself created an abnormality, it was the two Intifadas that created the shock and highlighted the ambiguity of the concept of borders and its professed temporariness. This situation pinpointed the problematic nature of the border, both geographically and morally, as its lack of a fixed hierarchy or a linear order undermines normality and violates all equilibria.

This book offers a spatial reading of contemporary Israeli literature written in the shadow of the Intifada. Although it is part of what can be termed the “spatial turn” in the research on Israeli literature, my reading takes a distinctive philosophical perspective. As shown in the works of Karen Grumberg, Lital Levy, Hannan Hever, Shimrit Peled, Yigal Schwartz, Barbara Mann, and Nili Gold, reading Hebrew prose in the context of space and place has proven to be very fruitful. A few of these works explore certain questions and texts that constitute the focus of this book. Grumberg’s *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature* (2011) adopts the spatial vernacular to raise questions about ideology and identity. She investigates the works of Amos Oz, Orly Castel-Bloom, Sayed Kashua, Yoel Hoffman, and Ronit Matalon and illustrates different concepts of space in Israeli literature and culture. Grumberg suggests that Zionist ideology shaped an idea of place, and explores the manner in which different manifestations of space can challenge its ideological power. Her perspective on the hierarchy of space, the concept of border and roadblock, and her illustration of the spatial themes in the context of Israelis, Palestinians, and Arabs are linked to this study. Levy offers a spatial reading of the landscapes of Arab villages in the works of Anton Shammas, Emile Habiby, and Elias Khoury.²² By reading canonic writers, as well as Mizrahi and Palestinian writers, from Yitzhak Shami to Emile Habibi and Ronit Matalon, Hever argues that the uses of place and space in Israeli works challenge hegemonial stances.²³ Both Levy and Hever reveal specific strategies of identity and literary resistance, issues that are explored here as well. In her book, *Ha-ribon ha-israeli- ha-sia’ha ve-ha-roman 1967–1973* (The Israeli Sovereign: Discourse and Novel 1967–1973), Peled explores the Israeli discourse on space and sovereignty between 1967–1973, and its literary complex constellation. Yochai Oppenheimer’s

book *Me'ever la-gader: itsug ha-aravim ba-siporet ha-ivrit ve-ha-israelit 1906–2005* (Barriers: The Representation of the Arab in Hebrew and Israeli Fiction, 1906–2005) provides a wide-ranging account of the image of the Israeli Arab in Israeli-Hebrew prose. While the book is not primarily an analysis of spatial representations and does not discuss ethical concepts, it contains readings of a wide spectrum of works, some of which are also analyzed here.²⁴ Yaron Peleg's book *Israeli Culture between the Two Intifadas: A Brief Romance*, published in 2008, unfolds a cultural and literary mapping of the 1990s, a period of escapism, bounded by the symbolic milestones of the two Intifadas. Peleg sheds light on the effects of the Intifadas on Israeli culture and discusses the works of Orly Castel-Bloom, Etgar Keret, Gadi Taub, Uzi Weil, and Gafi Amir, but rarely touches on the military context or the Occupation.²⁵

The theoretical framework of this book relates to these works but also differs from them in a number of ways. The core issue explored here is the question of the Occupation and the Intifada. The context of territories and borders is associated mainly with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to places of direct and indirect confrontation between soldiers and citizens. The book innovates in its theoretical development of the relationships between spatial concepts and ethics. Space and place in this book do not merely involve an examination of historical and ideological concepts, but also form a theoretical bridge between spatial thought and theories of ethics.

The key point of departure for this new theoretical framework is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of deterritorialization. Although Hever uses this concept mainly to articulate his postcolonialist reading, I demonstrate the ethical insights that derive from implementing this term as a prism.²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari describe deterritorialization in a variety of ways and contexts. In this book, it serves as both a descriptive term (the realm of unclear borders) and a normative term (underscoring normative and ethical issues). Primarily, I show that deterritorialization can be used to define the abnormality of a border, by conceptualizing this abnormality as a subversion of the concept of territorial boundaries and a decontextualization of the relations between culture and place.²⁷

