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## „Ezer Ke-Negdo“ in Zionism: The Cases of Gerda Luft and Gabriele Tergit

*This paper challenges binary approaches to social relationships in the field of Israel studies. It presents social practices undertaken by pre-1948 subjects situated between constructions of a Zionist self and of its “others”, i.e. between male, white, Eastern European, Hebrew speakers and Palestinian Arabs, Arab Jews, women, non-Eastern Europeans and non-Hebrew speakers. The article centers around a new analytical concept rooted in a poststructuralist interpretation of the biblical expression ezer ke-negdo from Gen 2:18 in the context of its common Hebrew and Arab etymological heritage. Analyzing the experiences of Gerda Luft and Gabriele Tergit, two German immigrants to Palestine in the 1930s, the article points to their social locations within the New Yishuv in Palestine as ezer ke-negdo subjects, i.e. located between the power of the New Yishuv and Palestinian “others”, and applies the concept of ezer ke-negdo as a “local” analytical tool emerging from outside Western academia in order to grasp the distinctiveness of Jewish-Arab history.*

*Der vorliegende Beitrag fordert die binären Ansätze in der Analyse sozialer Beziehungen im Bereich der Israel Studies heraus. Er stellt soziale Praktiken von Subjekten in Palästina vor 1948 vor, die in Mandat Palästina kontextbezogen zwischen den Konstruktionen des zionistischen Selbst und seiner Anderen oszillierten, d. h. zwischen männlichen, weißen, Hebräisch sprechenden Osteuropäern und palästinensischen Arabern, arabischen Juden, Frauen, Nicht-Osteuropäern und Nicht-Hebräisch-Sprechenden. Der biblischen Ausdruck ezer ke-negdo aus Gen 2:18 stellt den Schlüsselbegriff des Beitrags dar und wird im Hinblick auf seine gemeinsame jüdische und arabische Etymologie einer post-strukturalistischen Interpretation unterzogen, um als ein neues analytisches Konzept eingeführt zu werden. Seine Anwendung als eines „lokalen“, d. h. nicht der westlichen Akademie entspringenden analytischen Konzepts präsentiert der Beitrag am Beispiel der Erfahrungen von zwei deutschen Migrantinnen in Palästina der 1930er Jahre, Gerda Luft und Gabriele Tergit, deren soziale Selbstpositionierungen und Praktiken im Neuen Jischuw als solche der ezer ke-negdo-Subjekte gedeutet werden.*

When Israeli researchers rediscovered the Others, that is Palestinian Arabs, Arab Jews, women, non-Eastern Europeans, and non-Hebrew speakers in Zionism discourse between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s, an important shift towards the demystification of Zionism was made. Ever since stories of Zionism and accounts of the development of the State of Israel have ceased to be characterized by exceptional success and heroism. Instead, both have been presented as “for some an empowering

situation, for others (like Arabs, *Mizrahim* and women) [...] a subordinating, marginalizing experience.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it appears that the new, Post-Zionist narrative, however demystified, still stayed confined to a structuralist mode of conception. The Post-Zionist narrative offered merely a ‘contra-story’ to the Zionist meta-narrative, and focused centrally on the constructed Others vis-à-vis an expression of the Zionist Self. Meanwhile, experiences of Zionism beyond the dichotomy of the Self and the Other remained concealed. Consequently, a need for a more complex and fragmented Israeli historiography became urgent and was indeed recognized as such in the last decade. Works of the new generation of Israeli academics, also identified as representing the “third wave of Israeli historiography” or a “Post-Post-Zionist” approach, focus on different subjects, methods and research sources than the Post-Zionist scholars.<sup>2</sup> The result, and I would argue the most important advantage of this shift, is the prevailing distance from a binary perception of Israeli society as consisting of empowered and oppressed subjects.<sup>3</sup> Rather the intersection of power and oppression comes to the fore, making the Israeli story fragmented, complex, and even contradictory or conflicting. Products of this shift away from the bipolarity of Zionist Self and its (Palestinian Arab) Others are stories of common Jewish and Palestinian Arab popular culture, or new *in-betweenness* terms like ‘Arab Jews’ or ‘Ashkenazi Arabs’.<sup>4</sup>

The present study participates in these recent efforts to challenge and complicate binary approaches to social relations, specifically in the field of Israel studies. It analyzes the experiences of two German female immigrants to Palestine in the 1930s—Gerda Luft and Gabriele Tergit—both of whom were unequivocally located between constructions of the Zionist Self and its Others. As I will show, Gerda Luft’s criticism of Zionist political action against Palestinian Arabs, and Gabriele Tergit’s ‘silent’ (never published) argument with the Yishuv regarding the problematic relationship between the so-called *Ostjuden* and *Westjuden* in Palestine, were not simply voices of Zionist Others.<sup>5</sup> Designated as Others by the Zionist

<sup>1</sup> Herzog, Hanna: Post-Zionist Discourse in Alternative Voices. A Feminist Perspective, in: Nimni, Ephraim (ed.): The Challenge of Post-Zionism. Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics, London/New York 2003, pp. 157–163.

<sup>2</sup> On Post-Post-Zionist “turn” in Israeli historiography, see Likhovsky, Assaf, Post-Post-Zionist Historiography, in: Israel Studies 15 (2010), pp. 1–23.

