

In the end, everyone acts under the influence of money.

Even escapism no longer constitutes escapism. There's nowhere to escape to. Escapism brings us straight back inside.

I think that's an accurate perception.

Everything is for sale, so why, in fact, shouldn't Qatar buy?

Qatar is already inside – the question is how deep. Look, in the end, not everything Trump says is wrong. Trump talked about how Hollywood is losing business to other countries because of tax incentives. He said, "Friends, you're going to lose everything you worked on for over a hundred years." And he's right. Hollywood really is losing its hold. More and more countries – led by Britain – are offering both good production infrastructure and major tax benefits. They're taking American business and flying it abroad.

'The post-liberal content of our time carries a clear message: No matter what you do, the system will chew you up and swallow you. You have no viability as an individual.'

The Saudis are also taking advantage of this trend. In recent years they opened movie theaters for the first time in their history. They're offering not only funding for productions and films, but are actively luring crews to shoot there. So far, without great success, but definitely with some success. They brought American business there; they held a film festival.

Because everything is for sale.

Yes, and that's reflected both in the content and in the real world.

So what difference does it make who buys what? Money will triumph. The power structure won't change.

Money triumphs. That's what they said in "Succession," in the most literal way. Money triumphs over everything. There's the great despair in that, but maybe a bit of optimism. A hope for something else. Maybe from the sheer understanding that it's hopeless, something can happen.

Are you optimistic? Maybe what will happen is conservative extremism. In the end, MAGA values and conservative Muslim values aren't so far apart.

That's a real question. The optimism I'm referring to is the culture and creativity in film and television. If Hollywood actually loses its supremacy, the mega-status it's had until now, that may not be so terrible. We see, for example, that content from other cultures is becoming popular in the United States and internationally. Anime, which was once a small, obscure niche, is now a hit that speaks to ever-larger audiences. Or Korean television and film – who imagined we would be watching Korean series, or that a Korean film would win the Oscar? I'm not convinced it will be bad for us if Hollywood becomes less dominant.

And it will. Even apart from what we talked about here, don't you think Hollywood has long lost its seniority to other platforms – streaming, YouTube, TikTok?

I don't consider what's happening on TikTok to be a cultural creation.

And what about Apple TV?

Apple TV isn't one of the so-called big legacy studios, but it's still a part of Hollywood. There's no doubt YouTube and TikTok pose a tremendous problem for Hollywood. Economically, the impact on the business and the industry is vast. It's quite remarkable to see a heritage industry like Hollywood – a business that was so solid for a century – start to unravel. It's already becoming a risky business. Hence also the impact on content. That's why the moment diversity and inclusion practices became economically dangerous, Hollywood turned its back on them. In the end, progressive and conservative is of no interest to them. What interests them is business.

I didn't plan for us to talk about AI, but it would be odd not to mention it at all.

Hollywood is increasingly surrendering to AI. Of course, it declares that it will safeguard jobs and respect people, but in the meantime, it's working hard to replace whatever can be replaced – and it will, because money triumphs.

So we can't escape that bottom line. Will these be our concluding words: "Money triumphs, good luck to everyone?"

When you pull hard in one direction, there's automatically also a pull in the other. I truly hope something will be preserved – that there will still be people who want to consume authentic content, and creation driven by some sort of desire to innovate, to spark interest and to push boundaries. One can hope.



The Frankfurt Book Fair. Hebrew culture needs an alternative framework that will allow it to break free from the malignant bear hug of the Israeli establishment.

Arne Dedert / dpa



"Portrait of Haim Nahman Bialik" by Leonid Pasternak (1921). During the period of the Hebrew renaissance, Zionism was in its infancy.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

# The Hebrew language is thriving. Israel, not so much

When the language is hijacked for political ends, the Israeli establishment becomes a crushing weight on Hebrew writers. A response to Oded Carmeli

Dory Manor

I started like any other meeting, one of dozens we held at the international Frankfurt Book Fair last month. We sat down in the pavilion of a large Spanish publishing house and shook hands with the publisher. Her weariness was unmistakable. In the preceding days she had already met with a long parade of publishers, agents and editors from around the world.

Five minutes into the meeting, her entire demeanor shifted. "Just a minute – so you're actually independent? You don't represent the State of Israel?" she asked.

"We are a Hebrew publishing house, not an Israeli one," we told her. "It's the first Hebrew publishing house outside Israel since the 1930s. We're registered in Europe and work there. Our books are published in Hebrew and translated into German and English. All four permanent staff members of Altnetland Press are Israeli, as are many of our associates – in Europe, North America and Israel. Some of our authors live and write in Europe and America; many live in Israel. But we avoid accepting funding from official Israeli institutions. Hebrew is not a matter of territory, but of culture."

