

CHAPTER ONE

Nationalism, Zionism, and the Formation of a National Narrative

Both the impulse which led to the creation of modern spoken Hebrew, and the circumstances which led to its successful establishment, are too unusual to set a general example.

—E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*

Hebrew in the Zionist Imaginary

Modern theories of nationalism recognize that the origins and course of Zionism, the national movement of the Jewish people, are unusual if not unique among late-nineteenth-century national movements. Major thinkers have expressed their awareness of this singularity in terms that imply varying degrees of mystification. Ernest Gellner considers the State of Israel, the outcome of Zionism, “the most famous and dramatic case of a successful diaspora nationalism,” noting that “the human transformation involved in the Jewish case went counter to the global trend” (1983, 106–7). Gellner’s choice of words such as *dramatic* and *transformation* to characterize the developments that culminated in the founding of Israel intimates the scholarly consensus, which notes the peculiarity of the phenomenon without elaborating on what makes it so. Benedict Anderson expresses his perplexity concerning Zionism in more striking language: “The significance of the emergence of Zionism and the birth of Israel is that the former marks the reimagining of an ancient religious community as a nation, down there among the other nations—while the latter charts an alchemic change from wandering devotee to local patriot” (1991, 149n. 16).

Although it is curious that this enigmatic passage does not address—or

even acknowledge—the causal connection between the two elements, Zionism and the State of Israel, it does indicate the general puzzlement at the manifestation of Jewish nationalism. When Anderson characterizes the effect of Zionism as alchemic, he seems at a loss to categorize the movement or the processes that led to its success: *alchemic* signifies an inexplicable, mysterious process of transmutation. According to this scenario, the Jews, recognized for centuries as a deterritorialized religious community, were somehow transformed into a national community anchored in a physical territory. Anderson does not analyze the way in which the Jews were “reimagined.” Remarkably, though he is so keenly aware of the crucial significance of language in the development of national consciousness, he somehow misses its pivotal role in Zionism. Unique among national movements, Zionism might be said to have been conceived in language.

The lack of attention by such a seminal thinker to the key position of language in Zionism underscores an essential way in which “the Jewish case” calls into question some of the major assumptions of Western theories of nationalism. Thus, for example, the role of territory—a requirement that was a key component of national movements in the nineteenth century—was problematic in Jewish nationalism, where, in a sense, language replaced territory as the focus of national awakening. Nineteenth-century nationalist thought almost exclusively addressed the situation of nations that, though living in their homelands, were denied political independence. In fact, a foundational assumption of nationhood was the sustained physical location of the nation in its homeland—a specific geographical area—during a longer or shorter period of occupation by other powers, an occupation that had led to the marginalization of the previously dominant nation in its homeland.

The Jews, however, had overwhelmingly not remained in their ancestral homeland of Palestine during centuries of occupation (although a Jewish community, usually small, did exist there almost continuously, fed by constant immigration since the final loss of Jewish autonomy in 70 C.E.).¹ Since antiquity, they had been dispersed throughout the world, living in communi-

1. Detailed documentation of this minority Jewish community has been done, mostly by Israeli scholars interested in establishing its presence. See, for example, relevant articles and chapters in Avi-Yonah 1980, Cohen 1981, Kedar 1988, and Ya'akobi and Tsafrir 1988. Gellner's argument that “[n]early two thousand years of history had left no Jewish territorial base whatever, least of all in the land of Israel” (1983, 107) is based on his concept of a dominant population as a crucial base for nationhood.

ties sometimes totally isolated from each other. Thus, a “real” territorial base, which would satisfy conventional criteria, was not available to supply a basis for nationhood. Jewish nationhood obviously rested on a different foundation—that of a shared culture in which history, religion, and, in particular, language and its textual heritage were intertwined to occupy a central position. The territory, refigured as “Zion,”² became a powerful nation-forming locus of prayer and dream in the people's imaginary.

That culture as collective memory can provide a theoretical basis for this type of nationhood is clear from Ernest Renan's seminal definition in his Sorbonne lecture of 1882: “A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together” (Renan 1990, 19). Interestingly, Renan's flexibility of thought and ability to view the intangible as legitimate seem more modernist than the ideas of contemporary theorists, who still often apply the criterion of territoriality, thereby rejecting Renan's position. Gellner, for example, seems unhappy with culture as a criterion and qualifies it as inadequate for the understanding of nationalism (1983, 7). He explicitly challenges Renan in a chapter whose title—“What Is a Nation?”—is taken from Renan's essay. He concedes that “when general social conditions make for standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities, a situation arises in which well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify. The cultures now seem to be the natural repositories of political legitimacy” (55). Gellner seems to be applying Benedict Anderson's concept of print capitalism, according to which “print-as-commodity” is “the key to the generation of wholly new ideas of simultaneity” (Anderson 1991, 37). Yet for Jews, whose ritual literature was mostly in the Jewish lingua franca of Hebrew, print capitalism was hardly a prerequisite or a necessary condition of nationalism. Most Jewish men were at least minimally literate in Hebrew, and all of them used the language in daily religious practice; European Jewish women and uneducated men read religious literature in Yiddish, written in Hebrew characters. Language and textual culture had been an integral part of quotidian

2. This biblical synonym for Jerusalem became expanded metonymically to designate the entire land. It was appropriated by the Jewish national movement and provided its name.

life for centuries, and the advent of widely circulated printed products hardly signaled a cultural revolution.

Gellner, in line with his essentializing tendencies, attempts to construct a typology of nationalisms. According to this typology, the territorial aspect is still the main criterion for nationhood even for minorities that lack territory (“diaspora nationalisms”): “For a dispersed urban population, the major problem is, of course, the acquisition of the required territorial base” (1983, 106). As I noted earlier, Gellner makes no attempt to address the “typological” anomalies of Zionism and Israel beyond the fact that they exist. He cites the State of Israel almost as a curiosity, without offering any explanation, quoting briefly from Hugh Trevor-Roper: “[Zionism is] the last, least typical of European nationalisms” (106–7).

What, then, makes Zionism and its end product, Israel, so atypical? Gellner ascribes the rise of Jewish nationalism mostly to persecutions of the Jews: “[T]his extraordinary transformation was achieved, no doubt thanks in large part to the incentive provided by the persecutions, first in eastern Europe and then throughout Europe during the period of the Holocaust” (1983, 107). Although he leaves open the issue of the other factors that led to the transformation of the Jews, admitting to the decisive function of a common culture in the formation of Zionism would seem to contradict his assumptions about the centrality of territory in national consciousness.

It is nevertheless true that a key unifying element in this culture was the traditional link with the ancestral homeland, expressed through language, which was an integral part of Jewish spiritual practice over the centuries. Exile from the homeland strengthened the sense of community and enabled the imagining of the nation, in Anderson’s terminology. In the culture of exile, Eretz-Israel³ became the site of national longing. The link with the long-lost homeland was expressed in countless prayers and ritual practices of Judaism. This bond was the basis for the foundational assumption of mainstream political Zionism: a national revival, complete with economic, political, and cultural autonomy, could take place only in Eretz-Israel.

Organized political Zionism was preceded by Chibat-Tziyon, the European proto-Zionist movement of the early 1880s that developed in the wake of pogroms in Russia. The very name of this movement, which means “Love of Zion,” expressed its adherence to the traditional Jewish connection with

3. “Eretz-Israel”—the Land of Israel—is the traditional Hebrew name (adopted by Zionists) for the area that became known in late antiquity as Palestine.

Palestine. Impelled by a perceived need to address the problematics of Jewish life in the Diaspora, members of Chibat-Tziyon immigrated to Palestine in an attempt to lay the groundwork for an economically independent Jewish community there. By the end of the nineteenth century, these pioneers of the First Aliyah⁴ (1882–1903) had established more than twenty-five Jewish agricultural settlements in Palestine. The political World Zionist Organization was founded in 1897, with the Land of Israel as the focus of its aspirations and efforts.⁵

It is important, however, to note that Zionists were a minority among European Jews; other solutions to “the Jewish problem” (all linked with language) had been suggested earlier within the community, and they continued to be proposed in the early years of the twentieth century. The Haskalah Jewish Enlightenment movement (roughly 1780–1880) had promoted “European culture, secular values, and aesthetic forms of behavior and writing” (Harshav 1993a, 59), with the aim of achieving political and cultural equality for the Jews within the states in which they lived, aspiring to an assimilation that would include language. One heir to Haskalah was Yiddishism, which evolved in the first decade of the century as a counterforce to Zionism in a continuation of efforts to attain civic equality in Europe. Yiddishists envisioned the survival of eastern European Jews as a distinct community enjoying emancipation as a national group, with Yiddish as their national language (Goldsmith 1976, 107–8). At the 1908 First Yiddish Language Conference in Czernowitz, after heated debates between Zionists and Yiddishists, Yiddish was in fact proclaimed as a national language of the Jewish people.⁶

4. The Hebrew term for immigration to Palestine signifies a move to a higher plane of existence, as it were, with the move to the Holy Land. Zionism appropriated the term to mean waves of immigration motivated by Zionist ideology. Individual immigrants were and are still termed *olim* (ascenders). The different backgrounds and ideological trends of each *aliyah*, as well as the reaction to each group of newcomers, were crucial for the formation of Zionist culture in Palestine.

5. In 1903, the movement’s leader, Theodor Herzl, made a short-lived attempt to shift the practical emphasis of Zionism from Palestine to East Africa (the “Uganda Plan”), almost causing the dissolution of the organization. This alternative plan, suggested by the British, to establish a Jewish national home in Africa was diametrically opposed to the traditional link with Eretz-Israel and was rejected by the Sixth Zionist Congress (Shimonov 1995, 98–99).

6. It is not clear whether this ambiguous proclamation was addressed to Jews or non-Jews or both. There is scant information about the reaction to the Czernowitz conference in the ruling circles of the Hapsburg Empire. However, an effort in 1910 to include Yiddish as one of the

Another movement, the socialist Jewish Bund of Russia and Poland (founded in 1897), at first limited its Jewish program to the struggle for equal civil and political rights in those states, viewing Zionism as a reactionary, utopian, and petit-bourgeois phenomenon that would harm the Jewish masses (Goldsmith 1976, 80–85). The Bund allied itself with Yiddishism when it defined Yiddish as *the* Jewish national language and entered into an extreme confrontation with Zionism. Within Zionism, a territorial faction that considered other physical locations for Jewish settlement eventually seceded from the World Zionist Organization and formed the Jewish Territorialist Organization. An alternative form of Zionism was the nonpolitical “cultural Zionism” propounded by the influential Jewish writer Asher Ginzberg (better known by his pen-name Achad ha-Am, One of the People), who believed in 1901 that the establishment of a spiritual (rather than political) national center in Palestine would provide “a ‘safe refuge’ for our nation’s *spirit*” (1921, 129, emphasis in the original) and would serve as a safeguard against assimilation.⁷ Yet it was political Zionism that eventually succeeded in realizing its goal in the traditional Land of Israel.⁸

Zionism, with its roots in the deterritorialized diasporic “location” of Jewish culture, aspired to reterritorialize the Jewish nation at the expense of the same diasporic culture. The movement focused on a yearning to return to the homeland, negating diasporic life in its goal of creating a new culture. The tension inherent in a movement that strives to overthrow its own base—by disowning its immediate past and present for the sake of the future—reverberated significantly in the formative stages of the Yishuv. Far from being resolved by the gradual realization of the Zionist dream, this tension continued to lie at the core of the Yishuv throughout its formative stages and exists perhaps even in the Israel of today.

The opposition between the old values of the deterritorialized culture and the envisioned values of a reterritorialized nation was cardinal. Benjamin Harshav, expanding on what he terms “the force of negation” (1993a, 17–23), notes that the “Jewish revolution” at the turn of the twentieth century consisted in a negation of the three deictics “here, now, I.” The impera-

official languages of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was unsuccessful. For a detailed survey of Yiddishism and of the First Yiddish Language Conference, see Goldsmith 1976.

7. For a discussion of Achad ha-Am as well as of the territorialist orientation within Zionism, see S. Almog 1987, 129–41, 238–304.