<sup>3</sup> See similar conclusion in Likhovsky, Post-Post-Zionist Historiography, 2010, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> See Lev Tov, Boaz: Controversial Recreation. Patterns of Leisure and Popular Culture of Jews in Palestine between 1882–1914, as Reflecting Social Transformations, PhD diss., Tel Aviv 2007, [Hebrew]; Shenhav, Yehouda A.: The Arab Jews. A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity, Stanford 2006; Wallach, Yair: Shared Space in pre-1948 Jerusalem? Integration, Segregation and Urban Space Through the Eyes of Justice Gad Frumkin, in: Conflicting Cities and the Contested State, Department of Architecture, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England, 2011, see online at <http://www.conflictingcities.org/PDFs/WorkingPaper21.pdf> [04.01.2014].

<sup>5</sup> Gabriele Tergit’s attitude toward Zionism was until now neglected by academic research. Yet in her unpublished writings one can find many traces of her sympathy toward the Zionism of Theodor Herzl. This of course does not make Gabriele Tergit necessarily a convinced lifelong Zionist. Her short Zionist “moment” in the years 1933–1938, however, can hardly be ignored. For Tergit’s attitude to Zionism, see Maksymiak, Malgorzata A.: “Die Ostjuden Palästinas sind uns ganz fremd.” Der koloniale Antzionismus Gabriele Tergits 1933–1938, in: Bruns, Claudia/Hampf, Michaela (eds.): Wissen – Transfer – Differenz: Transnationale und interdiskursive Verflechtungen von Rassismus ab 1700, Göttingen 2014 [forthcoming].

misogynistic discourse, Gerda Luft and Gabriele Tergit defended their fellow Others under the framework of the New Yishuv's concept of Palestine, which excluded Arabs and German Jews (*Westjuden*) as its true inhabitants. Coevally, both women, as this paper claims, never lost belief in their own superiority over their fellow Others, which they differentiated from their European (in the case of Gabriele Tergit, specifically Western European) ethnicity and culture. From this perspective Gerda Luft and Gabriele Tergit were each comparable with the Zionist conception of the Self.

Noteworthy, however, is the fact that Luft and Tergit, who were trapped between the Zionist Self and its Others, did not rebel against the same categories of difference. In Zionist politics with regard to Arabs, Luft emphasized the intersection of *gender* and *ethnicity*. Alternatively, Tergit questioned the hierarchy of the superior *Ostjuden* laborer over the bourgeois *Westjuden* in Palestine, pointing to *ethnicity* in its intersection with *class* as another category of difference. Accordingly, Luft and Tergit did not understand their gender difference alone as an imperative to their social practices. The context of the intersectional construction of their *self positioning* was thereby far more crucial.

Before I turn to Luft and Tergit and their responses to Zionism as examples, I will introduce the expression *ezer ke-negdo*, found in Genesis 2:18, as a concept which helps us to understand the phenomenon of social subjects practice beyond the binary of Self and Other. I will show how Luft's and Tergit's respective roles as the *ezer ke-negdo* subjects shaped both women's experiences of and responses to Zionism. Leading up to, but explicitly stated in my concluding remarks, I will illustrate how the *ezer ke-negdo* concept can contribute to the necessary distance from the binary juxtaposition of social subjects in the analysis of power and subordination in Palestine of the 1930s.

### **The new Hebrew man and its *ezer ke-negdo***

My point of departure is the assumption that difference and power are not defined by a single category, but rather by multiple characteristics, which provide a variety of contexts where power and exclusionary relations within society are brought to the fore. Consequently, while power in 1930s Palestine was gendered and represented by the *new Hebrew man*,<sup>6</sup> it was also predefined by other categories of difference. It was male, but also young, Eastern European, white, heterosexual, Hebrew-speaking and labor-oriented. Accordingly, everyone, not only women, who did not fit into at least one category of the *new Hebrew man*, was "banished" from its community. Palestinian Arabs and Arab Jews, older people, homosexuals, non-Eastern Europeans and non-Hebrew speakers, were also among those who missed the entrance into the society of the *new Hebrew man*. Moreover, in various contexts categories of difference could intersect, causing multi empowerment or disadvantage, as would be the case for Palestinian Arab women, who were defined

<sup>6</sup> See for example Shilo, Margalit: The Double or Multiple Image of the New Hebrew Women, in: *Nashim* 1 (1998), pp. 73–94.





Taking into account all the above readings of *ezer ke-negdo*, Dan reaches an impressive conclusion: The woman, created to be like him (man), whose task was to stand opposite him and help him, was in the end against him. She was the opponent of the man. Her punishment was therefore that “he will rule over her.”<sup>11</sup>

While Dan’s final conclusion is perhaps less significant for the present context, his attentive reading of the scholarly interpretations of the phrase *ezer ke-negdo* provides the ultimate key for unlocking further interpretations of social subjects beyond the binary of Self and Other. The interpretation that a woman can be man’s helpmate and simultaneously fight against him suggests that the woman is neither in the position of the *new Hebrew man*, nor in the position of the Others. Rather, she oscillates between her task as a helper and as an opponent of man.

