

# Orientalism, Jewish Studies and Israeli Society: A Few Comments

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## Abstract

One of the claims that was voiced in the debate over Edward Said's book *Orientalism* was that the author ignored German Orientalist research. This essay does not discuss this claim itself, but rather uses this debate as a starting point for investigating different aspects of Israeli consciousness. Indeed, German Orientalism was not directly connected to colonialist activity, but it encompassed the discourse regarding the relation between Germany and Judaism and "the Jewish Question." The question was whether Jews were Oriental and therefore foreign to European culture, or rather a religious group that could be integrated into that culture. The modern national definition of the Jewish collective was based on adopting this worldview and on accepting the Orientalist paradigm. The tendency was to define the Jews as a European nation, emphasizing the difference between the new entity and the Orient. This tendency was manifested both in the attitude towards Arabs and towards the history of "the land" [Palestine/"Land of Israel"], and in the attitude to Oriental Jews [*Mizrahim*]. Nonetheless, other directions for the definition of Jewish thought and identity can also be found in the Orientalist literature.

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[Translator's note: *Mizrahi* (plural: *Mizrahim*), literally 'Easterner' or 'Oriental,' is the Hebrew term for Israeli Jews who immigrated from Arab or Muslim countries. It is contrasted with the term Ashkenazi (pl. Ashkenazim), which in the Israeli context refers to Israeli Jews who immigrated from Europe, Russia or America. The dichotomy *Mizrahi*/Ashkenazi is founded upon the traditional one between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, i.e., those who follow the traditions constituted in Spain and in Germany, respectively.]

## Keywords

Orientalism – Edward Said – German Orientalism – Zionism – Hebraism – Mizrahi – Ashkenazi – Palestine – Israel

Throughout the vast and extensive debate over Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, it was repeatedly argued that Said ignored German Orientalist research in his analysis. As is well known, Said tried to show in his book the different ways in which "the Orient" was imagined, and the ways in which Western identity was envisioned as "rational," "enlightened," and "progressive" against the Orient, and in particular the Arabo-Islamic one, which was represented as an expression of "irrationality," "non-creativity," "violence," "laziness," or alternatively, as an expression of "exoticism," "rootedness," "authenticity" and so on. He has demonstrated how in both cases the description was based on ignoring the concrete questions of the Orient. In this framework, Said examined the affinity between Orientalist research in general and the different forms of colonial rule over the Orient, and in particular those of England and France.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that research in Germany was not directly related to colonial activity (despite its involvement in the matters of the Ottoman Empire) led some scholars to describe it as a research "free" of colonialist motivations, and therefore as a body of research expressing a different stance towards the Orient. The first to make this claim was, apparently, Albert Hourani,<sup>2</sup> who did so on the basis of a principal agreement with Edward Said's thesis. Later on, the same argument was brought up by many others, both in the West and in the Arab world—some essentially agreeing with Said, but most voicing a vigorous rejection of the discourse that he raised, and showing an intention to reject it altogether, as if there was nothing of value in it.<sup>3</sup>

1 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

2 Gabriel Piterberg, "Albert Hourani ha-Manoah ve-She'elat ha-'Oryentalizm," *Jama'a* 1 (1997): 40.

3 E.g., Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," *New York Review of Books*, June 14, 1982. Said strongly rejected the claim regarding German Orientalism, and claimed that it does not change in any way the perspective that he uncovered (Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique* 1 [1985]: 91). Undoubtedly, the claim that German Orientalism can be clearly distinguished from Orientalist discourse is problematic, as was shown, e.g., by Maurice Olender's book that treats a related subject: the way in which the dichotomy Aryan/Semitic shaped the perception of culture (Maurice Olender, *Les langues du paradis: aryens et sémites, un couple providentiel* [Paris, Gallimard, Le Seuil, 1989]). It certainly does not change

It seems that this claim, like other claims, contributed to the broadening of the discourse about the modes of representation of the “Orient” and the ways of inventing and distancing it. But even those who contest particular aspects of Said’s theory would surely agree that the argument regarding the shaking off of German Orientalism does not refute the framework of critique that was set in *Orientalism*, but at most clarifies its complexity. It is unlikely that anyone would seriously argue today that there is any science that is “neutral” and “transparent,” any science that depicts reality “as it really is,” in the famous declaration of Ranke, and that is devoid of any cultural and ideological bias. In principle, it is difficult to claim that German Orientalism is essentially different from the conceptions that were developed in other places in Europe, and it certainly did not evolve as an autonomous framework. Arguably, the Orientalist scholarship that evolved in Germany has its own characteristics, and no one would question its magnificent achievements. It is certainly possible that such approaches may open new ways and advance the discourse. But the discourse presupposes the recognition of the principles that were brought up in Said’s work, and of the central position of the dichotomy West/East, Aryan/Semitic, as the foundation of the constitution of modern Western identity. Such awareness allows to look for other approaches in the Orientalist research itself. It is important to remember that Said did not denounce the totality of the knowledge that was developed in the Orientalist context, but rather examined the cultural standpoint that guided it.

But the subject of the present work is not the question of German Orientalism in itself. I am not qualified and do not intend to express my own opinion regarding this question. I am not an expert in the history of the Middle East, and my acquaintance with the relevant literature is very superficial. Nevertheless, the question of German Orientalism could serve as an important starting point for investigating central aspects of Zionist consciousness, as an axis that allows one to enter into the discussion of a few cultural and political layers pertaining to Israeli culture. This is possible in light of the place of the Orientalist perspective in the definition of the discourse regarding Jews in modern Europe. German Orientalist scholarship has indeed evolved in isolation from colonialist practices, but it included in it, more strikingly than in other places, the study of Judaism and the discourse about Jews. The question of the Jews, viz., the possibility of their integration in society, was discussed at least partially in the framework of Orientalist discourse. Jewish Studies were established in Orientalist institutes in the academic and theological institutions

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the essence of the discourse raised by Said, but rather it seems to me that this specific framework indeed contributes to expand the discourse.

in Europe. Therefore, the use of the argument regarding Said's disregard of German Orientalism to reject the framework of the discourse that he suggested is especially surprising when it is voiced by Jews. Indeed, this fact alone does not disqualify the argument itself, but it serves to put it in its appropriate broader context.

The relation West/East is one of the central axes that constitute Israeli culture and shape its cultural and political borders. Various aspects of that relation were studied in a series of works upon which this work is based.<sup>4</sup> As was

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4 This was outlined by Said himself (Said, *Orientalism*; *idem.*, *The Question of Palestine* [New York: Vintage Books, 1980]), who was followed in various ways by others. Ella Shohat followed Said's mark and examined in a series of articles different aspects of the Zionist consciousness, while discussing in parallel Palestinians and Mizraḥi Jews. She was the first to point out the importance of the Orientalist perspective to the analysis of different aspects of Israeli consciousness and society in a way that allows one to incorporate the discussion on Palestinians with that regarding Jews who immigrated to Israel from Arab countries. Her studies point out the affinity between the cultural consciousness and the social exclusion of Mizraḥim, and paved the way to an examination of the different ways in which the Orientalist paradigm shapes Israeli consciousness (Ella Shohat, "Sepharadim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims," *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1-35; *idem.*, "Antinomies of Exile: Said at the Frontiers of National Narrations," in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinkler (Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 121-143). In parallel, Shohat examined the representations of the Orient and of women in Israeli cinema (*idem.*, Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (1989). New Edition. New York and London: I.B. Tauris, 2010) and added an important perspective to the examination of the Eurocentric identification of the Israelo-Zionist discourse. Shlomo Swirski pointed out the various cultural-educational practices that enabled the exclusion of Mizraḥim (Shlomo Swirski, *Lo Neḥshalim 'Ela Menuḥshalim: Mizraḥim ve-'Ashkenazim be-Yisra'el: Nituaḥ Sotsyologi ve-Siḥot 'im Pe'ilim u-Fe'ilot* [Haifa, 1981]; *idem.*, *Ḥinukh be-Yisra'el: Meḥoz ha-Masulim ha-Nifradim*, [Tel-Aviv, 1990]). Moreover, Gabriel Piterberg has examined the Orientalist aspect on which the historical consciousness and the study of history in Israel are based, as well as the ways of incorporating the Orientalist paradigm in the Orient itself, in Israel and in Egypt (Gabriel Piterberg, "Domestic Orientalism: the Representation of 'Oriental' Jews in Zionist/Israeli Historiography," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, 2 (1996): 125-145). The study of the history of the Jews of Arab countries was examined by Avner Ben-Amos ("An Impossible Pluralism? European Jews and Oriental Jews in Israeli History Curriculum," *History of European Ideas* 18, 1 (1994): 41-51); different aspects of Orientalism in Zionist culture were studied by several scholars (See Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Fin de Siecle Orientalism: The Oustjuden and Aesthetics of Jewish Self Affirmation," in *Idem*, *Divided Passions*, Detroit, MI, 1991, 77-132; Sarah Chinski, "The Lacemakers from Bezalel", *Theory and Criticism* 11, (1997), 177-205 (Hebrew); and Gila Ballas, "Orient and Orientalism in the Late Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century Art," in *Assimilation and Acculturation*, Ed. Y. Kaplan and M. Stern, (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, (1989), 189-201. (Hebrew), sometimes

