

Volume One, Number One

Shadows over the Land Without Shade: Iconizing the Israeli Kibbutz in the 1950s, acting-out post Palestinian-Nakba Cultural Trauma

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Abstract:

The kibbutz – one of Zionism's most vital forces of nation-building and Socialist enterprise – faced a severe crisis with the foundation of the State of Israel as State sovereignty brought about major structural, political and social changes. However, the roots of this crisis, which I will describe as a cultural trauma, are more complex. They go back to the pioneers' understanding of their historical action, which emanated arguably from secularized and nationalized Hasidic theology, and viewed itself in terms of the meta-historical Zionist-Socialist narrative. This perception was no longer conceivable during the 1948 war and thereafter. The participation in a war that involved expulsion and killing of civilians, the construction of new kibbutzim inside emptied Palestinian villages and confiscation by old and new kibbutzim of Palestinian fields, all caused a fatal rift in the mind of those who saw themselves as fulfilling a universal humanistic Socialist model; their response was total shock. This can be seen in images of and from the kibbutz in this period: in front of a dynamic and troublesome reality, the Realism of kibbutz-literature kept creating pastoral-utopian, heroic-pioneering images.

The novel *Land Without Shade* (1950) is one such example. Written by the couple Yonat and Alexander Sened, it tells the story of the establishment of Kibbutz Revivim in the Negev desert in the 1940s. By a symptomatic reading of the book's representation of the kibbutz, especially in relation to its native Bedouin neighbors and the course of the war, I argue that the iconization of the kibbutz in the 1950s is in fact an acting-out of the cultural trauma of the kibbutz, the victimizer, who became a victim of the crash of its own self-defined identity. This analysis of the kibbutz, a central and original image in Modern Hebrew culture, Zionist and world Left, calls for a break from the fetishistic kibbutz icon in order to re-conceptualize and re-politicize the notions the kibbutz, of community, might still hold.

Keywords: Kibbutz, Cultural Trauma, Palestinian Nakba, 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Iconization

Introduction

Among the tensions that characterize the kibbutz's confrontation with the 1948 foundation of the State of Israel, one remains largely unspoken. The research neglects and the public discourse ignores the influence of Zionist-Socialism's encounter with bothersome moral questions as a result of The Israeli War of Independence and the refugee problem it caused. This issue will stand at the centre of my discussion here, as I will claim it was part of the cultural trauma the kibbutz suffered as a result of the changes that came with sovereignty. One of Zionism's most vital and progressive forces of nation building and socialist enterprise, the kibbutz experienced a major crisis of conceptual disorientation, overwhelmed by a series of fatal inner conflicts and painful fractures; one of these was its relation to the Palestinian Nakba. The participation in a war that involved the expulsion and killing of civilians, the construction of new kibbutzim inside emptied Palestinian villages and confiscation by old and new kibbutzim of Palestinian fields,¹ all created a drastic rift in the mind of those who saw themselves as fulfilling, at the same time with their Zionism, a universal humanistic Socialist model. Their response was total shock. It has traces, as I will demonstrate, in the common un-disrupted image of the kibbutz in the kibbutz-literature of the time, which symptomatically "does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it."²

The kibbutz and the State: A Shocking Break-of-Faith

In the early 1950's the kibbutz had to face the major structural, political and social changes of statehood. It had to cope with the very existence of a Jewish sovereignty, its international status and

¹ In this article, when discussing "the kibbutz", I refer mainly to kibbutzim (kibbutz in the plural) that were part of the HaKibbutz Hameuchad (The United Kibbutz) Movement, which was founded as a country-wide kibbutz-federation in 1927 and was the biggest Kibbutz-Movement in during the Yishuv (pre-Israel) period. HaKibbutz HaMeuchad was an organization with a central active leadership and strong obligating ideological bond between its kibbutzim. HaKibbutz HaMeuchad nourished the Palmach, an underground force that included more than 2000 warriors by 1948 and constituted of a significant part of the fighting units in the war. Many of the Palmach commanders and its men and women were connected to the kibbutz. Some were founders-members of kibbutz, others born and raised in kibbutzim, or were educated there. All units lived and worked in kibbutzim during service. HaKibbutz HaMeuchad Kibbutzim which were built inside emptied villages and on their lands: in the Galilee -- Malkia (March 1949 on the ruins of Al-Malkiyya), Yir'on (May 1949, on the ruins of Saliha), Kabri (January 1949 on the ruins of Al-Kabri), Beit HaEmek (January 1949 on the ruins of Kuwaykat); on the Mediterranean shore - Nahsholim (June 1948 on the lands of Tantura); in the center- Netzer (today Netzer Sereni, June 1948 on the lands of Bir Salim), Kfar Daniel (October 1949 on the lands of Daniyal) ; in Jerusalem area - Tzora (December 1948 on the ruins of Sar'a), Beit Guvrin (June 1949 on the ruins of Bayt Jibrin), Netiv HaLamd-Heh (August 1949 on the lands of Bayt Nattif), Tzuba (October 1948 on the ruins of Suba). HaKibbutz HaMeuchad Kibbutzs that demanded former-villages lands: Ein- Harod, Neve-Yam, Ginosar, Hukok, HaHoshlim (today Amiad).

