Iraqi-Jewish Literary Depictions of the Ma'abarah:

*A Space Both Concrete and Symbolic in the First Hebrew Writing of Iraqi-Jewish Immigrants to Israel*

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Aviv Ben-Or

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ABSTRACT

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A thesis presented to the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Aviv Ben-Or

This thesis examines the first Hebrew works of fiction by three Iraqi-Jewish authors, all immigrants to Israel. HaMa'abarah (The Transit Camp) by Shimon Ballas, Shavim veShavim Yoter (Some Are Equal and Others Are More) by Sami Mikhael, and Tarnegol Caparot (Scapegoat) by Eli Amir are three fictional works that focus on the experience of Iraqi-Jewish immigrants who were sent to live in transit camps upon arrival in Israel during 1950-51. This paper will analyze the complex representation of the transit camp in these texts as both a transitory and permanent space. The transit camp will be considered as a simultaneously symbolic and physical "contact space" in which the past, present, and future collide leading to a conflict that is in many instances intractable. The framework of the "contact space" is an adoption of Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone," or space where disparate cultures meet. The narratives, while divergent in structure and style, share the common thread of the transit camp as a focal point, not only a symbolic
focal point but a concrete one as well. The general orientation of scholarship and criticism of these texts has been relegated to a dichotomous discourse that consistently views the texts as facilitating a subversive dialogue opposing the dominant Zionist narrative. This paper does not claim that such an element is not present in the narratives, but rather looks to engage the texts without adhering specifically to the purview of Mizrahi identity politics and post-Zionist discourse. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the significance of these works as marking the entry point of the Iraqi-Jewish voice into Modern Hebrew writing, as well as the manner by and degree to which this is achieved.
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Introduction

When we would get close to the ma’abarah during our running exercises we would turn our backs to it. Go back, quickly get back to the kibbutz. Just don't let us smell the scent, don't let us know. But the ma’abarah was in our souls. Gazing down on us from the hill, as we ran to the road, it was exacting revenge on us by its very presence, breathing down our necks, not letting go. So far away yet possessing such power, pulling us towards it again and again.¹

-Amir, Tarnegol Caparot, p. 174

The Point of Contact

The ma'abarah (transit camp) is one of the central and formative features of the Iraqi-Jewish experience in Israel during the 1950s, the decade following the collective emigration of Jews from Iraq. The ma'abarot (pl.) were meant to be a temporary housing solution for the massive waves of immigrants on the heels of the creation of the State of Israel. By 1953 there were 212,000 immigrants living in ma'abarot, 80,000 of whom were Iraqi Jews, or 38% of the inhabitants of the ma'abarot, and 8% of the overall population of the State of Israel.² Needless to say, the experience of the ma'abarah, while being of many Jewish immigrant groups including Romanians, Poles, Yeminis, North Africans, and others, came to define the collective Iraqi-Jewish consciousness during the first decade of Israel's existence. By the time Iraqi Jews arrived in Israel the majority of them

¹ All translations from Hebrew sources are my own.
² Meir-Glitzenstein, Bein Baghdad leRamat Gan, p. 111.
came with virtually no money, possessions, or even the most basic means. In March of 1951, with the expiration of the denaturalization law for Jews, the Iraqi government froze all Jewish assets and seized most properties during the final stages of emigration.³ Many of the few personal possessions the immigrants tried to bring with them were looted or taken by the authorities at the airport on their way out of Iraq.⁴ The immigrants were then airlifted to Israel in an operation known as "Ezra and Nehemiah," and the majority of them subsequently sent to live in ma'abarot.

The ma'abarot stands as the nucleus of the first novels of three Iraqi-Jewish authors who came to Israel from Baghdad: Shavim veShavim Yoter (All Men Are Equal But Some Are More, 1974) by Sami Mikhael; HaMa'abarah (The Transit Camp, 1964) by Shimon Ballas; and Tarnegol Caparot (Scapegoat, 1983) by Eli Amir. Mikhael, born in 1926, was chased out of Iraq for communist activity, and came to Israel prior to the mass emigration, while Ballas and Amir, born in 1930 and 1937 respectively, came with the main wave of Iraqi immigrants during 1950-51. Ballas and Amir were both sent immediately to ma'abarot with their families when they arrived in Israel. Mikhael, arriving just prior to the era of mass immigration, initially lived on his own in Haifa. Upon the arrival of his family members in 1950-51, Mikhael joined them to live in a ma'abarah. The ma'abarah is thus a formative feature of each authors' narrative, and it functions as both a concrete physical space as well as a symbolic or poetic location. The ma'abarah experience of Iraqi Jews immediately following the mass emigration is a shared thread that binds these texts. It occupies the center of each author's consciousness; the experience of the space of the ma'abarah comes to shape individual character's

⁴ Meir-Glitzenstein, Bein Baghdad leRamat Gan, p. 45-50.
identities. Moreover, the novels reflect the traumatic aspects of immigration and placement in ma'abaraot as an essential part of a collective identity for Iraqi Jews. As will be seen below, many collective experiences, often traumatic in nature such as the spraying of D.T.T. upon arrival in Israel, or feelings of discrimination, persecution and helplessness, feature in each text.

In each narrative the ma'abarah takes on two sets of dialectic binary symbolisms: transitory and permanent, and concrete/physical and emotional. By comparing the three texts as such, it will be possible to see the multi-faceted meanings and functions of the ma'abarah as it is represented, and in turn how it plays a seminal role in the first literature produced by Iraqi-Jewish immigrants.

The present analysis will consider the ma'abarah as a type of "contact space," employing an interpretation of Mary Louise Pratt's concept. Pratt defines the contact zone as a "social space where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other."5 Her study focuses on the specifically colonial contact of domination and subordination between imperialist Europe and those peoples and lands that it colonized. I must indicate clearly that I do not intend to employ Pratt's specific connotation pertaining to the context of a colonial power occupying another group, nor do I propose to enter particularly into the post-Zionist discourse that equates Zionism with colonialism. Instead, I am interested in borrowing the concept of the contact zone specifically as a point of intersection of spatially displaced peoples and narratives that engenders conditions of "intractable conflict," as Pratt describes.6 In the literature under discussion in this paper, the ma'abarah is thus the contact space where Iraqi Jewry's past, present, and future

5 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 4.
expectations in Israel meet and conflict. It is a concrete space in which life takes place and existence is confined, as well as an emotional and symbolic location where identities are defined and consciousnesses are reformed after immigration. It is the geographical intersection of Iraqi Jewry with Israel, and as a poetic space, the ma'abarah is the contact zone for the past, present, and future of those Jews.

Iraqi Jewry, virtually in its entirety, was spatially displaced and relocated to Israel during 1950 and 1951. Memory of and nostalgia for the past in Iraq intersect with the reality of the present in the ma'abarah in Israel, and in turn with the expectations of what the future could or might be, creating a tension that leads to "intractable conflict."

Moreover, each narrative contains strong autobiographical elements, thus painting the texts with the brush of personal experience and suffering that shaped each author's life. As a result, the texts represent different modes of confronting and expressing the intractable conflict created in the space of the ma'abarah.

Considering the ma'abarah as an emotional or symbolic contact space allows for an analysis of the prominent continuity linking each narrative. I aim to expose the various ways in which the ma'abarah takes on meaning concretely and symbolically in each, and to illustrate the different means by which conflict and suffering are transmitted and confronted, as well as what solutions, if any, are offered. The starting point of conflict is the paradoxical nature of the ma'abarah: it is both transitory and permanent. It is ephemeral in intention and design, yet relentless in practice and reality. The texts represent this notion of the ubiquitous nature of the ma'abarah symbolically as well. Consider the opening quote above, taken from Amir's Tarnegol Caparot: "But the
ma'abarah was in our souls…exacting revenge on us by its very presence." The speaker is Nuri, the novel's narrator, and here he refers to himself and his Iraqi peers from the ma'abarah as they pass by the ma'abarah after having left it.

Memory and nostalgia play crucial roles as the main symbolic points of contact with the past. Different literary devices are used throughout the course of each narrative causing memory to flood the present and, in turn, have a significant impact on individual's perceptions of themselves. Memory is a definitive element of each text that functions in different ways. Lital Levy, in her analysis of Jewish literary representations of Baghdad by Iraqi writers (including Ballas, Amir, and Mikhael), demonstrates how "identity is mediated through the experience of space." Levy is concerned with how nostalgia for Baghdad is translated in these authors' works, and how it comes to define identity, not as Iraqi or Israeli, but as existing in a liminal place, neither within Baghdad nor fully removed. Identity is then recreated through its relationship to space and boundaries, in this case Baghdad and its specifically Jewish spaces.

The same can be said about the ma'abarah as the space through which Iraqi-Jewish identity is mediated. Both a social-spatial contact point as well as a mental and emotional one, the past in Iraq, the present in Israel, and the expectations or hopes for a future and solution collide in the ma'abarah, often violently, creating the experience of a concrete and mental space that comes to mediate the identities that are in constant flux. Further, the constant and compulsive need to escape from the ma'abarah is a necessary part of future expectations. However, this impulse is coped with in different ways in each

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8 Levy, Lital. Self and the City p. 164.
9 Levy, Lital. Self and the City p. 165.
text and it is not always clear whether such a break is possible, as the ma'abarah is obstinately "in our souls."

The process of writing these novels was a symbolic "ma'abarah," a multi-faceted transformation for Ballas, Mikhael, and Amir. For the former two, their novels significantly represented their first efforts in Hebrew writing, having been established writers published in Arabic in Iraq (and for some time in Israel as well) prior to the publications of their first Hebrew novels.\(^{10}\) Amir never wrote in Arabic, although he was a native speaker and the Arabic language and its cultural residue play an important role in his narrative as well. The transition from one language to another bears significant weight in the nature of this writing and the mode of representation in the narratives. As Reuven Snir points out, "the tension prevailing in the transition from writing in Hebrew to writing in Arabic is the tension between Arabic culture and a narrative that sees Hebrew as the language of the Zionist movement."\(^{11}\) As Arabic-speaking Iraqi-Jewish writers, each is faced with the task of finding a way to transmit and translate his experience, as well as the suffering of individuals on one hand, and the Iraqi-Jewish collective on the other, to a hegemonic Ashkenazi majority audience of Hebrew speakers. A proper treatment of the reasons and intent behind the linguistic transition is beyond the scope of this paper, however it is important to note the significance of the process in relation to the content of the present texts. The Iraqis' writing reflects an identity that was crystallized in the Arabic-speaking cultural space of Iraq and then re-shaped in the space of the ma'abarah in Israel, the point of convergence and contact of culture and language, space and time.

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\(^{10}\) Berg, \textit{Exile from Exile}, p. 50.

\(^{11}\) Snir, \textit{Arviut, Yahadut, Tzivyonut}, p. 313.
I will also be considering these three texts as constituting a form of "autoethnographic expression," which Pratt defines as "instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms." My intent is not to imply that the Iraqi Jews were a subjugated people in Israel, nor to employ the specific post-Zionist approach that posits such claims. Rather, I suggest that the literary expression of the feeling of repression and discrimination at the hands of the state experienced by Jewish immigrants from Arab lands upon arrival, coupled with the tension between their Arab cultural origins and the Zionist narrative dominant at the time, can fit Pratt's autoethnographic model since the contact was complex, multi-faceted, and essentially one of disparate elements. The frustration from lack of ability to counter the cultural and political power of Ashkenazi hegemony over the Iraqi immigrants is reflected in each narrative.

