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*Orient: Exile of
the Last Europeans*

Translated from the German
by Marion Faber

When we read the weekly journal *Orient*

(which is published in German here), we see certain segments of our German-speaking Aliya incarnate—those who will leave this land again if they are able, without ever having been here. For insofar as the journal has a profile, ... it is characterized by three traits: the sentiment of remembering, resentment towards the surrounding society, and arrogance. In essence, that is one single trait. People who have found no connection here lead a phantom existence in the world of yesterday, feel the anomaly, and cast the blame for it on "the others," who are impeding them, the talented and highly cultivated... It is the journal of the disconnected, who have made their lack of connection into an agenda." (Bulletin of the Hitachdut oley Germania ve Austria, August 14, 1942.)

In April 1942, in what was then Palestine, the first edition of a German-language weekly was published with the title *Orient. Independent Weekly. Contemporary Issues, Culture, Economics*. It was aimed at the political left and took a clear-cut oppositional stance. Its authors were Jews from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia who had fled from Nazi rule to Palestine. Two publishers had responsibility for the paper: Wolfgang Yourgrau (1908-1979) and Arnold Zweig (1887-1968). Yourgrau was the director and driving force behind the project. A physicist with voluminous knowledge of economics, philosophy, and East Asian culture, he was a journalist and active member of the German Socialist Workers' Party in Berlin. After the Nazis came to power in Germany, he was hounded by the SA and had to remain in hiding for some time. By the end of 1933 he had fled Germany and had ultimately arrived in Palestine.

Even before Yourgrau had made his final decision to create the weekly, he asked Arnold Zweig to work with him. The name of the famous writer would give a significantly higher value to the paper,

whose other staff members were largely unknown in Germany and completely unknown in Palestine. Although it is true that Zweig described Orient as a “weekly that I supported as patron,” Yourgrau was the publisher, practically speaking, and Zweig was only the “honorary publisher.” He did contribute to most of the editions, but often he did not write articles expressly for Orient, instead reprinting earlier texts.

When Zweig arrived in Palestine, he was already an important figure in the world of German literature, known also for his public stands merging pacifism, Zionism and socialism. He was, for example, the 1915 laureate of the prestigious Kleist Prize, and the author of the immensely successful and highly acclaimed anti-war novel *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* (1927). His work had always addressed Jewish themes. A Zionist long before the First World War, he was very close to the Zionist philosopher Martin Buber as of 1912. In the mid 1920s Zweig served on the board of the Zionist paper *Jüdische Rundschau*, and it was at that time – years before he ever set foot on Palestinian soil – that he wrote a Zionist book entitled *The New Canaan: A Study on Land and Spirit*. This quasi-utopian piece, which began with a fantastic description of Haifa Bay, and the view from the Carmel, focused on one idea: the “re-mediterranisation” of the Jew (*Remediterranisierung*):

What is it that forms and shapes man? And if we are to touch Judaism in an overly simplified way: what is it that gives the Jews of the northern lands their striking similarity to the ethnic locals? What is it that makes the Jews in Germany look more or less like the Germans, in Russia like the Slavs, in China like the Chinese? [...] One day people will know: lands change people. A different climate – with all its intangibles – means another [type of] breathing, another [type of] clothing; and another [type of] clothing already means a virtually new posture, and new soul. The skin gets to breathe new things, and to withstand the waves of different waters, the water of the Mediterranean. [...] The blood circulates at a different tempo [...] In addition to all this, however, [one should bear in mind] that the Jew – when his substance was more adaptable – was formed by this climate, and no other. This is the climate of the eastern Mediterranean – [...] undoubtedly, he [the Jew] is a Mediterranean man (Mittelmeermensch).

Zweig visited Palestine for the first time in 1932, but precisely this visit was linked to his growing skepticism regarding Zionism in Palestine. After his return, Sigmund Freud, his mentor and correspondent, wrote him the following: "How strange this tragically mad land you have visited must have seemed to you [...] Palestine has never produced anything but religions, sacred frenzies, presumptuous attempts to overcome the outer world of appearance by means of the inner world of wishful thinking."

Following the visit, Zweig wrote a very critical book about Zionism, entitled *De Vriendt Goes Home*. The book was based on the assassination of Dr Jacob Israel de Haan by members of the Zionist Haganah. The murder occurred in 1924, but Zweig chose to situate it at the outbreak of the 1929 Arab Riots in his book. Aghast by the inner-Jewish political assassination, Zweig let one of the protagonists explain the logic of the assassination offhandedly: "It's just as simple a process as the rising of the moon. [...] and do you know why it's happening again today? We are becoming a nation, and that is the proof. A nation treats its children pretty brutally – it lets them be killed in masses, perish in degradation, and starve; as witness the history of the world, latest chapter."

