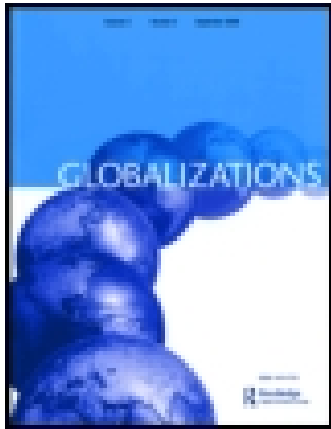


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### The Apocalyptic Sting and the Rise of Israeli Unrealism: Toward a Negative-Dialectical Critique

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## The Apocalyptic Sting and the Rise of Israeli Unrealism: Toward a Negative-Dialectical Critique

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper explores Gershom Scholem's notion of an 'apocalyptic sting'—a messianic political theology which, he feared, haunted Jewish and Israeli politics through the Hebrew language. The paper makes four key moves. First, I unpack Scholem's 'sting' in relation to contemporary Israeli religious radicalism. Second, I tie that notion of a sting to Frankfurt-School discussions of reification and its political effects. Third, I survey attempts to critique this notion of a sting, through the work of Israeli International Relations (IR) Realist Yehoshafat Harkabi. Drawing on the negative dialectics of Theodor Adorno, I then draw out and deepen Harkabi's reflexive stance, with an eye to setting out a vocation for critical IR-realism in the context of contemporary Israeli security discourse.*

**Keywords:** critical realism, classical realism, critical theory, 'apocalyptic sting', Yehoshafat Harkabi, Gershom Scholem

This Hebrew language is pregnant with catastrophe; it cannot remain in its present state—nor will it . . . Our children will no longer have any other language; truth be told, they, and they alone, will pay the price for this encounter which we have imposed on them unasked, or without even asking ourselves. One day the language will turn against its own speakers . . . Will we then have a youth who will be able to hold fast against the rebellion of a holy tongue? (Scholem, 1997 [1926], p. 27)

Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects—this alone is the task of thought. (Adorno, 1974 [1946/1947], p. 247)

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## Introduction

This paper explores Gershom Scholem's notion of an 'apocalyptic sting'—a messianic political theology which, he feared, haunted Jewish and Israeli politics through the Hebrew language. The paper makes four key moves. First, I unpack Scholem's 'sting' in relation to contemporary Israeli religious radicalism. Second, I tie that notion of a sting to Frankfurt-School discussions of reification and its political effects. Third, I survey attempts to critique the effects of that sting through the work of Yehoshafat Harkabi, an Israeli International Relations (IR) realist who drew on—and sought to contribute to—the broader tradition of what is today variously called classical or critical realism. Drawing on the negative dialectics of Theodor Adorno, I then seek to draw out and deepen Harkabi's reflexivity, deriving from it a vocation for critical realism in the context of contemporary Israeli security discourse.

## The Apocalyptic Sting: Scholem on Modern Hebrew

In a 1926 letter to Franz Rosenzweig, the German-Israeli philosopher and historian of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem discerned a fault line running through the politics of the new *Yishuv*: the emergent Jewish-Zionist community then settling—or on its own account, reconstituting itself—in Palestine (Troen, 2007, p. 872). Under the aegis of the British Mandate, that community was then in the midst of its first great expansion: from 60,000 to 84,000 between 1918 and 1922; by 1931, it would number 175,000 (Morris, 2001, p. 107; Tessler, 1994, pp. 266–267).<sup>1</sup> Though still a minority in Palestine—and of Jews worldwide—the core of a self-sustaining 'Jewish national home' seemed, finally, to be emergent. Scholem, who had moved to Palestine in 1923, would later write fondly of that period as one of great excitement (Scholem, 1980, p. 166; also Biale, 1979; Hertzberg, 1987; Myers, 1995; Piterberg, 2008).

Yet in 1926, Scholem had concerns. In part, those concerns were general within the *Yishuv*: ideological fractiousness was growing; so were tensions with Palestinian Arabs. But in his letter to Rosenzweig, Scholem writes of a different concern; of an 'apocalyptic sting' nested within the everyday use of the Hebrew language. Modern Hebrew opened up an aporia which, he feared, the *Yishuv* would be unable to contain.

The land is a volcano, and it hosts the language. People talk here about many things which may make us fail—particularly these days about the Arabs. But another more serious danger . . . threatens us, a danger which follows of necessity from the Zionist enterprise. What will be the result of updating the Hebrew language? Is not the holy language, which we have planted among our children, an abyss that must open up? (Scholem, 1997, p. 27)

The promulgators of the 'new' Hebrew, Scholem argues, lack reverence for the powers of the 'old' one from which it had been extracted. Hebrew, he asserts, will not submit to being a passive, secular vernacular for late-modern political and social administration. Its 'source code'—Biblical and medieval Hebrew—was entirely devoted to the transmission, interpretation, and application of revelation. The power and resilience of those foundational elements remained latent within the modern language—they were a staple of authentic Jewish self-understanding and, they would, he feared, crowd their way back into Hebrew politics and discourse.

People here do not realize the meaning of what they have done. They think they have turned Hebrew into a secular language and that they have removed its apocalyptic sting, but it is not so. The secularization of the language is mere empty words, a rhetorical turn of phrase. (Scholem, 1997, p. 27)

To make sense of this claim, the context in which it was made needs drawing out. The revival of spoken Hebrew was one element in a systematic program of Jewish self-reinvention. ‘Zionism is not continuity, it is no mere medicine for an ailment’, noted Yudke, the ‘everyman’ protagonist from Hebrew language novelist Haim Hazaz’s widely read (and self-consciously didactic) short story, ‘The Sermon’<sup>2</sup> (Hazaz, 1991, p. 138). Rather, ‘it is uprooting and destruction, the opposite of what has been, the end’<sup>3</sup> (Hazaz, 1991, p. 138). The old Jews have to reinvent themselves as ‘Hebrews’: a ‘nearly total sociocultural revolution’ that was intended to produce ‘a new society and culture, with its own customs and codes and a new language and literature’ (Almog, 2000, p. 1; see also Even-Zohar, 1996; Segev, 2000, ch. 11). To that end, the Hebrew language was to be updated and secularized; reconfigured to sustain a worldly public sphere.<sup>4</sup> Most of Scholem’s contemporaries viewed this as a purely technical set of problems regarding orthography, pronunciation, the creation of neologisms, and so on. By the 1920s, moreover, most considered these problems solved (Ben Yehuda, 1993 [1882]; Harshav, 1993; Rabin, 1996; Sáenz-Badillos, 1993; Saposnik, 2008; Shilo, 1994). Scholem evidently disagreed.