properly stressed by Ella Shohat,<sup>5</sup> this attitude defines both the distinction between Jews and Arabs, and that between Ashkenazim and Mizraḥim. It is often combined with the shaping of the distinction secular/religious. Taking the perspective of “German Orientalism” as a point of departure adds another dimension to the discourse. This context makes it easier to demonstrate how, in fact, the concrete definition of Zionist consciousness was based on accepting the same worldview that enabled the disassociation of the Jews themselves from Europe.<sup>6</sup> In the Zionist context, central aspects of the relation east/west were melded, which can be elucidated through German Orientalism (but not only the German one), and which were developed in a way that was directly linked to the settlement and colonization project in the Orient. In addition, Said’s critics observed that the theological factor that led the discourse of “the Orient” is characteristic of German Orientalism. The combination of a theological aspect with the use of European-Romantic concepts is also a key aspect of Zionist culture.

In this brief framework, I wish to present a few layers whose combination may clarify the existing consciousness, and also to point toward certain possibilities arising from its criticism. This is not a comprehensive treatment (I intend to expand on other aspects separately), but rather an attempt to show

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with relation to other discourse framework that created analogous dichotomies (masculine/feminine; secular/religious). Yaacov Shavit (*Ha-Yahadut bi-R'i ha-Yevanut* [Tel-Aviv 1992], 191-192; 482, n. 57) briefly discussed the shaping of the Orient according to Romanticist imagery. Sammy Smooha pointed out the position of the dichotomy West/East in what he termed the “rifts” in Israeli society—between Jews and Arabs and between Ashkenazim and Mizraḥim (Sami Smooha, “Class, Ethnic, and National Cleavages and Democracy in Israel,” in *Israeli Democracy under Stress*, ed. Ehud Sprinzak and Larry Diamond [Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993], 309-342. Oren Yiftachel discusses the ethnic basis behind Israeli developmental policy, in particular as means to dispossess Arabs, but also in the context of absorbing Mizraḥim (Oren Yiftachel, “The Internal Frontier: The Territorial Control of Ethnic Minorities,” *Regional Studies* 30, 5 (1996): 493-508); See also: *idem.*, “Binuy 'Umah ve-Ḥaluqat ha-Merḥav ba-’Etnoqraṭiyah ha-Yisre’elit’: Hityashvut, Qarqa’ot u-Fe’arim ‘Adatiyim,” *Tyoney Mishpat* 21, 3 (1997): 637-663. Gila Ballas outlined the Orientalist aspect of Israeli literature (*op. cit.*). Gil Anidjar pointed out the place of the Orientalist paradigm in the shaping of Jewish Studies, and in particular in relation to the study of Kabbalah (Gil Anidjar, “Jewish Mysticism Alterable and Unalterable: On Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the Zohar of Christian Spain,” *Jewish Social Studies* 3 (1996): 89-157). It should be noted that this short survey does not touch upon all aspects relevant to the question of Mizraḥim in Israeli culture.

5 Ella Shohat, “Sepharadim in Israel.”

6 Jonathan Boyarin, “The Other Within and the Other Without,” in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. Silberman, Laurence J. and Cohn, Robert L. [New York and London: New York University Press, 1994], 424-452.

through this lens a survey of some aspects of the influence of the Orientalist worldview on Zionist consciousness.



Jewish Studies in Germany (and not only in Germany) were from the outset a part of Orientalist studies, and were conducted in institutes studying the Orient. The origin of this combination goes back to the middle ages, when Jewish Studies and Islamic Studies had polemic and missionary purposes (for instance, in the work of the missionary Ramon Llull, who studied Arabic and Jewish manuscripts intensively for missionary purposes).<sup>7</sup> This engagement was significantly expanded during the Italian Renaissance, when Humanists turned to non-Christian literary traditions, and mainly after the Reformation, both in the Catholic and in the Protestant worlds. This period witnessed the growth and institutionalization of both Oriental and Hebraist studies.

The two disciplines were not conceived as identical: the special position of Judaism in the Christian tradition and in the definition of the Christian identity brought about from the outset the distinction between “Hebraism” and “Orientalism”. In the beginning of the modern era, Hebraist studies were significantly expanded, and had an important role in the process of reshaping European culture. Hebrew studies were conducted in a direct and clear relation to the effort to redefine Christianity, and as part of the institutionalization of academic studies in general. First in the Catholic world, and then predominantly in the Protestant world, due to the Protestant demand to return to the scriptures alone (*Sola Scriptura*), to read them in their original language as a precondition for truly understanding them. The principle assumption of the scholars involved in that field was that post-Biblical Jewish literature in its various manifestations contains, alongside superstitions, also authentic ancient material whose reading and study is essential to the understanding of Christianity, and a part of it was perceived as a testimony to the veracity of Christianity. Christian scholars expressed various positions and discovered different fields of interest: it was in the context of the Neo-Platonic Renaissance that the study of Kabbalah was first developed. Later on, it was mainly the study of the Hebrew language, Jewish Biblical exegesis and the Talmudic-Rabbinical literature that was developed. It is here that the scientific discourse of Judaism was institutionalized, which continues to guide “Jewish Studies” to this very day. Hebraists published dictionaries and grammars, bibliographies and

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7 Harvey Hames, “Approaches to Conversion in the Late Thirteenth-Century Church,” *Studia Lulliana* 35 (1995): 75-84.

concordances, though at times partial or flawed. In that context emerged for the first time the ethnographic literature dedicated to Jews, out of clear polemic motives. As stated, Orientalism itself evolved out of theological motives, but in a different context.

But despite the differences, it is important to stress the points of resemblance and overlap between these two discourses, and the fact that Hebraism was gradually integrated into Orientalism. In both cases, the research expressed a dialectical relation between two cultural languages: the theological discourse on the one hand, and the discourse that employed the concepts of “culture” and “ethnicity” on the other hand. It was in this historical context that the meeting point of the two discourses had its most symbolic manifestation—in the expulsion of the Jews and the Muslims from Spain in 1492, an event that coincided with Columbus’ expedition to “the New World”, and with the constitution of a similar discourse towards the Indians.<sup>8</sup> The expulsion of the two groups marks the exclusion process that was involved in the creation of the modern consciousness, and took place parallel to the crystallization of Orientalism and Hebraism as fields of study.

Like the Orientalist discourse, the Hebraist discourse opened up additional possibilities and even conditions for greater cultural openness and more dialogical identity. Out of the Hebraist discourse grew also the approaches that called for more tolerance toward the Jews, but it was also within it that the boundaries of the notion of tolerance were drawn: aside from the legitimization that this discourse granted to Jewish literature (and other literary corpora whose origin is in the ancient east), it also created the possibility of excluding the Jews and presenting them as “foreign,” either because of their origin, or because of their faith that was perceived as preserving their foreignness. Both of these aspects were combined in the creation of a new attitude towards the Jewish tradition. In many cases, the appreciation of the value of post-Biblical Jewish literature was accompanied by the negation of the concrete existence of the Jews, by presenting them as ignorant of the tradition that they carry, as replacing the authentic divine wisdom with human wisdom. This, in turn, led to a separation between certain aspects of Jewish literature that were deemed authentic and expressive of ancient truth and those aspects of Jewish life that were considered foreign to the Christian European culture and even inimical

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8 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

to it.<sup>9</sup> The images that were attributed to the Jews in this context were parallel to those ascribed to “the Orient,” as part of the Orientalist discourse.

Mostly after the 17th century, Hebraist studies were institutionalized within Orientalist institutes. The positioning of Jewish Studies within Orientalism took part in the definition of Judaism as part of “the Orient,” and in integrating the Jewish Question within the same discourse. Judaism and Jews were ascribed the same characteristics attributed to the East. In both cases, the image of femininity as symbolizing irrationality, capriciousness, etc. played a central role. Ethnographic literature dedicated to Jews played a parallel role to the ethnographic literature on Oriental peoples in defining the boundaries of civility, at times, as in the case of Mizraḥi Jews, combining the two discourses.<sup>10</sup> As much as Orientalism marked the disassociation of “the external other,” Hebraism thus marked the disassociation of the Jews, “the internal other,” as member of eastern culture.<sup>11</sup> This is also one of the contexts in which the dichotomy between “Eastern” and “European” was established as a matter of course. This distinction was combined with that between Aryan and Semitic, which played a decisive role in dividing the scientific discourse into disciplines: language, religion and culture.