In his preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, Michel Foucault notes that deterritorialization can be perceived as an ethical theory.²⁸ I extend Foucault's conceptualization and show that in the context of the Occupation, deterritorialization can be perceived as both a risk and an

opportunity. Traversing automatic and fixed borders and categories may lead to a downward spiral that negates all ethics and morality, thus rapidly reestablishing reterritorialization by building up new concepts of borders and roles. However, this situation also fractures time and space, providing the possibility for an uneasy contemplation that can lead to new paradigms. Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between “relative deterritorialization” and “absolute deterritorialization.” The former is “stratic or interstratic” and does not impact the order of things, whereas the latter marks an “absolute drift”—the impossibility of being territorialized again.²⁹ They claim that the two forms of deterritorialization can be positive and negative. Relative deterritorialization is negative when it is immediately subjected to forms of reterritorialization that block any line of flight. It is positive when the line of flight dominates secondary reterritorializations. Absolute deterritorialization is positive when it leads to the creation of something new, but is negative when it leads to total chaos and madness.³⁰

Marcelo Svirsky employs deterritorialization as his basic concept in his studies of Arab-Jewish activism in Israel-Palestine. He views deterritorialization as a revolutionary element that is interlaced with movements of reterritorialization, and produces rearrangements of the surroundings.³¹ In literature, however, deterritorialization does not only refer to a political situation but also to poetic strategies, and specifically to the effect of defamiliarization, alienation, changes of viewpoints, as well as figurative and metaphoric writings, all of which are basic aesthetic concepts that can bridge artistic experience and ethical contemplation. By implementing the concept of deterritorialization, this book shows that the literary texts presented here, though differing from one another, depict worlds, spaces, and narratives that shatter authoritative concepts of meaning, either by changing the setting from a known environment to alien places, or by adopting a nonlinear or nonrealist style. The main argument is that there is an ethical basis within the concept of deterritorialization; namely, that lack of compliance is a vital condition for any form of moral inquiry.

In this book, the political and social structures constitute the settings for an analysis of specific narratives, images, formats, and structures in Israeli literature that express the rich and diverse representation of this spatial crisis and its ethical implications. Its basic assumption adheres to the “turn toward the ethical” in contemporary literary criticism, which, as novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch states, provides a “new vocabulary of attention”³² in its interchanging relations between the raw material of

particular reality and the abstraction of philosophical theories.³³ Literature and reality have multifaceted relations and a multidirectional influence. Nevertheless, this book aims to show the power of literary texts to reveal problematic situations and encourage a new ethical gaze. Thus, it combines the concept of deterritorialization with other key concepts and notions in the field of moral philosophy, such as the ethics of military conduct, the controversial concept of *moral luck*, the ethics of bereavement, as well as the Levinasian notion of ethics, not only to reveal the importance of territory and borders in ethical controversies, but also to show how a literary work can be a source of ethical insights.

Hever claims that “in the teleological narrative of national identity construction we encounter the confluence of literary text with space [. . .] in many ways, this particular narrative of identity construction intersects the issue of territory and the quest to achieve sovereign rule over it.”³⁴ From this perspective, this book examines what happened to this national narrative as a result of the Occupation, specifically in the Intifada era, when the issues are no longer related to achieving sovereignty over the land and defining national identity, but rather to coping with the multifaceted relationships between borders, territory, and identity.

The literary community in Israel has always been an important part of the cultural arena, whether by supporting hegemonic stances or criticizing them in direct or indirect ways. During the 1940s, Hebrew literature was influenced by social realism and depicted protagonists considered to be contemporary prototypes who settled the Land of Israel and fought for its sovereignty. Writers were considered obligated to shape the new national identity while promoting humanism and moral norms. In the 1950s, the author Haim Hazaz wrote that the role of literature is to bravely and responsibly illustrate the circumstances in Israel, reflect the voice of conscience, capture the greatness, and reveal the corruption.³⁵ This position was part of the cultural consensus that encouraged constant inner criticism and subversion in which authors shed light on injustices to foster the ethos of the new state and its people.³⁶ However, as exemplified in S. Yizhar’s stories from the late 1940s, authors who challenged the Zionist ideology still identified with its general ideas. Glenda Abramson notes that:

Generally, the political dialectic in Israeli literature was, therefore, not simply a matter of protesting against unpopular government, since it spanned the entire history of the State of Israel from 1948 [. . .].

