

## Preface: The 1917 Centennial

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In 1948, during a lull in the war that was raging in the Holy Land, Nachum Gutman set out to document the land's human and geographical landscapes and paint portraits of the young soldiers fighting in the Jerusalem area and the Negev. He would go on to describe these experiences in his book, *Two Stones which are One: A Chase That Begins with a Snail and Tells of the Dottore who is Looking for the Other Piece, and is a Special Story from the War of Independence*, first published in 1968. The meandering title of the book (which in a later edition was replaced by the equally meandering title, *The Chase after the Roman Legion Stone — Two Stones which are One — a Special Story from the War of Independence*) suggests a sense of fragility and instability — linked, in turn, to the central mystery that triggers the plot: what became of the missing piece of an ancient stone, engraved with an enigmatic inscription in ancient script — an inscription which might prove, once and for all, the right of the Jews to this land?

At the time, Gutman was 50. The joy that swept him following the great victory in the war and the conquest of the land is fused in the book with a deep admiration towards the young fighters he met, oozing with charm and the fresh spirit of youth. The two themes intertwined here, conquest and youth, take Gutman 30 years back to World War I, when he was himself a young soldier, the age of the soldiers he met in 1948. Although the subtitle promises “a special story from the War of Independence,” a significant chunk of the book is actually devoted to the twilight of Ottoman rule in Palestine, the British conquest of 1917, and Gutman's own military service in the Jewish Legion. Gutman begins his journey in the book as an archeological artifact of sorts (“I will put you in the warehouse!” he is threatened by “culture officer Benny,” who is none other than Palmach education officer Benny Marshak); yet Gutman swiftly

becomes a kind of archaeologist, digging deeper and deeper under the surface, only to discover himself. Time and again, Gutman begins to tell us about the soldiers of 1948 but finds himself going back to 1917. A salient example is Gutman's description of how he managed, after the Israelis' conquest of the Castel fortress, to reach Jerusalem that was gradually recovering from the Arab siege; but just when he begins to describe his entry into the city, the narrative sinks 30 years back to December 1917 and to the first, euphoric encounter between the city's people and the British and Australian soldiers. The conquest of the land by the Israelis and its conquest by the British merge into a single reality (embodied, among other things, in Gutman's recollections of the Jewish Legion, whose soldiers are presented here as an early, raw incarnation of the Palmach fighters): indeed, two conquests that are one.

Or perhaps three? A comment that Gutman incorporates at the very end of the book duplicates that look backwards — while, at the same time, taking a leap forward. “I wrote and finished this book a few months before the Six-Day War,” writes Gutman on the last page: “The young men and women from the War of Independence, whom I drew and told about, they and their children and their good spirit — carried us to victory.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the book jumps from 1967 back to 1948 and from 1948 back to 1917, only to leap back to the present-day — be it the present of “the War of Independence,” or the present of “the Six-Day War,” when Gutman was almost 70.

Of all the wars he experienced, World War I preoccupied Gutman in particular: it was “his” war. In books such as *The Summer Vacation or the Crate Mystery* (1946) and *Path of the Orange Peels: Adventures in the Early Days of Tel Aviv* (1958) he depicted, vividly and in great detail, his memories from the war, the trauma of the expulsion of the residents of Tel Aviv — apparently the foundational event of Nachum's childhood — and the enthusiasm with which the British conqueror was welcomed. What turns *Two Stones which are One* into a particularly interesting document is how World War I in Palestine is placed at the center of a rich tapestry spanning forward and backward, temporally and spatially. Gutman's journeys in the book thus locate the year 1917 as a key historic, political and cultural moment that continues to shape the local reality through a complex system of duplications and reverberations. The attempt to reunite the two pieces of the Roman legion stone (an echo of an even earlier conquest of the land, of course) embodies the desire to piece together the fragments of time — a desire that indicates that every conquest is always a preparation for another conquest.

1 Nachum Gutman, 2005 [1968]. *The Chase after the Roman Legion Stone*, Tel Aviv, Ma'arachot, p. 189.

The central place of that year in both the local and global contexts is at the center of this issue of *Theory and Criticism*, marking the 1917 Centennial: ten researchers revisit the events of that year, exploring them from a range of critical and theoretical perspectives: colonial and postcolonial, historic and historiographic, visual and textual. Naturally, the Balfour Declaration and the British conquest of Palestine stand at the heart of the special issue, but the authors of the articles and essays published herein also elucidate the connection between those events and other political, social and cultural developments in this country and across the world, whose reverberations are felt to this day.