Recent work by Eyal Chowers helps to delineate the depth of this disagreement and its importance. Three key sets of questions bear consideration. First, what precipitated the total break with the past that Zionists held to be necessary? Second, ‘[w]here did Zionists find the audacity to take on such an all-engulfing experiment’ in self-reinvention? (Chowers, 2012, p. 7) Following these, a third question then suggests itself: how did Hebrew’s modernization (or on Scholem’s account, its *ersatz* modernization) threaten that audacious ‘thinking space’? Each of these questions may be taken in turn.

On the first, Chowers notes, there is a degree of consensus.<sup>5</sup> The old faith systems and corporatist social structures that had sustained European Jews were collapsing. Alternative arrangements—the promise of equality through either the rule of law, assimilation into the national ‘families’ of Europe, or universal revolution—had proven disappointing.<sup>6</sup> A demographic and economic crisis festered in Eastern Europe’s ‘pale of settlement’. Jews, both individually and as a community, understood themselves to be at a crossroads: ‘change or disappear, create themselves anew or perish in their old ways’ (Chowers, 2012, p. 2).

That explanation, however, goes only so far. Extreme crises may be necessary conditions for revolutions, but they are not sufficient to explain the forms they take, or the ideologies they suborn; to say nothing of communities and individuals who face such decision-points with resignation or indifference. Hence, Chowers’ second question: what accounts for Zionism’s audaciousness—for the totality of the transformation which the new ‘Hebrewness’ represented? On what intellectual conditions did it rely? To that end, he develops a notion which he calls ‘sundered history’

a precarious, in-between stage in which various historical narratives have disintegrated and new ones are not yet entrenched. The interrupted historical narratives may be religious or secular, linear or cyclical, eschatological or catastrophic; what matters is the undefined space established within or among them. (Chowers, 2012, p. 74)

Sundered history, on Chowers’ account, produces a very particular kind of felt political moment: one that is both profoundly isolating and profoundly fecund. These points bear some explication.

*Sundered history and Jewish existential isolation.* While a profound sense of worldly, political isolation predated Zionism—the Book of Numbers, in a well-known episode, characterized Israel as ‘a people that shall dwell alone, not to be reckoned among the nations’—that sense of worldly aloneness had other compensations (Num. 23:9; Leshem, 1989). Was Israel not God’s chosen?

Was it not ‘better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes’? (Ps. 118:9) Sundered history, however, undoes this: it is a moment ‘devoid of any guidance, whether from divinity, a natural order, an invisible-hand-like mechanism, or the unfolding of reason’ (Chowers, 2012, p. 74; also Yerushalmi, 1982, ch. 4 and 2014, ch. 12). If Jews had always been alone in *space*, now they were in *time* as well.<sup>7</sup>

*Sundered history and political agency.* Abandoned by providential forces, human existence takes on a new, Promethean, open-endedness; mass Jewish political action, if not easy, is now *thinkable*. ‘The new Zionism, which has been called political’, Max Nordau noted in 1902, ‘differs from the old, messianic variety in that it . . . desires to prepare the way by its own efforts’<sup>8</sup> (Hertzberg, 1977, p. 242; Lederhandler, 1994). As in Walter Benjamin’s account of the birth of the ‘mourning-drama’ [*trauerspiel*], an exuberant moment of political, aesthetic and ideational experimentation follows from the shattering of old historical narratives.<sup>9</sup> That shattering both makes way for the new, and summons it into being; for it is through such experimentation that individuals and communities adapt to their new circumstances.

To be sure, Chowers avers, Zionism’s theorists understood this ‘sundered’ moment as deeply contingent: a ‘window of opportunity’ that would need disciplined organizational–institutional frameworks, sustained collective effort, and some degree of luck to be capitalized upon. But for as long as it lasted, sundered history was understood to have produced a fortuitous moment in which both the need for, and the possibility of, a new kind of Jewish politics could be said to have emerged.

So understood, the first two questions neatly frame the third. Scholem’s concerns regarding Hebrew cast doubt on the very viability of the Zionist political project itself. For that project can be implemented only if ‘sundering’ can be sustained as a conceptual abstraction. To paraphrase Leo Strauss, Zionism must *both* be taking place, *and* be understood by its adherents to be taking place, within the space of sundered history: it is happening *in* that history, not *to* it.<sup>10</sup> If Hebrew is unable to sustain that distinction—if thinking and speaking in it draws one back into the realm of sacred, mythic, or eschatological time—then *the medium through which Zionism has chosen to express itself would wind up undercutting both the movement’s conditions of intellectual possibility and its promise of worldly emancipation*. The language would ‘sting’ its speakers: emancipation from one form of oppression would yoke them to another. Jewish quietism—what Scholem would elsewhere call ‘life lived in deferment’—would indeed be replaced; but with a form of political activism so uncompromising in its teleological perfectionism that anything short of an actual messianic return would feel partial, cheap, and unsatisfying (Scholem, 1971, p. 33).<sup>11</sup>