² J.F Lyotard, *Heidegger and "The Jews"*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, p. 47.

the challenges it now had to meet. The institutionalization of the Yishuv pre-Israel voluntary system brought a shift in the responsibility for the main Zionist tasks of the era. Prior to the State, the Kibbutz Movements were accepted as the bodies responsible for such activities. Defense, intake and integration of the (selective) immigration to the country, initiation and population of new settlements, which all were roles of the kibbutz in large part, were now no longer under its charge. Moreover, the State as an institution and a notion refuted the very concept of voluntarism that the kibbutz based itself upon. The kibbutz espoused the free power of the people and supported the building of the Jewish society 'from the bottom up' by movements of local communes. These views were rooted, needless to say, in the tradition of Socialist thought, which called for freedom from State force. The Socialist-Zionist utopia consisted of some Anarchistic elements, which were apparent mainly in its early years.³ The idea of obeying the law and follow civil duties, instead of acting spontaneously in the name of the cause – was strange to the kibbutz spirit and self-perception of the time.

In January 1948, with the unification of two Kibbutz Movements and their political parties,⁴ a new, distinct kibbutz party was founded. Mapam (The United Workers Party) was separated from the hegemonic Labor party Mapai (Eretz-Israel Workers Party), stood as a leftist pro-Soviet opposition to the Social-Democratic rule and did not enter the government after the first Israeli elections on March 1949. The heads of the Kibbutz Movements, who were part of the leadership of the Yishuv, found themselves, for the first time, far from the State's center of decisions making. The tendency of the young Israel towards the Western Bloc in the post-WWII political division put the kibbutz in a difficult situation. With Israel becoming an ally to the US, the kibbutz, who abolished Capitalism and defined itself as an anti-imperialist Socialist, yet Zionist, being, was presented with a fundamental inner conflict between loyalty to the national revival and the faithfulness to the Eastern Bloc. The belief in the historical right of the Jewish People and the need to protect Israel, clashed with the desire to belong to the Socialist World which did not recognize Israel and saw it as an imperialist extension. In addition to these political complexities, in the social arena the kibbutz, once an ideal for the Jewish society in Palestine, witnessed the decline of its privileged status. The great wave of Jewish immigration from the Arab countries in the early 1950s skipped the kibbutz for several reasons, and new forms of habitation

³ Avi Bareli, "Republicanism and The Labor Movement in the Early 1950s: Structural Postulations" in M. Bar-On (Ed.) *The Challenge of Sovereignty: Art and Thought During the First Decade of the State*, Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1999. Pp. 23-44. P. 31. [Hebrew]

⁴ HaKibbutz HaMeuchad's political party – Ahdut HaAvoda, united HaKibbutz HaArtzi (The Country-Wide Kibbutz, founded 1927) Movement's political party – HaShomer HaTzair. On the history of each party, the background for the unification, the structure and the fate of Mapam as the party of the two kibbutz movements, see Eli Tzur, *Landscapes of Illusion*, Mapam 1948-1954, Beer-Sheva: Ben Gurion University, 1998. [Hebrew].

and land-cultivation were preferred by the State.⁵ All in all, the kibbutz, that considered itself as the avant-garde of Zionism, became marginal in the new Republican (Mamlachtit) constellation. These strains in the kibbutz relationship with its surrounding general-national society severely damaged the kibbutz inner life and social fabric. HaKibbutz HaMeuchad (The United Kibbutz), the greatest Kibbutz Movement at the eve of the state was as a result thrown into a political-ideological schism that split many kibbutzim, and tore apart communities and families.⁶

It is in this mostly State-Zionist context that the fact the national war and its outcomes put the Socialist universal world-view of the kibbutz to an actual test, was overlooked. However, the kibbutz's failure to live its humanistic vision had its share in the effect of the crisis as the kibbutz's collective identity was cracked. It was a moment of a radical – even metaphysical – undermining, of a rupture in the system-of-meaning. The pioneers' – kibbutz founders – understanding of their historical action emanated, so I suggest, from secularized and nationalized Hasidic theology, and viewed itself in terms of the meta-historical Zionist-Socialist narrative. They abandoned religion, in a desire for a direct, mystical a-nomistic touch with holiness, and associated the sacred with Eretz-Israel, The Holy Land as it is perceived in the Jewish tradition.⁷ That was the kernel of experiencing their immigration as a spiritual move, an act of personal and national revival. Socialism, which consisted of an element of salvation, of building a new world, was integrated into Zionism through the notion of repair, a religious idea that bridged the two and enabled one to think the particular and the universal at once.⁸ Unlike

⁵ The Kibbutz Movements faced difficulties in the absorption of the massive Jewish immigration from Arab countries due to differences in perceptions and mentality. Most of the new-comers were not educated according to the kibbutz's values and did not developed affinity to them once in Israel. The kibbutz wished to keep its character and principles of inner-life and integrate the immigrants into them. This issue became a source of criticism on the kibbutz. As a result of this failure, and to meet the needs of the new-comers and the State, the government led a settlement policy in which the kibbutz did not play a major role. For elaboration see: Eli Tzur: "'Exodus began and what did our pioneers do?' The kibbutz under the test of the massive Aliyah (immigration to Israel)", *Iyunim bitkumat Israel* 9, 1999, 31-337.[Hebrew]. Yishai Geva, "The settlement tradition after statehood", *Iyunim bitkumat Israel* 5, 1985, Pp. 262-303 [Hebrew], Yossi Ben-Artzi "Changes in settlement preferences with statehood: A historical perspective" in V.Pilavski (Ed.) *The transformation from Yishuv to state, 1947-1949: Continuity and change*, Haifa: University of Haifa, 1990, Pp. 173-85. [Hebrew].

