

Introduction

Periodizing Israeli Literature

One of the more nagging problems of writing a book in English about Israeli literature is a problem of audience: it is unclear whether one is writing for scholars of Israeli culture and literature, for people actually invested in Israel as a collective project, or for a larger circle of theoretically informed scholars. That this problem is symptomatic of a deeper problem of social mapping, or of having some stable mental representation of the way in which one's activity is inserted into the world, should be obvious. Yet, so quick of a plunge into a generalized social condition would be too easy. Much more difficult is another valence of this problem: the fast crumbling of the humanities academia, its institutional form undergoing a process of neoliberalization that eliminates the tenured positions on which its previous existence depended. It thus becomes unclear whether one can keep on writing as if the reader is the same academic professional, with its specific prejudices, habits, and sensitivities, or whether some new mode of writing, and new topics and new sets of preoccupations, should be developed. Complicating things further is that the position of more political academic work has always had an ambivalent relation to this institutional position. Indeed, a new realm of politicized writing has evolved in many new journals and other publication venues, one that does not depend on institutionalized academia and that does not follow its writing conventions (but is also different from the older lay publications, its interests sometimes echoing the narrow areas of specialization of the more academic kind of writing). One would be tempted to call such new forms of knowledge production neoliberal, even when the writing itself is completely antagonistic to the current hegemonic mode of social organization. That this book follows the conventions of the older academic style should be seen as itself somewhat

of a utopian gesture—in the precise sense of evoking a social world that no longer exist—an ambivalent position if there ever was one.

But more practical problems result from this indeterminacy of audience, ones that have to do with more technical decisions on the composition of the following chapters, and which make introductions into more elaborate constructions than they were before. Thus, the introduction becomes something like a space in which one explicitly projects the book's expected audience, as if creating the readers in imagination. But the contradictions are not always easily solved on the level of the introduction's form itself. And so the crisis of the humanities—of which the devolving of theory from the lingua franca of the humanities into simply another hermetic field is surely another sign—is visible in the division of this introduction. In the first part, I provide an outline of the book's arguments. And to the second (and longer) part of it I leave the theoretical discussion of what this book is trying to achieve—placing its intervention not only within the world of theory but also in relation to the global study of literature, and with relation to the historiography of Israel and Zionism—for it should be clear that this book is no less about history and the theoretical problem of periodization than it is a book of literary criticism. In this latter part, I will briefly touch on the book's chapters again, as they relate to the theoretical issues raised. Any reader that has no interest in this more theoretical exercise of framing the book's intervention is welcome to skip the theoretical part altogether.

The present volume presents to the reader a new history of Israeli literature. To produce this new history I discuss three moments of transformation in Israeli letters: the 1950s, which are usually considered the moment in which Zionist realism gives way to the universalist “New Wave” of 1960s authors; the 1980s, which are usually taken to designate the moment in which Israeli literary postmodernism was born—with its accompanying multicultural valence; and the present moment (or rather a moment that began roughly in the middle of the first decade of the new millennium). This latter moment is usually not called anything in literary-critical commentary, for it is hardly discussed at all—a problem in its own right to which we will give due attention in the last two chapters of this book.

Even before the collapse of disciplinary boundaries, literary history has always been a strange creature—not entirely distinguishable from literary criticism, from the sociology of culture, or from history proper. So that this book forms new connections between literary and socioeconomic change should not be entirely surprising. And it is on this ground—of the mediation of social form into the realm of representation—that this book

most clearly challenges existing histories of Israeli literature, and of Israel and Zionism generally. Most existing approaches, as the second part of this introduction will amply demonstrate, suffer from conceptual weakness, which is itself the result of the absence of a clear theory of mediation between the social and the cultural; but most also suffer from an impoverishment of the imagination, whose source is their commitment to the categories of the literary-historical paradigm established in the 1960s. It is the inability to go beyond this narrative in any substantial way that is the problem that is most forcefully tackled by this current volume. I hesitate to name the approach taken here a totalizing and a Marxist one, and not only because of the prejudices and confusions still associated with these labels (which seem to finally be on the wane, with the decline of Cold-War era liberalism). But also because to call the approach taken here a Marxist one is for many to commit to seeing it as one possible approach among many others, in some kind of irreducible multiplicity of interpretive options. But it is precisely this seeming universality whose particularity is challenged in this book. It is not possible to accept the narrative offered here alongside these other ones; the narrative offered here becomes incoherent if it is seen as existing alongside these other narratives, rather than as these very narratives' transformation or reworking. It is this latter point that has to be kept in mind if one were to call this present volume a Marxist history of Israeli literature.