A reading of *ezer ke-negdo* as an embodiment of subjects that cannot be grasped along the binary logic of inclusion and exclusion corresponds directly with several similar approaches in cultural studies, like Homi Bhabha’s concepts of the *third space* and *in-betweenness*.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in contrast to Bhabha’s concepts, *ezer ke-negdo* provides clear advantages to explore the non-linearity, especially in the field of Israel studies. Since it is a non-western concept, its use underlines the potential of self-representation of Israeli-Palestinian history and culture and avoids the ‘colonization’ of Israeli historiography by interpreting it in western academic terms. Furthermore, non-linearity of social subjects is visibly inscribed in the expression of *ezer ke-negdo* itself: The word *ezer* can be interpreted as the Hebrew ‘helper’ and simultaneously as the Arabic ‘virgin/woman,’ referring to the Palestinian Arabs as the embodiment of Israel Others. Accordingly, the concept of *ezer ke-negdo* gains importance in particular when dealing with the role of social subjects’ inclusion and exclusion within Israeli society in the past and present. Finally, it is important to note that despite the relation to *gender* implied in this paper, *ezer ke-negdo* should be considered an open, gender-neutral concept. It can be applied for social subjects whose difference is constructed by an intersection of categories other than *gender* and *ethnicity*, for instance *ethnicity* and *class*, *age* or *sexuality*.

### ***ezer ke-negdo* in Palestine of the 1930s**

In a lecture given during a working session of the Women’s International Zionist Organization in Tel Aviv on January 4, 1938, Gerda Luft stated:

“In the past, we had a different idea about how to develop the Arab society. Our idea was to civilize Palestine, to modernize it, and whether we want it or not, the Arabs would profit from it. They would get better wages, better living conditions, their children would receive better education, a social revolution would take place, the feudal system would collapse, a capitalist and maybe even a socialist system would emerge, and this development would enable us to negotiate with these resulting new [Arab] men on equal terms. We erred politically as well as economically. [...] The Arabs prefer to stay in an uncivilized country without the Jew. [...] We need equality for Arabs, but not

<sup>11</sup> Doron, *Ezer Kenegdo*, 2004, p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> See Bhaba, Homi K.: *The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhaba*, in: Rutherford, Jonathan (ed.): *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London 1990, pp. 207–221.

because of the Arabs, because of ourselves! Otherwise we will decay morally instead of being saved.”<sup>13</sup>

About three years earlier, in August 1935, Gabriele Tergit made the following statement:

“The situation of the Jewish people is tragic. What to do with all those who cannot live in their countries? [...] First: To open a single country for Jewish immigration. England should be the pioneer with its colonies and dominions. [...] Second: to provide another closed territory in an area suitable for Europeans and to build a second settlement in addition to Palestine there, not in competition but as a complement. This would mean a relief to the single immigration of high skilled professionals, mentioned under "first," as well as for Palestine, keeping away immigrants who are not able or do not want to fit into the cultural setting there. [...]. The solution of the Palestine problem and the two paths is one.”<sup>14</sup>

Gerda Luft’s diagnosis of the Zionist failure to *modernize* the Orient, and Gabriele Tergit’s negative response to the integration of European immigrants, who “cannot or do not want to” be part of the Hebrew culture in Palestine, also exemplify bravery: both women made their statements at a time when the leading Zionist idea called for ‘conquest of labor’ and ‘conquest of land’ as the only way to deal with the ‘Arab Question.’<sup>15</sup> This was also a time of massive propaganda against everyone who did not believe in national rebirth through Hebrew language and culture. In fact, both women rebelled against misconceptions of the Arab Other and against turning Western European immigrants into their equivalent. In the case of Luft, the Other for whom she stood up was the classic European misconception of the *Orient*. Tergit, by contrast, opposed the new relations between West and Eastern Europeans in

<sup>13</sup> Luft, Gerda: The Arab Question in Palestine (lecture, Seminar of the WIZO-Tel Aviv, held January 4, 1938, Typescript of 28 pages, Sign. CZA F 49/1441, 4, WIZO Collection, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem), pp. 14, 23, 27–28 [German]. All translations from German and Hebrew texts into English used in this paper are, unless otherwise noted, provided by the author. The copy of Luft’s lecture kept in the Zionist Archive in Jerusalem is obviously a protocol of the WIZO meeting of January 4, 1938. The typescript begins with a short talk between Luft and the chairwoman of the group. Noteworthy is Luft’s question: “According to the program exercises are part of this seminar. Have you also discussed the Arab question during those exercises?” The chairwoman’s response was: “Yes, in detail” (Luft, The Arab Question in Palestine, 1938, p. 1). Consequently, Luft’s lecture on “The Arab Question” was a familiar subject to WIZO women in Palestine, since the debate on the relationship with Arab neighbors apparently belonged to the agenda of the WIZO in Tel Aviv. This fact, however, contradicts the image of WIZO in Palestine appearing in its publications, journals, and bulletins, where Palestinian Arabs are simply invisible.

<sup>14</sup> Tergit, Gabriele: Handwritten script without title and date, 7 pages, Sütterlin, Literary Remains of Gabriele Tergit, Private Collection of Jens Brüning, 1–2 [German]. The date of August 1935 is suggested by Jens Brüning, the archivist of Tergit’s literary legacy, who provided me with a copy of the document and permitted its use for publication. Brüning’s estimation indeed corresponds to the content of the script, which seems to respond directly to the debate over the rescue of German Jews and their Aliyah to Palestine held at the 19th Zionist Congress in Luzern in 1935.

<sup>15</sup> On separatist politics of the Second Aliyah regarding the Palestinian Arabs see for example, Shafir, Gershon: Land Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: 1882–1914, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1996. For comments on Jewish-Arab relations between the 1930s and 1950s, see for example, Kafkafi, Eyal: Segregation or Integration of the Israeli Arabs. Two Concepts in Mapai, in: International Journal of Middle East Studies 30 (1998), pp. 347–367.