⁶ In 1951 the kibbutzim which left HaKibbutz HaMeuchad Movement joined Ihud HaKibbutzim (Union of the Kibbutzim) Movement which then was united with Hever HaKvutzot (Group of the Kvutzot) to form a new Kibbutz Movement Ihud HaKvutzot VeHaKibbutzim (Union of the Kvutzot and the Kibbutzim). This movement was close to the ruling Social-Democrat Mapai party.

⁷ See Yotam Hotam, *Modern Gnosis and Zionism: The Crisis of Culture, Life Philosophy Jewish National Thought*, Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2007. [Hebrew]

⁸ See Hannan Hever, "Theology and Class in King of Flesh and Blood by Moshe Shamir", manuscript [Hebrew]. See also: Yehuoda Shenhav, "We have never been modern Zionists – appendix to Bruno Latour", *Theory and Criticism*, 26, spring 2005: 75-88. [Hebrew].

most Zionist historiography of the pioneer Labor Movement, which describes the place of Judaism as functional and sees Zionist-Socialism as a replacement for religion,⁹ I claim that the theological constituted the political. The pioneers' basic form of consciousness had a latent component, a phenomenological-structural one, which preserved the notion of viewing the deed-on-earth in relation to the metaphysical. For them the kibbutz was a theo-political embodiment of Zionist-Socialist return and salvation. Like "mitzvot" the pioneers fulfilled, with faith and devotion, in their every-day life a meta-historical case and narrative. This perception was no longer conceivable after Israel became a fact. The gap between the kibbutz's faith and its ability to act in close correlation to it emerged from the kibbutz's push to the margins; its lack of ability to conduct Zionist activity and to direct it to commune Socialism; and its failure to live in full its universal humanistic vision. There developed a distance between life and history. To that should be added the understanding that the very foundation of a Jewish state, was based on a theo-political principle. Sovereignty, according to Carl Schmitt, is established upon the ability to decide on the state of emergency, a state of exception which suspends the existing law and exercises its power. This ability is a secularized form of the divine force to intervene, via the implementation of a miracle, in the laws-of-nature and change the unchangeable.¹⁰ With the declaration of the State of Israel as a Jewish state, against the background of Jewish theology which gave religious validity to the claim on its territory, emergency laws (most of which are in use until today)¹¹ were activated in order to execute the State's exclusive control and determination of enemies. The kibbutz found itself subjected to a sovereign authority of which it was part and with which, on the one hand it shared the Jewish theological rights-infusing epistemological base, but which, on the other hand, paralyzed its political-agency and subordinated its power to decide and to act independently.

The pioneers and their descendants¹² lost their very understanding of themselves and their place in the world. They came across and struggled with bitter contradictions, and clashes of their moral commitments. In the context of the Nakba, there was the humanistic sensitivity to the Palestinian fate

⁹ See for Example: Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in Jewish State*, Berkeley, 1983.

¹⁰ See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

¹¹ See Shimrit Peled, *The Israeli Sovereign: The Discourse and The Novel 1967-1973*, manuscript, forthcoming Jerusalem, The Hebrew University Magnes Press. [Hebrew].

¹² The second generation in the kibbutz accepted the values and beliefs of their revolutionary parents. In fact its way to rebel against the older generation was to deepen these values. See for example Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, University of California Press, 2000. To the "descendants" of the kibbutz should be added also people who were not born but were educated in it, or grow up in a city but were educated in a Labor Movement-associated Youth Movement according to the kibbutz's views and spirit.

and the cry against injustice, in contrast with the war for Jewish self-determination and survival and the enthusiasm from its results. The realization that Zionism and Socialism could not be contained together in these circumstances was shocking. It brought about a break-of-faith, or a cultural trauma, which develops in conditions of “disorganization, displacement or incoherence in culture...when the normative and cognitive context of human life and social action loses its homogeneity...looking at it from the perspective of the actors we might speak of cultural disorientation ...[it is a] duality, split, ambivalence, clash within a culture emerging suddenly, rapidly and unexpectedly and embracing the core areas of cultural components, such as basic values, central beliefs and common norms.”¹³

This cultural trauma was expressed in what Dominick LaCapra defines as a form of acting-out: as manifestation of a complete denial of the traumatic experience and its destructive elements, by fetishism of the pre-traumatic past, an illusion of definite control over identity, narrative and history and a disregard for the collapse of the epistemic framework, generated by the trauma. Such acting-out strives to a closure, to discipline trauma, to save and recover it, to “solve” - hence repressing - it.¹⁴ In front of a dynamic and troublesome reality, the Realism of kibbutz-literature kept creating static, iconic heroic-pioneering pastoral-utopian images. Assumingly depicting the "here and now", it responded to history as if it never happened.