Further, these Iraqi-Jewish authors' texts can be seen as expressions of a specific culture in the sense that they seek to engage the dominant Hebrew audience with that culture and create a common context. Pratt refers to that dominant audience, which in the case of Israel are the culturally dominant Ashkenazi Hebrew speakers, as metropolitan readers. In other words, the metropolitan audience is comprised of mostly Ashkenazi Jews, not Mizrahim. However, autoethnographic texts also "address literate sectors of the speaker's own social group," which is seems to be the case for these Iraqi-Jewish authors (more so Ballas' and Amir's novels than Mikhael's) given the myriad cultural and

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12 Pratt, Imperial Eyes, p. 7, emphasis is the author's.
13 Pratt, Imperial Eyes, p. 7.
linguistic attributions that permeate their texts, including musical and poetic references that call upon Iraqi-Jewish traditions and customs.\textsuperscript{14} The result of addressing both the hegemonic majority and the authors' own social group leads to a process of engaging while simultaneously distancing from the dominant metropolitan audience and culture, a process that is central to each novel. Finally, autoethnographic texts signify or mark entry into dominant metropolitan literate culture for the specific group. As Ballas', Amir's, and Mikhael's novels embody the first Modern Hebrew writing by Iraqi Jews, they are indeed the entry point of an Iraqi-Jewish narrative into Hebrew literature.

The transition to the Hebrew language for these authors, and the linguistic and cultural residue of Arabic serve as mediators of identity and experience in the narratives. As autoethnographic expressions, the texts seek to engage the dominant literary culture, yet do so while maintaining a degree of distancing, achieved in different ways by each narrative. The Hebrew-Arabic cultural tension, a result of the disparities created by the contact space, is present throughout each text, increasingly polarized and markedly dissonant due to the larger context of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Highlighting how Ballas', Mikhael's, and Amir's texts handle that tension is central to understanding them as autoethnographic expressions, or translations of a particular culture and experience.

\textit{Post-Zionist Discourse}

The traumatic and abrupt conclusion to the Jewish presence in Iraq and the experience of the transit camp in Israel that followed are the underlying themes that appear in different forms and by means of various methods in each text. The historic backdrop of the Iraqi-Jewish emigration en masse should be the context in which the

\textsuperscript{14} Pratt, \textit{Imperial Eyes}, p. 7.
literature is situated. Ballas', Amir's, and Mikhael's first novels have been the subject of a handful of literary analyses and various studies of Mizrahim in Israel, the scope of analysis generally focusing on the dialogue between these texts and the dominant Zionist narrative, often in the context of post-Zionist discourse regarding Mizrahim. Nancy Berg's study of Iraqi-Jewish authors, *Exile From Exile* (1996), the first of its kind in English, includes a discussion of all of the authors and texts mentioned here. Berg defines this writing as "exile literature" and claims "[the texts'] importance lay in their presentation of perspectives alternative to the mainstream Ashkenazi voice in modern Israeli literature." Further, Berg defines exile as a "condition" that lies in one's perception of the situation, suggesting that the texts are expressions of an exilic existence as well.

Batya Shimony, in her extensive and exhaustive study of all Israeli literature representing the ma'abarah (including works written by non-Mizrahi authors), *Al Saf haGeula* (*On the Threshold of Redemption*, 2008), repeatedly points to the subversive dialogue that takes place between these texts and the Zionist narrative. For example, Shimony reads Ballas' *HaMa'abrah* as a response to the first Hebrew novel to depict the ma'abarah, *Shesh Kenafaim leEhad* by Hanokh Bartov. In short, Bartov's novel addresses the societal problems of the ma'abarah but ultimately offers a response that suggests the difficulties of the ma'abarah can be overcome by the characters, while, as shall be seen below, Ballas' novel does not remotely offer the same seemingly optimistic outcome, but the opposite. Shimony's study, recently published, is the first of its kind in that it attempts to canonize ma'abarah literature. The central theme she focuses on is that of

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liminal existence, or seeing the ma'abarah as a liminal space that is neither here nor there. Berg touches upon this in her analysis as well, as she and Shimony see the ma'abarah as a space of symbolic non-existence. The inhabitants are marginalized from the perspective of the Zionist narrative, both physically in terms of the remote physical locations of the ma'abarot, and symbolically in terms of culture and collective narrative (Zionist versus non-Zionist), hence their "non-existence" from the viewpoint of the hegemony.

Hanan Hever also discusses the ma'abarah in his article Lo Banu min haYam: Geographiya Mizrahit Sifruti (We Didn't Come From The Sea: Geography of Mizrahi Literature, 2002). Hever points out some interesting aspects of the multicultural composition of the space of the ma'abarah. He argues that the immigration of Mizrahi Jews to Israel was markedly different from that of European Jews in two important ways: the first being that for Mizrahim the immigration was not a rebellious act breaking with the past; secondly, because Jews of Arab lands came to Israel from the same "continuous space"- in other words, the Middle East. They did not cross the sea to get there, as did European Jews, and Israel was not an "imagined" place as it was for many Ashkenazim dedicated to the ideals of Zionism. The Mizrahi immigrant experience is positioned as opposite that of the Ashkenazi immigrant, and the texts representing the ma'abarah convey this through its otherness, through its being both an "Arab" and "Jewish," and therefore "non-Zionist," space. Hever insightfully points out the subtleties that are couched in the complexity of the literary representation of the ma'abarah.

The ma'abarah, beyond the perception of a liminal, transitional, or non-space, which on the one hand it is by very nature of the meaning contained in its name: transit

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18 Shimony, Al Saf haGeula, p. 80.
20 Hever, Hanan. Lo Banu min haYam, p. 206-207.
camp, can also be understood as more complex. It is the physical contact space of Iraqi-Jewry and Israel, as well as the clashing (in the Israeli context of the 1950s and 1960s) language cultures of Hebrew and Arabic. While the ma'abarah is a shared theme and formative element in each narrative, the texts' different methods of representing it and coping with it will be examined. A comparative approach to the texts can highlight that while in some respects the narratives construct a collective Iraqi-Jewish experience, they also diverge in how they represent the individual emotional ma'abaraot in which characters come to exist, and indeed in the different responses offered to the conflicts resulting from the ma'abarah as a perpetually transient contact space. It is from this symbolic meaning of the ma'abarah that some of the more difficult tensions arise.

Looking at the significance of the ma'abarah in the context of the literary production of Iraqi Jews as newly transitioned Hebrew writers will expose its centrality to their experience, not only historically but also symbolically. To discuss these writings as representing a strictly post-Zionist subversive dialogue is not only restrictive, but it convolutes and minimizes how the ma'abarah functions within the texts. Given the ma'abarah's crucial role in each text, I will seek to situate it as the principal space and experience that informs and transforms character's personal narratives and identities.

Examining these works only in terms of how they challenge Zionist hegemony obscures the symbolisms that represent each works' multi-faceted dimensions, and limits any attempt to offer an analysis that deals with more than just subversive aspects. The emergence of post-Zionist writings and Mizrahi discourse is quite late in relation to the publication of the texts under discussion here. This gap perhaps exposes a deficiency in the way in which later scholarly writings champion Ballas', Amir's and Mikhael's first
texts as definitive symbols of the post-Zionist rhetoric. In other words, looking back in time through the loaded lens of Mizrahi identity politics restricts a more multi-faceted approach to interpreting the symbolisms within each text.

The scholarship mentioned here tends to focus heavily on those subversive elements, in some ways to its detriment. This is not to imply that there is not present such a dialogue between the texts and the Zionist narrative. To be sure, numerous subversive elements are to be found along with sometimes scathing language that is highly critical of the Zionist establishment. Aside from the fact that such a mode of analysis has been broadly employed, it is also a surface reading. The texts, as "autoethnographic" expressions of the experience of Iraqi Jews in Israel, are dialogues not only facilitated as a response to Zionism (as suggested by the scholarship mentioned above), but also as a means of engaging the Ashkenazi Hebrew culture in order to inject in it a unique and original voice. In other words, the works are significant in that they represent the first Hebrew efforts of the authors. As Iraqi Jews, each author's particular experience, life, and reactions to the same realities saturate the narratives. Through the telling of the story of the ma'abarah these Iraqi immigrant authors are not simply presenting a cultural alternative to Zionism, they are finding a voice for their historical and cultural narrative while transforming their own identities as new Hebrew writers; they engage the dominant metropolitan literate culture not only to challenge it but to understand it by participating in it, now matter how tenuous the ensuing relationship.

*Historiography and Some General Background*
Before turning to the texts themselves, a few brief words about the history of Iraqi Jewry during the 1930s and 40s are necessary. It will also be helpful to look briefly at the historiographic divergences that exist among different types of writings about this period. More relevant to the literature is the construction of the narrative of emigration and understanding how it came to pass. Further, understanding the integration of Iraq's Jews into that country's society is a crucial aspect of the history, as well as one of the points of contention among some of the divergent narratives. This will also be important to keep in mind when turning to an analysis of the literature because the departure from Iraq and the events of 1948-1951 become a focal point in the Iraqi-Jewish narrative that informs the identity of many of the characters that appear in the texts. It is by way of memory and nostalgia that Iraq is represented, and understanding the Jews' place in that country just prior to departure is necessary to better understand the world represented in the novels. I will present a limited outline of the opposing views that are prevalent amongst some of the current writing since a full treatment of the historiography is beyond the scope of this paper.

Much of the extant historical and sociological scholarship that deals with Iraqi Jewry in the 20th century tends to focus on certain themes or events, often in an attempt to historicize the causes that led to the emigration/expulsion/exodus (depending upon the narrative to which one subscribes) of the Iraqi-Jewish community during 1950 and 1951. In each narrative, certain points are emphasized while others are ignored or explained away, and this process of sifting through the events and circumstances has led to a proliferation of voices that has further obfuscated the story. Ester Meir-Gliztenstein has written extensively on the subject, and apart from a comprehensive survey of Iraqi Jewry
in the 20th century, has dedicated an entire study to the history of Zionist activity in Iraq in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{21} Meir-Glitzenstein stresses the cooperation between the British and the Jewish community in Iraq, which became the means by which many Jews achieved socio-economic gains and improved their status in Iraqi society. This very relationship also became one of the causes that came to undermine the position of Jews in Iraq as anti-British sentiment intensified with the rise of Arab nationalism.\textsuperscript{22} For Meir-Glitzenstein, when Zionism arrived on the scene in the wake of the 1941 pogrom in Baghdad known as the \textit{Farhoud} (during which over 150 Jews lost their lives), it ended up as a successful movement. In Meir-Glitzenstein's narrative, the \textit{Farhoud} is emphasized as a link between Iraqi Jewry's past and its imminent future and relationship with the Yishuv, since after this event Zionist emissaries appeared in Iraqi Jewish centers and a limited but thriving underground activity began to develop in earnest, albeit in small numbers.\textsuperscript{23}

Ultimately, Meir-Glitzenstein sees Zionism as one of a number of forces that combined to lead to the mass emigration from Iraq. During the latter half of the 1940s the Iraqi regime became increasingly hostile to Zionist activity; as the conflict in Palestine escalated with the 1947 U.N. Partition Plan and eventually the 1948 war, the level of persecution of Jews in Iraq intensified as well. After the creation of the State of Israel, Jew and Zionist became one and the same in Iraq as the government systematically persecuted Jews and accused many of Zionist activity and conspiracy.\textsuperscript{24} Meir-Glitzenstein posits that the fissure between Jews and the Arabs in Iraq had begun with the modernization of the Jewish community through its cooperation with the British, and was

\textsuperscript{21} Meir-Glitzenstein, \textit{Zionism in an Arab Country} and \textit{Bein Baghdad leRamat Gan}.
\textsuperscript{22} Meir-Glitzenstein, \textit{Zionism in an Arab Country}, p. 228.
\textsuperscript{23} Meir-Glitzenstein, \textit{Zionism in an Arab Country}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{24} Meir-Glitzenstein, \textit{Zionism in an Arab Country}, p. 45.
subsequently sharpened by the impact of the conflict in Palestine. According to her narrative, Zionism was a social force led by and large by youth groups but that was dependent on the larger community to survive.\textsuperscript{25} While it was certainly a consequential factor, it was but one of many. The emphasis is placed largely on persecution at the hands of the government as well as the eventual seizure of all Jewish assets and property that led to the total liquidation of the community.\textsuperscript{26} This precarious situation allowed for the Zionist movement to take up the call and offer a solution to what became for many a feeling that there was no future for Jews in Iraq.