Palestine. As a German Jewish immigrant to Palestine, she refused to become an *Ostjude*—a colonial subject as perceived by German-speaking Zionists in Europe.<sup>16</sup>

### **Against the new Hebrew man and the Orient, for Women and Europe**

Gerda Luft, born in Königsberg in 1896, immigrated to Palestine in 1924 together with her first husband, Chaim Arlosoroff. There she began her journalistic career, first as a correspondent for the *Jüdische Rundschau*, then as a Knesset correspondent for *The Jerusalem Post*, and later as an Israeli correspondent for the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, the *Rheinischer Merkur*, and *The London Economist*.<sup>17</sup> Luft's autobiography reveals that she did not feel an emotional bond with Zionism,<sup>18</sup> although her journalism shows the importance that she, as a woman and as a member of the New Jewish society, assigned to the Zionist *Aufbau* project.

As early as 1929, Luft published an article concerning the movement of Hebrew women in Palestine, "Notes to the Eretz Israel Women's Movement," that appeared in the Jerusalem Hebrew women's periodical, *Ha-Isha*.<sup>19</sup> In the first lines of the article, Luft calls for the recognition of the plurality of women in Palestine, which for her included the Palestinian Arab women. The main thread of this article is Luft's criticism of the Hebrew Women's Movement for neglecting the existence of non-Jewish Arab women.<sup>20</sup> Luft writes that although there is no clear path as to how Jewish and Palestinian Arab women can become more familiar to each other, the most important thing would still be to make the Jewish women aware of the

<sup>16</sup> The relationship between the so-called *Ostjuden* and *Westjuden* was based on a Western European Orient discourse, which at the end of the 18th century placed Eastern Europe on the European map and mind, and presented it as an equivalent of the Orient. German-Jewish immigrants arriving in Palestine in the 1930s, however, encountered the European Orient discourse replaced by the Eastern European Jew as a colonialist, and the German Jew as the colonial subject. In Palestine, to quote from Aziza Khazzoom's monograph title, the "Polish Peddler Became a German Intellectual," whereas German intellectuals took the place of the *Ostjude* in Europe. See Khazzoom, *Aziza: Shifting Ethnic Boundaries and Inequality in Israel. How the Polish Peddler Became a German Intellectual*, Stanford 2008. For the European non-Jewish Orient discourse and the invention of Eastern Europe, see Wolf, Larry: *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994; Neumann, Iver B.: *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation*, Minneapolis 1999. For a German and German-Jewish view on Jews from Eastern Europe see Aschheim, Steven E.: *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness 1800–1923*, Madison 1984; Wertheimer, Jack L.: *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany*, New York/Oxford 1987; Maurer, Trude: *Ostjuden in Deutschland: 1918–1933*, Hamburg 1986; Heid, Ludger: *Maloche nicht Mildtätigkeit. Ostjüdische Arbeiter in Deutschland 1914–1923*, Hildesheim 1995. For an Eastern European Jewish response to German-Jewish stereotypes in Germany, see Brenner, David A., *Marketing Identities. The Invention of Jewish Ethnicity in Ost und West*, Detroit 1998. For voices of Eastern European Jews against German-Jewish Orientalism and for Eastern European Jewish stereotypes of German Jews, see Maksymiak-Fugmann, Malgorzata: *Mapping Zionism: Ost und West in zionistischen Konzepten einer jüdischen Nation 1897–1914*, PhD diss., Be'er Sheva 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Gerda Luft to Dr. Eckert, Tel Aviv, 21 April 1974, Sign. 504/33, Gerda Luft Collection (Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem).

<sup>18</sup> Luft, Gerda: *Chronik eines Lebens für Israel*, Stuttgart 1983, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> Arlosoroff-Goldberg, Gerda: *Notes on Women's Movement in Eretz Israel*, in: *Ha-Ishah*, 2 (1929), pp. 6–10 [Hebrew].

<sup>20</sup> In her autobiography, Luft underlines the importance of the riots in 1929 and the emergence of the Brith Shalom, though she did not join the organization. For her sudden attention to the surrounding Arabs in Palestine, see Luft, *Chronik*, 1983, p. 129.

existence of women in the Palestinian Arab society. Moreover, the task of the Jewish woman, Luft claimed, should be to fight “shoulder to shoulder” with her Palestinian Arab friend for change and advancement.<sup>21</sup>

Luft pointed out that even though the movement of Hebrew women, initiated by European and American activists, had already made the Arab-Jewish woman into an object of their interest by teaching her “the basics of civilization,”<sup>22</sup> the Palestinian Arab women were still not part of this program. She also complained that the bond between the worlds of Jewish and Arab women was very weak, and she lamented the lack of a women’s organization that would expand its activity into the Arab neighborhoods. Moreover, not only women, Luft continued, were to blame for this situation, as most of the Jews seemed to ignore the existence of Arabs in Palestine in general and perceive Palestine as a country of Zionist cities and *moshavot*.<sup>23</sup>

There is, in fact, some truth in Luft’s observation about Jewish-Arab relations: according to the Zionist idea of *modernization* for Palestine, the Palestinian Arabs were to indirectly benefit from the *Aufbau*-project, but they were not explicitly included in it.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, for Gerda Luft, well-regulated Arab-Jewish relations comprised the precondition for a modern Jewish state.<sup>25</sup> However, Luft’s approach towards the modernization of Palestinian Arabs did not differ much from the one brought forward by her male colleagues, that is, the *new Hebrew man*.