This harsh book, however, appeared only a few months before Hitler's rise to power in Germany, which forced Zweig to emigrate. He spent the first months of his exile in Sanary-sur-Mer.

At the end of 1933 Arnold Zweig settled in Haifa. His feelings are revealed by the laconic observation that he confided to his notebook upon his arrival: "In Palestine. In an alien land." On January 21, 1934 he wrote to Sigmund Freud: "I don't care any more about 'the land of my fathers.' I haven't got any more Zionist illusions either. I view the necessity of living here among the Jews without enthusiasm, without any false hopes and even without the desire to scoff." He had been forced to leave Germany, harbouring great doubts from the beginning about whether the choice of Palestine as a land of exile had been correct, and as early as the 1930s considered leaving again. From his house on top of Carmel, Zweig ceaselessly tested the possibilities of emigrating to Great Britain or to the United States, but for various reasons he could not do so until the end of the Second World War.

His correspondence with Freud masterfully chronicles Zweig's life in Haifa in the 1930s. In the first weeks he still hoped to somehow establish "a happy relationship with this country." Another letter, a few weeks later, sounded more sombre, but less because of Haifa or Palestine, and more because of the forced migration

from Germany: "Now I am suffering badly from the depression and melancholy of being uprooted and robbed." In the following letters he revealed that he suffered from "intense depression and outbreaks of hatred," and so "I don't live in the present, but am 'absent'". Further: from his Mediterranean city of refuge, he saw Europe more and more as lost. "I still have hope that Europe will not be destroyed [...] But belief? I've long given up belief." It was not, however, only the painful attachment to Germany and Europe, but also a growing disenchantment and friction with the Zionist reality in the Yishuv, where "one sheds one's Jewish national prejudices just as a dog shakes off his fleas in the water." A letter from September 1935 seems to mark a turning point for him:

"Meanwhile I have been going through various crises. Firstly, I have established quite calmly that I do not belong here. After twenty years of Zionism, this is naturally hard to believe. It is not that I personally am disappointed, for we are really doing quite well here. But all our reasons for coming here were mistaken. And this became abundantly clear to me when a fortnight ago I joined in a big anti-war demonstration along with left-wing workers. They tried to keep up the nationalistic fiction that they did not understand when I spoke German and so my speech was translated into Ivrit [Hebrew] – as though all 2,500 of them did not speak Yiddish at home. And all this took place with the left-wing Poale Zion [Party], who are attacked by the other 'righter' Social Democrats as being international. So we are slowly thinking of leaving but it will take some time."

Yourgrau's and Zweig's attitude to the reality in Palestine was certainly typical of many staff members and readers of Orient. They belonged predominantly to the non-Zionist left, and the idea of emigrating to Palestine would never have occurred to them if the Nazis had not come to power. Despite their tendency to consider the country only a temporary refuge, a kind of "doss house", they did try to adapt to the new conditions. For the significance of the Nazi regime back home became increasingly clear to them, and as it did they realised that their life in exile could not be reversed. Also belonging to this circle were a few long-term Zionists who challenged the present reality no less critically, and a few uncompromising anti-Zionists, as for example the poet Louis Fűrnberg (later the author of the East German song "The party is always right"). While most

of the immigrants did adapt in the end, transforming themselves in the eyes of their surrounding society and also in their own eyes from exiles into members of the Yishuv, of the Jewish community in Palestine at that time, the *Orient* group was part of a small minority that underwent an essentially different development. They would not or could not integrate and acculturate as the receiving society of the Hebrew Yishuv expected them to do. On the other hand, they were by no means ready to impose silence upon themselves, for that would have meant capitulating and denying their worldview and their identity. The volumes of *Orient* are testimony to their determination not to be muzzled.

The staff of *Orient* sharply criticised the Yishuv in three respects: First, they found Jewish nationalism in the Yishuv unbearably chauvinistic and militaristic and even ludicrously exaggerated. They called it "Exhibi-zionism." Secondly, they considered the political culture in the Yishuv to be non-liberal and undemocratic, as they showed through gross comparisons. Although many of the authors had experienced the horrors of Nazi terror first hand, they used formulations like "nationalism", "our SA", or "the unconsciously Nazified leadership [of the Yishuv]" without batting an eye. Thirdly, they regarded the cultural life in the Yishuv with a full measure of pride and scorn. They generally ignored the new Hebrew culture and spoke derogatorily about the "Eastern Jewish" culture in the Yishuv, which was the dominant one for most of the staff members of *Orient* (as it was for many other immigrants of middle-European origin). The authors made fun of the "narrow-minded shtetl mentality" and wished for "clear European heads" in their leadership.