Yehouda Shenhav, a sociologist who has written extensively on the subject of the Arab-Jew, and Ella Shohat, Professor of Women’s and Cultural Studies, focus on the Zionist movement in Iraq in a different light. In contrast to Meir-Glitzenstein, Shenhav and Shohat point to Zionism in Arab lands as a form of colonialism that viewed Iraqi Jewry as primitive and mostly traditional, and that it effectively forced a schism between the Jews and their Muslim neighbors who, according to this narrative, were part of a "constellation of coexisting."\textsuperscript{27} Seeing the Jewish community as a substantially integrated group in Iraq, Shenhav suggests that the distance between Iraqi Jewish culture and the Zionist nation-building project as being of that between the East and the West.\textsuperscript{28} He sees Zionist activity in Iraq as an extension of British colonialism, which effectively "nationalized" the Jewish community by "conquering" it and making it, largely against its will, a part of the Zionist master-narrative.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{25} Meir-Glitzenstein, \textit{Bein Baghdad leRamat Gan}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{26} Meir-Glitzenstein, \textit{Bein Baghdad leRamat Gan}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{27} Shohat, \textit{Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices}, p. 335.
\textsuperscript{28} Shenhav, \textit{Yehudim-Arvim: Leumiyyut, Dat, veEtniyut}, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{29} Shenhav, \textit{Yehudim-Arvim: Leumiyyut, Dat, veEtniyut}, p. 128.
Shohat similarly suggests that it was Zionist activity that exacerbated the tensions between Jews and their neighbors in Iraq as the movement looked to separate those Jews from their integrated space in society in order to appropriate them as part of the Zionist project. This process led to the repression of the Iraqi Jew's "Arabness," a necessary part of the Zionist ideology. The stark differences between this narrative and Meir-Glitzenstein's illuminate the difficulty of historicizing the events of the 1940s. Meir-Glitzenstein emphasizes that the westernization and modernization of the Jewish community during the first decades of the 20th century had already undermined its position in Iraq. Zionism, according to Meir-Glitzenstein, was a movement that gave a voice to the frustrated Jewish youth, predominantly from the lower-middle and poor classes of society. Conversely, Shenha and Shohat see Zionism as a rupturing force whose goal it was to displace the Iraqi Jewish community for the benefit of the Yishuv, and eventually the State of Israel's demographic need as it looked to Arab countries as a potential and sorely needed source of Jewish immigration.

While this is only a cursory glance at the various points of contention, it illustrates that there are certain fundamental divergences in the historiography that deal with this period of Iraqi Jewry. Events are read differently and emphasized in different ways. For example, Shenhav does mention the Farhoud but stresses that it was a glaring anomaly in the long span of Jewish-Muslim relations in Iraq. He accuses Zionism as having appropriated the Farhoud to its narrative and that the Israeli government drew a parallel between that event and the Holocaust. It became part of the Zionist notion of "from the Holocaust to resurrection," thus a misuse by the Zionism of a traumatic chapter in Iraqi-

Jewish history. Absent from Shenhav's writing is any explanation of the psychological effect on the Jews' own perceived position in Iraqi society. Shohat does not mention the *Farhoud* at all when she writes about the events of the Iraqi-Jewish immigration. She attributes the disintegration of Jewish-Muslim relations in Iraq to two processes: rising Arab nationalism and Zionist activity. Shohat's essay is not meant to be a comprehensive history in any sense, but is rather a critique of what she views as Zionist-centered scholarship that has appropriated the history of Iraqi Jews (as well as other "Arab-Jewish" histories) into a master-narrative that results in a blurred representation of events. Regardless, Shohat does indeed offer a version of the Iraqi-Jewish story despite the limited scope of the essay, and it is one that hinges on an understanding of Iraq's Jews as an integrated and intimate part of Arab society that was successfully displaced by the Zionist movement.

It is also worth noting Nissim Rejwan's and Sasson Somekh's autobiographies, both published in the past few years, each in two parts: life in Iraq prior to departure and life as Israelis after 1951. Rejwan and Somekh were both Baghdadi Jews who came to Israel during the 1950-51 immigration. Rejwan, from a lower class family, became a journalist and historian in Israel whereas Somekh, from an upper-middle class background, went on to become a scholar of Arabic language and literature, writing his dissertation on the work of Nagib Mahfouz. Both men, writing from a personal perspective, attempt to situate their accounts within the history, and the nuanced differences and similarities between these firsthand narratives and the academic texts

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32 Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, p. 337.
33 Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, p. 351.
illustrate that Rejwan and Somekh were well aware of the debates and controversies regarding the period in question.

There is an ambivalence present throughout these memoirs that suggests the difficulty posed by not only trying to reconstruct one's past 60 years later, but also by the historiographical debate that looms over the Iraqi-Jewish narrative. Both Rejwan and Somekh imply that Iraq's Jews were an integral part of the country's cultural and societal fabric, yet they suggest that there were clear lines that separated the Jews as well.  

Somekh emphasizes the cooperation and prosperous socio-economic ties between Jews and Muslims, and expresses an indifference towards Zionism, at least when he was a teenager in Iraq. Somekh is sensitive to the suffering the community experienced at the hands of the government, yet insists on painting a picture that emphasizes the good relations that existed as well. Rejwan claims that he had his "deeper roots dug firmly in the soil of Iraq." However, he does not view the Jews as part of the Arab people, but rather a "solidly established ethnic group." Regarding the Farhoud, Somekh, similar to Shenhav, views it as an abnormal and unique event in Muslim-Jewish relations in Iraq, while Rejwan, like Meir-Glitzenstein, sees it as having far reaching psychological consequences that eventually led to the mass exodus 10 years later.

The scholarship mentioned here, although a limited sample, is revealing nonetheless of the current state of a historiography that is clearly unresolved in many ways. Understanding how well integrated Iraqi Jewry was into society and the implications of Zionist activity in Iraq is central to each narrative, and the different ways

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in which each is explained, or not explained at all, are indicative of the sometimes subtle, sometimes striking differentiation among the narratives. Since each work of literature to be examined here contains strong autobiographical elements, these ambiguities and contrasts can help contextualize the stories and the formative events that were crucial in each author's life.

These historical works have been written and published for the most part during the past fifteen years, looking back on the history with a post-Zionist lens--whether for or against such a critique--that sometimes obfuscates the story and events even more. Keeping in mind the evolution of the narrative, as well as the difficulties contained in constructing it, will help to explain the context within which the literature was written. The crucial events of the 1940s and the transit camp experience that followed constitute, either directly or indirectly, the focal point of the consciousness of the three authors and their narratives.

The goal of outlining some of these inconsistencies has been to put into a context much of the scholarship of both the history and literature of Iraqi Jewry. The post-Zionist discourse mentioned above is often bound one way or another into these historiographic divergences, and considering this broader background while looking at the literature will hopefully establish a context for understanding the circumstances in which each author was writing. Each historical narrative assumes something about Iraqi-Jewish identity and the place of Iraqi Jews in Iraqi society, and then in Israeli society as well. Ballas, Mikhael and Amir offer a view not only into the reality created in Israel that was shaped by these historical events, but also into the experience of the ma'abarah within that reality.

Although the novels are written in a fictional mode, they should not be seen as a less
dependable source for an historical experience. Fiction, even that which deals with historical events, is a form of art, and thus selective of the details and experiences it represents. It is by this process of sifting through events and memory that each author constructs his narrative.

Summary of the Texts Under Discussion

Almost the entire narrative of Shimon Ballas' *HaMa'abarah* takes place in a ma'abarah called "Oryah," and is comprised of a cacophony of voices that constitute a variety of characters, all of whom are Iraqi immigrants. The story opens with the tragic death of a child during birth after the doctor who is called on refuses to enter the ma'abarah because of its filth and mud. This sparks a pressing urgency among the inhabitants of the ma'abarah, many with different goals and political motives, to try to organize a committee to elect delegates to represent the ma'abarah collectively to the state in an attempt to improve their situation and demand more rights, work, and basic services. A gang of thugs (Iraqi immigrants themselves), paid off by the administration of the ma'abarah, threaten to destabilize the situation and plunge life deeper into chaos and disorder. Three attempts at a gathering occur, each ending in failure, one of them in violence and the arrest of four inhabitants -- young, well-respected men who are seen by the ma'abarah collectively as representing the community's future hopes. As the story comes to a close very little changes or improves, and the cycle of inability to act and the feeling of hopelessness perpetuate.

Eli Amir's *Tarnegol Caparot* is told from the perspective of Nuri, a young Iraqi immigrant who leaves the ma'abarah to live on a kibbutz with other immigrants of his
age. The narrative follows Nuri's and his friends' identity struggle as Iraqi Jews from traditional family backgrounds clashing with the secular values of the kibbutz and new Israeli culture. Various answers or solutions are given to the difficulties encountered, and each character is forced to choose his or her path and means of coping with the new reality with which he is faced. Ultimately, the struggle between the kibbutz and its values, and the ma'abarah and the cultures and histories it represents, becomes the intractable conflict at the heart of the text. This is exemplified when Nuri is asked to act as a guide for the kibbutz in the ma'abarah, and to recruit other youth to come join the kibbutz. Forced to confront his past, irreconcilable with the present, Nuri is left ensnared in the tangled fabric of cultural disparities, ultimately returning to the ma'abarah in defeat.

*Shavim veShavim Yoter* by Sami Mikhael is also told in first person, by a young Iraqi immigrant named David. The narrative is structurally different from the first two in that it unfurls across different times and spaces. Each chapter begins with David's first-hand account of his experience in the events of the opening hours of the 1967 Six Day War. The narrative then backtracks to David's arrival to Israel and his experience in the ma'abarah, and eventually his leaving it as he obtains an education with the help of his brother, Shaul, and finds a lucrative job. The two paths of the story converge at the end of the text with David's return from the battlefield, after which he is awarded a prize of valor for saving his comrades after their tank is destroyed, ultimately fulfilling the Zionist notion of giving his blood to the land. Also central to the narrative is David's relationship with Margalit, his wife and the mother of his son. Margalit is from Poland, and her mother viciously despises her daughter's marriage to David because of his Mizrahi
background. The reader is informed from the beginning of the story that Margalit has left David and is raising their son with a "pale-faced" man whose last name ends in "itch" (a typical ending for Ashkenazi surnames). A scathing critique of the ethnic tensions in Israel during the 1950s and 1960s, harsh and often derogatory language is prevalent throughout the text. With a somewhat more optimistic ending, Mikhael's narrative suggests that though having children and participating in the war, David is able to bridge the cultural gap and "become a citizen," and essentially implies that there is indeed a hope for the next generation.
Part I

Representing the Ma'abarah: Ephemeral and Enduring, Physical and Symbolic Space

*It may be a swamp, but it's mine!*

- Amir, *Tarnegol Caparot*, p. 145

The ma'abarah is paradoxically represented as concurrently transitory and unending. This contradiction is an effect of the conflict created by the contact space. The dissonance generated by the experience of the contact space is one that is represented similarly in each of the present texts. As the space in which physical existence is regulated, the ma'abarah also represents a poetic space that has power and influence beyond its concrete borders. The narratives similarly illustrate the shared symbolic and concrete elements of the ma'abarah. This is shown not only through the ma'abarah's presence in the characters' consciousness, but also in how it shapes their experiences and their actions after they've left. Each text weaves these meanings and representations together, consequently creating a picture of the complexity of the ma'abarah for those who inhabit it.

