

About the Series

The **Political Theory and Contemporary Philosophy** series stages an ongoing dialogue between contemporary European philosophy and political theory. Following Hannah Arendt's and Leo Strauss's repeated insistence on the qualitative distinction between political *theory* and political *philosophy*, the series showcases the lessons each discipline can draw from the other. One of the most significant outcomes of this dialogue is an innovative integration of 1) the findings of twentieth- and twenty-first-century phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction (to name but a few salient currents) and 2) classical as well as modern political concepts, such as sovereignty, polity, justice, constitution, statehood, self-determination, etc.

In many instances, the volumes in the series both re-conceptualize age-old political categories in light of contemporary philosophical theses and find broader applications for the ostensibly non- or apolitical aspects of philosophical inquiry. In all cases, political thought and philosophy are featured as equal partners in an interdisciplinary conversation, the goal of which is to bring about a greater understanding of today's rapidly changing political realities.

The series is edited by Michael Marder, Ikerbasque Research Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of the Basque Country, Vitoria-Gasteiz.

Other volumes in the series include:

On Hegel's Philosophy of Right by Martin Heidegger, translated by Andrew J. Mitchell, edited by Peter Trawny, Maria Cavalcante Schubeck, and Michael Marder

Deconstructing Zionism by Michael Marder and Gianni Vattimo

The Metaphysics of Terror by Rasmus Ugilt

Negative Revolution by Artemy Magun

Humanity at Risk by Daniel Innerarity and Javier Solana

The Voice of Conscience by Mika Ojakangas

Democracy of Knowledge by Daniel Innerarity

Politics of the One by Artemy Magun

The Politics of Nihilism

From the Nineteenth Century to Contemporary Israel

Edited by
Roy Ben-Shai and Nitzan Lebovic

B L O O M S B U R Y
NEW YORK • LONDON • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published 2014

© Roy Ben-Shai, Nitzan Lebovic, and contributors, 2014

This book is based on the work of the research group "Nihilism and the Limits of Political Critique" at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, under the directorship of Dr Nitzan Lebovic.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The politics of nihilism : from the nineteenth century to contemporary Israel / edited by Roy Ben-Shai and Nitzan Lebovic, pages cm. — (Political theory and contemporary philosophy)
Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-62356-256-4 (hardback) — ISBN 978-1-62356-148-2 (paperback)

1. Nihilism (Philosophy) 2. Opposition (Political science) 3. Political culture—Israel.
4. Israel—Politics and government. I. Lebovic, Nitzan, 1970- , author, editor of compilation.
II. Ben-Shai, Roy, author, editor of compilation.

HX828.P655 2014
320.9569401—dc23
2014011169

ISBN: HB: 978-1-6235-6256-4
PB: 978-1-6235-6148-2
ePub: 978-1-6235-6698-2
ePDF: 978-1-6235-6172-7

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Printed and bound in the United States of America

Contents

Acknowledgments	vi
Contributors	viii
Introduction	1
1 Nihilism as Stasis: A Plea for a New Hermeneutics of Exposure <i>Nitzan Lebovic</i>	13
2 Less than Nihilism <i>Luca Di Blasi</i>	35
3 Doing Nothing or Nothing Doing? <i>Michael Gillespie</i>	51
4 A Concept of Nihilism for the Coming End of the World <i>Adi Ophir</i>	63
5 Nihilism, Revolt, and the Spectacle <i>Bülent Diken</i>	79
6 The Epistemology of Nihilism in Otto Weininger's <i>Sex and Character</i> <i>Bettina Bergo</i>	103
7 In Sickness and in Health: Nietzsche, Améry, and the "Moral Difference" <i>Roy Ben-Shai</i>	125
8 Nihilism and Repetition: Dahlia Ravikovitch's Reiterations as Critique <i>Liron Mor</i>	151
9 What is a "Manifestly Illegal" Order? Law and Politics after Yoram Kaniuk's <i>Nevelot</i> <i>Itamar Mann</i>	177
10 To Be at Home: Spaces of Citizenship in the Community Settlements of the Galilee <i>Fatima Abreek-Zubeidat and Ronnen Ben-Arie</i>	205
Index	227

continued existence, as we are, into question? If we dared to pass, and tolerate, judgment about it?

In 1966, the first generational transition since the end of World War II, Améry's book was designed for and addressed to the German public, in particular young intellectuals who had to assess their relation to their homeland and the past. Perhaps the fact that in 2001 this book was finally translated into Hebrew signifies the readiness of a new generation of Israelis to make the same kind of assessment, to be *corrupted* as the youth of Athens were once corrupted by a nihilistic Socrates. Many intellectuals on the left are urging us today to move on, to stop being "the victims," so that we can finally have a future. I beg to differ; it is like dropping a stone on one's foot to heal a toothache. Rather than calling to overcome our self-identification as victims, which was never genuine (or wholehearted) in the first place, I would sooner call the Israeli youth to overcome the poisonous myth of manly and heroic invulnerability.

Bibliography

- Améry, Jean. 1980. *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1994. *On Aging: Revolt and Resignation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1999. *On Suicide. A Discourse on Voluntary Death*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1978. *The Life of Mind. Thinking—Willing*. New York: Harvest.
- Bergson, Henri. 1992. *The Creative Mind*. New York: Carol Publishing Group.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. "Truth and Power." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. New York: Harper&Row.
- . 1982. *Nietzsche, Vol. IV: Nihilism*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers.
- . 1991. *Nietzsche, Vol. II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. New York: HarperCollins.
- . 1993. *Basic Writings*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1968. *The Will to Power*. New York: Vintage Books.
- . 1979. *Beyond Good and Evil*. New York: Dover Publications.
- . 1980. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. New York: Vintage Books.
- . 1989. *Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Pattison, George. 2000. *The Later Heidegger*. New York: Routledge.
- Wollin, Richard (ed.). 1993. *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*. Boston: MIT Press.

Nihilism and Repetition: Dahlia Ravikovitch's Reiterations as Critique

Liron Mor

As if Friedrich Nietzsche's famous announcement of the death of God was not dramatic enough, Gilles Deleuze dramatizes it further, employing it to outline a typology of nihilisms based on the various potential meanings of this statement. The first form of nihilism he introduces, the *negative nihilism* of the death of the Judeo-Christian-Pauline God, manifests itself in the will to nothingness—an ascetic rejection of this world, whereby life takes on the value of nil and all trust is vested in higher ideals as grounding all knowledge and values. To it belongs what Nietzsche terms slave morality, the blind obedience to transcendent laws and norms regardless of their content, assigning blames and punishments in order to view oneself as good. The second form, the *reactive nihilism* of the European higher man, who killed God only to put himself in His place, constitutes a reaction to this devaluation of life by annulling higher values themselves. It may therefore be seen as characterizing a critical modern perception of the law: Unlike the Law of ancient philosophy or the Judeo-Christian Law, which were considered to be grounded in some ideal Good, our modern laws are nothing but manifestations of the current state of power struggles and the good is simply determined by the legal.¹ Thus, upon realizing that even when taking the place of God he remains a slave—living a depreciated life and following empty conventions—man has no one to blame but himself. We then end up with the *passive nihilism* of Buddhism, or of the death of Christ as Buddha—the last man's preference of nothingness of

¹ Deleuze elaborates on this modern perception of the law, and on true repetition as set against the law, in his *Difference and Repetition* and "Coldness and Cruelty" (Deleuze 1994; 1991, especially 81–90).

the will over a will to nothingness, his noble acceptance of the destruction of the self itself, of the end of man.²

However, beyond this supposedly linear progression toward absolute annihilation, and at the height of nihilism—precisely at the point where it overcomes itself—we find Nietzsche's hypothesis of *the eternal recurrence of the same* as another type of nihilism. In the eternal recurrence Deleuze recognizes the radical, active nihilism of the superhuman consciousness, the active willing of man's own destruction—in no way an effort to put an end to one's life, but rather joyfully accepting the death of God and actively killing what is "man" in us. Turning the eternal recurrence into the repetition of difference, Deleuze characterizes it as a selection—affirmative, active, creative—whose ultimate end is the most radical form of critique, a critique beyond critique, the transformation of all known values; not a change in values but a change in the very element from which the value of values is derived (Deleuze 2002, 171–175).