The liberal intellectuals, who constituted the mainstream group of Israeli writers from the start, exhibited subversive tendencies even when nominally supporting and traditionally identified with Labor.³⁷

In fact, generations of Israeli authors from the 1940s up to the 1970s identified with the ruling political parties. This did not silence criticism, but may have moderated it. This may also explain the delay and the hesitation in the literary response to the Occupation after 1967. The Occupation forced Israeli society to examine its basic Zionist narrative and face the contradictions inherent to Zionism as a movement that believes and supports universal humanistic liberal ideas, while simultaneously enacting a national ideology that allows military control over the Palestinian population. This responsibility was not simple to shoulder.

Correlatively, since the Occupation was not the center of attention in the first two decades following the Six-Day War (1967–1987), it is not surprising that canonic Hebrew prose of the time rarely engaged with this issue. During the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s a few playwrights (e.g., Joseph Mondy, Hanoch Levin, and Yehoshua Sobol) and poets (e.g., Meir Wieseltier) related to the Occupation, but Hebrew prose was slower to respond to the political situation and tended to focus on the Israeli-Arab conflict and the 1956, 1967, and 1973 wars (see, for example, Amos Oz's and A. B. Yehoshua's writings from the 1960s to the 1980s). While several of these texts were highly critical of Zionist ideology, they still did not address the Occupation and the new ethical and spatial issues it raised.³⁸

According to Dan Urian, the first Lebanon war provided the initial spark for the debates on the Arab/Palestinian question and the Occupation, although the Israeli consensus had started to crack as early as in the 1973 war but primarily in the 1977 election, which ended thirty years of Mapai Party rule and led to a vast shift in Israeli politics. The Lebanon war disrupted national solidarity and created an oppositional movement,³⁹ which prompted civil disobedience for the first time. This became more extreme during the 1987 Intifada and led to a radical change in literary discourse. Along with the moral and intellectual involvement of literature in political discourse, many literary texts began describing the Occupation and the Intifada, and its extreme violence and guilt, as a reflection of a national pathology.

Literary prose on the Occupation and the two Intifadas has dealt with the political and cultural debate and posed interesting spatial ideas. Although not all these texts raise the question of spaces and borders directly,

or in the same manner, the range of spatial issues they present illustrate this abnormality and constitute it as the kernel of corruption. Analyzing these complex representations of the Occupation and the Intifadas often reveals the internal conflict between the humanist tendency of Israeli literature, which is usually perceived as aligned with the political Left, and an acceptance of the reality of the Occupation. This analysis holds a mirror to Israeli society, its writers, and its intellectuals, which points toward a kind of dual morality.

Overview

The corpus of works written between 1987 and 2007 reveals a variety of themes, narratives, and poetic strategies. This twenty-year time frame serves to examine Israeli writing from the beginning of the First Intifada up to the aftermath of the Second Intifada. It paints a variegated portrait of the Israeli soldier, depicts the settings of the Occupied Territories, but also describes life in cities such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. It examines realistic writing as well as fantastic-grotesque images from both the soldiers' and the Palestinians' points of view, and discusses texts that use both first-person and third-person narration. While the issues discussed are not limited to this time frame, these two decades can be considered a historical and literary period in their own right in which these works, despite their variety, manifest the overriding theme of an intensive articulation of the sickness of a society in a state of confusion. One of the key purposes of this book is to show that this illness can best be understood through readings of the concepts of space, borders, and ethics.

This volume is made of two parts. The first part, "In the Heart of Darkness," is centered on the Israeli soldier and the Occupied Territories from the First Intifada in the 1990s to the Second Intifada. The second part, "Does Literature Matter?" discusses literary works set in civilian spaces of Israel and explores the ways in which everyday life in Israel has been affected by the conflict.

