The Fallacy of Analogy and the Risk of Moral Imperialism: Israeli Literature and the Palestinian Other

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Abstract: This article discusses the role of analogy within the ethics of reading. It examines how Israeli literature uses analogies when reflecting on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Many literary texts that depict the Israeli–Palestinian conflict draw analogies between the Israeli Jewish people and the Palestinians, between specific individuals on both sides, or between historical traumas. These analogies are designed to bridge gaps and encourage empathetic reading. This article challenges this role of analogy by arguing that analogies may in fact paint an erroneous picture of symmetrical relations, strengthen victimhood that denies responsibility, and can often lead to "empty empathy." Analogies may also create a willfully deceptive understanding of the other, while actually maintaining a narcissistic superior stance. Based on philosophical notions put forward by Emmanuel Levinas, this article suggests a different path to ethical understanding in which the literary text, while still enabling analogy, uses other rhetorical devices to create relationships that suspend it and reveal its imposture.

1. Introduction

In almost every study of Israeli literature on the 1948 War, S. Yizhar's "The Story of Hirbet Hiz'a" is given extensive attention. Israeli-born S. Yizhar (Yizhar Smilansky) (1916–2006) is considered one of the main writers of the Palmah Generation in modern Hebrew literature, whose authors documented the experiences of the 1948 war and depicted the lives of native Israelis fulfilling the Zionist ethos. The story, written in 1949, is about a group of Israeli soldiers who are ordered to demolish an Arab village and expel its inhabitants. The story focuses on the soldiers' cruel attitude towards the helpless villagers. Except for the narrator, a soldier who has mixed feelings about these actions, the other soldiers all act with insensitivity, and are completely unaware of the terrible nature of their deeds.

This text is cited so often because it contains an explicit analogy between the Palestinians and the Jewish people, which appears in a few paragraphs. The narrator, an outsider within the group of soldiers, reveals the prolonged tension between his feelings and those of his friends: Unlike the other soldiers, the narrator sees the suffering of the Palestinian villagers. His mode of thinking is based on analogy:

> Without intending to, I would suddenly think about how *it was with us*, at home, [. . .] when suddenly there were shots, shots from the border, [. . .] shots from the distant hills, shots of the night or shots before dawn, and rumors, and lights-out, and something big and serious and threatening and disconcerting, and running, and a secret, and tense listening [. . .] A mother, scared to death, would go out to gather her children with a pinched and almost

> stopping heart. How a paralyzing silence of bewilderment, of a famous "let it not be us, Oh Lord!". (Yizhar [1949] 2008, p. 48, my italics)

And later:

> Something became clear to me suddenly, in a flash. As if everything at once sounded different, more true—exile, this is exile. Exile is like this. Exile looks like this [. . .].

> I had never been in exile—I was speaking to myself – I never knew what it is like [. . .] but they talked to me, and told and taught and repeated in my ears again and again, from every corner, book and newspaper, everywhere: Exile. Pulled all my strings. Our people's challenge to the world: Exile! And it was in me, probably already with my mother's milk. What have we done here today? (ibid., p. 85)

By relating the scene to "how *it was with us*", the narrator grasps the feelings of uncertainty and enormous fear of the people under attack, and empathizes with the victims. By using the charged Jewish term "exile" (in Hebrew: *galut*), the narrator makes a connection between his Jewish heritage—the terrible experiences of exile—and the plight of the Arab villagers. The readers, presumably Israeli Jews who, like the narrator, have been inculcated in the plight of exile, can grasp the Palestinian trauma, and recognize the awful truth: That this time we, the Jews, have brought a terrible exile upon them.

The analogy between Palestinian and Jewish history permeates the entire text, and as Yochai Oppenheimer (2014) pointed out, poses an alternative moral point of view. Contrary to the *sabra* prototype of the "New Jew"—the man of action and the perfect warrior who is brave, devoted to his mission, and willing to give his life to protect his country and its people (Shapira 1996, p. 184)—the story takes the perspective of Diasporic Jews, who were perceived in the 1940s and 1950s as passive and weak, and were accused of accepting their fate "like sheep going to the slaughter" during the Holocaust. Yizhar thus challenged the emerging Israeli culture of masculine strength, while revealing its immoral conduct.

To this day, this story is considered one of the most important and controversial literary texts on the 1948 War.[1] Yizhar's courageous decision to paint unflattering images of Israeli soldiers, and depict a mechanism that can lead to unethical and unlawful military conduct, earned him both praise and condemnation.

Yizhar's story is a good case study on the role of literary analogy in the context of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In a 2015 volume in Hebrew on the Holocaust and the Nakba (2019, in English), Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg attempt to provide a new "register of history and memory that honors the uniqueness of each event, its circumstances and consequences, as well as their differences, but also offers a common historical and conceptual framework within which both narratives may be addressed" (Bashir and Goldberg 2019, p. 5). In their discussions on the plight of the two people, they look for ways to challenge the dichotomy between these two narratives. Hannan Hever, in his introduction to a collection of Hebrew poetry about the Palestinian Nakba, describes how problematic it is for Jewish–Israeli authors to connect these two traumas:

> Inequity cried out, yet at the same time, the ones who were responsible for this injustice were entangled in a national war that was perceived by the public as a war over the very existence of the nation. Thus, literary discourse found itself in an extremely deep conflict. On the one hand, it wished to show moral sensitivity towards the fate of the Palestinian people, yet, on the other hand, it spoke from a sense of intense anxiety for the continued existence of the Jewish people, and hence also from an overflowing sense of joy over their victory. (Hever 2010, p. 12)

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[1] Anita Shapira discusses the changing attitudes towards this story over the years, and its role in shaping the collective memory of the War. See (Shapira 2000). See also (Ginsburg 2014).

Israeli literature has tended to mirror the history of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, with its two major crossroads of 1948 and 1967, by raising questions regarding militarism, humanism, the democratic nature of the State of Israel, and the dual position of citizens who are soldiers. Literary representations in different times and contexts have attempted to cope with these ethical dilemmas, while revealing the internal conflict between the humanist tendencies of Israeli literature, which is usually perceived as aligned with the political left, and the ways it deals with Zionist national stances and asymmetric power relations with the Palestinians. Numerous texts that depict the Israeli–Palestinian conflict make analogies between the Israeli and the Palestinian people, between specific individuals from both sides, or between their historical traumas. These analogies, which often go beyond the Holocaust and the Nakba, are driven by the idea that analogy is a major stylistic device for "understanding things beyond our knowledge and senses" (Holyoak and Thagard 1995, p. 9).