8. See, for example, Shimonov 1995 for a detailed history of Zionism and its various facets.

tives, therefore, were: “not here”—that is, out of the shtetl to the city or to another country altogether; “not like now”—that is, a struggle for political and personal change; and “not me”—that is, a need to refashion one’s own personality (which, as we shall see, often led to a mobilization of the individual subject to the needs of the collective). It was part of the Zionist credo that a refiguring of the self would lead to a refiguring of the nation. Zionism integrated these three imperatives in its vision of a new Jewish character and culture that would be forged in the ancestral homeland. The revolutionary makeover was embodied in Hebrew—the ancient, sacred language common to all Jews and a fundamental component of their culture, which the founders of Zionism sought to adopt for everyday use. Although Renan did not consider language an indisputable criterion of nationhood, other European theorists clearly regard it as an integral component, perhaps the most crucial one, of national culture—though not, as noted, in the case of the Jewish nation. Anderson refers to the late-eighteenth-century romantic European conception of “nation-ness” as linked with private-property language that begins with Johann Herder (1991, 67–68). Classic Zionist ideology designated Hebrew as the “private-property” language of the Jewish people and its use became a signifier of nationhood.

The revival of Hebrew had begun earlier, during the Haskalah. Its writers began creating secular literature in biblical Hebrew, the traditional Jewish language of “high culture.” Hebrew, as Robert Alter notes, “had always been the most valued language of Jewish culture . . . and had long been the medium of refined literary exercises and epistolary art” (1988, 13). Its cultural prestige was unique. As the language of a tradition of Jewish learning that had been identified with men over the centuries, it was also a marker of masculinity.

Yiddish, in contrast, the vernacular of most eastern and some central European Jews, was the language of quotidian discourse and as such was considered a signifier of “low culture.” Although both men and women used it in daily life, texts and religious books for girls and women were written in Yiddish (as Harshav notes, however, they were “also read and enjoyed by men albeit as a peripheral or secular genre” [1990, 23n. 4]). The perception of Yiddish as a marker of femininity was to figure significantly in the Hebrew-Yiddish conflict.⁹ At the outset, Haskalah ideological writers used both Yiddish and Hebrew, each for a different purpose: they used Yiddish as a

9. Shmuel Niger’s 1913 essay “Di Yidishe Literatur un di Lezerin” (Yiddish literature and the female reader [1985]) is a ground-breaking attempt to delineate the gender implications

initial vehicle for disseminating Haskalah ideas and construed the new secular Hebrew (as distinct from the traditional language of ritual) as a familiar yet higher-ranking language of transition between “low” Yiddish culture and the eventual adoption of European cultures. With the extinction of the Haskalah dream of assimilation following the Russian pogroms of the early 1880s, there seemed to be no further purpose for the secular use of Hebrew.

For most Jewish ideologists, the Hebrew-Yiddish opposition was emblematic of modernization. Mainstream Zionism, however, gave Hebrew a new valence beyond the name of a language. Zionists considered the full-scale revival of the ancient language for everyday use both a prerequisite for and a sign of the projected national renewal. *Hebrew* came into use both as an adjective and a proper noun, to describe the future Jewish society and the individual of the Yishuv. In 1905, the ardent young Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky painted (in Russian) a vivid portrait of the future Palestinian “Hebrew” that, as Amnon Rubinstein points out, was derived from a conscious juxtaposition with the prevalent image of the Diaspora Jew:

Our starting point is to take the typical Zhid [Jew] of today and to imagine his diametrical opposite . . . because the Zhid is ugly, sickly. . . . [W]e shall endow the ideal image of the Hebrew with masculine beauty. . . . The Zhid is trodden upon and easily frightened, and the other one ought to be proud and independent. The Zhid is despised by all, and the other one ought to charm all. The Zhid is accustomed to surrender, and therefore the other one ought to learn how to command. The Zhid prefers to conceal his identity from strangers, and the other one ought to march forth with courage and dignity, look the world straight in the eye and flaunt his banner: “I am a Hebrew!” (Jabotinsky 1958, 99)

This passage encapsulates contemporary Zionists’ attitude toward diasporic culture as concentrated in the anti-Semitic persona of the “Zhid.” Jabotinsky did not invent this pejorative term for Jews—it was commonly used in Slavic countries—but his (or his translator’s) use of it is a stunning example of an internalization of anti-Semitic stereotypes that fueled the Zionists’ own sense of themselves as revolutionaries.¹⁰ As Naomi Seidman notes,

Yiddish. For a finely nuanced analysis of the role of gender in the Yiddish-Hebrew opposition, see Seidman 1997.

10. For a detailed examination of the psychosexual implications of this internalization, see Boyarin 1997.

“the disempowered diaspora existence . . . was often consciously or unconsciously perceived as having emasculated or feminized the Jewish collective” (1997, 110). The choice of *Hebrew* to designate far more than the language at this early stage of Zionism is telling; expressing the Zionist ideal, the word identifies a reinvented public and private persona. The Zhid is ugly, sickly, cowardly, despised, and submissive, whereas the ideal Hebrew will be beautiful, healthy, proud, commanding, and self-assertive. But let us note Jabotinsky’s use of a subjunctive conditional mode rather than a straightforward future tense in this description. The wishful *tzarikh libiyot* (ought to be) instead of the confident *yibiye* (will be) seems to subvert the certainty of conviction that he expressed so forcefully in other writings. The overtone of doubt foreshadows the inherent tension and ambivalence that complicated the individual’s decision to abandon native cultural values and reinvent the national subject.

Yid, the English version of the slur, evokes Yiddish, the name of the language identified with the Diaspora and its values. The standing of Yiddish as a language was further weakened by quasi-scientific opinion; the mother tongue of most Zionist immigrants to Palestine was termed *jargon*.¹¹ Paradoxically, the term—derogatory to this day—was internalized by the Jews whose culture it disparaged and was widely used in Jewish letters as early as the Haskalah;¹² Haskalah ideologues viewed Yiddish as an unavoidable tool toward Enlightenment, to be discarded as soon as Jews were able to use other languages. In the nineteenth century, the term *jargon* lost much of its negative valence for European Jews and was in widespread use by Jews and non-Jews alike as the name of the language. It was only in 1903 that *zhargon* was replaced by *Yiddish* in the masthead of the popular European Yiddish

11. Of course, Zionism and the Yishuv included Jews who did not speak Yiddish, a fact that mainstream histories largely gloss over. Alcalay (1993) makes a seminal effort to balance the mainstream emphasis on the role of European Jews in the Yishuv and to place this role in a larger context. Interestingly, as seen in later chapters, it was Yiddish writers in Zionist Palestine who were not only keenly aware of the cultural and emotional situation of the Zionist non-European minority, but gave it unique expression.

12. An authoritative 1960 definition of *jargon* runs, in part, “(a) a language, speech or dialect that is barbarous or outlandish; (b) a hybrid speech or dialect arising from a mixture of languages . . . or one artificially made up. Specifically: Yiddish” (*Webster’s*). By 1987, the reference to Yiddish had been dropped, but *Webster’s* definition retains the elements of incomprehensibility and nonnormativity: “(a) confused unintelligible language; (b) a strange, outlandish, or barbarous language or dialect.”

newspaper *Der Fraynd*. Viewed in this light, Yiddish seemed to bear out nineteenth-century racist European notions that people speaking a hybrid language were somehow inferior and incapable of clear, intelligible, and sophisticated thought. Thus, according to Zionism, the language had to be discarded if the people were to improve and reinvent themselves.

The choice of Hebrew as the national language was a corollary of Zionism's selective relationship with the nation's history. At the 1901 conference of Russian Zionists in Minsk, Achad ha-Am (Asher Ginzberg) stated: "A nation has no national language except that which was its own when it stood on the threshold of its history, before its national self-consciousness was fully developed" (1921, 126). Achad ha-Am here echoed prevalent nationalist terminology, with its roots in romanticism. An intimate kinship with the classical past is central for a nation whose culture idealizes antiquity. For the Jewish nation, "the threshold of its history" was the pre-exilic period, antedating diasporic existence. In Jewish collective memory, the biblical period—emblematised by Hebrew, the language of the Bible—came to be viewed as a time of purity in heart and purpose (discounting the Bible's own diatribes against the people's disobedience of divine law).¹³ Anderson places this particular bond within the context of nineteenth-century nationalism: "Nations to which they [nation-states] gave political expression always loom out of an immemorial past" (1991, 11). Elaborating on the Zionist construction of a collective identity, Yael Zerubavel comments: "The selective reconstruction of Antiquity was part of the historical mission of reviving the ancient national roots and spirit. Antiquity became both a source of legitimization and an object of admiration" (1995, 25).¹⁴

Interestingly, a similar analysis was made in the Yishuv as early as 1914, with a highly negative conclusion. A major thinker of the Po'alei Zion (Workers of Zion) Labor Party, Alexander Chashin, spoke of Yishuv educators as "teaching our youth to hate the Diaspora and with it—its language.

13. The Bible itself contains examples of such tendentious construals of the past as a time of absolute righteousness. Taking the nation to task for sins in his own time, Jeremiah evokes an idealized earlier era in a famous evaluation of the post-Exodus wanderings in the desert: "Thus saith the Lord, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer. 2:2). Applying the common biblical metaphor of Israel as a wife, Jeremiah is disregarding here the Bible's numerous mentions of Israel's transgressions precisely during that period.

14. See Yael Zerubavel for a cogent analysis of the selective memory involved in what she terms "the Zionist reconstruction of the Jewish past" (1995, 30).

... They take a historic leap to the point of breaking their necks, from the destruction of the Second Temple [70 C.E.] to the founding of Rishon le-Tziyon [1882] and totally obliterate the long period in between these two events" (1914, cols. 1–2).¹⁵ The tendency to idealize the pre-exilic Near East found its most extreme expression in the "Canaanite" political and cultural movement of the Yishuv in the early 1940s; the ideologists and artists of this movement dissociated from any form of late biblical or rabbinic Judaism and attached themselves to premonotheistic regional traditions, buttressed by the archaeological discoveries of the previous half-century. The derogatory name was given the group by the poet Avraham Shlonsky (1900–1973), who was not a member; the disparaging tone derives from the fact that the biblical Canaanites were traditional enemies of the people of Israel. The group termed itself Ivrim Tze'irim (Young Hebrews). Although the movement never gained widespread popularity, the nativist values it espoused while categorically negating all exilic values had a disproportionate impact on Yishuv culture. The "Canaanites," whom I discuss later in greater detail, became a major force in the Israeli art and Hebrew literature of the Statehood Generation (1950–60) and beyond.¹⁶

The Jewish national movement was not unique in the extraordinary value it placed on the past. It is instructive to examine its analogies with the mid-nineteenth-century Greek national movement.¹⁷ Like the emerging Jewish national movement several decades later, Greek nationalism redefined the

15. Chashin's life was typical of many young Jewish intellectuals of the time. A brilliant writer, Alexander Chashin (Averbukh) was a major leader of Po'alei Zion before the First World War, began distancing himself from Zionism in the 1920s, and joined communist circles. He moved to the USSR in the late 1920s and worked for the Soviet Yiddish newspaper *Der Eme*. However, his Zionist past was apparently deemed unsuitable there, and he was executed in 1937; his name was cleared in 1950 (Berger-Barzilai 1968, 62–89).

16. For a detailed presentation of "Canaanite" ideology, politics, and history, see Y. Shavit 1984; for an overview of the group's impact on Israeli society and culture, see Diamond 1984 and Gertz 1985; for the relationship between "Canaanism" and mainstream Zionism, see Shmoni 1995, 316–21. For more specific discussions of the influence of the movement on the Yishuv's visual arts and literature, see Zalmona 1998, esp. 66–67; and see my discussion of the "Canaanizing" Yiddish poetry of Rikuda Potash in chapter 5.

17. Gregory Jusdanis notes several parallels between the Greek national movement and Zionism, such as similar grounds for their appeal to the West: "the Greeks laid claim to the cultural and secular roots of western civilization, while the Zionists exploited the foundational role of the Hebrew Bible in the Judeo-Christian tradition" (1991, 14). However, his choice of language in making this comparison is not impartial. Jusdanis seems to imply that the Greeks have

acterized in hindsight as Hebrew. Ya'ari-Poleskin continues in this vein when he speaks of "Tel-Aviv, the Hebrew quarter of Jaffa" rather than the "Jewish quarter," and of "Hebrew workers" in Galilee rather than of "Jewish workers" (1922, 17, 78). However, in the first decade of the twentieth century, neither the founders of Tel-Aviv nor the Zionist immigrants to Galilee were likely to speak Hebrew. Ya'ari-Poleskin and others concretized in the language all their aspirations and hopes for the future community. This characterization persisted well into the period of Israeli statehood. The third volume of a mid-twentieth-century history textbook, which was a staple of Israel's educational system for decades, differentiates between "the Hebrew Yishuv in the Land and the Jewish people of the world" (Ettinger 1969, 282).