The first section is composed of three chapters that analyze the transformation of the Israeli soldier from an admired hero to an agent of evil. The first two chapters trace the ways in which literature has mirrored an evolution in the perception of soldiers from initially viewing them as subjects of a greater power, through envisioning them as the victims of the national war machine, and finally leading to critical stances toward the

military ethos and its ethical shortcomings. The third chapter examines literature depicting the lives of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

The first chapter, "On a Hot Tin Roof," examines the relationships between space and ethics, as manifested through a recurring scene in many literary texts where soldiers requisition a Palestinian home or take control of its roof so that they can monitor the Palestinian street and track down wanted individuals. Gilad Evron's story "Ha-baz" (The Falcon) from *Mar'eh makom* (Reference, 2003), Asher Kravitz's *Ani Mustafa Rabinovitch* (I, Mustafa Rabinovitch, 2004), Shai Lahav's *Lekh le-aza* (Go to Gaza, 2005), A. B. Yehoshua's *Esh yedidutit* (Friendly Fire, 2007), Yaniv Iczkovits's *Dofek* (Pulse, 2007), and Eshkol Nevo's *Mish'ala ahat yemina* (World Cup Wishes, 2007) describe this type of scene where the soldiers have a spatial and topographical advantage that may lead to a kind of superiority, which, in turn, they eventually lose along with their humanity, their friends, and/or their lives. This investigation is initiated by Dave Grossman's book *On Killing* (1995) and the issues of space and distance. Grossman, a scholar who has explored the psychological and social aspects of soldiers in battle, analyzes the effect of physical distance between soldiers and their victims. The spatial concept of topography moves in this chapter from a bird's-eye view, in which the soldier cannot see his victims clearly, to a face-to-face encounter with the Palestinians. As the distance begins to close, and a more intimate encounter takes place, the feeling of deterritorialization sharpens and the horror is increased, as does the soldiers' "emotional burden." The reading also draws on Orly Lubin's analysis (2006) of Dina Zvi-Riklis's film *Nekudat tatspit* (Lookout, 1991) to explore the impact of this recurring scene and the changes in distance, and discuss the manner in which these literary texts make use of spatial superiority through a variety of poetic twists.

The conflict of the soldier and his position is articulated in the second chapter, "No Luck." This chapter introduces an ethical architecture designed to better understand what motivates authors to write rooftop scenes and describe the soldiers' feelings of distress and guilt in such detail. The leitmotif of the Israeli soldier in these texts often revolves around issues of personal responsibility and free choice, and concretizes the soldiers' continuous feeling of guilt in terms of the catchphrase *Yorim u'bokhim* (shooting and crying). This phrase, which expresses a kind of "Catch 22" in which soldiers are trapped in a designated space with a different reality and deviated norms, refers to the dual notion of the soldier

as both the perpetrator (causing Palestinian suffering) and the victim (of the military and political situation). Hebrew literature and culture, from the 1948 war to this day, has presented fictional and nonfictional writings of war testimonies along this line. To formulate this dualism, I present the philosophical concept of *moral luck*. Thomas Nagel, an American philosopher who wrote several books in the field of moral philosophy and ethics, developed the notion of moral luck, which refers to a state where a moral agent is assigned moral blame or praise for an action, even though a significant part of what she or he does depends on factors beyond his or her control. The connection between deterritorialization and the dualistic nature of moral luck is evident: the soldiers' spatial disorientation is a fundamental component of the process of losing control over their actions, which eventually leads them to military conduct they would be unlikely to perform under any other circumstances. Reading prose from the Intifada through these concepts of deterritorialization and moral luck engenders a philosophical account of the phenomenon of Israeli war testimonies and the concept of *Yorim u'bokhim*. In this chapter, I read Yitzhak Ben-Ner's *Ta'atuon* (Delusion, 1989), Roy Polity's *Arnavonei gagot* (Roof Rabbits, 2001), and Liran Ron Furer's *Tismonet ha-mahsom* (Checkpoint Syndrome, 2003), as well as the texts presented in the first chapter.

The third chapter, "The Third Eye," focuses on works that describe the Palestinian perspective through Palestinian narrators. Moral philosophy has often explored the notion of "point of view" by questioning its claim of objectivity and underscoring its problematization. Thomas Nagel, for instance, chose the title *The View from Nowhere* for his 1986 book, in which he articulates the theoretical assumption that ethical questions should be addressed from a neutral point of view. Although it is clear that this type of position is impractical in real life, fiction provides a unique opportunity to switch perspectives and adopt different points of view. In this chapter, I read works by Israeli Jewish authors who ostensibly give voice to Palestinian elders, women, and children, and depict their suffering under the Occupation. I discuss the cultural and ethical issues surrounding the appropriation of the voice of the subaltern by the conqueror, and analyze the authors' esthetic choices, such as the use of the grotesque and unrealistic spaces.