Summary of the Argument

The first chapter engages what I am calling the prehistory of Israeli fiction—beginning somewhat arbitrarily with Herzl's *Altneuland* and continuing to the pre-statehood years of the first half of the twentieth century. I choose here to focus on the largely forgotten realist literature of the 1920s and 1930s, which is usually deemed to be nothing but Zionist propaganda. I argue that 1930s novels such as Yisrael Zarchi's *Barefoot Days* reproduce formal elements of utopian novels (represented for us in Herzl's *Altneuland*), in trying to imagine the overcoming the contradictions of the Zionist collective project in Palestine. As opposed to the mainstream narratives (Israeli-national; Post-Zionist), I use recent writing to see this collective project as one aimed at radical social transformation, but that is not necessarily aimed at an establishment of a capitalist state. The consequences of this position are that the establishment of the state is eventually the result of Zionism's failure, rather than its success, challenging the hegemonic literary-historiographical narrative

established by Gershon Shaked (and inherited by all major commentators). The concluding section of this chapter, in which I address S. Yizhar's *Khirbet Khizeh*, will argue that it is precisely this failure that is repressed socially, but becomes unconsciously registered in Yizhar's novella and in the literature of the 1950s. The more theoretical part of this introduction discusses in more detail the antagonism between this narrative and the Israeli-national one, but also its antagonism to the main Post-Zionist variants of this history (mainly, that the historical narrative presented here is a totalizing one).

The next two chapters explore the ways in which this repressed break between Zionism and the state is expressed in the literature of the 1950s. One of the more entrenched beliefs in Israeli literary criticism is that this period marks the beginning of a turn away from the "propagandistic" literature of the '30s and '40s to the more "universal" or "non-ideological" literature of the '60s. Shaked's "New Wave" is here universally accepted as the most important moment of rebellion against literature-as-midwife of the nation; the "Zionist metanarrative"—an empty pseudo-concept if there ever was one, as I hope to demonstrate in what follows—becoming the aim of literature's bitter critique, rather than supplying the latter's basic narrative forms. Chapter 2 sets itself the task of exploding this narrative, exploring works by Yigal Mossinsohn and Nathan Shaham, who are supposed to be some of the clearest examples of ideologically committed literature. I then show that in Mossinsohn, the invention of internality or the self is a way of successfully mediating between history and individual action (necessary precisely because the crisis of the Zionist collective project has entailed a crisis of historicity or this relation to history). In Shaham, the point of view of the *Palmach's* soldiers is taken to emphasize precisely this crisis. The *Palmach* is here a perfect no-place: its sudden purposelessness as it nears its dissolution to form the national military removes social function from its members—and therefore becomes a convenient literary figure for the crisis of the Zionist project. The work of both authors, then, attempts to register this repressed crisis, and the interrogation of national-ideological motifs in both is a clear means to this end, and so is the ballooning of subjectivity and its antagonism to the social, under whose spell Shaked and other critics readily fall, as some imagined exit from ideology.

The next chapter then looks at the non-militaristic literary side of the '50s, by exploring works by Hanoah Bartov and Yehudit Hendel, giving particular attention to the latter's *Street of Steps*. Other thematizations of the same crisis, I argue, appear in the works of these two authors. In Bartov, a drama of integration of Jewish immigrants into a new Jerusalem

neighborhood is modelled after the “settlement novel” of the ’20s and ’30s (in which rural agricultural settlements are established). I try to argue that a failure to narrate is formally embedded in this straightforwardly realist narrative: the intervention of an outside agency whose social position is never mapped (as opposed to all others) is needed for the national allegory to function. It is this “alien” help that betrays the presence of the same crisis of the Zionist project. In Hendel’s much more complex novel, the failure to narrate becomes the formally dominant element (which is precisely the reason for the novel being so well-liked by the New Wave authors and critics). I address several thematizations of this narrative failure—the dissolution of time, the melancholia pervasive among Hendel’s characters (and many other characters in 1950s fiction), and naturalist representation of relationships. All of these, I argue, are the result of the same historical crisis. What Shaked and Miron (and others) see as an anti-ideological turn to universal themes or some eternal truth of human existence is here instead explained as a historical result.

Chapters 4 and 5 jump thirty years ahead to the 1980s, which is the next important moment of transformation in Israeli literature—one Avraham Balaban called the “Other Wave” in Israeli letters, echoing Shaked’s earlier “New Wave.” To call it “postmodern” as we once did would be to ignore many newer commentators that try to persuade us that using that term was wrong in the first place. That claim becomes part of the problematic we will try to solve in these chapters. Three questions guide me here: Whether there ever was Israeli postmodern literature (“postmodernism” here implying a whole periodizing schema, rather than an (at the last instance, incoherent) usage of it as an ethical or aesthetic choice)? What social transformations are related to this aesthetic change? And, why do Israeli critics since the mid-2000s retreat from using the term to describe Israeli fiction? The latter question is mostly treated in the last two chapters (since its answer properly belongs in this later period rather than in the ’80s and ’90s). I then show that the works of Orly Castel-Bloom and Yehudit Katzir display all the characteristics usually associated with postmodern fiction. I argue that at the heart of these lies an unconscious crisis of social mapping and historicity—a dissolution of the ability to orient oneself in social space. Yet, the relatively early emergence of postmodernism in Israeli letters, I argue, make the immediate source of this crisis unique to the Israeli context: it is the overnight proletarianization of Palestinians by Israeli capital, following the 1967 war. After 1967, I argue, Israeli everyday reality becomes overwhelmingly produced by those who are not part of

Israeli social imagination—which results in the representational crisis that lurks behind the more playful tone of Katzir and Castel-Bloom.