A more recent study gently interrogates the identification of nationalism with Hebrew in Yishuv culture. Elyakim Rubinstein's essay on the history of the Yishuv details the agenda of its first organizational meeting in 1918, which addressed "Hebrew language and culture, the Hebrew *militzyah* [military force] . . . Hebrew civil law . . . and Hebrew labor" (1979, 152). Rubinstein is evidently struck by the aggregation of instances of *Hebrew* used as an adjective rather than as a noun and appends a rare footnote: "The use of the word 'Hebrew' as an attribute of each item in the agenda is interesting. This is characteristic of the prestatehood period, and indicates Jewish institutions or actions, as opposed to government or non-Jewish bodies and actions. 'Hebrew' also indicated the revival of the Hebrew language in Palestine" (152). He is aware that the use of *Hebrew* in this context went far beyond its lexical significance. By separating his observation into two parts, he notes the cultural implications of the 1918 phrasing, according to which every Jewish project in Palestine was defined as Hebrew even if it had nothing to do with the language per se. His remark is an instance, rather unusual in traditional Zionist historiography, of sensitivity to the ideological implications of Zionist terminology.

Rubinstein is also careful with his phraseology when he describes the curriculum of the Yishuv's elementary schools: "About one-third of the curriculum was devoted to Hebrew subjects because the schools regarded themselves as shaping the Eretz-Israeli Jew growing up in the land and his national culture with its new character" (1979, 217). Although he characterizes the curriculum subjects as *Hebrew*, he defines the young Zionist natives of Palestine—the objects of this educational system—as *Eretz-Israeli Jews* rather than as the more conventional *Hebrew*, with its attached valences. He does not detail the Hebrew parts of the curriculum; in the tradition of the

time, they probably consisted of subjects with a bearing on Jewish history in Palestine. Rubinstein's distinction between Hebrew subjects and *Eretz-Israeli Jews* is noteworthy for its tacit questioning of the mainstream's terminology.

The opposition "Hebrew-Jewish" is still resonant today, though *Israel* gradually replaced *Hebrew* as an adjective after the founding of the state. Shlomo ha-Ramati, writing more recently on the evolution of Hebrew into a national language, perpetuates the mainstream position when he consistently refers to Zionist education in Palestine as *ivri-le'umi* (Hebrew national), opposing it to other modernizing educational projects such as the Alliance Israelite schools for Jewish boys established in Jerusalem in 1883 by the French Jewish aid organization of that name. The Alliance school, says ha-Ramati, "was not a Hebrew-national institution, but a modern Jewish school. . . . [T]he first Hebrew-national school began to operate in Rishon Le-Tziyon in 1888" (1997, 147–48). The clear implication is that Alliance school pupils were members of the Old Yishuv (the Zionist name for the native Palestinian Jews whose culture was considered to be of a negative diasporic nature), not motivated by proto-Zionist ideology—unlike the founder of the Rishon Le-Tziyon school.

Building a Hebrew Nation

The establishment of the new "Hebrew" values did not come easily or naturally to the immigrants who made up the population of the Yishuv. It was necessary to implement a nation-building policy, in the sense applied by Anderson when he speaks of post-Second World War states: "[I]n the new state one sees both a genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm and a systematic even Machiavellian, instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations, and so forth" (1991, 114). The prestatehood Zionist leadership certainly used systematic measures in order to shape the Yishuv as the basis for a future state. Early on the Seventh Zionist Congress (1905) adopted the majority view that the educational system in Eretz-Israel should be "Hebrew in character" (Ettinger 1969, 189). The Tenth and Eleventh Zionist Congresses (1911 and 1913) affirmed and encouraged the Yishuv's exclusive use of Hebrew. The quasi official Yishuv press was Hebrew (an attempt in 1908 to publish a Zionist Yiddish newspaper in Palestine ceased after two issues).²¹ By 1914, Hebrew

21. See the discussion of this attempt in chapter 3.

was the exclusive language of instruction (Wallach 1974, 29). In 1923, the British Mandate authorities named Hebrew as one of the official languages of Palestine, along with English and Arabic. The victory of Hebrew seemed to be complete. Nonmainstream positions in the Yishuv concerning the language choice, such as the position supporting the legitimization of Yiddish, were frowned upon and strongly discouraged. The Yishuv was beginning to construct a mainstream narrative that could not concede the existence of an alternative culture—or even a subculture—marked by language because such an admission would cast doubt on the total success of the project.

The dominance of Hebrew came at a steep price, although public opinion largely concurred in the need to adopt the language. Let us return to Renan's seminal definition of nationhood in "What Is a Nation?" in 1882: "The essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (1990, 11). What are the "things" that the members of the nation have forgotten and that, if remembered, might endanger the nation's essence? In illustration, Renan referred explicitly to acts of physical brutality that he believed are sometimes necessary in order to achieve national unity. From his late-nineteenth-century position, he mentioned specific acts of violence and massacres carried out in the course of molding the French nation. Renan's emphasis on the imperative of forgetting is intriguing: "[E]very French citizen has to have forgotten the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century" (11). Commenting on Renan, Homi Bhabha takes special note of the rhetoric and syntax of the latter's argument:

It is this forgetting—the signification of a minus in the origin—that constitutes the beginning of the nation's narrative. It is the syntactical and rhetorical arrangement of this argument that is more illuminating than any frankly historical or ideological reading. Listen to the complexity of this form of forgetting which is the moment in which the national will is articulated: 'yet every French citizen has to have forgotten [*is obliged to have forgotten*] Saint Bartholomew's Night's Massacre, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century.' It is through this syntax of forgetting—or being obliged to forget—that the problematic identification of a national people becomes visible. (1994, 310, square brackets and emphasis in the original)

The nation cannot be articulated until the forgetting is complete; a new beginning to the national narrative is contingent upon forgetting the old one. Bhabha's argument about the centrality and implications of forgetting for the nation's sense of identity is particularly applicable for understanding the development of the Yishuv's culture. The syntax of forgetting was crucial to Zionism, which sought to discard diasporic Jewish culture and to obliterate its very existence from collective memory in order to realize its own ideology and vision. The success of the new creation depended on the suppression of the old one, including its most emblematic element, the Yiddish language.

So total was the act of official forgetting that the prolonged Hebrew-Yiddish conflict, which was of such personal and general cultural significance, is often not even mentioned in the mainstream histories. Thus, Ettinger presents only the Hebrew-German "*riv ha-leshonot*" (language quarrel) of 1913 as the key event leading to the victory of Hebrew in the schools of the Yishuv. The German Jewish philanthropic organization Ezra stipulated that German be the language of instruction in the technical schools it was establishing in Palestine. Says Ettinger: "This decision gave rise to a wave of protest in the Yishuv. Most of the 'Ezra' school students went on strike and the teachers resigned. . . . Since [the resolution of the clash in favor of Hebrew,] the dominance of Hebrew throughout the educational system in the country was assured" (1969, 210). Ettinger subsumes the Hebrew-Yiddish opposition in a brief reference to the "war about the languages of Jewish creativity" (219) in which he takes a long historical and geographic view when he groups Yiddish with Aramaic, Greek, Arabic, and Spanish. By doing so, he minimizes the cultural and political significance of the language dilemma.

Efraim Talmi and Menachem Talmi's popular reference book *Leksikon Tziyonim* (Lexicon of Zionism) gives substantially the same account, using the more militant term "*milchemet ha-safot*" (language war), and ends with the triumphant statement, "The struggle ended with the victory of the Hebrews [*ha-ivrim*]" (1981, 226–27). The authors seem to shift the cultural dispute into the realm of militant physicality, which the Hebrew-Yiddish dispute also inhabited.²² It is not education in Hebrew that is victorious, but "the Hebrews," conjuring up a David-and-Goliath scenario. In this interpretation, the brave young Hebrews—students, teachers, and workers—are pitted

22. See the discussion of the incident, which included physical violence, in chapter 3.

against a formless bureaucracy that controlled the funding for the proposed schools. Elyakim Rubinstein, too, refers to the German-Hebrew language conflict of 1913 as the decisive event that led to the “victory of national Hebrew education” (1979, 214). But here again he proves more discerning than other historians when he appends a note about the significance of the attribute *Hebrew* in the names of the Yishuv’s early educational flagship institutions, the 1905 Hebrew Herzliya High School (known as *Gymnazyah Herzliyah*) in Jaffa and the 1909 Hebrew High School (*Gymnazyah Ivrit*) in Jerusalem: “It is not for nothing that the name ‘Hebrew’ appears in the names of these institutions. It symbolizes their innovative character” (214).

When these standard histories of the Yishuv mention Yiddish, they carefully circumscribe it within mainstream parameters. They characterize it in terms of the geographic Diaspora, or the Old Yishuv. None of these sources acknowledge the fact that Yiddish was widely used in the Zionist “new” Yishuv. Talmi and Talmi devote their entry on Yiddish to the spread of the language in the European Diaspora. Speaking of the movement known as Yiddishism, their *Leksikon Tziyoni* explains: “From the end of the nineteenth century, a cultural movement developed and grew among the Jews of eastern Europe that aimed to base secular nationalism in the diasporic locations of the nation in exile on the foundation of the Yiddish language, its literature, and press” (1981, 181). In this characterization, Yiddish is located exclusively in the Diaspora (although “the recent center [of Yiddish] in Israel” is noted [181]). Rubinstein, too, situates Yiddish exclusively within the prestatehood Old Yishuv, equating it with the Diaspora community. His appendix on the Old Yishuv notes its members’ demand to receive municipal funds for “education in Yiddish, as was formerly the custom, and as was still practiced in the Diaspora at the time” (1979, 203). He identifies Yiddish with anti-Zionism. Describing the Jewish communist factions in Palestine, he says, “These communist groups chose Yiddish names in order to symbolize their negative attitude toward Zionism and their identification with the Jewish communists in the USSR” (278). True to the syntax of forgetting, none of these historians mentions the Yishuv’s own intense and changing relationship with Yiddish. Such resounding silence on a vital cultural issue may well express a deep ambivalence on the issue as well as the sense that Yiddish was a continuing threat to Yishuv culture throughout the prestatehood period.

In fact, there were clashes, sometimes violent, within the Yishuv over the role and use of Yiddish. For example, teen-aged students of the *Gymnazyah Herzliyah* forcibly prevented Chaim Zhitlovsky, the foremost proponent of

Yiddishism in eastern Europe, from giving the last in a series of talks in Yiddish in Palestine in 1914 (Pilowsky 1986, 17, 70n. 15); they tore his shirt as he was leaving the hotel for his lecture. Decades later, an eyewitness recounted in 1945 that stones were thrown at the hotel and shots were fired (Yatziv 1947, 567). It is significant that the students were incited by the principal, Chaim Bugrashov; this was not simply the impulsive response of hotheaded teenagers, but an act guided by one of the Yishuv’s most respected educators and cultural leaders. Although the Zhitlovsky incident was heavily discussed in the Yishuv’s contemporary press,²³ it does not appear in later histories. Nonthreatening issues, however, are openly discussed in these histories. Thus, because German was never a contender for cultural dominance in the Yishuv, the failed 1913 attempt to use it as a language of instruction is considered a banner for the victory of Hebrew. The common and persistent use of Yiddish, in contrast, goes unnoted.

Yiddish was a force to be reckoned with in this period. It provided the name for and was an integral part of the Yiddishist movement that proposed an alternative to Zionism. The Yiddish-Hebrew issue served the different ideological positions of both Bundists and the Zionist participants in the 1908 First Yiddish Language Conference; the left-wing non-Zionists considered Zionism a bourgeois movement and Hebrew the language of a small group of Jewish intellectuals.²⁴ The language issue became a convenient tool of political conflicts within contemporary Jewish culture.

The strategy that the mainstream Zionist culture of the early Yishuv adopted toward Yiddish can perhaps be best understood through Gellner’s notion of a high culture. Rephrasing and expanding Renan’s principle about forgetting, Gellner’s formulation resonates deeply with the course taken by the Yishuv:

Nationalism has its own amnesias and selections which, even when they may be severely secular, can be profoundly distorting and deceptive. The basic deception and self-deception practised by nationalism is this: nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in

23. Such as *ha-Achdut* 5, no. 37 (10 July 1914) and nos. 38–39 (24 July 1914).

24. This view was later echoed by the Palestinian Po’alei Zion Party, whose left-wing members militated in favor of using Yiddish in Palestine. The Yiddish publications in Zionist Palestine were popularly associated with Po’alei Zion in a politicization of a cultural issue.

