Lost Homeland: On the Portrait of the "Mizrahi" in Yehoshua Kenaz's Novel "Infiltration"

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Hebrew culture, wretched poor, vessel of tears, shall I impute her crimes to her and remind her of her earliest sins? I shall."[1]

A

A few weeks after Yehoshua Kenaz's book Infiltration was published [in Hebrew],[2] a literary radio show ran a program about the novel. In the program,[3] speakers from completely different spheres of "the literary republic" — authors, poets, literary researchers and translators— participated. All identified a similar quality in the novel: "From the point of view of Nili Mirsky and Avraham Yavin, translators and literary critics" said the host of the program introducing two of the speakers, "this novel is a literary creation whose story of basic training is only its external shell and which enfolds within it questions and critique on the human condition that are beyond time and place." The poet and journalist Eli Mohar believes that "Infiltration is not a book that deals with social content, but the individual and his heart's fears and compassion." The literary researcher Ariel Hirschfeld identifies the duality that drives the novel, and formulates it in more authoritative terms: "Infiltration is a social novel," he said, "But it is much more than that—it is [also]a metaphysical novel."

This virtually collective reading of the novel reveals the way in which critical review encountered Infiltration. It identified in it two types of novel — a social novel and a metaphysical one — and preferred to read the metaphysical novel because it is obviously "much more than that [just a social novel]." Wit this normative hierarchization of the novel-within-a-novel that prefers the metaphysical to the social, the critics have de-politicized one of the most political novels written in Israel. These "readings" are also demonstrate the active participation of Hebrew literary criticism in the process of imagining a homogenous Israeli community, a retreat to an imaginary "we" any time fragmentation makes itself visible in some kind of text. Critics re-invent the novel as a liberal narrative, the story of a metaphysical, non-social and non-gendered individual, someone who is "all of us" and, at one and the same time, "none of us," in order to conceal any mention of the physical, the gendered or sociological fragments, from which are assembled not only the "we," but also the "one."

Even Geshon Shaked, perhaps the most politicized reader in Hebrew literature, tends to see Infiltration in terms of the pain and vacillation of "Man." With the help of apolitical, existential language, Shaked strips the novel from its Israeli political setting and situates it in a sort of liberal extra-territoriality, style of 1984: "The title of the novel, Infiltration, testifies largely to its content. The novel poses the

question: How can individuals 'infiltrate' society, yet retain their uniqueness within a society that, because of its uniform nature, always prefers the masses?"[4]

In the following pages I attempt to recover the political nature of this wonderful novel by dismantling the imaginary Israeli subject hiding behind the "metaphysical individual," allowing its gender-based and ethnic fragments to come to the fore. I accomplish this by attempting to listen to moments in the novel in which the unified nationalistic readings, in the words of Roland Barthes, explode and are scattered.[5] I also attempt to understand why the critics have identified two types of novels in Infiltration, and why they have chosen to prefer one over the other. The deciphering of the ideological codes that enabled the critics to understand the novel will lead us at the end to a fateful encounter between the way Israeli literature and culture perceives the Mizrahi and Mizrahi identity, and how we might understand the relationship between this conception of Mizrachim and characteristics of the Israeli novel.[6]

B

Infiltration is set in the 1950's, in a boot camp of the IDF (Israel Defense forces). Kenaz's big innovation here, or what aroused most of the attention of the critics, is that this is basic training for noncombatant soldiers, that is, soldiers who have physical limitations, defective bodies. Ostensibly, this seems to be a rather daring literary choice, but in the context of Modern Hebrew literature, it is clear that this choice has deep roots in tradition,[7] and is typical of "canonical" writers with a particular ideological position since the writers of the "generation of the State."[8] Moreover, most of those who read this novel point out that the bootcamp base is not really a "place for others" but a microcosm of Israeli society,[9] including children of the moshavim [Israeli cooperative settlements], students of the elite high schools, Mizrahim from the transit camps, Holocaust survivors and even one ex-haredi [ultra-Orthodox].

The process that Israeli society imposes upon these characters is a well-known one in our literature. Yigal Schwartz terms it "human engineering"[10] and Michael Gluzman, "the physical rehabilitation of the Jewish body."[11] Yaffa Berlowitz calls it "the attempt to create a model of the 'new man,' that includes among other qualities, a healthy, strong body with a healthy, strong soul."[12] And David Biale, in his book Eros and the Jews, describes it this way:

One of the central claims of Zionism was that the Jews lived a disembodied existence in exile and that only a healthy national life could restore a necessary measure of physicality or materiality. This political ideology was not only based on the body as metaphor; it sought, in addition, to transform the Jewish body itself, and especially the sexual body. Zionism meant both the physical rooting of the 'people of the air' (Luftmenschen) in the soil of Palestine and the reclamation of the body.[13]