I then turn to 1980s and 1990s writers who do not at all display Castel-Bloom's and Katzir's playfulness, and who therefore are taken as representative of the “non-postmodernists” of the period: David Grossman, Yehoshua Kenaz, and Batya Gur. I then proceed to show how the crisis of social mapping becomes the main problem that all three texts try to resolve in imagination. In Grossman's *The Smile of the Lamb* this crisis is expressed through attempting to reconcile politically committed literature with an aesthetic ideology in which collective meaning is impossible; in Kenaz's *Infiltration* this crisis is manifested in an encyclopedic pastichization of the 1950s self-representation; and in Gur's detective novels it is registered in the exploding of the agency of the detective in the final instance. I thus answer two of the three questions posed: Israeli postmodern literature does exist, we can say, as long as we remember the unique origin of this postmodernism in the results of the 1967 war.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to the contemporary moment. My overarching claim in these chapters is that contemporary Israeli literature enacts a search for temporality or history. One should be careful to understand the specific difference of these texts from the previous, postmodern moment: these do not express some exit from or leaving-behind of postmodernity (a term whose specific significance I will address more fully in these chapters). Rather, the difference is one of coming-into-consciousness what was previously only an unconscious content: the disappearance of temporality and of historicity themselves—and the erosion of the possibility of mediation. These are no longer seen as freedoms (as they did in the postmodern moment), but are instead figured as problems to be solved, breathing life into a more utopian approach (or at least a more anti-anti-utopian) to the problem of a timeless present. Chapter 6 examines works by Ofir Touché Gaffa (representing here the emerging Israeli SF) and Einat Yakir. Gaffa's more speculative exploration of time in *The Day the Music Died* provides its readers with an unresolved contrast between a Fordist temporal world and the futureless present in which so many Israelis find themselves today. What is important here is that futurelessness itself must be contained by asserting its identity with previous generation's stable sense of the future. In Yakir's *Sand*, the search for time is enacted in a completely different way. The poor, precariously existing, family of ex-Soviet immigrants to Israel on which the novel focuses provides the occasion for a different temporal tension to emerge: that grating against each other of different modes of production

typical in the experience of ex-Soviet immigrants into capitalism. Uneven development, we used to call this chafing of two systems of organizing social life, and a certain sense of progress—or of time—used to accompany their spatial juxtaposition: the development imaginary that separated the first world from the second and third. These little expressions of time are here recreated in Yakir's novel, as I hope to show, needing to find their place within a horizon of total contemporaneity inscribed by neoliberal capitalism.

But here too this book insists on the dialectical specificity of the Israeli “case” of neoliberalism (or the way in which it is precisely through its difference that the Israeli case is part of a totality). So I offer here a new model through which to imagine the entity that we call “Israel,” one that offers its division into three “worlds,” or three forms of social existence, only one of which is dominated by the neoliberalism of the more American kind. This trio, I suggest, does not form a whole in itself, but only through its relation to global capitalism. The novels explored in these last two chapters and the search for time which they enact, I argue, provide us with a glimpse only into the first of these three “Israeli” worlds. In the last chapter, then, I trace the search for time in three additional texts: Yiftach Ashkenazi's *Fulfillment*, Lilach Netanel's *The Hebrew Condition*, and Ron Leshem's *Beaufort*. Ashkenazi's novel presents its readers with an allegory of the collapse of historicity itself, tracing the development of the sensibilities and contradictions associated with it from the 1960s to the early 2000s. The specific causes or origins ascribed to it in the novel are less important for us than the attempt to generate historicity again, or a sense of the present as part of historical change, which was exploded in the previous postmodern moment. In Netanel's novel—if one can call it that—the search for temporality is expressed through the main formal element: the repetition with slight variation of different narrative segments. This is not a playful dissolution of history, of ideology, or of everyday reality, but the subsumption of all of these under a—now threatening—inability to narrate, which is finally contained at the end of the novel, as I try to show. Leshem's *Beaufort* is here viewed as the last instance in a genre which this book explores in the earlier two moments as well, in the works of Yizhar and Kenaz. What is unique to Leshem's novel is precisely again the staging of imaginary containment missing from the earlier novels—the dissolution of everyday Israeli life and of the possibility of telling history must here be dispelled. That, in turn, signals to us that both have become felt problems to be overcome.

It is neoliberal capitalism and its effects that are therefore registered and “solved” in imagination in all of these more recent works, which are thus

given a historical and social background that distinguishes them from their predecessors. It is also the root cause of Israeli literary criticism's inability to identify this newness, and its gradual retreat from using terms such as "postmodernism," I argue in these last two chapters. The next section of this introduction explores in much more detail the theoretical background for the intervention performed by this book, mapping its relation to Israeli cultural historiography and to the theoretical problem of periodization more generally, as well as to Marxist theorizations of "peripheral literatures"—all these world literatures that do not belong to the core of global capitalism, assuming this last concept retains any coherence. Any reader that is not interested in these problems is welcome to skip over this next section and move on to the readings themselves. Yet this next section is necessary and urgent—and to defend this claim we must already move to the realm of theorizing.