The effect of this linguistic ‘rebellion’ would be to obscure what might otherwise be an obvious *prima facie* distinction: between Palestine’s growing *Yishuv* and the ingathering of the exiles as depicted in prophecy; between the modern Israeli state as an end in itself, and that state as a stage in the rebuilding of the ancient Israelite Kingdoms. Some 20 years before the independence of the Israeli state would be declared ‘the first flowering of our redemption’; some 40 years before the war of 1967 would be read as ‘the finger of God’; and some 60 years before the ‘mainstreaming’ of dispensationalist Christian Zionism; Scholem seems to have glimpsed, however furtively, the peculiar combination of category mistakes, empirical misprisions, and conceptual reifications that make the contemporary Israeli state appear to be more than itself: a central actor in a grand historical (or meta-historical) drama.<sup>12</sup> Zionism’s thesis threatened to become its own antithesis. For it was the sundering of all such dramas, and the failure of European politics to make up for that loss, that had given rise to Zionism in the first place.

### Unpacking the Apocalyptic Sting

It can, of course, be argued that no language is free of such providential associations: consider at this point Benjamin's distinction between divine and human language, Adorno's and Horkheimer's argument about the 'entwinement' of myth and transcendence inherent in all forms of conceptual and instrumental thinking, or Schmitt's argument about the 'theological' quality of ostensibly secular political speech<sup>13</sup> (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002; Benjamin, 1986; Habermas, 1994; Schmitt, 1985). If so, then the dangers that follow from Scholem's analysis, and the problem of developing reflexive tools adequate to them, may be understood as a variant of a generalized problem: the 'regressive' political consequences that follow when words and concepts elide the things those words and concepts mean to describe. Allowing for differences in idiom, Scholem himself says as much:

A language is composed of names. The power of the language is hidden within the name; its abyss is sealed therein. After invoking the old names day after day, we shall no longer be able to hold off their power. . . . Names have a life of their own. (Scholem, 1997, p. 28)

In effect, Scholem is describing a process by which the reification of concepts undermines the emancipatory aims of their promulgators. 'Shot through with chips of messianic time', the words that Hebrew speakers use threaten to overmaster them (Benjamin, 1968, p. 263).

While an exhaustive account of reification exceeds the present essay—the term, as Rose (1978, p. 28) observed, has 'no canonical source, and has become prominent and debased as much by insinuation as by scrupulous examination'—a barebones account can be straightforwardly offered.<sup>14</sup> Instrumental reason works by imposing ideal-typical conceptual forms onto things in the world: organizing objects of thought or perception on the basis of key similarities—a process Weber (1958) called *genus proximum, differentia specifica* (pp. 47–48). That grouping has a useful effect: it becomes easier to appropriate things for human ends. A stand of trees in a particular corner of West Virginia (say) becomes 'lumber' by such a process, while the hilltop beneath it becomes 'coal': standardized commodities that can be extracted, refined, exchanged, and used.

Over time, however, the artificiality of that imposition is forgotten; the foreshortened concept comes to *replace* the thing it means to describe. In the process, all that was unique about that stand of trees and that hilltop—its value in, of, and for itself, as distinct from the uses to which its various elements might be put—is *also* elided.<sup>15</sup> That moment of forgetting or occlusion is what is meant by reification: things become wholly identified with the truncated conceptual markers that name them. Bleiker has aptly summarized the effects of such 'identitarian' thinking: to 'subsume the particular under the general, force subjective and idiosyncratic identities into one unitary system of thought, one universal point of reference, one truth that silences all others' (Bleiker, 2000, p. 140).

In critical discussions on reification, the process reaches its worst—but also its most logical—conclusion when human beings *themselves* become seconded to it.<sup>16</sup> In that moment, the whole system of instrumental appropriation falls back on itself. An emancipatory project has produced its dialectical opposite: exploiting human beings to sustain itself. As Horkheimer explained:

Reason has become completely harnessed to the social process. Its operational value, its role in the domination of men and nature, has been made the sole criterion. Concepts have been reduced to summaries of the characteristics that several specimens have in common . . . They are thought of as mere abbreviations of the items to which they refer . . . It is as if thinking itself had been reduced to the level of industrial processes, subjected to a close schedule—in short, made part and parcel of production. (Horkheimer, 2004, p. 15)



In short, then, reification is a process by which emancipatory projects betray themselves, owing to a distinctive form of forgetting: forgetting how our world is thought into being, and how that thinking affects individuals within it.

While Scholem's (1997) notion of a 'sting' complicates this barebones account somewhat, forgetting remains central to it. As noted, modern Hebrew draws on an older archive; ancient names 'filled to the brim' with sacred, otherworldly meanings (p. 28). To rationalize Hebrew would be to strip out those meanings, tying modern Hebrew words only and entirely to the immediate, worldly existence of the *Yishuv*. This cannot succeed, Scholem fears; the words will retain their divine resonances. As a result, the speakers of those words will forget what world they live in; following Jacques Derrida, the 'daily, concrete, pathetic' landscape of inter-war Palestine will be forgotten or occluded.

One should not throw oneself too quickly into sophisticated interpretations of this letter . . . before having reconstructed the daily, concrete, pathetic landscape, but also the paradigmatic scene of this Berliner intellectual from the diaspora, living two cultures, familiar as are so many others, with sacred non-spoken texts reserved for study and liturgy, and who all at once hears, in the Palestine of the 1920s, these sacred names in the street, on the bus, at the corner store, in the newspapers that every day publish lists of new words to be inscribed in the code of secular Hebrew. . . . like a miraculous manna but also like the profanatory *jouissance*, in the face of which a sort of religious concupiscence recoils in fright. (Derrida, 2001, p. 209; also Honig, 2012; Mosès, 2009)

That profanatory *jouissance*—the 'playful' power of words—includes their power to overmaster the things they mean to describe, and the dangerous utility that follows from it. Scholem's fear about Hebrew's 'sting' meets Adorno's and Horkheimer's account of reification. 'This is why', Adorno averred, 'the philosophy of identity is the mythological form of thought' (Adorno, 1973, p. 203).