Her response was astonishing: Her eyes welled up. She admitted that for a long time she had felt heartbroken over Israeli policy and had been searching for even a sliver of hope. Us too, we told her. Us too. This veteran publisher loves Israeli literature, yet recoiled from official Israel – the Israeli responsible for the large-scale killing in the Gaza Strip, the Israel seen internationally, and rightly so, as having lost its moral bearings and taken on an alarming nationalist and racist spirit.

A small, almost private moment – a rare tremor of the heart. It showed me, more vividly than any analysis or op-ed, the position Hebrew culture occupies today in the world, and what those who speak in its name are projecting: either a panicked, shied-like posture of victimhood and withdrawal, or genuine openness to the world.

In a recent Haaretz article, ("We Used to Conceal Jewish Symbols. Now It's Hebrew We're Asked to Hide"), the author, Oded Carmeli, makes the astonishing claim: "Without the Hebrew state there is no such Hebrew language."

Where does one even begin responding to that? It isn't a cultural argument at all but a nationalist political assertion. It's another way of saying: Hebrew belongs to us, to the Israeli establishment, to this territory, to a single national body. This is a deeply anxious and isolationist view. According to it, the Hebrew language cannot exist without borders and an army.

Is it really necessary to remind people that Hebrew existed for thousands of years without any state to "protect" it? That it flourished in Granada and Vilna, in Venice and Odessa, in Vienna and New York? That modern Hebrew literature was born and thrived outside the borders of Israel and did not wait for Israel's "redemption" to flourish – or for the "War of Redemption"?

Years passed, circumstances changed entirely, and today more and more super writers of Hebrew live and work around the world, people who chose to emigrate from Israel but not to



Displaced Palestinians in the war-devastated Jabalya refugee camp, January 2025. The moral outrage international publishers is directed not at the Hebrew language but at Israeli policy, and it is justified.

Omar Al-Qutub / AFP

The Israeli pavilion can only be described as shameful publishing-washing, a clear attempt to use writers and their books as public diplomacy. The Israeli establishment is now a crushing weight on all our shoulders.

abandon the language. In the 1980s and 1990s this was a marginal, almost anecdotal phenomenon. The emigrants – aka yordim (those who "descend" from the country) – left mostly for economic reasons, and few engaged in cultural or creative work.

That has changed. Today there are large centers of Hebrew speakers outside Israel – Berlin and Athens, New York and Paris, Warsaw and Lisbon, Amsterdam and Silicon Valley – and creative artists, writers and intellectuals make up a substantial share of those communities. One can easily imagine that this number will grow in the near future. The Israeli government is doing everything it can to ensure that it will.

A very partial list of writers, translators and thinkers, residents of the Hebrew Diaspora, stretching between Athens and Palo Alto: Avrami Golan, Sayed Kashua, Maya Arad, Tamar Orlitzky, Igal Sarna, Hila Amit Abay, Arle Horowitz, Dea Hadar, Moshe Sakai, Ruby Namdar, Ron Segal, Idan Gefen, Ithamar Handelman-Smith, Anton Shamash, Avit Mishmar, Tali Oksa, Matti Shmueloff, Iana Hammerman, Reut Ben-Yaakov, Yuval Ben-Ami, Tamar Raphael, Alon Altaras, Einat Bady, Tali Konas, Tomer Gardi, Jonathan Nierad, Sigal Naor, Rami Saar, Gad Goldberg, Omri Boehm, Arle Dubnov, Shachar Pinsky, Elad Lapidot, Ron Naidoff.

Some of the finest contemporary poets of Hebrew live outside Israel: Nadav Linnal, Hila Abay, Maya Kuperman, Yehzekel Rahamim, Aharon Levin, Yoel Taieb, Oran Zakai, Nir Eilon, Roy Schneider, Orion Rosen, Asaf Dvori, Tali Hevry-Chybowski and Maya Weinberg.

And there are also some of the most important Hebrew theater and film artists of recent decades: Itay Tiran, Ofra Henig, Yael Ronen, Nadav Lapid. Most of them left Israel permanently, some for a defined period. And this does not include the many creative artists who live between Israel and other places, or who left quietly – and from firsthand

knowledge that the international publishers are shying away from like leprosy.

No one is mistaken when they see this for what can only be described as shameful publishing-washing, a clear attempt to use writers and their books as government *hasbara*, public diplomacy. It is embarrassing that serious writers, some of them excellent, believe with touching naïveté that this increases their chances of gaining contracts abroad. The time has come to understand that the official Israeli establishment is now a terrible burden, a crushing weight on all our shoulders.