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Before reviewing those texts, I would like to introduce the six articles that appear in the first, general section of the issue. Here too we can begin with Nachum Gutman, who opens his first and most famous book, *In the Land of Lobengulu King of Zulu* (1939), by recalling how, having packed his belongings, he boarded “red car number five. It carried me to the end of Allenby Street and a few moments later I was sitting on the train to Haifa. From the port of Haifa you can go anywhere in the world.”<sup>2</sup>

From the port of Haifa you can go anywhere in the world — but the world, too, can come to Haifa. The complex interplay between global and local spaces is discussed by **Sarai B. Aharoni** in an article examining the politics of memory and oblivion surrounding the Sixth Fleet’s visits to Haifa Port in the years 1979-2001. Reading historic and legal texts alongside an ethnographic documentation of the rejuvenating port area, Aharoni sheds lights on the silenced conflicts between the American Empire and the port city in the neoliberal era. She examines the physical aspects of the encounter between citizens and soldiers in order to expose, “from the ground up,” the shaping of the alliance between the U.S. and Israel. Aharoni argues that the disappearance of the Sixth Fleet soldiers from Haifa’s spatial memory and from the Israeli national narrative is rooted in the local ambivalence toward the dependency relationship between the empire (the U.S.) and the client state (Israel). The dominant discourse, she claims, normalized prostitution, encouraged the obfuscation of gender violence, and promoted a supposedly solemn and egalitarian narrative, according to which the “special relationship” between the two countries was based on mutuality, political independence and complementary interests.

2 Nachum Gutman, 1970 [1939]. *In the Land of Lobengulu King of Zulu*, Ramat Gan: Massada, p. 7.

**Noa Hazan's** article examines the rhetoric of visual representation through which the national story is rewritten in various museums throughout Israel. She argues that even today, when curators are seemingly well aware of the need to reflect the multicultural character of Israeli society, the museums still impose a strict separation between their departments of art, ethnography and archaeology. This division, rooted in 19th-century conventions, allows the museums to adopt a multicultural curating approach and to provide a showcase for diverse communities of Israeli society that have been excluded from exhibits in the past — but to do so without actually questioning the prevailing ethnic-power balance in Israel. Thus, the costumes of Middle-Eastern communities that are still worn today are displayed as ethnography; everyday Palestinian objects that were in use until the mid-20th century are displayed as archaeology; whereas works painted 100 years ago by European artists are displayed as national Israeli art. In this way the national museums preserve the ethnocentric-national meta-narrative even at a time when the national power relations are being undermined in reality.

The durability of national narratives in a changing cultural reality is also at the center of **Zvi Triger's** article about posthumous reproduction from the seed of a deceased man. Who are the “parents” of a child born under such circumstances? Is parenthood a genetic and essential category or an operative and performative one? The article presents Israeli parenthood (and not just Israeli) as an ideological concept rather than a “natural” one. The bereaved parents who seek to have a posthumous grandchild act within the bio-power of the authorities (in Foucault's phrase) when they seek to contribute a new life for the good of the community; whereas the state, sanctioning the process, bases it on a pro-natalist ideology, the commemoration of the dead, and Jewish halachic considerations. The principle of the child's best interests, which should be taken into account, is shunted aside in this case. This marginalization, Triger concludes, arises from the framing of the posthumous reproduction within the ideologies of memorialization and national continuity.

Urban spaces are usually presented in the West as “natural” arenas for the LGBT community, whereas the periphery represents for the LGBT community a space of rejection, estrangement and alienation. The same is true for Israel: Tel Aviv is considered the quintessential LGBT “capital,” whereas the periphery areas in northern and southern Israel are perceived as areas of backwardness that limit the possibilities of LGBT existence, activism and belonging. Revisiting these perceptions, **Gilly Hartal** focuses on the experiences of LGBT activists who returned to the periphery after a formative stay in “the big city.” She shows that rather than reproduce the center-periphery power structure, LGBT activists in the periphery seek to subvert the paradigm, while creating belonging practices and discourses that engender a mode of becoming a queer periphery.