Focusing on Israeli poet Dahlia Ravikovitch's (1936–2005) poem "A Lullaby Translated from the Yiddish"³—written in 1989, in response to the exoneration of IDF (Israel Defense Forces) soldiers accused of beating a Palestinian civilian to death—this chapter explores the first three types of nihilism, demonstrating how Ravikovitch exposes the nihilist nature of laws and norms in Israeli society. It further examines whether certain practices of reiteration that the poet utilizes may be seen as instances of the final, active type of nihilism, and whether this should be perceived as the culmination of nihilism or as its very dissolution, a different form of political critique. Analyzing Ravikovitch's practices of reiteration, I show how it is precisely by pushing nihilism to its extreme forms—utilizing the nil itself and the active selective repetition of the eternal recurrence—that Ravikovitch suggests a radical form of critique against the nihilist implications of the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

There are two by-products to this endeavor. Concretizing the fictional concept of the eternal return through reiterative literary devices—namely, allusions and quotations of a certain kind—may aid us in illuminating the idea of the eternal recurrence itself, which is considered impossible to grasp since its active nihilism is allegedly predicated on the destruction of the very

² For Deleuze's typology of Nietzsche's nihilisms as dramatized by the death of God, see Deleuze (2002, 152–156).

³ Hebrew, *Shir 'eres meturgam mi-Yiddish* (Ravikovitch 2010, 334–335).

subject who thinks, or rather experiences, it.⁴ Second, the various types of nihilism surveyed above constitute not only types of interpretations and evaluations of the world, but also types of interpretations and evaluations of the self in its relation to others—ranging from a self that is completely dependent on a transcendental "master" to a superconsciousness that goes beyond itself so as to connect with the world, with others. I therefore argue that this active, critical nihilism is bound up with a necessarily different relation to others.

Indeed, the relation of Ravikovitch's poetry to Palestinian suffering is quite unique in the sphere of Hebrew poetry. Her own generation of poets, the so-called Statehood Generation (1950s–1970s),⁵ tended to shun overtly political issues in favor of mundane and personal experiences, a move commonly viewed as a rebellion against the previous generation—the Palmach Generation. This previous generation consisted mainly of poets who participated in the establishment of the state of Israel and generally prided themselves on the nationalist character of their work.⁶ While Ravikovitch's political poetry is not satisfied with this self-obsessed enclosed subject and therefore clearly differs from the poetry of her own generation, it nonetheless avoids merely returning to the methods of the Palmach Generation. Those nationalist poets, even when attempting to step outside of themselves in writing about the Palestinian disaster of 1948 (the *Nakba*), tended to view it through the lens of the Jewish Holocaust, enslaving the former to latter, rendering the Holocaust the cause and justification for the *Nakba* and whitewashing its crimes.⁷ Between a complete disengagement from the other, left in its radical alterity and rendered fully inaccessible, and its absolute subsumption under one's own language—which leaves nothing of the other's alterity in place, thereby missing it altogether—Ravikovitch's political poetry suggests a third, more ethical, alternative. It is through her use of poetic reiterations, as I will demonstrate below, that

⁴ This heuristic analogy between eternal recurrence and poetic reiterations seems quite sensible taking into account their similarities: citation, either by quoting or alluding, like eternal recurrence, seems to be self-annihilating and, like eternal recurrence, is in fact selective, emphasizing difference—fragmenting texts, we select elements to be repeated and thus affirmed, and interpreting them creatively we are able to reinvent the rules of the game, the criteria for judging.

⁵ Among the prominent poets of the Statehood Generation are Yehuda Amichay, David Avidan, Yona Wallach, Meir Wieseltier, Natan Zach, and others.

⁶ Central to this generation of poets were Natan Alterman, Avraham Shlonsky, Amir Gilboa and Haim Gouri, among others. For a discussion of the history of poetry in Israel as a generational struggle, or an Oedipal rebellion against the father, and Ravikovitch's place within it see (Gluzman 2010, 173–174).

⁷ As Hannan Hever demonstrates in his introduction to the collection *Al Tagidu be-Gat* (Hever 2010, 9–55).

Ravikovitch articulates a certain relation to the other that is based on fiction and thus avoids both representing the other and disengaging from her, and which I here term sympathy.⁸

Like many of Ravikovitch's political poems, "A Lullaby Translated from the Yiddish" directly addresses the issue of the nihilism of the law and ethical judgment by presenting a certain case for us to evaluate, as though constructing—or rather, reconstructing—a trial of sorts.⁹ Written in 1989 in the wake of a military trial known as the Giv'ati Case, this poem not only stages a trial but also refers to a recent one. The case revolved around an incident that occurred on August 22, 1988, during the First Palestinian Intifada, at the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, when four Giv'ati Brigade IDF soldiers fatally beat a father and his teenage son during the apprehension of the son, allegedly involved in stone-throwing. The father and son were then detained and brought to the military post, where later that night the father, Hani al-Shami, died of his wounds. The four soldiers were prosecuted for manslaughter in a Military Court, claiming in their defense to have been merely following orders.¹⁰ When a later beating at the military post by other, supposedly unknown, IDF soldiers came to be regarded as the *more direct* cause of al-Shami's death, the military judges acquitted the defendants of manslaughter, finding them guilty of brutality alone and never prosecuting the soldiers involved in the later beating.¹¹ Evidently, the nature of the law here is such that it is only interested in the question "is this the case?"—that is, whether or not this case falls under the category of the offense, here translated into the question "is it or is it not a

⁸ I use the term sympathy here, rather than other similar expressions—such as empathy, for example—for three main reasons. First, its etymology suggests participating in the pain of others, feeling *with* them (from Greek *sympatheia*: *syn-* "together" and *pathos* "feeling"), and it therefore more adequately signifies Ravikovitch's specific relation to others, which will be discussed below. Second, the concept of sympathy has a long, rich history in political thought, especially in the thought of the eighteenth century, when central figures such as Adam Smith, David Hume, and Edmund Burke were discussing its power as an aesthetic, ethical, and political emotion, capable of tying society together. Finally, the word is already in use in the pejorative term "Palestinian sympathizer," serving to denote precisely those who maintain an empathic and supportive relation to Palestinians.

⁹ On the proliferation of trials in Ravikovitch's writing and their staging as a site of strife between conflicting interpretations, see Szobel (2013, especially 43–48).

¹⁰ These orders—stipulating that during apprehension, suspects of disturbance of peace should be beaten to the point of broken limbs, regardless of whether or not they resist arrest—were indeed, as a defense witnesses pointed out, congruent with the spirit of the phrase coined by the Israeli Minister of Defense at the time, Yitzhak Rabin, famously calling upon the IDF "to break their arms and legs" (see in the ruling itself, Kassim 1989, 196. For discussions of Rabin's deplorable statement, see Gordon 2008, 157; Grossman 2003, 10).

¹¹ Everyone involved in this case—defendants, investigators, and witnesses who allegedly saw the beating at the post—claimed no knowledge (or recollection) of the identity of any of those who took part in this fatal beating (Kassim 1989, 190–191).

case of manslaughter?" The work of judgment here is merely concerned with subsuming this particular case under a universal category and hence shows no interest in the questions of who actually committed the offense, why, and how, just as it shows no interest in the question of its actual ethics. In Nietzsche and Deleuze's terms, it is the negative nihilism of delegating all moral criteria to the law, exempting oneself of genuine evaluation. However, Ravikovitch's poem—asking rather "which is the case," "of what type it is"¹²—contests this nihilistic dimension of the law through its reiterations and offers a different perspective for interpreting and evaluating the case, one founded on sympathy.

Interestingly, this poem is the only one in Ravikovitch's *Complete Poems* (*Kol ha-shirim*) that is itself repeated, being published in two versions—an earlier one, bearing the full title "A Lullaby Translated from the Yiddish," and a later one, simply titled "A Lullaby" (*Shir 'eres*), as though no longer in need to be as obvious about its "origin" or about the very fact of being a reiteration. This self-attested repetition is, however, the very reason I chose to focus here on the earlier version. Additionally, and unlike the later version, this version incorporates quotations of testimonies from the judicial decision in this case, quotations that constitute the first form of poetic reiteration discussed here.