Periodizing Israeli Literature, or Trying to Imagine the Present

This theoretical section of the introduction is divided into two parts. The first will deal generally with the problem of using a literary-critical tradition that has developed in the context of Western European and American literatures to discuss a peripheral literature. I will not focus here on the specificities of the Israeli case, but rather on the theoretical problem that can never be completely settled, namely, how Marxist literary criticism can be adapted to new social and cultural context. Our answer here would of course take us beyond these cultural specificities into that grand objective unity of the world under global capitalism. The second part of this introduction will be more strongly related to the subject matter of this book. I will here argue not only that a new history of Israeli literature is sorely needed, but also that the Marxist totalizing perspective—one that is able to relate cultural specificities to larger social structure and the history of form—is well suited to offer such new historical account.

Yet both of these depend on a more fundamental motivation that animates this project, one which has to do with a certain sense of being "stuck" historically, both in a narrower sense of what literary criticism of Hebrew literature offers us and in a broader sense of a lack of any transformative collective project beyond capitalism itself in a much more material sense. This is not to mean a lack of happenings, to be sure. But activity does not necessarily mean life, as Phillip K. Dick once said; and so it remains to raise

in our imagination the possibilities of transformation at which this book is eventually aimed. The new history of Israeli literature offered here is thus also a new history of Israel in general, and the new way of imagining the past which it contains necessarily extends into a new way of thinking the future. And to answer the proponents of objectivity or “surface reading” that might frown at this explicit political horizon—we must bring out the old arguments again, to show that the horizon of all interpretation is political, whether one is conscious of it or not.

Yet to articulate the problem itself with any degree of clarity we need to take a detour through geopolitics and what it means to be a peripheral literature (in an entirely non-ethical way) for our analysis not to be an arbitrary application of concepts to matter. At the height of what used to be called the age of postcolonial theory, the organizing categories of our literary geopolitics were those of “The West” versus the rest of the world. These existed uneasily with an older division, that of the three-worlds paradigm, denoting the capitalist, communist, and what was neither of these.¹ If this trio became defunct with the collapse of the Second World (the Soviet Union and its allies), the former is also in rapid decline, with the falling out of vogue of postcolonial theory. It seems inadequate today to invoke “The West” in the same way as the postcolonials used it, when social strife seems to have reached out of the former colonies to infect the old empires. The newer distinction between “Global North” and “Global South,” which to a certain degree inherited the old West-Rest distinction, rings false as well, mostly as it seems to be free from the ethical overtones and insistence on colonial past as the objective moment of origin of its problematic. Instead, the Global North-South divide seems to posit global inequalities as some matter for corporate intervention, a completely practical matter rather than one for revenge or revolution. Whatever the faults of the older categorical systems, their disintegration—or the absence of a stable frame to the way we think about geopolitics—puts us today in an even worse position. For, now our geopolitical imaginations seem to be ruled by a general indistinction—one that is inscribed either directly or through a nominalism in which there are just particular countries and no general categories can be applied. This synchronic indistinction is accompanied by a diachronic or historical one, in which imagined temporalities of development collapse. Gone is the imaginary operation that used to flatten the world into a linear sequence in which certain countries are more developed than others, making way instead for what Emilio Sauri and others see as a permanent contemporaneity.² One of the common examples of this tendency toward what we might call

an empty difference (which by its own emptiness reverts to its opposite, sameness), is the notion of “alternative modernities,” in which modernity no longer has any determinate content, but is rather exploded into an irreducible multiplicity of “experiences of the modern.” We will return to this collapse of geopolitical mapping and temporality in what follows.

In this situation, the older critiques of these categories (modernity, development, etc.) from within the left become wholly unnecessary.³ Yet there is one such geopolitical division that survives, I would like to suggest: the Marxist distinction between the global economic core and periphery, developed by Immanuel Wallerstein, but used in many other different Marxist theorizations of global capitalism, such as Robert Brenner’s.⁴ All of these hark back to Marx’s own determination that “the tendency to form a world market is given in the concept of capital itself.”⁵ Thus, what unites the world into a single system is the global spread of capitalism itself, an expansion that historically takes place through colonialism and imperialism—but in which the colonized part of the world becomes no less capitalist than the colonizing one. But this spread of sameness is not inherently antagonistic to difference as such, but is rather the common grounds on which difference is allowed to develop. “One but unequal,” is Wallerstein’s formula for this unity of the world, in which the differences between countries is not reduced away, but explained through the different locations of each economy within the hierarchy of world capitalism—clearly dominated by the United States (and in the same breath one should add that dependence acts both ways in the totality of global capitalism—if anything, it is the master that depends on the cooperation of the slave more than the other way around).