Land Without Shade: Acting-out the Cultural Trauma

The 1951 semi-documentary novel *Land Without Shade*, telling the story of the pioneering settlement in the Negev desert during the 1940s and the establishment of kibbutz Revivim, was written by the kibbutz-member couple Yonath and Alexander Sened. It is a positive narration in the fashion of Socialist Realism, of the Zionist-Socialist overcoming of the hardships of nature, a hostile region and war in a collective effort to build a better society. The foundation of the kibbutz in the Negev is described in an epic movement, echoing Biblical connotations. The authors give in to the romantic force of their subject matter, and in a complete identification with it, draw a genesis tale of creation which bears almost a mythical power: the commune is the protagonist, a headquarter of civilization in the savage land of the desert, struggles within itself and with its human and physical environment in the name of sublime values; works stubbornly to move forward and to bring progress; devoted to the fulfillment of Zionist vision of a Jewish rebirth and return to Eretz-Israel and to the Socialist belief in a just, equal society; obeys the unwritten rules of sacrifice as part of its revolutionary ethos.

Piotr Sztompka, “Cultural Trauma: The Other Face of Social Change”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 3(4), 2000. Pp.449-466., 453.¹³

¹⁴ See Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

The book was received warmly, immediately upon its publication, by readers and critics alike. In fact, it is one of the most successful kibbutz novels of all time, with 11 editions up-to-date and an overall of 70,000 to 80,000 copies sold. With its first appearance, it was read in durations as part of a weekly radio show, and was translated soon thereafter.¹⁵ *Land Without Shade* was adapted and played on amateur stages all over the country, and selected parts of it were read in Labor-Movement, Kibbutz-Movement and Youth-Movement assemblies and ceremonies; it was also one of the first texts of the new Hebrew Literature that was integrated into the State's school-curriculum.¹⁶ As becomes clear, this popularity was guided and accompanied by high professional-evaluation as it was considered by the majority of critics in the period to be an expression of an “essential plentiful truth”¹⁷ of life in the kibbutz, an “educating book”¹⁸ which portrays the new sociological and psychological being the kibbutz was believed to be.

As mentioned above, the early 1950s were years of complications, inner struggles and weakening of the kibbutz. This problematic reality can then explain the reception of the heroic literary image of the kibbutz as a form of compensation. It is quite obvious to say that it gave strength, comfort and hope and was to educate by exemplifying dear values in a hard time of crisis; indeed, most critics mentioned these qualities of *Land Without Shade*, emphasizing its socio-political importance and judging it in ideological rather than aesthetic standards.¹⁹ The novel, according to this view, was a definite proof for the right way of the kibbutz, for its vitality, an approval of its beliefs, of the light it carries. The interesting question is however, how the kibbutz's self-perception maintained itself and was not changed by the raging historical circumstances; how its self-representation did not examine its truths and goals in relation to the new dilemmas with which it was confronted. Remarkably, leaders' speeches and kibbutz publicists' writing called for recovery of the good-old-kibbutz values and activities of the pre-Israel era, and the kibbutz literature was constituted on generic conventions, motives and well-familiar themes, which repeated and even imitated the kibbutz image in the Yishuv literature.

¹⁵ Translated into Yiddish (1953) and into Portuguese (1956). L. Levite, one of the most pro-Soviet members of Hakibbutz Hameuchad Movement's leadership, came up with the idea to translate the novel into Russian, in order to show the Soviets Zionism's achievements. See Shula Keshet, *Underground Soul: Ideological Literature – The Case of the Early Kibbutz Novel*, Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University and HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1995. Pp. 271. [Hebrew].

¹⁶Keshet, Ibid. 274.

¹⁷ Ibid. 273-278.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

The culturally-traumatic subversion of stability is represented in the text in a fetishistic vein, where the pre-Israel past is considered flawless, an organic time-space in which there was a perfect harmony of vision and path. The novel arranges fragmented battered human-social-public experience in an aesthetic pattern which strives to render it meaning and order. The very composition of the novel is, in this sense, a haunting return of the “real-time” trauma. It testifies, in the language of the repressed, remnants of the un-represented traumatic excess which resists the symbolic-order. The novel's tendency to blur past and present in the narration time-structure is only one, maybe most apparent, symptom of the traumatic breakdown of distinctions and the breach of limits. The careful reading of *Land Without Shade* tracks the trauma in the frozen kibbutz-image which reflected and influenced the imagination of many. With respect to this depiction and to its exceptional reception, I would like to focus on the representation of the neighboring Bedouin in the desert, and the 1948 war, in order to uncover the trauma the Nakba caused to its operating party.

A Symptomatic Reading

Land Without Shade was meant to be a memorial volume for the kibbutz's members who died in the war, hence, it was based on true historical events and included the real names of some people. This thematic obligation is materialized at the poetic level by a complete correspondence between the story-time and the narrative-time. It is not told in retrospect, as a fragmented memory, but as a whole, in a rational chronological order, by an omniscient and in the eternal present of the events: that way we are exposed to an authoritarian, reliable voice who lays out a dynamic course. In fact, this is evidence for conceptual stagnation, for shock which furthermore hints at the unresolved confrontation with the crush of identity by an attempt to silence its demons. Supposedly a vivid and lively novel, innovative in creating a collective subject and expressing its progressive spirit, it tends to be read as compulsive reaction against the background of the shattering war. Precisely the documentary nature of the novel, its proximity to historical events both in its Realism and in time and space of appearance – indicates the failure to process history and its challenging aspects.