In the context of Hebrew poetry, Hever argued that there has been an inability to acknowledge Palestinian suffering. He discusses how poets use poetic devices to cloak violence. Hever suggests a theoretical explanation for the use of analogy in Yizhar's work by positing that it creates a multidirectional binary schism between the "I" (the Israeli Jew) and the Other, which is not oriented towards feelings of responsibility for the Palestinian Other, as positioning the Palestinian as a complete "other" fails to understand or take responsibility for his suffering, since he is seen as a total stranger. Similarly, positioning the Palestinian as equal to the "I" fails ethically since it positions him as part of the narcissistic self (Hever 2017, p. 24). Thus, as Shira Stav has shown, the connection between the two narratives only goes in one direction: The Palestinian catastrophe can only be grasped by thinking about the catastrophe of the Jews (Stav 2012, p. 86), and this directionality eventually leads to a narcissistic position of moral imperialism.

This longstanding debate on Yizhar's story, and the broader issue of the coupling of the traumas of the Jews and the Palestinians in Israeli literature, are taken in this article as a starting point for a theoretical assessment of the role of literature as a mode of moral investigation, and specifically the place of analogy in ethical criticism. It applies ethical notions developed by Emmanuel Levinas to explore and criticize the use of analogy in Israeli literature in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. I show that analogies can be deceptive and create a deceitful pretense of understanding the Other, while in fact maintaining a narcissistic superior position. This argument is divided into two threads: The first raises the issues of symmetry and victimhood. The second discusses cases where analogy works alongside empathy, while challenging the nature of this empathy. The final part of this article suggests an alternative approach to an ethical understanding, in which the literary text, while exploring analogy as a basis for new relations, uses different rhetorical devices to suspend its parallelism and reveal its deceptiveness. This suspension and its disclosure may upend the reader's empathy, giving poetic shape to Dominick LaCapra's argument on "empathic unsettlement", and pave the way for greater moral responsibility.

2. When Analogy Instigates Competition between Victims

In Amos Oz's autobiographical novel, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, he describes his family's journey from Eastern Europe to Israel and the family members' inability to adjust to their new surroundings. Oz (1939–2018), who was born in Jerusalem, was one of leaders of the "Statehood Generation" (or The New Wave) that emerged in Israeli literature in the 1960s, when the State of Israel was rooted in reality and Israeli prose was attempting to break free of the Zionist ethos. This late work is a partial autobiography, which depicts his family and ends with the core trauma of his mother's suicide when he was still a child. *A Tale of Love and Darkness* is considered to be the masterpiece of one of most influential authors in Israel who was an outstanding spokesman for peace. In the novel, the family history is interleaved with the story of Oz's childhood and adolescence in Jerusalem during the 1940s and the 1950s, and delves into his personal struggle to shape his identity against the backdrop of Zionist national aspirations and the founding of the State of Israel.

In the following quotation, Oz analyzes the kernel of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians and draws a clear-cut parallel:

> In the lives of individuals and of people, too, the worst conflicts are often those that break out between those who are persecuted. It is mere wishful thinking to imagine that the persecuted and the oppressed will unite out of solidarity and man the barricades together against a ruthless oppressor. In reality, two children of the same abusive father will not necessarily make common cause, brought close together by their shared fate. Often each sees in the other not a partner in misfortune but in fact the image of their common oppressor.

> This may well be the case with the hundred-year-old conflict between Arabs and Jews. The Europe that abused, humiliated and oppressed the Arabs by means of imperialism, colonialism, exploitation and repression is the same Europe that oppressed and persecuted the Jews, and eventually allowed or even helped the Germans to root them out of every corner of the continent and murder almost all of them. But when the Arabs look at Jews they do not see a group of half-hysterical survivors but a new offshoot of Europe, with its colonialism, technical sophistication and exploitation that has cleverly returned to the Middle East—in Zionist guise this time—to exploit, evict and oppress all over again.

> Whereas when we look at them we do not see fellow victims either, brothers in adversity, but somehow we see pogrom-making Cossacks, bloodthirsty anti-Semites, Nazis in disguise, as though our European persecutor have reappeared here in the Land of Israel, put keffiyehs on their heads and grown moustaches, but are still our old murderers interested only in slitting Jews' throats for fun. (Oz [2002] 2005, p. 330)

As a Zionist who saw Israel as the sole salvation for the Jewish people after the Holocaust, and as a member of the peace movement, Oz attempted to understand the nature of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict by proposing a highly appealing psychological explanation for the behavior of the two nations—that both the Jews and the Arabs suffered oppression whose roots are European, and that both evidence posttraumatic responses.

Oz's analogy is structural, and illustrates the basic formulation of analogy. The history of analogical reasoning, and the philosophy of the concept of analogy is extensive (Bartha 2019), and is mainly associated with the philosophy of science and the ways in which analogies in nature can promote scientific theories. In literature and humanistic thought, Aristotle was the first to refer to analogy in *Poetics* as part of his definition of metaphors: "Metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy, that is, proportion" (Aristotle [350BC] 1961, Chapter 21, 1457b. 4). Aristotle describes three types of metaphors: A construction from genre to species or from species to genre (relations that resemble what we define today as synecdoche), or from species to species (the classical metaphor), or by proportion; i.e., resemblance by structure (Kraus 2015, p. 178). Metaphor by analogy refers to a situation in which within a group of four things, the second is related to the first as the fourth is related to the third, so that one may substitute the fourth for the second or the second for the fourth (Aristotle [350BC] 1961, Chapter 21, 1457b. 6).

Viewing analogy as a proportion is a key component of structure-mapping theory. Here, analogy identifies both vertical and horizontal correspondences between a selected set of items. According to Mary Brenda Hesse (1966), horizontal relations illustrate similarity (and difference) between domains, whereas vertical relations point to similarity between objects, relations, or properties. Structuralist models of analogy put forward formal criteria for evaluating analogies associated with mapping. Dedre Gentner's more recent structure mapping theory (Gentner 1983) distinguishes between properties and relations. It defines systematic relations between objects, and not between their attributes; whereas structural properties determine an analogy, analogies are about relations and not about knowledge.

The issue of cognitive processes that are involved in analogies has prompted research in the last few decades, resulting in connectionist models. John Hummel and Keith Holyoak argued that "human

analogical reasoning (as well as other types of thinking) depends critically on the capacity to manipulate structured representations" (Hummel and Holyoak 1997, p. 433). This ability to form and manipulate relational representations refers to the ability to "appreciate analogies between seemingly different objects or events, the ability to apply abstract rules in novel situations, the ability to understand and learn language, and even the ability to appreciate perceptual similarities" (Hummel and Holyoak 2003, p. 220). To understand the basic constraints that govern analogical thinking, these "connectionist models have been directed towards uncovering the psychological mechanisms that come into play when we use analogies: retrieval of a relevant source domain, analogical mapping across domains, and transfer of information and learning of new categories or schemas" (Bartha 2019, sec. 3.5.1). Keith Holyoak and Paul Thagard (Holyoak and Thagard 1995) posited the existence of structural, semantic, and pragmatic constraints, involving the direct *similarity* of certain elements, "*structural* parallels between the roles in the source and the target domain" (p. 5), and personal goals providing "the *purpose* for considering the analogy at all" (p. 6). Clearly, these three constraints are not rigid, and can appear in different settings and with different intensities.

