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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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When does a native become a settler? (With apologies to Zreik and Mamdani)

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> The simplest definition of Indigenous people, obviously enough, is that they are the only ones who have not come from somewhere else. (Wolfe, 2016, p. 16)

1 | INTRODUCTION

With a nod to Mahmood Mamdani (1998), Raef Zreik asked, in an article of the same title: "When Does a Settler Become a Native?" (Zreik, 2016). Zreik begins his article by exploring the terms of the question itself: Is it historical (how much time needs to pass for the settler to become a native?), sociological (what changes must the settler go through to become a native?), ethical (what actions must the settler undertake in order to become a native?) or perhaps personal (is it sufficient for the settler to start feeling like he is a native?)? Although Zreik does not count "structural" among the question's possible forms, his response is very much informed by the understanding of settler colonialism as a structure—articulated most systematically by Patrick Wolfe. In very different ways, and with different conclusions, both Zreik and Mamdani claim that only with a radical change in the structure of the settler state can the categories settler/native be dissolved; not, as the title proposes, in ways that turn the settler into a native, but in ways that make this distinction less meaningful, at least in its political bearings (see also Wolfe, 2016). The question, more accurately framed, is thus whether a settler can cease to be a settler, and the response is decolonization itself. We insist here on "decolonization" and not "completion," even though Zreik, like others, proposes that the settler ceases to be a settler also when the colonial project is "completed, … as in Australia and the USA" (Zreik, 2016, p. 356). This framing, however, erases the political claims of natives in these geopolitical contexts (Simpson, 2014, p. 11).[1]

In this article we want to explore the converse query. Rather than asking, "can a settler become a native, and if so, how?," we inquire: "can a native become a settler, and if so, how?" If the answer to the first question involves laying

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pathways toward decolonization, our question is a way of tracing the formation of the settler project, and as part of it, its structure.

Our article puts forward a dual argument, a historical one and a conceptual one. First, we seek to unfold a specific history of natives who, we argue, became settlers: Jews who lived in Palestine before the Zionist era. Focusing on two issues—language and land—we trace the movement of local Sephardi Jews[2] between being natives and settlers against the backdrop of the rise of the Zionist project in Palestine. Our main argument is that, although these Palestinian Jews worked to craft alternative social spaces that would transcend, overcome, or at least bypass the rigid colonial dichotomy,[3] and although such spaces became momentarily possible, eventually the space was organized within a settler-colonial pattern and the Palestinian Jews had to find a position along the colonial dichotomy of native/settler.

Our second argument concerns the structure of settler colonialism that we seek to excavate from these historical details. Working primarily through analytical frames provided by Wolfe, Mamdani, and Fanon,[4] we aimed to identify the principles underlying settler colonialism, focusing on the interconnection between place, race, and movement. Our case study runs counter to the idea (common to Wolfe and Mamdani) that the category of settlers necessarily emerges through *movement*. Though settlers are very often defined as geographical outsiders, our case study concerns people who were transformed from being natives into settlers without moving. At the same time, Fanon's insistence that race is the defining element in the category of settlers proves insufficient here, since the racial status of the Arab-Jews within the Zionist settler mechanism did not fit into a one stable national and colonial racial structure: racially they were almost conflated with Arabs rather than with the dominant settler cohort (even if never fully so).[5] Thus, our case study reveals a settler structure whose formation was more fluid and multifaceted than can be captures with a single category. Such fluidity opens up different possible histories and thus also different possible futures.

The argument, then, has both conceptual and political implications. Conceptually, much like Zreik and Mamdani, we aspire to contextualize and problematize the settler/native binary by showing how a group of people can hold, at different historical moments (and sometimes simultaneously), the positions of both settler and native. Viewing the Zionist settler project from the native Jews' perspective undermines the clear-cut separation mechanisms between native and settler—as well as east and west, Arab and Jew—and thereby calls us to rearticulate some of the main understandings of the settler colonialism paradigm.

Politically, returning to this period of unsettled categories is of a particular value for the present moment, a time when the rhetoric of the two states solution is being gradually abandoned. Even if the two states option may never have been viable, or has not been an option for a long while, the language of political separation has dominated public discourse in Israel for several decades. However, in recent years Israel has not only began to speak a different language, in which the two-states option is "no longer" desired; it is actively engaged in reshaping the constitutional foundations of the state and preparing the infrastructure for the annexation of the West Bank, thereby giving a legal anchor to the long-standing fact of its control over the entire territory. The horizon seems to be a political model that unites the territory into a single political entity, albeit one that is based on separation between the different governed groups. The Arab-Jews of Palestine offered an altogether different model for a unified territory, based on a shared space rather than separation. Their endeavors offer an important lesson in the process of imagining a political future beyond the logic of partition. As the future of the Jewish project in Palestine/Israel may be on the verge of a turning point, this is a crucial time to offer alternative visions for its formation.