Issues of space and resistance are also discussed in the article by **Elya Milner** and **Haim Yacobi**, which tells the story of Dahmesh, an unrecognized Palestinian village within the boundaries of the city of Lod, which is the subject of a prolonged legal struggle for recognition. Using different documents produced as part of this legal struggle, the article shows how the legal debate is shaped in such a way that it cannot be brought to conclusion. The case of Dahmesh, which is located in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area (and not in the Negev), thus exposes the perpetual instability of areas where the Zionist project was supposedly completed, and which are not usually perceived as areas of national conflict. The judicial-planning discussion over the question of recognition or nonrecognition of Dahmesh is examined here in light of Carl Schmidt's insights concerning sovereignty as a decision to suspend the law: Milner and Yacobi argue that in this case, the sovereign power wishes to delay the moment of sovereign decision in order to establish its presence in the political space.

The article by **Hannan Hever** and **Yehouda Shenhav**, the final piece in the general section of the issue, follows the series of violent events that shook Baghdad's Jewish community in the years 1950-1951 — and the violent history of these events' commemoration (or rather obliteration). The article focuses on the personal archive of Baruch Nadel, a journalist, researcher and author, who blamed the State of Israel and the Mossad — and specifically the Zionist emissary, Mordechai Ben-Porat — for planning and executing the series of explosions which, according to Nadel, was intended to spur the Jews of Iraq to emigrate to Israel as part of "Operation Ezra and Nehemiah." Through attentive analyses of texts left by Nadel in his archive for "future researchers," the authors expose Nadel's modes of coping with the sovereign's silencing mechanisms, which were designed to silence both the historic narrative and those who wished to expose it.

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This issue of *Theory and Criticism* is going to print on the backdrop of a long series of festive events and academic conferences, exhibits and films, assemblies and demonstrations, all marking the centennial of the key events that turned 1917 into such a pivotal year in the history of Israel/Palestine: the conquest of Beersheva (currently celebrated in Israel as the "liberation" of Beersheva); the Balfour Declaration; and General Allenby's entrance into Jerusalem. The intensive discussion surrounding the events of 1917 demonstrates, yet again, that year's function as a historic crossroads and memory site that continues to influence and shape our present reality.

**Dotan Halevy's** article, that opens the "1917 Centennial Forum," goes back to Britain's Palestine campaign. But rather than revisit ANZAC's cavalry charge of

Beersheva or the conquest of Jerusalem, Helevy reviews a significant episode that has been marginalized in both the historic and historiographic discussions: the destruction of the City of Gaza, which during 1917 was dug to the ground by the Ottomans and pounded from the air by the British. As a quintessential site of destruction, Gaza is an ideal space to examine the imaginary and real differences between the Palestine campaign and the “Great War” as experienced in the trenches of the Western front. Helevy argues that the historiographical tendency to distinguish between the two fronts reflects Orientalist concepts of war in the Orient and of the Orient in general. Focusing on the representations of the Great Mosque of Gaza, which was bombed by the British, the article shows that it was precisely the similarity between the destroyed mosque and the familiar image of destroyed churches on the Western front that enabled the British to establish the distinction between Britain and its Muslim rivals. In so doing, they presented Palestine as a place where one could restore belief in the idea of “progress,” which had been irreparably violated in the European killing fields.

**Arie M. Dubnov** returns to the Balfour Declaration — not to the political interests that gave birth to it but to the processes of its reception and the different interpretations it was given, especially in the Jewish-Israeli context. Employing the conceptual framework coined by Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, Dubnov reads the declaration as a “vertical alliance:” according to this reading, the encounter between Jewish nationalism and British imperialism does not signify a moment of crisis or revolution; rather, it is a continuation and refining of familiar Jewish behavior patterns — which, in this case, merged with the control techniques that characterize informal imperialism. This interpretation was not foreign to the early Zionist authors. It was challenged only in the 1940s, with the rise of the “Perfidious Albion” narrative, which sought to shun the dependence on Great Britain. Dubnov illustrates that the militarist narrative that emerged in those years in the yishuv (“the security style,” as it was recently dubbed by Uri S. Cohen) played a central role in blurring the colonialist past and erasing the vertical alliance between the Zionists and the British Empire. This process was completed after 1948, when the Balfour Declaration was pushed into the margins of collective memory.

