

Preface

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“A priest with a thick beard and a pretty white lamb, bound with a rope, waited together for the orb of the sun to reveal itself in full above the mountains of Gilead,” writes Prince Yonatan, recalling the days when he was in charge of the sacrifices in the Temple. “The lamb wagged its tail mischievously, like a little boy looking forward to going for a walk. We will soon begin.”¹ Yonatan is one of the protagonists of Yishai Sarid’s novel *Hashlishi* (The Third), which portrays the last days of the Kingdom of Judah that was established – in the not-too-distant future, it transpires – after a series of bombs hurled by “Amalek” had vaporized and destroyed the hedonistic cities of the coast. Yonatan, who is also the narrator, admiringly describes the other protagonists in the book: his charismatic father, Yeho’az, a resourceful officer who, after the attack, gathered together the remnants of the people, crowned himself king, and established the Kingdom of Judah; and his older, more successful brothers who hold key posts in the kingdom. But it is clear that the true hero of the novel is The Third itself – the Temple that was rebuilt after the expulsion of the Arabs from the land and the destruction of the Muslim holy sites on the Temple Mount. With the resumption of the Jewish practice of animal sacrifices (*korbanot*), the Temple becomes not only the center of national life but also the dwelling of God, who waits there, behind the veil covering the Holy Ark, “ancient and silent and deeper than everything,” Yonatan writes: “I hear his heavy breathing” (p. 9). But the end is drawing nigh: International pressure, the enemies without and the great gaps within – all these gradually destroy the halakhic state that is also a police state. Apparently, God does not like being locked up in the Holy of Holies.

The spirit of this fascinating and important novel hovers over the current Israeli reality – and, naturally, over this issue of *Theory and Criticism*. As we completed work on this issue we were informed, for example, that right-wing activists had

¹ Yishai Sarid, 2015. *Hashlishi* (The Third), Tel Aviv: Am Oved, pp. 16–17. All the following citations from Sarid’s novel are given within the text.

“practiced,” for the fifth consecutive year, the Passover sacrifice ritual in the Beit-Orot Yeshiva in East Jerusalem (with the participation of Jerusalem’s chief rabbi). Before the sheep was slaughtered, a discussion was held there on “whether and how much one must strive today to resume the sacrifices.”² One answer to the question was given several days later, on the eve of the Passover holiday, when the police arrested ten suspects in the Old City who were in possession of four kids that they intended to sacrifice on the Temple Mount.³ Sarid’s book offers a precise portrayal of this ritual, its structure, and its broader implications. Yonatan, waxing nostalgic for the Temple that has been destroyed again, describes the cruel act in poetic, almost sensuous, language:

A single cut must be made, with no hesitation. I stroked the head of the thin, bound animal and, with a single thrust, slit its throat – the windpipe and the esophagus, and the blood vessels that run between them. The pipes opened wide before my eyes, totally severed and bright; a fraction of a second passes before the stream of blood spurts out and I immediately direct the flow to the golden basin, the lamb’s blood streams into it and fills it quickly and its warmth is palpable on the vessel’s sides. [...] The lamb gurgles, quivers a little, struggles; in its eyes there is infinite sadness. I see his soul flying before my eyes like a butterfly with translucent wings, and it almost escapes from me, but I trap it in the warm blood and dedicate it to God. (p. 18)

The gluttonous priests gobble up with pleasure the remains of the sacrificial meat that is not put on the altar, but not Yonatan: from the day that he first slaughtered a sacrifice and saw its contorted face and the profound sadness flooding its eyes, no meat passed his lips (p. 45).

Various scholars, including Sarina Chen and Motti Inbari, have addressed in recent years the nationalist and messianic views of the fundamentalist organizations that seek to rebuild the Temple and renew the sacrifices. It seems that much less attention has been paid to the fact that although a large section of the Israeli public apparently does not share the extreme ideology of these organizations, the topic of the Temple Mount and the Temple in general – and the discourse about the

2 ActiveStills, 2016. “Temple activists ‘practiced’ sacrificing an animal for Passover in East Jerusalem,” *Siha Mekomit*, 25.3.2016.

3 Nir Hasson, 2016. “Ten people were arrested on Passover Eve on their way to carry out the Passover sacrifice on the Temple Mount,” *Haaretz*, 23.4.2016.

sacrifices in particular – have gained an increasingly central place in the education system and media of the National-Religious community in Israel.