We begin with a methodological section (Section 2) on the paradigm of settler colonialism and its applicability to our discussion. We also consider in this section the methodology of working through the question of language in the Zionist/Israeli settlement project. We show that the dual separation between Arabic and Hebrew and between Arabic and the land (Palestine) was one of the core elements of the Zionist project as a settler project. Against these (settler) efforts to reorganize space and establish a European-Hebrew/Jewish national entity, Section 3 traces native efforts by local Sephardi Jews to construct a shared Hebrew-Arabic bilingual (and binational) space. Section 4 examines the cooperation and involvement of some native Jews in land purchase activities. We argue that, even if not intentionally, this involvement worked counter to the efforts to create a shared space that would not be subjected to the hierarchical logic of colonization. Section 5 explores how the complex positionality of the local Jews waned as they

were interpolated into the settler project. The article's final section provides more conceptual reflections, situating the histories outlined in sections 3 to 5 within a more systematic analysis of settler colonialism.

2 | TWO METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

2.1 | Settler colonialism

With the recent emergence of settler colonial studies as a discipline there has been much debate over the applicability of this framework to the Israeli/Palestinian framework.[6] As with any paradigm, the applicability of the general scheme to a particular context remains limited, yet as Zreik (2016) puts it "as far as the dynamics, the technology, the settling project of taking over the land, and the relationship to the native are concerned, Zionism does fit into a paradigm." We shall therefore work with it here, yet with important caveats. Ann Stoler (2006) calls us to note that each and every colonial case is unique. We can say the same about settler colonialism. Thus, while we adopt this category as the most apt for our case, and while we accept that it is largely a political category distinct from colonialism—some would even say it is an "antitype category" of colonialism (Veracini, 2010, p. 9)—we also see the insistence on rigid separations between these orders as unproductive in some cases.[7] This insistence, which has come to dominate settler colonialism as a paradigm, often erases not just the unique nature of these different contexts, but also the multiplicity of orders and rationales organizing each. Palestine of the early 20th century was placed within several regimes of racialization and political rule that were at times contradictory: it was a settler colony in the making; a colony situated at the core of a struggle between several imperial forces; and part of the Ottoman imperial order, with its own racial orders.[8] To reduce all this to one paradigm is analytically misleading and politically problematic. We are thus invested in the category of settler colonialism only to the extent that it allows these complexities and intersections between different colonial, indigenous, and imperial (racial/sectarian) structures to surface, even if it means that the category itself emerges as having wide margins.

Our analysis also suggests that the formation of settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine was not a necessary outcome of the existing Jewish presence in Palestine, or even of the Jewish immigration to Palestine. Not only do we focus here on Jews who lived in a non-colonial structure with Muslims and Christians in Palestine (albeit under Ottoman imperial rule); we point to a model, foregrounded by these Jews, of a Jewish existence in Palestine (including immigration to Palestine) that took the form of shared indigenousness (Campos, 2010; Svirsky & Ben-Arie, 2017). Indeed, the potential modes of inhabiting the land that we review here, combined with the fact that a minority of Jews resided in the land before the waves of Jewish immigration, as well as with the idea of a nation returning to its homeland, could have facilitated a Jewish-Palestinian political space that was organized according to a non-colonial logic (Campos, 2010; Jacobson, 2011). However, the particular mode that Jewish presence took in Mandatory Palestine and certainly after 1948, eventually stabilized Israel within the parameters of settler colonialism.

In this way, our analysis of Israel/Palestine as a settler colony seeks to trouble a primary category of the paradigm, which is already under some critique. In Wolfe's (1999) account, one of the three main elements of the settler colonial structure is "an empirical binarism" separating settlers and indigenes. This binary is not strictly racial, and in later writings (2016) Wolfe makes sure of working through the historicities and construction of race, and to show the multiplicity of racial divisions alongside the social process through which difference is produced. Specifically, settler logics allow for, even facilitate, the malleability of racial constructs in the name of establishing settler's domination. The binary is therefore not strictly racial, even if it expresses itself in racial terms. It is rather a geographical binary, between those who were in the land and those who came to it from outside (invaded). This is why, for Wolfe, the process through which the categories of native and settler dissolve—that is, through which assimilation occurs—is the fortification of the settler colonial state rather than its potential eradication (assimilation, he argues, being a strategy to eliminate the native).[9] For Wolfe, this process has a clear historical trajectory: When one goes back in time, binarism is made more visible until it is a non-refutable fact—invasion. This relation to territory—to location and movement, the distinction between those

who were here before and those who were not—is the empirical fact alongside which all other differentiations (racial, cultural, class, economic) are constructed (Wolfe, 1999, p. 180; 2016, Part 1).