In the literature of the Second Aliyah [second wave of Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel 1904–1914], this ideology was realized in many narratives. Some of these portrayed successful metamorphoses—

stories of physical transformations concluded by the Jew becoming a new Hebrew--some unsuccessful attempts—stories of the tragic or parodic inability of the Jew to change. Kenaz's novel, like these founding Zionistic texts (whether literary or non-literary), develops the physical descriptions of the recruits in accordance with the hoped-for transformation, using the metaphor of illness that characterized figures like Ben-Gurion's "Jew in the Diaspora."[14] In Infiltration: "All the people you see here are sick," said one of the recruits. "All of them, for your information, are cripples. Defective combat-worthiness! Medical Grade B!"[15]

In the Ben Gurion-inspired narrative, as in some of the literary genres of the First and Second Aliyot,[16] the ailing Jew is restored to health because of his aliyah, where he develops physical and mental robustness and becomes a person who is " free of the afflictions of exile, valiant and daring, standing up bravely to any foe capable of dominating the forces of nature, fructifying the wasteland, conquering the sea and the air, working creatively for the achievement of Israel's economic independence and the formation of a new Hebrew society". [17]

However, the ethos of transformation as a result of contact with the land becomes problematic after 1948 from a political perspective: it became impossible to conceive that Jews from Yemen, Iraq or the concentration camps could become healthy, "new Jews" in every way, just as a result of their aliyah to Eretz Israel and contact with the homeland. Therefore a change took place in the transformative process itself, and the forces of creativity, robustness and health were transferred from the land itself to the venues of training or hachshara, primarily as represented by the army base, and specifically bootcamp for new recruits. If, until then, it was Eretz Israel in its entirety that was capable of healing the Jew and changing him into a Hebrew, now the transformation could only take place in the framework of the IDF. In the words of Ben Gurion:

The army of a progressive nation can be, and in our case must be, an instrument for raising the level of the population. Our army will not be fulfilling its mission, externally or internally, if a soldier's period of military service does not enrich him physically, culturally, and morally…Our army [must be] a bastion of pioneering youth who are healthy in body and spirit, endowed with initiative, courage, energy, and a willingness to overcome every difficulty and face every danger.[18]

This narrative of physical rehabilitation is integrated in Infiltration through various techniques, some of which are typical of the poetic strategies used by the "State of Israel" generation of writers. Like Amos Oz in the short-story collection "Where the Jackals Howl," Kenaz scatters culturally resonant texts in his novel, such as the song "Roar of the cannons became silent," or heroic stories of Palmach fighters of the previous generation. These establish the possibility of rehabilitation within the storyline and also create ideological tensions — between generations, between the ideal of the State and its reality — that are characteristic of this generation of writers. In the words of Melabbes the narrator, "At these very moments I'm becoming and I have no influence over it. We're all becoming now, and maybe that's why we've been incarcerated here, like plague carriers or criminals serving their terms."[19]

C

But Kenaz uses this theme of physical recovery, perhaps the central theme of Jewish culture in its Zionist version, in order to make an ironic comment about the Zionist meta-narrative. In the very place where the Zionist voice imagines a physical transformation, Kenaz expresses the denial of the body in his heroes' attempts to transcend their physicality. From his perspective, those that succeed in being transformed, as in some of the novels mentioned above, are destined to an especially tragic end — a physical one.

This is the situation for Spector, the teacher, who lies dying in Hadera, one of the first moshavim of the Second Aliyah. Spector is a veteran Ashkenazi of the yishuv [Jewish settlement in pre-State Palestine] and the father of one of the recruits. He had been a teacher, but did not know how to deal with the generation of wild, rude children spawned by the Fifties. Now disease eats away at his body, but he is still lucid enough to make a long speech to his son about the essence of the "true existence" that is, of course, tied to the transcendence of the body:

Whenever I hear the word friend, the word friendship, I immediately think of Montaigne. I can't help thinking of him. I've often asked you to read his essays. But you never wanted to. I don't know—something frightened you. Or perhaps it was my pressure that put you off. You must read Montaigne. As opposed to the experience of friendship he knew, the common ties between people, what you in your corrupted language call friendship—seems pathetic, pitiful if not contemptible. The friendship Montaigne talks about is a sublime unity between two human beings, a kind of supreme spiritual pact. It's the real thing, an act of grace, a gift of the gods to the elect. …

Love that is all spirit, pure soul; love that is not dependent on the flesh. It has nothing to do with sensual pleasure. It has no ups and downs because it's not subject to the dictates of time. Youth, age, beauty, ugliness, have no effect on it. It's compelling, uncalculating, no promises or commitments, no rights and no obligations, no thought of expediency. And the main thing—it has no mutuality, because anyone who enters into such a union between souls is really returning to himself, but to his selfhood, his complete, double selfhood, which includes both possibilities, of being the self and the other at one and the same time. And therefore it involves no compromise or renunciation, because the two wills are two voices of one common, comprehensive will. It involves no mutual aid, because when one friend does something for the sake of the other, he does it to exactly the same extent for himself.[20]