Neither the expulsion of Bedouin from the Negev by the end of the battles²⁰ (and the evacuation and demolition of Palestinian villages all around the country) nor the moral problems that stirred profound arguments in Mapam which Revivim, as part of HaKibbutz HaMeuchad movement, was engaged in, changed manners of thought and patterns of representation. The novel tries to conceal the severe deeds, sharp dilemmas, harsh debates, shocking rifts – in familiar terms and uses two major forms to

²⁰ See Benny Morris, *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947-1949*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Pp. 245-247

discipline the trauma. The first one is replicating modes of Orientalist perception of the Arabs, and the second is the Zionist-framing of the Nakba.

The basic pattern of the novel is that of a contrast. The Bedouin are always placed in an opposition to the Jewish pioneers, as the ultimate 'Other'. Their otherness is being shaped in the lines of attraction-rejection in relation to the 'non-western' typical of western thought: on the one hand the attraction to the naivety and purity, the mystery and the exotica of the nature, on the other hand the rejection of the irrational, pre-literal, the savage, its dismissal as petrified and inferior.²¹

The pioneers want to tap into the primordality of the Bedouin, by knowing the desert and its secrets like them, learning their language and even imitating them by wearing kaffiyahs. Performing as hybrid "Hebrew Bedouin" or "Arab Pioneers", they almost do not believe they are in an unmediated meeting with the Oriental(ist) exotics: "Sheikh Salema...his lean body, the bird-strip, the refined Abaya, everything... was as it was remained in memory from the drawn postcard of childhood, which told of the lands of legendary and wonder. Only that then they did not imagine they will come across such exotica in their life-path..."²² One character in particular, that of Ariya, shows huge interest in the Bedouin. He studies the Bedouin, seeking to get close to them by collecting and recording their costumes, stories and songs, and, in an inner monologue delivered to us by the omniscient narrator, reveals his sexual attraction to a Bedouin woman: "...how I courted yesterday the shepherd, Salem's daughter. So what? I swallowed her only with my eyes. Terrified creature as she is....I, God damn it, did not sleep with a woman yet...this lovely creature was frightened..."²³

But this attention to the Bedouin has, of course, another side. Power relations and even signs of violence are present in the desire to "swallow" the woman, to conquer, to own "this creature". In a sublimated way this exists also in Ariya's walking around with a notebook to write down the Bedouin words and deeds, viewing them in fact as an exemplar, something to research out of anthropological curiosity, to map, to catalogue, to define, to frame – in order to capture, to control. It appears also in the language of the novel itself, which looks at the Bedouin from the outside, as an object,²⁴ and by that

²¹ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994.

²² Yonath and Alexander Sened, *Land Without Shade*, Tel-Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1951. Pp. 39. All the quotes here are from the 7th edition (1966), and all the free translations from Hebrew and Yiddish are mine, L.L.

²³ Ibid 74-75

²⁴ A. Sened tells Keshet (270) that the first version of the novel (which appeared only in the first edition) was corrected and the second version is the one which came out in ten more editions and became well-known. The authors corrected the text in those places where they represented the Bedouin's voice and speech and depicted their lives "from inside." Sened does not elaborate the reasons or the nature of these changes.

poses the “right” or “proper” representation of them. The projection of Western fantasy is determining, thus, the “sufficient” image of the Bedouin: “Take a frame and put Salman head in it, leave the background of the blue sky, the purple veil adored hill, the tent, the camel, the tendril pile ... and there you have a landscape picture with no need of any processing, just write in its brim 'desert scenery with a Bedouin and his tent', and send it all over the world.”²⁵

The intention to educate the Bedouin, to bring progress and prosperity to the desert and its people, out of seeing them as primitive – is expressed in many ways ranging from physical disgust and social judgment to disrespect and patronage. Few examples: “...What is a good soil in the eyes of the nomads? What can they give to this soil? What do they know to demand from it?”²⁶, “the settlement of the Jews in the desert hints the Bedouin of new possibilities for existence, to replace their living-sources which are getting rapidly diminished...”²⁷ “Ho, Hasan, what an idiot, don’t you see that the cannel is going up the hill? Wants to lift up water, the sheikh with the pedigree [to the prophet Muhammad] wants to lift up water! The guys should be brought here, they will split their guts. (its) just (that) the Bedouin are pitiful”²⁸ “Menashke was shaking out of revulsion... Bedouin!”²⁹ “...to put in the mouth this cup, from the actual mouth of this old (Bedouin) with his yellow decay-eaten teeth...”³⁰

From both of these angles – the romantic and the civilizing – the Bedouin are not considered relevant in the political sense. It is important to notice that descriptions of hostility and suspicion are kept local. The national context is dissolved, as if it was all nothing but neighbors’ disputes, or the ever-going struggle of nomads and settlers. The Bedouin are not regarded as a people, as a collective of any sort. In fact, the authors provide us with a relative abundance of information on the inter-tribal competition and tensions, about the disloyalty of many sole Bedouin to their leaders, and of the leaders’ betrayals of their men whom they dictated over, exploited, and abandoned during the war.