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some cases of the totality, of the population. . . . The nationalism revives, or invents, a local high (literate, specialist-transmitted) culture of its own, though admittedly one which will have some links with the earlier folk-styles and dialects. (1983, 56–57)

At the turn of the twentieth century, the deliberate imposition of a high culture in the interests of ideology seemed a natural corollary of the paternalism that was part of Enlightenment thinking. Referring to the process that shaped the culture of modern Greece, Jusdanis applies the notion of an imposed culture when he states, “The idea of a national culture, the invention of a new identity, was made possible by cultural engineering” (1991, 26). Paradoxically, it was the young Zionists, rebelling against tradition, who imposed this high culture and made Hebrew, the language of the diasporic Jewish cultural elite, its emblem. A concept akin to cultural engineering seems to underlie at least one early discussion on Hebrew and Yiddish in the Yishuv.

In 1910, Po’alei Zion—which, along with ha-Po’el ha-Tza’ir (the Young Worker), was one of Palestine’s two main Labor Zionist political parties—was debating the publication of a Yiddish-language newspaper.²⁵ Countering the arguments in favor of a Yiddish publication, David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973), one of the founding fathers of the Yishuv and later Israel’s first prime minister, endorsed a policy of selectivity when he stated: “If in speech and propaganda we are forced to use many languages, we may not use any language but Hebrew in our cultural work. For concerning language, one cannot take into account only temporary and practical observations, because this is an essential issue that bores and descends into the abyss [*tehom*] of our national existence and our future as a healthy nation, united in its land” (Ben-Gurion 1910, col. 30). Ben-Gurion’s remarks, which resonate on more than one level, merit careful reading. In distinguishing between the languages of speech and propaganda, on the one hand, and the language of cultural work, on the other, he was perpetuating the traditional separation between the functions of Yiddish as the language of “low” everyday and utilitarian culture and Hebrew as the language of “high” culture. In fact, according to his categorization, speech and propaganda lie outside the realm of “culture” altogether. Ben-Gurion went a step further when he appropriated Hebrew, the prestigious language of study in diasporic culture, as “ours”—

25. This debate is discussed and analyzed in detail in chapter 3; here I focus on a single telling phrase.

in other words, that of the Zionist immigrants who considered themselves the founders and vanguard of the new nation. The Hebrew *chalutz*, used in the Bible to denote those who go ahead of the masses (usually in the context of conquest of the Promised Land), was appropriated to designate “pioneer” in the Zionist lexicon, where it bore both the full biblical connotations of daring and courage in exploring new terrain and the modern sense of avant-gardism. Ben-Gurion’s wording conveys the sense of elitism that was pervasive among members of the Second Aliyah (1904–14). “Practical and temporary considerations” were shunted aside, such as the fact that the changeover to Hebrew was difficult and anything but natural for the vast majority of the immigrants.

But then Ben-Gurion’s tone underwent an odd change. In a haunting choice of words, he used *tehom* (abyss) to designate “our national existence and our future,” intimating a profound sense of unease about the current state of the Yishuv and a fear for its future identity. The biblical *tehom* (Gen. 1:2), usually translated as “the deep,” parallels the *tohu va-vohu* (without form and void) in the same verse. The two terms *tehom* and *tohu* in Genesis are linguistically connected and are aspects of pre-Creation formlessness.²⁶ In other biblical occurrences, *tehom* is the site of lurking premonotheistic danger and chaos. Ezekiel (26:19), for example, describes the future destruction of Jerusalem as the victory of *tehom*: “When I make you a city laid waste . . . when I bring up the deep [*tehom*] over you and the great waters cover you.” Ben-Gurion’s diction, with its dark overtones, seems to belie his overt confidence in the future of the Yishuv. The highly influential contemporaneous Hebrew poet Chaim Nachman Bialik used the related concept of *tohu* to denote the threatening menace of nonexistence in his 1915 essay “Giluy ve-Khisuy ba-Lashon” (Revealment and concealment in language) when he suggested that language itself, especially poetic language, functions as a defense against the dark void (*ha-tohu ha-afel*) that is an ever-present danger to human consciousness (1965c, 202). When Ben-Gurion used *tehom* in 1910, he perhaps anticipated Bialik’s sense of the fundamental importance of lan-

26. Both *tehom* and *tohu* are also linguistically linked with the figure of the female goddess Tiamat in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*, possibly composed in the early part of the second millennium B.C.E. In this renowned version of Mesopotamian creation stories (of which there are quite a few), Tiamat, the sea, is the mother of the gods, but she also emblematises chaos and poses a threat to order. She is eventually slain by her offspring in a fierce battle (Daley 1989, 228–77). Biblical references to *tehom* seem to echo this ancient local tradition.

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From its beginnings, the Yishuv was essentially an immigrant society seeking an identity, unlike the societies of countries where an indigenous population was striving for national legitimization and independence. Yet it was an atypical immigrant society. Even-Zohar notes the difference between the immigration to Palestine and other migrations in modern times and delineates the cultural dilemma faced by the Zionist immigrants. In his analysis, the cultural behavior of immigrants as a rule oscillates between the preservation of the source culture (as in the case of the English migrations abroad) and the adoption of the culture of the target country (as in the case of European migrations to the United States). The latter course often leads to attitudes of contempt toward the "old" as an expression of the hope to begin a "new" life by becoming part of the target country's culture. But, as Even-Zohar points out, in the case of immigration to Palestine a "decision to 'abandon' the source culture . . . could not have led to the adoption of the target culture since the existing culture did not possess the status of an alternative. In order to provide an alternative system to that of the source culture . . . it was necessary to *invent* one" (1981, 170, emphasis in the original). However, the new Zionist culture of Palestine was compiled as much as it was invented; its raw materials came from many sources, including the local culture of the Palestinian Arabs. Guided by romantic European orientalizing notions, the early Zionists selectively appropriated elements of Arab culture, such as dress, food, and customs, which they considered diametrically opposed to Jewish diasporic life or even derived from pre-exilic tradition that had somehow survived in the country.²⁷ Yiddish, the language that the eastern European immigrants brought with them, had no place in this picture.

This language was also linked in Palestine with the pre-Zionist, mostly religious Old Yishuv, thus further delegitimizing it for Zionists. In the mid-nineteenth century, most Palestinian Jews were Yiddish speakers of European origin living mainly in Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, and Hebron; they

27. For a fascinating account of the first Zionist settlers' attraction to Arabic culture, see Berlowitz 1996. Oz Almog (2000) provides details and examples of the ambivalent attitude toward Arabs that developed in the Yishuv. For an analysis of the far-reaching effect of the Orient on culture in the Yishuv and in Israel, see Zalmona 1998 and chapter 3 in this volume.

subsisted on *chalukah*, an intricate system of donations from Jewish communities abroad (see, for example, Kosover 1966, 3–93). The Zionist pioneers of the Second Aliyah, young people in an ideological climate that idealized youth, had only contempt for anything marked as "old." They disapproved of the Old Yishuv's way of life, equating its economic basis with the "nonproductive" economy of diasporic Jews, which Zionism aimed to change through "productivizing" the people. Yet by the time of the Second Aliyah, members of the Old Yishuv had actually broken away from the charity system that the young pioneers so disparaged. In 1879, a group of native Jerusalemites founded Petach-Tikvah; members of the Old Yishuv, joined by proto-Zionists of the First Aliyah, established other farming villages in the 1880s. By the turn of the century, however, circumstances had led many of these villages to become dependent on the aid of Jewish philanthropists such as Baron Edmond de Rothschild. Zionists perceived this aid as no different from *chalukah* and viewed all segments of the pre-Zionist community—including the First Aliyah villages—as a totality. Thus construed, the Yiddish-speaking Old Yishuv posed a sharp negative contrast to the self-image of independence and initiative that the Zionists considered superior and were striving to create.

Class, ideological, and generational differences were enlisted in the Zionists' struggle against this culture. The Jewish farmers of the First Aliyah preferred to employ Arab laborers, who were more familiar with the physical conditions and had no socialist ideals such as equality of employers and employees. Paradoxically, the socialist Zionists of the Second Aliyah perceived the farmers simultaneously as beggars because of their dependence on philanthropy and as rich capitalists devoid of national consciousness, ignoring the impulse that had brought many of them to Palestine. The animosity between the older, nonsocialist, and better-established farmers and the young, revolutionary, and penniless laborers was firmly entrenched. Yiddish, which many First Aliyah farmers spoke, was a convenient signifier for the culture that the Zionists negated, and the inevitable clashes often focused on the language issue. But members of the First Aliyah, who had mostly immigrated from eastern Europe, used Yiddish as a matter of practicality rather than out of an anti-Hebraic principle (Sadan 1978, 68).²⁸ Although Hebrew culture was one of their ideals, the Hebrew of the time, being a "deficient" polysystem in Even-Zohar's formulation, was poorly suited to quotidian

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needs. Interestingly, however, Kosover's summary of the history of Yiddish in Palestine extends from the late fifteenth century to 1880, the eve of the First Aliyah (1966, 3–94). This time frame clearly marks off the Yiddish of the Old Yishuv as the language of diasporic values and implies that members of the First Aliyah spoke only Hebrew.²⁹

The mobilization of language as emblem and instrument is perhaps most striking in Yosef Chaim Brenner's important early modernist Hebrew novel *Shekhhol ve-Khishalon* (Breakdown and bereavement [1978]).³⁰ Set in the second decade of the twentieth century, the novel sharply criticizes many aspects of the Yishuv and also castigates the Old Yishuv's way of life. One of Brenner's poetic devices is the representation of Yiddish speech and Yiddish linguistic conventions in his novelistic Hebrew. The first Old Yishuv characters in the novel are two women who carry on a “*sicha-genicha*” (conversation-whining [1465]), a neologistic phrase that in its rhyming reproduces a Yiddish device of mockery as the second element of the rhyme degrades the first.³¹ This very first reference to their conversation marks it as Yiddish, the language of feminine weakness, sickness, and passivity—all stereotypical diasporic values. The conversation takes place in the courtyard of a mental hospital in Jerusalem, the stronghold of the Old Yishuv. As they speak, the women punctuate their discourse liberally with the conventional Yiddish exclamations “*oy-oy-oy!*” and “*vey-vey-vey!*” Even more interesting are Brenner's Hebrew representations of Yiddish idioms. “*Eyn klal mah le-daber*” (there's nothing more to say [1465]) is a literal translation of the Yiddish *nishto mer vos tsu zogn*; “*mah at medaberet*” (what are you saying [1466]) reproduces the Yiddish *vos redstu*;³² and “*lech ve-shave'ah chai ve-kayam*” (protest in vain [1468]) represents the Yiddish *gey shray khay ve-kayem* (go scream to the one who lives and exists—a euphemism for God).

Chefetz, the pioneer protagonist of the novel, has just arrived from a

29. Yet Kosover himself breaks out of this time frame, without acknowledging the fact, when he includes examples of Yiddish in the speech of pioneers as late as the 1920s; see the discussion of a pioneer song later in this chapter.

30. The novel was written in stages during 1913–14 and 1917–18 and was finally published in its entirety in 1920.

31. For a discussion of the structure and function of Yiddish collocations, see Harshav 1990, 27–40, and Matisoff 2000.

32. These two idioms, like many others, have become an accepted part of Hebrew discourse, though their origin is popularly unacknowledged.

new settlement to seek treatment for a mysterious general malaise. As he eavesdrops on the Yiddish conversation, he is overwhelmed by the grim realization that “I am in Jerusalem,” an internal exclamation that frames the women's conversation (1465, 1467). Yiddish is inherently linked with the inability to function “normally.” The setting of a mental hospital in Jerusalem, with its women inmates, seems to embody the worst aspects of diasporic life. For Chefetz, the Yiddish conversation foreshadows the inevitable breakdown of his life and his bereavement from any hope of normality. When Brenner positions the sick Zionist in a Yiddish-speaking location in Palestine, he is using the conventional metonymies of Hebrew for Zionism and Yiddish for diasporic culture to express his own profound skepticism about the validity of the Zionist ideal, or perhaps about its very possibility. By implying the use of Yiddish to signify diasporic elements both in the Old Yishuv and, as we shall see, among the pioneers, he reveals his apparent conviction that the features of diasporic life would be perpetuated even in Palestine.