Bashir and Goldberg's introduction to their volume on the Holocaust and the Nakba draws heavily on the structural context of analogy. "These two national narratives," they state, are "connected to two far greater narratives embraced by contemporary global culture ... At the heart of both narratives lie catastrophes, albeit of very different natures." They show that while these two narratives—the Holocaust narrative and the postcolonial narrative—are antithetical and contradict each other, the structure of both narratives bears some resemblance since they reveal "the devil at the very core of modern, liberal, democratic, western civilization [...] committed and continues to commit terrible political crimes" (Bashir and Goldberg 2019, p. 4). Thus, whereas the two narratives are commensurable, applying "another register of history and memory" may offer "a common historical and conceptual framework within both narratives may be addressed" (p. 5).

The excerpt from Oz goes further in presenting the analogy's *structural* aspect by pointing out the parallels between the victims (Jews and Arabs), and between the oppressors' system of power. The text also embodies the other two constraints formulated by Holyoak and Thagard: Semantics (similarity) and pragmatics (purpose). Alongside the *structural* elements, Oz points to the *similarity* between the experiences of the two nations: He compares the relationships between the Jews and the Arabs to relationships between siblings who have a common father (Isaac and Ishmael in the Bible). The *purpose* of Oz's analogy is to understand the current situation in which Jews and Arabs are in conflict, instead of uniting and amassing their common strength. His reasoning is that the comparison between Jewish and Arab suffering and the suggestion that this joint suffering is the result of joint traumas, may lay the groundwork for reconciliation.

However, when Oz compares the Palestinian and the Jewish plight (with its culmination in the Holocaust), the weakness of his analogy as an ethical device is revealed. The Holocaust has become the key component of Jewish identity of our time, within as well as outside of Israel. Since the 1980s, it has been transformed into a symbolic event constituting an ethical epitome and a historical tipping point for the Western world, which shape the way people and societies relate to themselves. Theorists such as Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman, Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, and others view the Holocaust as the paradigmatic and ultimate trauma (Hunter 2018). It is perceived as an extreme, singular event that must not be compared to any other political context. Thus, within the explicit Israeli political discourse, any reference to the Holocaust when discussing other wars and persecution is condemned, and using this parallelism in the context of the Palestinian tragedy is considered in some circles as borderline treason.

Oz's readers, who are primarily Israeli–Jewish, are used to hearing about the Holocaust within the national story of the Jewish people as victims and their two thousand years of suffering. This position is often inherent to the Zionist narrative, and is frequently expressed in the form of "victim-community," to use Martin Jaffe's terminology (Jaffee 1991). According to this narrative, Jews were persecuted in Europe and sought refuge and a home in their historical fatherland, where they became victims of Arab

violence. Since "being a victim means being the 'owner' of an irretrievable loss," as Adi Ophir phrased it (Ophir 2000, p. 174), and since there is no cure, compensation, or understanding of the Holocaust, the pain and the loss are still evident to this day. Nevertheless, the philosophical underpinnings of this concept and its ethical value—in the context of constructing a parallelism between the plight of the Jews and the plights of the Palestinians—needs to be examined, in particular as to whether this type of analogy promotes an ethical understanding of the Other.

This article draws on major contemporary approaches to ethics and empathy, and is inspired by the works of Emmanuel Levinas, one of the key 20th century thinkers on ethical criticism. In his analysis of Western philosophy, which he defines as an "imperialism of the same" (Levinas [1969] 2002, p. 87), Levinas describes the subject's search for coherent structures of meaning, while subordinating the particular to the general and reducing the unknown to the framework of "sameness" (ibid., pp. 42–48). Structure-based analogies provide clear examples of this type of reduction and subordination. Reductionist and instrumentalist approaches can occur in any relationship when one party approaches the other with his or her own mode of thinking in an attempt to know and comprehend the other, while in fact only understanding the other in terms of his or her own "sameness". In these cases, the self, as Benda Hofmeyr noted, "tends to assume an instrumentalist approach to all that is other" stemming from inherent self-interestedness, as well as for sustenance and survival (Hofmeyr 2016, p. 177). In literature, this type of perspective may place the reader on an "Olympian height" as Andrew Gibson argued (Gibson 1999, p. 11), which characterizes colonial practices whose aim is to reduce the suffering of colonized others but in fact only deals with what the Western colonizers understand, or misunderstand, to be their suffering.

Oz's analogy implies that both Israelis and Palestinians can see themselves as brothers who share the same traumas. However, he creates a symmetrical structure-based analogy that ignores concrete circumstances, thus producing a structure that is blind to the complexity and uniqueness of each trauma. In Oz's text, the two counterparts are equal victims whose suffering comes from the outside like a natural disaster, such that the Palestinian tragedy is not specified in any way. This view does not include Israeli responsibility for Palestinian suffering, since it draws on the notion that the Jews (like the Palestinians) are passive victims. As Raz Yosef noted (Yosef 2011, p. 143), this position "refrain[s] from dealing with the question of responsibility for the injustices." Instead, the text justifies the actions of Israelis who are just "a bunch of half-hysterical survivors" (Oz [2002] 2005, p. 330).

Oz's text illustrates Levinas's "imperialism of the same" not only by nurturing the depiction of ultimate victims while denying any other consequences, historical contexts, or specifications, but also by taking the paternalistic stance of the friendly therapist of these two nations who can address their suffering as psychological distress. Hence this text, written by an author who championed and was part of the peace movement, exemplifies a presumption of understanding the other while actually remaining on his "Olympian height" and adopting a new type of moral imperialism. In doing so, it fails to produce an ethical understanding or responsibility for the suffering of the other.

Michael Rothberg, in his article "From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory" discusses two types of analogies, which he terms solidarity and competition. "While the mix of equation and competition concentrate desire and envy [. . .] the combination of equation and solidarity produces a form of liberal universalism" (Rothberg 2011, pp. 535–36). Rothberg's assessment suggests that as long as the Israeli narrative tightens the analogy between Jews and Palestinians through the Holocaust, they will be caught in a narcissistic movement, in 'competition' rather in 'solidarity'. In these cases, not only is the symmetric picture fraudulent, but the ethical direction is altered. Promoting an understanding of the Palestinian Other while including the Holocaust in the equation (with its extreme cruelty that presumably cannot be compared to any other historical trauma), is an unfair competition that leaves the text in a state of moral imperialism: The Jews, as victims, are inevitably the "winners," but at the cost of failed ethical understanding and responsibility towards the Palestinian Other.