As a concrete space, the ma'abarah is homogeneously represented in Ballas', Amir's, and Mikhael's writing through imagery of wind, the cold, rain, mud, and darkness, the latter being one of the more prominent features. In *HaMa'abarah*, by Ballas, these elements often serve to express characters' emotions and feelings. Changes
of mood or fortune, indeed one's very sense of reality, are affected and determined by the physical conditions of the ma'abararah. As Esther, a young woman left to tend to her younger siblings due to her father's depression and drunkenness, returns home from work in the evening, her joy from having found sorely needed work quickly evaporates as she enters the ma'abararah.

She turned her face around. Evening was falling. The paths of the ma'abararah became blurred. Her happiness dissipated...She stood trembling. The wind blew noisily through her hair and fluttered in her dress.\(^{38}\)

Similarly, as Salim Shabbat, one of the young men in the camp, works in the small yard in front of his tent, he is unable to cope with the harsh natural elements as rain and mud constantly obstruct the entrance to his home.

The hoe sank into the mud. The final clod of earth was moved aside and the water spilled into the channel, uncovering the soft black underbelly of the swampy mess. Salim Shabbat cast the hoe aside behind the canvas tent and slapped his hands together. The puddles of water were drained and entrance into the tent would no longer be difficult. He raised his head towards the sky and saw clouds drifting sluggishly. Again his heart was filled with worry.\(^{39}\)

Here, a sense of perpetual or cyclical conflict is expressed as well, reflected throughout the entirety of the narrative. Salim's relentless battle with the mud and rain that continues to clog the entrance to the tent that acts as his home is emblematic of his inability to escape the ma'abararah. In this instance, it is the physical difficulties of the ma'abararah that are representative of Salim's state of mind and his hopelessness. Indeed, rain will return, and as he cannot command the weather, he also cannot command his destiny, trapped as

\(^{38}\) Ballas, HaMa’abararah, p. 140.
\(^{39}\) Ballas, HaMa’abararah, p. 90.
he is in the mud of the ma'abarah. This physical nature of the ma'abarah is that very element that makes it an emotional one as well, a space that limits and confines those within it psychologically.

Further, in *HaMa'abarah*, the ma'abarah's permanence is emphasized by the fact that nearly the entirety of the narrative occurs within its space. The contradictory nature of the ma'abarah as permanent and transitory is illustrated in different ways. There are symbols of permanence embedded in the ma'abarah despite its intended function as a transitional space. Shlomo Hamra runs a café out of one of the canvas tents that also serve as homes for the immigrants, and Shaul Reshti runs a small repair shop as well. The image of businesses, a general sign of permanence and stability, is juxtaposed with the notion of the ma'abarah as transitory. There is also a café in the ma'abarah in *Shavim veShavim Yoter*, described as "the only point of light in the ma'abarah," not merely because the owner owns an electric generator but also because its permanence gives some sign of a normal and stable life. This contradiction inherent in the function of the space of the ma'abarah becomes that which shapes and constricts characters' existences and identity, in turn expressing the frustration and disappointment so prevalent in the texts that reflect the reality of the 1950s. Shaul Reshti, in his thoughts, describes the ma'abarah as follows:

> If only he could escape from here! Everything here is temporary, passing. The time, the place. Happiness of life. The past is hidden, entangled in the thicket of the soul. And the roots are torn, shriveled and wilting. There exists only a feeling of the end. He had never

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40 Mikhael, *Shavim veShavim Yoter*, p. 47.
been visited by such thoughts of death as in recent days...He aspired for a life of stability.  

But in the ma'abarah everything passes.  

The ma'abarah, while temporary or passing on the one hand, has left Shaul with no escape, no hope for liberation, and most significantly, no future. Accordingly, the intractable conflict is highlighted: even though time passes, there is no future to come, and so Shaul passes into nothing, the sense of finality striking. The ma'abarah persists in both engendering a sense of life as fleeting as well as a sense of its immobility, even its end. This notion of disparate times converging in the ma'abarah will be looked at more closely in the following chapter.

Amir succinctly captures the notion of emotional space in Tarnegol Caparot. The text focuses heavily on the internal identity conflict of the narrator, Nuri:

*When we would get close to the ma'abarah during our running exercises we would turn our backs to it. Go back, quickly get back to the kibbutz. Just don't let us smell the scent, don't let us know. But the ma'abarah was in our souls. Gazing down on us from the hill, as we ran to the road, it was exacting revenge on us by its very presence, breathing down our necks, not letting go. So far away yet possessing such power, pulling us towards it again and again.*  

The ma'abarah is anthropomorphized as it becomes like a living entity, something that breathes and even has power. It has manipulated Nuri and his friends, penetrated their emotions at the deepest level and made itself present even when it is not so physically.

Although Nuri is living on the kibbutz and has therefore, for the time being, escaped the ma'abarah, it remains an unremittingly permanent space for him. Nuri even expresses reserved affection for the ma'abarah, something quite absent from the

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41 Ballas, HaMa'abarah, p. 156-157.  
characters in Ballas' and Mikhail's texts. Frustrated by his incapacity to adopt and transform himself to the secular culture of Israeli-born kibbutz youths, Nuri despairs, determining that the only option before him is to return to his family in the ma'abarah.

"There is one path in front of me if I want to be at peace with myself: to return to the ma'abarah, to its melodies and its scents. It may be a swamp, but it's mine!"\textsuperscript{43} Further:

"The people of the ma'abarah are my relatives, my neighbors, teachers who fell from their greatness, people who lost their world. Each of them is my father."\textsuperscript{44} The ma'abarah shapes Nuri's identity and his perception of himself. As a contact space between his past and present its permanence persists emotionally and symbolically in everything that it represents: his family, friends, and old life. They are only able to exist as he knew them in Iraq within the ma'abarah. While the majority of Nuri's narrative takes place in the kibbutz, the ma'abarah is ubiquitous as expressed above. It takes its revenge on its inhabitants, never letting them abandon it, pulling them ever towards it.

In \textit{Shavim veShavim Yoter} the ma'abarah in its physical description is associated with literal filth and trash. Such blunt and often harsh language is typical in Mikhail's novel. For David, the narrator and protagonist, the ma'abarah comes to symbolize the very nature of his existence in Israel. On the way to war in 1967, his tank passes by the site where his ma'abarah had stood, and his unit first encounters a field abundant with colorful trees. As the tank turns to the other half of the site, the scent of garbage suddenly encompasses the soldiers, reminding David of the ma'abarah:

\begin{quote}
With the turn [of the road] we were surrounded by a choking stench that invaded our nostrils. This half of ma'abarah "Hiriya" wasn't covered in fresh, green trees: it became a giant garbage dump that collected Tel-Aviv's trash daily. As far as I'm concerned this
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{43} Amir, \textit{Tarnegol Caparot}, p. 145.  
\textsuperscript{44} Amir, \textit{Tarnegol Caparot}, p. 178.
was a sort of erecting of a fitting monument for the things that transpired here. From the day that I remembered ma'abarah "Hiriya" I knew that we, all of us sitting here [in the tank], were thrown into this human garbage dump at the hands of those same anonymous pale-faced men, citizens of the big city...the monument suited well the human tragedy that happened there.\(^45\)

Equating himself to an insect in the eyes of Ashkenazim (the pale-faced), David describes the ma'abarah: "Cockroaches, flies, fleas, bedbugs. In our ma'abarah these swarms of insects wandered from the pits of the latrines to the plates upon which rested our meager meals."\(^46\) These are among the opening passages of the text, and they dramatically and callously set the tone for the remainder of the narrative. Beyond the clear placing of blame on the Israeli establishment for the dire conditions of the ma'abarah, the act of opening the narrative with a description of the ma'abarah and its centrality to David's youth, as the space where "one's character is crystallized,"\(^47\) exposes its centrality to the text and to the narrator's consciousness as well. This passage evokes a similar sense as that from Tarnegol Caparot, above, in which the ma'abarah has penetrated the very souls of its inhabitants. The ma'abarah, beyond its physical attributes and even after it no longer exists (as in David's case in the scene in 1967), is ever-present in the emotions of those who lived in it. As both permanent and passing, physical and emotional, the ma'abarah is unyielding and even comes to influence and form the later events and experiences of David's life, such as the war itself.

The image of a ditch (t'alah in Hebrew) is a prominent symbolic feature in Mikhael's narrative, as well as to a lesser degree in Ballas'. The ditch represents the

\(^{45}\) Mikhael, Shavim veShavim Yoter, p. 10.
\(^{46}\) Mikhael, Shavim veShavim Yoter, p. 11.
\(^{47}\) Mikhael, Shavim veShavim Yoter, p. 11.
ma'abarah itself, which as has been seen is likened to a "garbage dump." In Shavim veShavim Yoter the ditch appears in three crucial instances: it is the space in which David has his first sexual experience (literally a dried up watering hole, filled with mud); David's older brother Shaul gets into a physical fight with Abu-Halwa, a pimp and leader of thugs in the ma'abarah, and the two of them end up in a ditch at the side of the road; when David's tank explodes he saves his companions by dragging them to a ditch created from the blast. In essence, the image of a pit, a dump, or a trench is a frequent symbol in the text, and it serves as a broader metaphor for the ma'abarah itself as well as the disappointments and frustrations of its inhabitants. David laments his first sexual experience as "tainted by trash like the rest of life in the ma'abarah." Again, the ma'abarah as a concrete space, in this case embodied by the ditch, is simultaneously a poetic space that represents a bitter shattering of dreams and expectations, most bluntly conveyed by David's disappointing loss of virginity, which transpired in the physical as well as emotional mud and filth of the ma'abarah.

As a concrete space in which daily life drags on, the ma'abarah is also an emotive and symbolic space reflected in experiences and realities. The physical depictions of the ma'abarah are parallel in each narrative, as are its symbolic meanings. Its perpetual transience, as it were, is at once concrete and symbolic. The characters are constrained physically, unable to leave the ma'abarah, and symbolically, as it becomes emotive, shaping their state of mind. Its significance in each novel speaks for its significance in each author's life and to the ma'abarah's effect on Iraqi Jewish immigrants of that generation. However, the ways in which each text handles the intractable conflict of the

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48 Mikhael, Shavim veShavim Yoter, p. 46.
ma'abarah as the contact space where past, present and future intersect differ from one another on various levels, as will be seen in the following chapter.
Part II

Contact Space:

The Ma'abarah as the Site of Dissonant Convergence of the Past, the Present and Future Expectations

"You're like me," she answered. "You know that Baghdad is dead."

-Amir, Tarnegol Caparot, p. 165

The ma'abarah is represented as the only space in which the past perpetuates, and through memory, nostalgia, and frustrated expectations of the future, the present is rendered as unstable and in conflict. The sense of finality after 1951, both in the literary works and historical treatments, is conveyed as absolute. It is interesting to note this point even though some 6,000 or so Jews remained in Iraq after the mass emigration. They were by and large cut off completely from the majority that immigrated to Israel, and suffered greatly in the years leading up to and during the Ba'thi ascendency to power. Nonetheless, the immediate past in Iraq, only just abandoned for the Jews who left, is a prominent feature in each of the three narratives. The past plays an important role not only in cultural representation but also in the shaping of the experience of the present as it confronts the complex reality of Israel and the difficulty of the ma'abarah. As Hever points out, the paradox inherent in the ma'abarah is its physical existence in the concrete space of Israel; it is both Arab, in the sense that a specific Iraqi-Arabic culture and
language are transferred there, and Jewish. It is therefore not fully Israeli despite its location within Israel proper, thus exposing the conflict of its very nature. The past and the present collide in the physical space of the ma'abarah as well as in its symbolic space. As a symbolic space the ma'abarah is present in emotions and psyches, it pursues the characters and invades their very souls, as was seen in the passage above. The result of this collision is a discord that for certain characters is irreconcilable. The response to conflict is different in each text, and the solutions, if any are offered, are divergent.