The second form of poetic reiteration employed by Ravikovitch, a certain kind of allusion, is implied by the title, which proclaims the poem itself to be a repetition—not an exact rendering but rather a slightly altered one, a translation. What is supposedly translated here is a Yiddish lullaby. It is not, however, any particular lullaby, but rather an archetype of this Eastern European Jewish genre, which was traditionally combined with the genre of lamentation song and used

¹² Against what he calls "the judgment of God"—that is, Kantian determinative judgment or transcendental judgment—which is merely interested in the Socratic question "what is x?" or "is this x?," and is therefore only concerned with subsuming particular objects or cases under universal categories and rules—Deleuze sets up a notion of Nietzschean immanent evaluation based rather on the question "which is the case?," "of which type it is?" (Deleuze 2002, 20, 76–79; Kant 1996, A132/B172). It may be tempting to perceive the alternative form of evaluation that I am about to present here in terms of Kantian reflective judgment, especially in its aesthetic forms, for reflective judgment is indeed concerned with the particular and employs the imagination in order to generate a universal rule (or a principle, a category, or a concept) in order to account for it (Kant 1987, 18–20). However, by way of anticipation of my argument in Section II, I would like to stress that the idea of a generalizable type as a mode of evaluation has nothing to do with creating a universal; its generalization is always local and limited and in no way assumes universality. While the evaluation of a type may in fact rely on similarities and differences in relation to precedents, for example (and as such is related to the legal tradition of the common law, as opposed to the codified civil law), it is closer to a search of a certain concrete episteme of a particular era in a particular place—or, in Deleuze's words, "a type is a reality which is simultaneously biological, psychical, historical, social and political" (Deleuze 2002, 115).

to grieve and protest persecution and devastation (Kronfeld 2010, 527–528). The translation process here refers primarily to the importation of the form of the Yiddish lullaby into the Israeli-Palestinian reality, so as to lament and oppose the persecution of Palestinians by IDF soldiers. In order to do so, however, Ravikovitch must evacuate the Yiddish lullaby of its Jewish protagonists, at least partially, actively introducing some nil into it, in order to allow others to temporarily and simultaneously take a place in it.¹³ This is achieved already through the ambiguity concerning the target language of this translation. On the surface, the poem seems to “translate” the language and cultural heritage of Yiddish into those of Modern Hebrew, the language in which it is in fact written. However, the poem may also be understood as a “translation” from Yiddish culture to the Arabic experience of a Gaza refugee camp, even if it was never written in either of these languages. This ambiguity, attained by hollowing out Ravikovitch’s own heritage as she repeats it, is central to the political-effect of the poem, for it manifests the active nihilism Deleuze finds in Nietzsche, which may serve to combat the nihilism of the law.

I

The poem consists of three lullaby stanzas, separated by two blocks of quotations from the judges’ decision in this case. Since Ravikovitch’s critique of nihilism is largely found in the middle part of the poem, I will introduce the first stanza briefly and circle back to it later.

Mama and Grandma shall sing,
shining-white mothers of yours.
The wing of Mama’s shawl
is touching the covers almost.
Mama and Grandma shall sing
an ancient and mournful tune;¹⁴

¹³ This gesture, which becomes even more explicit in the final stanza, suggests a transgression of a tacit command that is increasingly upheld in Israel—never to compare any calamity to the Holocaust or to any other anti-Semitic persecutions (which are the main concern in Yiddish lamentation lullabies) (on this command, see Ophir 2001, 12–21). Most recently, a bill was introduced in the Israeli parliament, legally banning the use of Holocaust symbols and vocabulary when not in reference to the Holocaust itself, thus limiting any such comparisons and identifications.

¹⁴ The translation is mine. It is, however, in dialogue with Bloch and Kronfeld’s translation of the later version of the poem, titled “Lullaby,” which appeared in the most recent English collection of Ravikovitch’s poems (Ravikovitch 2009, 219–220).

These first few lines already contain Ravikovitch’s poetic justice in a nutshell. They fashion the classic setting of a lullaby—the physical intimacy of mothers tending over the bed of a sleeping, or about to be sleeping, child—and situate Ravikovitch’s trial within it, as a song, a poetic search for justice, addressed to a half-anesthetized, largely disinterested puerile audience. As we will see, these verses, like the title, produce an ambiguity as to the mothers’ identity by hollowing out the form of the Yiddish lullaby, opening their figures up to be occupied by Palestinians as well, thereby involving the readers in an active interpretation. Finally, they intimate a certain repetition by referencing a generational cycle and indicate that any judgment is suspended, is only to-come, by staging the entire scene in the future tense, as though this song, the alternative trial, is not the one we are reading but is rather yet to be sung.

Additionally, these opening lines position the reader as the addressee of the poem—the child who is being put to sleep. In line with the ambiguity discussed above, the readers are put either in the position of a young Israeli child, about to hear the story of the Giv’ati Case and hopefully grow up to be critical of the situation it discloses, or in the place of a Palestinian child, perhaps the very Palestinian child who was the victim of the Giv’ati soldiers.¹⁵ Thus, we are made to take the place of both an Israeli and a Palestinian child, both a victim and a future judge of this case, and therefore evaluate this case by imaginatively experiencing the situation of the victim rather than merely assessing it as a removed object.

Captured thus by the singing mothers, put in the place of the passive listening child, the reader is now presented with a certain scene from the case, which is about to be repeated three times throughout the poem:

in the dark cordon in Jabalya
set down, clasped in each other,
a broken father, spitting langue-blood,
and his fifteen-year-old son.

This scene, of the shattered father and son being held by each other,¹⁶ portrays a specific moment in the chain of events, after they had already been beaten at their home, detained, and brought to the post, where they experienced further violence. The posture depicted recalls the iconography of a *Pietà*, the scene of

¹⁵ In her reading of the later version of the poem, Dana Ulmert suggests another possibility—that the lullaby is addressed to a different son of al-Shami, a brother of the one involved in this affair (Ulmert 2010, 438).

¹⁶ This reciprocity is further emphasized in the Hebrew original (*ahuzim ze ba-ze*).

the lamenting Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Christ,¹⁷ and mirrors the singing mothers in their intimate scene over the child's bed. I will return to this posture and the associations it raises shortly.

Ravikovitch then interrupts the form of the lullaby in order to introduce the first quotation from the judicial decision—an excerpt of a witness testimony—which repeats the very scene that was just portrayed by the poet, yet in a language aspiring to the objectivity of legal discourse:

The first witness who referred to the assault on the deceased at the post was Second-Lieutenant Zaken, Shimon... At the beginning of his testimony the witness notes that he remembers the incident... The deceased was wearing a white *galabiyya* stained with blood... The witness noted that at the time the deceased and his son were leaning against the wall, shoulder to shoulder... Second-Lieutenant Zaken notes that at that time he threatened the deceased and told him to shut his mouth.

Notice Ravikovitch's omissions, her emptying out of the legal text as her efforts are primarily focused on extrapolating this specific scene of *Pietà*. The first ellipsis indicates the omission of some concrete details about the witness, such as his identification number and position, while the second marks the omission of the context of the incident, "during which the deceased and his son arrived at the post and were leaning on the western wall of the [soldiers'] rooms" (Kassim 1989, 198). The third ellipsis stands for the omission of the witness' reported account of his attempt to converse with al-Shami: "He tried to speak with the deceased, asked his name and address, but only heard him groaning 'I want to die.'"¹⁸ Just as Ravikovitch dismisses the supposedly concrete details of the witness' identity and of the context of the event, so too she rejects Second-Lieutenant Zaken's account, reported by the judges, of al-Shami's words on this occasion, despite their dramatic effect. Repeating al-Shami's refusal to give his formal details to Zakan, Ravikovitch refuses to put words in his mouth that are three times removed from their source. She does not allege to know what al-Shami said or felt under the circumstances; she merely focuses on the bodily aspects of the scene, now "corroborated" by the quotation from the decision—the father and son leaning toward each other in a kind of mutual *Pietà* while blood is oozing out of the father's mouth.

¹⁷ In the later version of the poem, this image of the mournful mother is further echoed in mentioning "Rachel weeping for her children," as a kind of "Jewish" version of the Mournful Virgin (for the poem, see Ravikovitch 2010, 241; 2009, 219).

¹⁸ For the full testimony, see Kassim (1989, 198).