These distinctions, which had manifold expressions, shaped both German Orientalism in all its forms and the discourse about the Jews and their culture.<sup>12</sup>

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9 The scope of the literature that deals with the different aspects of Hebraism is vast and still growing in recent years. As was noted by Richard Popkin, this fact stems from the admission of the importance that Hebraism played in the shaping of European consciousness, especially since the 15th century. In what follows, we will survey different works that dealt with the study of Hebrew, Kabbalah or other frameworks (Popkin, Richard and Weiner, Gordon, *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* [Dordrecht, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994] and references therein). Frank Manual, Heiko Oberman and others have outlined the general context of the evolution of the Hebraist discourse, e.g., Heiko Oberman, *The Roots of Antisemitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Frank E. Manual, *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

10 Elliot Horowitz, “A Different Mode of Civility: Lancelot Addison on the Jews of Barbary,” *Studies in Church History* 29 (1992): 309-325.

11 On the origins and evolution of this distinction, see Boyarin, “The Other Within and the Other Without.”

12 On this issue, see Maurice Olender’s detailed discussion (Olender, *Les langues du paradis*). At the center of this discourse are the categories that were devised by Ernest Renan. Renan was indeed a clear representative of Orientalism, but his approach, and particularly the importance he saw in the cultural differences between the races, affected the shaping of the research.



Even the great Jewish Orientalists, such as Goldziher, did not reject this discursive framework, and accepted the Orientalist paradigm. They did oppose the ascription of the Jews to the Oriental world.<sup>13</sup> It may well be that their motivations were different, partly due to the awareness of the success of Orientalism with regards to the Jews, as has been claimed by Bernard Lewis.<sup>14</sup> But they did not devise a different attitude towards the East.<sup>15</sup>

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The significance of the Jewish question as part of the Orientalist discourse is clearly manifested in the discourse that evolved at the end of the 18th century regarding the integration of Jews in European society and their civil rights. This discourse reflects the turning point that occurred regarding the “Jewish question” in face of the relative secularization of the political sphere, i.e., the alleged neutralization of the status of religion and the emergence of the Enlightenment. These developments took place following the falling apart of the corporative social frameworks and the emergence of the centralist state. Secularization and centralization in fact destabilized the former foundation of Jewish autonomous existence and raised new kinds of questions as to their separate existence and the very possibility of their integration as communities in a European state.<sup>16</sup> Now the question did not revolve around the faith of the Jews, but their characteristics and their social structure.

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13 This was outlined by Yaacov Shavit, who examined Goldziher's early work and showed how “‘the Renanian convention’ was rejected by accepting its assumptions” (Yaacov Shavit, *Ha-Yahadut bi-R'i ha-Yevanut*, 238-241; *idem.*, “Ha-Yesh la-Yehudim Dimyon? Tkhunot Bney Shem u-Vney Yefet: Shemim ve-'Arim ba-Polemiqah ha-Yehudit ha-Modernit,” in *Beyn Yisra'el la-'Umot*, ed. Almog, Shmuel [Jerusalem, 1987], 215-241). In other words, Goldziher tried to show that Judaism fits the categories that Renan and others established to qualify the Aryans in contrast to the Orientals. This framework also bridges the discursive differences in the different countries, and undermines that claim regarding the uniqueness of German Orientalism. Goldziher's work strove to respond to Renan's famous claim, according to which Jews were lacking imaginary and creative mythical thinking force.

14 Bernard Lewis, *Islam in History* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), 11.

15 Lewis explains that the Jews turned to the East on the background of being accused of being Oriental, with the attempt to turn to something that is “more Oriental” than them (*Ibid.*).

16 Salo Wittmayer Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?,” *Menorah Journal* 14, 1928, 515-526.

This process had different expressions in each one of the countries of Western Europe, according to the different historical developments in each one of them. But in all of them it was established on similar concepts to those that defined the Orientalist discourse—whether it was about their rights or their culture, whether they were defined as part of the Orient or were directly subjected to the distinction between European culture and everything that was considered an inferior culture—whether it was directly or indirectly related to colonial rule.

In Germany, the discourse has an unmistakable Orientalist character, and renowned Orientalist scholars took a decisive role in it and were called to express their opinion in the matter. As a whole, the discourse was about the question of to what extent the Jews are a separate nation, oriental in character, and would therefore remain a foreign element that could never be integrated in society. This position was rejected strongly by Christian Dohm, the clearest supporter of granting Jews emancipation, who brought the subject into public debate. He argued that the cause for the inferior social and moral state of the Jews was the oppression that they endured in the middle ages and which was still practiced in his time.<sup>17</sup> He maintained that Judaism is at its core a religious-spiritual essence, and therefore removing some of the restrictions that are imposed on the Jews will enable them to be integrated in society and will bring their moral and civic regeneration in the present. It would bring about their return to “humanity”—i.e., to the values that were set by the German bourgeoisie.<sup>18</sup> Dohm also mentioned the “Oriental” elements of the Jews, but rather emphasized the romantic-positive side of the Oriental image, presenting it as an expression of an ancient and magnificent culture. He believed that as representatives of such a culture, the Jews have a place in European culture.

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17 Christian Dohm, *Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews* (Cincinnati: Ohio Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion, 1957 [1780]).

18 On Dohm's treatise and the debate that sprang from it, see Robert Liberles, “Dohm's Treatise on the Jews: A Defence of the Enlightenment,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 33 (1988): 29-42; *idem.*, “From Toleration to Verbesserung: German and English Debates on the Jews in the Eighteenth Century,” *Central European History* 22, 1 (1989): 3-32. On the affinity between the debate about the Jewish question and the “internal” Jewish discourse, see David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York, 1987), 28ff. It should be stressed that the central question was the possibility of an autonomous communal existence within a centralized government. The language in which this question was discussed was, at least to some extent, the Orientalist language.

In contrast, the German Orientalist and Hebraist Michaelis claimed in his report that Jewish culture is a clear expression of an oriental culture.<sup>19</sup> In analyzing the Jewish law that, he claimed, perpetuates their separateness, he stressed that this law represents an oriental national culture that is foreign to the European approach. Such claims and even more radical ones (since even Michaelis allowed the integration of certain extraordinary individuals among the Jews) were raised over and over again within the discourse surrounding the Jewish question, and were an important foundation—though definitely not the only one—of modern Antisemitism.

Without underestimating the importance of the moral and political differences between the approach of Dohm, who supported the integration of Jews, and that which rejected it altogether (although the attitude of Michaelis himself was also ambiguous), it is important to note that both sides of the debate assumed that in their present state, the Jews reflect a degenerate and harmful essence, that they are foreign to society and its values, and that their “amelioration” is a necessary precondition for integrating them into it. The debate concerned only the very possibility of reaching such amelioration, and the circumstances that led to what was defined as “the present degeneration of the Jews.” Later critics showed how this debate illustrated the exclusionist aspect that is part and parcel of the Enlightenment. Orientalism was not the only factor for the exclusion of Jews, but it was one of the elements that enabled the rise of modern antisemitism as a political force. Antisemitism had other cultural sources, but it cannot be separated from the discussion on Orientalism.

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Modern Jewish discourse in general was based on accepting the aforementioned discursive framework. Most of the approaches that developed in Western Europe in the 19th century were based on presenting Judaism as a religious community that operates according to rational values in conformity with European culture and loyalty to the state. Despite critical stances toward dominant streams in European thought in other fields, the modern Jewish discourse was not based on a refutation of the dichotomy West/East, but rather on the negation of its pertinence to the Jews. In other words, for the Jews, the problem was not the characteristics that were attributed to “the Orient,” but the fact that they were attributed to Jews. Consciously or not, this approach was based on an acceptance in principle of the same stance that allowed the

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19 Johannes D. Michaelis, “Arguments Against Dohm,” in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Mendes, P. and Reinhartz, J. (New York and Oxford, 1980 [1782]), 36-38.

exclusion of the Jews. The aspirations towards an “amelioration of the Jews” (which were derived from objective social problems) were based to a large extent on principles similar to those that shaped the Orientalist discourse. Other approaches that explicitly tried to create a bridge between “West” and “East” remained marginal.