In Amir's *Tarnegol Caparot*, instances of nostalgia become a recurring theme. These glimpses into the past are often triggered by the present, leading to a conflict that for the narrator Nuri, is impossible. The majority of Nuri's narrative takes place on the kibbutz, yet as discussed above, the ma'abarah permeates his story as a symbolic space, even (and especially) when he is not physically present in it. Nuri's past then collides with his present and deepens his uncertainty about how to handle the future, how to reconcile the difficulty of being torn between two worlds. Some of his memories are nostalgic, removing him from the frustration of the present and transporting him to Iraq, providing him with respite and even escape. Others serve as a constant reminder of his origins, in turn complicating and making more difficult the reality of the present as Nuri confronts his new life and identity as part of the kibbutz, inevitably at odds with the traditional world of his parents.

Similar to *Shavim veShavim Yoter*, Amir's text appeals to sight and sound as the means by which to elicit memory. Often triggered by an image or even a scent, Nuri is transported back to Iraq, washed away by waves of nostalgia. The ma'abarah as a mentally confining space is what creates Nuri's need to seek relief and his tendency to
become lost in memory. Upon arrival at the kibbutz he is struck by the color and richness of its vegetation: "the scent of white roses tickled my nostrils. Suddenly, as if from across vast and forgotten distances - a different scent of a garden full of palms, expansive fields of grass, my hand in father's."49 Seeing Haifa for the first time immediately brings him back to Baghdad.

_The tall buildings of Haifa didn't seem like the ones back there, on Al-Rashid Street, the main street in Baghdad. Despite this there was something in the air that reminded me of the street of my childhood. The shuk, restaurants, ice cream stands, newspaper sellers, and cafes. An Arab wearing a red fez, playing with prayer beads behind his back, moving calmly along the crowded sidewalk. Like there, I said to myself. In any case a little bit Baghdad. How I wished we could live together, the entire family, in a house of white stone with a rounded balcony, arched stained-glass windows, and a roof open to the sky._50

The physical beauty of Iraq is what Nuri yearns for, and seeing the houses of Haifa causes him to wish his family lived together in one of their own, a house like their old home, instead of the ma'abarah. Hanah Naveh writes that the story of immigration is "the story of an original identity's battle for survival."51 Nuri's war is double-layered; it is both a war for survival of his past and a war _against_ that survival, since his past is portrayed as conflicting with the values and culture of his present.

Unable to relate to or feel a part of the cultural activities of the Israeli-born kibbutz youths, Nuri and his friends resolve to recreate Iraqi-Jewish culture within the kibbutz. Turned off by the foreign sound of the classical western music that the Israeli teens worship, the young Iraqis hold weekly parties (in the text referred to in the Arabic:

49 Amir, _Tarnegol Caparot_, p. 11.
50 Amir, _Tarnegol Caparot_, p. 46.
51 Naveh, _Nosim v'Nosot_, p. 44.
hafla) centered on the sounds of the oud and the darbuka, dizzying dancing and incessant, thumping rhythm. The symbolic ma'abarah, in this instance represented by the Iraqi-Jewish musical and linguistic culture, is transported into the space of the kibbutz, and in the whirlwind of memory Nuri is thrust back into his past. When they begin to sing a liturgical poem traditionally sung at Iraqi-Jewish weddings, Nuri is again confronted with the past, resilient in his consciousness yet also trapped there indefinitely.

When I heard this poem, that we would sing in Baghdad in honor of the groom as he was called to the Torah, a trembling came over me. I was transported to another time. I'm six years old. Na'im, my uncle, who for many years refused to abandon his bachelorhood, had found a wife. He was handsome, always smiling, melting hearts with his sly lips, impressive in his dress and a silk scarf tied in elegant carelessness around his long neck.52

Nuri goes on to portray the wedding in full, his rich description relaying the experience of a child watching the adults of his family lose themselves in the fervor of the song and dance of celebration. The beauty of Nuri's nostalgia is shattered as one of the kibbutz workers comes upon the party and remarks, "We wanted to make human beings out of you! And look what you're doing: howling!"53 This scene is emblematic of Nuri's failure throughout the length of the narrative. As his past comes into contact with his present, the tension is irreconcilable. His hopes for the future, for finding a place for himself in Israeli society, are stifled by the realization that he cannot resolve this conflict.

Tarnegol Caparot offers an ambiguous answer to the problem that its characters face. As a symbolic contact space, the ma'abarah (and the world that it represents) forces the past to confront its disparities with the present, these disparities being at the heart of

52 Amir, Tarnegol Caparot, p. 129.
53 Amir, Tarnegol Caparot, p. 129.
the conflict. Again, in the framework of the contact space, the geographical and historical separation of Iraqi-Jews and the new Israeli state is bridged both concretely (the ma'abarah exists in Israel) and symbolically (the ma'abarah defines identity). Ultimately it is these disparities that lead Nuri to despair of the future he had hoped for, one in which he could bridge the gap between his past and the present, becoming Israeli while preserving that past. Recall Levy's suggestion that identity is mediated by the experience of space: Nuri's identity is mediated through his experience of the space of the ma'abarah and the kibbutz, albeit unsuccessfully. For Nili, one of the young Iraqi girls, the gap is bridged by a complete rejection of her past and an adoption of the new Hebrew culture that she encounters, essentially fulfilling the Zionist ideal. It is Nili who says to Nuri, "You're like me, you know that Baghdad is dead." Nili is aware of Nuri's internal struggle, and she confronts him candidly regarding his attempts to integrate into the kibbutz, thus emphasizing his failure. His reflection after their conversation typifies the conflict.

Who am I? What am I? I knew one thing: the transition from Iraq to the ma'abarah cut me down to size and ruined my world and that of my parents. Now that I'm not lacking anything I need to ask myself: what am I doing here? Just running from Baghdad? And where will I arrive? Is there even someplace to go? Did Nili truly get there, as she claims, or is she just pretending?55

Confined by the experience of the ma'abarah and the sense of loss of the past, Nuri cannot feel whole. Baghdad is not yet dead, it lives on in the ma'abarah, symbolically and also physically, given the huge percentage of Iraqi Jewry that came as an intact community. Nuri stresses this fact himself when he answers to Sonia, his chief mentor

54 Pratt, Imperial Eyes, p. 6.
55 Amir, Tarnegol Caparot, p. 166.
and guide on the kibbutz, as to the difference between his experience as an Iraqi and hers as an Eastern European (Polish, in Sonia's case).

"...I thought and I thought...what's the difference between the 16 year-old Sonia and the 16 year-old Nuri? The difference is I didn't come [to Israel] alone like you, and Dolek, and Faivush. I came with my family and friends and relatives, all of Jewish Baghdad switched places, and now it's in the ma'abarah."\(^{56}\)

Nearly the entirety of Baghdadi Jewry was transported out of its context and implanted in the ma'abarah. From this perspective the concept of the contact space is most appropriate. Spatially and mentally disrupted, yet still intact as a group, Iraqi Jewry lives on in the ma'abarah. For this reason Nuri cannot find it within himself to reject his past; instead it spills out into the present in a conflictive way. The above conversation with Sonia is held after Nuri's failed attempt to recruit young children from the ma'abarah to come to the kibbutz. His conflict comes to a head when he returns to the ma'abarah, dressed as a kibbutznik, and in a reversal of roles represents the kibbutz in the space of the ma'abarah. Nuri's misery reaches its climax when he ends up in a confrontation with the rabbi of the ma'abarah, who fundamentally disapproves of the lifestyle and education of the kibbutz. Ashamed and disappointed by his exposed breach of tradition, Nuri despairs. Eventually, he succeeds in bringing a group of Iraqi youths to the kibbutz for a welcoming event. The day ends in disaster as the Iraqi children behave rudely and interrupt the speech welcoming them, thus signifying Nuri's ultimate failure.

Amir's narrative concludes with Nuri's dejected return to the ma'abarah. Returning to help his family make a living, Nuri has essentially rejected the kibbutz as well as the future he had attempted to carve out for himself there. His conflict far from resolved,

\(^{56}\) Amir, Tarnegol Caparot, p. 223.
Nuri's narrative comes to a close with a poignant sense of guilt, epitomized in the title of the novel. *Tarnegol Caparot* is a slaughtered fowl in Jewish tradition that is used in a ritual before the Yom Kippur holiday. The chicken is waved in circles above one's head, an act symbolizing the casting out of one's sins and the seeking of atonement, the bird functioning as a scapegoat for those transgressions. Nuri brings a slaughtered chicken home from the kibbutz as a gift to his parents (rare in the ma'abarah given the scarcity of food) but instead utterly disappoints them when it becomes clear that the bird was not slaughtered according to Jewish law. The scene symbolizes Nuri's intractable conflict: he has failed to integrate into the kibbutz and in the process alienated himself from his own culture, leaving him only with guilt and disappointment.

Upon returning to the ma'abarah at the end of story, Nuri happens upon an old beggar whom he reveals to be a happy figure from his youth, Abu Jamila, now reduced to destitution. In an instance of subtle beauty, the text offers a final memory of the past as it converges with the present.

> On a small mound, just a few steps away from me, he was sitting in an eastern position, as is the way of the poor, his voice dry. At his feet small stones and a few coins upon a piece of tent cloth. Abu Jamila, he and no other, the legend from Baghdad, from weddings and celebrations. There wasn't a wedding at which Abu Jamila didn't appear, like a spy bursting out of hiding, unexpectedly, from among the crowd. Refined, elegant, emitting a diluted scent of Arak as perfume, hopping from table to table, blessing others with rhymed prose, spreading jokes and riddles, touching glasses with those sitting at each table while gathering, in circular motions with his hands behind his back, the bundles of cash, a tribute of thanks to the king, the king of joy. Him? Really? He himself? How old is he now? It seems that his age is that of Baghdad's. He WAS Baghdad. One of those phenomena of nature that no man can change.
King! The king of Baghdad. The King of my childhood. Abu Jamila is the embodiment of the past and he forces it upon the present by means of his very presence, yet through his downfall and impoverishment he also represents the failure of the future or, perhaps more appropriately, the lack of one. He is "cut down to size" like Nuri and the rest of his family. Despite this, Abu Jamila symbolizes the permanence of the past, even if it is regulated to exist only within the ma'abarah. Not only is he Baghdad, he is also the quintessence of the contact space, simultaneously the concrete and symbolic intersection of the past and present. He is physically present, almost juxtaposed with reality (as suggested by the text itself) because he embodies the symbolic past in Iraq. Humiliated and degraded, Abu Jamila's future is bleak, echoing Nuri's feelings and frustration for his own future.