Why does Ravikovitch omit these concrete details, emptying out and fragmenting the quotation from the testimony? Why does she repeat the same scene instead of adding new ones? Why does she focus most of her efforts on these bodies, their posture, and their suffering? It is only in the next stanza, which reintroduces the form of the lullaby, that we learn against what Ravikovitch is struggling and by what means.

Moving in his sleep, the child,
shaking his innocent head.
Four angels from the throne of glory
flapping their wings above him.
Suddenly trembling seized him
and his mouth dried up like straw.
It is only a nightmare you witnessed,
a dream and not reality.
Back to sleep, my dear, apple of my eye,
nothing has happened yet.

The child is suddenly awakened by a horrific dream, which is described as the most astonishing religious revelation. Echoing a long tradition of lamentation, the stanza mentions the throne of glory from the Book of Jeremiah (*Jer.* 17:12, NIV) and the four angels of the throne, alluding to a mystical revelation in the Book of Ezekiel, when the workings of heaven are revealed to the prophet in the form of a throne engulfed by four heavenly hybrid creatures (*Ezek.* 1:26). This description therefore refers us to the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, both of whom forebode the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple due to the Israelites' sins.¹⁹ With this allusion in mind, the child's revelation seems like one of reproach, foretelling the punishment and destruction of those who had transgressed God's laws by their murderous act, a punishment that is still to come, for, as the wording of the poem has it, "nothing has happened yet."

With these allusions in mind, this revelation seems to follow the logic of negative nihilism, the resignation to transcendent laws and ethical codes while neglecting life in this world, the implications of violence on living bodies,

¹⁹ Moreover, since this revelation leads the child to be seized by trembling (Hebrew, "*ra'ada ahaza bo*"), it also alludes to a verse in the Book of Isaiah, which depicts the fear and trembling that seize sinners upon God's destructive journey to exalt His glory: "The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips [seizes, *ahaza*] the godless: 'Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire?' (*Isa.* 33:14). The answer to this question is clarified in the next verse: only the righteous will survive.

and the duty to perform ethical interpretations and evaluations of one's own. However, since these references appear in the poem immediately after the presentation of the brutalized father and son, they may also be perceived as ironically characterizing the brutal, senseless orders that the Giv'ati soldiers allegedly received—to break the limbs of disturbers of peace whether or not they resist arrest—as following the tautological logic of negative nihilism: That is, as acceptable, even good, simply because they came from above. Within this logic, the soldiers' obedience was "good" (regardless of the brutality inflicted) on the condition that this was indeed the order given, for the order itself must have been good. Hence, the judges' obsessive attempts throughout most of the trial to determine whether those were in fact the orders—so as to determine the culpability of the soldiers—become a grotesque embodiment of this nightmarish tautological logic.

However, the nightmare can also be understood as the terror produced precisely by the fact that nothing has happened yet, that no punishment had come upon the transgressors—for the brutal soldiers were acquitted of manslaughter and the murderers were never prosecuted. As such, the terror pertains to both Israeli and Palestinian children, now taught by their mothers that any hope of punishment for the attackers is merely "a dream and not a reality." These allusions thus question the authority of the law in its purest form—the Godly law, the transcendent, universal law that is one with the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of the Absolute Himself—for it does not correlate to its consequences. At the very least, these allusions establish that any such system of Godly judgment, in which there is perfect correlation between the moral good, the law, and its consequences, belongs in dreams and is no longer part of this world. This perspective embodies the turn toward reactive nihilism—annihilating all higher values just to be left with the horror of no values in this world—which then culminates in the passive nihilism of sleep.

This turn from negative to reactive nihilism—a very subtle turn, for, as Deleuze points out, the two are rather interdependent and consist of the same type of depreciated life (Deleuze 2002, 25–29)—was itself played out during this specific trial, when, in a highly unorthodox step, the brutality itself and the legitimacy of the orders came to be examined. Once the causal link between the beating at the house and al-Shami's death had been loosened, the military judges could not but acquit the defendants of manslaughter, in line with the "yes or no" logic of legal judgment. Yet, in this case, whose "uniqueness" is emphasized over

and over again throughout their decision,²⁰ the judges exceptionally found the defendants guilty of brutality, ruling that they should have refused the order to beat non-resisting suspects, for the order was itself "manifestly illegal" (Kassim 1989, 236).

As explained, and complicated, by Itamar Mann in his contribution to this volume, a "manifestly illegal order" is a specific legal category within the Israeli military codex referring to an order that is so patently illegal and immoral that soldiers ought to disobey it (as opposed to a merely illegal order, which soldiers are in fact required to obey).²¹ By taking an apparently legislative, sovereign stance, putting themselves in some external meta-position and rendering this specific order exceptionally illegal, the judges did not reestablish some higher principle of moral good beyond the law or the order. Rather, by this exception, they fundamentally legalized and sanctioned all other immoral and illegal orders—including the ones that were given in the military post and might have led, according to the ruling itself, to al-Shami's death. The law's self-correction in the form of the "manifestly illegal order" does not solve the problem of its nihilism, but rather leads to that nihilism of a second order—reactive nihilism.

II

The way Ravikovitch relates to this case, however, is in every way opposed to this logic of the judgment by law. In her poetic reworking of this legal affair, she does not ask herself whether or not this is the case, whether or not the four Giv'ati soldiers directly caused al-Shami's death, whether or not those were the orders, or whether or not they were legal. This dichotomous logic is of little help to her. Furthermore, Ravikovitch is not interested in what actions exactly took place and in what words were allegedly uttered. Rather, she is concerned with the questions "which is the case?" "of what type is it?" and with the very bodies of the victims themselves, presenting them to us as almost-physical evidence. This is one form of Ravikovitch's political reiteration, the form of a quotation, with which this section is concerned.

²⁰ See, for example, Kassim (1989, 186–188).

²¹ This legal term was first introduced by Judge Binyamin Levi in his decision in the affair of the Kafr Qasim massacre in 1957 (Parush 1990). As Leora Bilsky showed, Levi was a central figure in the Holocaust trials of the 1950s and the 1960s and an advocate of harsh punishments to Jewish collaborators with the Nazis (Bilsky 2001).

Quotations, as a collection of examples, are the exact opposite of the horizontal, universal, and abstract law that is grounded only in itself. They are always particular, concrete cases, which, by the very act of repetition, are imbedded in a vertical tradition, thereby calling for an evaluation according to their similarities and differences in relation to their precedents and according to the criteria they themselves suggest. This evaluation is never a sentencing; its verdict is forever differed, for the body of text is still addressed to anyone who positions herself as its reader. As particular examples, quotations do not attempt to represent anything; they certainly do not seek to abstract any universal logic pertaining to each and every case. Rather, they merely present, physically importing a body of text and positing it before us.

Let us examine these notions in Ravikovitch's second quotation from the Judgment:

Another witness, Corporal Teperberg, Haim . . . noticed the deceased, who was walking bending forward and was set down next to the wall. He was leaning against the wall and putting his head on his son's shoulder. At that time, blood was oozing from his mouth.

Why does Ravikovitch repeat the same exact scene for the third time, again emptying out the testimony of any concrete or new details? She omits all these details that may have been relevant to the questions posed by the judges because she is concerned with something else entirely—namely, the body and its suffering posture. This selective quotation, eliminating everything but the body, is a desperate attempt to relate to an other as he is, without any representation that would impose her own language on him—without putting words in his mouth, thoughts in his head, or feelings in his gestures. As a literary excursion, having no real access to the bodies of these others, this attempt is of course destined to fail; however, this does not prevent Ravikovitch from asymptotically aspiring to articulate nothing more than these bodies, thereby testifying to the preposterousness of the legal system's pretense to know these others and this event inside and out and give a conclusive verdict on the matter.

Ravikovitch's practice of quotation emphasizes the inanity of this pretense further: first, because it showcases the discrepancies between the different witnesses' accounts (and between those and her own), thus demonstrating the impossibility of knowing anything beyond the mere fact of the suffering body; second, because her practice of quotation itself repeats the same gesture as the attempt to present the body in itself, without representation: instead of reporting

the event of the trial, instead of criticizing its proceedings and this aspiration for objective knowledge—for critique is still within the realm of representation—Ravikovitch merely brings parts of it into her text. It is a nearly physical importation of fragments of the Judgment into her poem in an attempt to avoid any representation whatsoever. This attempt, again, remains merely asymptotic, for any selection must in fact involve some interpretation. However, since the selection of the parts of text is primarily focused on descriptions of suffering bodies, both form and content here unite in accentuating a certain surplus of the body, particularly the suffering body, over the logic of the law.