The power of deterritorialization appears in this inquiry in two different contexts. The first is the writers' decision to alienate themselves from

their innate position as Jewish Israelis and engage with a different perspective. The second is their choice to abandon a causal linear narrative for nonrealistic writing. This chapter analyzes three texts: David Grossman's *Hiyukh ha-gdi* (The Smile of the Lamb, 1983), Dror Green's *Agadot ha-intifada* (The Intifada Tales, 1989), and Itamar Levy's *Otiyot ha-shemesh, otiyot ha-yare'ah* (Letters of the Sun, Letters of the Moon, 1991).

The second section of this book is composed of four chapters, each chapter discusses two literary texts that deal with the ways in which everyday life in Israel has been affected by the conflict. Most of these texts were written after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995 and during the Second Intifada, when the optimism regarding the possibility of peace agreement faded rapidly. During this period, a sense of uncertainty filled the hearts of mainstream Israelis. Since these works do not center on the friction points between Israelis and Palestinians, and their setting is not the Occupied Territories, they often tend not to ask direct questions about the Occupation and do not aim to describe military conduct. Instead, they depict the lives of individuals under daily terrorism, controversial forms of army service, and bereavement, all of which cast a different light on the theme of spaces and borders. Because the chapters analyze literary works by canonical writers, they also discuss these authors' political personas and the tension between the acceptance of the central Zionist ideology and its subversion.

The fourth and fifth chapters revolve around different works by a single author, which depict changes in Israeli society from the 1970s and 1990s up to the first decades of the twenty-first century, or a time period from the First to the Second Intifada. The fourth chapter, "A. B. Yehoshua and the Moderation on the Left at the Turn of the Millennium," discusses Yehoshua's depiction of the character of the bereaved father. This character appears in many of his works from the short stories he published in the 1960s to the novel *Friendly Fire* that was published in 2007. While the Israeli *akeda* myth and the issue of national bereavement have been discussed in relation to Yehoshua's work, here I stress the evolution of this myth, its specific connotation in relation to the Occupation and the Intifada, and its ethical burden. In a sense, the concept of the *akeda* (the binding of Issac), which depicts the soldier as a son who is sent to sacrifice himself on the altar of the state, is but another variation on the notion of moral luck, since the soldiers are doomed to be part of a social mechanism that negates their free will, and hence defines a political perspective that

perceives the soldiers as innocent. In recent years, Yehoshua has been taken to task for tempering his highly acerbic criticism of Israeli politics and moving closer to the political center. This change in attitude toward the military-national consensus not only illustrates the political-ideological crisis that the Israeli Left has experienced in the past twenty years, but also stems from Yehoshua's status as a major author in the Israeli canon, which implicitly demands a certain national role. The analysis shows that in his early works, such as *Be-t'hilat kayits—1970* (Early in the Summer of 1970, published in the early 1970s), he was very critical of the idealistic concept of national bereavement in particular and militarism in general, while in his later work, when depicting a soldier in a Palestinian village, Yehoshua moderates his position to reflect and internalize an acceptance of the national concept and the myth of national bereavement.

The fifth chapter, "Orly Castel-Bloom between the Two Intifadas," discusses two novels by Castel-Bloom—*Dolly City* (1992) and *Halakim enoshiyim* (Human Parts, 2002). In this chapter, I explore Castel-Bloom's use of literary techniques such as supernatural, grotesque, and plastic images of the human body as a metaphor for the political, which in turn come to reflect a unique take on the concepts of borders, the Occupation, militarism, and terrorism. As many literary critics have already stated, Castel-Bloom's style obliterates the basic structures of space to create an alienated world that appropriates parts of Israeli reality, while at the same time infuses them with postmodern images. The chapter analyzes the differences in Castel-Bloom's deterritorialization of the Zionist space in the two novels. In *Dolly City*, Castel-Bloom voices uncompromising criticism of the Occupation and the questions of borders, and takes a blunt, provocative, and active approach. In *Human Parts*, she presents a more passive description of the sensation of oppressiveness, in which Israelis are shunted from moral decay to great fear, prefer to perceive the world through the all-encompassing eye of the media, and let their fears turn them into puppets on the historical and political stage.