Thus Spector "scorns the flesh finding ugliness in anything that is flesh and blood, or material substance. But Yehoshua Kenaz prepares a trap of irony for those who despise the flesh. Disease will kill Spector in a few weeks, that is, at least his body. Meanwhile his son Micky, the new recruit, observes his dying father, and translates his father's yearning for a life that is beyond the body in political terms, to a disappointment with this place, this Israel, and a yearning for another land, another

place. “He’s lived with us like an exile, longing for a lost homeland that he’ll never see again,” Micky says.[21]

This attempt to deny the body, to transcend anything that deals with concrete matter or “existence,” finds purest expression in Alon, the novel’s tragic hero. Alon is a kibbutznik, a member of a society that embodies that “other place,” a utopian, liberated place where the Jew envisions a new body and new sexuality. Alon is also supposed to be something else entirely, not a recruit in an army base of invalids but, perhaps, a soldier in the renown 101 Unit, or with a group of paratroopers: in other words one of the ghostly heroes who lack bodies. “Perhaps at that very hour a little group of paratroopers was crossing the border into Jordan or Egypt, stealing down the village paths, climbing up the mountain terraces and descending into the wadis, without dislodging a stone, without showing against the skyline.”[22]

But Alon the recruit, like Spector the teacher, or anyone else in the Kenazi universe, has a body, and these bodies are flawed, defective, not capable of correction or rebirth. They are flawed not because they are Jews but because they are bodies, physical entities. And these bodies sabotage the possibility of actualizing the dreams that Alon and Spector dream, dreams whose established linguistic motif is transcendency and disassociation:

In these moments I saw him shaking off the dull weight of the cloddish earth …and soaring back into his true element, the bright blue skies and far horizons of legend. [But even] this moment of respite, this sudden bestowal of grace, would be eroded by nagging arguments, dragged down by the humdrum daily reality of all the pettiness, the ugliness, the vulgarity, the selfishness, the sickness, and the Diaspora mentality by which he presumably felt himself surrounded.[23]

At the end of the novel, Alon’s aspiration to overcome the defect in his body and join the paratrooper unit is thwarted. The “other place” is denied him, and he is forced to continue living with his bodily flaw and the group of invalids who inhabit the real place, the “here and now” (the army base, the country). Still he refuses. “It simply doesn’t interest me. This isn’t my place. I belong somewhere else…I’m leaving here for another place,” he says a moment before he shoots himself in the head.[24]

D

One expression of the tendency of the characters in the novel to renounce reality is their attempt to deny, or actually to repress, their sexuality. Defective sexuality was one of the physical characteristics of illness in the image of the Diaspora Jew in European (and Zionist) culture,[25] and one of the main motivating forces behind building a new male Zionist body. But within the ideological and semantic system created by Infiltration, this attempt to create a new sexuality is cast as an anxious attempt to repress a real, concrete, physical sexuality. Therefore, even Alon from the veteran Ashkenazi yishuv, the representative of ideology that envisioned a new sexuality, is not capable of real bodily contact. In his relationship with his girlfriend Dafna, a fellow kibbutznik, there is no sexual contact. Alon, like the

“old” Jew, contents himself with fantasy—his nude drawings of Dafna, with pencil and charcoal. Even this nudity is not real because that would render it ugly and pornographic: “You saw my drawings, the nudity that I invented for here,” says Alon to his friend Micky, Spector the teacher’s son, “It’s not her. It’s not a photograph of her.”[26]

Kenaz portrays the sexuality of those recruits who, like Alon, belong to the veteran Ashkenazi yishuv as fearful, repressed, sometimes even hysterical. The major expression of this anxious sexuality is the desire to have a “different body” or according to Kenaz’s conception, not to have a body at all but to repress one’s physicality.

This sense of repression and renunciation is clearly captured in Micky’s attempt to lose his virginity. A few days before the end of basic training Micky visits a whorehouse accompanied, not coincidentally, by two Mizrahi recruits: Avner, whose blatant sexuality we will become familiar with, and Zackie, for whom Kenaz has not really created a character but has certainly created a body.

The sex scene between Micky and the prostitute will be familiar to readers of Modern Hebrew literature who will recognize the sexual failures of Aviezer, the feminine-male in the book of Mordecai Aaron Ginzburg, or those of Nahum Hegzer (“Hatzida” of Gnessin) and of Yosef Chafetz (“Bereavement and Failure” of Brenner).

From behind the closed door in the room that Micky had just entered, Gita’s voice suddenly cried angrily: “What’s the matter with you? Why don’t you take off your underpants?”

The old woman burst out laughing. There was no knowing if she had understood what her daughter had said in Hebrew, but in any case she was amused and appeared to expect her two companions to join in her laughter. But Avner’s face darkened, he drew his thick brows together as if trying to understand something, and Zackie whispered: “What’s going on? Isn’t he a man?”

And again Gita’s voice rose from behind the door. “No, I don’t want it like that. If you won’t take them off, you can go and take your money back. I won’t do it.”