Ravikovitch's selections therefore force us to look at this specific case, at this specific body brought before us, leaving behind the legal yes/no questions and their universalist disjunctive logic. We are no longer required to judge whether or not this is the case the law stipulates, but rather, asking "which is the case," "of which type it is," we must actively invent a rule, a logic, that may account for this case, that may allow us to evaluate it. But what is the type that Ravikovitch finds in this case as a rule for interpreting and evaluating it? It is none other than the type of the *Pietà*, which she discerns in the posture of the bodies themselves. Emphasizing this type—by repeating the same bodily scene three times and mirroring it in constructing the entire poem as a lullaby—Ravikovitch suggests that we evaluate the case according to its posture and the traditional iconographies it recalls. This *Pietà* scene may be seen not only as forging a link between the beaten son in Jabalya and the dozing-off child in the poem (and between the dying father and the child who is falling asleep)—thus further strengthening the ambivalent positioning of the reader—but also as bringing into consideration the often-neglected perspective of women and mothers. Many scholars have claimed that Ravikovitch makes ample use of her perspective as a woman to undermine the national narrative and transgress national boundaries by sympathizing with other "private" women.²² However, Ravikovitch goes here beyond any personal identification—as a woman, as a mother, or as an orphan who lost her father as a child. By the redoubling of the

²² The imagining of the suffering of other women and mothers through her own experience as a woman and a mother seems to characterize much of Ravikovitch's poetry, especially in her book *Mother with a Child*. (Hebrew, *Ima 'im yeled*) In her poem "A Mother Walks Around" (Hebrew, *Ima mithalekhet*), for example, Ravikovitch is striving to imagine the suffering that a pregnant Palestinian woman whose fetus was killed by the IDF might experience in giving birth to a dead child and living the rest of her life in his absence. Throughout her poetic attempt to understand, Ravikovitch maintains the future tense and the counterfactual form—that is, narrating the events that will not happen, but could have happened, had this child been born. (For the poem, see Ravikovitch 2010, 234, 2009, 214–215.) For discussions of the place of motherhood and femininity in Ravikovitch's poetry, see Kronfeld (2010); Szobel (2013); Tzamir (2010); Ulmert (2010).

mothers in the father and son, Ravikovitch imports this scene of pity, of pain for the suffering of others, along with the lullaby scene, into her reconstituted court, thus taking the case out of the male environment of the military post or the courtroom, placing it in relation to other historical sufferings, and introducing a new logic for its evaluation: the logic of a sympathetic relation, of pity, that is inherent in the lullaby itself—for ultimately, a lullaby is nothing other than a parent fictionally attempting to relate, from within their own monologue, to an other that is physically present yet verbally inaccessible. In other words, unlike other scholars, I do not believe that Ravikovitch simply uses her “femininity” or “motherhood” in order to relate to other women or mothers, thus accepting given gender divides. Rather, while recognizing that she indeed has nothing at her disposal other than these constructions, she pokes holes in them and imaginatively uses them to relate to those who are not necessarily women or mothers. She uses the position in which she is already imbedded and repeats it differently precisely in order to relate to those who do not immediately belong to the same category, thereby challenging the category itself. As we will see in the next section, Ravikovitch makes similar use of the category of her Jewishness.

This process—inventing new rules according to the case itself, while insisting on its difference—is, according to Deleuze, characteristic of the active selection of the eternal recurrence. Yes, there are many cases like this one, and they repeat time and again. But instead of judging them according to a pre-given law, we may choose to evaluate each of them creatively according to the criteria it suggests—in this case, following the logic of the *Pietà* and the lullaby. Deleuze uses Nietzsche’s metaphor of the dice-throw to clarify this aspect of eternal recurrence. We may cast the dice over and over again, waiting for the winning combination according to the rules of the game, the one that will allow us to roll again. Or we can reinvent the rules of the game each time the dice fall back on the table, affirming the result by creatively extrapolating a rule out of it in order to “win” and bring back the dice throw (Deleuze 2002, 25–29). The bad player counts on the return of the combination by the repetition of throws; the good player obtains the repetition of the dice-throw in the fatally rolled number. This is Deleuze’s definition of the repetition of difference: Unlike the repetition of the same, the repetition interpreted and evaluated according to a preexisting rule, it is a repetition that creatively selects, reads the difference in each return, and invents rules to account for and evaluate it.

Moreover, according to Deleuze, the repetition of difference, the eternal return, also eliminates from returning all reactive forces, negating negation itself,

its *ressentiment* and will to nothingness, thus bringing about a transmutation of values (Deleuze 2002, 68–71). For Ravikovitch, this means that her repetition of the “same” scene eliminates everything that has to do with preexisting laws and their logic—the concrete details of the witnesses, the militaristic context, the descriptions of the orders and the beatings, all presented in the ruling in order to answer the question “is this the case?” Rather than judging the case by these preconceived universal rules, she invents a new, temporary one, immanently evaluating the case according to what she creatively selects in its returning, according to the type she both recognizes and constructs. It is thus that quotation can approximate the active, selective, and creative selection of the eternal recurrence.

III

Let us now return to the first stanza and to that second form of nihilistic reiteration that Ravikovitch implements—the ambiguity produced by her practice of allusions, by introducing a certain absence into the reiteration of her own tradition. While the shawl (Hebrew, *mitpahat*), for example, worn by the singing mother in the opening stanza, seems at first as a specifically Jewish attribute, the word *mitpahat* in no way signifies Jewish head covers alone and may in fact refer to any kind of head covers, including Muslim ones (or even to other forms of fabrics worn or held by the mother). Similarly, while the characterization of the mothers as “shining white mothers,” as pure and holy mothers, is a convention of the Yiddish lullaby (Kronfeld 2010, 522), the redoubling of the mother in the figure of the grandmother does not belong to these conventions and therefore opens them up to other connotations: Since in the following four verses we learn of the violent incident at Jabalya, one of the ways to make sense of this redoubling is to understand the two mothers as singing each to her own son—that is, the Palestinian child from Jabalya, the mother’s son, and his (dead) father, the grandmother’s son. Thus, the “holy mothers” convention of the Yiddish lullaby, just like the *mitpahat*, is opened up to being potentially occupied by Palestinians as well.

This enlisting of “Jewish” symbols and conventions and their opening up to be occupied, at least partially and potentially, by others, culminate in the sixth line, when we learn that the song to be sung, presenting the Giv’ati case, is “an ancient and mournful tune” (Hebrew, *zemer ‘atik ye-nugeh*). This phrase is not merely an

ironic comment about the affair, portraying it as the regretful repeated behavior of IDF soldiers; it also merges together, and thus hollows out, two canonical Hebrew poems, “Mournful Song” (*Zemer nugeh*), written by Raḥel Bluwstein in the 1920s, and “Ancient Tune” (*Nigun ’atik*), written by Natan Alterman in the 1950s. While these poems, which were set to music and are therefore widely known in Israel, seem so particularly Israeli, their contents, as unrequited love songs, aspire to the universality of human experience. However, this attempt at universality—composing melancholy love songs whose story is as ancient as time, only purely in Hebrew—is itself part and parcel of the national enterprise, for it positions Hebrew poetry as one national corpus amongst all others and situates Israel itself—whose canon, too, now consists of ancient mournful tunes and is thus itself as ancient as time—as one nation amongst all others.²³ Ravikovitch’s placing of these poems in the mouths of the two lamenting mothers not only hollows out the canon of Hebrew poetry to make room in it for the mournful and long-familiar tune of soldiers’ brutality toward Palestinians, but also redeems these poems of their universalist aspirations, tying them back up to their locality, and precisely thereby exposing their nationalist ambition and transgressing their national boundaries. After all, the “ancient and mournful tune” that the mothers are about to sing is the very story of the violent murder in Jabalya.