Cultural Ambivalence and Narrative Creation

Hayden White characterizes historical narratives as “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (1985, 82, emphases in the original). He considers the narrativity of historical discourse to be a value arising out of “a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (24). It is this desire for coherence, fullness, and closure that fed the rise of Zionism's mainstream national narrative. According to this narrative, the uniformly idealistic Yishuv developed through the efforts of a single-minded group of pioneers who never doubted the successful outcome of their project and never wavered in a single tenet of their ideology. True to the logic of a moralistic fable, they were eventually rewarded for their efforts by the establishment of a Jewish state.

Like any narrative, the Zionist one needed to gloss over the incoherence, partial nature, and open-endedness that characterize actual events as opposed to a fictional narrative. Small wonder, then, that the mainstream Zionist narrative neglects the ambivalent aspects of Yishuv culture, such as the continued use of Yiddish. Yiddish and Hebrew had traditionally coexisted in the Jewish community of Europe within a taxonomy that classified the appli-

cation and usage of each language in European Jewish practice.³³ However, in Zionist Palestine, the old taxonomic order was radically transformed: Hebrew was designated as the language for everyday use as well as of high culture, and Yiddish was totally delegitimized. Yiddish officially became an anomaly, although it was the *de facto* language of much, if not most of the community well into the 1930s. “Anomalies,” observes Bruce Lincoln, “can be ignored, ridiculed, distorted, or suppressed, these all being means by which they are relegated to the margins and interstices of both a given classificatory system and of lived experience” (1989, 165). Several historical and anecdotal examples illustrate the mechanisms by which the anomaly of Yishuv Yiddish was dealt with in scholarly as well as popular perceptions of the culture.

In the 1976 foreword to their handbook, Talmi and Talmi describe their goal as “an attempt to present, as briefly as possible, a book of information and knowledge about the revival movement of the Jewish people, about the ‘ingathering of the exiles and the return to Zion,’ about the settlement of Eretz-Israel, etc., processes whose supreme expression was the establishment of the State of Israel” (1981, 4).³⁴ The book does in fact deal mainly with Zionism’s concrete achievements, such as settlements and community institutions. Zionism itself is defined as “the modern national movement that supports the return of the people to Zion, to its historical homeland of Eretz-Israel, the establishment of a free, independent Jewish state, and the renewal of the spiritual, cultural, political, and economic life of the Jewish people.” The writers continue, “from its inception, Zionism was an inclusive national movement, with different spiritual and social trends” (312), and they go on to present brief descriptions of various political factions and parties within the movement. Yet they construe the revival of the “spiritual” life of the people exclusively as a return to pre-exilic values (which, as we have seen, were at least in part an artificial construct) and thus suppress dissonant tones in the national culture.

33. For a detailed description of the roles of Yiddish and Hebrew in traditional European Jewish society, see Shmeruk 1978 and Harshav 1990; for an analysis of some changes in these roles in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Seidman 1997.

34. The phrases “ingathering of the exiles” and “the return to Zion” are derived from biblical prophecies of national redemption; in the context of Zionism, they refer to the mass immigration to Israel during its first years and to earlier immigration to Palestine.

An illuminating example of a possible narrative variant are the anecdotes recounted in 1917 by Yehoyesh (1872–1927),³⁵ the renowned American Yiddish poet who lived in the First Aliyah settlement of Rechovot in 1914–15. The mainstream histories imply that by 1914 Hebrew was prevalent, if not exclusive, throughout the Yishuv. It is therefore intriguing to read Yehoyesh’s report of the eagerness with which the town’s residents read the American Yiddish newspapers that he received by mail: “People waited for them impatiently, and they would be passed from hand to hand. Some people made me promise, for God’s sake, that I would give them the papers first” (1917, 56). Yet though Yehoyesh was a major figure of Yiddish culture, his Palestine memoirs make it clear that he was also a sympathizer with Hebrew and Zionism. His classic Yiddish translation of the Hebrew Bible (1927) is suffused with the geography, flora, and fauna of the Land of Israel, concretizing what were traditionally construed as metaphoric statements.³⁶ More pointedly for our purposes, he notes in his memoir that children in Palestine used Hebrew for quotidian purposes such as the names of wild-flowers (1917, 29). This description of considerable language heterogeneity in Zionist Palestine seems closer to what the actual situation might have been and evokes a picture that is probably more realistic than the unisonant national narrative. His own ambivalence on the language issue is clear from this duality of attitudes: enthusiasm for the revival of Hebrew in the Yishuv but also a yearning for Yiddish in the community. If conflicting loyalties can be discerned in this Yiddishist writer’s view of the Yishuv’s developing culture, we can only imagine how much stronger the psychological conflict was among those who were ideologically committed to completely renouncing their mother tongue.

Yishuv natives’ memories, which provided raw material for the national narrative, often reflect a language ambivalence that was minimized in later accounts. Let us look at accounts of Hebrew usage in the farming villages founded during the First Aliyah. A study by Shlomo ha-Ramati unintentionally provides an instructive example of the “incoherence” that a national narrative must avoid in order to function properly according to White’s model. Ha-Ramati exposes the intricacy of the language changeover process

35. The pseudonym of Solomon Bloomgarden.

36. During his stay, Yehoyesh consulted with Yisra’el Aharoni (the self-styled “first Hebrew zoologist”) about biblical fauna (Yehoyesh 1917, 50–63).

and its oppositionality to the “closure” required by the Zionist narrative when he introduces and quotes Yehudit Harari’s reminiscence about Rechovot at the turn of the twentieth century:

[There was] a large number of foreign words in the Hebrew speech of the first teachers. It is therefore not surprising that such “mixed” speech was also common among the students, as reported [in 1956] by Yehudit Harari, who was a student in the Rechovot school: “We students spoke Hebrew diluted with Yiddish: *di shvartse parah shlogt zikh mit di karnayim* [the black cow is hitting itself with the horns].” (ha-Ramati 1981, 433)

A close examination of the proportions of the languages in Harari’s example is illuminating: of the eight words, only the two nouns are Hebrew (*parah*, “cow,” and *karnayim*, “horns”), whereas the other six and the syntax itself are Yiddish.³⁷ Yet Harari herself presents this as an example of “Hebrew diluted with Yiddish,” elevating Hebrew to dominant status despite the evidence of her own memory. Thus, she stays in line with the mainstream national narrative that was almost fully formed in 1956. Even more intriguing, however, is ha-Ramati’s characterization of Yiddish, the language that underlies this quote: he further distorts the speaker’s perception of the past, using her anecdote to prove that turn-of-the-century Hebrew contained a large number of “foreign words.” Harari’s Yiddish takes on the status of a foreign language, although it was the mother tongue of those natives who spoke it.³⁸ Natives wanting to join the mainstream were thus alienated from their original culture in a manifestation of nationalist cultural engineering.

A narrative of great cultural significance that, because of its difference, is not included in normative accounts of the Yishuv’s culture is that of Esther

37. Kronfeld (1999) notes that in the acquisition of a second language that is considered more prestigious, it is often the nouns that are learned and used first.

38. Yiddish was not the only “foreign language” used in the early settlements. A dream sequence in Brenner’s 1911 Hebrew story “Atsabim” (Nerves) strikingly conveys linguistic practice in that society by presenting both Arabic and Yiddish within the Hebrew frame language, in translation and transliteration. A voice shouts, “*Rukh, rukh min hon!* (Go, go away!) *S’tezikh tsugetshepet!?*” (Why are you being a nuisance? [Brenner 1978, 1253]). Whereas the Arabic first sentence is given a parenthetical translation in the text (here given in English), the very colloquial Yiddish is presented in Yiddish spelling, with which Brenner’s readers were familiar. The linguistic melange was a key component of Yishuv culture, as is clear in the example later from Brenner’s Hebrew *Shekhhol ve-Khishalon* (Breakdown and bereavement [1978, 1443–1688]) and in the Yiddish works discussed in chapters 2–5.

Raab, the first native Hebrew and female poet of the Yishuv, born in Petach-Tikvah in 1899; Raab’s parents were members of the First Aliyah. On more than one occasion, Raab spoke freely about Yiddish as her first language: “Speech was not in Hebrew, it was in Yiddish. There was no Hebrew” (1978, 14). In a 1981 interview, Raab was asked specifically, “Was Hebrew your first spoken language?” She responded, with considerable affection for her mother tongue: “No, we spoke Yiddish, Hungarian Yiddish. I am from Hungary. Then the Lithuanian Jews came, and the whole household adopted Yiddish, that nice Yiddish that the Bialystokers spoke. . . . Yiddish is a beautiful language” (1981, 109).³⁹ In Raab’s recollection, Yiddish was not only the language of the First Aliyah settlements in the first decade of the century; it was a rich, vibrant language, spoken in a variety of regional dialects. It is worth noting here that Raab was considered an outsider and a maverick in the Hebrew literary establishment in her lifetime. Chana Kronfeld posits that a major reason for Raab’s marginal status was the fact that in the immigrant society of the Yishuv Raab wrote as a native, presenting both the land and the Hebrew language of early-twentieth-century Palestine as models (1996, 71–78). Raab uses Hebrew innovatively, employing “a jarringly new and ideologically charged rhetoric of ungrammaticality, the likes of which mainstream Hebrew modernism has never seen” (73). It is a measure of Raab’s independent mind that, besides speaking freely about her childhood culture, she was also proud of her multilingualism—she was fluent in French and read German—and of her poetic links with European modernism (Raab 1981, 102–3, 106, 108).⁴⁰ Her outspokenness on the predominance of Yiddish in Petach-Tikvah, although perhaps characteristic of her particular sensibility, is a dissenting voice unusual in the Zionist narrative.

The Zionist pioneers could not do without Yiddish. That the use of Yiddish in Palestine was more prevalent than the use of Hebrew among the members of the Second Aliyah is clear from careful readings of contemporary literature and memoirs. In Brenner’s *Shekhhol ve-Khishalon*, which in-

39. “I am from Hungary” is an interesting remark, considering that Raab was born in Palestine after her family immigrated from Hungary in the late nineteenth century.

40. In the same interview, Raab also provided details of her connections with Jewish and non-Jewish European writers such as the Hebrew modernists David Fogel and Avraham Ben-Yitzchak (Sonne), the French poet Germaine Beaumont, and the German poets Stefan George and Walter Cale. She translated work by several European poets into Hebrew (Raab 2001, 454–57).

cludes representations of Yiddish in Old Yishuv speech, some conversations among the young Zionists are also marked as Yiddish. In these cases, Brenner transposes Yiddish syntax and collocations into Hebrew, mocking the pioneers' fumbling attempts to speak the language. When members of the group say of the sickly Chefetz, "*gam gibor gadol eynenu*" (he is not physically powerful either; *gibor gadol*, literally "a great hero" [1978, 1446]), they are translating from the Yiddish *keyn groyser giber iz er oykhet nisht*. The subject pronoun *eynenu* (he isn't) follows the two adjectives *gibor gadol* (great hero), echoing the respective positions of the equivalent Yiddish pronoun *er* and adjectives *groyser giber*, which, in normative Yiddish, precede the subject in such emphatic sentence structures. In normative Hebrew syntax, the adjective follows the subject, and the word order would be *eynenu gibor gadol*. It is clear from the syntax of the represented Hebrew that the characters are speaking Yiddish.

A different case, equally influential but perhaps less representative because of its unique nature, is the extraordinary one of Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970), the other towering figure of Yishuv Hebrew literature in the early decades of the century. Agnon is considered, along with Brenner and Uri Nissan Gnessin,⁴¹ one of the fathers of modern Hebrew literature (Shaked 2000, 112) and even its major formative voice (Hever 2002, 46); he was the first Hebrew writer to win a Nobel Prize for Literature (in 1966). Agnon was a protégé of Brenner, who recognized and encouraged his genius and facilitated his first publication in Palestine, the story "Agunot" (Forgotten wives) in 1908. Yet Agnon, more so than Brenner, refused to affiliate himself explicitly with Zionist ideology; he immigrated to Palestine in 1908, went to Germany in 1912, and returned to Palestine in 1924. His political and aesthetic positions were singular: as Arnold Band notes, his stance was marginal, fraught with ambiguities and possessing no easily definable commitment (1994, 29). Although Agnon accepted the ideological values of the Second Aliyah, he did not dramatize their realization (Shaked 2000, 82). This is particularly evident in his novel of the Second Aliyah, *Temol Shilshom* (Only yesterday), in which the doomed protagonist fails in his at-

tempts first to realize his pioneering ideals and then to return to the traditional culture; in Jerusalem's Old Yishuv, he meets with a horrific death by rabies. *Only Yesterday* was published in its entirety in 1945, decades after the Second Aliyah was over, and it reflects the temporal distancing as well as Agnon's studied detachment and ironic attitude concerning ideologies.