What our case study shows, however, is that even this difference between locals and invaders is constructed. Rather than returning back in time to the original moment in which difference emerges as a matter of fact, our return in time, in a proto-Foucauldian move, is to a moment *before* the territorial binarism of native/invader was institutionalized in order to observe its very creation. Accordingly, our mode of questioning is similar to that of Zreik and Mamdani, whose inquiry into the settlers who can (or cannot) become natives seeks to challenge this binarism as part of a project of decolonization. The fracturing of binarism is, for them, not the entrenchment of the settler state, as it is for Wolfe, but rather the fracturing of the colonial structure. At least in Zreik's case, this is probably a function of the context. Due to the Jewish separatist project, which was simultaneously unifying (*all* Jews presumably became one of a single project) and exclusionary (*only* Jews – a category to which one cannot easily convert), assimilation is not translated to this context from the Australian or North American ones. Even if before 1948 and during the first months of the war there were some believed that Palestinians could be assimilated to the state-building project, they were marginalized after the great exodus of 1948, which opened the possibility of imagining a relatively pure Jewish state.[10] Against this backdrop, the very possibility of "assimilation" into a single body of citizenship is a radical political horizon in the Israeli/Palestinian case—a complete democratization of the state.

Yet, unlike both Zreik and Mamdani, who take the settler formation as given and seek to imagine its possible futures, we seek to understand the historical formation of the settler structure itself. To some degree, much like any other genealogical project, a return to this moment is an endeavor to question what now seems to be empirical (Foucault, 1998). In this context, it is important to emphasize that our claim is not that there were not structural binary distinctions, hierarchies, and modes of exclusion between Zionist Jews and Arab Palestinians, or between Palestinian Jews and those who immigrated from Europe; but to the moments in which binarism was still not altogether clear, and complicate the binary by contextualizing it. This mode of reading history opens up alternatives that emerged and were abandoned—alternatives going beyond partition or separation.[11] Indeed, as Marcelo Svirsky (2014) argues, it is precisely the ontology of binarism, as he terms it, that, "put[s] politics to death."

In this regard, it is important to add that although we use here, for the sake of clarity, a seemingly rigid divide between "Sephardi natives" and "Ashkenazi settlers," this divide can be contextualized and further historicized as well, and it, too, is a matter of positionality and identification no less than a matter of ethnicity and origin.

2.2 | Transformation (the movement of land and people)

The Zionist project included a transformation of place as well as of its inhabitants—a movement both geographical (immigration, transfer) and discursive/political (moving the land, as it were, westward, and transforming landscapes and their meanings). Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin situates this movement within the ethos of the "negation of exile." The process of negation "can be interpreted as the negation of all that was considered 'Oriental,'" as part of an effort to "integrate the Jews and their history into the narrative of the west" (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2005, p. 167). Accordingly, "The transformation of the Jew into the new Jew, was also the transformation of the land that attempted to preserve the Arab 'view.'"

As he goes on to argue: "This rejection had dramatic implications for the Jews from Arab countries" (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2005, p. 170).

The ethos of the negation of exile thus encapsulates the essence of Zionism as a settler colonialist movement: an eastbound movement that sought to eliminate the old exilic (eastern) Jewish identity while also negating the local cultural and historical heritage of the land and its native residents.[12] This was a process that was simultaneously symbolic: how land is imagined (Shohat, 1988; Shumsky, 2014); geopolitical (the physical removal of Arabs from the land); and material; consisting of the shaping of space (Tzfadia & Yacobi, 2011; Yiftachel, 2006) alongside the eradication of physical traces of Arab presence, past and present (Abu El Haj, 2001; Khalidi & Elmusa, 1992).[13]

If we argue that the Arab-Jews of Palestine were ultimately "settlerized" without having moved, then this transformation of place itself is one of the means by which their position was transformed: with the "movement" (westernization) of the space, those who stayed put "moved" across the colonial scheme and were transformed—de-Arabized and de-nativized (Shenhav, 2006; Shohat, 1999). Within the many layers that compose this movement, we focus on language. Yet language in this context cannot be seen solely as a cultural product, as it played a crucial role in the very material facets of transferring land and rendering it available to Jewish settlement. From the beginning, the Zionist "redemption of the land" was associated with the so-called "revival of Hebrew" (Saposnik, 2010), with "Hebrew" being used in relation to a range of issues beyond the tongue one speaks. Hebrew became a marker of nationality, with references to ideas such as the "Hebrew nation"; it became (as part of this mark of nationality) the idiom organizing economic relations, particularly in the Zionist campaign for "Hebrew labor" (*Avoda Ivrit*) that was in fact a call to boycott Arab workers in the Jewish colonies (see Khalidi, 1997; Shafir, 1989); and it played a role in transforming space and reclaiming Jewish ownership while negating the indigenes' claims to the land, via toponymic changes (replacing Arabic with Hebrew names) and remapping projects, which are at the core of settler colonial movements (Abu El Haj, 2001; Benvenisti, 2002; Masalha, 2007). On all these different levels, "Hebrew" was the mark and tool of the de-Arabization of the land.