According to Luft’s 1929 article, it was through contact with the Jewish European world that the Palestinian Arab woman would learn the European lifestyle and bring it into her own immediate sphere.<sup>26</sup> Daily encounters between Jewish and Palestinian Arab women as employers and employees in housekeeping, as sellers and buyers of fruits and vegetables, or in baby care stations, had been occurring already for some time. Nevertheless, contact between the two worlds was weak, partly due to a language barrier. In particular Arab Jewish women, Luft argued, could bridge relations between Jewish and Palestinian Arab women, but they still needed first to familiarize themselves with “European thinking and its expressions”.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Arlosoroff-Goldberg, Notes, 1929, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Arlosoroff-Goldberg, Notes, 1929, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Arlosoroff-Goldberg, Notes, 1929, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> The benefit of the Zionist endeavor for the native Arab population in Palestine is an invariable topos within the Zionist narrative. European Zionists trapped in the logic of the European *Orient* discourse perceived themselves as “cultural brokers,” who would bring the achievements of Western civilization to the *Orient*. Accordingly, Palestinian Arabs would profit from Jewish modernization in the fields of hygiene, technology, banking, and education. See for example Ruppin, Arthur: *Das Verhältnis der Juden zu den Arabern*, in: *Der Jude* 10 (1918–1919) pp. 453–457. Yet, Palestinian Arabs’ benefit from Zionism was often dependent on Zionist interests in the country. For some proponents of medical care for Palestinian Arabs, the main argument was, for example, that the “unhygienic Arabic population, polluted by illnesses [“verseucht von Krankheiten,” sic!] provides constant and serious danger for the Jewish Yishuv.” See Brünn, Arthur: *Gemeinsame medizinische Arbeit zwischen Juden und Arabern*, in: *Palästina* 8 (1932), pp. 254–258 (esp. p. 255).

<sup>25</sup> Gerda Luft’s oppositional line towards the Yishuv’s Arab politics is in some way reminiscent of the attitude of her first husband Chaim Arlosorof, who was assassinated in 1933. Arlosorof, who pleaded for integrative politics for Palestinian Arabs, was, like Gerda Luft, at odds with the mainstream labor movement in Palestine. See Kafkafi, *Segregation*, 1998, p. 347 and p. 350.

<sup>26</sup> Arlosoroff-Goldberg, Notes, 1929, S. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Arlosoroff-Goldberg, Notes, 1929, S. 8.



Hence, Luft's temporary program put her yet again in the position of the Other. She called for the introduction of compulsory Arabic classes into Jewish school curriculums. She also argued for the inclusion of Palestinian Arab women into the activities of Jewish women's organizations. Based on the example of the women's movement in Europe, Luft urged those Jewish organizations to get involved in a joint cooperation with an Arab women's movement, once the latter materialized.

In other words, Gerda Luft can be likened to the male Zionists who wished to develop Palestine in a European way. However, by working for contact and stronger ties between Jewish European and Jewish and Palestinian Arab women, she rebelled against the male concept of the *Oriental Other*, and against the dominance of the *new Hebrew man* in the new Jewish society. Luft was, at least in this context, filling the role of the *ezer ke-negdo*. She oscillated between her European ethnicity, which she shared with the *new Hebrew man*, and her gender ascription, which brought her closer to the world of Arab Jewish and Palestinian Arab women.

### Longing for the old Hebrew man

Gabriele Tergit was born Elise Hirschmann in 1894 in Berlin to a Jewish middle-class family. Although she saw her future as a social worker, she became a journalist, starting her career at the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Vossische Zeitung*. Her *Gerichtsreportagen* (court reports) published in these newspapers soon made her a star journalist of Weimar Germany. As a Jew and a member of a press network critical against the rise of Nazi Germany, Tergit managed to escape racial and political persecution by going into exile. She followed her husband to Palestine in November 1933, leaving the country five years later for England.<sup>28</sup> Due in part to Tergit's decision not to address this crucial topic in public, and her refusal to publish her observations about Palestine in her journalistic work or her autobiography, Tergit's attitude towards Palestine has not been explored until this day.<sup>29</sup>

After arriving in Palestine, Gabriele Tergit remained skeptical of the Zionist endeavor there. As a political refugee, she never came to perceive Palestine as her new *Heimat*. On the contrary, she believed that the idea of a Jewish Palestine pursued by the Eastern European leadership of Labor Zionism resembled the 'Blut und Boden' ideology of the Nazis. And yet, Tergit's anti-Zionism, which in her words "cast a greater shadow upon my life than the expulsion from Germany,"<sup>30</sup> was not a radical negation of Zionist ideology per se. Her views as a devoted Western European Zionist and follower of Herzl, with his ideas of German "Tropenhelm-Mentalität"<sup>31</sup> (colonial mind-set) towards Eastern Europe and the *Orient*, influenced

<sup>28</sup> See Tergit's autobiography, Tergit, Gabriele: *Something Rare At All: Memoires*, Frankfurt a. M. 1983 [German].

<sup>29</sup> For a larger discussion on Gabriele Tergit and her ambivalent attitude towards Palestine and Zionism, see my upcoming publication: Maksymiak, *The Ostjuden*, 2014 [forthcoming].