Again there was a silence, and again they heard Gita’s voice: “Don’t bullshit me. You’re talking nonsense. I can see that everything’s all right down there.”[27]

This scene, which takes place towards the conclusion of basic training, when the hysterical Jews are supposed to have been transformed into virile, confident men, Kenaz’s ironic attitude towards the Zionist theme of physical and sexual rehabilitation is obvious. But we now also start to recognize Kenaz’s differentiations, only alluded to previously, between the characters of the veteran ideological Ashkenazi yishuv and the characters of the immigrants, mainly those from Arabic countries. We begin

to see how the imaginary “individual” of Hebrew literary criticism, the “individual” who is the fantasy of the national reading, is dismantled into other, ethnic entities.

Micky’s body and that of Hedgehog, the other Ashkenazi recruit, are still tattooed by the traumatic collective memory of the Jewish body, and participate in the Zionist gendering meta-narrative while the bodies of the Mizrahi soldiers are separated in this scene from the “national body,” and take no part in the gendering script. True, the physicality and sexuality of the Ashkenazi figures from the veteran yishuv, whether recruits and others, are flawed just like those of the immigrants, but the former group attempts, throughout the length of the novel, to transcend or deny their physical flaws, to become supra-physical or nonphysical. The immigrants, on the other hand, are reconciled to their physicality and sexuality, and therefore they are the ones who have an active physical and sexual existence.[28] Zackie, for example, described in nearly zoological terms: “His torso was covered with black hair, like a furry pelt, as were his arms and shoulders and the top of his back, all the way up to his chin.” And later, “Zackie’s black fur was dripping with sweat.”[29]

Kenaz also differentiates the sexuality of Ashkenazim from that of immigrants in the economy of representation, and the spatial mapping of the novel. Kenaz divides the novel into areas that embody the Zionist dream of overcoming the physical (moshav, kibbutz), and those locate “reality” (the transit camp, Jerusalem slums, Ramle). In those regions associated with the Zionist dream of the veteran Ashkenazi elite, the novel’s “metaphysical regions,” there is no real sexual life. Instead, the characters repeatedly attempt to (verbally) deny the sexuality of their bodies, to repress and transcend them. Within the immigrant reality, on the other hand, there are active sexual lives even if these are never “clean” or “normative.”

The novel’s economy of representation in the development of character and milieu is evident in a discussion between Ziva, a wellborn girl from Rechavia, and Avner, a Mizrachi. Their conversation takes place near the Terra Sancta building— a former monastery that housed Hebrew University’s Faculty of Humanities in the Fifties — located in the heart of the Rechavia neighborhood. Having met at a party Avner is escorting Ziva home. He tries to kiss her near the old monastery, but Ziva rejects him, even though she admits that she is attracted to him, suggesting something else in exchange:

“I want us to be friends,” said Ziva.

For a moment he was silent. The insult burned in his heart. He looked at her face, at her slender shoulders, at her neck encompassed by the sleeves of the sweater. “Friends?” he asked. “That sounds great, but what does it actually mean? Do you really think that a boy and a girl who’re attracted to each

other, like we are, can be friends without love and sex coming into it? What kind of friendship can there ever be between a boy and a girl? Unless they're attracted to each other like a man and woman, and then it's the sexual attraction that interests them in each other and keeps them together. Friendship can exist between members of the same sex. And that's something else entirely…But how can I have a friendship with a girl? You can't mean it seriously."

"I certainly do," said Ziva. "I'm not ignoring the problems, but I'm positive that if they really want to, then it's possible for a boy and a girl to have a friendly relationship even if they're physically attracted to each other and all the rest of it. In any case it's worth trying, it could be really nice."

"Nice?' exclaimed Avner. 'In my opinion it would be hell on earth."[30]

In light of what we learn about Ziva, her request in the above passage can be read as if she spoke from with the halls of the monastery, as she attempts, like a monk, to rise above her body. Or, her words can be an expression of higer ideals expressed inside one of the classrooms of the Faculty of Humanitites. In either case, Ziva, like Alon and his imaginary nude drawings, abhors the real body and chooses fantasy instead.[31]

E

The enigmatic character of Melabbes, the novel's narrator, plays an important part in the process of splitting the imaginary "individual" of the critics into a string of "other bodies."[32] Melabbes is, perhaps, the ultimative "individual" of the national allegory, the private "me" who conceals the imaginary "we" that is assimilated within.

Melabbes lacks not only a personal name, but also a body. He is disembodied to such a degree that his character is split in the course of the novel, sometimes telling the story as a witness narrator, as one of the recruits on the base, at other times functioning as an omniscient narrator who denies and transcends the laws of matter. Many readers tend to see these fluctuations between witness and omniscience, as a weakness. But it is exactly division, this "physical fragmentation," that makes him interesting.