The world is thus not relegated to sameness in this model, but rather to what is usually called “combined and uneven development,” a term that already moves us from some purely economic register to one of social form. Crucial to this conceptualization of the world-system is the following observation: what (used to) seem to us like an imperfect economic development—thriving “economic” bustling not yet expanding into certain areas that seem backward—is actually produced and maintained *as underdeveloped* by the expansion of capitalism itself. As the Warwick Collective put it in their recent theorization of world literature:

the imposed capitalist forces of production and class relations tend not to supplant (or are not allowed to supplant) but to be conjoined forcibly with pre-existing forces and relations. The outcome . . . is a contradictory ‘amalgam of archaic with

more contemporary forms’—an urban proletariat working in technologically advanced industries existing side by side with a rural population engaged in subsistence farming; industrial plants built alongside ‘villages of wood and straw’; and peasants ‘thrown into the factory cauldron snatched directly from the plow’ . . . The multiple modes in and through which this ‘coexistence’ manifests itself—the multiple forms of appearance of unevenness—are to be understood as being connected, as being governed by a socio-historical logic of combination, rather than as being contingent and asystematic.⁶

Thus, the “what” seems like a lag in development—the periphery of global capitalism lagging behind the core, displaying remnants of non-capitalist social structure—is in fact produced or reproduced by the global capitalist system. What is crucial for us to note is the shock of contemporaneity that thus becomes the antidote to some notion of imperfect or not-yet-complete development: the core’s metropolitan skyscrapers and the periphery’s slum cities and rural villages being complementary and necessary parts of the same capitalist world system.

Thus this Marxist conception of the becoming-one of the world system is antagonistic to any notion of alternative modernities as incommensurable realities (a special place should be reserved here for those “modernities” that took place, at least for part of their existence, precisely against and outside of capitalism—such as those of the Soviet Block, or that of China. It is only here that some true alternative to global capitalism temporarily exists, as Liu Kang notes for the case of China, even if these too ended up becoming part of the capitalist system in the end.⁷ We will return to these cases in what follows). The title of Fredric Jameson’s *A Singular Modernity* attests precisely to this Marxist position, whose explanatory advantage over its antagonist should be clear: the different modernities are here successfully seen as so many social experiences corresponding to different parts of the capitalist totality.⁸ Put more dialectically, the difference of the periphery is precisely where their unity with the core resides.

It is this Marxist view of the historical formation of the capitalist world-system that becomes crucial for the kind of Marxist approach to peripheral literature followed in this book. The different literatures are related to the core and to each other by constituting so many imaginative responses to these local social conditions created by the global expansion of capitalism. This historical expansion is not just one critical content among

many. Rather, as Nick Brown comments in his study of European Modernism and African Literature:

The global expansion of capitalism, with all of its social, psychological, and cultural effects, is obscured when we speak of modernism as a product of “Western culture” and of African literature as “non-Western.” Indeed, when the boundary between the two is bracketed, the differential movement of capital emerges not as one kind of content among many, but as the fundamental content of both modernism and African literature.⁹

What is important for us is not so much the critique of the category of “The West” as such, whose coherence and utility have diminished considerably as we said above, but rather a different point: that the expansion of capitalism as the referent (in the last instance) of both Modernism and African Literature is barred from being just another interpretation of both of them, alongside other readings—as in some non-antagonistic multiplicity of readings. Rather, this referent is either invisible (if we accept an insurmountable division between African literature and European Modernism), or it is the overriding referent of both, if we violate this division. It is in this sense that taking identity categories as our basic coordinates (rather than as ideologies or codes to be transcoded, excludes a Marxist reading, rather than supplementing it, or coexisting with it (and to be clear: a code of class is by all means also one of these transcodable imaginations). In other words, to see the validity of the global Marxist literary comparativism—that the different literatures are so many creative imaginary responses to different parts of a global capitalism—one has to accept that identity categories do not constitute endpoint or horizon of interpretation, which is to say that their existence in our mind is ultimately contingent and historically produced. This does not mean that they are secondary or derivative, but rather exactly the opposite: that they, among other figurative tools, are our only way of imagining resistance and transformation. To be sure, one could level the same accusation at the Marxist paradigm—that class antagonism as interpretive key can also be overcome (in thought and historically). And Marxists would be happy to agree: the dissolution of capitalism and social class as such have always been the ultimate goal of Marxist critique.

Alongside Nick Brown’s work, other examples of the Marxist paradigm can be given. First, at a more general level, we have already mentioned that uneven development has meant the persistence of pre-capitalist hierarchies

and social forms alongside those of capitalism, to a certain extent even owing their continued existence to capitalist expansion. As Benita Parry and others argue, the coexistence of two (or more) radically different social systems accounts for all kinds of “irrealisms” or deviations from realist narration, a kind of splitting of the representational apparatus that a too-hasty reading would just identify with modernism.¹⁰ Fredric Jameson similarly shows that literature that emerges out of these contexts, such as Latin American Magic Realism, “betrays the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features.” . . . The organizing category of magic realist film . . . is one of modes of production.¹¹ Yet the problem of peripheral literatures cannot really be resolved at this level of generality, but rather has to be posed and solved for each historical context anew, as Jameson and Brown themselves admit. Parry’s “irrealisms” could serve as a good example for the unsatisfactory nature of such generalizations: the deviation from realist representational norms, even if it is common to all unevenly developed contexts, is too overdetermined by other causes to provide a good litmus test for peripherality. Franco Moretti’s work well-known theorization of world literature, in which disruptions of narrative voice become the distinguishing mark of peripheral novels, is another example of such a generalization: no matter its value for defining world literature, it is certainly too general to become some kind of strict homologue of economic peripherality.¹²