<sup>30</sup> Gabriele Tergit to Hans Jaeger, 3 December 1974, *Literary Remains of Gabriele Tergit*, (Private Collection of Jens Brüning) [German].

merely her explicit opposition against the predominant Eastern European Zionism in Palestine.<sup>32</sup>

Arriving in Palestine, Tergit immediately recognized “all those difficulties” for a German Jew to become part of the emerging Hebrew society.<sup>33</sup> A lack of Hebrew knowledge and the practice of intellectual professions by most German refugees were some of the practical obstacles to their successful integration. Theoretically, these difficulties could have been overcome by studying the new language<sup>34</sup> and professional redeployment (“Berufsumschichtung”). Still, Tergit rebelled against such forced changes. More important for her than the language was the culture generated by it. German Jews and Russian Jews had, in Tergit’s opinion, their own culture, whereas a Hebrew culture did not exist in her time. She wrote: “There is obviously no Hebrew urban architecture, no Hebrew art, no Hebrew way of life, no Hebrew art industry, i.e. no Hebrew garment, no Hebrew chair.”<sup>35</sup> Further, Tergit considered the professional redeployment of German-Jewish immigrants in Palestine as an unreasonable demand, a kind of class relegation from bourgeoisie to working class, from *Westjude* to *Ostjude*. She strictly opposed the tendency of Zionists in Palestine “to abandon the spiritual power of young people, who are the third generation of doctors, and to use them to steer tractors.”<sup>36</sup> Tergit was convinced that such a procedure could seem natural for “a young man from Warsaw’s slum area,” whereas for a German bourgeois youth it would mean a “descent.”<sup>37</sup>

In other words, it was a mental barrier—between the Eastern European *new Hebrew man* and Western European Others—which did not allow Tergit to accept the new political, social, and cultural order of the Palestine Jews. In her letter from Jerusalem written to “Herr Edelstein” in 1934, Tergit confessed: “I loved German Jewry in all its varieties from Vienna to Berlin. I cannot tell you how it acerbates me to see it here insulted, slandered and ridiculed.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> I borrow this metaphoric term from Ben Gavriel, M.Y.: Israel. Wiedergeburt eines Staates, München 1957, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> My following analysis of Gabriele Tergit as *ezer ke-negdo* in the Zionist social, political and cultural system in Palestine of the 1930s relies on those 89 hitherto unpublished pages from her German typescript “On Palestine” with kind permission for publication from Jens Brüning. The complete typescript under the German title “Über Palästina” consists of about 290 pages. Part of it, a compilation of Tergit’s short Palestine reports, was published in 1996 by Transit Publishing House. For the volume of short Palestine reports by Tergit, see Tergit, Gabriele: Im Schnellzug nach Haifa, ed. Brüning, Jens, Berlin 1996. For the complete typescript see Tergit, Gabriele: Über Palästina, Literary Remains of Gabriele Tergit (Private Collection of Jens Brüning), no year.

<sup>33</sup> Brüning, Jens: Foreword in Tergit, Im Schnellzug, 1996, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> For the study of Hebrew by the German-Jewish Immigrants in Palestine, see for example Maksymiak-Fugmann, Malgorzata: “Man muss sich zwingen [...]”. Die Sprachpolitik als Gegenstand einer Pressedebatte im Palästina der dreißiger Jahre, in: Lappin, Eleonore/Nagel, Michael (eds.): Deutsch-jüdische Presse und deutsche Geschichte. Dokumente, Darstellungen, Wechselbeziehungen, Bd. 1, Bremen 2008, pp. 73–84.

<sup>35</sup> Tergit, Über Palästina, n. y., p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Tergit, Über Palästina, n. y., p. 49.

<sup>37</sup> Tergit, Über Palästina, n. y., p. 41.

<sup>38</sup> Tergit to Edelstein and Lichtwitz, 28 August 1934, Literary Legacy of Gabriele Tergit, (Private Collection of Jens Brüning) [German].

For the German Jews in Palestine, Tergit wrote a text called “Über Palästina,”<sup>39</sup> which offered a harsh evaluation of the power relations between Eastern and Western Zionism.<sup>40</sup> Therein Tergit illustrated the division of Zionism in two ideological orientations: one represented by Herzl, and the second by his vehement opponent, Achad Haam. Accordingly, Tergit conceived of Palestine as not ‘Herzlsch,’ and therefore as barely suitable for refugees:

“The Palestine of Herzl would be a place for refugees. For the Palestine of Herzl would mean to welcome the incoming people. The Palestine of Herzl would mean affection on the street and in the bus, support in finding a job. No one would have to wait unnecessary, no one would be called to come without reason. [...] The Zionist theory of Achad Haam does not want Palestine to be a place for refugees, but rather a school for Hebrew language. Therefore an immigrant does not get help in Palestine but an education. The question is not: ‘Do you have work?’ [...] but ‘Do you study Hebrew?’”<sup>41</sup>

Without a doubt, Tergit's observation that German Jews in Palestine constituted a group of immigrants marginalized by the Eastern European Zionist elite was accurate.<sup>42</sup> However, standing up for those “victims of Zionism,” to use Edward Said's expression,<sup>43</sup> Tergit harked back to the old construct of an essential difference between East and West, between the cultural superior *Westjude* and the backwards *Ostjude*. She did not even recognize Eastern Europeans as Europeans, because the national Jew, who, according to Tergit, was created by Achad Haam, as well as religious Jews, was a product of Eastern Europe.<sup>44</sup> The Hebrew language of those non-Europeans was therefore not a problem of German Jews: “Die Hebräische Sprache geht die deutschen Juden nichts an!”<sup>45</sup> Tergit also located the origins of

<sup>39</sup> See above, footnote 37.