The readings of the works of Yehoshua and Castel-Bloom suggest there was a paradigmatic shift in literary representations after the Second Intifada. The sixth and seventh chapters present an alternative ethical and spatial view. In the sixth chapter, "Terrorism and the Face of the Dead Other," I offer a reading of Shifra Horn's *Himnon la-simha* (Ode to Joy) and A. B. Yehoshua's *Shlihuto shel ha-memune al mash'abei enosh* (A Woman in Jerusalem), both published in 2004 and both dealing with terror

attacks in the heart of Jerusalem. The daily lives of the protagonists in the two novels are disrupted by a deadly terror bombing when they encounter one of the anonymous victims, a casualty who is a total stranger. This chapter proposes an ethical reading of these two novels through Emmanuel Levinas's ethics, by exploring the protagonists' surprise and shock at their encounter with the Other. I discuss the way in which the journeys in both novels reveal the face of the Other, and examine how these novels deal with the issue of one's responsibility for the dead Other, beyond his demise.

The final chapter, "Dismantling Borders: A Female Perspective," examines ethical alternatives to the question of borders in Ronit Matalon's *Sarah, Sarah* (Bliss, 2000) and Michal Govrin's *Hevzekim* (Snapshots, 2002). These two works, through their context and style, systematically dismantle borders—not only those of the liminal space of the Occupied Territories, but also the entire national space and sovereignty—and create deterritorialization. The analysis draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of space along with Rosi Braidotti's more recent ethical-feminist perspective, to underscore the new position reflected in these novels toward territorial sovereignty and its significance. This final chapter explores the aesthetic and ethical approaches in the two novels and the possibility of their realization.

The book ends with a short epilogue that discusses the nature of contemporary literary criticism and examines this era from today's perspective.

Overall, this book attempts to shed new light on the multifaceted relationships between space and ethics in contemporary Israeli prose written during the Occupation and the two Intifadas. From realistic to nonrealistic fiction, from the soldier's point of view to that of the noncombatant, from male protagonists to women and children, this book presents a collage of voices, which illustrate the role of Israeli literature in today's Israeli cultural and political arena.

PART 1

In the Heart of Darkness

Meyer, the soldier narrator of Etgar Keret's story "Darukh ve-natsur" (Cocked and Locked), finds himself in a narrow passageway in a Palestinian village. A Hamas activist, who likes to curse and intimidate soldiers, is standing in front of him calling him a "cocksucker" and "homo." He asks him if "Your cross-eyed sergeant bush [push]¹ it up your ass too hard yesterday?" and makes crude sexual remarks about Meyer's sister or mother.² Later he points at his heart and urges Meyer to shoot him, knowing that Meyer will not do a thing.

Keret's story, published in Hebrew in 1994, illustrates the asymmetric power relations between Israelis and Palestinians and raises crucial questions about military conduct. It does so by depicting a single point of friction between a Hamas activist and Meyer, the narrator, a soldier who is positioned facing him, but is duty-bound not to respond in kind.

Meyer, whose friend Abutbul was severely injured and will probably remain in a coma, is frustrated by the situation and feels completely powerless during his everyday encounters with Palestinians. When he points his rifle at the Hamas activist just to scare him, the sergeant approaches and shouts at him: "what the hell do you think you're doing, standing there like a damn cowboy with your weapon smeared over your cheek? What do you think this is? The fucking Wild West or something?"³ The sergeant admits that he is also upset about Abutbul and has fantasies of revenge; however, the role of a soldier is to refrain from these actions, which are

those of terrorists—“if I did that, I’d be just like them. Don’t you get it?”⁴ Unlike the Palestinians who use any means at their disposal to hurt and kill (as they did with Abutbul), Israeli soldiers must act differently, be better than them, and not shoot.