At a time when the Yishuv press in its entirety was dealing with the first reports about the nature and dimensions of the Shoah, many considered the extreme Germanness of *Orient* provocative and intolerable. The authors of the weekly identified openly with German culture, with the "other Germany". They refused to equate Germany and German culture, society and history with Nazism, lock, stock and barrel. In their eyes, the real Germany was to be found in exile, as they were. This German identity and the influence of the Comintern at that time explain why *Orient* battled so fiercely against the anti-German tone in the Yishuv and insisted in an almost baffling way on rebuilding Germany with generosity when the Second World War would be over.

Orient, then, provided a mouthpiece for views that were unusual in the Yishuv and were considered illegitimate and dangerous. It is possible that the positions they represented - a

strong connection to the old homeland and the endorsement of non-Zionist structures and visions – also found expression elsewhere in the Yishuv, but certainly not so clearly and consistently or so completely lacking Zionist-ideological validation. Without a doubt, however, the actual influence of *Orient* was extremely slight. For that reason, the bitter campaign that was waged against this modest weekly with its limited readership, as if it represented a real danger, serves above all to characterise its receiving society. Many members of the establishment saw in this weekly the confirmation of their worst fears in respect to the “Yecke Aliya”, the German immigration, and that in turn sharpened the negative attitude of the Yecke leadership towards this journal.

Less than a year after the first edition of *Orient* was published, on February 2 1943, a bomb destroyed the Jerusalem printing shop in which the paper was printed. It was the fourth printing shop that, one way or another, had been forced to stop providing services to *Orient*. The enemies of the weekly drew the noose ever tighter. They sent threats to printing shops, newspaper dealers, and even to coffee houses that kept the paper for their guests. Yourgrau claimed that there were even attacks on kiosks and cafés that defied these warnings. The journal’s staff was especially disappointed by the lack of support on the part of the “Yecke” party Aliya Hadasha and the Hitachdut oley Germania ve Austria, which had already joined their opponents. Shortly after the bombing, in April 1943, the journal ceased publication.

Orient is an important historical source, bequeathed by non-Zionist immigrants. The essays in this weekly and the reactions to them give insight into an extremely complex world, for they stand at the intersection of two great historical phenomena – on the one hand the “German exile” and on the other the history of the Yishuv in the 1930s and 1940s. *Orient* was published precisely at the place where these two phenomena overlapped, and therein lies its uniqueness and its meaning.

Orient was a marginal, exceptional publication in every respect: because of its political views, its staff and readers stood on the margin of the contemporary society of the Yishuv, and because of its place of publication and its explicit Jewish character, *Orient* held an exceptional position within the framework of the “German exile” and the German exile press. Nevertheless, I believe that precisely because of this exceptional position, *Orient* illuminates the essential characteristics of Yishuv society, of “German exile” and of German-Jewish identity.

Without doubt, the “Yecke Aliya” is an Israeli success story, emerging from the catastrophe of German Jewry after the Nazis’ rise to power. The integration of these German-Jewish immigrants into Israeli society and their contribution to the Israeli state are uncontested, but the history of the Yeckes was more multilayered, as is shown by the example of *Orient*. The resettlement of middle-European Jews in Palestine as a consequence of Nazi rule did not only create “new Israelis”. It also brought with it the circumscribed, but fascinating phenomenon of German-Jewish exiles in Palestine. Zweig, Yourgrau and Fürnberg in the *Orient* circle and similar groupings give evidence of that. Within wider Yecke circles there arose something that could be described as inner exile or a separate internal culture. To varying degrees, people felt as if they belonged and at the same time did not belong. For the story of the Yeckes is not just an Israeli story, but also the continuation of a German-Jewish story, in which the ongoing connection to German culture - even in a post-catastrophic situation where holding onto it was deemed illegitimate - retains a central position. *Orient* publicly advocated a cultural connection that was generally kept secret among the Yecke immigrants. From Palestine, Arnold Zweig wrote to Sigmund Freud: “I am a German writer and a German European and to acknowledge this has consequences.” He who even before the First World War had been an active Zionist and had recognised the intellectual world of “Eastern Jewry” in his work, lived a German exile in Palestine for 15 years, while having liberated himself from his “Zionist illusions.”

Zweig’s literary work anticipates this exile. In his first book *Notes about the Klopfer Family* (1911), he has his protagonist, who has emigrated to Palestine, say shortly before his suicide: “Among this people of incipient Asians we are the last Europeans, detached from all our roots [...] The future belongs to the Asians [...] But I am grateful to have drunk from Europe’s wellsprings and no one can force me to forget this.” Some 22 years after writing these lines, Arnold Zweig came to the Orient as an exile; 37 years after writing them he returned to Europe, to East Berlin.

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