If all this seems abstract, the Israeli political theorist Aviezer Ravitzky can help; his work delineates how modern Hebrew draws on transcendently and eschatologically derived concepts and signifiers to describe present-day statist and administrative realities:

The . . . 'apocalyptic sting' [is] to be found in . . . many terms whose original religious meaning has been radically altered or altogether lost in modern Hebrew. For example *bitachon*, which now denotes military security, originally referred to trust in God; *ha'apalah*, which is used to refer to the pre-state 'illegal' immigration [of Jews to Palestine, DL] originally denoted a forbidden and catastrophic breakthrough . . . The very name given to the State of Israel, *Medinat Yisrael* . . . hovers between the sacred and the profane. (Ravitzky, 1996, pp. 3–4)

The argument here is not simply that Biblical turns of phrase, or that common religious expressions and names of ritual practices, have been tendentiously appropriated by ideologues; though, as Liebman and Don-Yehiya note, that was certainly the case (1983, p. 38, 93 and *passim*). Here, the 'dependent' and 'independent' variables switch: Hebrew's 'pregnancy' is the logical a priori: it contains within it resonances and echoes, which pull its speakers out of sundered history. Hebrew 'rebels'.

Through that rebellion, the audacious, human-centeredness of Zionism winds up producing precisely the *opposite* of what its founders intend: an 'alternative Zionist historiography and . . . historiosophy', in which a messianic 'invisible hand' surreptitiously inserts itself into the world of human affairs: the ideal of worldly, 'do-it-yourself' emancipation becomes a kind of false consciousness to be discarded when it no longer suits, a social illusion masking the true workings of providence (Ravitzky, 1990, p. 19).

### Fighting Forgetfulness: Yehoshafat Harkabi and the Vocation of Political Realism

Scholem's concerns reveal a strong onto-political overlap with classical realist approaches to world politics. Sundered history's 'precarious, in-between time' accords well with realism's 'anti-pelagian' critique of 'Whiggism': the notion that there are overarching themes, truths, deities, or states under whose sign history unfolds (Butterfield, 1950 [1931]; Guilhot, 2014; Rengger, 2007). In both, moreover, deep contingency renders the world differentially malleable to concerted political action. Promethean audacity, like Morgenthau's *animus dominandi*, must be tempered with princely *virtú* and prudence; realism's 'empty sky from which the gods have departed' is precisely what speakers of an apocalyptically 'stung' language would struggle to express or imagine (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 267).

It should not therefore be surprising if, in the wake of the 1967 war, we find Israeli IR-realists linking concerns like Scholem's to the sort of critical reflection practiced by Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr, or more recently by Richard Ned Lebow and Michael C. Williams. Such critique would strive to restore the virtues of prudence, *sophrosune* and relationality to Israeli political discourse—chastening its hubristic, messianic excesses (Lebow, 2003, p. 366; Levine, 2012, pp. 146–151; Williams, 2005, pp. 15–16). In other contexts, I have argued that such interventions may not on their own be sufficient to meet the problems that late modernity poses; that the challenge which sundered history poses to realism's 'unstable synthesis of disenchantment and belief' requires a more far-reaching critical sensibility (Levine, 2013, pp. 106–108; Williams, 2005, p. 127). If sundered history is to be more than yet another ontology—if the discursive possibilities that follow from it are not to harden into new, and presumably no less repressive master narratives—then quite far-reaching negative-reflexive countermoves must follow.

At this point, consider the later works of Yehoshafat Harkabi (1921–1994). The leading political realist of his own (or perhaps any) generation of Israeli intellectuals, Harkabi's enduring prominence in both public life and scholarship is hard to understate: at turns, Israel's Morgenthau, its Lippmann and its Kissinger (Eyal, 2006, ch. 6; Shlaim, 1994; Zerubavel, 1995, ch. 10.). As a scholar, he wrote some 20 books, from close analyses of the various parties to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to foundational texts on nuclear deterrence and strategic studies. Prior to his academic career, he had fought in both the British army and the *Haganah*, took part in the Rhodes armistice talks, and rose to head of the Israel Defense Forces' Intelligence Directorate. He later held a series of senior positions in the Ministry of Defense and the Prime Minister's Office (Shlaim, 1994). He also gave frequent interviews and public lectures, and wrote newspaper op-eds.

In the 1980s, Harkabi published two books for a general readership: *The Bar Kokhba Syndrome* (English, 1983; Hebrew, 1982) and *Israel's Fateful Hour* (English, 1989; Hebrew, 1986). In their polemical intensity—if not their specific context—they recall works like *Scientific Man and Power Politics*, *The Purpose of American Politics*, and *The Irony of American History* (Morgenthau, 1946, 1960; Niebuhr, 1952). In them, Harkabi takes the issue with a particular kind of romanticism, which he held was becoming increasingly endemic to Israeli political and strategic thinking. In past decades, Harkabi argued, a disciplined, process-oriented realism had characterized mainstream Zionism's approach to politics and security:

This school argued that [political] achievements do not come as a dramatic *event*, but as a *process* of long struggle, of accumulating national assets (sloganized as 'acre after acre, goat after goat'). Without abandoning the dream of Jewish independence, it stressed the need for realism. The feet of the people must be firmly planted on the ground, the constraints of reality always taken into account. (Harkabi, 1988, p. 71, emphases in original)



Of late, however, a kind of magical thinking had become increasingly mainstream. A critical mass of Israeli leaders and voters now took their political and diplomatic cues from charismatic heroes and the ‘cunning of history’:

This outlook is characterized by seeing achievement as the result of an event . . . that provides a solution once and for all, a historical big bang. It glorifies the heroism of the spectacular one-time deed for which the individual must be ready to sacrifice his or her life . . . obivat[ing] the laborious creation of infrastructure . . . and allow[ing] Jews to proceed directly to statehood and power. (Harkabi, 1988, p. 72)

The difference between the two accounts, Harkabi argues, lies in the historical narrative within which each locates human action. Zionist realism stressed the workaday accumulation of national assets because human beings have only limited powers in the face of an indifferent universe: realist prudence meets an ontology of Sundered history.