This tactic of repeating her own tradition while hollowing it out, just like her critique of the political situation and its discourse, is recurrent in Ravikovitch’s poetry. Of special importance here is her known poem “Hovering at a Low Altitude” (1982). Ravikovitch opens this poem, which then proceeds to depict the rape and murder of a young Palestinian girl, by declaring, “I am not here” (*Ani lo kan*). While it appears at first as an absolute negation of the self or as a form of nihilist escapism, this nonsensical formula—“I am not here”—encapsulates in fact the logic of Ravikovitch’s self-evacuating practice of reiteration as a struggle against ethical nihilism. It is at once an ironic rendering of an escapist spirit and an emblem of the practice of sharing our “here” with other bodies and voices by removing some of the self.²⁴ The “I” that suspends itself from “here” makes room for others to appear; however, since by indexing a “here” with its finger the “I” cannot be fully absent, Ravikovitch’s formula marks this active partial removal of the self as a political act and suggests that

²³ Tsamir makes similar claims in relation to the Statehood Generation in Hebrew poetry (Tsamir 2006).

²⁴ On the status of the self in “Hovering at a Low Altitude” (Hebrew, *Reḥifa be-gova namukh*), compare: Kronfeld (2010); Ulmert (2010).

she relates to others and their suffering precisely through the “here” of her “I.” In “A Lullaby Translated from the Yiddish”—like in many other political poems in Ravikovitch’s *Mother with a Child* and *True Love*²⁵—the “I am Not Here” formula is consistently utilized, as Jewish identity, tradition, and experience do not merely serve as an alternative to those of Zionism, but also as an arsenal of cultural and historical experiences, as that “here” that helps her get closer to, and sympathize with, others. Ravikovitch seems to understand the suffering of Palestinians not by separating herself from the Jewish collective and its history (including the occupation of Palestine itself), but rather by making this history all the more present: she recruits her heritage to the fullest degree in order to allow her “I” not to be “here,” in order to create some empty space for the other to appear.

This poetic practice of hollowing out the self is congruent with the affirmative forgetting that Deleuze discovers in Nietzsche. According to Nietzsche, memory is the “festering wound” (Nietzsche 2000a, 6) of the base man—it is the *ressentiment* and the spirit of revenge of the nihilist who ceaselessly blames and accuses, who knows all too well “how to not forget” (Nietzsche 2000b, 1, 10), and never acts on her painful emotions. The noble, active, and creative, on the other hand, know how to actively forget (Deleuze 2002, 116). It is only in active forgetting that one can truly love one’s enemy (Nietzsche 2000b, 1, 10). Overcoming a nihilistic attitude requires this active selection, deciding which burdens we can let go of, what memories we can eliminate from future returns. Klossowski, even more so than Deleuze, makes this forgetting “[coincide] with the revelation of the [Eternal] Return,” since in it “I learn that I was other than I am now for having forgotten this truth, and thus that I have become another by learning it” (Klossowski 1997, 57). This active selective annihilation of the self—literally, an active nihilism—is the second sense of radical nihilism, as an overcoming of nihilism by pushing it to its limits and as a new form of critique, which is found in Ravikovitch’s reiterations.

While this practice recognizes a basic similarity between the self and the other, thus relating to her through speculating upon one’s own experience, Ravikovitch’s sympathetic relation does not consume this other for it assumes and marks differences through the nil, without describing that different being.

²⁵ This is most readily apparent in a section in *True Love* (*Ahava amitit*) titled “Issues in Contemporary Judaism” (*Sugiyot be-Yahadut bat-zemanenu*), which, as its name clearly suggests, contemporizes issues traditionally regarded as Jewish, rendering them relevant to the recent political situation in Israel–Palestine, often by opening them up to being occupied by Palestinians as well (Ravikovitch 2010, 199–208; 2009, 189–198).

The Palestinian mothers putting the child to sleep in this poem are in no way equated with Jewish mothers in Yiddish lullabies—such a repetition of the same would merely trivialize their pain by universalizing it, turning all suffering into one and the same suffering.²⁶ Similarly, had Ravikovitch attempted to speak for them or give them a concrete form from within her own language, she would have simply erased their alterity and specificity. Instead, it is her own heritage that she repeats but with a difference—selectively, with gaps, according to the logic of the “I am not here”—so that the differences of this specific case may shine forth. Whatever interpretation is produced in this gap constantly attests to the fact that it is merely fictional and could have been produced differently. This is accomplished not only through the ambiguity surrounding the mothers’ identities, but also by the narration of the scene in the future tense—suggesting that the events may unfold otherwise—and by the use of qualifiers, such as the “almost” describing the encounter between the shawl and the covers as a metonymy for the encounter between mother and son.²⁷

The labeling of this lullaby as a translation seems less arbitrary considering that this hollowing out and making room appears to be the very definition of translation. Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay “The Task of the Translator,” for example, emphasizes precisely this gap, which is produced, according to him, by any translation: “Whereas content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds [...] and thus remains unsuited to its content, overpowering and alien” (Benjamin 2004, 258). The very process of translation therefore necessarily creates a gap between the language of the translation and “its content,” between the reiteration and its supposed origin. The repetition of the textual heritage of the self with a difference, the repetition of the form of the Yiddish lullaby in Modern Hebrew in relation to Palestinian suffering, thus necessarily introduces this “overpowering and alien” gap.

²⁶ This form of relating to Palestinian suffering, equating it with historical Jewish suffering, is prevalent in Hebrew poetry—or, at least among those few Israeli poets who attempted to fathom Palestinian pain (see, e.g., Hever 2010).

²⁷ This signaling of the fictionality of her account and the fact that it could have been produced differently is most prominently achieved in Ravikovitch’s poetry by her characterization through counterfactuals, which serves her to tacitly present an alternative story to the one she is engaged in telling and to fictionally speculate about others without imposing her interpretation upon them as a truth claim. See, for example, “Hovering at a Low Altitude,” where she relates to a young Palestinian girl by listing the things she is not and the things she has not done, and the aforementioned “A Mother Walks Around,” in which Ravikovitch narrates the events that a dead Palestinian baby and his mother will not experience, but could have potentially experienced, were it to be born (Ravikovitch 2010, 179, 234; 2009, 174, 214).

Maurice Blanchot takes this gaping a step further, claiming that this spacing of the text, infusing it with “the privilege of ambiguity and instability,” is the very definition of a *good* translation, for when a translation is successful, it not only brings with it a “feeling of a light space between the words and what they aim at,” as in Benjamin’s metaphor, but also makes these meanings “oscillate mysteriously between many forms whose perfect suitability is not enough to restrain them” (Blanchot 1995, 180). By creating gaps, good translations evoke all the other possible translations for the text before us, hence “[involving] us in restoring to them in silence all that the passage from one language to another has made them lose, and all that no language would ever have allowed them to express” (Blanchot 1995, 189). Blanchot therefore considers a good translation to be the quintessential literary act: by gaping, it opens up a sea of potential meanings, thus involving us in active reading and interpretation, while indicating that any interpretation, including that of the translator herself, is merely experimental and temporary and could have been otherwise.²⁸ This is, I argue, precisely what Ravikovitch achieves in this poem, which thus justifies its title to the last degree.

IV

Mama and grandma are singing a song
so that you sleep without harm, tender child,
holy mothers are watching over you.
Here, a twig from above you fell as well.²⁹

²⁸ At the same time, the questions of translation also epitomize the quandary of relating to the other. The incessant negotiations between an impossible absolute faithfulness to the original and an equally impossible absolute freedom from it are ever-present in theories of translation throughout history. The entire question of translation lies between the extremes of absolute untranslatability—the impossibility of accessing the other for it is so foreign that it cannot be translated—and radical translatability, the complete reduction of others to the language of the self due to the absence of any markers indicating a shared meaning beyond what I imagine in my own language. Translations are precisely the texts whose manner of relating to the other lies in-between those impossible extremes. The fact that translations do exist, however, constantly undermines this assumed impasse and attests to the fact that some relation to others is always already in place, therefore the question should rather be how does this relation operate. For a historical survey of the negotiations between faithfulness and freedom in translation, see, for example, Bassnett (2002); Bassnett and Lefevere (1998).

²⁹ In the Hebrew—“*hine gam zalzal me’alekha tsanak*”—*me’alekha* might signify both “(from) above you” and “from amongst your leafs.” I chose to focus on the first meaning since it echoes the mothers’ protection from above, as well as that of the angels, thus relating to Ravikovitch’s struggle against transcendental judgment.