The next day, the Hamas activist continues, as usual, to call Meyer names, inquire about Abutbul’s condition, and send the Hamas’ regards. But this time, Meyer cannot stand this situation in which his power to act and his masculinity are continuously attacked and finds an original solution. Meyer makes an unexpected gesture: he tears the wrapping off his field dressing and ties it across his face like a kaffiyeh. He takes his rifle, cocks it, and makes sure the safety is on. He swings the rifle over his head a few times and then, suddenly, lets it go. It lands about midway between him and his Palestinian counterpart.

“That’s for you, ya majnun” I scream to him. [. . .] He’s faster than me. He’ll get to it before me. But I’ll win, because now I am just like him, and with the rifle in his hands he’ll be just like me.⁵

Meyer feels he can only win and vindicate his manhood by relinquishing his weapon. He decides to throw down his rifle and confront his antagonist with his bare hands. He approaches him, knocks him down, kicks him hard, grabs his face, and bangs it into a telephone pole, letting his anger fuel his actions. The ending is clearly a nod to cowboy movies, when a rifle flies into the sky and spirals slowly downward in slow motion as the protagonist shows his manly power.

This story is about space and ethics: cowboys could shoot whenever they wanted, whereas the Israeli soldier in the Occupied Territories must refrain, to preserve his moral superiority over his enemies. Meyer is depicted as a gentle soldier who cares about his friends and family, but the nature of the situation prompts him to commit an act of brutal violence. Eventually, the solution has much to do with this Wild West image. Meyer tries to internalize the rules of engagement as formulated by the sergeant, and thus abandons his rifle so he will be on an equal footing with his counterpart and will be able to smash his head, just like what happened to his friend Abutbul. Throughout the story, the Palestinian points at his heart, as though he is ready to be killed. He feels free to expose his genitals and say whatever he likes. This “freedom” reflects the cynical behavior of a person who has lost all notion of the value of life. Meyer, on the other hand,

has a lot to lose, including his morality. At the end of the story, after he “takes care” of the Palestinian, he symbolically recovers his masculinity and power, but has incurred a great loss.

Keret’s unique style in “Cocked and Locked” employs radicalism and sarcasm to capture the ethical challenges posed by warfare in the Occupied Territories. These challenges stem from the unclear nature of military intervention in the Territories and the asymmetric power relations between Israelis and Palestinians, as Uri Ben-Eliezer states in his book *Old Conflict, New War*:

These wars are not waged between professional, conscript, or mass armies, even if such armies take part alongside other military groups. In fact, these wars involve a welter of forces: private armies, militias, autonomous military units, paramilitary groups, regional armies, segments of national armies, tribal armies, national movements, underground organizations, mercenaries, terrorist gangs, and even criminal organizations.⁶

Ben-Eliezer, a sociologist who writes on militarism in the context of Israeli society, discusses how these new wars differ from conventional ones between states. New wars are often asymmetric, in particular if they are conducted between a state and a non-state. The stronger side can have greater technical capabilities, but the weaker side can surprise the stronger side with unpredictable tactics, such as guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Many such wars do not have differentiated battlefields, and the dichotomies between the front and the rear, soldiers and civilians are often conflated. Thus, “the violence often shifts from the battlefields to the big cities, refugee camps, and villages—in short, to civilian habitats.”⁷ In many cases these wars are not declared; they have clear objectives, such as to conquer enemy territory or appropriate material resources. Thus, it is unclear when the war is over or who the winner is. Another aspect of new wars is the involvement of media, both traditional and local and also new and global. Thus, stories and images are quickly redistributed and become part of the conflict.⁸

With no such clarity of objectives and successes, and with the big eye of the media, perfect military conduct is impossible, as illustrated in Yuval Shimony’s text “Omanut ha-milhama” (The Art of War, 1990). This short allegorical text unfolds the story of a commander who decides to train for combat in a built-up area by constructing a perfect life-size model of a

residential combat zone. In a Kafkaesque manner, the model becomes the essence of the operation, as the whole group works on every detail, trying to model the people and even the birds. They never carry out the operation, because they cannot make the model perfect.

Unlike Shimony's model, in Keret's story the protagonist is plunged into an actual residential combat zone, in which he cannot engage in rule-book military conduct. The contrast between Shimony's ideal model and the forlorn appearance of Keret's protagonist underscores not only the problematic circumstances of soldiers in the Territories, but the literary power of the authors, who articulate these situations through images, myths, and concepts.