3. When Analogy Invites "Empty Empathy"

In the Mishnaic tractate *Pirkei Avot* (a compilation of ethical teachings and maxims), it is stated: "do not judge your friend until you reach his place". There are numerous variants on this commonplace ethical concept. In the American context it is often associated with the saying "don't judge a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes", which seems to have originated from a 19th century poem by Mary T. Lathrap, although it is often attributed to a Cherokee aphorism.[2] In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee was apparently inspired by this proverb when she wrote that in order to understand an other, you need to climb into his skin and walk around in it (Mueller 2017). These statements emphasize the need to understand the Other by putting oneself in the Other's place. However, the suggestion of walking a mile in someone else's shoes states an intention rather than an actual ability, since a person can never truly be in someone else's position.

This intention is the basis for the concept of empathy, which has long engaged philosophers, psychologists, and literary critics. Empathy refers to the human ability of thinking and feeling "with" the mental states of another person, "looking into" the other's mind, and simulating his or her experience.[3] Starting in the 18th and 19th centuries with philosophers such as David Hume and Adam Smith who referred to "sympathy" or "fellow-feeling",[4] to early 20th century thought when the term "empathy" was coined, the concept has been considered as "ethically significant". Simulating the internal perspective of fictional characters or narrators (Keen 2007, pp. 39–40) is perceived as facilitating an understanding of others' minds and promoting ethical actions toward one's fellow human beings.

The extensive scholarly work on the role of narrative empathy suggests that narratives employ rhetorical devices which, by eliciting their readers' imagination and encouraging them to identify closely with fictional characters, prompt "a wide range of ethical responses" (Harrison 2008, p. 258) and operate as "invitations to ethical judgment."[5] Analogies in literary texts often serve as a conduit for creating empathy since they posit a parallelism between the familiar and the unfamiliar and can enable the reader not only to see the Other, but also to feel with him/her. However, analogy may also fail morally, as shown in the literary example below.

Boris Zaidman was born in Moldova in 1963 and came to Israel at the age of 13. He belongs to a group of contemporary writers in Israel who examine issues of immigration and hybrid identity. In his second book *Safa shesu'a* (Cleft Lip, Zaidman 2010, p. 207), he describes the detached life of the protagonist, an immigrant who spent his childhood in the USSR, and finds himself in Israel in a continuous state of alienation. The first part of the book describes his army service in a combat unit, a phase that is perceived in Israeli culture as a way to integrate people from different backgrounds into Israeli society. In one of the episodes during his stint in the Occupied Territories, the narrator-protagonist describes a little Palestinian boy who threw a stone that hit the military jeep. The jeep stopped with a screech, and the boy stood

> frozen in place like a rabbit before a jeep's headlights [. . .] but maybe because the kid raised his hands, the analogy of the rabbit fell out of the bottom of his helmet's tin pot, and in its place appeared this image. Of the kid raising his hands with his barrette or cap or whatever it was, in a "Demi Saison" coat that came down to his knees and shorts [. . . .] this was the image that popped into his head. It was in black and white, blurry, enlarged and poignant.

2　See: https://grammarist.com/phrase/walk-a-mile-in-someone-elses-shoes.
3　For an in-depth study of the concept of empathy, see the collection *Empathy—Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, eds. Coplan and Goldie (2011); see also Hoffman's *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (Hoffman 2001).
4　On moral sentiment in 18th century English philosophy, see (Frazer 2010); see also (Keen 2007, pp. 42–48).
5　Scholarly writing on empathy in literature and its ethical significance is widespread. See the influential work by Martha Nussbaum (2001). This idea is also implicit in writings of scholars who refer to notions such as "moral knowledge" or "thought experiments"; for example, Currie (1995, p. 257). See also McGinn's analysis of "ethical understanding" (McGinn 1997, pp. 171–78) and Carroll's presentation of "literary thought experiments" (Carroll 2002, pp. 3–26).

> He even searched for another image [. . .] less famous and trite, but he couldn't find it. And Jharas and them, and especially he himself, were suddenly cast in the role of them. And the two olive trees in the yard and the ivy that leached off one of the trunk, and this kid's beige flip-flops and the fact that he wore a dirty casquette painted in the white red and green of the Palestinian flag [. . .] and not a Polish cap or a French barrette, and the fact that it was bathed, and burnt in sun, and was not the Polish wintery sky, all this did not even tickle this bleak analogy and the fucking feeling that he is now on the wrong side. (Zaidman 2010, p. 31)[6]

Zaidman presents a web of mirroring. The young boy, who tried to object to the Occupation by throwing a stone and is caught by the jeep's projector, looks like a rabbit seized amidst his escape. Immediately afterwards, the picture changes and the narrator sees the most iconic still image of the Holocaust in his mind's eye: The boy from the Warsaw ghetto after the failure of the Ghetto's uprising, with his hands held up in surrender, and the wells of fear in his eyes. This analogy, that the author admits is fairly banal, captures the horrors of the Holocaust in a sort of shorthand but here takes on a new meaning: By equating the Palestinian child to the Holocaust victim, the soldiers, and the narrator among them, become analogous to the Nazis.

Before Zaidman can process this conclusion further, the child's father appears, slaps the boy, and takes him home quickly to safety. However, although the military scene has ended, the protagonist continues to reflect on it, and forms another analogy, which this time is more concrete:

> And then he suddenly realized that he was that kid, it was always him. [. . .] with an at once sober and delusional sharpness, Tulik saw himself in Zelinski street, pushing Igor Shevchenko [. . . .] and all this was a response to the "Zhydovka Song" that Shevchenko sang to him [. . . .] and suddenly his father came and grabbed him by his arm and almost rolled him backwards, right behind his back, like he wanted to shield him, to hide him [. . . .] and his father's hands, you could tell that they were shaking, even through the black leather gloves.

> And suddenly he saw that kid with his dirty cap painted with the colors of the Palestinian flag, standing in his place, in the snowy courtyard of the Fifty-Fifth Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov School, and those kids, who were lucky enough to be born as "first class locals", singing that song to him, singing that song to him. He and the Arabush were both second class citizens—the Zhyd and the Arabush. (Zaidman 2010, p. 33)[7]

The second analogy does not view the Palestinian boy as an example of well-known gruesome historical events, but rather morphs into a more intimate reflection of the narrator himself as a child in the USSR. When he tried to defend himself by pushing Igor, the boy who abused him, he was stopped immediately by his father who knew that Igor was the son of a KGB official. His everyday humiliations as a Jewish boy, and the weaknesses of his parents who protect him by telling him not to try to resist, are suggestive of the shared fate of the narrator and the Palestinians.

In the first analogy, the protagonist is aware of his thoughts and reflects on their banality and remoteness. This is a conscious use of analogy. He compares the boy's clothing to those of the famous image of the Warsaw boy and reflects on the differences in the weather, but understands that the analogy is not only about *similarity* but is based on *structural* parallels between historical times and between the Jewish story and the Palestinians'. However, towards the end of the paragraph, Zaidman switches to a different kind of analogy that involves his own experiences. Unlike the general terms of Jewish history in Yizhar and Oz, here the traumas of his childhood appear in the thin body of the Palestinian boy.