When Melabbes observes the body of one of the Mizrahi soldiers, for example, what he sees, alarms him to such an extent that he needs "to write on the body." This writing occurs in a literal sense, and also in the Foucaultian or Butlerian significance of the expression,[33] that is, to engrave signs on it, to cover it with words. Consider this description:

Albert the Bulgarian, as was his habit, lay on this bed naked as the day he was born. Only thus, he argued, did his body get the airing required for perfect repose, refreshment, and naturalness. There was something ostentatious and ridiculous in this habit, something shameless, bizarre, and rather repelling in the attention he devoted to cultivating his body, the concern with which he examined every pimple

and spot that appeared on his skin, in the way he stroked his stomach and chest whenever he lay down to rest …

He pressed his chin into his throat and let his eyes wander lovingly along the prospect of his body stretching down from the heights of his head, like a panorama of fields and hills and valleys and woods suddenly spread out before the hiker scaling a peak, his reward for all the rigors of the road.[34]

Anxiety is, of course, the central motivation of this scrutiny. At first this feeling is translated into deep aversion, but afterwards, when Melabbes is no longer able to look but also unable to remove his gaze, this anxiety is translated into writing on the body. Such writing denies the body by means of the written word, recreating Albert's body as a "panorama," as "fields and hills and valleys and woods." Moreover, there is a great similarity between the landscape with which Melabbes covers the anxiety-provoking body of Albert and the clichéd linguistic panoramas with which Hebrew literature of the Enlightenment envisioned Eretz Israel, taking the "textual landscape" of Eretz Israel in Mapu's Love of Zion as an example.

The novel reveals its sharp insight in this passage and others like it: that the process of the gendering of Zionism is to be understood not as a process that failed, but precisely as a process that succeed, if only in part. Kenaz views the Zionism-gendering process not as the "attempt to build a new masculine body," but as the repression of "the real Jewish body" by means of ceaseless verbalization, the transformation of the body into a site of verbalization. Or, to continue the Kenazian metaphor, the gendering of Zionism is the process of repressing the body by drowning it in words and denying it with language. Therefore, this book contains no description of the bodies of the Ashkenazi soldiers from the veteran yishuv, simply because they have no bodies. And it is exactly this denial of repressed body that allows Melabbes, the witness narrator, to serve also as an omniscient narrator.

But the repressed physical body of the national subject returns occasionally in the novel, and its presence is threatening, or shall we say, uncanny. It always returns through the very tangible bodies of the immigrants, especially the immigrants from Arabic countries. The narrator cannot stop scrutinizing these bodies throughout the entire novel with a kind of flinching desire. In the description of Albert this uncanniness reaches an apex. Here, the metaphysical individual, already dismantled into the "imaginery" verbalized consciousness of the narrator confronts the actual, physical body of Albert, the Mizrahi body. In the gap between these bodies is the gaze. The gaze and the anxiety.

F

Melabbes' meeting with the "body" provokes anxiety and deep aversion, along with an incomprehensible attraction. Uncanny moments such as these are scattered throughout the novel, in which Ashkenazi figures, representatives of those that dreamed up the Zionist gendering narrative, encounter the actualization of the body or sexuality that is always ascribed to "other" bodies, or immigrants, chiefly the Mizrahim.

The most uncanny moment in the novel is the dance scene of Rahamim Ben Hamo, a Moroccan and perhaps also a homosexual. Rahamim's dance starts as a sort of parody of a belly-dancer performance.. But as the dance continues, Ben Hamo's performance becomes, in Melabbes' eyes, something else, both frightening and fateful. Melabbes is unable to remove his gaze, and his gaze is fraught with suffering and misunderstanding.

By means of a classic reversal, Melabbes projects his perceptions of anxiety and disaster on Rahamim who. Yet even this reversal cannot camouflage the panic that is visible in the linguistic trance that sweeps Melabbes away:

Suddenly Rahamim Ben-Hamo got out of bed and spread out his arms, like someone stretching himself after a nap. He went on standing there, moving his arms up and down, and his intentions were unclear. But the singers understood, and Sammy coalled out to him: "Come to us, sweetheart, come to us!"

And Rahamim glided toward them, stamping his feet and wagging his behind, with a provocative smile on his face.[…] Zackie's wailing voice rose higher and higher […] his friends groaned with him and cried out thanks and blessings in Arabic, and then the drumming began again and the singing was renewed. Rahamim opened his eyes and smiled and wriggled his plump body in a kind of caricature of a belly dancer. His torso was naked and hairy, and the frayed edges of his working pants almost entirely covered his childishly small feet.