The discourse on the sacrifices lies at the heart of **Mira Balberg's** article, which opens this issue. Balberg does not address this discourse in order to examine political tendencies or messianic approaches; rather, she uses it to discuss the deeper misgivings that are preoccupying the National-Religious population. As is well known, animal sacrifices are presented in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature as a central means of worshiping the deity, as was customary throughout the ancient world. But religious, cultural, and political changes that took place from the end of the first century CE made this practice almost disappear; sacrifices were replaced by new religious practices that were considered more refined and “modern,” such as prayer and study. Nevertheless, the dominance of the sacrifices in the Torah and in the Halakhah, which are understood in Orthodox circles as essentially eternal and unchanging, requires Orthodox Jews today to deal with the blatant incongruity between the textual tradition that emphasizes the importance of the sacrifices and the values and sensitivities characteristic of the current era. The empathy Prince Yonatan feels for the suffering of the animals is also reflected in the question-and-answer websites aimed at the National-Religious public in Israel, in which questioners wonder why animals are ordained to be slaughtered to atone for the sins of human beings. Other questioners shy away from what they see as a primitive ritual or do not understand why the deity needs sacrifices.

In an intricate, groundbreaking discussion that combines theoretical insights from the discipline of religious studies, close readings of the rabbinical sources, and a critical analysis of contemporary popular sources, Balberg examines how rabbis and other authority figures attempt to resolve this incongruity. She argues that in response to the misgivings and reservations raised by the questioners regarding the sacrifices, the rabbis attempt to give this practice new sensory, sensual and emotional content that emphasizes the subject and his experiences. In this way they try to recreate the sacrifices in the religious imagination as a fantasy of unencumbered spiritual certainty “that contains the possibility of a closeness to the deity that is real, direct, and free of doubt.” But this subjectivist-experiential interpretation is the diametric opposite of the procedural and clearly non-interactive way in which the sacrifices were understood by the Sages. As Balberg puts it, presenting the sacrifices as an “experience” totally ignores the most central feature of the Sages’ impersonal approach (namely, the mechanical and precise handling of the blood) and, in

doing so, accentuates the individual who brings the sacrifice – an individual who is relegated to the margins of the ritual in the Sages’ description. The contemporary writers, who claim direct continuity with the Sages, in fact turn the Sages’ view of the sacrifices on its head, thus exposing the fundamental tensions that characterize the spiritual life of the National-Religious Zionist community.

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Avi Marciano’s article presents the theoretical and scholarly potential of Surveillance Studies in the local context by focusing on one of the most significant developments in Israel in recent years: the promotion of Israel’s national biometric project. As part of this project, the state issues biometric identity cards and passports to every citizen and establishes a mandatory biometric database containing physical data. The article examines three central theoretical issues formulated in various disciplines in relation to surveillance – the informatization of the human body, the digitization of social sorting, and the violation of privacy rights – and shows how the process of establishing a mandatory biometric database in Israel manifests and promotes these three developments. Marciano’s main argument is based on an analysis of the state of emergency that has been in force in Israel since the establishment of the state: he claims that the plan to establish a biometric database derives from the same rationale that inspired the antidemocratic laws that were enacted under the state of emergency. In this manner, “the establishment of a biometric database for the purpose of routine management of citizens exemplifies Giorgio Agamben’s warning, normalizing a practice that in democratic terms is reserved for exceptional situations.”

Here, too, Yishai Sarid’s novel affords a glimpse of the near future. As if heralding the anticipated collapse of the state, the technology in the Kingdom of Judah is unreliable. According to Yonatan, the old computers are barely functioning, but “due to the embargo ” it is impossible to buy new replacements; the engineers “have left the country one by one” (p. 34); and the scientists have fled “to the fleshpots of foreign lands” (p. 48). Nevertheless, in the entrance gates that lead to the Third Temple, guards still scan and identify the pilgrims and verify their identity by means of the chip implanted in the body of every Jew:

On the nape of each Jew’s neck, under the skin between the shoulder blades, a computerized chip is implanted. Before an infant is one year old, his parents must bring him to the chip implanting ceremony. They put a sugar cube in

the infant's mouth to distract him. The chip makes it easy to spot infiltrators and to preserve the purity of the people and the land. The act hurts no more than the prick of a tiny needle, and the child quickly forgets that a foreign object has been implanted in his body. The mark becomes part of him. (p. 34)

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Marking the body in various ways and the political and social ramifications of this act bring us, albeit indirectly, to the article by **Calanit Tsalach**, which offers an “autoethnography of ethnicity-based microaggressions.” The discussion’s point of departure lies in the difficulty of coping with mechanisms that deny and silence claims of discrimination, deprivation, racism, or othering. These mechanisms have a particularly significant presence in academia: While it creates, positions, and reproduces knowledge, academia is also a hegemonic arena that maintains its status in a continuous and unmarked manner. Tsalach uses autoethnographic tools – that is, she examines and probes her own place in academe – in order to examine a series of small, seemingly random moments that create her sense of otherness. These episodes involve silence and speech, the delineation of boundaries and identities, and the ability to cross those boundaries, but they focus primarily on acts of ethnicity-based “microaggression” – that is, subtle insults, often automatic and unconscious, that are directed daily at non-white people, increasing the sense that the presence of these “other” subjects violates the “natural” state of the campus. Microaggressions may seem innocent and harmless enough, but their cumulative weight and the burden of coping with these harmful mechanisms is a common and significant component of the lives of students and faculty members of color. Tsalach explains her choice of autoethnography as a methodology: It gives voice to a personal experience in order to promote better understanding of “knowledge in general, its limits, its oppression, and also its potential.”