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[6]   The quotations from the novel were translated from the Hebrew by Tamar Gershtenhaber.
[7]   *Zhyd* is a pejorative term for Jewish and *Arabush* is a pejorative term for Arab.

This last scene, as well as other Zaidman stories, creates a dual gaze where he examines contemporary Israeli reality as an adult, but at the same time views his childhood memories through the perspective of the child he once was. As in *Cleft Lip,* in his first book, *Hemingway ve-geshem ha-tziporim ha-metot* (Zaidman 2006), his gaze is directed towards Arabs and Palestinians. He describes Arabs who suffer from exclusion and offensive treatment despite Israel's claims of being a democratic and enlightened state, while making analogies to his childhood in the USSR, where the official line was that "all the nations in the Soviet Union are equal and that the big Russian nation keeps and protects them" (Zaidman 2006, p. 120), while in fact Jewish discrimination was rampant. Zaidman's concentric circles of analogies are emotionally effective. They engender a dramatic moment of highly charged reactions that may prompt empathy. However, this empathy may also fail ethically.

Levinas discusses a number of issues related to empathy (Amiel Hauser and Mendelson Maoz 2014) that have implications here as well. In an early essay entitled "Reality and its Shadow," Levinas condemns art as "the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow" (Levinas [1948] 1989, p. 132). Like Plato's criticism of representative art in the *Republic*, and based on the metaphor from the allegory of the cave (Ben-Pazi 2015, p. 595), he argues that a piece of artwork actually substitutes images for reality: It is distorted, deceiving, and delightful, and these illusions are comparable to sleights-of-hand or catchy tunes that impose themselves on the consuming subject who "is caught up and carried away by [them]" (Levinas [1948] 1989, p. 132). Levinas rejects ontological claims that art is something that can provide knowledge: "art does not belong to the order of revelation. Nor does it belong to that of creation"; it "moves in just the opposite direction" (ibid.) and invokes blindness and passivity.

However, this objection is only one facet of Levinas' attitude toward art. His writings on literature are ambivalent as to whether literature fosters or undermines ethical thought. In *Time and the Other*, written in 1947, he admits that "it sometimes seems to me that the whole of philosophy is only a meditation on Shakespeare" (Levinas [1947] 1987, p. 72).[8] Levinas wrote several essays on literary texts that appear in the collection *Proper Names* (originally published in 1976). Unlike his comments regarding the misleading nature of artwork, in this collection he shows that literature indeed casts "us up upon a shore where no thought can land" (Levinas [1976] 1996b, p. 134). This ambiguity in Levinas' work is bridged by the role of criticism (Staehler 2010, p. 179), which, as Hofmeyr states, involves "drawing [art] out of its self-enclosed world of escapist beauty into the real world of engagement" (Hofmeyr 2007). It is a "response to the completeness of the work of art, to its immobilization of time, to the violent immanent holding of its plastic rhythmic schema and erasure of the absolute" (Riera 2006, p. 127). From this standpoint, Richard Cohen suggests that in his criticism, Levinas may be not be arguing in terms of "the concrete 'literary' world" of Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky and others, but rather from the world of Talmudic Judaism which combines disputes, arguments, explanations, tales and anecdotes with a commitment to the exegesis of "sacred history" (Cohen 2010, p. 160).[9]

Levinas' attitude towards literature invites literary investigation[10] that encourages the reader and the critic to consider the "difficult but unambiguous imperatives deriving from the larger interhuman

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8   See (Cohen 2010, pp. 150–68) on Levinas's assessment of Shakespeare.

9   An example of the role of literature in Levinas's writing is his essay on S. Y. Agnon, "Poetry and Resurrection," published in 1973, where he suggests that the essence of art can be found "between the lines—in the intervals of time, between times –like a footprint that would precede the step, or an echo preceding the sound of a voice" (Levinas [1976] 1996a, p. 7). He focuses on Agnon's short story "The Sign" which combines the memories of Holocaust victims with a dreamlike episode in an abandoned synagogue where he meets the 11th century Andalusian Hebrew poet Ibn Gabirol, but forgets his poem. Levinas considers that the power of Agnon's text lies in its ability to go beyond "the anecdotal or social curiosities, the narrative or fictive element which it is sought," (ibid., p. 10) to a place "older than Saying, by which the non-sense of death is put in question, by which the resurrection begins in death itself." (ibid., p. 15). Levinas reads literature between the lines and "between times," focusing not only on the possibility of encountering the Other, but also as a way "to call us back to error," (Levinas [1976] 1996a, p. 135) confront death and reveal the "tragic affirmation in face of the horror of being" (McDonald 2008, p. 25).

10   See (Eaglestone 1997, pp. 129–68; Robbins 1999, pp. 127–31, 134–54).

and moral context that inevitably permeates the artwork despite itself" (Cohen 2010, p. 244). This implies being skeptical about readers' real ability to actually enter a character's mind and achieve "a genuine understanding of another person's feelings, thoughts and character" (Gregory 2010, p. 293). In Zaidman's text, we thus need to question the move from analogy to empathy, and inquire whether empathy brings about a state of understanding of the Palestinian Others and becoming responsible for them.

Cleft Lip clearly depicts the ethical sensitivity and self-criticism arising from the flawed moral position of Zionism, and focuses on the difficult experiences of a soldier who thinks for himself and thus, feels confusion and torment. It follows a narrative pattern often dubbed "shooting and crying", in which soldiers are shocked to discover how easily they and their comrades shoot, kill, or commit acts of brutality, find themselves drowning in feelings of torment, guilt, and shame (Mendelson Maoz 2018, pp. 30–33).[11] In this narrative structure, the Israeli soldiers' feelings and moral remorse are described at length, whereas the Palestinians are little more than stage props. They are described as a group, or as prototypes of what people may think of Palestinians: They are poor, miserable, and unhealthy, wear dirty rags, and do not have a voice. Hence, Zaidman's text is mainly engaged with the hyphenated identity of an immigrant in Israeli society. The analogies with the Palestinians and their emotional impact are subjected to soldier-protagonist soul-searching. Thus, although this creates an emotional impact, the empathy here is directed towards the soldier, his traumatic memories, his struggle to define his identity and his sorrow and guilt, and not toward the Palestinian Others, who are the main victims in this scene. This misleading empathy shows, as suggested by Matthew Sharpe, that "like the image of Narcissus on the surface of the water, the materiality of art *draws us* in" (Sharpe 2005, p. 35).

In a short piece entitled "A Soft Focus on War" (Zizek 2020), Slavoj Zizek discusses Kathryn Bigelow's film *The Hurt Locker* (2008) and criticizes the way it prompts a sympathetic reaction towards US soldiers. Zizek compares this movie to two Israeli films on the 1982 Lebanon war: Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) and Samuel Maoz's *Lebanon* (2009):

> Such a "humanization" of the soldier [. . .] is a key constituent of the ideological (self-) presentation of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). The Israeli media loves to dwell on the imperfections and psychic traumas of Israeli soldiers, presenting them neither as perfect military machines nor as super-human heroes, but as ordinary people who, caught into the traumas of history and warfare, commit errors and can get lost as all normal people can.