Thus begins the final stanza. The ironic, even sarcastic, tone that runs like a red thread through the poem, condemning the nihilistic attitude of those who “sleep” during such injustices, culminates here, with the “holy mothers” of the Yiddish lullaby alleging to sing a song that is keeping the child from harm: As a Palestinian, the child is already brutally harmed, and as an Israeli, being thus kept from harm in his bed, he needs no protection and stands in stark contrast to the injured Palestinian child, his utter passivity thereby disparaged.

This passive will to perish, this “nothingness of the will,” is further implied by the allusion to the title of one of the most famous poems by Chaim Nahman Bialik, Israel’s national poet, “A Twig Fell” (*Tsanah lo zalzal*). This late poem by Bialik laments the perishing of his life, and creative force, through an extended metaphor comparing human life to the journey of a twig throughout the cycle of natural seasons; come spring, however, the subject of this poem will no longer flourish again, like a twig no longer organically connected to a tree. The opening verse of this poem, which lends it its name, encapsulates much of its significance: “A twig fell upon a fence and slumbered.”³⁰ It is this slumber on the fence that leads to the subject’s demise, for had the twig fallen on either side of the fence, upon fertile ground—that is, had the narrator taken any action instead of merely sleeping or sitting on the fence—then it might have not ended up barren, thrown out of the cycle of life. Linking passivity and sleep with death, the twig thus joins the four angels from the throne in foreboding destruction and in calling upon the sleeping children of Israel and Palestine to awaken, to transform their passivity into action.

The sense of a cyclical return introduced by this allusion is reinforced in the next verses:

And you shall grow up and become a man,
and the anguish of Jabalya you shall never forget
from '48 to '67, from '67 to '88,
the anguish of Jabalya you shall never forget,
and the Village of Beita and the village of Hawara
and Saja'iyya and the village of Silfit.

While any judgment is suspended, this suspension is complemented by a plea to never forget, thus guaranteeing that this suspension is not an absence of awareness (but, perhaps, an awareness of a certain absence). With this plea

³⁰ Hebrew, “*tsanah lo zalzal 'al gader ya-yanom...*”

to never forget Ravikovitch again enlists her own cultural heritage, explicitly hollowing it out in order to allow room for relating to others. In this case, she reappropriates two Holocaust commemoration practices: first, the practice of listing names of towns where suffering was endured, here replacing East European names with Palestinian ones; second, the command to “never forget,” here “translated” from its established collective form of Holocaust commemoration in Israel, “we shall not forget” (*lo nishkakh*), into the second-person imperative, “you shall not forget” (*lo tishkakh*). Ravikovitch says nothing here about Palestinians or for them; she merely introduces difference into her own culture. Through the selective appropriation of these practices she takes this struggle against injustice out of the national realm and makes it the concern of anyone who positions herself as the addressee of this poem, anyone who sympathizes, thus paving the way to imagining a broader civil society.

Furthermore, these commemoration practices are clearly used here to observe Palestinian suffering. This is done, however, merely by citing towns’ names, without attempting to represent Palestinian suffering in Ravikovitch’s own words and without unifying it, without speaking about *the* Palestinian suffering. The repetition of names of concrete places is redoubled in the repetition of years marking specific events in time (the *Nakba* of 1948, the occupation of 1967, and the incident at Jabalya during the First Intifada in 1988), which in the Hebrew original is intensified through the alliteration of the sound *ah*, a cry of pain and anguish, concluding the names of the Hebrew years and the command to never forget (“*mi-tashah le-tashkakh, mi-tashkakh le-tashmah, / et tsa'ar Jibaliyya lo tishkakh*”). Here, Ravikovitch joins together the two methods she has been employing so far: the allusions to Jewish history, which is being partially hollowed out, and the citing of suffering of Palestinian towns, using proper names—which, like quotations, are the closest thing to concrete bodies and their singularity. These methods allow Ravikovitch and her reader the option of relating to this suffering through their own experiences, while not losing sight of concrete places, events, and people, and while maintaining the awareness that this relation is fictional.

The catalogue of places and dates creates a certain kind of metonymic generalization. As opposed to the exceptionalist logic of the judges in the case mentioned above, the repetitive allusions to Palestinian pain in other places and times suggest that the Giv'ati affair was not “unique” but rather one among many other cases of senseless orders and acts of brutality. The repetition here is clearly not of the kind of the eternal recurrence, but rather a nihilistic repetition

of the same. What is repeated is a nihilistic type of orders, norms, and legal proceedings and their acceptance in Israeli society. In Ravikovitch's critical presentation of this vicious cycle, however, the different cases are not equated—they maintain their proper names, their singularity. Unlike the judgment by law, or other acts of judgment that place particulars under a universal (rule, concept, or category), this kind of typical generalization generates a community through difference. It is a matter of a different relation between the one and the many, which implies the possibility of a different kind of community.³¹

The conclusion of the lullaby brings the critical effect to its most radical peak:

And all their blood shall be on our heads,
demand it from us,
nice child.

The blood on our heads alludes to the biblical story of Rahab. Rahab is known as the prostitute who hid the Israelite spies—sent by Joshua to explore the land of Canaan before its occupation—from their enemies. In return, she obtains immunity, assuring that she and her family will not be harmed during the coming occupation as long as they remain within her clearly marked house. As the biblical text expresses it, if they leave the house, their bloodshed will be “on their heads;” if they do not, any bloodshed will be “on our heads” (*Jos* 2:19). Indeed, the promise is kept and Rahab and her family are saved, while the rest

³¹ Interestingly, Ravikovitch seems to oppose this use of particular cases to make more general claims about the situation. In her poem, “Marina Hadad”—where she narrates a counterfactual, the events that could have happened were the news reporters to enter the “right door” and visit the recently deceased Marina Hadad (a name suggestive of a Christian Palestinian)—Ravikovitch writes,

All the makings were there: bereavement, sorrow,
the mother a single parent, the state of the nation as metonymy
for the fate of the individual (especially vice versa) [...]
She was one of a kind,
call it the luck of a goy that she alone
was not exploited
to diagnose the state of the nation
and forecast the inescapable reifications.

(Translated by Bloch and Kronfeld. See Ravikovitch 2009, 259–260)

It seems as though, despite terming it a metonymy, it is rather the form of synecdoche that Ravikovitch rejects, for it is the exploitation of the individual Marina Hadad to represent the whole, the entire nation, which disconcerts her. The practice of reiterating the names of years and towns does not fall under the same category for it does not universalize the Giv'ati Case or efface all differences between different calamities, even within Palestinian history itself. It is clearly not standing for the whole nation, clearly not a synecdoche, but rather a metonymy, an open and limited generalization of sorts, indicating that this singular case shares features in common with a few other particular cases to which it is adjacent.

of the population of Jericho is massacred (*Jos* 6:16–17). The blood that “shall be on our heads” in the poem is therefore the bloodshed of the exceptionally sacred, those who were not supposed to be harmed during the occupation. However, unlike the occupation of the land in the days of Joshua, the modern occupation of Palestine spares no one and makes no differentiations between the inhabitants according to their different conducts, hence “all their blood shall be on our heads.” Simultaneously, this blood “on our heads” is the very mark of the rare exception to the violence of occupation, that single instance when the order to commit a massacre will not be legal. It is thus an emblem of the manifestly illegal order and a sign that even this exceptionalist logic does not absolve of responsibility for suffering but rather intensifies the sense of nihilism.

Finally, the call on the child and the reader to demand this blood from the collective is a twofold call. On the one hand, it is a call for a retrial, for a new and completely different evaluation of this case. This reevaluation, however, is suspended, still to-come, for an alternative trial never materializes in the poem itself. It remains a potential prospect, in some future time when the addressee of this poem, the child or the reader, has “grown” to reevaluate the situation and oppose its logic. The suspended temporality of this trial—obviously preferable to the decisive rulings of the soldiers and the judges—resists the law's demand that we subsume the case under a category, for the most important part is yet to happen. Rather, it implores us to experience the case at hand and come up with a general rule, basing our creative evaluation on the criteria dictated by the case and its precedents, so that we conduct ourselves ethically. On the other hand, Ravikovitch's poem pleads for the (self) destruction of the collective in its militant and nihilistic form—a destruction that is the very turning point between passive and active nihilism. While Ravikovitch herself may be unable to take this active supracritical position, she has already paved the way for her reader, urging her to take this step.