We stood in a circle around the dancer and the singers, watching silently, not knowing what all this had to do with us. Rahamim Ben-Hamo dances as if possessed by a demon, increasingly liberated from the forces connecting him to us, increasingly given over to the demon inside him: he closed his eyes and writhed like a rearing snake, his hips and thighs and belly and chest and neck and arms and head all at the mercy of a strong inner tide sending waves rippling though every inch of his body. His eyes were closed and his face looked as if he was on the point of tears, or in the throes of some terrible, ecstatic expectation[…]. He went on dancing with his eyes open, and there was a different expression now in those big, black, stupid eyes, beaten and long suffering and resigned, an expression such as I had never seen before. […]

Suddenly a throttled cry escaped from his lips. A shriek of pain or pleasure, and then another, and his face flushed darkly, and as his body went on writhing he stretched out his hand as if in a cry for help, as if the intensity of the pain or the pleasure that was producing one moan after the other from his mouth was too much for him to bear. The ugliness of the animal-like writhing and the moans that accompanied it, of the savage beating on the drum, was so powerful, dark, and fascinating that it hardly seemed ugly at all.[35]

What is very clear in this passage, aside from a strong uncanny sense, is the Orientalistic choice of words. Edward Said has pointed out that the West created an affinity between the East and primitive sexuality, and to the centrality of dance as a metaphor for this sexuality.[36] But what complicates the ideological structure in which this novel is trapped, is that many of the anxiety-provoking sexual or physical characteristics that Melabbes perceives in Rahamim's dance, were also typical images of the sexuality of the "Jew" in Europe in the nineteenth century –that same sexuality which is repressed by the Zionist gendering process.

Rahamim, at this very moment in the novel, evokes the stereotyped image of the "Jew" Sander Gilleman's formulation — not exactly a man, but certainly not a woman.[37] Rahamim blurs the sexual dichotomy and expresses a kind of lack of sublimation of sexuality, as George Mosse describes the image of the "Jew" in Europe. Mosse also pointed to the similarities between the stereotyped images of the Jew, the black and the homosexual in Europe: both the blacks and the Jews, he wrote, were perceived as possessing feminine sensuality and lacking in masculinity. Jews, as a group, were thought to demonstrate feminine characteristics, exactly like homosexuals.[38]

If that is the case, Rahamim's homosexuality and his "blackness" enable the repressed Jewish body to return and appear, to be revealed or inscribed "on him." This performance, in Melabbes' frightened and yearning gaze, becomes a kind of ethnic "drag," a horror show where the "Jewish body" appears in the black body of Rahamim, or behind it, or in front of it, or perhaps all of these bodies, the "black" and the "Jew," are joined altogether into one body and cannot be separated.

The anxiety awakened in Melabbes, is exactly the uncanny feeling that accompanies the "return of the repressed," and appears in many other moments in the novel as the presence of the "Mizrahi body," that is, the body of the "other." We have seen how this body, detached from the imaginary body of the "national individual, " returns as the palpable reality of the "Zionist fantasy" and threatens the Zionist narrative of gendering or repression. In this scene, which has been moved into the margins of the novel, as in the Freudian dream, physical reality breaks through with all its strength, in the black body of Rahamim Ben Hamo.

Rahamim, in this novel's economy of representation, assumes the role of the denied body, the cardiac murmur, the defective material which was supposed to have been repressed in the Zionist process of gendering and transformation. This is the same material substance from which the ordinary lives of this country are cast, with its ugliness and its beauty, its pleasure and pain, humiliation and sublimity. Kenaz, as opposed to the narrator of the novel (and as opposed to Amos Oz, for example), does not despise the corporeal, perhaps he even loves it. It is in the physical, the ugly and the degrading that he finds life.

But Kenaz's attraction to the physical and the tragic end that he ascribes to those who attempt to deny it, does not change the economy of representation in Infiltration. The novel's structure of

representation maintains a clear division between the Ashkenazi characters from the veteran yishuv who attempt to deny the physical reality through verbalization, and the characters of the immigrants, especially from Arabic countries, who embody the material reality that deprives the spirit of its perfection. In Rahamim's sensual dance there is something else, apart from labeling the Mizrahi as the "other" of the novel (and of the Zionist culture in general), and the ascribing of pure physicality to Mizrahim. In the novel's economy of representation, the veteran Ashkenazi maintains a utopian and fantastic (even if hysterical) view of the Israeli history that Kenaz writes about here (and he does, in fact, write history). The Mizrahi, on the other hand, experiences the vivid colors of reality; his world is concrete and available, preventing the realizing of a utopia. In the great drama created by this novel, the drama of the dream and its shattering, the dream is attributed to the veteran Ashkenazis, and its demise to the Mizrahim.

Kenaz uses this economy of representation to throw an ironic light on the Zionist narrative of physical rehabilitation. He formulates a kind of critical historiography of the Zionist narrative, in which the dream of the healthy physical body is understood as the attempt to deny it, and the Jewish desire for a vital, sexual body is understood as the wish to repress the "real body." This re-organization and re-formulation of the Zionist narrative marks Zionism as a destructive, repressive fantasy that chose to ignore actuality of the defective bodies of us all. In this scenario, it is the physicality of the Mizrahi which marks him as the tangibility and actuality of Zionist history, as its "reality."