The ‘unrealism’ of the romantics, in contrast, assumed fickle, supermundane intelligences that responded to the *style* of one’s action no less than to its substance: heroism on the part of a few could prove the worthiness of the whole, and so secure the blessings of providence.<sup>17</sup> This holds even—indeed especially—if the strategic thinking behind such heroism remains obscure or wishful.

Consider, Harkabi notes, a growing cultural fascination among contemporary Israelis for the deeds of Simon Bar Kokhba—the leader of an ill-fated revolt against Roman rule that lasted from 132–135 CE/AD. The third such revolt after Rome’s annexation of Judaea in 63 BC/BCE, the Bar Kokhba revolt scored some impressive initial successes. A ferocious Roman retaliation followed, however: worse, on Harkabi’s account, than anything Jews had experienced or would experience until the *Shoah* (Harkabi, 1983, p. 48). Roman Judaea witnessed wholesale slaughter and enslavement; Jerusalem, already in ruins from an earlier revolt, was rebuilt as a Roman garrison town in which Jews were forbidden to settle; and both the city, and the province itself, were reconstituted and renamed (the latter as *Syria Palaestina*), apparently to obscure their ‘Israelite’ identity.<sup>18</sup>

The ‘blowback’ from the revolt would redound across both space and time. The Empire would ban key Jewish rituals, like circumcision, and Jews everywhere in the Roman world became objects of sustained suspicion in its wake. The extreme political quietism of rabbinic Judaism; the birth of Western political anti-Semitism and early Christianity’s subsequent disavowal of its ‘Israelite’ roots; and the precipitous decline in Jewish populations throughout the Mediterranean all stem from Bar Kokhba’s folly; it is, for Harkabi, *the* defining catastrophe of the Jewish diaspora until the twentieth century (Harkabi, 1983, pp. 55–83; see also Vital, 1999, p. 367). Yet despite the magnitude of Bar Kokhba’s failure, Harkabi noted, moves to upgrade him within the modern state’s cultural pantheon were everywhere in evidence: from street-namings and semi-official hagiographies to a military-style interment ceremony for bones found at an archaeological site associated with the revolt in 1982 (Aronoff, 1986; Paine, 1983; Ribalow, 1967, pp. 27–36; Zerubavel, 1995, ch. 10).

Key for Harkabi is the claim that Bar Kokhba’s revolt was manifestly ‘unrealist’: the only outcome he would accept was total Judaeian independence. How could a tiny province under sustained Roman suzerainty—one that had been soundly defeated only 60 years before—possibly have achieved that aim? What partial political gains might his initial tactical victories have garnered, had Bar Kokhba been willing to settle for ‘half a loaf’ (Harkabi, 1983, pp. 106–107)? Neither the bravery of his fighters nor his tactical acumen was to be disputed; but what good were such gifts when they brought a wholly foreseeable catastrophe in their wake? ‘In war,

the main thing is to win the last battle, not the first' (Harkabi, 1983, p. 36; for a contrary view, see Gichon, 1988).

Yet to focus on Harkabi's authority as a classical historian is to miss the point. His problem is less Simon Bar Kokhba than Menachem Begin, Ariel Sharon, and Yitzhak Shamir. How are we to deal, he asks, with popular leaders who offer fantastical bluster, wishful thinking, and thinly veiled appeals to ethnocentrism, in lieu of coherent strategic thinking? Growing public fascination with Bar Kokhba was symptomatic of a deeper problem: Israeli strategic and political discourses had become 'primitivized'.<sup>19</sup> 'The majority of the electorate' had been rendered 'immune to reasonable argumentation, especially when reason clasp[ed] with the demagoguery of . . . leaders'<sup>20</sup> (Harkabi, 1983, pp. 178–179). By offering 'a more critical attitude toward the Bar Kokhba rebellion' Harkabi hoped to remediate 'this trend toward unrealism and . . . improve Israel's political behavior' (Harkabi, 1983, p. xiv). Bar Kokhba was to be for Israeli readers as Cleon (in Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars*) was—and is—for students of Anglo-American IR: a classical study in hubris with a contemporary 'take-home message'.<sup>21</sup> Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, its expansion of settlement activities in the 1980s, and its paralysis in the face of the first Palestinian *intifada* in 1987 frame this effort.

Though the contexts differ, Harkabi's critique of Israeli unrealism tracks closely with Morgenthau's critique of 'scientific man'. Both wished to assert the contingency and worldliness of politics: Morgenthau against 'rationalists'; Harkabi against 'unrealists' (Morgenthau, 1946, 10 and *passim*). His critique tracks closely with Scholem too. Saber-rattling 'unrealists' may profess to revel in the glories of Jewish self-determination; in fact they are unable to sustain the conceptual space which true self-determination requires. For in *delinking* Israeli politics from sundered history, unrealism *re-links* it to the forces of providence. Zionism's hard-won agency, in other words, had never really been won; Israeli sovereignty was not a *res publicum*—a good held in the common—but a gift of providential approbation. The 'daily, pathetic' landscape of Palestine disappears under the 'sting' of the apocalyptic. Harkabi's unrealism is Scholem's rebellious language made manifest.