> It is easy to discern the falsity of such a gesture of empathy: The notion that, in spite of political differences, we are all human beings with the same loves and worries, neutralizes the impact of what the soldier is effectively doing at that moment.

Zizek blames the Israeli media for generating empathy towards Israeli soldiers (in Lebanon and the Occupied Territories), and depicting them as innocent young individuals who find themselves doing horrible things and later suffer from post-traumatic syndrome and endless sorrow and regret. He argues that this mythical description is driven by ideology designed to reduce public awareness of soldiers' violent conduct. Thus, instead of raising tough questions about their military activities, and

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11   The term "shooting and crying" was formulated in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, during a time of great euphoria in Israel when the Kotel (the Western Wall) in Jerusalem became accessible again to Israelis, and many biblical holy places in the West Bank came under Israeli control. A book entitled *Si'ah lohamin* (Fighters' Discourse) that was based on a series of recorded conversations made after the war with kibbutz members including Avraham Shapira Muki Tzur, Amos Oz, and Yariv Ben-Aharon, revealed the shock and mourning in the kibbutz movement over the terrible losses in battle, but also the trauma of war and the soldiers' responses to their exposure to killing (Shapira 1968). Muky Tzur termed the overall feeling that was reflected in the volume "sliha she-nitsahnu" (we apologize for our victory). Later writers, journalists, and historians coined the now-famous phrase *yorim u-bokhim* (shooting and crying), which probably draws on a satirical column in the 1970's in *Ha-olam ha-ze* by Kobi Niv, about parents who decide, out of patriotism and morality, to call their first son "shooting" and their second son "crying", so that while the first shoots the second can cry (Niv 1976). The column mocked the hypocrisy of the national discourse that encourages the use of military power on the one hand, but weeps in sorrow on the other.

acknowledging the suffering of their victims, the media and the arts work to elicit empathy towards these young soldiers.

Zizek's accusations can be related to Ann Kaplan's term "empty empathy", which she used to discuss photographs of the Iraq war. Photographs can provoke shock, and immediate empathy, as in the famous Warsaw ghetto picture. However, Kaplan claims that in the case of the Iraq war, "most of the photos offer viewers a chance to empathize with the difficult situation of our marines and ground forces, and mainly with Iraqis whom our forces are helping. It is for this reason that the response can be called 'empty empathy'" (Kaplan 2005, p. 94). The connection between Kaplan's assessment and moral imperialism is clear: Kaplan argues that while empathy can be created by these images, it can also fuel the narcissistic self who only sees the Other in the context of his or her own superiority. In the case of Israeli literature, as long as the Palestinians are marginalized in the texts and the narrative centers on the Israeli soldier, analogy and empathy indeed point to the moral failings of the Israeli side, but fail to promote an ethical understanding and responsibility for the other.

4. Creating Empathic Unsettlement as Ethical Understanding and Responsibility

Can Israeli literature find different venues to discuss the Palestinian catastrophe, without subjecting it to the catastrophes experienced by Jews or adopting a stance of moral imperialism? This section discusses an ethical alternative that creates a variant on analogy that is based on two notions: The first is Dominick LaCapra's "empathic unsettlement," and the second is the Levinasian concept of analogy as relations. These notions aim to undermine the structure-based analogy, and respond to both Levinas' criticism of sameness, and the arguments against empathy. To illustrate how Israeli literature can embody this alternative, two examples from Ronit Matalon's prose are discussed.

According to Cathy Caruth, texts on trauma embody the possibility of sounding "the plea of an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commends us to awaken" (Caruth 1996, p. 8). However, when LaCapra argues for acknowledgment of the traumas of the Other, he stresses that "it is very important to distinguish empathy from identification and to explore the specific ways it may and should be articulated with such demands and responsibilities" (LaCapra 2001, p. 212). According to LaCapra, empathy is important in grasping the trauma of the Other, but also taps into the pleasure principle, as one of its aspects links achieving this empathy with arriving to some harmony (p. 78). His concept of "empathic unsettlement" constitutes a barrier (p. 41), since it allows for certain empathy to emerge, but still maintains distance and does not seek resolution and harmony. Bashir and Goldberg view "empathic unsettlement" as a way to achieve radical otherness, and formulate "new structural possibilities that seek to reduce the very likelihood that these traumas will be generated" (Bashir and Goldberg 2019, p. 25).

Emmy Koopman analyzed the concept of "empathic unsettlement" in the works of J.M. Coetzee, and suggests that "empathic unsettlement" can offer a "fruitful 'middle ground' between a 'conventional' engaging narrative which allows readers to understand the represented Other, and disrupting techniques which make clear that understanding the Other can never be complete" (Koopman 2010, p. 237). This creates a "balance between disruption and engagement" (p. 240). Thus, "empathic unsettlement" breaks down any delusive empathy and the tendency to reduce Otherness to sameness, and preserves the reader's sense of unease.

The second option for an ethical alternative is Levinas's concept of analogy as relation, which derives from the analogy he drew between the relationship of every Other and the relationship of Moses to God—to articulate the meaning of Moses's response to God: "Here I am" (Exodus 3, 4). This analogy has puzzled many, and prompted Derrida to discuss it as a "certain analogy" (Derrida [1987] 1991, p. 44). Without analyzing the core of Levinas' theology (which is beyond the scope of this article), presenting the relationship between two Others as analogous to the relationship between Moses and God emphasizes the impossibility of grasping the Other. As Levinas states: "He shows himself only by his trace, as is said in Exodus 33. To go toward Him is not to follow this trace which is not a sign; it is to go toward the others who stand in the trace of illeity" (Levinas 1986, p. 359).

Kas Saghafi, in his writings on Levinas' analogy, discusses the etymology of "analogy" [ana-logia]—the repetition (ana) of a logos (of a relation or a ratio), "pointing to the possibility of a convertibility or conversion and a reversibility [. . .]. Thus, analogy implies a double movement: The repetition of an initial relation and the reversibility or reversal of a relation" (Saghafi 2005, p. 60). Graham Wards discusses the negotiation between sets of contrasts such as "ego and illeity, distance and proximity, finite and infinite, presence and absence, Saying and said" (Ward 2002, p. 191), and suggests that analogy should be considered a relationship "before identity, before subject and object, before positioning" (ibid., p. 190). This puts forward the notion of analogy as relation, which fractures the structure-based analogy: Rather than centering on parallelism or mirroring, it works by building relationships.

These two notions, of "empathic unsettlement" and of analogy as relation, are missing from all above-mentioned literary analogies between Israelis and the Palestinian Other, since they refer to structure and are based on mirroring and reduction. In these examples, the Palestinian Others are described in a very general way and only from the vantage point of the Jewish trauma. These texts aim for resolution and lack convertibility, conversion, or reversibility.