The affinity between the Orientalist paradigm and the definition of Jewish identity found its complex expression in the development of Jewish Studies in Europe. As noted before, the scientific treatment of Judaism was initiated through Christianity, and with its crystallization, it was included among the programs of the institutes dedicated to the study of the Orient. The Christian Hebraists (along with a small group of Jewish scholars with a similar approach) were the first to treat Jewish texts using modern critical tools, and to analyze them in the language of modern scientific culture. They created the tools to adapt Jewish Studies to the organization of knowledge that was developed in the universities of Europe, and it was they who set the perspective and cultural values that led research.

These principles continued to shape the academic study of Judaism to a large extent in the 19th century, when Jewish scholars adopted the same tools and established what is known as “Jewish Studies” (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*). In this period, the research activity regarding the Jews in different aspects was established, and this contributed importantly to the process of the redefinition of Jewish identity in Europe. This research continued along the path that was set earlier by Christian scholars, reflecting their perspective on the subject matter and their ambivalent attitude towards it. In parallel, the research reflected the tendency to establish an autonomous discourse on Judaism, but at the same time to define it as part of “History,” i.e., as part of the West. Indeed, there is a difference between the Christian pursuit of Jewish scriptures as a basis for the redefinition of the Christian-European culture, and the Jewish pursuit of these texts for the redefinition of Judaism. This is due to the direct affinity of Jews to these texts, and often also due to Halakhic commitment that accompanied the development of Jewish Studies. But what is relevant to our point is to point out that the definition of Jewish identity was founded on the acceptance of a perception of history that is similar to that which founded exclusionist positions regarding the Jews. This perception reflects the acceptance of the Orientalist paradigm and the inclination to distinguish the Jews from “the East.” Thus, the research that was dedicated to the history and literature of the Jews constituted a practice that enabled the integration of that which was defined as “Judaism” into Europe, and the formulation of a Judaism with the values that were defined as “European.” At the core of this research was the inclination to demonstrate the suitability of Jewish values to the

values of European culture and the values and principles of the Enlightenment. It is interesting that it was precisely medieval Jewish philosophy, which was distinctly developed within Islamic culture, that was used for this purpose and was presented as a token of Jewish rationality.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the literature of Kabbalah and certain contents of the Midrash, which were seen as expressing “Oriental” superstition, were rejected.

The attempt to use the language of science for defining Judaism remained intertwined to a large extent with the theological aspect, and was combined with the cultural aspect that science purports to represent. The research in Jewish Studies and Jewish historiography was based on an image of the present as a new emancipatory age, and on a view towards the values of Enlightenment as an expression of new doctrine. This rich and diverse research enterprise served in various ways to define the Jews as a part of Europe and a part of history. In addition, this research was partly the basis for a dialectic between two cultural languages: the language of the Jewish textual sources and that of modern science. It was based on accepting the same historical perception on which Orientalism as a whole, and the perception of supremacy, were based, but at the same time it kept a certain distance from the culturally dominant perspective as an autonomous space striving to take part in the general cultural context.<sup>21</sup>



In the Zionist context, this perception has a much clearer significance. Zionism explicitly rejected the inclination toward assimilation into European society, which it treated as “absorption” [*hitbolelut*], a denial of the central authentic foundation of Judaism—its national essence. But in practice, despite this rejection, not only did Zionism (as a framework with diverse positions) not deviate from the trend that it rejected, it even stabilized it and drove it into a much sharper formulation. It was based on the definition of the Jews as a separate nation, but rejected the perception of the Jews as an oriental one. The process

20 Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 189-198.

21 The dialectic aspect which is at the core of the process of assimilation was pointed out by Amos Funkenstein, who demonstrated how this dialectic exists in all of the frameworks of Jewish existence, and pointed out its significance in the modern context (Amos Funkenstein, “The Dialectics of Assimilation,” *Jewish Social Studies* 51 [1994]: 1-14) and from a different angle by Shulamit Volkov, “Minorities and the Nation-State: A Post-Modern Perspective,” *Jewish Studies* 37 (1997): 69-88.

of the redefinition of Judaism as a territorial nation was based rather on an identification with Europe, and on establishing a self-identity while creating an ambivalent relation towards “the East”: on the one hand, an expression of a primitive and violent culture, and, on the other hand, a model to be imitated. In both cases, there was no place for the existence of “the East” as a concrete cultural existence, and, in particular, for Arab national aspirations. In a seemingly paradoxical way, the departure of the Jews from Europe and the founding of a Jewish settlement in the East served as a basis for an integration into the West and for the redefinition of the Jews as a European nation.

Since the beginning of Zionist settlement, the definition of the relation towards “the East” was a central pivot for the formulation of national cultural values. This relation was expressed in different, but complementary, ways in the attitude towards the Arabs and the Jews of the Orient.<sup>22</sup> It ranges from total alienation and attribution of clear Oriental characteristics to the East and the Arabs as expressing essential evil, laziness, primitivity, etc. to a representation of the East as an idyllic expression of an ancient authentic culture, and viewing the Arabs (or Mizrahi Jews, especially the Yemenites) as guardians of the ancient Jewish culture. Thus, no room is left for the Orient in itself, outside its role in the process of shaping Jewish identity as Western. Moreover, these images were part of the effort to exclude Arabs from the domain of the land and its description and from the job market, under the slogan “Hebrew Labor.” The settlers of the second Aliyah, such as Shmuel Yavnieli, initiated the effort to bring the Jews of Yemen to Palestine, to fill the place of the Arabs. The Yemenites were presented as representatives of the ancient national ideals, but at the same time were excluded from society.

A clear expression of this can be found in Herzl's writings, who did not hide his hostile attitude towards the Orient as a whole; he defined it as primitive, and included in that definition the Oriental Jews. He described the Zionist entity as a “spearhead of civilization against barbarity.”<sup>23</sup> His attitude reflects a distinction that was taken for granted by his contemporaries, a distinction that was perceived not only as an historical fact, but as a natural and even biological one. This presentation of the Zionist enterprise was shared by many writers and statesmen and was oftentimes treated as a commonplace. In his

22 Yaffah Berlovitz, *Lehamtsi' 'Erets, Lehamtsi' 'Am: Sifrut ha-'Aliyah ha-Rishonah* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad 1996). Shmuel Almog, “‘Ha-'Adamah le-'Ovdeha' ve-Giyur ha-Falahim,” In *'Uma ve-Toldoteha*, vol. 2, ed. Shmuel Almog (Jerusalem 1983), 165-175. Ella Shohat, “Sepharadim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1-35.

23 Theodor Herzl, *Kitvey Hertsl*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Hasifriyah Hatsiyonit 1960), 33-34.

utopian novel *Altneuland*,<sup>24</sup> Herzl shows through its protagonist the process of the amelioration of the Jews—the transformation of the Jews of East Europe, the *Ostjuden*, making them into Westerners in a society that is established in the East. The foundation of the state of the Jews is the journey to reform the Jews, whose departure from Europe was perceived as a way for them to be integrated into the West, and was based on a complete identification with the cultural and political values of the West, while at the same time expressing scorn and loathing towards the Jews of the East. The society that was described by Herzl was in a way a united Europe, a refined combination of its national cultures. The Arabs are presented in the book as being grateful to the Jews for the progress that they have bought about—a classic colonialist image that appeared over and over again in many other remarks of Zionist writers when referring to the question of the Arabs.<sup>25</sup> Even if such remarks today seem naïve and absurd (and indeed, they reflect the knowledge and imagery that were current when they were written), it is important to note that essentially the same colonialist consciousness continues to guide the discourse even now, though in other more or less subtle ways. Other Zionist speakers used different images, but did not stray from the twofold framework that was presented above.

The Orientalist perception was fully integrated in the historic and theological consciousness that shaped Zionism, a consciousness that perceived the contemporary settlement of Palestine as a return of the Jewish people to its land and a realization of the longings of Jews throughout the generations. The national consciousness did not replace the religious myth, but rather provided an interpretation to it. It was specifically the attempt to describe what was referred to as the “Jewish Messianic aspiration” and the “longings of the generations” as a national aspiration in its modern political sense, that involved an adoption of the Orientalist paradigm. This is also the framework that gave Orientalism its unique meaning. This attempt was based on a denial of the actual East while “inventing” an ancient-mythical one purporting to reflect the authentic origins of Jewish existence and perceived as essentially different from the Arabo-Islamic East. Even those among the Zionists who strove to present the Jews as an “Oriental” people were still bound to the European Romanticist images, and rejected the history and the existence of the Islamic

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24 *Ibid.*

25 Gorny surveys the different approaches to this question. See Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs 1882-1948: A Study of Ideology* (Clarendon Press 1987). It is worth noting that despite significant differences from the political point of view, these did not concern the presuppositions of the discourse.

world in which they settled.<sup>26</sup> On the opposite side, the trend to imitate Arab culture that was seen as “authentic” and as preserving the ancient foundations of ancient Jewish existence was not based on granting autonomy to the Arab existence, but was rather meant to replace it and take its place. Arab existence had no place in this national framework. The interpretation of religious myth as a national story led to its adaptation into the European Romanticist terminology and to the integration of Judaism into the European narrative. The characterization of Jewish settlement as a return of the Jewish people to its land was therefore a way of redefining Jews as part of the West, while adopting the same imagery that was the basis for characterizing the Jews themselves in European culture. The process of migration to Palestine was perceived as a process of “repair” and of return at the same time, a process that leads to integration into the European consciousness.