Meirav Aharon-Gutman’s article documents and analyzes the encounter between the community administration of Jerusalem’s Musrara neighborhood and Muslala, a group of artists that was active in recent years in the neighborhood’s public space. What began as fruitful cooperation turned into a sharp confrontation. To explain this failure – which is inconsistent with the familiar image of artists’ groups as agents of urban renewal – Aharon-Gutman turns to concepts formulated by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition*, and primarily to the tension

between the political (that is, the freedom to deal in the plurality in a way that opens it to unexpected consequences) and the social (the way in which the plurality is ordered, arranged, established, and normalized). This distinction helps explain the failure of the cooperation: Musrara was attractive to the artists because they identified artistic activity with the possibility of dealing with the neighborhood's plurality (that is, the political) – namely, to create a “dialogue” and a “meeting point” (as they termed it) with the Palestinians in eastern Musrara; but at the same time they sought to make this a “social,” “communal” act based on a coalition with the veteran Jewish residents of the neighborhood. The artists failed, Aharon-Gutman maintains, because they did not understand how the political and the social are at cross purposes; while the neighborhood's residents, in turn, felt they were being deceived and threatened. “We thought they would be doing art, not politics,” argued the members of the community administration, thus expressing the dialectic that Arendt points out. From there it was just a short step to expelling the artists from the neighborhood.

Revisiting the affinity between Zionism and sexuality, **Nirit Kurman** offers an insightful new reading of David Vogel's 1929 volume of poems *Lifnei hash'a'ar he'afel* (Before the Dark Gate). Critics have tended to focus on the gentleness and passivity in Vogel's erotic poems and in so doing have missed their violent and active aspect. Kurman demonstrates that the poems are characterized by sexual violence, overt or covert, directed against a female character – but also that the very inferiority of this character turns out to be a source of power. Moreover, the poems reveal the surprising connection between female sexuality and Jewish traditions, a connection that enables us to reconsider Vogel's complex relation to Zionism, as a poet who chose to write in Hebrew and in the Hebrew literary milieu but openly rejected all Zionist content. Through sexuality in general and pleasure and masochism in particular, the poems challenge both the Aryan anti-Semitic paradigm that likens the Jew to a woman, as an expression of inferiority, and the Zionist paradigm that internalizes the anti-Semitic view and therefore seeks to make the Jew masculine. In this way, Vogel's lyrical poetic expression, tender and sorrowful, encodes a wild sexuality that proposes a fluid gender continuum that goes beyond one-dimensional gendered and ideological thinking.

Haim Weiss's contribution, which concludes the articles section in this issue, explores the connection between archaeology, nationalism, and messianism by focusing on the archaeological excavations in the Judean Desert (1960–1961). These

excavations yielded many findings, including a bundle of letters sent by Shimon Bar-Kosibah (popularly known as Bar-Kochba), the military commander of the revolt against the Romans in the second century CE, as well as skeletons, some of which were said to be the remains of Bar-Kosibah's fighters. These discoveries aroused enormous public interest. The archaeologist Yigael Yadin, who was also the second Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, headed the excavation and thus became not only Bar-Kosibah's modern counterpart but also the "high priest" of the religion of archaeology, which was meant to create a direct link between the present and the past. Yet the very existence of this secular-Hebrew-native project heralded its anticipated collapse. Paraphrasing Gershom Scholem's famous letter to Franz Rosenzweig, Weiss notes that the representation of these archaeological finds carries a loaded apocalyptic sting that constantly exposes the theological and messianic roots of archaeology itself, which is apparently – only apparently – viewed as native and secular. This messianic potential was realized in 1982, when some of the skeletons were buried in an official military funeral initiated and led by the former chief rabbi of the IDF and the chief rabbi of Israel at that time, Shlomo Goren, to the chagrin of Yadin and many of his archaeologist colleagues. This funeral – that is, the symbolic and literal handover of the bones from Yadin to Goren – marks the decline of secular Zionism and the rise of religious-messianic Zionism. From this point on, archaeology would be appropriated and employed by groups with religious and messianic interests. And thus we have returned, almost inadvertently, to The Third – to the Temple Mount, to Yonatan, and to the pretty white lamb. "We will soon begin."