Whereas Brenner's uneven style was often perceived as awkward, Agnon was immediately recognized as an inimitable master of Hebrew, able to weave the various registers and historical strata of the language into a seamless stylistic fabric. Yet his mother tongue, like that of Brenner, was Yiddish, and the represented speech of his characters is underlain by "vast layers of Yiddish subtext" (Harshav 1993a, 169). The early story "Giv'at ha-Chol" (The sand hill), published in 1919, contains such loan translations from Yiddish as "*mah li le-daber*" (literally, "what have I to say," implying "I have nothing to say," reproducing the Yiddish *vos hob ikh tsu zogn*) and "*be-chaiat*" ("By my life," Yiddish *kh'lebn*) to denote surprise (Agnon 1960, 381, 384). Such usage may serve to underscore the linguistic confusion of the characters, recent young immigrants who have left their families behind in Europe and are trying to adjust to a culture in which Hebrew is required. In fact, the protagonist makes his living by teaching Hebrew in Jaffa, where the story is set.

However, even a relatively late novella such as "Iddo ve-Eynam" (Iddo and Eynam), initially published in 1950—in which the action oscillates between post-Second World War Jerusalem and an archaizing imaginary Jewish past that combines the magical and mythical with pagan elements—is replete with versions of Yiddish collocations and syntactical structures that had entered modern Hebrew and function as a poetic device in the novella. In a conversation about a shortage of housing in the city, one character begins his description of the situation as follows: "A young man comes back from the war and seeks a roof over his head" (Hebrew: *chozer bachur min hamilchamah u-mevakesh lo korat gag le-rosho*; Yiddish: *kumt a bocher tsurik fun milchome un zukht zikh a dakh ibern kop* [Agnon 1967, 349]). In normal Hebrew syntax, the noun *bachur* (young man) would be in first position and the verb *chozer* (returns) in second position; yet the sentence reproduces a specific syntax used in Yiddish to refer to a topic introduced earlier (the housing situation). The speaker is a well-to-do immigrant from Germany with a name that is stereotypically German (Gerhard Greifenbach) and worldly airs: he and his wife, Gerda (an equally stereotypical feminine German name), are going on a trip abroad "to rest a bit from the toil in the land

41. The works of Gnessin, a remarkable writer who produced only four novellas and a few short stories before his early death, have been described as "the earliest instance of fully achieved modernist prose in Hebrew" (Alter 1988, 51–52). Although Gnessin was a close personal friend of Brenner, he was not a Zionist and returned to Europe after only a brief visit to Palestine.

[Palestine]" (343).⁴² Greifenbach probably considers himself remote from the Yiddish culture of his forefathers, who, like the ancestors of many German Jews, most likely came from eastern Europe. The descendants of such immigrants disparaged Yiddish and its culture as low. Thus, the inclusion of Yiddish turns of phrase in Greifenbach's "cultivated" conversation may be an example of Agnon's particular brand of oblique sarcasm rather than a representation of actual speech.

On the eve of the Third Aliyah (1919–23), however, Yiddish was still functioning widely in everyday use. In a fascinating but little-noted article on the revival of Hebrew in Palestine, Roberto Bachi presents data on the use of Yiddish collected in the 1916–18 Palestine census. According to these data, approximately 60 percent of the Jewish population in 1917 did not report Hebrew as their main language. Yiddish was the language that most of these people spoke, followed by Arabic. Bachi appends a footnote: "Nearly 70 percent of 'parents' of Ashkenazi background and about one-third of 'children' of this background spoke Yiddish" (1956, 74n. 11; there is no age specification for the designation of "children"). "Thus, the position of Hebrew," Bachi states, "was extremely weak" (74n. 11). This observation, made by a prominent government statistician less than a decade after Israel's establishment, is a rare admission that the designated language was in a highly precarious position at this crucial stage of the culture's formation.

The situation was not much different in the 1920s. The Third Aliyah was as Hebraist in ideology as the preceding wave of immigration. In a 1923 speech, David Ben-Gurion proudly referred to the new Zionist immigrants as "Hebrew workers in the land" (1964, 96), and H. Frumkin, summarizing the Yishuv's economy on the eve of the Third Aliyah, uses *Hebrew* overwhelmingly as an adjective for the community (1964, 74–75). Yet a later account by Moshe Palmon, a rank-and-file immigrant of the Third Aliyah, reflects some of the difficulty and ambivalence that accompanied the use of the language. Palmon recounts his language experience while he was working in a Tel-Aviv factory:

42. Agnon often makes punning references in character names—here, a bilingual play on the literal meaning of the German verb *greifen* (to grab). It may be an allusion to the pretentious affectations of Greifenbach and Gerda, concerned for the security of their house while they are gone rather than for the safety of the narrator, who remains in a Jerusalem where Arab rioters and British-imposed curfews are common.

Most of the workers were immigrants from Russia who did not know Hebrew, and one heard mainly Russian. When more workers came, the numbers of those who knew Hebrew rose slightly, yet the situation did not change much. Out of habit and exhaustion from work, no attention was paid to speaking Hebrew. When the workers became more numerous, they tended to overcome habit, and the number of Hebrew speakers increased. Even those who did not know the language did not treat it with such alienation [*lo hitnakru lah kol kakh*], and some of them tried to overcome the difficulty. . . . The craftsmen did not know Hebrew either and did not treat it seriously and spoke Russian or Yiddish. (1964, 577)

Palmon's choice of phrase is telling. The *hitnakru* form of the verb root *n'k'r* is a reflexive that implies a deliberate estrangement. When the biblical Joseph, for example, decides to punish his brothers who have come to Egypt begging for food, he treats them "like strangers" (*va-yitnaker eleyhem*, literally "estranged himself from them" [Gen. 42:7]). Though the word occurs in the context of a lessening alienation, Palmon spells out the immigrants' unwillingness to grapple with Hebrew; depending on their backgrounds, they preferred Russian or Yiddish, their mother tongues. His account vividly conveys their sense of being burdened with a linguistic requirement for which they were not equipped and that they may not have chosen.

As noted earlier, Kosover's study of Palestinian Yiddish also includes some Yiddish spoken by the Third Aliyah pioneers. He quotes a stanza from "a popular 'chalutzim' song of the twenties (heard from Meir Roytman in [the new town of] Migdal in May 1927): 'Un dernokh hob ikh tsu zukhn / gelt farn binyan oder kvish— / azoy krig ikh glaykh an entfer / az: 'masari iz mafish!'" (And later I need to seek / money for a building or a paved road— / and I get the answer right away: / "there is no money!") (1966, 139). The song is mostly in Yiddish. Of its twenty-one words, only two are Hebrew (again, nouns: *binyan*, "building," and *kvish*, "paved road," both highly significant in the Zionist context of "building the land"), and two are Arabic (the noun *masari*, "money," and *mafish*, an expression negating the existence of something). Yiddish songs were certainly popular in Zionist Palestine well into the 1930s and beyond. A personal collection of favorite songs that Zev Segal, a founder of Ra'anana, compiled and copied out in the course of thirty-five years attests to this popularity: of the 108 songs in his note-

book, 32, or almost one-third, are in Yiddish (Segal 1934–69).⁴³ The Yiddish songs were often sung in the home of this Hebraist Zionist, who was totally at home in both languages, saw no real conflict between them, and never relinquished Yiddish in his personal and family culture. The persistence of Yiddish songs in the Yishuv is particularly telling given the ideological engagement of popular song in the Zionist project (Almog 2000, 235–41; Shachar 1999, 495).

The view that by the late 1920s Yiddish had disappeared is an example of a Zionist myth of the type to which Nurith Gertz alludes in her important study of Yishuv literature in the 1930s. Gertz states that the ideological use of “the Zionist myths that were taken for granted by the Yishuv . . . was in line with the tendency to avoid confrontation with complicated real-life conflicts and conferred the appearance of an accepted value even upon positions that were specific and unilateral” (1988, 58). However, Gertz does not apply this insight to the myth of the disappearance of Yiddish. Paradoxically, it was in the late 1920s that Yiddish culture in the Yishuv began to thrive and find expression in print. The years 1928 and 1929 saw the appearance of the first four of the nineteen Yiddish literary magazines that were published through the 1930s; three of these magazines were published in the new “Hebrew” city of Tel-Aviv. The flourishing of Yiddish in the Yishuv was problematic, an anomaly that needed to be integrated into the national narrative.

The old-timers who had come with the Second and Third Aliyahs and who had a socialist and agricultural orientation perceived the eighty thousand members of the Fourth Aliyah (1924–28) (known as the “Grabski” Aliyah, after the Polish prime minister who initiated the stringent anti-Jewish fiscal legislation that led to the emigration of many Jews) as petit-bourgeois and lacking in Zionist zeal because many of them preferred to start businesses in the towns.⁴⁴ They were construed as less Zionist because they had arrived out of economic necessity. Bezalel Amikam’s historical survey of the Yishuv suggests that the ideological failings of the Fourth Aliyah were at least in part responsible for the economic depression in Palestine during the late 1920s. He quotes a contemporaneous evaluation of the Fourth Aliyah by the prominent Labor movement leader Moshe Beilinson, who regarded the ethics of this wave of immigrants as an evil influence that was corrupting

43. The collection also includes songs transliterated from English, Arabic, and Russian.

44. A popular, Yiddish-inflected pejorative term for Fourth Aliyah immigrants was *grabskalakh*, “little Grabskis.”

the purity of the Zionist movement: “Speculation creates a poisonous atmosphere in the country and in the entire Zionist movement. It deprives the movement of its purity of character [*tohar ofya*] and causes many among us to stray from the [right] path and to turn to a path of profit without work” (Amikam 1979, 321). Beilinson accused the Fourth Aliyah of transplanting negative (i.e., nonsocialist) exilic values. Although these immigrants were only following established, though unacknowledged, custom when they continued to use Yiddish in Palestine, this easily identifiable fact was used against them for political and economic reasons as it was against no other group.

Gertz spells out this conventional disapproval in cultural terms when she presents the reasons for the continued stagnation in the numbers of Hebrew literature readers in Palestine in the early 1930s: “A large part of the [recent] immigrants were refugees from European anti-Semitism, and their motives for immigrating were not national or pioneering. They therefore did not feel any obligation toward Zionist values and the [Hebrew] literature that expressed these values” (1988, 34–35).

For an impartial perspective on the conventional belief that Hebrew was uniformly adopted in the Yishuv by the late 1920s, let me return to Bachi’s 1956 essay on the revival of Hebrew in Palestine. Presenting the data of three censuses of Jewish workers in Palestine (1922, 1926, and 1937), he appends an intriguing footnote: “The data of the two official censuses of 1922 and 1931 cannot be used because these were damaged by inaccurate statements as a result of intentional political propaganda that was conducted, to have all the Jews declare ‘Hebrew’ in response to the question about languages” (1956, 69n. 8). He implies that during the official censuses members of the Yishuv were pressured to deny their use of other languages. Without offering specific sources for this information, he indicates that the ostensibly impartial censuses had a clear political cast. When he uses passive and agentless constructions such as “*nifge’u*” (were damaged) and “*bitnahalah*” (was conducted), he seems unwilling to assign blame or responsibility for the falsification of facts.

Perhaps the most revealing bit of information about Yishuv culture in the 1920s is included incidentally in Zohar Shavit’s encompassing and detailed survey of the development of the Hebrew culture of Palestine. In 1927, Hebrew and Yiddish newspapers were being read in roughly equal numbers in one public library of Tel-Aviv. On one day in June of that year at the Barzilai Library, 121 people read Hebrew newspapers, whereas 107 read the Yid-

dish press, published in Warsaw and New York (1999, 386). Shavit does not elaborate on this astonishing statistic, which contradicts the mainstream's denial that Yiddish culture even existed, let alone was sought after, in the Yishuv. Clearly, consumers of Hebrew and Yiddish cultures in the Yishuv were close in numbers. The myth of Hebrew's early dominance in the Yishuv was used to essentialize the sense of a new national identity and to "avoid confrontation with complicated real-life conflicts," according to Gertz's model (1988, 58).