This last point, as well as the politically-neutralizing Orientalist perspective as a whole, served as a mechanism to deal with the guilt felt towards the Palestinians by repudiation of responsibility.³¹ Hebrew Literature's representation of Arabs as “too beautiful to be a threat”³² or as child-like natives,

²⁵ *Land Without Shade*, p.90.

²⁶ *Ibid* 20

²⁷ *Ibid* 23

²⁸ *Ibid* 159

²⁹ *Ibid* 46

³⁰ *Ibid* 93

³¹ Yochai Oppenheimer, *Barriers: the representation of the Arab in Hebrew and Israeli fiction, 1906-2005*, Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved, 2008. [Hebrew]. Pp. 10-13.

³² *Land Without Shade*, 26

bodily unpleasant and sometimes even defective, living in a lagging corrupt social order, lacking of political consciousness and unifying national cause; the depiction of all of them as simple villagers, with no sign for the politically-aware urban intelligentsia – all hint at the implicit assumption that the Palestinian catastrophe is their own fault. The shocking crisis of sovereignty resulted in a lack of response-ability,³³ in an evading of the moral debt towards the Palestinian tragedy.

When the reality-based plot turns to the war, *Land Without Shade* suspends all the ties of the kibbutz members with the Bedouin, which actually disappear almost completely from the story. They are mentioned in a word in a few places, mainly as collaborators with the enemy, and we are told briefly in one or two incidents that they fled. Nothing about their fate in the war, nothing about the former-neighbors' relationship under the new conditions is accessible to us, after it was a central subject in the preceding parts of the novel. Here we are facing an important narrative-strategy of the text. Its Realist style and multiplicity of characters, names and events, makes indistinct the very principle of every storytelling, which is omission, selection. It creates the illusion of transparency of knowledge, providing us with every detail. But the text does choose what to share with us, and is very careful in the way it does that. There are things that we get a very limited exposure to and others that are completely blocked from us. There are, for example, only two lines (!) that talk about revenge that one of the kibbutz's members, mentioned by his name, took in response to the abuse of his friend's dead-body. This is all we know about this incident, that is told in a matter-of-fact manner, integrated in a different context, as part of an inner-thought monologue of Shraga, the novel's "Alter-ego character" that worries about the expanding of revenge activities.³⁴ It seems we are presented with this side of the war, just so we will be able to forget it: it exists in the text and by that makes it faithful to the truth – hence should be taken seriously – but at the same time it marks the brutal violence as pointed and specific. By calling the kibbutz member who committed the act of revenge by his name, by nominating him, the text minimizes the crime, and at the same time gains credibility which it can then use to convince us that it is telling everything.

Only in a 1990 interview did Alexander Sened admit that he and his wife left some things out of the book "... In *Land Without Shade* we did not dare to tell that (they) raped a Bedouin woman... how come Israel's heroes will rape a Bedouin..."³⁵ In a kibbutz-writers assembly in 1951 he stressed: "The right word can educate ... we wanted to fight inside our camp for plain human love for the Bedouin, to

³³ See Giorgio Agamben *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, New York : Zone ; London : MIT, 1999. See also: Hannan Hever, "Trauma and Responsibility in Khirbet Khizeh by S.Yizhar", a paper in a conference, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 13.6.2012. [Hebrew].

³⁴ See *Land Without Shade*, p. 215

³⁵ Keshet, 280

struggle within ourselves, against terrifying urges that spread... also in the kibbutz.”³⁶ Indeed, the minor descriptions of aggression are brought only for educational reasons; they are adjusted to the Jewish point-of-view and needs, to its capability for tolerance. The Palestinian suffering is subjected to the kibbutz vision of itself as an exemplary society. Their story does not have life of its own, but only as a part of the Jewish one. This is valid to the general framing of the Nakba in the Zionist narrative, where it is integrated into, and gets its intent and reasoning from, the Jewish national time – from disaster to revival.

The occupation of Lod, for example, is represented in the text in just such this manner: “The Defense Army forces took up Lod... - that is to say that we are moving forward... - Not bad, now Lod, tomorrow certainly Ramle. In the Galilee they are standing at the gates of Nazareth...”³⁷ The terrible killing of about 250 civilians in Lod, during Operation “Danny” in July 1948, and the massive expulsion from the conquered city (as well as from Ramle) were well known to the authors and the readers of the novel, and were a source of doubts and pain. The Kibbutz HaMeuchad community was one of the first to be exposed these facts, when as early as November 1948 Shmarya Gutman, a member of kibbutz Na'an who was in charge of the thousands of civilians in the occupied city, wrote in the movements' internal bulletin “Mibifnim”, under the title “Lod goes to Exile”, a description of the difficult sights: “It was sad to see this journey – tens of thousands are going to exile... In a few hours the town was completely emptied. A strange silence strolled in its streets. The doors of the stores and the houses were left open and inside everything was thrown in a mess...”³⁸