<sup>40</sup> Tergit makes an interesting remark on the text in her letter to Joseph Leftwich in 1955. She writes, “I still think *Problem Palästina* [The Question of Palestine, M.A.M.] is my best book. I stopped writing *Effingers* [a novel by Tergit, M.A.M.] in 1934 [sic!]. I know to-day [sic!] that I have behaved as a Don Quichote. I was writing a book for German Jews who were either Zionists and didn't want to hear what I had to say or for German Jews who were not Zionists but scarcely Jews at all. Of course I could not get it published.” See Gabriele Tergit to Joseph Leftwich, 15 July 1955, Literary Legacy of Gabriele Tergit (Private Collection of Jens Brüning) [English].

<sup>41</sup> Tergit, *Über Palestina*, n. y., p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> The bibliography on the “distinctiveness” of German-Jewish immigrants in Palestine and their position as Others towards the Eastern European elite of the Yishuv is rather comprehensive. The following titles provide only a small selection of works from the previous decade. See for example Miron, Guy: *German Jews in Israel: Memories and Past Images*, Jerusalem 2004 [Hebrew]; Gordon, Adi: *In Palestine. In a Foreign Land. The Orient: A German Exile Weekly Between German Exile and Alyah*, Jerusalem 2004 [Hebrew]; Zimmermann, Moshe/Hotam, Yotam (eds.): *Zweimal Heimat. Die Jeckes zwischen Mitteleuropa und Nahost*, Frankfurt a. M. 2005; Sela-Sheffy, Rakefet: *Integration through Distinction. German-Jewish Immigrants, the Legal Profession and Pattern of Bourgeois Culture in British-ruled Jewish Palestine*, in: *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19 (2006), pp. 34–59.

<sup>43</sup> See Said, Edward W.: *Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims*, in: Shohat, Ella/McClintock, Anne/Mufti, Aamir (eds.): *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation & Postcolonial Perspectives*, Minneapolis 1996, pp. 15–38, and Shohat, Ella: *Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims*, in: Shohat/McClintock/Mufti, *Dangerous Liaisons*, 1996, pp. 39–68.

<sup>44</sup> Tergit, *Über Palestina*, n. y., p.13.

<sup>45</sup> Tergit, *Über Palestina*, n. y., p. 4.

despotism in the East and concluded that since the emergence of Fascism in Italy, Eastern European despotism swept to the West, making a clear differentiation between East and West in Europe impossible. This concept led Tergit to draw analogies between the Nazi regime and the “Zionism of Achad Haam” in Palestine. Tergit argued that the “Ideals of Russian Zionism [...] amalgamated the mystic of *Blut und Boden* of the modern nationalism as well its rejection of intellect.”<sup>46</sup> It even led her to see a similarity between individual German Zionists and leading Nazis, pointing to an overlap of Zionist and Nazi rhetoric. Tergit wrote: “‘The espousal of the soil with the people shall create a new spirit’, said Berthold Feiwel, but this could also be a slogan of Goebbels or Rosenberg.”<sup>47</sup> As a consequence, Tergit searched for a single settlement for Europeans, free of both Eastern European despotism in the form of Russian Zionism and the Nazi regime as its German equivalent. In other words, being an Other in Palestine and standing up for other Others, that is, German-Jewish immigrants in Palestine, Tergit never lost her faith in the superior *West* over the primitive *East*. Using this concept in order to free German immigrants from Eastern European subordination, she was simultaneously in the position of the Other and longing for the *old Hebrew man*—white, Western European, bourgeois, and German-speaking.

#### The Temporality of *ezer ke-negdo*

During this particular time in Palestine, the intersection of various categories of difference in identification allowed European women to transcend the position of the Other in certain contexts: being the Other, women could potentially form a part of the *new Hebrew man*’s community as its *ezer ke-negdo* subjects. With regard to linear time, however, negotiation processes of difference within this position appear as inherent situational strategy, - carried out with great persistence over long periods but attenuated according to changing necessity. In the 1930s, Luft, for example, took the side of the Palestinian and Jewish Arab society and its women, while at the same time she sought to introduce it to European ways of thinking. But twenty years later she showed a different approach to the Zionist Other. In her autobiography, she wrote the following about her visit to a Jewish family from India in the mid-1950s:

“The small house had two rooms. Everything was very clean. The woman in the house, dressed in oriental garments and also very clean, was preparing the meal for the entire family. It was some kind of curry rice, which she had surely learned to make at home. For cooking, she used the famous Primus. It stood on the floor surrounded by all the ingredients and utensils she would need. My companion reprimanded her immediately: ‘There is no cooking on the floor here in Israel. Here, everybody cooks on the table, sits on a chair and no one squats on the floor.’ [...] I kept silent [...] and on my way back to Tel Aviv I asked myself: is it really this important to cook on a table and to sit on a chair? And more importantly: ‘What will society be like if a young man keeps nagging a mother with kids about how to keep a good house?’”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Tergit, *Über Palestina*, n. y., p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> Tergit, *Über Palestina*, n. y., p.14.

<sup>48</sup> Luft, *Chronik*, 1983, p. 189.