Ronit Matalon (1957–2017) was a major player in contemporary Hebrew literature. Unlike S. Yizhar, Amos Oz, and Boris Zaidman, who are all Ashkenazi Jews with European roots and were unfamiliar with Arab culture and language, Matalon was born to Egyptian Jewish immigrants and raised in an immigrant neighborhood. The nine books she authored constitute an alternative to the canon of Hebrew and Israeli literature. She worked as a journalist in Gaza during the First Intifada and was a social activist and a senior lecturer in Hebrew and Comparative Literature at Haifa University. The episodes below are taken from Matatlon's novels *Sarah Sarah* (Bliss, Matalon [2000] 2003) and *Kol tse'adenu* (The Sound of Our Steps, Matalon [2008] 2015), and illustrate how Matalon deliberately chose a different path when describing the trauma of the Palestinian Others.

Sarah Sarah revolves around the long-term friendship between two Jewish Israeli women, Sarah and Ofri. The narrative develops in four main spatial and temporal locations. The first takes place in the early 1980s and describes how the women met. It is set against the ethnic and economic differences between Ashkenazi Sarah and Mizrahi Ofri. The second takes place in the late 1980s during the First Intifada, when Sarah—then a photographer in the Occupied Territories—marries Udi. The third covers the first half of the 1990s and narrates the birth of Sarah's son, Mims (Emanuel), her relationship with Marwan, a Palestinian Israeli who is studying at Tel-Aviv University, and how she then abandons him, followed by her divorce from Udi. The fourth and final phase describes Ofri's stay in Le Plessis-Belleville, France, until the news of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination ends the narrative, both structurally and chronologically.[12]

Much can be said about complex relationships between Israelis and Palestinians in this novel, including the relationship between Sarah and Marwan. However, here I would like to focus on Sarah's activity in the Occupied Territories, stemming from her job as a journalist and photographer. "Back then she was making two or three trips there a month, with or without the reporter" (Matalon [2000] 2003, p. 10), "she had been working almost around the clock for the last week" (ibid., p. 66). Sarah enters the Territories and experiences the Intifada from first hand. She returns home distressed by what she saw, but this does not stop her from going back. On the contrary, she finds herself attracted and wants to join in. For example, she becomes involved with the Palestinian family who shelters her when she is caught up in riots that break out in the course of her work, and she spends the night at their home: "At eight-thirty the family got ready for bed. They offered her a separate mattress, but she refused. She sat on the couch all night with her legs folded beneath her" (ibid., p. 10). She has also formed a relationship with the family of Busaina, the little girl killed by IDF gunfire: "During the last few months of 1989 she wove her own version of Busaina's story, squeezing

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12   For a more detailed analysis of this novel see (Mendelson Maoz 2018, chp. 7).

the entire intifada into the tiny portrait of the girl standing between her four brothers that stood on the coffee table in her parent's house in Khan Younis" (ibid., pp. 105–6). Matalon does not produce an emotional text that involves feelings of strong empathy; nor does she reflect on any structural pattern or similarity to the Jewish trauma. Rather, she creates a situation in which she positions herself *with* the Palestinians and not *against* or *opposed* to them. This intimacy on the one hand, and inability to achieve emotion on the other, engenders "empathic unsettlement".

An artistic expression of Sarah relation to the Palestinian is evidenced in her refusal to take the remote, flat role of a photographer. As a professional photojournalist, Sarah takes photos for the newspaper, but she also takes pictures "for herself"; that is, she engages in photography as a profession but also as an art. The photos she takes for herself are mainly of people sleeping, including adults, children, Palestinians, and Israelis: "people in Gaza asleep in different positions, different spaces, inside or outside houses; men, women, soldiers, old people, hospital patients, children; together and alone." (ibid., p. 10). In contrast to the commissioned photographs that are placed in envelopes, these photographs have no addressees. They are not placed in an envelope or sent to the person who commissioned them.

> She divided them into two groups: commissioned and noncommissioned. The commissioned photos, the ones for the paper, roamed the house in brown envelopes that were transferred from the kitchen table to the phone stand in the hallway, from the bookshelf to the pile of phone and utility bills, from among the scattered newspapers to the couch and under the clothing removed from the laundry lines. She never showed the other ones, the noncommissioned photos; those she arranged in exemplary order in a specially purchased filing cabinet. (ibid.)

Susan Sontag's famous essay "Fascinating Fascism," which was written in 1975, has been seminal in understanding the power of photos in political contexts (Sontag 1975). In the specific Israeli context, Tamar Libes and Anat First discuss the role of pictorial images from the Intifada and their political power, and in particular note "the selection of dramatic images, transmitting emotional, empathy-arousing images that can be simultaneously absorbed everywhere" (Libes and First 2003, p. 62). Pictures have the power to replicate the existing social order by fixating identities, power structures, and intensifying control mechanisms. This is what Gil Hochberg defines as the visual aspect of the Occupation. She claims that the Israeli visual field dominates the visibility of the Occupation, and points to three organizing principles that are responsible for this configuration: *Concealment*—erasure and denial of the Palestinian situation,—*surveillance* and the power of the military gaze, and *witnessing* that can reveal Palestinian hardship, but is considered subjective and limited in nature (Hochberg 2015, p. 8). Regev Nathansohn uses the term "banal photography" to describe these tendencies toward concealment and surveillance. "Banal photography" is usually shot from a panoptic position that sees everything within the categories of sameness and otherness, in a way that serves the logic of a government or an ideology, and enables control and supervision as well as displaying clear categories of identity, space, and time. This type of photography also presents binary axes such as here/there and soldiers/Palestinians (Nathansohn 2007, p. 130), and thus, appropriates suffering to fit the ideological scheme.

However, Sarah's personal photos of people sleeping constitute a transgression through photography, by providing a gaze that is "disturbing, unfamiliar, likely to lead to fresh thinking, as well as criticism. [. . .] the imaging unravels its conventional understanding, the categories we are familiar with rule out any possibility for decoding what is presented to us" (Nathansohn 2007, p. 141). As a photographer, Sarah is located in a panoptic position that inevitably invades the privacy of the subject she photographs, yet she chooses to make a difference. While the press photographs do not change power structures, the photos of the sleeping people do not allow the viewer or the reader to categorize them, and thus impede any comparison or contradiction. This photography differs because it will constitute a private archive, which Sarah does not publish. Sarah's noncommissioned photographs negate the idea that "the subject would turn himself into a third entity, material" for other purposes (Matalon [2000] 2003, p. 64). Moreover, in these photographs, the identity of the photographed subjects is not always clear; sometimes they are not doing what is expected of them, there is no clear location,

binary contrast, or causality (Nathansohn 2007, pp. 147–48). Thus, Matalon again dismantles the structure of power and hence the structure of analogy: The uneasy reflection of the sleeping figures negates any possibility of using the photos within the framework of an ideological or political structure, thus exposing the readers to an ethical moment without offering a quick resolution.