Palestinians’ attitudes towards the Balfour Declaration throughout the 20th century and to this day are explored by **Eli Osheroff**. The prevailing Arab perception according to which the Jews are not a “nation” in the modern sense but rather a “religious community” has a strong connection to the relationship between Zionism and imperialism since 1917. Osheroff illustrates that the British promise of a national home for the Jewish People in Palestine contributed to the emergence of the Arab discourse on Jewish nationality. That discourse peaked after 1948, when the negation of Jewish

nationality became an official plank of Palestinian ideology. The article shows, however, that before 1948 central members of the Palestinian national elite recognized the idea of Jewish nationality, and in the 1930s were even willing to compromise with Zionism and the British Empire and recognize “spiritual Zionism” as an ideological framework for the existence of a Jewish national home in Palestine, according to the promise given in the Balfour Declaration. The article focuses on Yousef Haikal, a local Palestinian leader and intellectual from Jaffa, whose thought illustrates the role played by Ahad-Ha’am’s writing in shaping the pragmatic Arab approach in the 1930s.

Alongside the articles published in the “1917 Centennial Forum,” the “Essays and Criticism” section of this issue is devoted to an analysis of the events of the same year and its effects over the last century. In the opening essay of the section, **Iris Agmon** argues that the historiography of World War I is written as if from the end — the inevitable end of the Ottoman Empire — and that this Europocentric perspective leads to a number of blind spots. Agmon’s present study on the publication of the Ottoman “family code” in October 1917 illustrates the need to examine the processes that occurred in the Ottoman Empire during the war and the preceding decades from the perspective of historic players who acted without knowing that the centuries-old empire was about to collapse within a few years.

**Karin Loevy**’s review essay examines how the new sovereign, legal and spatial order in the Middle East was imagined by those who worked to create it since 1917. She argues that a new wave of studies indicates that the parties involved in the redrawing of the region during the war years imagined a “new Middle East” — an open colonial space rife with possibilities. By reviewing a number of current studies, Loevy weaves a rich story of the unexpected and unfamiliar channels of that colonial activism -- in law, infrastructure development, international diplomacy and administration — that took place as part of the supposedly familiar moment of 1917.

**Rachel Havrelock** explores one specific aspect of that colonial activity, with far-reaching consequences: the oil franchise regime in the Middle East and its connection to the new states created in the region after the war, their boundaries and national character. She shows that those borders (drafted, for example, by the Sykes-Picot Agreement) were dictated first and foremost by the interests of the British, French and American oil corporations. This process created nation states bound to franchises that appropriated the states’ control of their subterranean wealth; “hollow” states obsessively concerned with reinforcing their connection to the national territory that was defined by borders drawn for the benefit of the oil corporations.

The collection of photographs curated by **Guy Raz**, and the interpretive essay that introduces it, concerns the visual documentation of the Jewish Battalions—collectively known as the Jewish Legion—operating in the framework of the British Army in World War I. This representation is a central chapter in the development of a sub-genre of photography that can be called “the portrait of the Jewish soldier in the Land of Israel.” Focusing on the work of three photographers—Yaacov Ben Dov, Tzadok Basan, and Avraham Suskin—Raz compares the different visual strategies developed by these photographers in order to present the new Jewish body, the national landscape and military culture. He argues that the question of “who is a Jewish soldier” is intertwined here with an equally important question: “who is a Jewish photographer.”

**Hillel Cohen** and **Yuval Evri** examine how the Sephardi natives of the land responded to the Balfour Declaration. The prospect of establishing a Jewish state, where the Arabs of Palestine would become a minority, was met with euphoria among many Jewish communities in Palestine and around the world. However, it deepened the dilemma facing the Sephardic, Mizrahi and Mughrabi Jews of the land, who found themselves torn between the European-colonial version of the Zionist movement, and the attempt to shape a native Jewish nationality based on the ethos of a joint homeland for Jews and Arabs. The response to the declaration by two figures, Haim Ben Kiki and Yosef Chaim Castel, reveals fabrics of loyalties and partnerships that predated the binary division between Jews and Arabs — a division that was taking hold in those years.

And, finally, **Efraim Davidi**'s essay carries us back to another dramatic event that occurred in 1917 and had a tremendous influence on the 20th century: the October Revolution. Davidi examines the impact of the Revolution on the local arena through the story of the Socialist Workers Party established in Palestine in October 1919, whose founders defined themselves as communists. Davidi places the party's activity in the political and social context in which it was founded: in the world — the Bolshevik revolution and the establishment of the Third International; in Palestine — the entrenchment of the British colonial regime; and in the yishuv — the communists' confrontation with the Zionist parties. Although the party changed its name in 1923 (this time into Yiddish), its short-lived history illuminates hopes and dreams, crises and failures, which are with us to this day.