G

The economy of representation of Infiltration is, as I mentioned at the beginning, not unique. In a series of major novels that was published in Israel in the Seventies, and described the drama of the dream and its shattering, (a drama that has been told many times by the State-of-Israel generation of writers),[39] the Mizrahim are cast as agents of rupture, disaster. They are identified with "place" (reality), while the Ashkenazim inhabit the "other place" (dreams), and this politics of ownership of the physical and the metaphysical, is not exclusive to writers."The novel can also be seen as an attempt to describe society, " says Eli Shaltiel, an historian and editor, in the same radio interview of the book. "This was a very specific society, of Israel in the Fifties, and Yehoshua [Kenaz] took a lot of trouble not to fake the atmosphere or the dates, or the circumstances; as a historian I can vouch for his [accuracy]…He was also careful about the speech of his heroes."

The role of the Mizrachim in the Zionist vision is now conceived as an historical role vis-à-vis the Zionist act which is always ahistorical (despite the Zionist claims to have "entered history"). There is, of course, a political significance to the formation of this portrait of Mizrahim, but not only. This particular understanding of the Israeli reality, the ability to point to what is tangible about the Zionist dream, is also one of the main reasons for the wave of realistic novels in the Eighties, novels that are founded on the same understanding of Mizrahim and the same economy of representation.[40]

More than fifty years after Brener wrote that it is impossible to write a realistic novel in Eretz Israel because it still lacks "permanence and typical representative-ness" the emergence of the Mizrahim as a theme in Hebrew culture facilitated the writing of the "realistic novel."[41] The semiotic and cultural systems consolidated in the Seventies and Eighties,[42] and the allotment of the ownership of the physical and metaphysical to ethnic identities, enabled the State generation of writers to portray the Mizrahi as the realistic substance of Zionist history. This consolidation is, of course, what allowed critics to understand Infiltration as "a metaphysical novel," since it records the Ashkenazi profile; and also as a social novel-- that is, a novel that deals with reality-- because it records the profile of the Mizrahi.

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[1]Eliezer Steinman, "The Hebrew Communist" [Hebrew] in: Modernism's Manifests ed. Benjamin Harshav, (Jerusalem: 2001), p. 132.
[2] Yehoshua Kenaz, Infiltration, trans. Dalya Bilu (Vermont: Steerforth Press:, 2003).
[3] "Talks about Infiltration" [Hebrew], Prose: Journal for Literature and Art, 93-94 (1987), pp. 60-65.
[4] Geshon Shaked, Literature Then, Here And Now, [Hebrew], (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1993), p. 169.
[5] Roland Barthes, S/Z, translated by Richard Miller, (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux: 1989).
[6]I have chosen the appellation of Mizrahi for Israelis of Arab or North African origin, as opposed to Ashkenazim of European origin. The plural of Mizrahi is Mizrahim. Mizrahim have also been called Sephardim or even Orientals in Israeli nomenclature
[7] Hebrew canonical literature has a stable and magnificent tradition of anti-heroes, whose history can be summed up as the story of physical weaknesses and sexual failures. The novels of Y. H. Brenner and S.Y. Agnon have had great influence on the formation of this tradition; these authors formed their anti-heroes as the antitheses to the figure of the "new Hebrew" (Israeli). See Shaked, Note 4 above, pp. 18-23; and Gershon Shaked, "Hebrew Prose 1880-1980," in: Land and Diaspora, (Tel Aviv: HaKibutz HaMeuchad and Keter, 1983), for example on p. 117: "Heroes of Agnon, Reuveni, Areli Orlof, Kimchi and Shatz—most are weak individuals, lost ones who never found their place in Israeli society …they do not succeed in realizing their erotic selves and fail wherever they turn."
[8]Many have already focused on the affinity between the poetic and ideological position of authors of the "generation of the State of Israel" and that of Brener and Agnon, for example. The casting of anti-heroes characterizes the early literature of Oz and Yehoshua, as a strategy of criticism and disappointment from the Zionist revolution. Regarding this matter, see Shaked, Note 4 above, p. 32. Thus Kenaz's ideological base does not represent an essential innovation, and even some of his poetic strategies (such as the tension between the narrator and the implicit author, the parody of literary motives from the Palmach etc.) are common to the poetics of the generation of the State, see Nurit Gretz, Hirbat Hizah and the Morning After [Hebrew], (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1983), for example pp. 70, 83, and 149.
[9]Ariel Hirschfeld compares the basic training camp of this the novel to Pension Vauquer portrayed in Balzac's Pere Goriot: a social laboratory in which is a unique collection of the unusual is concentrated and reflects the usual, Ariel Hirschfeld, "Where One Identity Stops and Another One Starts"[Hebrew], Politics, 33 (1990), pp. 48-55.
[10]Yigal Schwartz, "To Build and to Be Built in Israel: Human Engineering and Space Engineering in Modern Israeli Culture" [Hebrew], Mikan: Journal for Hebrew Literary Studies , A (2000), pp. 16-22.
[11]Michael Gluzman, "Longing for Heterosexuality: Zionism and Sexuality in Herzl's Altneuland" [Hebrew], Theory and Criticism, 11 (1997), pp. 146-150.
[12] Yaffah Berlovitz, Inventing a Land, Inventing a People [Hebrew], (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1996), pp. 15-16.
[13]David Biale, Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America, (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), p. 176.
[14] "There were cripples, as well as people suffering from tuberculosis, heart trouble, nervous diseases, and so on. There were also the blind, the aged, and the deaf-mutes." David Ben-Gurion, Israel: A Personal History, translated by Nechemia Meyers and Uzy Nystar, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1971).p. 362.
[15] Kenaz, Infiltration, p. 7.
[16] Berlowitz describes the change as experienced by the heroes of the First and Second Aliya literature as an "act of immediate metamorphosis" (see note 12 above). As to the profile of the hero who