The second example is from Matalon's most personal novel, *The Sound of Our Steps*. The novel is not defined as an autobiography, but incorporates major experiences and descriptions that hint at the life of the author, in that it depicts an Egyptian–Jewish immigrant family during the 1950s, living in a pre-fab in an immigrant neighborhood on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. Lucette, the protagonist's mother, was raised in an affluent family in Cairo, is well-educated, and speaks both Arabic and French. However, in Israel she has become embittered, speaks inarticulate Hebrew, lives in a derelict house, and struggles to provide food for her children Sammy, Corinne, and Toni, the youngest, who is a reflection of Matalon herself as a child and is frequently referred to as "the child".

Matalon's ability to upend analogies when it comes to discussing the Palestinian Others is best illustrated through the relationship between Lucette and her Palestinian gardener. In the mother's constant attempts to invent a sense of home, she tries to grow flowers by following the guidelines for an ideal garden in a horticulture book. The novel provides detailed instructions on how to plant roses and repeated descriptions of the mother's attempts to grow them. Roses could have been a consolation and made the hovel more like a home. The novel equates the inability to grow flowers with a lack of control over space, to suggest that she, as a Mizrahi woman, is not the master of the land. She hires a Palestinian gardener, and is the only one in the neighborhood who is not afraid of "them". The encounter between the immigrant from Egypt and the Palestinian gardener creates a unique interaction between two groups who have suffered oppression, and is suggestive of an analogy between them. This type of analogy is often found in Hebrew literature in cases where the Palestinians are shown to be analogous to other marginal peoples or disabled protagonists, as in Daniella Carmi's *Haiey ha-lila shel Cleo* (Cleo's Night-Life, Carmi 1991). In other instances, they are described along with other marginalized protagonists who want to escape from their lives, as in Hadara Lazar's *mikan va-hal'ah* (From Now On, Lazar 1983) and Dorit Rabinyan's *Gader haya* (All the Rivers, Rabinyan [2014] 2017), or as analogous to oppressed Mizrahi characters, as in some of Sami Michael's and Eli Amir's works. Oppenheimer claims that in many of these analogies, the relationship between the Palestinian and the Israeli is depicted by the author in a way that ignores notions of national struggle, thus narrowing the characters' historical and cultural identity (Oppenheimer 2008, pp. 325–29).

In Matalon's text, the analogy between Mustafa the gardener and Lucette is interpreted differently. It is clear that in a symbolic context, both Lucette and the gardener cannot grow flowers since neither of them belong to the people who are the masters of the country and the land (Frade Galon and Mendelson Maoz 2019). Furthermore, their mutual connection is also strengthened through the Arabic language. In the novel, Lucette consistently uses the Arabic word "elgnena" to describe her dream garden. However, despite her efforts to have a garden, the flowers die and thus, she decides to draw flowers rather than grow them, turning toward the painting of roses, cyclamens, and poppies.

> Every morning she was waiting for him with the coffee, and they began with a review of her work: "nothing to write home about." She surveyed the painting with a critical look. "not so good this time, eh, *ya* Mustafa? "Good, he disagreed. "why do you say not good? Straight from Paradise they are, these flowers you paint." (Matalon [2008] 2015, p. 366)

However, while depicting the close relationship between the two, Matalon does not let the readers be carried away with this heart-warming analogy. The novel ends when Lucette decides for the first time to go to Mustafa's home, to see how he is doing during a curfew imposed by the Israeli military on the Occupied Territories. Unlike other Israeli texts that describe relationships between Israelis and Palestinians only within the Israeli space, Lucette asks her son to take her to the West Bank, determined to see Mustafa. When they arrive, "Mustafa 'lost his color' when he saw them" (ibid., p. 367).

> They entered the only room of his house [. . .] sat down on the long sofas, which opened up into beds at night, and looked around them: the entire wall of the room was covered with the mother's flower painting.

> [. . .] the mother came closer. She almost pressed her nose to the wall and looked: on the areas of the pictures painted brown for the soil, Mustafa's daughters had stuck real reddish soil, on the green gouache of the leaves they had pasted green leaves from bushes and trees, and on the huge flowers painted burgundy, yellow, and purple—petals of red, yellow, and purple flowers, some of them fresh, most of them already wilted. (ibid., p. 367)

Lucette and Mustafa, both of whom are on the fringes of the Israeli consensus, speak the same language and try together to make the land flourish. In this sense, this is a structure-based analogy. However, this last episode not only reveals the differences, but does not let the Israeli component dominate. Unlike the other literary examples discussed here, Matalon takes her reader to Mustafa's apartment, where he lives with his five children in one room with no land. In his apartment, Lucette's painting hobby turns into a vivid picture of the lost Palestinian land. Hence, in these closing lines of the novel, Matalon does not let the reader preserve the parallelism between the Mizrahi mother and the Palestinian worker and reveals its deception: Although both of them love flowers, it is impossible to compare their failure or despair. As with the two sets of photographs in *Bliss*—the first that supports the basic discourse of sameness and otherness, and the second that blurs them—here too, while the narrative hints at a possible analogy between the sufferings of the Palestinians and the Mizrahi, the final episode changes the order of things and leaves the reader unsettled.

5. Conclusions

Analogy can contribute to better comprehension and is usually based on structural parallelism (Holyoak and Thagard 1995, p. 9), yet when it comes to understanding the Other, analogy can be risky. Otherness signifies a radical uniqueness that cannot be conceptualized, thematized, or comprehended, and can never be summed up or reduced to any one general structure or set of attributes (Levinas [1969] 2002, p. 73). This radical separation affects subjects and obligates them to take unconditional responsibility for the Other, who "resists possession, resists my powers" (Ibid, p. 197).

Texts on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict often use analogies to promote understanding. However, these analogies can lead to two ethical flaws. The first shifts attention from the trauma of the Other to a narcissistic dichotomy implying competition between victims for superior victimhood, and the second leads to "empty empathy." Using Levinasian concepts and LaCapra's notion of "empathic unsettlement," I suggest that by preventing the emergence of analogies that can blur the uniqueness of the Other, and by viewing empathy with suspicion, analogy can create a foundation for understanding the Other when it scaffolds an opportunity for relationships. While the literary examples in the early sections of the article show that Palestinian Others and Israelis are usually presented as antipodes, Matalon, a Mizrahi woman author, reveals Otherness in a way that cannot be reduced or discounted, by constructing analogies based on relationships that shatter symmetry and instill unease that may be a basic step toward ethical understanding. In doing so, she employs the poetic alternative of "empathic unsettlement." Will Israeli prose continue to pursue this path, or will it retreat to the much safer standpoint of a moral contemplation of the narcissistic self? Only the next decades of writing on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict will tell.

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