The participation in the Lod affair “cut deep grooves” in those who experienced it from the Israeli side.³⁹ Kibbutz-associated soldiers who were there in real time hesitated and even questioned the commands.⁴⁰ Mapam was agitated by severe internal arguments, in a hopeless attempt to find its way to handle the fact that they supported and took part in the war, yet protested against its means.⁴¹ Yet here, in *Land Without Shade*, the occupation of Lod is interwoven into a series of military achievements, as

³⁶ The *Kibbutz in Literature: Symposium of Kibbutz Writers and Critics*, Tel – Aviv: 1952, Pp.32

Land Without Shade, p.225.³⁷

³⁸ Avi-Yiftah (Shmarya Gutman), “Lod goes to Exile”, *Mibifnim* 13, 3, November 1948, Pp. 452-461. [Hebrew].

³⁹ Mula Cohen, the OC of the Yiftah Brigade that fought in Lod, is quoted in Morris, 206.

⁴⁰ According to Yitzhak Rabin, the deputy commander of Operation Danny. This part was cut out of the Hebrew version of The Rabin Memoirs, and was published in full in English by the New-York Times. See Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*, Tel-Aviv, 1990, Pp. 73. See also Rabin in an interview with Anita Shapira in her *Igal Alon: Spring of his Life*, Tel-Aviv: HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 2004, Pp. 374, note 79, p.541. [Hebrew]

⁴¹ See Flapan, 79-83

part of the Army's advancement. Only in the context of Jewish national revival can the authors give themselves and their readership account of the shocking human Palestinian disaster they caused.

In the same way, in *Land Without Shades'* narration of the course of the war, were merged the recollections of Anna, an autobiographical character based on the author Yonath Sened, a Holocaust survivor who joins the kibbutz following her husband. Her memories from the Jewish Ghetto appear in the text with no specific plot-explanation, to remind us of Jewish History, which gives the horrible war a sense. On her way to the kibbutz in the middle of the war, Anna cries quietly, remembering the words of a Yiddish song, which is quoted in the text in its original language:

"איך וויל נאך איינמאל זען מיין היים

צי איז דארט נאך ווי געווען

אט דא דער טייכל, דא דער בוים,

אט דא דער דאך וואס האלט זיך קוים.

"⁴²מיין ארעם היים...

I want to see my home one more time

Is it still there as it was

Here is the river, this is the tree

Here is the roof which stands tenuously.

My poor home...

The use of Yiddish – the “unconscious” of Zionism – in a modern Hebrew text, with no translation, in order to mourn and long for a destroyed home, from which she became a refugee, is the “return of the repressed” – the Diasporic Jew, the Jewish victimhood – at the heart of Jewish fight to its national rescue. This past traumatic existence is used to explain the trauma of the present and to “cope” with it be its redemption. Along this way to the kibbutz in the Negev, Anna passes a destroyed Arab village,⁴³ but the lost home of (other) refugees is mentioned as part of the landscape, as a milestone. The Palestinian story cannot occur to her on her way to her new home. Symbolically and symptomatically, the Nakba is positioned on the path from Holocaust to Independence, as the only possibility to control the confusing-traumatic fact that she is now on the side that destroys other peoples’ homes; this can be overcome only by “balancing” the misery and repeating the Jewish – Zionist narrative.

⁴² *Land Without Shade*, 234.

⁴³ *Ibid* 227

As Hannan Hever claims, no representation of trauma in a Hebrew text of the time, could escape the Jewish trauma of the 20th century, the Holocaust. The dominant presence of trauma in Jewish History enslaves the Jewish view to its own victimhood. With the entrance of the Jews into history as an active factor, they create Palestinian experience which they recognize, from their own mental wound, as trauma.⁴⁴ In *Land Without Shade* we get to glance this entanglement, when, close to the end of the book we read of an argument within the kibbutz. One of the members, Meir'ke, is suggesting they will ambush “the fleeing Bedouin” and “conquer a flock for the meat, and to establish (our) farm.”⁴⁵ The group rejects the idea in the name of moral values, of course, and the educational sake of including this episode in the book is clear to us already. But one page later, this argument is discussed again, in private, between two characters: Aya, the sabre – who was born in Israel, and did not oppose the ambush plan at the beginning, and Menash'ke – who came from the Diaspora, and was consistently against hurting the civil Bedouin. The way she talks and thinks of the Arabs reminds him of his life as a Jew in Poland. “(Aya)... ‘you are an Arab’ was the most terrible curse said among us and mother berated us and tried to teach that there are good Arabs and there are bad Arabs” – “(Menash'ke) do you know what this reminds me? Back in Poland we had a neighbor, a gentile ... a big anti-Semite and he use to say: 'there are good Jews and there are bad Jews’.”⁴⁶

The identification with the victim, the emotional involvement, is not only a “secondary trauma”, the trauma of the witness, but – maybe first and for most – the trauma of the victimizer. Those who dreamt of and saw themselves as building a new world of a national-universal salvation, could not absorb their crash of identity: they acted out the traumatic shock by fetishistic holding of the past and a frozen representation of themselves – the kibbutz – as devoted to the fulfillment of Zionist vision of a Jewish rebirth and return to Eretz-Israel at the same time with the materialization of a humanistic universal Socialist society, as a “house with no dark-basement”,⁴⁷ a land without shade.