One should thus more closely examine theoretical accounts of specific literatures, of which Brown’s discussion of African literature is a good example. Another example can be found in the writing of Roberto Schwarz on late nineteenth-century Brazilian literature. The problem of posed by the Brazilian conjuncture, according to Schwarz, is a peculiar meeting point of peripheral capitalism with imported liberal ideology. In the countries of the capitalist core, liberal ideology of individual freedom has explanatory (or, as some would say, orienting) value, at least in terms of the immediate experience of wage-laborer: competition between workers is the immediate condition encountered by workers in these economies. But this is not the case in Brazil. Here, according to Schwartz, the capitalist world market (for which Brazil is an agricultural exporter) depended on the continued use of slave labor in the late nineteenth century, rather than wage-labor. This entailed a rather unique adaptation of the function of the liberal ideology imported into Brazil, and its literary use. Schwarz’s brilliant proposal for understanding of the relation between literature and social form in this context should be quoted at length:

Slavery was indeed the basic productive relationship, and yet it was not the social relation directly at work in ideological life. The key lay elsewhere. To find it, we must take up again the country as a whole. To schematize, we can say that colonization, based on the monopoly of the land, produced three classes of population: the proprietor of the latifundium, the slave and the 'free man,' who was in fact dependent. Between the first two, the relation is clear. Our argument will hinge on the situation of the third. Neither proprietor, nor proletarian, the free man's access to social life and its benefits depended, in one way or another, on the favour of a man of wealth and power [. . .] Favour was, therefore, the relationship by which the class of free men reproduced itself, a relationship in which the other member was the propertied class. The field of ideological life is formed by these two classes, and it is governed, therefore, by this relationship. Thus, under a thousand forms and names, favour formed and flavoured the whole of the national life, excepting always the basic productive relationship which was secured by force. Favour was present everywhere, combining itself with more or less ease to administration, politics, industry, commerce, the life of the city, the court, and so on. [. . .] Favour was our quasi-universal social mediation—and being more appealing than slavery, the other relationship inherited from colonial times, it is understandable that our writers based their interpretation of Brazil upon it, thereby unwittingly disguising the violence that had always been essential to the sphere of production.

Slavery gives the lie to liberal ideas; but favour, more insidiously, uses them, for its own purposes, originating a new ideological pattern. [. . .] Liberalism, which had been an ideology well grounded in appearances, came to stand for the conscious desire to participate in a reality that appearances did not sustain. When he justified arbitrariness by means of some 'rational' reason, the beneficiary consciously exalted himself and his benefactor, who, in turn, had no motive to contradict him, rationality being the highest value of the modern world. In this context, ideologies do not describe reality, not even falsely, and they do not move according to a law of their own; we shall therefore call them 'ideologies of the second degree.' Their law of movement is a different one, not the one they name; it honours prestige,

rather than a desire for system and objectivity. The reasons for this were no secret: the inevitable ‘superiority’ of Europe, and the demands of the moment of expression, of self-esteem and fantasy, which are essential to favour. In this way, as we have said before, the test of reality and coherence did not seem to be decisive, notwithstanding its continuous presence as a requirement, recalled or forgotten according to circumstances. Thus, one could methodically call dependence independence, capriciousness utility, exceptions universality, kinship merit, privilege equality, and so on. By linking itself to the practice of what, in principle, it should criticize, liberalism caused thought to lose its footing. Let us not forget, however, the complexity of this step: inasmuch as they became preposterous, these ideas also ceased to mislead.¹³

The totalizing horizon of Schwarz’s argument (“the country as a whole”) here should be noted: his understanding of the uniqueness of late nineteenth-century Brazilian literature has to do with relating local ideology to the local economic base. The new social role of liberal ideology in this case emerges from the mismatch between imported ideology and a social form. It is only through this totalizing movement that Schwarz can conclude that Brazilian literature is wholly based in the “favor” social relation, which provides a simple but very powerful explanation for the curious pastiche-status of liberal ideology in the literary works he discusses (most notably, the work of Machado de Assis). But the national frame is not the absolute limit of this totalizing movement. The dialectical force and implication of the argument would be completely missed if we ignore that the difference of the Brazilian case is the form of appearance of its unity with the capitalist world system—which constitutes the final horizon of thought for Schwarz’s argument.

The case of Israel and Zionism, on which we have not begun to touch, is too different from the Brazilian one to merit any direct analogies. What is important for my purpose here is to note the way in which the terms with which we do literary criticism become indirectly twisted in the periphery. To say “liberal ideology” in Schwarz’s context is to be clear enough in terms of conceptual content. But, as Schwarz shows, it is to say something entirely new in terms of its social location and function—since the liberal subject is nowhere to be found, and liberalism does not function as an ideology in any familiar sense. As I will try to show throughout this book, the same is true of using imported terms in the Zionist and Israeli