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The Holocaust and the Nakba: Memory, National Identity and Jewish-Arab Partnership, a collected volume edited by Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, aroused a public storm when it was published in 2015 (by the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad). In the essay that opens the "Essays and Criticism" section of this issue, **Yochi Fischer** sees the volume as a turning point in the discourse on the Holocaust and the Nakba, but at the same time reads it alongside some of the discourse's various political, philosophical, and cultural manifestations since 1948. Delving into her own family archive, she uses it to examine the Jews' and Palestinians' attitudes toward this dual memory.

Engaging with similar questions, **Elia Etkin** reviews three recent historical studies that deal with national conflicts between Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine (that

is, the events of 1929 and the 1948 war). Through these works, she explores recent developments in the historiographic approach to these events – the transition from macro-diplomatic, political, and military perspectives to a focus on “soft” civilian foundations, in local events and in the experiences of “ordinary people.”

Uri Ayalon, one of the founders of Anarchists against the Wall, goes back to the beginnings of this group and examines the dilemmas it faced in its attempt to adapt the anarchist ethos to the Israeli context: for example, the difficulty of resolving the contradiction between the aspiration to establish a Palestinian state and the anarchist position that is opposed to all states; or the fact that in response to the army’s attempts to suppress the group’s activities, the anarchists adopted a military and even macho style of action. At the same time, he tries to propose ways of undermining the inevitable proximity between Zionist and anti-Zionist forms of activism.

Since the 1990s, human rights have become a supreme moral institution in the West. Most scholars approach human rights as a universal ideal, but recent years have seen the emergence of more critical accounts. **Daniel Rosenberg** reviews three books that critique the human rights discourse that has developed in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territories, a discourse led by activists in political and civil society organizations. Building on these studies, Rosenberg criticizes the naïveté that often characterizes the involvement with human rights, as well as the dissociation from political, social, and cultural contexts. His assessment focuses on the difficulty of interpreting human rights and of implementing them in ways that befit both the universal ideal and the particular language in which universal rights are framed at the political level.

Erez Garnai considers two new studies that deal with prisons in Israel, as well as the Dorner Committee Report, which recently examined the policy of imprisonment and treatment of criminals in Israel. He argues that these academic studies ignore the social – that is, the sociological – aspect of punishment in Israel and thus reflect Israeli sociology’s lack of interest in this field. The conclusions of the Dorner Committee, which determined that there is no justification for lengthening the periods of punishment set by law as a means of combating crime, reflect to a great extent the deep change in recent years in the American penal discourse, which is gradually filtering into Israel.

The issue closes with **Yehouda Shenhav**’s farewell to his friend, the writer and playwright Salman Natour, who “died without prior warning” (as in the horrifying title of the novel in the writings that Natour left behind), in February 2015. “How

does one write about Salman Natour,” Shenhav wonders in his opening words, “and on what does one write: the prose, the translations, the philosophy, the plays? His political and intellectual strength? The exciting humanity? The love of human beings? The friendship and the loyalty?” Unable to decide, Shenhav offers two different openings to possible eulogies: After all, he says, “Salman was a man of openings, not of closings. Each of his stories began with a multitude of openings and concluded with a multitude of closings – which looked like new openings.”

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I intended to end this preface with Shenhav’s farewell to Natour, but shortly before the issue went to press we received the horrific news of the death of our colleague Michael Feige: He was murdered in the Tel Aviv shooting attack on June 8, 2016, as he sat in a café in Saroná.

How does one say goodbye, and so hastily, to Michael Feige? Michael was an outstanding, esteemed, and loved member of the *Theory and Criticism* community. Several important sociological articles of his appeared in this journal. The most recent, on Yigal Amir and the ethnic fringes of Gush Emunim, was published in the issue just before this one. Michael was a peer-reviewer of many other articles that appeared here, helping their authors with direction, good advice, and constructive criticism. Most important, his fascinating work on a string of diverse topics – including political space in Israel, issues of memory and commemoration, and the connection between archaeology and nationalism – played an extremely important role in shaping and developing the theoretical-critical discourse in Israel in the last two decades.

Michael was a brilliant scholar, original and thorough – but first and foremost he was a mensch. Everyone who knew him, even superficially, could not but be impressed by his humanity; his pleasantness; his modesty; his optimism; the empathy he expressed in every context; his imagination and ingenuity (manifested first and foremost in the titles of his articles!); his ability to rise above binary, one-dimensional divisions; his patience; his loyalty; his generosity. His sudden death is a great loss indeed – to his family, his friends, the entire academic community, and also to us here at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and at *Theory and Criticism*.