In addition, language helped in shaping the racial contours of the land's inhabitants. After being one of the basic elements in the orientalization of Jews in Europe through the creation of the "Semite" as a linguistic-racial category (Anidjar, 2007), language (this time Hebrew, rather than "Semitic" languages) became one of the key elements in the de-orientalizing of the Jew: Hebrew was able to "return" to the east, to become the language of the land (Palestine), only after it was reconstructed as a *European* language, dissociated from its oriental and Semitic origins. Rather than being conceived as an indigenous language rooted in the historic and contemporary east—a relative, as it were, of Arabic—Hebrew thus became part of the westernization of the land.

The demand to speak Hebrew was, accordingly, entangled with the demand to abandon, simultaneously and relatedly, Arabic and (Arab) native-ness. The Arab-Jews were caught up in this effort to eliminate Arabic as part of an effort to displace Arabs. Arabic, their own language, was gradually labelled a foreign language, and then the language of the enemy (Eyal, 2006; Mendel, 2014). This is where our story ends, yet we are more interested in its earlier moments: moments of potential opportunities created by local Palestinian Jews. If Zionism as a settler colonialist project took Hebrew to be a mark of a new Jewish indigeneity that was organized around the exclusion of Arabic and used to demonstrate exclusive land ownership, the alternative we foregrounded here via the Palestinian Jews saw Hebrew as a language that should not *replace*, but *join* Arabic as the language of the land, creating an indigeneity that was based on Hebrew–Arabic bilingualism with a constant movement (translation) between Arabic and Hebrew.[14]

3 | LANGUAGE(S) OF THE LAND

Let us begin with the end, or at least, one possible end. On February 26, 1922, roughly four and a half years after the publication of the Balfour Declaration, the newspaper *al-Sabah* published a call to local Jews from Jamal al-Husayni, issued on behalf of the Arab Executive Committee and titled "Come to Us." al-Husayni then the secretary of the Arab Executive Committee and a prominent politician, addressed the native Jews directly:

> *To our Jewish fellow natives of the homeland, to those who were cheated by Zionism, to those who understand the goals and damage of Zionism—to them we extend our hands today and call: Come to us! We are your friends! … you and we are the sons of the same homeland, whether the Zionists like it or not… We are sorry for your persecution by the Zionists, for the denial of your rights, freedom, and ability to explore your goals and aspirations. We consider this to be an offense against the honor of the Palestinian nation, whose sons you are. Hence, your Muslim and Christian brothers strongly protest against these actions, extend their arms, and call you: Come to us! (Quoted in Jacobson & Naor, 2016, p. 22).*

This address rested on a long history of shared lives among the various communities inhabiting Palestine before the Zionist movement: Muslims, Christians, and Jews. But al-Husayni's call for Jews to join the Palestinian movement in the post-Ottoman context was a residue of social and political order that had already vanished and been replaced by a new (British) imperial order of partitions.[15] Under this new order, Arab-Palestinian invitations like the one that al-Husayni published, infuriated not only the Zionist leadership, but also many among the native Sephardi community.

In response to a similar call a year earlier the Sephardic Union claimed:

> *The Sephardim of Eretz Yisrael [the Land of Israel] strongly object to reports that they support the Arab delegation. They are in complete unity with the rest of the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael and its demands for the promises about the creation of a Jewish national home to be fulfilled.* (Doar Hayom, *1921, p. 2)*

But as al-Husayni's call implies, this alliance with Zionism was far from being self evident.

During the late Ottoman era, many native Jews tried to distance themselves from the European-colonialist aspects of the Zionist movement and to position themselves as part of the imagined local Ottoman homeland alongside the native Arabs.[16] While they welcomed Jewish immigration, most of them viewed Zionism's European character as an interruption, if not a destruction, of the fabric of life in Palestine and were critical of its separatist approach. The question of the status of the Arabic language was at the heart of their critique.