Yet it is unclear whether Harkabi's realism offers sufficient critical tools to fend off the unrealism he identifies. He would have would-be realists recommit themselves to a world in which no escape from the everyday processes of politics—no redemption, no messiah, no *deus ex machina*—is possible. As with Morgenthau, the path to that recommitment goes through a shift of affect; Harkabi wants Israelis to *feel differently* about their past, their present, and their state:

Let us, as Jews, take pride in the continuity of Jewish existence without being overly pleased with ourselves. Let us recall that we Jews are only, to use the language of the prayer book, 'a vestige of our people', 'survivors', and a 'remnant'. Many, very many were lost to us on the way, both those whose spirits did not sustain them so that they left us, and those who voluntarily or by force, were assimilated into their surroundings—not to speak of the many wiped out by the viciousness of our several enemies. (Harkabi, 1983, p. 110; compare to Morgenthau, 1972, pp. 68–69)

To evoke that change of affect, Harkabi resorts to liturgical phrases—terms like 'vestige' and 'remnant'—which are drawn from Biblical accounts of Israel's first exile to Babylon.<sup>22</sup> Yet the recollection of past catastrophes does not, on its own, sustain a sense of sundered history. For after the Babylonian diaspora came the ingathering of the exiles and the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemia; the precedent for the visions of redemption that fuel modern-day Israeli unrealism. If so, then the question must be asked: has Harkabi, in fact, escaped Scholem's apocalyptic sting?<sup>23</sup> Are his words, too, not 'filled to the brim' with sacred,

otherworldly associations? What practices would be needed to guard his critique from crystallizing into its own apocalyptic counter-vision?

### **Toward a Practice of Remembering: Negative-Dialectical Considerations on Realism**

The shift in affect to which Harkabi alludes—the intuition that the ‘thinking space’ of realism cannot be sustained through language alone—tracks well with Frankfurt-School critiques of reification; the latter, moreover, may offer tools by which to deepen and extend his critique. For Adorno, this was the sensibility expressed in the second quote that formed this paper’s epigraph: that ‘the task of thinking’, given the problem of reification, was to fashion perspectives that would ‘displace and estrange the world’; using ‘the messianic light’ not as a guiding star, but to illuminate the ‘indigent and distorted’ reality of the present moment—Derrida’s ‘daily, pathetic landscape’, *avant la lettre* (Adorno, 1974, p. 247).

Taken to its logical conclusions, such a move gives Harkabi and Scholem a Copernican turn: *assuming*, as its ontological point of departure, the ‘sunderedness’ which Hebrew cannot sustain, and directing us to guard actively against any loss of it by cultivating specific reflexive practices. Where unrealists seek to keep faith with an ineffable divine that worldly language can ostensibly never capture, such thinking does the opposite: it concerns itself with a fragile, worldly humility; an attentiveness to contingency which Hebrew’s ‘apocalyptic sting’ constantly threatens to obscure or occlude.

Elsewhere, I have both proposed a term for such a sensibility, and attempted to derive a set of theoretical practices from it (Levine, 2012, pp. 51–58 and 100–109). The term *animus habitandi*—‘the will to dwell within, or to abide’—speaks to the sensibility; Adorno’s notion of a constellation is adapted to think through the practices that would follow from it. Drawing on that earlier work, this final section will briefly delineate these terms, with an eye to meeting the specific burden of reflexivity posed by the politics of sundered history in the context of Hebrew’s ‘apocalyptic sting’ and the related rise of Israeli ‘unrealism’.

Drawn from the Latin word *habitare* (to live within, inhabit, or dwell), the term *animus habitandi* takes its rhetorical cue from Hans Morgenthau’s well-known *animus dominandi*: the ‘will to dominate’, which he held to be a basic fact of political life that must be accepted a priori. For its part, the *animus habitandi* speaks to a particular ethos, which means to oblige theorists and policy-makers to accept their vulnerability to reification as given. Its foundational act of faith is that the world consists of undifferentiated complexity and indeterminacy. So understood, ‘sunderedness’ stands in for the full panoply of possibility opened up by the collapse of hegemonic historical and meta-historical narratives. Yet we cannot think without imposing such narratives; hence the fullness of sundered history is always in danger of being occluded and forgotten. Accordingly, the *animus habitandi* calls on scholars to strive to abide in complexity and indeterminacy. The key move here is the *animus habitandi*’s uncompromising negation of *all* transcendent, meta-historical, or providential narratives; even those that might try to appropriate negativity itself to such ends.

For its part, the constellation is an attempt to operationalize the ethos of the *animus habitandi*, in light of the account of reification offered above. Following Martin Jay, the term constellation denotes ‘a juxtaposed, rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle’ (*infra* Bernstein, 1991, p. 8). Reification posits that our tendency is to forget the partial nature of concepts: to conflate them, the narratives which they produce, and the ontologies to which one must stipulate for them to make sense, with the world as such (Wight, 2006). In that vein, the constellation seeks *to*

*cultivate remembering*, by ‘curating’ our theoretical narratives against others to which they are diametrically opposed. Polyvocal and highly pluralist narratives function such as snapshots or sonar soundings: a means by which pre-existing political–social–normative sensibilities are stretched and fitted onto a complex, indeterminate, vital world. They are nothing more than fixed perspectives or worldviews derived from both consciously and unconsciously formed ontological assumptions, giving the observer a stable point of theoretical leverage over a world that resists reductive knowledge. The practice of constructing a constellation thus aims to operationalize the ethos of the *animus habitandi*.

For students of IR-Realism, such an approach changes the epistemological grounds for theoretical analysis. Realism functions here as an idealized space from which to generate a critique of the present. Debates over its ostensibly ‘timeless wisdom’ (Buzan, 1996) fall by the wayside, for rather than providing a set of axiomatic ontological claims, realism’s key assumptions function as a kind of critical *tu quoque*: a means to indict the ‘unrealism’ of others, by foregrounding both their shortcomings and its own. ‘When philosophers . . . engage in conversation’, Adorno wrote, ‘they should always try to lose the argument, but in such a way as to convict their opponent of untruth’ (Adorno, 1974, p. 70).