Gabriele Tergit, in contrast, was able to find herself a place other than Nazi Germany or Eastern European Palestine. She left Palestine for England in 1938 and became an anti-Zionist, opposing the basic ideas of Zionism, not only those of Achad Haam. In England, Tergit was back in the non-proletarian surroundings of Western European culture and liberalism, and hence back in the confines of the *old Hebrew man* for which she had been longing. Predefined in terms of (a supposed) Western European superiority, this new context of the *old Hebrew man* allowed Tergit to find other Others apart from Eastern European Zionists, who in this case were the Israelis. In her 1974 letter to Sir Jäger quoted previously she confessed:

“Zionism stands for expediency: the political fraud. It inserts everything what brings profit into the Jewish community. [...] All fundamentals of Zionism from the Jewish part are wrong. Everyone loves his own surrounding, the street he played in. It is absurd that he would have an intimate relation to a foreign country. All Non Jews hate the Jews. [...] But shall all the Christians be haters of the Jews? Balls! Nazi-Balls. Where is the difference of the Jews in such racial condemnation? [...] That the Israelis are now priced for their courage, for their ‘virtue’ of fighters and that they now have to build up the country is of course terrible. They should be complimented on their ethics, their family life, their wisdom, their talents. [...] As an experiment it [Zionism] is too high-priced. I don’t want a new Massada or a new Holocaust.”<sup>49</sup>

The fact that Gerda Luft and Gabriele Tergit changed their attitudes toward Zionism with regard to the intersection of *gender/ethnicity* and *ethnicity/class* points to the temporary character of the *ezer ke-negdo* phenomenon. As *ezer ke-negdo* subjects both women (literally) embodied an ongoing negotiation of identifications with the Zionist Self and its Others. This process, nevertheless, stopped in 1948. The extent to which the events of this year influenced Luft’s and Tergit’s renunciation of *ethnicity* as Zionist category of difference needs to be elaborated in further research. For now it is important to note that their social position as *ezer ke-negdo* subjects – however temporary and limited in context – unveiled the complexity and diversity of social relations as well as of the processes of identification neglected until now by Zionist and Post-Zionist approaches.

### Conclusion

The history of Palestine in the 1930s has often been understood as a history of conflicts on various levels. Arguments between Jews and Arabs, Sephardim and Ashkenazim, supporters of Yiddish and their Hebrew speaking opponents, middle class and socialist Zionists, and *Ostjuden* and *Westjuden* came to the fore in both Zionist and Post-Zionist narratives. And still, such a historiography seems not yet comprehensive enough; it focuses too much on the binarity of these conflicts and therefore neglects phenomena endemic to those unlit areas where their margins overlap and yet other, alternative entities and agencies become alive. Therefore,

<sup>49</sup> Tergit to Hans Jäger, 3 December 1974, Literary Legacy of Gabriele Tergit (Private Collection of Jens Brüning). [German]

binary views of conflicts tend toward a simple adaptation of essentialist characteristics of processes of inclusion and exclusion. Consequently, historiographies applying such an approach inevitably perpetuate the conflicts they aim to analyze.

In this paper I have attempted to break with this essentialist narrative tradition by seizing on a ‘local’ analytical concept that is capable of grasping practices of social subjects beyond the binary of Zionist Self and Other. A post-structuralist interpretation of *ezer ke-negdo* as a biblical expression of a common cultural Hebrew and Arab heritage, I argued, might hold a key to appropriate analysis of the *inbetweenness*-phenomena in Palestine/Israel with respect to their regional specificity. And although I introduced *ezer ke-negdo* using responses to Zionism by two women, I deem it important not to render it as exclusively female in its analytical range. Instead, I consider *ezer ke-negdo* concept neutral to sex and gender, and open for application to all social subjects who simultaneously contested and supported the difference constructed by the *new Hebrew man*. In fact, there is a wide range of contexts and social subjects in the history of New Yishuv that are barely graspable with conventional Zionist or Post-Zionist approaches: as the leader of the WIZO propaganda office, Nadja Stein devised a pedagogic strategy for film education of Palestinian Arab and Jewish youth; Manya Shochat was the “mother” of the Kibbutz movement and also cofounder of the League for Arab-Jewish Friendship; Shin Shalom challenged, in his autobiographic novel *Diary from the Galil*, the categories of ethnicity, class and gender by conceiving a love story between a Zionist man and an Arab girl; Jacqueline Kahanoff, the lately rediscovered (Egyptian-Jewish) writer, put forward a highly cosmopolitan conceptualization of the Levant. In addition, on an institutional level the concept *ezer ke-negdo* appears beneficial for analyzing motivations for joint activities among otherwise opposing groups, as happened among Jewish and Arab female workers during the strike in Acre in 1927, among the members of the male-dominated Arab-Jewish Relations Committee within the women’s organization Hadassa, or among Arab and Jewish members of Palestinian Communist Party. The issue of homosexuality in the time of British Palestine, as well as numerous stories of Jewish homosexuals defying Zionist categories of difference in their romantic relationships with Palestinian Arabs, constitutes yet another easily graspable field in terms of practices of *ezer ke-negdo* subjects. In sum, *ezer ke-negdo* as an analytical concept relates to various phenomena of context-specific and temporarily limited uncertainties in the negotiation process of identifications. Accordingly, it offers an alternative to the western academic analytical concepts of *in-betweenness* in as much as it operates within semantics – though much avoided – distinctive of Jewish-Arab linguistic history, social relations and cultural heritage.

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