In all of these contexts, the Orientalist and the theological-national aspects were intertwined and made up the basis for the consolidation of the Zionist consciousness and the constitution of a new civilization. This intertwining started earlier, and also took place simultaneously among pilgrims and Christian scholars from various European countries, who came to Palestine since the 19th century in order to explore the Holy Land. The combination of the “Holy Land” and the “East” reflects therefore the concrete meaning of the national definition of the Jews, that is, the historical-theological myth on which it relies. This also marks the unique character of Zionist consciousness as compared to other colonialist consciousnesses that were shaped by the Orientalist paradigm. The theological image and the Romanticist-Orientalist conceptual language were combined in it in a way that clarified the meaning held by the definition of the religious myth as a national-political one. The reference to the land in terms taken from Biblical myth and prayer imagery denounced on the symbolic level its existence as a territorial-cultural framework. Only a handful of the Zionists strove to define the new identity in terms of integration in the land itself and not in its mythical image. Thus, in the Zionist context, the two aspects of the German discourse were combined—the theo-

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26 I have examined this matter from a different perspective in my article on the concept of the “return to history,” in which I tried to point out the theological-political meaning of this concept (Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Ha-Shivah ‘el ha-Historiyah shel ha-Ge’ulah, ‘o: Mahi ha-‘Historiyah’ she-‘eleha Mitbatsa‘at ha-‘Shivah’ ba-Biṭuy ‘Ha-Shivah ‘el ha-Historiyah,’” in *Ha-Tsiyonut ve-ha-Ḥazarah la-Historiyah: Ha‘arakah mi-Ḥadash*, ed. Eisenstadt, Shmuel Noah and Lissak, Moshe [Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhaq Ben Tsvi 1999]). On the Eurocentric aspect of the Zionist utopias, see Rachel Elboim-Dror, *Ha-Maḥar shel ha-‘Etmol*, vol. 1: *Ha-‘Uṭopiyah ha-Tsiyonit* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhaq Ben Tsvi 1993).



logical and the cultural one, and the cultural aspect became an interpretation for the theological one. Zionism defined itself as a realization of Jewish history, a return of the Jewish people to its land, and a revival of the ancient civilization of the “East”. The Orientalist aspect was therefore crucial in the translation of the Judeo-Christian theological-Messianic myth into the Romanticist-national conceptual language. This combination was one of the factors that enabled the denial of Palestinian existence.

Thus, the meaning of the Jewish writing of history as a national-territorial history was a denial of the Arab history of the land as part of the definition of Jewish history. The land remained in its mythical framework as the land of the Bible and the patriarchs. This is the land into which the return was carried out, and its history had no value other than that of the continuity of the Jewish entity in it. As was shown extensively by Yaakov Barnai, the attempt to argue for the continuity of the existence of a Jewish entity in the land—a claim that is in itself historically problematic—was based on a disregard of the history of the land.<sup>27</sup> The beginning of the Middle Ages in the history of Israel was set by Ben-Zion Dinur as the period of Islamic conquest, which allowed him to present the rest of Jewish history as a continuous national struggle against occupation and all of its consequences—a civilization of more than 1,200 years.<sup>28</sup>

Hence, clinging to the theological myth allowed the integration of Jewish consciousness in a European framework, and the foundation of a European entity in the East, while erasing the East itself. The attempt to express the myth in the Romanticist language of modern nationalism emphasized the Orientalist approach that was involved in it. This attempt reflected the adoption of approaches that were developed in the Hebraist context as a foundation for a redefinition of Jewish collectivity.



27 Yaakov Barnai, *Historiyografiyah ve-Le'umiyut: Megamot be-Heqer 'Erets-Yisra'el ve-Yishuvah ha-Yehudi, 634-1881* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1995).

28 This perception continued to serve as the basis for the constitution of Israeli culture in more recent times. The aspect of silencing and denying the Arab existence in Palestine in Hebrew literature was discussed by Yitzhak Laor (*'Anu Kotvim 'Otakh Moledet* [Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad 1995]). On the erasure of ancient history in Israel as part of Christian and Jewish Biblical scholarship, see Keith W. Whitelman, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London and New York: Routledge 1996). The erasure of the history of Israel as part of the establishment of a “continuous Jewish existence” was pointed out by Barnai (*Historiyografiyah ve-Le'umiyut*). The exclusion of the land in art was shown by Sara Chinski (“Shtiqat ha-Dagim,” *Te'oriyah u-Viqoret* 4 [1993]: 105-123).

The Orientalist paradigm also had an interesting expression in the institution-ization of disciplines at The Hebrew University in its early stages. When the university was founded, two institutes were established in it: the Institute of Jewish Studies and the Institute of Eastern Studies. This reflected in fact a division of the classic German Orientalist institute, i.e., an extraction of the study of Judaism from the research object called “Orient.” The two institutes were founded on the German academic tradition, and the border between them was not clear. There were scholars who worked in both institutes, and some, like Josef Horovitz, who rejected the separation, and thus signalled a different research path, in which Judaism was indeed a part of the East.<sup>29</sup> This separation does not reflect the entirety of the research, but it does point to an intention to separate Judaism from the East in the context of the definition of national identity. Later on, in the 1930s, when the debate broke out over whether Jewish history and that history that was dubbed “general” should be separated or joined,<sup>30</sup> the term “general history” served to refer only to the history of Europe, since the history of the Middle East was studied in other frameworks.<sup>31</sup>

The circumstances that led to the separation of Jewish Studies from Oriental Studies may seem obvious, in view of the explicitly announced role that the university took upon itself—developing national consciousness, in a framework similar to that which developed earlier in the universities in Europe. This framework was seen as one that would allow impartial research, and that would lead to uncovering Jewish national foundations. Nevertheless, the context in which this autonomous framework evolved elucidates the concrete meaning of the definition of Jewish Studies as national research. On the basis

29 Menahem Milson, “Reshit Limudey ha-‘Aravit ve-‘Islam ba-‘Universitah ha-‘ha-Un, In *Toldot ha-‘Universitah ha-‘Ivrit bi-Yrushalayim: Shorashim ve-Hathalot*, ed. Katz, Shaul and Hed, Michael (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1997), 578.

30 Ariel Rein, “History and Jewish History: Together or Separate? The Definition of Historical Studies at the Hebrew University, 1925-1936, in *Toldot ha-‘Universitah ha-‘Ivrit bi-Yrushalayim: Shorashim ve-Hathalot [The History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Origins and Beginnings]*, ed. Katz, Shaul and Heyd, Michael (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1997).

31 The debate on the separation between “Jewish history” and “general history,” whose origins were pointed out by Ariel Rein (*Ibid.*) goes on even today (although research is conducted anyway in a combined way); but the debate itself shaped and emphasized the view of “Jewish history” as part of the history of Europe. This state of affairs exists in all universities, but there is a different situation in Ben-Gurion University, which until recently had only one department of History. Unfortunately, this opportunity was missed, and also here a separate department was founded for the study of the Middle East, while disconnecting general history and Jewish history from the Middle East in which the study and research are taking place.

of this mindset, a rich and diverse research evolved, and we are still operating within its parameters. Thus, it is all the more important to reflect on its characteristics and boundaries.<sup>32</sup>

The Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem did not simply continue the research of the German Orientalist institutes for Jewish Studies, but many of its founders, and the most outstanding of them, Gershom Scholem, were trained in such institutes. The devisers of Zionist research saw in front of their eyes (even if critically) the research that evolved in independent Jewish institutes that were founded in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries and played an important role in the process of the redefinition of Jewish identity in that period, usually with direct relation to the development of different religious streams.<sup>33</sup> But as mentioned above, this research and the discourse that ensued did not reject the dichotomy West/East and its consequences, but only its pertinence to the Jews.