Shavim veShavim Yoter is structurally similar to Tarnegol Caparot in that the narrative is not confined only to the ma'abarah but unfolds in other spaces as well. As has been seen, in Tarnegol Caparot Nuri ultimately yields to the conflict and concludes that he has no option but to return to the ma'abarah, even if he cannot be whole there. In Shavim veShavim Yoter, David uncovers a different path, one in which the text suggests a solution to the conflict, or at least a bridging of the gap between the past and the present created by the conflict. After saving his comrades during the Six Day War David is awarded the most prestigious Israeli prize of valor. In the closing pages of the text, at the award ceremony, David dedicates his honor to his son, and sees the certificate as proof that he is an Israeli citizen, having shed blood for his country. It is through his offspring that David becomes an Israeli, ultimately fulfilling the Zionist narrative through the

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57 Amir, Tarnegol Caparot, p. 233-234, my emphasis.
58 Mikhael, Shavim veShavim Yoter, p. 254.
giving of his flesh and blood. Hope for the younger generation is a theme throughout the narrative. Shaul sends his and David's younger brother to live on a kibbutz in an attempt to get him out of the ma'abarah as quickly as possible. Regarding Shaul's own young son, David remarks to himself "this one won't bear the mark of the ma'abarah." The concept that the next generation will be able to escape the conflict of the ma'abarah, that it will not remain a symbolic contact space for the immigrants' children, is the solution offered by Mikhael's text. For David and his brother Shaul, only the future of their children can be redeemed, while they themselves remain in the symbolic space of the ma'abarah.

Indeed, the ma'abarah persists symbolically for David throughout the text even after he leaves it. His relationship with Margalit comes to represent his future, a future that in the end does not belong to him. Even though David and Margalit meet in the ma'abarah, Margalit as an Ashkenazi, as something new and objectified for David, represents his future and the rejection of his past. Their life together is meant to be a new beginning, a repression of the ma'abarah. Margalit is then juxtaposed with Madeline, the young Iraqi girl whom David knew before coming to Israel and with whom he had his first sexual encounter in the ma'abarah. Madeline is the past, Iraq, and the ma'abarah; she represents his culture and his Iraqiness. Madeline is tragically murdered by Abu Halwa the pimp and her violent death suggests that she had no other option, no way to escape the conflict. David illuminates the difference between Madeline and Margalit as he wonders whether Margalit could be as proud of him as he thinks Madeline would have been.

Madeline - the woman that saw a man in me, the one who could join her arm with mine, proudly cross the street with me, her eyes rejoicing in her being a woman and my heart

59 Mikhael, Shavim veShavim Yoter, p. 138.
answering with beats of joy in my being a man. Does pride like this beat in Margalit's heart?\(^6^0\)

Madeline represents a previous existence, a past in which David would have been considered equal. Margalit, representing the present and a possible future, does not see David the same way, and the ultimate downfall of their relationship suggests the conflict created in and by the ma'abarah. The text hints that despite Margalit's declared love for David, their marriage is doomed to fail from the start because of David's Iraqiness and the scorn and contempt heaped upon him by Tziporah, Margalit's mother. The intractable conflict in David's narrative is best exemplified by the contrast between Madeline and Margalit, the former his past, the latter his present. David's hopes for a future for himself die out in the frustration and bitterness of his marriage, yet his son offers him redemption. For David, like Nuri, the ma'abarah endures as a symbolic space, controlling his emotions and defining him even after he has left it.

Despite this, David's struggle is different from Nuri's in that he leaves behind the traditional world of his family while he is still in the ma'abarah. David's parents are in fact killed when their canvas tent catches on fire, a violent yet appropriate metaphor for what the text suggests has happened to the past and to Iraq: it has been burned. He and his older brother Shaul force themselves to dredge through a period of feverish study in their tent in the ma'abarah so David can pass the matriculation exam. He is successful and finds a steady job with an insurance company, only to lose sight of his achievements as his racist mother-in-law drives him and Margalit apart after their marriage and the birth of their son. Shaul rebukes his brother who is unable to forget the ma'abarah. For Shaul, it

\(^6^0\) Mikhael, *Shavim veShavim Yoter*, p. 226.
is in the past but for David, it remains. "'Ah, Shaul...you've forgotten the ma'abarah.'
'Nonsense; we're talking in the future, not in the past.' "61

Shaul's criticism of David is centered on the latter's inability to let go of the ma'abarah and what it symbolizes, he let it permeate into his life after the fact, the past continuing to inflict difficulty on the present.

In *HaMa'abarah*, Ballas' narrative diverges in that it does not follow one particular character but is a chorus of voices that represent a whole, albeit in disharmony. Consequently, no single character can clearly be designated as the protagonist. The ma'abarah itself serves as the protagonist; it seems like a breathing entity, a scorned yet necessary part of existence. It is both living and dead. The ma'abarah is loathed by those who inhabit it as well as by those who do not. For Ballas it is not only the central space within which identity is constructed and confined, it is the *only* space.

However, Ballas offers a window into aspects of the Jewish past in Iraq that are not illustrated in the other texts. Going deeper than just nostalgia for Baghdad or intimate family memories, the text attempts to reconstruct the actual place of the Jew in the Iraqi milieu of the early 20th century. The father of Ne'eman (Ne'eiman can be considered one of the more central characters in the narrative), who is of an older generation, discusses his travels in Iraq over a cup of "properly" prepared Iraqi coffee with Yosef (another central character), something he had learned from Bedouin in southern Iraq.

"I learned how to make coffee from the Bedouin in the south. Have you ever been to the southern desert?"

"No. I had never left Baghdad."

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"If that's the case, then you don't know Iraq. Iraq is not Baghdad. The village, the desert, they're a whole other world. I spent many years among the Bedouin and the southern villages. Ezra the Jew, they called me...On my life and that of my son's, they expressed great respect towards me. Whenever I would arrive at a village, riding a mule and loaded with goods, the men and women would run to tell the sheikh that Ezra the Jew had arrived. The sheikh would receive me in his hall and host me in his own home throughout the duration of my stay among his tribe."

"And where did you sell the goods?"

"They would come to me to purchase. The sheikh would buy, and afterwards the heads of the tribe. In one day I would sell all the fabric and tobacco I had brought with me. But this wasn't the point. It was not possible to simply sell the goods and go. People of the tribe would come to me and ask advice in every matter affecting their lives. Sick people, those with no cure would come asking for a recovery. Women would bring sick children to me and would ask for a drug to cure them. I was forbidden to refuse..."

"Forbidden?"

"Forbidden. Don't you know the traditions of the tribesmen? They have strong faith in the Jew who comes to them from the city. Sometimes they believe in him more than in their own sheikh."

Ne'eman's father's memory illuminates a distinct Jewish experience in Iraq vis-à-vis Muslim neighbors. For Ne'eman's father, being a Jew meant something specific in Iraq, certainly different than what it means in the present within the ma'abarah and Israel. The significance of the past, especially with regards to identity and sense of self, is omnipresent in the text. Its contact with the present reality is thus unavoidable and conflicting, given the bleakness of that reality.

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62 Ballas, HaMa'abar, p. 34-35.
Memory is also used to juxtapose happiness with the bitterness of the present, similar to Nuri's experience in *Tarnegol Caparot*. In *HaMa'abarah*, Esther, the young woman caring for her younger siblings after the breakdown of her father, is offered respite from her present difficulties through a memory of her youth in Iraq.

*She closed her eyes, trying to fall asleep. She was so dependent on rest, on forgetting, if only for a brief time, until Tikvah returns to the ma'abarah and the children tire of their games in the alleyways. But the sleep did not come. These Sabbath eves bring her to the point of depression. She recalled the distant days of her youth, the bath in the heated washroom, Kiddush, the set table covered with a pure lace cloth. It was just yesterday that they were turning and listening to her father's song, ringing in his voice "Woman of Valor..."*

Trapped in the ma'abarah after the death of her mother, Esther's father is too unwell to even function. Esther's suffering, and in turn her identity, are defined through her nostalgia for the past and the suffocating space of the ma'abarah, which is the present. Her hopes are that she can join the army and receive an education, hopes that increasingly dissipate in the ma'abarah. Similar to the trajectory of the majority of characters' lives in the text, Esther's future looks grim, with no apparent solution to her difficulties. In *Tarnegol Caparot* the conflict created in the contact space was mainly existential, whereas in *HaMa'abarah* the focus of the conflict is on its affect on the actual concrete existence of the immigrants, and their physical entanglement in the ma'abarah. The identity crises of Amir's and Mikhael's texts is not as focal in Ballas', although it is present to some degree.

Ne'eman's father, in another memory of the past, expresses a marked sense of nostalgia, similar to Esther's memory. This memory also accurately conveys the

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63 Ballas, *HaMa'abarah*, p. 55.
relationship between memory and space, as well as past and present, and how these elements converge in the novel as formative themes.

"I know Iraq like the back of my hand," Ne'eman's father sailed in his memories. "There are places in which it is possible to live without depending on any other man. You can throw a stone into the palms, and dates whose taste is almost honey fall down to you. Isn't this the kind that is written about in the Bible? You walk to the edge of the rivers, the streams and lakes, and catch fish to your heart's desire. You go out to the fields and take hold of a handful of wheat. Now THAT'S the Garden of Eden, believe me."

Here Ne'eman's father's memory recalls the biblical Eden as well as the classic description of Israel as the land of milk and honey. As he recalls the honey flavor of the dates he replaces the biblical Israel with Iraq; the land of the two rivers is in fact Eden, the land where honey flows. His memory blends Iraq and Israel together, his past in the former and his present in the latter, into an expression of identity and ultimately conflict. He is an Iraqi Jew, rooted in Iraq, his own Eden. Conversely, the reality of Israel is not sweet; rather it is epitomized by the sufferings of the ma'abarah.

In an instance where memory is a traumatic experience, Yosef projects his past suffering into the present. After his arrest at the ma'abarah gathering that spirals into chaos, Yosef is brought to the police station and is required to provide his fingerprints. He is consequently cast back into a scene from his final days in Iraq, and the trauma of departure resurfaces and bleeds into the present.

...[the public defender] brought the large, black inkpad near him.

"What's this for?"

"In order to make that blank form dirty."

"You want a fingerprint?"

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64 Ballas, HaMa'abarah, p. 187-188, my emphasis.
In his mind's eye he saw a similar inkpad, big and dirty like this one, onto which the rough hand of a policeman pressed and held his fingers. A large crowd stood in the "Meir Elias" synagogue in Baghdad. Everyone hurried to sign the document that gave up their citizenship with their ten fingers. His mother wept bitterly.

"I won't give it!" he cried out.65

Yosef's memory, suddenly triggered by the request for fingerprints, places him back in Baghdad, in the main synagogue, crowded with Jews looking to give up their citizenship and leave Iraq forever. The only inference to the mood of the scene is his mother's bitter tears. Yosef is defined through this experience, but only through his memory of it as it penetrates the present affecting his actions, almost irrationally, and he refuses to give his fingerprints, an act perceived by him to be the symbolic relinquishing of his identity. His refusal results in prolonged imprisonment, perpetuating his conflict. Yosef's hope had been to build himself a house in Israel, but he ultimately fails and is unable to do so. For Yosef, it was "a dream that wasn't realized. A dream that sank into the mire of the ma'abarah."66

Ballas' narrative comes to close on a dark and ambiguous note, and the author chooses not to offer a solution to any aspect of the multi-dimensional conflict that characterizes the story. An acute sense of emptiness colors the closing passage of the text, which follows Yosef as he enters the café.