The Fifth Aliyah (1929–39) was the largest, with numbers estimated at 235,000. The *Leksikon Tziyoni* notes, "the Fifth Aliyah was notable for its varied composition. In addition to a young labor force, people with capital as well as professionals and others knowledgeable in economics, commerce, and industry arrived. The population of the cities and towns increased greatly" (Talmi and Talmi 1981, 271). The Yishuv's culture was altered in a way that the ideologists of Labor Zionism found hard to accept in spite of the welcome increase in the population. Their socialist-agrarian ethic construed the growing popularity and rapid development of the cities, which had begun during the Fourth Aliyah, as a degradation of Zionism, a threat to all that had been accomplished, and a regression to undesirable diasporic values. Labor Zionist ideologists also disapproved of the small towns, where agriculture was based on private land ownership and where the laborer-landowner conflict of the Second Aliyah had flared up at the turn of the century. This disparaging view of a changing ideological climate masks the perception of a threat to the dominance of Labor in the Yishuv.

The language issue continued to be of crucial importance, with *Hebrew* now functioning as an oppositional code word in the struggle between Labor and non-Labor factions. Writing in *Moznayim*, one of the two major literary magazines of the Yishuv, writer and critic Shlomo Tzemach expressed disappointment at the direction he saw Yishuv culture taking: "Instead of the villages of Hebrews [*kfarey ha-ivrim*] spread over hill and dale, 'quarters' and 'suburbs' have come, bearing the names of all the middlemen [*sarsurim*] and criminals. . . . What we are creating in the Jewish small town in the land is a nest of spiritual provincialism of the most sterile and empty kind; with all its disgraceful characteristics" (1934, 529–30, quotation marks in the original). In this description, the agrarian "villages of Hebrews" are presented as part of a bucolic landscape, an organic part of the countryside as they spread over the hills and dales (the collocation "*har va-gai*" [hill and dale] was part of the idealized geography of Zionist Palestine and denoted a pastoral existence).

Residential urban neighborhoods, in contrast, had "come" like some unnatural manifestation. Although *sarsur* basically means "middleman," the word has taken on highly negative connotations in modern Hebrew and is used today for pimp; in Tzemach's description, it is equated with criminals. Tzemach used the Hebrew *ayarah* ("small town," a diminutive of *ir*, "city," and the Hebrew equivalent for the Yiddish Jewish term *shtetl*, itself never used in a Hebrew context) in conjunction with the adjective *Jewish*, thus distinguishing it pejoratively from the "villages of Hebrews" that he admires. Tzemach was arguing that the diasporic *shtetl* had been transplanted. The cultures of Tel Aviv and the towns (as distinct from the agrarian "Hebrew" villages), which were gaining in significance as a result of the Fifth Aliyah's size and composition, now emblematized all that Labor deplored.

The Tongue-Tied Soul

The development of Hebrew culture in Palestine has been studied fairly extensively.⁴⁵ However, mainstream Zionist narratives mostly gloss over the personal toll in individual cultural adjustment exacted by the imposition of Hebrew over Yiddish. The process that led to the dominance of Hebrew is usually described in the abstract and through collective rhetoric, as though individuals were not involved. This is true even of relatively recent studies. Yael Zerubavel's innovative and compelling analysis of Israeli collective memory effectively interrogates and exposes the process by which myths adopted by Zionism (such as that of Masada) became unquestioned fundamentals of Israeli culture. Yet, speaking of the revival of Hebrew and its adoption as part of the national renaissance, she notes briefly only that "the emergence of Hebrew as the Yishuv's national language was a complex process that entailed a struggle on both ideological and practical grounds" (1995, 30). Because she does not mention the Zionist immigrants' integral link with Yiddish, she diminishes the personal conflict inherent in the "ideological and practical" struggle to the point of nonexistence. The only language struggle she mentions explicitly is the 1913 German-Hebrew dispute

45. See, for example, Berlowitz 1996, Elboim-Dror 1996, Even-Zohar 1981, Harshav 1993, Karmi 1997, ha-Ramati 1997, Yael Zerubavel 1995, and especially Z. Shavit 1999, whose survey is the most ambitious and comprehensive, though not complete. Almog 2000 provides a multifaceted historical overview of the native Hebrew culture.

(80). This dismissal of a key component of a process recognized as complex is significant in a major study that interrogates mainstream values.

Although some modern mainstream histories of the Second Aliyah do include examples of the pioneers' ambivalence toward Hebrew and the problematics of their cultural adjustment, they often do not analyze or place these examples in proper context. Thus, Michael Greenzweig's essay on the status of Hebrew during the Second Aliyah deals mainly with the "practical" difficulties of using a language that was inadequate (as Ben-Gurion put it in 1910) and details the educational steps taken to increase the vocabulary and the spread of Hebrew in the Yishuv. Greenzweig ostensibly mentions Yiddish only in connection with the Old Yishuv: "Another segment of the Yishuv spoke Yiddish at the time [1904–14] and consciously shunned Hebrew speech. These were mainly members of the Old Yishuv in Jerusalem, and in other cities as well, such as Jaffa" (1985, 199). The nature of the other Yiddish speakers (besides the "main" speakers) is elided, possibly because of the character of the volume that contains the essay: it is part of a series that reflects the consensus and presents mainstream Zionist and Israeli history in a somewhat popularized fashion.

However, a dissonant tone emerges within Greenzweig's essay in the reminiscences of Second Aliyah immigrant and ideologue Shlomo Lavee. Recalling the language situation in the early communal settlement of Kinneret in 1905, Lavee described it as "one of the settlements that was totally Hebrew in its language. The cost cannot be assessed. It is totally impossible to estimate what it costs a person to switch over from one language of speech to another, and especially to a language that is not yet one of speech, and how great the spiritual torment [*inuyey ha-nefesh*] is of a soul that wants to speak, and has something to say, and is dumb and tongue-tied" (quoted in Greenzweig 1985, 207). This pained description comprises a rare attempt to convey a common personal dilemma. Underlying the practical difficulties—expressing oneself in a language inadequate for daily use—is the profound emotional issue of abandoning the mother tongue. The date of Lavee's reminiscence is not given, but it was most likely long after the events. His reference to "spiritual torment"—the same language as in the biblical injunction to fast on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:31 and elsewhere)—evokes the ambivalence that had to be suppressed concerning the obligation to forget Yiddish. Lavee spoke for the pioneers of the Second Aliyah who were frustrated at being "dumb and tongue-tied." Greenzweig's summary, though, ignores the issues that Lavee's account reveals: "On the eve of the

First World War, it was absolutely clear that in this struggle between Hebrew and foreign languages, the Hebrews and their supporters were ahead" (1985, 211). As in ha-Ramati's study, the mother tongue takes on the status of a delegitimized foreign language.

Perhaps the most revealing contemporaneous articulation of the individual's dilemma is Rachel Katznelsong's 1918 essay, suggestively titled "Nedudey Lashon" (Language wanderings).⁴⁶ The essay's Hebrew title is ambiguously worded; *nedudey* is a construct form of the plural noun *nedudim* (wanderings). Katznelsong's use of this particular noun for the construct form resonates on several levels: it evokes the construct *nedudey sheynah* (literally, "sleep wanderings" or insomnia) and is in dialogue with Bialik's seminal 1905 essay "Chevley Lashon" (Language pangs), which deals with problems of expression in the modern Hebrew of the time (Bialik 1965b). In 1918, Katznelsong spelled out the personal conflict involved in the need to choose between languages. She confessed to the hardship involved in the imposition of Hebrew, in anguished terms that few pioneers would admit to in print:

[In the Diaspora] it never occurred to us to speak Hebrew. Would we abandon what was natural and choose what was artificial? And these were the strong connections we betrayed when we came to Eretz-Israel. For here, we no longer feel like children of Yiddish. . . . We had to betray Yiddish, even though we paid for this as for any betrayal. And we feel the need to justify and explain to ourselves how we so quickly abandoned what was the content of our lives. (1918, 69)

46. My translations of excerpts from this essay are based on the translation in Harshav 1993a, 183–94. Interestingly, a later version of this essay, published in a 1966 collection of Katznelsong's writings, contains many significant changes: "jargon," for example, is replaced by "Yiddish," and the key exclamation "we had to betray Yiddish, even though we paid for this as for any betrayal" is omitted (Katznelsong 1966, 231–41). Katznelsong's decision to follow the consensus here seems to echo some of her other choices, such as the subordination of her own public and literary career to that of her husband, Zalman Rubashov, who became the third president of Israel. When she married, she appended "Rubashov" to her name; when Zalman Rubashov was elected president in 1963, they hebraized their Russian last name to Shazar. For a fascinating self-revelation of this complex modern woman, see her diaries and journals in Katznelsong 1989. The title of this work, *Adam Kemo Shehu* (A person as he/she is), which was compiled posthumously, expresses an emphatic refusal to present it as a woman's "confessional" writing.

Elsewhere in the essay she used the extreme military term “*milchemet ha-safot*” (war of languages), perhaps as an indication of her own inner struggle. She stated, “This language was a substitute homeland for us in the Diaspora” (68), a phrase that perhaps foreshadowed Chaim Zhitlovsky’s famous 1937 definition of “Yiddishland.” How, then, did Katznelson and her comrades rationalize the cultural and emotional dislocation that the language decision involved? “In Yiddish,” she said, “we were loved as we were” (73). The choice of Hebrew was derived from the perceived revolutionary nature of Zionism, which called for total change. In her formulation, “There is a trend of thought, which for us was revolutionary, that expresses itself in Hebrew, whereas Yiddish literature—apparently naturally and necessarily—was ruled by narrow-mindedness, mostly inert and reactionary in our eyes. At best it was only a weak echo of what was revealed in Hebrew. And any person, especially we, in our situation and in the situation of our people, yearned for revolutionary thought” (69). For Katznelson, Hebrew satisfied the need for personal as well as national revolution against what Zionism considered reactionary.

A measure of Katznelson’s deliberate dedication to Hebrew is the fact that although she was an astute literary critic, her characterization of Yiddish literature as “inert and reactionary” is a stereotypically negative evaluation of a literature that in 1918 was enjoying one of its most vibrant moments. “The Hebrew writer will always be more a citizen of the world than the Yiddish writer,” she declared (1918, 74); but Yiddish literature in Europe was then explosively joining contemporary revolutionary and modernist movements in a way that the nascent Hebrew literature could not because of the expressive limitations of the language or did not because of the nationalist bent of Zionism. The Yiddish expressionist poet Perets Markish (1895–1952) had begun publishing his poems in Yiddish journals the previous year and was about to publish his first book of poetry. The Yung-Yidish group, formed in Poland in 1919, marked “the beginning of Yiddish modernist poetry” in Europe (Wolitz 1991, 28). In the early 1920s, Yiddish groups such as Di Khalyastre (the Gang) and individual poets such as Uri Tsvi Grinberg were conscious participants in European modernism. In the United States, Yiddish literature had evolved through several modernist trends.⁴⁷ It is difficult to believe that the well-read Katznelson, whose diaries

indicate the breadth and depth of her literary interests, was not aware of this innovative, multifaceted Yiddish modernism.

What underlies Katznelson’s subscription to the Zionist mainstream narrative that identifies “revolutionary” with “Zionist,” both emblematised by Hebrew? Could what seems to be a studied refusal to mention contemporary Yiddish literature, in the same diary entries that note her readings in German and Russian, have been a strategy to justify her own language choice? It would certainly have been easier to abandon a language that was stigmatized as undeveloped and reactionary rather than one that was the instrument of modern, revolutionary literature and politics. Katznelson made explicit her internalization of the stereotypes concerning Yiddish when in “Language Wanderings” she discussed the proposal of the 1908 First Yiddish Language Conference to translate the Bible into Yiddish: “You can translate the Bible into the languages of all cultured peoples. . . . But how can the Bible be translated into Yiddish? The Bible can be translated into German or English because there is equality between these languages and the language of the Bible, an equality that does not exist between that language and Yiddish” (1918, 76–77). Underlying this passage is the conventional, Haskalah-derived, Zionist opposition between Yiddish and culture. By equating Yiddish with “noncultured,” Katznelson was stifling the ambivalence she expressed earlier in the essay.