Working-through Cultural Trauma to welcome new moral agency

What might be the political perspectives and implications of this new literary – historiographic perception of the kibbutz image and kibbutz history?

⁴⁴ Hannan Hever, introduction article to Hever (ed.) *Tell in Not in Gath: The Palestinian Nakba in Hebrew Poetry, 1948-1958*, Zochrot / Parrhesia / Pardes, 2009. Pp.9-53, p.17. [Hebrew].

⁴⁵ *Land Without Shade*, 257

⁴⁶ Ibid. 258

⁴⁷ Keshet, 274-275, discusses this view as it was held in the 1950s by the young Alexander Sened and the central and influential critic Moshe Braslavsky.

The kibbutz was and still is a central and original image in Modern Hebrew culture, Israeli culture and Zionist-left imaginary. It captured also the imagination of Western World Leftists, as it was thought to be a viable model for socialism voluntarily practiced in a free society, and the face of a different, non-militaristic Israel. Herbert Marcuse, who visited a kibbutz in the early 1970s, told his host, the novelist Amos Oz, then a member of kibbutz Hulda: “you are the only socialist experiment that did not pour blood and did not bourgeoisify.”⁴⁸

Marcuse was obviously referring to the inner political-system of the kibbutz that, unlike other socialist constitutions, does not force membership and is managed as a direct, community democracy. These observations, together with the non-bourgeoisification one, should not be taken for granted, although their critical examination is beyond the scope of the present paper. It is however significant to emphasize that Marcuse was reproducing, probably unbeknownst to him, the Zionist discourse, which tends to solidify the kibbutz's internal socialism and social-progressiveness as isolated and cut off from wide socialist concerns.

A reading of the kibbutz image as an acting-out of the trauma of the victimizer smashes, first of all, this fictitious line of distinction. It calls for recognition of the influence of the occupation on society in Israel, including the kibbutz as its revolutionary Zionist encapsulation, not only from 1967 – the year from which the occupation is impossible to ignore. The kibbutz's fidelity to the Zionist meta-narrative was a reaction of shock, in a quest for a cure to the traumatic injury of its identity. But this desperate hold – against the effects of the state – in the state itself, in its justification and its legitimization – cost in socialism. The state nullified the kibbutz's humanistic-universalistic aspirations.

The Zionist closure was acting out the trauma, not working it through, and by that sentences the trauma to a compulsive repetition. The kibbutz should cease to function – even today, in Israel and elsewhere – as an a-historic, a-politic utopian fetish for the ethics it once tried to live; only by indicating and processing the trauma of identity will it become again a base for political options. “There is the possibility of perpetrator trauma which must itself be acknowledged” LaCapra tells us, but, he adds, with that comes the commitment to a process of overcoming this trauma which must “in some sense [be] worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ “Of the Novelist as Society's Conscience: A Conversation with Amos Oz and Muki Tzur”, *Igeret*, 1034, 29.10.1972, Pp-2-6. [Hebrew].

⁴⁹ LaCapra, 79.

It is a time, I believe, of a philosophical situation, marked by a crucial, clear and unavoidable choice of thought and of existence that must be made; by a distance of thought and creation as human facilities from (State and Market) power; and by the requirement to locate and reflect situations of exception, momentums of transformation against social and political conservatism. These signs point, as Alain Badiou would argue, to the necessity for an invention of a new problem.⁵⁰ Rethinking the kibbutz image can be a meaningful step in this direction. The kibbutz must be viewed beyond the rhetorical figures of common discourse, beyond the icon it became, in order to pave new routes for novel truths to arise.⁵¹ Once re-conceptualized as a moment of rupture, a break, the representation of the kibbutz bears the potential to be again constituted as, in Badiouian terminology, an Event – a zero-point for innovative problematization, questioning, mapping, definition, categorization, understanding – hence political alternatives. In other words, its deconstruction is, dialectically, the (only) way for its reconstruction.

The manifestation of the trauma of the victimizer must not, by any means, be compared to the trauma of the victims. It does resist the dichotomy of Israelis and Palestinians, and the separation of their fate, past, present and future, but it should never be forgotten that the two groups do not stand at the same position in relation to the Nakba, and much attention should be paid to avoid a dangerous perception according to which “we are all victims” of the 1948 war and the denial of Palestinian national and human rights ever since. This view echoes Liberal “all human” thought which refuses to acknowledge power relations. It is also at the risk of repeating and reaffirming the subjugation of the Palestinian pain to the Jewish point-of-view and interpretation of its own suffering.

Instead, the process of working through the Zionist Left Cultural Trauma should involve giving up the fetish of utopian Zionist redemption as well as the melancholic nostalgia for Socialism while accepting the partial, the notion of becoming, insisting on the permanent effort, out of responsibility and sensitivity, for the rehabilitation of a moral agency, which aims to promote justice and equality. Against the background of the current situation in Israel and its occupied territories, the need of such process is no less than urgent.

⁵⁰ See Alain Badiou, “Thinking The Event” in Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, Cambridge: Polity, 2009, pp. 1-48.

⁵¹ Ibid.