In doing so, particular narrative accounts of politics—realist or unrealist, ‘stung’ or ‘sundered’—are revealed within the context of the historical moment that produced them; and in that contextualization, are robbed of their implicit claim to transcendent or universal validity. Following Adorno, they produce a *negative* dialectic: a form of analysis which documents not the *convergence* of concepts and things—Hegel’s rational and real—but underscores the persistent gap between them: their non-identity.<sup>24</sup> Jane Bennett aptly summarized such thinking:

We knowers are haunted by a painful, nagging feeling that something’s being forgotten or left out . . . no matter how refined or analytically precise one’s concepts become. ‘Negative dialectics’ is the method Adorno designs to teach us how to *accentuate* this discomfiting experience and how to give it a meaning. When practiced correctly, negative dialectics will render the static buzz of non-identity into a powerful reminder that ‘objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder’. (Bennett, 2010, p. 14)

Negative dialectics could thus deepen Harkabi’s anti-hubristic ‘pedagogy’, opening it up to the irreducible plurality and openness of sundered history: ‘a concept of nonidentity to cure the hubris of conceptualization’ (Bennett, 2010, p. 15). The aim is not synthesis, but mutual chastening: narratives that are ‘linked by criticizing one another, not by compromising’ or by being smoothed into reductive synthesis (Adorno, 1973, p. 31).

### Concluding Thoughts

The explosive growth in Israeli religious radicalism since 1967 seems to have affirmed Scholem’s worst fears, and in the years since Harkabi’s death, popular-intellectual critiques of Israeli unrealism like his have multiplied. Like his, moreover, these newer critiques are rhetorically curious performances. Self-consciously brave and important, they affect a voice that is at turns polemical, personal, and soberly reflexive. In each case, it is as though the author must summon up the courage—finally!—to cross a Rubicon, to say ‘what must be said’.<sup>25</sup> That this pattern repeats itself into something like a genre, however, might give us pause. Why the same story, in so many different voices? Perhaps to *evoke the need for a reflexive, sundered, realist Zionism* is not yet to *render it thinkable*. So considered, these texts would reflect a kind of painful esthetic experiment in grafting, in which the various pieces do not entirely

‘take’. The efforts persist because there is a cultural space in which such a text is needed or desired, even if it is not (or not yet?) entirely writeable. ‘Critique would not have the power to break up false consciousness if it were not impelled by a passion for critique’ (Habermas, 1971, p. 234).

Certainly, the tendency to view Israel as more than itself—to view it in existential, world-historical and/or messianic (or anti-messianic) terms—is limited neither to either Jews nor to Israelis. Both that tendency and the various ‘apocalyptic stings’ that lie behind it unite Israel’s fiercest critics with its staunchest allies. What none can abide is the possibility that Israel is *simply another state*; that the conflict over Palestine *means nothing*, and *signifies nothing*.<sup>26</sup> It simply does harm. To remove those stings might be to recover something of a sense of that harm in its multiform physical, historical, and affective aspects; to cultivate a fuller measure of compassion for those bound up in it, a sense of duty to attend to their voices and needs. ‘The smallest trace of senseless suffering in the empirical world belies all the identitarian philosophy that would talk us out of that suffering . . . .Woe speaks: Go’ (Adorno, 1973, p. 203).

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### Notes

- 1 We do well, however, not to take a determinist view of Zionist thinking in this period: a self-sustaining ‘national home’ did not universally mean a sovereign Jewish state. On this point, see Lavsky (1996).
- 2 I am indebted to Ben Halpern’s translation, see Hazaz (1956).
- 3 This is known as *Shlilat ha-golah*, or ‘negation of the diaspora’; see, *inter alia*, Raz-Krakotzkin (1993), Schweid (1984), Walzer (2013), and Zerubavel (1995, pp. 17–33).
- 4 Here following Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox (1974, p. 50): ‘a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion[.]’
- 5 See, for instance, Avineiri (1981), Baron (1928), Gartner (2001, chs. 6–8); Halpern and Reinhartz (1998, ch. 1); Hertzberg (1977, pp. 22–32), Laqueur (1976, chs. 1–2); Sachar (1996, chs. 1–3), Shapira (1999); Vital (1999, pp. 366–475) and *passim*, and the collected essays in *Modern Judaism*, 18:3 (October, 1998). But note Frankel’s (1992) critique of this consensus.
- 6 Recalling Arendt (1968, p. 54): ‘Equality of condition, though . . . a basic requirement for justice, is nevertheless among the greatest and most uncertain measures of modern mankind.’
- 7 To make sense of this, consider a well-known passage from the Babylonian Talmud (BT Ketubot, 111a) attributed to Rabbi Jose son of Rabbi Hanina, known as the ‘three adjurations’: that so long as Jews neither sought to end their diaspora, nor rebelled against the nations of the world, God would intercede on their behalf with the rulers of the world ‘that they shall not oppress Israel too much’. Jews’ dispersion among other nations was not, in other words, *itself* to be equated with existential abandonment; that would come only with the ‘sundering’ experience of modernity. I am here indebted to Cooper (*in press*) and Ravitzky (1996, pp. 22–25).
- 8 Or recall Golda Meir’s comment: ‘I, of course, do not believe in God; I believe in the Jewish people’ (Arendt, 2007, p. 467).