case—most importantly periodizing terms such as realism, modernism and postmodernism. Even if each of these, when invoked in Israeli literary criticism, designates the same specific determinate content that it has in the global core—the characteristics of a specific style or aesthetic principles—each functions in a manner entirely different within the contradictory totality of the development of Zionist and Israeli capitalist society. The antagonistic coexistence of realism and modernism in Hebrew literature from Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century is useful as a quick illustration here. For, what can we mean by “realism” and “modernism” when the latter does not supplant the former, but rather flourishes alongside it? If modernism is not seen as the result of some exhaustion of realism, in what sense is it modernism at all? Indeed, in what sense can one call “realism” an aesthetic branch that triumphed over its “modernist” antagonist—not today, in what seems like (but is exactly not) a revival of realism, as it were after the end of postmodernism—but in the early twentieth century?¹⁴ That this strange situation makes one look for a model in the Soviet option, with its notorious doctrine of Socialist Realism, should in itself tell us that a radically different social state of affairs must exist to support such coexistence of “realism” and “modernism” (and it should be clear that the Soviet analogy is as problematic as the analogy to the capitalist core, since Socialist Realism was a representational strategy of hegemony, a position that was not available to early Zionism).

This book’s exploration of three moments of transformation of Zionist and Israeli literature is precisely an attempt to make visible the dialectical difference of its subject matter, through its location within (or entry into) global capitalism. And the fate of Palestinians, as we will see, is absolutely central to this new historical mapping. The first moment is the 1950s, which should be seen as extending from the mid-’40s to the late ’50s. This is precisely the moment of political triumph for capitalist social form in Palestine (which is not to say that capitalism first appears in Palestine in this time). The second moment is that of the 1980s, which was hailed as the coming of postmodernism to Israeli literature (a narrative which critics today seem reluctant to reproduce), which as I will try to show has to do with the economic results of the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The third moment is the current one, which can be characterized as the imperfect neoliberalization of Israeli society: the rolling-back of welfare-state social protections, and the heightened immediacy of subjects’ relation to the forces of global capitalism, which seemingly paradoxically exists alongside the growth of a new “welfare state” in the occupied

territories. To forestall the usual knee-jerk accusations of reductionism, it is important to emphasize how non-reductionist our Marxist readings will be (as any reading of the following chapters easily demonstrate): For, as Adorno's writing about popular music demonstrates, literature is here not at all "merely" an expression of the economic.¹⁵ Rather, each text should be seen as constituting an original imaginative response to social contradictions, as a truly genuine creative effort to provide contradictions with perceivable figures and to imagine their resolution. For Adorno, 1940s American popular music retains its creative magic by mastering an outright impossible task: to reconcile the contradictory (social) demands of exhaustion and boredom. In a similar way, any truly Marxist understanding of cultural production must contain an account of its indispensable necessity as a separate realm in its own right (provided that culture does indeed still forms such a realm). Thus, it is only through offering a totalizing explanation—one that places culture within the force-field of a contradictory social whole—that the uniqueness of literature is preserved, rather than eradicated. And if "reductionism" is to be understood in a more temporal vein—as the explanation of the new wholly in terms of a preexisting explanatory schema—then a Marxist account is even more suitable to be a way of escaping reductionism into new and unfamiliar interpretive territory. As Walter Benn Michaels claims, our contemporary scholarly moment is overwhelmingly characterized by studies that focus on multicultural themes (racial, ethnic, sexual, etc.)—a judgment that can surely be extended to English-language publications on Israeli literature. A Marxist account thus undoubtedly offers a fresh, or non-reductive, analytical prism—one that as I argued above cannot be simply one among an irreducible multiplicity of marginal perspectives.¹⁶

But another short comment regarding multiculturalism or identity politics (which have dominated the critique of Israeli culture) is in order, if only to clarify that one does not need to imagine it to be absolutely antagonistic to Marxist hermeneutics. For one of the problems of accounts that stress the explicit appearance of race, gender, or class is that they are hermeneutically limited to an ethics of overt content. It should be clear that a morality tale about the misfortunes of the lower class is as non-Marxist as one about Mizrachis or an oppressed gendered perspective. Rather than championing such reified version of "class analysis," the hermeneutical model with which I work here is one of a layered model of interpretation, which can accommodate the antagonistic coexistence of multiple interpretive codes or levels (the most complete articulation of which exists in Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, but has its predecessors in the works of

Lukács, Pierre Macherey, and the Frankfurt School, but also of Freud and Lacan). It should be stressed that it is entirely false that some interpretive levels are more primary or important than others in this model in any ethical sense; nor do any of them stand for a deeper “truth”: the overt figure being completely necessary and vital, in that it is the only vehicle through which certain antagonisms can become visible and usable in political struggle—and here, of course, the anti-reductionist primacy of representation in any Marxist account of culture is again asserted. A Marxist hermeneutic is therefore not to be preferred because it utterly replaces that of identity politics, but because it is the only one that can bring both codes together in a single interpretive effort, without it becoming some facile reconciliation.