The story of Yosef David Maman, a Sephardi Jew who taught in a school in the Galilee, is telling in this context. Maman regularly published articles in the Sephardi-owned Hebrew newspaper *Ha-herut*. Originally, these articles primarily translated and interpreted, and to an extent mediated, the criticism of the Zionism's European character expressed in the Arab press to the Ashkenazi newcomers. This mediation was part of an effort to reshape the relations between Zionism and the local community, and hence to reshape Zionism as such—to render it closer to both the language and the people of the land; Arabs and Arabic. However, in a series of articles published in the summer of 1911, a change in his rhetoric can be discerned, as Maman begins to criticize sharply the newcomers' refusal to learn Arabic and integrate into the indigenous society:

> *And when your dear reader will claim: "And how shall I read, when I cannot read Yishmael's language?"[Arabic] I will reply: … You the internal wonderer [Jew] come to France and learn French, go to Germany and learn German, Argentina and learn Spanish, come to America and learn English, and why is it when you come to Turkey—which is better for you than all these—you will not learn Turkish, and when you want to enter Palestine you will not learn Arabic—the language of the people of the land with whom you live every day? (Maman (1911a),1; authors' translation)*

By pointing to the uniqueness of this refusal to learn the language of the land, Maman exposes the Jewish newcomers underlying racist attitude. The disregard of Arabic by the new Jewish settlers was, according to him, part of their racist perception of the local Arab population. This includes the Arab-Jews, which they viewed as "total Arabs" (*aravim gemurim*) (Maman (1911b) p. 1; authors' translation). This alienation from the people, the language, and the local political situation could be solved, he argued, only by changing the new immigrants' relation to the Arabic language—a change, it seems, he eventually despaired of:

> *And if you do not know how to read [the Arabic press], look for someone else who will translate for you, who will explain to you the full extent of the situation, because we [the Sephardic natives] are now inclined to agree [among us] not to help you further on this subject. It seems that our help [in translating from Arabic] only increased your indifference … to the land you are in, and to the governing people under whose auspices you live. (Maman, 1911a; authors' translation)*

Maman's rejection of his role as a mediator of language (translator) was in essence a refusal to cooperate with the colonial scheme that dismissed the local culture and language, and that saw locality itself as a threat. Recent scholarship

has focused on the role of native Arab-Jews as translators or mediators (Gribetz, 2014; Halperin, 2015; Jacobson & Naor 2016), also as part of a larger tendency to see them as hybrid phenomena, trapped in the borderland between Hebrew and Arabic national poles.[17] But Maman did not see himself as a moderator or facilitator between European Jews who immigrated to Palestine and Palestinian Arabs. Rather than an attempt to mediate between opposing worlds, Maman's original act of translation (alongside hundreds of articles translated from Arabic to Hebrew by other Sephardi natives) was part of an effort to *refuse* these very divisions between Jews and Arabs, Hebrew and Arabic, settlers and locals. That is, his (and others') goal was to expose the new Jewish settlers to the local Arab political environment in order to encourage them to engage with the local political leaders and intellectuals. It was when the potentiality of shared space was repudiated and he was called, instead, to translate, to work within the logic of binarism—albeit as a hybrid entity, which as such mediates the two sides of the binary—that Maman abandoned his position.

These words of Maman were part of a heated debate over an enterprise to establish a Jewish newspaper in Arabic, led by Dr Shimon Moyal—a native Palestinian who was deeply involved in Arab and Ottoman intellectual circles. Objecting to Moyal's initiative, Abraham Ludvipol, a prominent Ashkenazi Zionist journalist who immigrated to Palestine in 1907, wrote a series of articles published in the same year as Maman (1911),[18] in which he sought to create a divide between two groups of Sephardi Jews—the "nationalists" (Zionists) who "present … themselves to us as products of the new National Revival"; and the Arab assimilators like Moyal or Maman. To the (Sephardi) nationalists he suggested that they should distance themselves from Moyal's initiative because as "Jews we have no need for a Hebrew [i.e., Jewish] newspaper in Arabic" (Hazvi, October 4, 1911, quoted in Behar, 2017, p. 320). The "young Sephardi" therefore faced a choice: to join the Zionist project as a separatist (colonial) project and renounce their (Arabic) language and links to the local community; or to be labeled Arab assimilators who were alienating themselves from "the new National Revival." In this sense, Ludvipol's articles present a mirror image to the call by al-Husayni with which we opened this section.