changes, "man of muscle," who stars in some of the Second Aliya literature (Luidor, Vilkensky), see Shaked, note 7 above, for example on pp. 59-61.
[17] Ben-Gurion, Israel: A Personal History, p. 432.
[18] Ben-Gurion, Israel: A Personal History, p. 369. The most outstanding symbolic expression of the transformative effect of the IDF is expressed in the following segment in which Ben Gurion describes the first swearing-in ceremony in the history of the Israeli army: "Before the ceremony, the Minister of Defense required that each commander adopt a Hebrew last name and discard his foreign one. Dan Epstein changes his name to Even, Yigal Peikovitz to Alon, Yigal Sukenick to Yadin … two people also took the opportunity to change their Hebrew last names for new ones: Eliyahu Cohen became Ben-Hur, Yosef Rochel became Avidar."
[19] Kenaz, Infiltration,. p.134.
[20] Ibid., p. 222-223.
[21] Ibid., p. 223.
[22]Ibid., p. 59. Kenaz enfolds in this beautiful, implicit description, the essence of his conception of bodily transformation: The attempt to create a new body is only the attempt to escape from the body, to become a "spirit."
[23] Ibid., Hebrew p. 53-54.
[24] Ibid., p.543.
[25] Gluzman, "Longing for Heterosexuality," see Note 11 above.
[26] Kenaz, Infiltration, p.526.
[27] Ibid., p. 576.
[28]The novel creates a kind of ethnic scale of physical life, and the Ashkenazim and Mizrahim are only the extreme values on opposite sides of the scale. In between there are also, for example, new immigrants from Eastern European countries (Romania, Bulgaria), whose physicality and sexuality are closer to the Mizrahi end of the scale. Zero-Zero, an immigrant from Rumania who occupies himself primarily with his skin infections, will be the sole recruit who will end his life as a character in this novel outside of the trainee phase. That is, he is the only one who is lucky enough to "change" and leave the base after he becomes a father—that is, after he successfully realizes his sexuality.
[29] Ibid., pp 112, 114.
[30] Kenaz, Infiltration, p.328.
[31]Another example of the fantasy motif is the narrator's infatuation with the female fitness instructor on the base, who is cast in mythological terms: "It was a revelation of beauty from another world. As if we had just witnessed one of the metamorphoses described in ancient myths." Ibid. p.27.
[32] Melabbes is an unusual name in the original Hebrew. It is actually the original Arab name for the site of Petach Tikva, one of the earliest moshavim, the hometown of Melabbes'.
[33]Judith Butler, "Critically Queer" GLQ Volume 1 #1 (1993): 17-32.; Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
[34] Kenaz, Infiltration, p. 367.
[35] Kenaz, Infiltration, p. 94-96.
[36] Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York: Vintage, 1979).
[37]Sander Gillman, Sexuality: An Illustrated History, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1989).
[38]George Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985).
[39]Gidon Efrat described the structure of the dream and its demise, which characterized Israeli theater in the Seventies, partly by use of Yaakov Shabtai's plays: "In the Seventies the Israeli playwright specialized in, among other topics, portraying the dream of pioneering [Zionism] as an empty balloon … as a generation that tried to achieve the impossible, a generation that founded a circus on the sands." There is much similarity between the ideological foundations of Infiltration and the way in which the plays of Shabtai and Nissim Aloni, for example, portray Zionist history and Israel of those years: "The founders of Israeli came with a great dream to transform the world, to create a new world, better, different, ideal. And here, idealistic pioneering made way to a completely regular political reality." Gideon Efrat, Land, Man, Blood [Adama Adam Dam], (Tel Aviv: Cherikover, 1980), pp. 172-173.
[40]For realism as an ideological construction and a tool for activating "ideological control" see, for example, Allison Lee, Realism and Power, (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 27.
[41]The emergence of the European bourgeoisie and especially the proletariat, enabled the writing of the French and English realistic novels (and afterwards, the naturalistic ones) in a similar fashion. See, for example, Georg Lukacs' Essays on Realism, ed. Rodney Livingstone, tr. David Fernbach (MIT Press, 1983).
[42] For the concept of "stability" and its importance in the ideological construction of the "me" and the "other" see: H. Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of

Colonialism," in Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, ed. R. Ferguson, M. Gever, T. T. Minbha, C. West, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).