Carmeli claims that the official Israeli pavilion was placed in a corner for security reasons and that it was the only Hebrew presence at the world's largest book fair. The lengths to which some will go in order to produce a narrative of persecution and victimhood. The truth is very different. At the Frankfurt fair there were, as every year, many representatives of Hebrew: at least five private publishing houses, at least three literary agencies and a delegation of about a dozen literary figures who were invited by the German Foreign Ministry. Not one of them was boycotted, and none were in danger.

As for Altnetland, Carmeli writes, along with several other misleading claims: "...How exactly does it operate outside of Israel, if its Hebrew books can't be purchased anywhere east of the Jordan and west of the Mediterranean... What makes Altnetland 'Diaspora Hebrew publishing' other than the fact that Sakal and Manor moved to Berlin? [And from] there... they send a PDF file of the new novel by Tel Aviv-based Leah Aini to a typesetter in Tel Aviv, who sends it to be printed in Ramat Gan, who sends it to the distributor in Petah Tikva, who distributes it to Jerusalem and Ra'anana."

This is simply incorrect. I have no interest in sparring or answering Carmeli's personal tone. Carmeli is the publisher of a competing house and the editor of a magazine that competes with Ohi, which I edit, yet there was no full disclosure in his article. I am not in the habit of writing about competing publishers and editors. Literary envy produces no wisdom. Still, it is important to set the record straight.

Altnetland publishes books in Hebrew in Israel and also in Europe. Our books are printed in Tel Aviv and in Bonn, Germany. They are distributed in Israel and, beginning in 2026, in selected stores across Europe. Hebrew books in Europe for the first time since the 1930s. If that is not a historic moment, I do not know what is.

Our full catalog currently consists of 18 titles in three languages: Hebrew, German and English. It includes writers who live in Israel and writers who live outside it. Creativity, must we really repeat this, is not a matter of territory.

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Another sentence in Carmeli's article managed, I admit, to shock me. He writes, "Manor assimilated into the crowd. Because he does not show Hebrew on his body." This reveals an astonishingly reactionary worldview. Anyone who talks about showing Hebrew on the body treats language as membership in a sect or a closed community. How is Hebrew supposed to be shown on the body so that its speakers

will not blend into the crowd? As a tattoo? A circumcision? A blue-and-white badge?

Like hundreds of thousands of Hebrew speakers who live outside Israel, have no need for such a patch. I have lived in Europe for much of my adult life, 10 years in Paris and the last six in Berlin. I do not need to show Hebrew on my body because I live in Hebrew.

I speak Hebrew with my partner on the streets of Neukölln in Berlin just as I spoke Hebrew with him in the Latin Quarter of Paris at the start of the millennium. I am raising my 6-month-old daughter in Hebrew and I sing "The Sixteenth Sheep" to her in the city's parks and other public spaces. In the cafés of Berlin I read Dahlia Ravikovitch and Leah Aini, as well as Shaul Tchernikovsky, S.Y. Agnon and Leah Goldberg, great Hebrew writers who lived and worked in the very city where I now live.

I have many Hebrew speaking friends here and I speak with them in our language in restaurants, bars, cinemas, exhibitions and public readings. I have been writing poetry and prose in Hebrew, editing in Hebrew and translating into Hebrew for more than three decades, much of that time outside Israel. I do not show Hebrew on my body. I live and breathe it.

If anything threatens Hebrew today, it is the narrowing of horizons, the cultivation of victimhood and the subordination of the language to the flag and to political patronage. All of this aligns seamlessly with the orchestrated political effort to convince Israelis and Jews around the world that despite everything the Israeli government is doing, with all the murderousness and racism and hatred, with the judicial coup and cultural and moral deterioration, living in the *galutz*, in "exile," is somehow more dangerous.

The position Carmeli represents is not a defense of Hebrew. It is fear that the language will cease to be the exclusive property of the state and will return to what it was for most of its history, a wandering language, universal, open, multicentered, in constant dialogue with other cultures, and no longer the possession of one state, armed to the marrow, racist and reviled around the world.

What will become of Hebrew in another two or three generations? No one knows. For the time being, I am content to look one generation ahead, and to literature a single generation to an entire world. Consider the period of the Hebrew renaissance, from Bialik's "To the Bird" in 1891 to Vogel, Agnon, Goldberg and Alterman in the 1930s. Zionism was then in its infancy, and Hebrew creativity was part of it.

Today Zionism is sprouting poisoned fruit, and the next generation of Hebrew writers will have to reckon with the consequences. Against this painful backdrop, the historical shift now underway – the return of Hebrew to the diaspora – is not a tragedy but an extraordinary opportunity for renewal. It is the moment to free oneself of fear and breathe wider air. The world is vast, friends, and it speaks (also) in Hebrew.

Dory Manor is a writer, poet and editor, and the co-founder of Altnetland Press in Berlin. His novel "The Red House" is being published by Kinneret Zmora. His first French novel, "Le Gorille," will be released in March 2026 by Grasset.