But unlike the response a decade later of the Sephardic Union to the Arab-Palestinians' delegation to London—a response in which they aligned themselves with the Zionist project—in 1911 Moyal rejected the very choice itself. His words merit quoting at length:

> *Tell us, our guest Mr Ludvipol, dressed in a coat made of European culture, who pretends to furnish with knowledge, education, and wisdom those whose attires are actually thicker than his: Have you ever had the opportunity of embarking on a long journey to find yourself suddenly caught in heavy rain, and then invited by a gypsy to be a guest in his tent? On your departure, did your education and manners guide you to condemn the tent's owner for his poverty, wildness, and parochialism or, instead, take your leave of him with gratitude and praise? Even if you primarily view us as Mizrahim*, you ought to remember that you are our guest, and that local Jews and our ancestors suffered many years to maintain their national identity amidst the many national groups that generation after generation ruled the Land. These are the Land of Israel's local Jews whom you value as of zero worth but who are nonetheless the primary foundation for Israelite national revival. *(Ha-Herut, 1911, October 19, quoted in Behar, 2017, 321; our emphasis)*

If Zionists saw themselves as indigenous people returning to their land, Moyal uses the nomad analogy to reverse the settler/native equation: while the natives are the owners of the land and hold the power to endow it with a national affiliation, Ludvipol is marked as a European settler, a guest who tries to impose his perspectives onto internal eastern affairs rather than being grateful for whatever hospitality he receives.

The Jewish newspaper in Arabic was intended to be both the medium and symbol of a different approach to locality, but Moyal never received support from the Zionist movement. At some point he suggested selling off one of the Jewish settlements in order to sponsor the newspaper, a suggestion which in Ludvipol's point of view only strengthened his perception that Moyal preferred the Arabic language to the Jewish settlement project (*Hazvi*, October 4, 1911, quoted in Behar, 2017, 320).

In 1914 Moyal decided to sponsor a newspaper himself (together with Esther Azari-Moyal and Nissim Malul). The paper, called *Sawt al-Uthmaniyah* (The Voice of Ottomanism), was published from January to October 1914 (Jacobson, 2011). Moyal's vision of a joint Hebrew-Arabic culture and homeland collapsed together with his newspaper and fortune. He died during the war after serving as a hospital manager in Ottoman service.

4 | THE AGE OF PARTITION

The 1911–1914 debates we outlined in the previous section were part of a (failed) effort by Maman, Moyal, and others to reclaim Jewish settlement in Palestine as a non-colonial project by transforming the Jewish immigrants into inhabitants of the land. These transformations were to take place through the acquisition of Arabic and their assimilation into local Arab society. Such efforts at mediation can be seen as attempts to create new modes of locality and belonging in which Jewish presence would not be a settler presence.[19] Or they can be seen as an effort to *preserve* such a mode of belonging despite waves of immigration, to fold the new Jewish immigrants into their own position as Jewish-natives; as if to keep open an identity gateway through which the Ashkenazi Jews could now enter—either as guests (to return to Moyal's words), or as permanent allies, contingent on their willingness to accept the terms of this alliance.

We cannot fully unpack here the reasons leading from the more complex and liminal position of the 1911–1914 debates to the rejection of al-Husayni's "come to us" invitation in 1922 (and even this framing is schematic and somewhat misleading, and is used here more to indicate possibilities than to unfold a detailed history). World War I; the Balfour Deceleration and the new logic of separation it foregrounded; the changes in imperial lineages (the shift from the Ottoman to the British empire), which dramatically transformed international framings of conflict, ethnicity, or nationalism; the material changes relating to labor, the accumulation of wealth, and above all to land; the intensification of violent confrontations between Jews and Arabs; all these have changed the political and social balance not only between Jews and Arabs but also between local Sephardi Jews and Ashkenazi settlers (Jacobson & Naor, 2016). As part of these changes, the Sephardi Jews, who had held a prominent position due to their unique status as Ottoman subjects, lost their status, while the European Zionist movement became the official representatives of the Jewish community vis-à-vis British officials. Within this complex history, we very briefly point to the story of land purchase as one factor that mirrors the mediating language efforts described above. If settler colonialism is primarily about land (as we learn from Wolfe or from history), then it may not come us a surprise that these enterprises ended up by swallowing the efforts that operated on a more cultural level.

At the same time as the events recounted above were unfolding, a different type of mediation effort was also underway. Toward the end of the Ottoman era a number of prominent Sephardi natives, including some of the supporters of the Arabic newspaper initiative, also acted as mediators for Jewish organizations seeking to purchase and develop land (Campos, 2007; Glass & Kark, 1991). Due to their fluency in Arabic, their connections with the local Arab population, and their social, legal, and political status in the Ottoman Empire, these Sephardi Jews were able to serve as middlemen and go-betweens in land transactions: they could create and translate documents and navigate formal and informal processes, making them a major asset to these organizations.[20] Furthermore, they also taught Arabic to some of the Ashkenazi land entrepreneurs, who without a knowledge of the language could not effectively "redeem" the land.