The prominent Zionist scholars who founded and shaped Jewish Studies in Israel wished to differentiate their approach from that of their predecessors in Europe, whose work they saw as an expression of “assimilationist” and apologetic perspectives.<sup>34</sup> They saw the Zionist perspective as a framework that allowed an objective and impartial view of Jewish history and Jewish culture. But as David Myers demonstrated convincingly,<sup>35</sup> despite this self-image, in many ways they continued the research tradition that evolved in Europe, even as they denounced it. Nevertheless, this perspective received a new meaning when it served as a basis for a definition of a sovereign Jewish collectivity.

The establishment of the Institute of Jewish Studies was therefore an establishment of a characteristically German institute in Jerusalem. This step reflected the endeavour to define Jewish history as a national history, which was defined as an expressly European history. The continuity also emphasizes the alterations of this perspective as it was transplanted into the East as a basis for defining a political collective. From a discourse of a minority culture, which

32 My doctoral dissertation discusses different aspects of this research (Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Yitsugah ha-Le'umi shel ha-Galut: Ha-Hiṣṭoryografiyah ha-Tsiyonit vi-Yhudey Yemey ha-Beynayim*, PhD dissertation [Tel-Aviv University 1996]).

33 David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995).

34 Gershom Scholem, “Mitokh Hirhurim ‘al Ḥokhmat Yiśra’el,” in *Dvarim Bego: Pirqey Morashah u-Thiyah*, ed. Avraham Shapira (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1976 [1945]), 385-403. Yitzhak Baer, “Le-Verur Matsav ha-Limudim ha-Hiṣṭoriyim Shelanu,” in *Mehqarim u-Masot be-Toldot ‘Am Yiśra’el*, ed. Yitzhak Baer (Jerusalem: ha-Ḥevrah ha-hiṣṭorit ha-Yiśre’elit, 1985 [1938]), 5-13.

35 David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past*.

at least in theory served to undermine the European story of progress, it turned into an argumentation seeking to explicitly integrate into this order, to represent it against the “East”, and to differentiate Judaism from the cultural context in which the institute was founded.

It is clear that this does not sum up the entirety of the rich and diverse research that evolved in the Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. The framework that was shaped by scholars of Jewish Studies is complex and multifaceted. In fact, it was one of the main frameworks in which the historical myth was persistently reexamined, thus bringing up the contradictions and difficulties that it held. This is a clear example of a framework in which a literature with an explicit ideological aspect on the one hand, and an implicit Orientalist one on the other hand, produces from itself the consciousness of its difficulties.

Prominent historians who worked in this institute, such as Gershom Scholem and Yitzhak Baer, wished to define Jewish history as an autonomous history that evolved “organically,” despite the “influences” that it absorbed. The history of the Jews was separated from the contexts in which it was shaped and was transferred into a mythical, ahistorical context, while the historical contexts in which Jews lived were defined by them as having only a secondary meaning.<sup>36</sup> Scholem’s worldview emphasizes the view of Zionism as a dialectic fulfilment of Jewish history, but this analysis was made in explicitly European terms, creating a common cultural context for Jews and Christians, and setting aside the Oriental, Muslim and Arab context.

Baer and Scholem positioned the beginning of the immanent historical process in the Second Temple period, following the encounter of Judaism with Hellenism. In doing so, they created a shared framework for Judaism and Christianity. From then on, according to them, Judaism has an immanent history, in which its ancient authentic core is preserved and revealed—a core that is supposed to be the basis of spiritual renewal. Thus, an ancient Hellenistic East took shape, which was separate and different from the existing Arab East.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, a shared framework for Judaism and Western Christianity was formed, separating them from the Islamic world. As Gil Anidjar has shown, Scholem reflected in his writing the ambition to transfer Kabbalah into the Christian world, while ignoring the Islamic context of its development, aiming to integrate Kabbalah into the conceptual framework that was used for defining

36 Ben-Tsiyon Dinburg (Dinur) and Yitzhak Baer, “Megamatenu,” *Tsifyon* 1 (1936): 1-6.

37 On the constitution of the Hellenistic East in this context, see Shavit 1992. Shavit also mentions the shaping of “an imaginary and metaphorical East in which there are no Arabs” in Buber’s writings (*Ibid.*, n. 54, 57).

European culture. Anidjar showed how Scholem's use of the concepts "myth," "mysticism" and "symbol" marks their adaptation in a framework that was ascribed to the European culture and denied from the East.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Scholem described a direct cultural evolution from antiquity to Medieval Christian Europe. Baer defined Medieval Jewish philosophy as an expression of external Islamic influence, foreign to the "organic spirit" of Judaism. At this point occurred the turning point within Jewish discourse: unlike the historians of the 19th century, who tended to view Kabbalah as an Oriental aspect that was therefore foreign to Judaism, Zionist historians viewed Rationalist Philosophy as a denial of the "authentic Jewish spirit." The Jewish mythical imagination was perceived as a foundation upon which the national culture was based. But in both cases, the goal was to exclude elements that were seen as Oriental from the realm of identity. This was especially conspicuous in regard to the history of the Jews of Islamic countries in the modern era—a subject that was

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38 Gil Anidjar, "Jewish Mysticism Alterable and Unalterable." Anidjar argues that this aspect continues to characterize the study of Kabbalah today, and is manifested in the works of its prominent representatives—Moshe Idel and Yehuda Liebes. These arguments were answered extensively by Moshe Idel ("Orienting, Orientalizing or Disorienting the Study of Kabbalah: 'An Almost Absolutely Unique' Case of Occidentalism," *Kabbalah* 2 [1997]: 13-47), who showed the relatively vast space that he and his colleagues (and Liebes in particular) dedicated to uncovering the "Islamic influences" of Jewish mystical thought. But the argument regarding "influences," without detracting from its importance, presupposes that Judaism (and in this case, Kabbalah) is an autonomous frame, disconnected from the Islamic context in which it evolved. The category of "influence" emphasizes the detachment of Judaism from its Islamic context, while formulating it in European terms. Idel did not engage in his article with the presuppositions of the research, and it seems that he does not deny the Orientalist aspect that Anidjar exposed in Scholem's research. Anidjar's principal critique could direct this research into fruitful directions, and to an awareness of the essentialist cultural aspect. As a whole, the question of the affinity between Judaism and Islamic thought was treated in a long line of studies, which pointed out the shaping role of Arab thought on various realms of Jewish thought, particularly in philosophy. But the question of the position of Judaism as part of this culture and the role of Islamic culture in defining and forming Judaism was nonetheless not sufficiently examined, and the question of "influence" does not change this. Rina Drory has treated the connection between Arabic poetry and the development of Hebrew poetry, in a study that allows placing Judaism as part of the general Islamic context (Rina Drory, *Reshit ha-Maga'im shel ha-Sifrut ha-Yehudit 'im ha-Sifrut ha-'Aravit ba-Me'ah ha-'Asirit* [Tel-Aviv: Ha-Qibuts ha-Me'uhad, 1988]), Rina Drory, "Arabic Interference with Medieval Hebrew Literature: A Reconsideration," *New Comparison* 13 (Comparative Approaches to Middle Eastern Literature), (1992), 2-13. This study, among others, opens a new way for a different positioning of the field known as "Jewish Studies."

completely excluded from the discourse of what was known as “the history of the Jewish people” [*Toldot ‘Am Yisra’el*]. The definition of Jewish history as national was based on the exclusion of the Jews of the East, especially in the modern era. The attitude towards the history of the Jews of the Islamic world followed the general attitude of Western scholarly writing on this period as one of “cultural degeneration.” The Jews of the East were perceived as having a magnificent past, but one whose inheritors are rather the Jews of Europe, and not the Orientals themselves, whose culture was deemed primitive and requiring correction. In the context of the writing of Jewish history as a national history, these historical beings had no place and no value. Up until now, the histories of the Jews of Islamic countries are hardly included in the school curriculum, and the definition, which is problematic in itself, of “the history of the Jewish people” refers only to the history of the Jews of Europe.<sup>39</sup> In this context, in an even more striking way than in the European literature that they criticized, scholars have shaped the image of Judaism as a part of the West, excluding any aspect that was seen as Islamic, and therefore an expression of heresy. Thus, one finds within the research the different sides of the definition of the East—either as an expression of superstitions that have nothing to do with Judaism, or as an expression of futile rationalism that denounces authentic traditions.

It is interesting that in the early stages of the establishment of the Zionist research of Jewish history, the center of attention was given rather to the Jews of the East, as part of the approach that argued that Oriental Judaism (and in particular, Yemenite Judaism, which had a special place in the Zionist imagination) preserves the “authentic” foundations of ancient Jewish existence. This supposition reflects the Orientalist discursive context as it was described by Said: even the Idyllic image that was attached to Oriental Jewry denied any reference to their cultural values and their social reality. It was a step in the shaping of culture in a Western European language, a step that even demonstrated the exclusion of the Jews of the East from the collective. Oriental Jews were not part of the history that remained the history of the Jews of Europe, but rather a memory of an ancient civilization, ahistorical in character.