In the packed cigarette smoke within the space of the coffee house the pale smoke of hallucination sluggishly began to undermine. He floated above the heads of those seated, spilling out to the sides, and in the end disappeared into the dense layer of smoke, like the

65 Ballas, HaMa'abar, p. 81.
66 Ballas, HaMa'abar, p. 166.
disappearance of reality in the bosom of illusion. A strong scent came to Yosef's nose, a heavy scent. He closed his eyes and listened to the tumult.67

Disappearing into the thick layer of smoke is a fitting metaphor for the state in which Yosef and many other inhabitants of the ma'abarah find themselves at the close of the narrative. Similarly represented by Nuri's return to the ma'abarah in Tarnegol Caparot, the sense of the permanence of the ma'abarah is prominent in the closing sequence of HaMa'abarah. Hever claims that the novel "fails to indicate" which option is the appropriate one to improve the struggle of the inhabitants.68 He further points out that it "fails to bring about the constitution of a clear new identity."69 This of course assumes that the articulation of a new identity would be a resolution of conflict, a success of some sort. I suggest that the focus not be on the evolution of identity but simply on the very process of defining and confronting it. Hever's analysis is helpful to the present study in that he points out the fixation on the ma'abarah as both the beginning and the end of conflict, and that the disparities of the past, present, and future collide in the space of the ma'abarah. The challenge of maintaining a sense of self is at the core of the symbolic conflict of the ma'abarah. However, Hever writes, "[Ballas'] stories refuse the causal sequence of identity formation and choose instead to fragment the universalist aesthetic assumptions underlying the Israeli national narrative of the time."70 Hever's reading seeks to pit the text as the subversive side of the relationship between the "other" and the Zionist narrative, whereas an alternative interpretation would see it as situating the individual struggles within the context of the multi-faceted conflict of the contact space.

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67 Ballas, HaMa'abarah, p. 203.
68 Hever, Producing The Modern Hebrew Canon, p. 165.
69 Hever, Producing The Modern Hebrew Canon, p. 166.
70 Hever, Producing The Modern Hebrew Canon, p. 164.
The clash with Israeli hegemony is indeed bound up within this conflict, however it constitutes but one element in a complex immigrant narrative.

Symbolically, the ma'abarah represents for each author and the characters that they create a contact space of dissonance: a dissonance that represents the displacement of an entire community on the collective level, as well as the reshaping of individual consciousnesses and the internal identity conflicts that accompanied the past's jarring encounter with the present. Physically, the ma'abarah represents the geographic intersection of Iraqi-Jewry in its entirety, as it were, with the reality of the newly formed Jewish state. The ma'abarah's concrete and/or symbolic prevalence in each text speaks for its significance regarding experience as well. The conflict of the contact space is bound implicitly with hopes for the future, and, according to these three texts, it is by and large an intractable conflict: Nuri feels inevitably pulled backwards, David, while affirming on the one hand the solution of the Zionist narrative, does so at a heavy symbolic and physical price, and the characters in HaMa'abarah find themselves at the close of the story where they had been at the start. The future, and what it does/could represent, is in discord with what the past represents as well as what is occurring in the present.

Bouzaglo, one of Nuri's friends, characterizes this despair in his assessment of the ma'abarah: "I'll tell you what the ma'abarah is: it's like the desert of Moses, everyone is going to die."71

The concluding chapter will look at the significance of these three texts as the first expressions of Iraqi-Jewish culture and experience. Considering each narrative as a form of "autoethnographic" expression, I will look at the different ways by which the texts

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71 Amir, Tarnegol Caparot, p. 20.
seek to engage the dominant Israeli audience with the Iraqi-Jewish immigrant narrative and culture, and in turn find an entry into as well as a voice in Hebrew writing.
Part III

*Engaging While Distancing: Entering Modern Hebrew Literature*

"And me, I'm not even capable of saying one sentence in Hebrew."

"You have to learn, Salim. This is the language of the land. If it's our intent to move forward and to work like we know how to work, we have to learn Hebrew."

"I can't stand that language. When I hear the Yiddish blathering in it I get nauseous. Hebrew isn't a language of men like Arabic, whose every word weighs a ton..."

-Ballas, *HaMa'abarah*, p. 101

Ballas', Amir's, and Mikhael's novels, published over the course of nearly a twenty-year period (1964, 1974, and 1983 respectively), mark the entry of an Iraqi-Jewish story into Modern Hebrew writing. This is not to say that they necessarily represent a homogeneous narrative, but that the texts created a voice within Hebrew literature for the immigrant experience of the first generation of Iraqi-Jews coming to Israel. Much of the scholarship and analyses dealing with these novels have dealt with the presence of Arabic phrases and linguistic references that saturate the texts as a form of opposition to the Hebrew culture of Israel. While I do not aim to make any claims about the hybridity of an "Arab-Jewish" identity of Iraqi Jews (a subject part of a discourse beyond the purview of this paper), I am suggesting rather that these three texts be considered as immigrant literature telling an immigrant story. They represent the transmission of an Iraqi-Jewish experience and culture, beginning with crystallization in
Iraq in the 1930s-1940s, and then a transformation in Israel in the 1950s and beyond. As has been illustrated in this paper, space, both symbolic and physical, serves to mediate identity. Likewise, language plays an important role in what it represents and how it is in turn utilized. Ballas', Amir's, and Mikhael's texts are each astutely aware of the symbolic nature of Hebrew in relationship to Arabic. The dissonance between the pre- and post-Iraqi-Jewish immigration narrative is mediated, albeit often with difficulty, by these two languages. Significantly, the very act of writing in Hebrew (especially for Ballas and Mikhael) marked the formation of a new identity for the authors themselves.

The process of acquiring an adequate level of the Hebrew language to write in it expressively and creatively can be considered a symbolic ma'abarah (transition) for the authors whose native language is Arabic. Noted above, Mikhael and Ballas had both published in Arabic prior to writing their first Hebrew works, and the transitional process between languages reflects the birth of a new type of literary voice. This experience is in turn echoed in the themes and symbolisms contained in their first writings. Both Ballas and Mikhael had actively opposed writing in Hebrew upon arrival to Israel, but eventually they made the transition to Hebrew, Ballas leading the way with HaMa'abarah.\(^72\) HaMa'abarah was in fact written first in an Arabic draft before Ballas chose to rewrite it in Hebrew for a wider audience.\(^73\) (As mentioned above, an analysis of the reasons and motivations behind the choice to make the linguistic transition is beyond the scope of this paper.) Even though Amir did not undergo the same process of transitioning from Arabic to Hebrew writing, Arabic was still the native tongue of his childhood and he had to learn Hebrew as a second language. The act of expressing in

\(^{72}\) Snir, *Aravuit, Yahadut, Tziyyonut*, p. 312.

\(^{73}\) Shimony, *Al Saf haGeula*, p. 228.
Hebrew an Arabic cultural sensibility and experience was a symbolic ma'abarah for him as well. Levy points out Mikhael's own view that because these authors' Hebrew writing matured in the new cultural cosmopolitan scene of Israel in the 1960s and later, their work was not weighed down by the Hebrew literary tradition informing their Ashkenazi antecedents. In that sense, as Levy goes on to illustrate, there is a freer, more universal element to Ballas' and Mikhael's writing (less so regarding Amir's work, given that he did not write in Arabic initially) that signifies it as something new that grew organically from within while being simultaneously influenced by a variety of external cultural and linguistic factors. It is on this multi-faceted literary backdrop that the Hebrew language can serve to distance Ballas', Mikhael's, and Amir's writing from those authors' works which constitute the dominant literary tradition, while at the same time engaging that tradition on their own terms. This dynamic is ultimately the essence of an autoethnographic expression: a text that engages the dominant literary culture while distancing from it as well. It is by no means a consistent or methodical process, and it is at times subtle and others more stark.

An intrinsic aspect of each text is the way in which language informs experience. The tension between the Hebrew and Arabic languages is present throughout the narratives, definitively captured in the opening passage above. This manner of ridicule saturates each work, especially Ballas'. The quote is indicative of Ballas' perception of Hebrew language culture as a mediator of identity in the polarized environment of Israel in the 1950s. HaMa'abaraha is describing a story that takes place in Arabic; it is understood that the characters communicate in Arabic, conveyed through the sprinkling of Arabic terminology and idioms throughout the text. While Ballas made a choice to

74 Levy, View from the East, p. 157.
write in Hebrew, it can also be seen as a natural development. Indeed, as pointed out in the opening quote, it "is the language of the land." The opening quote expresses both the tension between the Arabic sensibility of the immigrants and their affinity for their native tongue, as well as the practical need to adopt Hebrew.

Madelaine Hron, in her book *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture* (2009), considers the ways in which immigrant authors in their writing translate the pain of their specific experience of abandoning home and making a transition to a new place. One option or method for such a translation that Hron suggests is "to transpose the cultural elements [of the immigrant's culture] directly into the host country." Further, "such a transposition, or the transfer of elements from the source text, with minimal or no modification, would markedly preserve one's cultural identity." Ballas frequently implements this method in *HaMa'abarah*. The text opens with a sentence in Arabic, transliterated into Hebrew, with a footnote explaining the meaning, directly "transposing" Iraqi-Jewish cultural elements into his narrative. Opening his first Hebrew novel with Arabic words, Ballas makes a significant statement that Shimony reads as a strong act of defiance in opposition to Zionist hegemony. I suggest that alternatively, the significance of Ballas' use of Arabic should be understood by looking at the text as a whole. Specifically, Ballas uses footnotes quite freely throughout the relatively short 200 pages that constitute the text. The footnotes do not simply serve to explain what is lost in translation, but have a broader function as well. For example, one footnote explains a reference to a fascist-oriented youth group in Iraq in the 1940s. There is a footnote that describes the particular scent of a certain root used for medicinal

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75 Hron, *Translating Pain*, p. 43.
77 Ballas, *HaMa'abarah*, p. 11.
purposes; another that takes the time to explain a particular Iraqi-Jewish dish served on the Sabbath. Further, Ballas makes reference to the history of the Iraqi-Jewish immigration: he mentions Nuri al-Said, the Prime Minister of Iraq during the years leading up to the Jewish emigration, widely agreed upon in historical writings as some of the worst in terms of persecution of the Jewish community. Ballas also uses the seemingly irrelevant mentioning of a particular type of suitcase used by Iraqi Jews to provide a footnote that explains how many Iraqi officials tore open and plundered Jews' belongings at the airport as they exited the country.

In this way Ballas subtly informs the reader of a past as well as a culture that has been dislocated and cut off from its source, and exists now only in the ma'abarah. Through Arabic expressions and speech, particularistic cultural references, and even select historical notes, Ballas' text can be seen as a translation of culture, an autoethnographic expression that engages Hebrew literature while demarcating its own space, preserving its distance from the dominant literary tradition. The text serves not only as a tool to transmit Iraqi-Jewish culture and experience but also to educate its readers; to provide some insight into Ballas’ perception of Iraqi-Jewish consciousness and identity pre-immigration, as well as the evolution of that identity and the circumstances surrounding that immigration. The footnotes are a fundamental part of the text that serve different purposes: to contextualize Iraqi-Jewish history and by extension the conflict wrestled with both before and after the immigration to Israel, and to offer a view into the distinct cultural elements that color the Iraqi-Jewish experience as well as Ballas' own perspective and intellectual crystallization.

78 Ballas, HaMa’abarah, p. 16, 28.
79 Ballas, HaMa’abarah, p. 94.
80 Ballas, HaMa’abarah, p. 194.
Another unique aspect of Ballas' text in comparison to Amir's or Mikhael's, is the presence of Iraqi-Jewish prose and song; specifically, the composition of poems and lyrics after the style and pattern of a particular Iraqi-Jewish tradition by the characters within the text. The above opening quote of the first chapter is an example: "To Israel like sheep they led us, To the black ma'abarah they brought us." These lines are part of a verse of poetry composed by the character Moshe. Earlier in the narrative, Moshe performs another song he had written, replete with references to imagery of Iraq as well as Iraqi folklore.