But as they soon came to realize, these land entrepreneurs' grasp of Arabic was not a way to build bridges, but rather a tool for "kill[ing] a people—conquer [the] land and dislocate its language"[21] (Shilo, 1990, p. 49). Thus, the vision of teaching Arabic to the newly arrived Jews was given a twist: while the native Sephardi Jews found an audience for their claim that the study of Arabic was crucial, the language became a tool for settlement rather than a way of constructing a shared space. Thus, Arabic functioned in this context no longer as the language of the land (*sfat haaretz*), as the local Sephardim saw it (a local language which was also their own language), but as the language of the other—and, further, the other whom one dispossesses.

As we saw, once land was moved from Arab to Jewish hands, it became a *Hebrew* land, and Hebrew itself became a mark of both Europeanness and new Jewish localness; thus, the meaning of locality itself shifted, pushing Arab Jews

into the margins of the Zionist ideal of the Jewish homeland. Paradoxically, then, their cooperation with the settlers' land-purchase activities, which depended on their ability to speak the language of the land, reinforced the process of negating this language and the nexus of identity it embodied. Moreover, in a shifting reality of mass immigration and challenges to global (imperial) orders, the involvement of local Jews in land transaction aroused suspicion and criticism among Arab-Palestinians and further fractured the idea of a shared space (see Campos, 2007). The materiality of land purchase thus created pressures to delineate the native/settler divide, to stabilize loyalties along more rigid lines of division, to re-align interests and with them (or against them, or despite them) ideologies. It was in this context of land purchase, then, that the Hebrew–Arabic nexus marked the transformation from native to settler, both symbolically and in practice.

This might present itself as a simple story of two opposite trajectories: if as mediators of language the native Jews sought to construct a political space that was an alternative to the logic of settlement, as mediators involved in land purchase they participated in the ethos of "conquering the land"; that is, they were active agents in and of the Zionist project as a settler project. But this would be an over-simplification. Not only does it misrepresent the position of these political and social agents, some of whom were critics of Zionism and were engaged in this process merely as entrepreneurs (Tamari, 2008); it further misses their multiple (native) political and social positions and their changing and sometimes contradictory associations and loyalties.

In Zionist historiography and narrative, all these complexities and critiques are erased. If the contribution of native Sephardic Jews to life in Palestine is remembered, it is as supporters—usually as followers—of the settler project, always in order to entrench, and not contest, the mainstream Zionist narrative. Importantly, however, this is not yet another case of what Wolfe terms assimilation: a process in which a group of natives becomes part of the settlers' colonial-formation. This is not only because from the outset they occupied an unstable position between the natives and settlers in ways that make categorizing them as this or that problematic from the start. Further, the native Arab-Jews' "assimilation" into the Zionist formation (albeit often fractured and partial), was accompanied by an opposite need to preserve the indigenous status of the local Arab-Jews. By re-reclaiming the local/native presence of Arab-Jews in Palestine, Israeli Jews could—and still can—make claims for the land and for their own indigeneity. Marking this dual trajectory is the aim of the next section.

5 | FROM NATIVES TO SETTLERS AND BEYOND

In 1873 the Meyouhas family moved outside the Old City walls of Jerusalem to Silwan, a village that roughly a century later would become one of the most contested sites of Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem and its accompanying project of gradual transfer. Nowadays, this project is primarily promoted by the settler organization ELAD (a Hebrew acronym for "To the City of David"), which was established in 1986 and has since then become one of the most powerful political actors in Jerusalem. As well as receiving generous support from the state, the ELAD Foundation also collaborates closely with the Jerusalem municipality, the ministries of education and defense, and the Israel Antiquities Authority. As a result, every year hundreds of thousands of young students, educators, soldiers, hi-tech employees, young Jews from abroad, and tourists are channeled by the Foundation (which has almost completely monopolized Old City tourism) to "discover the secrets of biblical Jerusalem."

As part of these organized tours, many tourists stop in front of the Meyouhas's home. There they can see an Israeli flag in the window and are told that in this house, one of the first Jewish settlements started almost 150 years ago. The new Jewish settlement in Silwan (which has also sought to impose a new Hebrew name on the village—*Ir David*, "City of David"), can thus be presented as a *return* to indigenous Jewish property, a *reclaiming* of a Jewish past—or better: sustaining a Jewish continuum. These notions of "reclaiming" and "continuum" are made possible by the very past-presence of local Sephardi Jews in the land.

While the settlers invading Palestinian homes in Silwan are among the most extreme in the settler movement, the City of David has never been a marginal or extreme story. Rather, it is a faithful reflection of the foundation of the

Zionist mainstream: revisiting the biblical story on which to base the return of the Jews to Palestine and to create an imaginary line connecting Zionist nationalism and ancient Jewish sovereignty. This leap in time makes it possible to base in history demands for Jewish ownership of the territory while wiping out the history of the land and its Arab inhabitants.