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The Orientalist aspect of Israeli society was expressed most clearly in the attitude towards Mizrahim: it created the basis for their social exclusion and,

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39 It should be noted, though, that the history of the Jews in Europe is also hardly studied, except for its relation to the establishment of the Zionist movement.

in particular, the denial of their culture. In this context, the way in which the discourse about the Jews in Europe was adopted as the basis for defining a new identity was clearly manifested. Here, it can be clearly seen that the shaping of the new Jewish identity was based on acceptance of the same principles that formerly led to the exclusion of Jews in European discourse, and the same value system that led the discussion that was described above regarding the Jewish question and their capacity to integrate into European society. The question that was at the center of the discourse was to what extent could the Mizrahim be “degenerated,” or whether their characteristics were genetic, and their culture essentially different from the one defined by the “absorbing society.”<sup>40</sup> This discourse directly replicated the one that was held in Germany regarding the Jews, and is a clear expression of an Orientalist approach. In this context too, the agreed upon basis was the need to “correct” the Jews of the East.

The similarity between the two abovementioned discursive frameworks is manifested on several levels that were examined in the works cited in the beginning of this paper, and, most prominently, in the discussion on the question of education.<sup>41</sup> The discussion regarding education (and particularly integration) as well as the curricula themselves are contexts in which the Orientalist aspect played a prominent shaping role. A clear example of a proponent of this approach was Carl Frankenstein, who was seen for years as an authority in the integration of Oriental Jews, and who established an educational project for integrating excellent students of Oriental origin into Israeli society and imbuing them with its values. He fiercely rejected the genetic approaches that argued that it was impossible to “restore” and “regenerate” these Jews, and that their negative characteristics were “irreparable.” But Frankenstein also did not reject the discursive framework fundamentally, but rather perpetuated it, since he argued that the Oriental children can be “rescued.” He also claimed that the culture of these Jews reflected “Oriental traits”—irrationality, a need for immediate satisfaction of stimuli, and inconsistency. He defined the state of the immigrants from Islamic countries as “secondary retardation,” that is—not innate retardation, but rather the result of a culture and a difficult economic and social state, and therefore corrigible.<sup>42</sup> To achieve this, the children had to be

40 Tom Segev, *The First Israelis*, 1949, 155-187 (New York, Free Press, 1998) and Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel”.

41 Shlomo Svirski, *Hinukh be-Yiśra’el: Maḥoz ha-Maslulim ha-Nifradim* (Tel-Aviv: Breyrot 1990).

42 For example, Carl Frankenstein, *Shiqum ha-Inteligentsiyah ha-Havulah* (Jerusalem: Bet ha-Sefer le-Hinukh shel ha-Universiṭah ha-Ivrit, 1971), *Idem, Shiḥrur ha-Ḥashivah*

separated from their parents, the representatives of an Oriental culture, and had to create a new identity for themselves. He exacerbated the distinction that presented the Oriental culture as primitive and backwards, lacking rationality and learning skills, and depicted the Mizraḥim as having an “injured intelligence.” The titles he gave to his books: *The Rehabilitation of the Injured Intelligence, Releasing Thought from its Chains*—attest to the Orientalist framework that shaped education. The educational framework was supposed to provide a substitute for the culture of the parents, a substitute that was meant to enable the “universalization,” i.e., to provide the cultural values of the East-European westernized Israeli elite. In other words, the condition for the integration of the Mizraḥim was their “regeneration,” which meant a complete and total denial of their cultural traditions and an orientation towards erasure of the cultural memory that they carried. This approach also shaped the sociological view in Israel in those years, a view according to which Mizraḥim were representative of a backwards culture, so that to sever them from their cultural tradition equated to “universalization.” It goes without saying that these “facts” were taken for granted, not requiring any proof.<sup>43</sup>

This was described in an even more direct way by the educator Reuven Feuerstein, whose statements were recently examined by Meir Buzaglo. Feuerstein also objects to the approach that argued that “the North African man will always remain North African,” and claimed that he can be transformed through complete separation from his “former backwards” culture. Buzaglo pointed out that this approach was based on a complete denial of the past and tradition, which were seen as an expression of “backwardness.”<sup>44</sup>

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*mi-Kvaleha* (Jerusalem: Bet ha-Sefer le-Ḥinukh shel ha-'Universiṭah ha-'Ivrit 1972). For a detailed analysis of these approaches and their consequences, see Shlomo Svirski, *Ḥinukh be-Yisra'el*, 103-137. See also Shlomo Svirski, *Lo Nehshalim 'Ela Menuḥshalim: Mizraḥim ve-'Ashkenazim be-Yisra'el: Nituaḥ Sotsyologi ve-Šiḥot 'im Pe'ilim u-Fe'ilot* (Haifa: Maḥbarot le-Meḥqar u-le-Viqoret 1981).

43 Deborah Bernstein, “Ha-Sotsyologiyah Qoletet et ha-'Aliyah: Diyun Biqorti be-'Askolah Dominanṭit shel ha-Sotsyologiyah ha-Yisre'elit,” *Maḥbarot le-Meḥqar u-le-Viqoret* 1 (1978): 5-19. Uri Ram, *The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology: Theory, Ideology and Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

44 See Meir Buzaglo's work, “Mizraḥiyut, Masoret, Kur Hitukh: 'Iyun Filosofi Politi,” Buzaglo analyzes there Feuerstein's book *Yaldey ha-Malah, ha-Pigur ha-Tarbuti 'etsel Yehudey Maroko u-Mashma'uto ha-Ḥinukhit*, and examines it in the context of a general discussion of the concept of tradition and its rejection in the Zionist context.

[Translator's note: Buzaglo's article was published in 1997: Meir Buzaglo, “Mizraḥiyut, Masoret, Kur Hitukh: 'Iyun Filosofi Politi,” In *T-Shivyon ba-Ḥinukh*, ed. Dafna Golan-Agnon (Tel-Aviv: Bavel 2005), 209-235.]



It is important to note that Frankenstein, like Feuerstein, actually represented the “liberal” side of the debate—those who argued that the Oriental Jews can be “corrected” and integrated into Israeli society, against others who rejected altogether the possibility of their “correction,” and claimed that the backwardness of the Mizrahim was genetic. But it is rather this fact that shows most clearly the character of the cultural consciousness and its boundaries. Without disregarding his sincere motives and the context in which he wrote these things, it is nonetheless a fact that it was an approach based on a cultural-ethnic distinction that guided the seemingly enlightened policy. The same discursive framework that was used against the Jews in Germany, and was the basis for their exclusion, was replicated now by Jews of German origin and directed towards the Oriental Jews in a way that relied on and reflected the attitude towards the East in general.<sup>45</sup> Frankenstein’s discussion is nearly an identical replication of that over the Jewish question in German, without any self-reflection about this clear association. The “correction” meant a complete separation from Arab culture, the cultural context in which Jewish identity was also shaped. The dichotomous definition of the relation between “West” and “East,” and the total identification with the West, was carried out to such an extent that the expression “Arab Jew” was perceived as a contradiction in terms. The precondition for being a Jew became “not being an Arab,” and a rejection of the culture in whose terms Jewish identity was formerly defined. The renunciation of identity and memory became a precondition for “integration.”

The problem is not in what Frankenstein wrote, but rather in the fact that these approaches are still used uncritically as a basis for pedagogy in several academic institutions. It is perhaps possible to understand Frankenstein’s approaches against the background of his time, but a critical appraisal is a precondition for any renewed discussion of culture in Israel, including education.<sup>46</sup> This is an example that illustrates clearly the limits of German Orientalism and makes clear the limitedness of the criticism that was directed at Said.



45 On Frankenstein’s awareness of these aspects, see, for example, his collected articles (Carl Frankenstein, *’Emet ve-Hofesh: ’Arakhim ba-Hinukh* [Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat ha-Po’alim, 1987]). Frankenstein presents there the question of tolerance, but does not leave any room for a different attitude to the Oriental culture, and again excludes it from that which was defined as an expression of rationality and modernity.

46 See Poriya Gatz, “Limudey Aparṭhayd ba-’Universiṭah,” *Pi Ha-’Aton* (March 1997), 12-15; Eyal Nir and Mu’alem, Ahuva, “Na Lehakir: ha-Ṭipus ha-Levantini,” *Haaretz Weekend Supplement* (Aug. 22, 1997): 14.