Ravikovitch's quotations, almost physical fragments of a foreign text, are not turned into an exotic artifact judged under our preconceived criteria but rather present us with a selective hint, a physical fragment, of a larger entity, with which we can relate by the literary practice of sympathy—a speculative and temporary identification with the other performed in the gaps left by the selections. A similar sympathetic evaluation is offered by Ravikovitch's use of allusions, these hollowed-out repetitions of the self. As such, Ravikovitch's poetic justice, these evaluative trials-by-reiteration, constitutes a radical form

of critique precisely by not criticizing in the prevalent sense of the word—for these reiterations merely present the case anew. According to Deleuze, true critique is not criticism—negative, reactive, representative—but a political experience—affirmative, active, creative, transgressing the law and pushing its limits. As such, it has a double function: exposing the law as empty and, subsequently, reinstating the very movement it is attempting to prohibit—in our case, the movement toward others. In this way, critique and affirmation are bound together, for this critique is at the same time creative, substituting the principle of difference and selection for the principles of universalism or resemblance. This figure of reiteration is a repetition geared toward the future, toward difference. It is the eternal return as Deleuze perceives it in his reading of Nietzsche, the repetition of that which differs from itself, whose ultimate goal is the radical transformation of values. Finally, it suggests not only a certain interpersonal ethical relation, but also the possibility of a different political collective as metonymic—that is, brought together by shared analogical concerns, that are not necessarily “the same” but are still perceived, from within each particular experience, as relatable.

Bibliography

- Bassnett, Susan. 2002. *Translation Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- , and André Lefevere (eds). 1998. *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2004. “The Task of the Translator.” In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. I*, edited by Michael William Jennings and Marcus Paul Bullock, 253–264. Cambridge, MA: Belknap.
- Bilsky, Leora. 2001. “Judging Evil in the Trial of Kastner.” *Law and History Review* 19(1): 117–160.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 1995. “Translated From...” In *The Work of Fire*, edited by Charlotte Mandell, 176–190. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1991. “Coldness and Cruelty.” In *Masochism*, edited by Jean McNeil, 9–138. New York: Zone Books.
- . 1994. *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 2002. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson. London and New York: Continuum.

- Gluzman, Michael. 2010. “ha-Kina ha-’oletzet: ‘al shne shirim shel Dalayah Ravikovitch ‘al Yona Volakh.” In *Kitme or: Hasmishim shenot bikoret u-mehkar ‘al yetsiratah shel Dalayah Ravikovits*, edited by Hamutal Tzamer and Tamar Hess, 173–182. Bene Berak: ha-Ḳibutz ha-me’uḥad.
- Gordon, Neve. 2008. *Israel's Occupation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Grossman, David. 2003. *ha-Mayet kederekh hayyim: Ma’amariym, 1993–2003*. Tel Aviv: ha-Ḳibutz ha-me’uḥad.
- Hever, Hannan (ed.). 2010. *Al tagidu be-Gat: Ha-nakbah ha-Palestinit ba-shirah ha-’Ivrit, 1948–1958: Asupat shirim*. Tel Aviv: Sedek; Parhesyah; Zokhrot.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1987. *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- . 1996. *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Kassim, Anis F. 1989. “The Order to Beat Palestinians: Justice à la Israel.” *Palestine Yearbook of International Law* 5: 184–241.
- Klossowski, Pierre. 1997. *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, translated by Daniel W. Smith. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kronfeld, Chana. 2010. “Shira politit ke-omanut lashon be-yetsiratah shel Dalayah Ravikovitch.” In *Kitme or: Hasmishim shenot bikoret u-mehkar ‘al yetsiratah shel Dalayah Ravikovits*, edited by Hamutal Tzamer and Tamar Hess, 514–543, Bene Berak: ha-Ḳibutz ha-me’uḥad.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. 2000a. “Ecce Homo.” In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann, 655–800. New York: Modern Library.
- . 2000b. “On the Genealogy of Morals.” In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann, 437–600. New York: Modern Library.
- Ophir, Adi. 2001. *Avodat ha-hoyeh: Masot ‘al tarbut Yišre’elit ba-zeman ha-zeh*. Tel Aviv: ha-Ḳibutz ha-me’uḥad.
- Parush, Adi. 1990. “Psaḳ ha-din be-parashat Kefar Ḳasem: Mivḥan ha-degel ha-shaḥor veba-muṣag shel Peḳuda bilti-ḥuḳit ba’alil.” *Iyune mishpaḥ* 15(2): 245–272.
- Ravikovitch, Dalia. 2009. *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*, edited by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Ravikovitch, Dahlia. 2010. *Kol ha-shirim*, edited by Giddo Ticotsky and Uzi Shavit. Tel Aviv: ha-Ḳibutz ha-me’uḥad.
- Szobel, Ilana. 2013. *A Poetics of Trauma: The Work of Dahlia Ravikovitch*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press.
- Tzamer, Hamutal. 2006. *be-Shem ha-nof: Le’umiyut, migdar ye-subyekṭiviyut ba-shirah ha-Yišre’elit bi-shenot ha-ḥamishim veba-shishim*. Yerushalayim: Keter; Merkaz ha-ḳsharim, ha-merkaz le-ḥeker ha-sifrut veba-tarbut ha-yehudit veba-Yišre’elit, Universitat Ben-Gurion ba-Negev.

- . 2010. "ha-Tsofa le-vet Yiśra'el mibi-fenim: Daliyah Ravikovitch, ha-shira ha-le'umit-Yiśra'elit, ye ha-migdar shel ha-yetsugiyut." In *Kitme or: Hasmishim shenot bikoret u-mehkar 'al yetsiratah shel Daliyah Ravikovits*, edited by Hamutal Tzamir and Tamar Hess, 416–443. Bene Berak: ha-Ḳibutz ha-me'uhad.
- Ulmert, Dana. 2010. "Ani lo kan': Ha-'emda ha-poliṭit yeha- 'Tyum 'al ha-zehut be-shirat Daliyah Ravikovitch." In *Kitme or: Hasmishim shenot bikoret u-mehkar 'al yetsiratah shel Daliyah Ravikovits*, edited by Hamutal Tzamir and Tamar Hess, 416–443. Bene Berak: ha-Ḳibutz ha-me'uhad.

What is a "Manifestly Illegal" Order? Law and Politics after Yoram Kaniuk's *Nevelot*¹

Itamar Mann

We knew about wars from the side of a firearm, not from the side of the pretty sons of bitches who filled our windows, who laughed, who thought old age is a disease and who say that all we did in war wasn't worth what one F-15 does. We were the elders of the rough blow, we cut Arabs' balls, made no big deal of heroic songs.

Kaniuk 2006, 108

This essay proposes a typology of three formations of the political imagination, which have had the tendency, in the post-Cold War period, to devolve into three kinds of nihilism: sovereignty, cosmopolitanism, and the rule of law. Each of them is regarded as "nihilism" for different reasons, which will hopefully become clear as the argument unfolds. I conclude by somewhat tentatively proposing an alternative to these nihilisms, under the title of "judgment." Needless to say, there is nothing new in exercising judgment. The particular political and cultural conditions in which judgment now occurs will be the object of the discussion below.

To concretize and contextualize these themes, the essay relies on three texts: first, a piece of fiction, the novella *Nevelot* ("Caracasses") by the late Israeli author Yoram Kaniuk (Kaniuk 2006).² The story will lead directly into the second text, *Military Prosecutor v. Malinki*, which is a famous opinion of an Israeli military

¹ Thanks to Roy Ben-Shai, Kenneth Mann, Liron Mor, Kiel Brennan-Marquez, Nitzan Lebovic, Oded Na'aman, and the members of the Van Leer Workshop on nihilism for their invaluable comments.

² Yoram Kaniuk died June 8, 2013. He was a great writer. As the book covers of his English translations obstinately testified, *The New York Times* once called him "one of the most innovative, brilliant novelists in the Western World." But as Nicole Krauss describes, he died feeling underappreciated. I would like to dedicate this essay to his memory. For background on Kaniuk and his death, see Kershner (2013, A25); Krauss (2013).