Perhaps the most clear-eyed view of the process by which Hebrew came to dominance in the early Yishuv, and one of the boldest for its time, was that of Yosef Chaim Brenner, whose compromising stance toward Yiddish was unique. Although Brenner was a Zionist and a supporter of Hebrew as the language for the Yishuv, he was eminently aware of practicalities. Brenner condemned the imposition of Hebrew by the Zionist establishment; in 1908 he wrote: “The Holy Tongue [*leshon ha-kodesh*] is not a fetish for us; we are free persons and will accept no fetish [sic]” (1985, 188). He openly legitimized Yiddish as a Zionist language and appreciated its value and power as a living language that could not be eliminated by sheer force of will. In the first, programmatic issue of *ha-Me’orer* (The arouser), the journal he founded in London in 1906, when the very future of Hebrew letters was in doubt, he declared: “Hebrew we write because we cannot but write Hebrew, because the divine spark within us emerges only in this flame . . . not even in

47. For detailed discussions of European Yiddish modernisms, see Wolitz 1979, 1981, and 1988; and Tilo Alt 1987, 1991. For a detailed survey of the New York Yiddish literary scene, see

Harshav 1990. For an illumination of some nuances of the Yiddish modernisms, see Kronfeld 1996.

the blended, beloved language, the language of our mothers, that is in our mouths [*ha-safah ha-belula, ha-chaviva, sefat imoteynu, asher be-finu*—i.e., Yiddish]” (1985, 107–8). Brenner’s choice of phrase is highly resonant. Through use of “*ha-safah ha-belulah*” (the blended language), he enters into direct debate with *safa berurah* (clear language [Zeph. 3:9]), used as the name of the pre-Zionist movement founded in Jerusalem in 1889 by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (considered the father of the impulse to revive Hebrew as a spoken language) with the aim of eliminating the use of other languages by the Jews of Palestine. Brenner then expressed his affection for “the language of our mothers” (“*sefat-imoteynu*,” a translation of the common Yiddish term for the language, *mame-loshn*, which incorporates the maternal figure) and ended by locating the language intimately “in our mouths.” Like Katznelson, Brenner was struggling with his own personal language dilemma. The dichotomy between the ascribed cultural values of the languages is manifest in his imagery. The comforting, familiar, oral aspects of the mother tongue are opposed to the disembodied elitism of Hebrew—a divine flame, an inherently dangerous element emanating from a distant authoritative entity.

Brenner repeatedly affirmed that the use of Yiddish must continue as a counterforce to the Hebrew elitism that he identified and perceived as dangerous. In 1912, for example, he wrote: “In our world there is no room for the laws laid down by and the assurance of the supposed ‘elite.’ . . . On the contrary! Let them speak, let the Jews in all their varied locations speak the Yiddish/Jewish [*yehudit*] language, the language that is in their mouths, let them respect themselves and respect their language. . . . Enough of absolute requirements and of the world of the abstract” (1985, 649–51). Brenner uses *yehudit* for Yiddish, one of several Hebrew names for the language. The fact that the Hebrew culture never succeeded in coining a stable Hebrew term for Yiddish—using the transliterations *yidish*, *idish*, and the euphemisms *idit*, *yehudit*, and even *ashkenazit* (incorporating *Ashkenaz*, the European Jewish term for Germany, where Yiddish originated)—may be another symptom of its pervasive ambivalence toward Yiddish language and culture (Seidman 2000).⁴⁸ Ever the realist and acutely aware of the ideological weight of terminology, Brenner wrote of Yiddish in 1914, “A popular language spoken

48. Names for Yiddish also seem to have been ideologically influenced in the scholarly community. In his section on names for Old Yiddish, Jerold Frakes remarks on “the magnitude of potential ideological power manifested in projects such as the naming of a language” (1989, 102–3).

by tens of thousands of people can never be *zhargon*” (1978, 1240), challenging the continued Zionist internalization of the negative “jargon” stereotype for Yiddish. In the years until his death, he continued to review Yiddish publications in Hebrew periodicals. He expressed his linguistic and ideological ambivalence toward both Hebrew and Zionism in his heartfelt exclamation of 1908: “*I do so still enjoy a new, well-printed collection in my Jewish language [bi-leshoni ha-yehudit]*” (1978, 180, emphasis in the original). Yiddish evidently was an integral part of his intellectual sensibility and his reading practice. A year before his death, Brenner was strongly moved by a plaintive Yiddish folksong sung by a Zionist pioneer in Palestine about a poor, lonely Jewish shopkeeper in the Diaspora (Barlev 1964, 328).

Brenner’s reputation as an activist and a writer who applied the same absolute and often ruthless honesty to himself as he did to others seems to have sanctioned for the public his continued affirmation of “unofficial” views, such as the admittance of Yiddish into Yishuv culture.⁴⁹ The general affection and esteem for him grew even stronger after he was murdered by rioting Arabs in 1921; in hindsight at least, he was “forgiven” for expressing unpopular views. Yitzchak Tabenkin, a contemporary who was a major ideologue of the activist wing in the Yishuv’s Labor Party for decades, wrote in the 1960s: “Brenner is the prosecutor of Jewish history. And even though he has an element of exaggeration and sometimes he goes over the line, his words contain a great educational power that influenced many of us” (1977, 14). Tabenkin’s notion of Brenner as “going over the line” can perhaps point us in the direction of a possible alternative to the mainstream narrative of the Yishuv and of Israeli culture. What was the “line” that Brenner crossed? Tabenkin seems to refer to Brenner’s refusal to be bound by any kind of dogmatic ideology, which essentializes a community’s identity.

Benedict Anderson’s concept of national unisonance leaves no room for the dissenting or minority voices that are part of any mass movement. To account for the necessarily more heterogeneous linguistic practices of an immigrant community in a newly formed national center, I would propose the notion of “multisonance.” This notion is derived in part from Homi Bhabha’s suggestion that an “in-between” temporality or space is the actual location of a nation’s culture. Bhabha identifies “a liminal signifying space

49. Hannan Hever attributes Brenner’s tolerance of Yiddish to his universalistic tendency, which incorporated an aversion to any particularism or local patriotism, including the Zionist view that the Land of Israel was the only possible home for the Jews (1994, 70).

... marked by the discourses of minorities, heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference" (1994, 148). In the Yishuv, this liminal space, marked by ambivalence, was the location of such Hebrew literary figures as Brenner and Agnon, the major voices of difference in the cultural consensus. It was also the location of a vigorous, though unacknowledged Yiddish culture that expressed itself in a rich array of unique literary work, several of whose writers I address in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

Meeting Expectations?

The Palestinian Fiction of Zalmen Brokhes

We are strangers, Jews, who have strayed into your land.

—Zalmen Brokhes, "The Jordan Roars," 1937

Defusing the Subversive

Cultural engineering, crucial for the formation of a new national identity, can manifest itself through the production of a body of literature that conforms to nationalist ideology. This canon will then supply the frame as well as the materials for the national narrative. "The canon," says Gregory Jusdanis, "not only represents national identity but also participates in its production by instilling in people the values of nationalism" (1991, 49). The Hebrew literature produced in Palestine from the beginnings of proto-Zionist Jewish immigration in the 1880s and especially after the founding of political Zionism in 1897 was mobilized toward creating a new national identity according to the Zionist ideal. The New Jew would speak Hebrew, be totally dedicated to the Zionist ideal, and possess traits considered typically non-Jewish, such as courage and initiative.

This ideal incorporated an internalization of European anti-Semitic stereotypes, many of which attributed to diasporic Jews negative traits usually viewed as feminine. This view of the New Jew as supermasculine dates back to Max Nordau's concept of *Muskeljudentum* (muscle Jewry), which he presented at the Second Zionist Congress in 1898. Nordau noted the stereotypical characterization of Jewish males as physically underdeveloped, feeble, and inferior and maintained that the condition could be rectified by heightening their athletic prowess (1909, 379–81). "Zionism," says David Biale, "promised . . . the creation of a virile New Hebrew Man" (1992,

link to the classical past, a past that was reified in a language. Greek culture over the centuries had traditionally included a modern vernacular (termed *demotic*) and an ancient, sanctified “classic” language, *katharevusa* (albeit in a modified archaic form rather than in the truly classical Greek). Similarly, European Jewish culture used Yiddish as its vernacular and Hebrew (in its original form) as its sacred language. A cultural war ensued in late-nineteenth-century Greece between supporters of the vernacular and those who strove to revive the purist language. A hybrid of demotic and *katharevusa* was designated as the official language of the state, education, and “serious” writing, but demotic continued to be used in popular culture, including its literature; the Greek cultural struggle has been resolved only rather recently in favor of demotic. Gregory Jusdanis even argues that in Greece the disjunction between the realms of the state and national culture frustrated the formation of a cultural homogeneity (1991, 46). In Zionist Palestine, in contrast, it was Hebrew, the sacred language, that predominated and provided the basis for the culture.

Zionism’s selective reconstruction of the past designated Hebrew as the once and future language of the new community. For Christian Europe, whose support was deemed vital for any future Jewish political entity, the biblical connection with the language would substantiate the image of antiquity so crucial to modern nationalism and would legitimize the nation that lacked a recognized territorial base. Yet the correlation of Hebrew with the idealized values of a specific historical period was at least in part artificial. Hebrew was not the only language spoken by the residents of pre-exilic Judah; the Bible itself provides one of the earliest examples of bilingualism among them. Aramaic was a Judahite court language: in the conversation between the commander of the Assyrian army and King Hezekiah’s officials during the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 729 B.C.E., the Judahite officials emphasize their knowledge of Aramaic (2 Kgs. 18:26).¹⁸ Over the following centuries, Aramaic grew increasingly widespread and became a major component of postbiblical (rabbinic) Hebrew. The ubiquitous Aramaic, the regional lingua franca of the time, was the vernacular of the Jewish residents of Palestine for centuries and apparently was the language that Jesus and the

a legitimate “claim” to the roots of Western civilization, whereas the Zionists unfairly “exploited” the Jewish connection to the Bible.

18. The incident is repeated in a slightly different version in Isaiah 36:11 and 2 Chronicles 32.

Jews of his time spoke (the Babylonian Talmud is written predominantly in Aramaic, as are innumerable ancient Jewish inscriptions and documents). Thus, the choice of Hebrew as the language of the revival was an act that involved an adjustment of the perception of the past, or of a particular (imagined) past, to suit the nationalist requirement. Ironically, Aramaic components that had become part of the *leshon-kodesh* (sacred language) over the centuries constituted a significant proportion of modern Hebrew as it was forming in the late nineteenth century. This fact went virtually unremarked by the zealous modern “revivers” of Hebrew, who chose to highlight the biblical components.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, *Hebrew* was being widely used to signify the reinvented Jewish community. In the Yishuv, the adjective *Hebrew* was adopted—rather than, say, *Jewish* or *Zionist*—for the four units of Jewish volunteers (the Zion Mule Corps and the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, and Fortieth Royal Fusiliers) that were formed in the British army toward the end of the First World War (the “Jewish Legion”). These units were thus known in the Yishuv as the *ha-gedudim ha-ivriyim* (Hebrew battalions); it is worth noting that many, if not most, of the volunteers knew no Hebrew beyond traditional religious usage. The Yishuv’s name for the units indicates the Zionist hope—echoing Jabotinsky’s vision—that those who served in them would be freed of the stigma that all Jews were cowards. Their new “Hebrew” identity would be synonymous with bravery on the battlefield.

The 1922 volume *Cholmim ve-Lochamim* (Dreamers and warriors), a collection of pieces published in Palestine to praise the founders of the Yishuv, exemplifies some applications of the adjective *Hebrew* in the prevailing cultural climate. The book opens with a description of Yehoshua Shtamper, a proto-Zionist founder of Petach-Tikvah (1879).¹⁹ The writer, Ya’akov Ya’ari-Poleskin, uses mainstream Zionist terminology when he describes Shtamper as “one of the first founders and builders of the first Hebrew settlement [in Eretz-Israel].”²⁰ Although Hebrew as a spoken language was still a dream in the 1880s, the pioneering settlement with its new ideology is char-

19. Petach-Tikvah is usually considered the first modern Jewish settlement in Palestine.

20. The writer’s hybrid last name is composed of his original Russian name (Poleskin, connoting “forest”) and its literal translation into the Hebrew, *ya’ar* (forest), with an adjectival ending. The hebraization of personal names in an act of renaming was a hallmark of Zionist practice that, as Amos Elon points out, “reflected the emotional climate of the times [and a] fervor to live the revolution body and soul” (1971, 131).