- 9 'The sovereign is the representative of history [i.e., in the *Trauerspiel*, DL]. He holds the course of history in his hand like a scepter.' 'This view', Benjamin asserts, 'is by no means peculiar to the dramatists'. Rather, 'it is based on . . . constitutional notions' which emerge from a very particular historical and political moment. The sovereign embodies a curious tension: 'the disproportion between the unlimited hierarchical dignity with which he is divinely invested and the humble state of his humanity'. This tension gives rise to its own distinctive form of 'apocalyptic sting': a sub-genre of the in which fictive sovereigns—interestingly for our purposes, often dramatized in the person of King Herod!—fall into rampaging paroxysms of destruction. With no force in the world or beyond it able to punish or stop them, they are felled only by the involutions of their own madness. Translated into the idiom of a mass political movement, this tracks Scholem's fear closely (Benjamin, 1998, pp. 65 and 70, respectively; see also Barouch, 2010, 2012).
- 10 Strauss (1997, p. 6): '[I]n the religious sense, and perhaps not only in the religious sense, the state of Israel is part of the *Galut* [Diaspora]. Finite, relative problems can be solved; infinite absolute problems cannot be solved'.
- 11 Ravitzky (1996, p. 1) aptly captures this sort of perfectionism and its disappointments:

It was a dream of utter perfection: the day would come when the entire Jewish people . . . would reassemble as one in an undivided Land of Israel . . . the Jewish people would free itself completely from its subjugation to the great powers. It would then be a source of blessing for all nations . . . Thus did the messianic dream persist for a hundred generations. Compared with this dream, the actual historical realization that has taken place in our own time seems truncated . . . the concrete fulfillment wrought by Zionism remains relative and contingent[.]

- 12 'The first flowering of our redemption' [*raishit tzmichat ge'ulateinu*] is a phrase drawn from the official Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel. On 'the finger of God', see Oz (1982), and Ex., 8:15. On dispensationalism see, *inter alia*, Gorenberg (2002).
- 13 Scholem, it should be noted, admired Benjamin's work on language, and had attempted to translate the essay cited here into Hebrew; see Jacobson (2003, pp. 123–125).
- 14 This discussion is necessarily foreshortened, but draws on Levine (2012, ch. 1). For lengthier discussions of reification, see Bewes (2002), Habermas (1984, ch. 4), Honneth (2008), Lukács (1971), Ollman (1971), Pitkin (1987) and Said (1983, ch. 10).
- 15 Adorno (1973, p. 5): 'To think is to identify. Conceptual order is content to screen what thinking seeks to comprehend. The semblance and truth of thought entwine.'
- 16 Adorno and Horkheimer (2002, p. 66):

Science stands in the same relationship to nature and human beings in general as insurance theory stands to life and death in particular. Who dies is unimportant; what matters is the ratio of incidences of life and death to the liabilities of the company.

See also Adorno (1973, pp. 126–127).

- 17 Harkabi (1988, p. 83): '[R]eliance on an event is compatible with the religious expectation of divine intervention in a world-shattering act.'
- 18 Aronoff (1986, p. 121): '[Prime Minister Begin] reminded his audience that it had been the Roman Emperor Publius Aelius Hadrianus who had given Judaea the name Palestine, "a name that still haunts us."' Jerusalem, for its part, was renamed *Aelia Capitolina*, after Hadrian.
- 19 Harkabi's use of the term *primitivization* bears more consideration than can be given here. When used in conversational Hebrew (*primitivi*), the word is racially overcoded: it denotes the unreasoning traditionalism that was ostensibly endemic among Jews of Middle Eastern and North African descent. Those same 'Arab Jews' were a key node in Likud's electoral base. See Chetrit (2009), Khazzoom (2008), Shenhav (2006), Shohat (1988), Smooha (1978), and Yiftachel (2006). Aronoff (1986), for his part, suggests openly what Harkabi only implies: that increased interest in Bar Kokhba was tied to a concerted attempt by Likud to 'reconstellate' the pantheon of Israeli heroes in the wake of its 1977 electoral victory.
- 20 And elsewhere: 'Many [contemporary] Israelis maintain that "the most unrealistic approach is the most realistic." Desires and yearnings are accepted as if they were a political program; and fantasy is enthroned as vision . . . ' (Harkabi, 1983, xiii–xiv).
- 21 On the *Peloponnesian Wars* (in particular the 'Melian dialogue') as a parable for IR-Realism, see Levine (2011); for contemporary versions of such parables, see Lebow (2003, ch. 1) and Dauphinee (2013). On Harkabi's motives and the public debate that ensued, see Zerubavel (1995, ch. 10).



- 22 Namely, Ezra 9:14: ‘... would You not be angry with us even unto utter destruction, till there was neither remnant nor escape?’
- 23 If not, then he is, even so, in good company; for neither did Morgenthau (1982, p. 80):

The war of 1967 proved Israel was a nation, that its people could fight and stand on their own feet ... That war, in relation to the experiences of four thousand years, worked its magic. [...] The pride of ‘67 was based in part on a military victory, but also upon the *type* of military victory. I mean the triumphant way in which Israel overcame all its surrounding enemies. It was a kind of biblical victory. You could imagine the cohorts of God fighting the battle of the Jews.

Thanks here to Mollov (2002).

- 24 Adorno (1973, p. 12):

That the concept is a concept even when dealing with things in being does not change the fact that on its part it is entwined with a non-conceptual whole. Its only insulation from that whole is its reification—that which establishes it as a concept ... To change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics.

- 25 *Inter alia*, Avishai (2008), Beilin (1999) Benvenisti (2012), Burg (2008) Goodman (2005), Gorenberg (2011), Beinert (2012), Sand (2010), Kaniuk (2012), Shavit (2013) and Van Creveld (2004). ‘What Must be Said’ is the title of a 2012 poem by Günter Grass, itself one such critique. See <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/05/gunter-grass-what-must-be-said>, last accessed 10 June 2014.
- 26 Yerushalmi (2014, pp. 290–291):

After one of Israel’s reprisal raids ... in Gaza ... one of my acquaintances said to me that Israel is no different than any fascist aggressor. By what criterion, I asked. “We judge Israel,” he replied, “not by the standards of the Middle East, but by what we would expect from a Scandinavian country.” Yet what do we know of how the Swedes or Danes would react if they were perpetually vulnerable to sworn enemies, not armies but invisible individuals that are difficult to identify as such ... No, I suggested, your standard is not Scandinavian but unconsciously messianic, with no room for Israel’s imperfections or effort to comprehend them.

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