It is here that we can finally approach one more specific charge of reductionism, namely, that seeing Israeli literature (or indeed any peripheral literature) through the prism of the global spread of capitalism ignores other historical narratives of this literature, as if declaring itself to be the real material transformation underlying what is essentially mere ideology. In the case of Israel, that would be the narrative of the development of Zionism and the Hebrew literature attached to it. We have two antagonistic types of narrative for these: the Israeli national narrative, and the Post-Zionist one. I would like to defer our detailed treatment of this history, or more accurately its rewriting, to the following chapters of this work. Here, I would simply like to address in more general theoretical terms the relation between this Marxist account of the spread of capitalism and narrating peripheral literary history using its own terms—briefly and schematically, but usefully so. I argue not only that the Marxist account is not reductive, but also that it can actually accommodate what seems initially to be irreconcilable narratives of the same period—those of national liberation, or even those of anti-capitalist collective projects as such. The case of China in Liu Kang’s writing, which was mentioned above, is one such instance, and that of Zionism is another (and it does not matter for our present purpose whether one sees the essence of Zionism as oppressive or emancipatory). Anti-colonial struggles for independence are yet another. In all of these, to say that what counts is the integration into world capitalism of the specific peripheral area in question seems initially to ignore or discount those other narratives of struggle (which have their literary-historical equivalents—seeing the period’s literature understood either as working in the service of this struggle or critical of it). In other words, it is worth elaborating further Brown’s provocative assertion that

The narrative of national independence, appearing spontaneously as complete in itself, in fact takes its historical meaning from what is excluded from it, namely the limitations placed on the liberation movements by their location in the world economy. Each of these countries, once independence was on the horizon, faced the same question: whether to dare genuinely to challenge the logic of capital and violently disturb property relations or, remaining within the context of a purely national liberation, to strike a bargain with the former colonizer (in the contemporary example of South Africa, with investment capital).¹⁷

It should be clear in today's political climate—in which what was previously the revolutionary “Second World” has long become thoroughly capitalist, and in which the massive protests of the Arab Spring mark the utter bankruptcy of the anti-colonial revolutions, we would do well to find a way of narrating these seeming historical openings—rifts that could have led to a different world—together with their final integration into global capitalism, without losing sight of either the possibilities opened up by the initial upheaval or that final incorporation into the global order. One should begin by noting that an anti-capitalist horizon actually did unevenly inform many of these struggles for national liberation. The more explicitly revolutionary cases of China and the Soviet Union are simply the ones that most emphatically pose the problem of such narratives: how to think together an anti-capitalist struggle (which sometimes even seems successful) with an ultimate integration into global capitalism. But ignoring this for the moment, rather than noting that capitalism is the unacknowledged limitation of national liberation narrative, I would like now to offer an explicit theorization of what Brown gestures toward by saying that “the narrative of national independence . . . takes its meaning . . . from the limitations placed on the liberation movements by their location in the world economy.” In other words, what I will now argue is that the narrative of national emancipation is in fact preserved in the Marxist historical narrative of capitalism's expansion, rather than vanishing from it as some merely expressive illusion—a vulgar Marxist narrative if there ever was one.

So on the one hand we have an idealist narrative of national independence, and against it the vulgar Marxist narrative of the spread of global capitalism. It is worth noting at this stage that one of these narratives has to do with the economic base (spread of capitalism), while the other revolves

around ideology or the superstructure (national independence). To understand both as part of the same historical moment I will use the Marxist appropriation of the Hegelian notion of the Ruse of Reason, or what Fredric Jameson calls the “vanishing mediator” in his essay on Weber’s account of Protestantism and its relation to the birth of European capitalism.¹⁸ The basic structure of historical transformation is understood here to have three moments, which take place along two axes: that of means (or material infrastructure) and ends (or ideological superstructure). The first moment in such transformation is the making-explicit of some goal that was implicit in the older superstructure. In the next moment, new means are elaborated in order to achieve this older goal, replacing older means which seem to have failed to serve their purpose. In the last moment, the older goal itself vanishes, leaving us with the new means, a new socioeconomic infrastructure. In Jameson’s essay, whose subject matter is the rise of Protestantism and its relation to the “infrastructural” formation of capitalism, the first moment is that of Luther (in which the older religious goals are stressed and the existing means condemned); the second one corresponds to Calvin (in which the new rationalization of means is elaborated), and the third—in which religious goals disappear altogether, leaving us with nothing but the new means or infrastructure, capitalist social relations—is simply modern society. It is in these moments of historical transformation that the effectiveness of the superstructure is revealed, or as Jameson puts it: “Thus [in this schema], the superstructure may be said to find its essential function in the mediation of changes in the infrastructure [. . .] and to understand it in this way, as ‘vanishing mediator,’ is to escape the false problems of priority or of cause and effect in which both vulgar Marxism and the idealist position imprison us.”¹⁹

It is this narrative structure that will now make it possible for us to think together the spread of capitalism and national or social liberation movements—even those that have a socialist element to them. For the first moment’s old goal is precisely that of emancipation (which exists more or less implicitly on both the colonized and colonial side). And the second moment’s new means that are introduced are precisely those of capitalist social form and the subjective set of behaviors needed to function in it, or a social form that would fit well into the unevenly developed economic position of each specific peripheral economy. In the third moment, the goal of liberation simply disappears or becomes tame and ineffective, leaving us with the new means that were created: capitalist society. Thus, the national liberation movement is here the ruse under which a transition into capitalist social form (or one of its stages) is made possible. It is in this way that