"Rise, my friend, to the Tigris and the dawn,
We'll drink wine and enjoy the dawn.
Quickly, my friend, before the rising of the sun,
And ere the sinking of the moon.
For many generations the Jew has wandered,
Yet in his arrival to the Land he is humiliated.
Our tale with the Yiddish is a long one,
Longer than the story of Antar al-'Absi."\(^{81}\)

Ballas' footnote here informs us that 'Antar al-'Absi is a hero of legend. Similarly, regarding another song recited in the text, the author notes it as part of an Arabic folkloristic tradition of unrhymed prose. The act of composing Hebrew poetry after a specific Iraqi style is a way in which the author attempts to assert an Iraqi-Jewish past and culture while making it accessible to metropolitan Hebrew culture. The footnotes are not merely a peripheral element but a key component of Ballas' text. They are a subtle means by which to bring the reader closer to the reality experienced than the text itself is able to achieve, a symbolic mediator between the text and what is lost in translation.

\(^{81}\) Ballas, *HaMa'abarah*, p. 31.
Thus the dominant metropolitan Hebrew audience is engaged in two important ways: on the one hand, the novel itself is written in Modern Hebrew, dealing with an actual part of Israeli reality and society (albeit a marginalized part), and on the other hand, it serves to make known to that audience the distance between itself as comprised of native speakers, and the Iraqi immigrant as an Arabic speaker who finds himself at odds with new spatial and linguistic experiences. Ballas thus engages metropolitan literate culture on a very specific linguistic level, and less so by the actual plot and events of his narrative, since it takes place entirely within the ma'abarah. Therefore his autoethnographic expression is articulated almost entirely on the level of linguistic and cultural allusion.

Amir's and Mikhael's texts do not contain the same degree of direct, or "transposed" cultural representations, although both certainly make use of Arabic phrasing and language, mostly relegated to greetings and titles. As Berg points out, the Arabic that appears in Amir's and Mikhael's novels is generally comprised of familiar sayings and expressions that had already infiltrated into Modern Hebrew speech. Berg concludes that the effect is one of "linguistic dissonance."82 The themes and storylines themselves serve to engage the metropolitan readership on common ground, while also distancing, a different approach from the pronounced insertion of Arabic language into the dialogue, as in Ballas' text. Thus the actual events of the plots of the narratives are the main tools by which autoethnographic expression is achieved in Amir's and Mikhael's cases. Tarnegol Caparot exhibits this notion in a scene when the young Iraqis arrive to the kibbutz. They are given new Modern Hebrew names and are told to cease using their given names, many of which are Arabic. Hebrew names were in fact imposed on many of

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82 Berg, Exile from Exile, p. 61-62.
the new immigrants who came in the 1950s whose Arabic names could not be read or understood, and so the significance Amir attaches to this process in his text reflects the narrative of Iraqi-Jewish history; it is a translation of the pain of the immigrant experience (to apply Hron's terminology) of losing one's name and by extension losing part of one's former self.

Moreover, the broad theme of the story is centered on an Israeli phenomenon: the kibbutz and its values, even if from an outsider perspective -- namely that of Iraqi immigrants. A definitive instance of engaging while distancing metropolitan Hebrew culture in the text is a scene in which the Iraqi youth write a theatrical drama to present to their Israeli-born peers on the kibbutz. It is to be performed in Hebrew while featuring songs sung in Arabic. After having rehearsed and prepared the presentation, the Iraqis suffer the humility of seeing no one bother to come view the performance. It is at this point that they decide to hold a hafla, or party, described in the previous chapter. What is relevant here is the actual plot of the story that the Iraqi youths create for their play:

That same night we sat down and wrote a play about a young Iraqi from Basra, a member of the Zionist underground. For four days we argued over what the name of the hero should be. I suggested Razi, and Matzul insisted: "Nahum. A good Jewish name." I gave in. The story was simple, about Nahum who was born in Basra and finished his studies there. One Sabbath eve, he met a mysterious Jew, swarthy and bespectacled, who was called "The Messenger." They say he came from the Land of Israel. Some called him the Messiah. No one knew for certain where he came from, maybe he was Elijah the Prophet. The Messenger taught Nahum to use a gun. One day the Muslims caught Nahum and threw him in jail with Abu-Jasim, head of the gangs of thieves in Basra. Abu-Jasim's comrades broke into the jail and freed all of the prisoners, including Nahum who then hid for 19 days in Abu-Haskil's basement, the neighborhood baker, waiting for The
Messenger who had disappeared on the day of his imprisonment. In the dead of the night, The Messenger appeared at Abu-Haskil's basement and led Nahum to a Bedouin who swore by Allah and the Prophet [Muhammad] to smuggle him to the Land of Israel via the great desert, in exchange for only 100 dinars. This was very little, he claimed. Nahum made it to Israel and was killed in the War of Independence.\footnote{Amir, \textit{Tarnegol Caparot}, p. 124.}

Significantly, they chose to designate the hero as strongly influenced by the Zionist underground movement in Iraq, an atypical example of an Iraqi Jew. The Zionist movement at its height only ever reached about 2,000 members.\footnote{Meir-Glitzenstein, \textit{Zionism in an Arab Country}, p. 112.} Despite this, the Iraqi youths, and the text itself, are exploring a common ground upon which the dominant Zionist culture may be engaged. Their insistence on performing the songs of the play in Arabic thus distances the engaging feature of the act itself, retaining the autoethnographic component. The death of the underground Zionist Iraqi operative in the '48 War represents an attempt to internalize the Zionist notion of sacrifice and the giving of blood for the land. Even though the play never comes to fruition, the implication of its composition and presence in the text signifies the act of engaging while distancing.

Similarly, Mikhael's text also engages the Zionist narrative in an indirect way. Mikhael more directly fictionalizes actual historical events in \textit{Shavim veShavim Yoter}, most significantly the Six Day War, an essential part of Israeli history. That one of the two parallel plot lines within the text follows Israeli soldiers on their way the battlefield is the most transparent way in which the narrative engages the metropolitan culture. The text distances itself through David's seeming indifference to the war, caused by the disappointing events of his life ever since (and mostly due to) living in the ma'abarah. The trajectory of David's life epitomizes the tenuous act of engaging while distancing:
after escaping the ma'abarah, obtaining a degree and in turn a successful career, he still cannot be whole, he fails in many respects, most importantly in his marriage. It is only through the war and the act of heroism he performs that David is able to find some vestige of redemption. The oft-quoted closing passage of the text exemplifies this notion.

"Hero..." I muttered. When I was there, when I crawled in the sand, my bones were shaking from fear. The prize wasn't given to me for courage - but for moments of terror and dread. In fact my life has continuously been nothing but fear and anxiety since my youth. However, despite this they've given me this certificate - at least its power is useful against someone like Tziporah; even she can't ignore it. Well, at last I've provided something for my son. The words written out on the beautiful paper don't touch me within, but on the other hand, I feel like I've received a completely different certificate, much more important; I've been handed a document that bears witness to and declares that I am an Israeli citizen. For the first time in my life I'm acting as an equal citizen whose skin color doesn't constitute an obstacle for him, like some sort of physical defect. Indeed, I was forced to endure descent into the fire of war and to send my beloved wife to another man in order to achieve this status...

Can I forgive?

Time will tell.\(^85\)

Through the birth of his son and sacrifice in the war, David fulfills two important tenets of the Zionist narrative. As he states here, he has finally become a citizen. Of course, the text suggests that this transformation is incomplete, or imperfect in some way, given what David had to endure to achieve his new position. Hence the engaging-through-distancing element of the text is most pronounced in David's closing reflection on the trajectory his life has taken from his days in the ma'abarah.

There are other aspects of the narrative that relate the specific Iraqi-Jewish experience and function as a means of distancing. The most well known event is the description of the flight to and landing in Israel at the beginning of the text. Here we are given an account of the spraying of D.D.T. on the Iraqi Jews upon arrival, a humiliating and degrading experience that is mentioned in Amir's text well. Represented as the event that crushed the will and pride of David and Shaul's father, rendering him a broken man, the incident serves to translate a significant part of the Iraqi-Jewish immigrant narrative that had lasting psychological effects on those who experienced it. Mikhael chose specific historical events with significance for the metropolitan Hebrew culture, and fused them with select elements of the Iraqi-Jewish narrative within that broader context, consequently engaging-while-distancing, accomplishing an autoethnographic expression.

Autoethnographic expression, according to Pratt's framework, is often the result of the contact space. The conflict created by the disparities of time and space in Ballas', Mikhael's, and Amir's texts were able to find representation and a voice through the different ways in which each author strove to create a common context with Hebrew literary culture within which their narratives could be expressed. Despite the common theme and space of the ma'abarah in each text, autoethnographic expression is achieved in various ways, as has been seen here. The prominence of language and space as the main mediators of identity in the texts signify those elements' centrality to the authors experiences since, as mentioned, each story contains marked autobiographical features. Therefore the meaning that space and language take on is amplified, as has been seen by

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the way that each functions in the texts. Finding the uneasy and unstable balance between engaging the metropolitan literate culture on its own terms while expressing a distinct linguistic and cultural experience is definitive of Ballas', Mikhael's, and Amir's novels as well as the various transitional processes (immigration, language acquisition, life in the transit camps) that their first writings represent.
Conclusion

I have sought to illustrate that the ma’abarah’s central role in the first Hebrew writings of Iraqi-Jews reflects not only its centrality to the imagining of their collective and individual narratives, but that it is a space whose symbolic and concrete meanings engendered a conflict that struck at the core of identity and self-perception. The potency of the power of memory and its ability to pervade and affect the present has a sharpened significance given the utter finality to Jewish presence in Iraq after 1951 and the fact that the community is represented by large in these texts as living in the past. As has been seen above, this is often the only way to exist, regardless of the tensions it causes with both the present as well as future expectations and hopes. Ultimately, Mikhael's text translates the Iraqi-Jewish story through its representation of the narrative of transition from immigration, to leaving the ma'abarah, to the 1967 War; Amir's through the fissures of identity that result from the way that the ma'abarah symbolically affects Nuri's experience in the kibbutz; and Ballas' through the strict relegation of events to the physical space of the Iraqi-dominated ma'abarah, as well as by the multitude of cultural references and footnotes mentioned above. Each text illustrates a different aspect of the struggle of the Iraqi-Jewish immigrant story by situating the experience of the space of the ma'abarah as the nexus.

The influence of post-Zionist scholarship and the polarization of Mizrahi identity discourse inevitably color the perception of these texts along with their place and
implication within the context of the study of Modern Hebrew literature. A more universal approach might be to investigate the effect that the Arabic literary environment and culture had on the writings of Iraqi Jews. Language, space, and memory serve as tools not only to challenge the dominant culture with which the texts engage, but also for an exploration of identity and confrontation of the intractable conflicts described in this paper. Even if that confrontation leads to negative results or none at all, it is this exploratory process itself that drives each text despite the differences of individual experience.

Considering the narratives and what they represent as a particular Iraqi-Jewish experience, and not necessarily comparing them to other ma'abarah stories by non-Iraqis or even other Mizrahi authors in general, is crucial to an approach that looks to situate them in broader cultural and linguistic contexts. What was minimal at the time of publication of these novels, and later obscured by the politicized atmosphere of the post-Zionist voice, was an appreciation for the diversity of influence as well as the linguistic and cultural milieu coloring the early lives of Ballas, Mikhael and Amir. Even though their writings have emerged significantly from the periphery of the Hebrew literary sphere, little attempt has been made to assess them on a level that takes into account the Iraqi, Arab and Jewish (specifically non-Zionist) cultural narratives that from an early point had informed the authors' consciousnesses. Such an approach would help shed light on the multi-faceted complexity of Iraqi-Jewish culture during the first half of the 20th century as well as after the immigration to Israel.

87 Reuve Snir, Professor of Arabic Literature at University of Haifa, is the only scholar I am aware of who looks to incorporate the broader context of Arabic literature and its effect on these authors' Hebrew writings into his research and analysis.
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