It is rather in the research that was characterized as “Orientalist” in the conventional sense of the word that one can find traces and hints of another approach, even simply in the very existence of an interest in the Arab culture and the Arab world, although mostly it is a cultural-literary interest that was detached from an actual interest in contemporary life and debates. This is also manifested in certain segments of research in Jewish Studies that were dedicated to the culture of the East. I do not claim that the research that evolved and that still exists in this context was devoid of the Orientalist paradigm and free of its cultural and political consequences; moreover, I do not claim that this research reflects a stance different from the dominant framework that guided the definition of Jewish existence. On the contrary, the seeming paradox that arises here is that this stance opens other possibilities precisely because it is an expression of a “normal” Orientalist attitude, i.e., devoid to a certain extent from the unique theological aspect that is manifest in the Zionist consciousness. It is important to recall that the critique of Orientalism does not stem from a different standpoint that is somehow devoid of cultural delimitations. Therefore, it should be pointed out that even here, in the Orientalist research itself, additional viewpoints can be indicated that could be a basis for a different kind of discourse.

What was created by this framework is the possibility to conduct research on the history of Palestine that is not concentrated only in Jewish existence, and particularly, not dominated by the place of the land in the Jewish-Zionist myth. The land was also perceived as an independent geographic-cultural entity with a history of its own that related to the history of the entire region. In other words, in the Zionist context, it is precisely Orientalism that holds the potential for the possibilities of discourse that are rejected by the myth itself. In certain cases, it preserves an empathetic relation to the East in some sense. This framework guided the work of certain prominent scholars in the field, among them scholars who combined Orientalist research with research on the history of Israel. Uriel Heyd, for example, who is one of the leading scholars of the second generation of the Institute of Eastern Studies in Jerusalem, turned on the basis of his studies in Ottoman history also to the study of the Jews of Palestine.<sup>47</sup> His studies deal with the history of Palestine in that period separately from the theological-redemptive myth that defined the land in the context of the dominant Zionist thought. It is interesting that Heyd was also one

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47 Uriel Heyd, “Yehudey 'Erets-Yiśra'el be-Sof ha-Me'ah ha-17 'al pi Pinqasim Turkiyim shel Mas ha-Gulgolet,” *Riv'on le-Heqer Yerushalayim ve-Toldoteha* 4 (1953): 173-184. *Idem*, “Te'udot Turkiyot 'al Yehudey Tsfat ba-Me'ah ha-16,” *Riv'on le-Heqer Yerushalayim ve-Toldoteha* 5 (1955): 128-135.

of the first to study the emergence of Arab national consciousness in the land, in a book dedicated to Zāhir al-ʿUmar, the Galilean leader of the 18th century.<sup>48</sup>

As noted above, the limits of this approach remained clear. Studies that were written in Jerusalem perhaps attest to a clear German Orientalism, but they definitely do not deviate from the framework that was described by Said. Their approach was not based on a different stance towards the national conflict, which also led to a lack of interest in social and cultural aspects of Arab society. But it did create a space that is not completely bound to the theological-national image, and thus it marked a possibility for a different definition of Jewish existence in the land, an existence that does not deny the concrete character, the culture, and hence, the rights of its inhabitants. This approach did not exist in the cultural-political context in Israel, and the Orientalists certainly did not express a different definition of identity—not regarding the Arabs and not regarding the Oriental Jews. But presenting the “Orientalist” context in this framework marks the limits of the existing consciousness. This approach allows one to separate the discourse in Israel from the myth, and thus to redefine Jewish existence in a way that is not based on seeing the present as the realization of a history that is founded on a divine promise.



The question of Orientalism is therefore aimed at clarifying certain aspects of the Israeli-Zionist consciousness, and through this also marks a possibility for a different definition of Jewish existence. The consciousness embodied by Zionism exacerbated the Orientalist paradigm due to its integration in the theological story that defined the Jewish settlement in Israel in terms of a “return” and a renewal of the ancient Jewish framework. This framework still defines Israeli-Jewish consciousness in its entirety down to today, in a way that prevents a view toward the concrete land, the Islamic Orient and the Arab culture, and leaves them as symbols of cultural images, ignoring their complex identity and most importantly, their rights. This is particularly so in defining the political discourse surrounding Palestinian national rights, but also in other cultural aspects. The combination that exists in Zionism between Orientalism and national consciousness that is based on theological concepts, allows one to examine the possibilities that come out of explicitly Orientalist conceptions. The condition for this is of course awareness and an examination of the Orientalist aspect that continues to guide research, and particularly its

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48 Uriel Heyd, *Dahir al-Umar, Ruler of the Galilee in the 18th Century: Patterns of Government and Administration* (Jerusalem, 1973).

political, social and cultural consequences. The twofold position of the Jews in this context—as victims of Orientalist consciousness and as its enthusiastic proponents—emphasizes the difficulty of the existing framework.

On this point, Said's perspective joins the standpoints that were formulated earlier by certain Jewish thinkers, most of whom were of German origin. These thinkers criticized different aspects of modern consciousness, including its adoption among Jews. It is worth mentioning, for example, the critique of Walter Benjamin on the modern perception of history, and in particular the perception of progress that is based on the denial of the memory of the oppressed.<sup>49</sup> Benjamin indeed did not refer at all to the question of Orientalism, but his fundamental approach bears much importance for this matter, since it is aimed at the elements that are denied by the consciousness of the present. On a similar basis, the Jewish German-born philosopher Hannah Arendt reproached Zionist policy in the 1940s, since she believed that it was based on the same perception of history that enabled anti-Semitism to become a central power. At the same time, Arendt demanded that Zionism should be based on a recognition of the rights of the Arabs, and supported a bi-national solution. She argued that this was the only way that Zionism could fulfil its role in struggling against anti-Semitism.<sup>50</sup> In other contexts, Arendt expressed a clearly Orientalist worldview, prejudice, and a patronizing attitude equally towards Arabs and Mizrahim. But precisely her principled stance demands the integration of these principles in the same critical framework that was later shaped by Edward Said, among others. These are only two prominent representatives, but the discourse that they initiated continues to exist and to develop until today.

Said's approach intersects these approaches and provides them their concrete significance as a general cultural position that has ramifications regarding the questions of scientific research, and also for determining the limits of the political discourse and cultural identity. The critical awareness that springs from this intersection is not based on overcoming the Orientalist perspective, but rather allows one to position knowledge and power relations that are created within it. It can point us to a discursive framework in which the definition of Jewish existence is not based on an opposition to the East, on a negation of the history of the land and the denial of the rights of its inhabitants. This awareness is also not based on an unequivocal political position, certainly not on a single political way. It is supposed to determine the discourse, to reveal the presuppositions upon which it is based, and to be assisted by this critique, with the aim of redefining cultural identity. This is the condition for a decolo-

49 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken 1968), 253-267.

50 Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah* (New York: Grove Press, 1978).

nization of the present Jewish culture and for the abolition of the dichotomy East/West as a basis for defining reality.

The sweeping criticism of Said for his “neglect” of German Orientalism blocks us from this awareness. It rather replicates the Orientalist approaches and prevents the necessary critique of them. But the Israeli perspective in particular might open another way for this discursive framework, thanks to the complexity embodied in it and the fact that Orientalism connects a wide array of discursive fields. This is especially so in light of the fact that in the Zionist context, Orientalist research indeed contains concrete critical questions that are avoided in the context of the basic Zionist myth that leaves no room for the East.

Said was born in Jerusalem, a few steps from the house of Yitzhak Baer who was mentioned above. In his neighborhood, Talbiyah, and in the adjacent neighborhood, Rehaviyah, lived most of the scholars who shaped the characteristics of Israeli-Zionist research. Indeed, many of them supported a relatively egalitarian approach, and from them came most of the proponents of the movement “Brit Shalom,” that was founded in 1926 and which sincerely strove to establish the new Jewish entity on the basis of a recognition of the rights of the inhabitants of the land. But even they failed to shape a consciousness that would take into account the existence of Said, who of course does not represent here only himself. The exodus-expulsion of the Arabs from the Arab-Jewish neighborhood (and the adjacent villages) was silenced and left out of the recollection. In Said’s house, as in other houses in the neighborhood, Jews were settled, some of whom were refugees of the Nazi German inferno. In this context, the use of the argument about ignoring the German Orientalism in order to reject Said’s arguments is very strange. Precisely this context could provide another aspect to the discourse suggested by Said. This is due to the same duality, due to the memory of the minority, who were a victim of the same historical view, and due to the commitment to this memory. Even if we claim that German Orientalism also contained other options, it is fitting to determine the specific meanings of these approaches in the Israeli context. This awareness might point us to a different kind of definition for the Jewish-Israeli collectivity—one that recognizes the existence of the land, and rejects the existing dichotomy between West and East.

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