Ironically, one of the first Jews to criticize this exclusivist narrative was Yosef Meyouhas, who was a child when his family moved to Silwan in the 19th century. Meyouhas got to know the Arab Palestinian tradition, which became an integral part of his own tradition. He was one of the first translators and documenters of Palestinian Arab oral and written culture into Hebrew, as part of an attempt to forge a connection between the Jewish newcomers and the indigenous Arabs (Evri, 2019).

Meyouhas's most important work was the trilogy "*Children of Arabia*," a compendium of translations into Hebrew of Biblical tales from the local Palestinian Muslim oral tradition. In it, he proposed an unusual analysis of the relationship between the biblical text, the Arab inhabitants, and the physical space of the land, and offered a political alternative to the doctrine that still dominates the Zionist narrative. Instead of seeing the biblical text as a basis for the historical Jewish ownership of the land, he highlighted its role in the center of a shared Judeo-Muslim tradition.[22] Today, some 75 years after his death, the only opportunity students have to learn about Meyouhas is from the settler Zionist perspective, in an organized tour in the "City of David," organized by those who work to destroy and eliminate the shared Hebrew–Arabic space into which he was born and which he endeavored to preserve.

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This resurfacing of the indigenous status of Palestinian Jews became more significant after 1967, with the occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. In places like Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, or Hebron, settlers[23] have dispossessed Palestinian Arabs from their homes and lands (and continue to do so), claiming that they are "returning" to the "absentee properties" of native Palestinian Jews who were expelled from their homes in 1929, 1936, or 1948. The new settlers thus draw ties between themselves and the native Jewish communities that used to reside in these places, portraying themselves as the legal and historical successors of the original Jewish inhabitants. From a model of coexistence and shared land, which was very much anchored in a shared Arabic culture, the native Jews have thus come to represent and justify a model of land theft and dispossession.

Nevertheless, the lines that supposedly connect the new settlers to the native Arab-Jewish communities are fictive and thus fragile. In December 2006, armed settlers took over an area near the vegetable market in Hebron, claiming that they were simply restoring Jewish land that the city's Muslims had wrongfully taken from the native Jewish community. In response, a group of 37 descendants of the historical Hebron Jewish community took out an advertisement in the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, declaring:

> *Settlers living in the heart of Hebron do not have the right to speak in the name of the old Jewish community … These settlers are alien to the way of life of the Hebron Jews, who created over the generations a culture of peace and understanding between peoples and faiths in the city.* (Haaretz, *December, 6, 1996, quoted in Campos, 2007, p. 41)*

This story of the appropriation of native identity has not then been settled, and can therefore be disrupted and redrafted in times to come.

6 | THEORETICAL INFERENCES

To understand the relevance of these stories beyond their local context we should return to the defining categories of the settler colonial paradigm. While it does not pose our question specifically, the lecture by Mamdani with which we opened does mention natives, at least those coming "wholly from within Africa" (Mamdani, 1998, p. 2) who become

settlers. Settlers, in his account, emerge through *movement*; they are *geographical outsiders*.[24] For Mamdani, movement is so central to the formation of the settler that ultimately, "every native outside of his or her own home area was a settler of sorts, someone considered non-indigenous" (Mamdani, 1998, p. 3). Our case study, however, focused on a group of people who *stayed put* and were transformed into settlers by the formation of the settler state; those who were already there, geographical insiders, who nonetheless became settlers.

But Mamdani, and, following him, Veracini, does see movement that is distinctive from this mode of settlement, and differentiates between settlers' and immigrants' modes of movement. These two groups "move in inherently different ways" as well as "towards very different places": unlike immigrants, settlers do not seek to integrate into existing structures, to become part of the place to which they move, or to protect their identities within their own enclaves in that place, but rather to transform the place so that it takes their own image; to eliminate the natives and so to become the new law of the place (Veracini, 2010, p. 3). The movement that results in the "settlerization" of the moving person is therefore a function of their relation to place and people, and the fostering of a non-settler relation was the precise goal of the local Palestinian Jews in our story.

Movement, therefore, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient category to distinguish settler from native. Fanon sees the primary category of settler colonialism not as *place* but as *race*: the settlers are first and foremost *racial outsiders*. Inverting Marx, Fanon (2004, p. 3) argues that "in the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich." Race becomes the foundation of the movement of dialectics.

In our case, however, the racial division is at best blurred. The shift in the position of the Arab-Jews across the native/settler divide was not a complete and final realignment of racial lines. It was not, in other words, a complete transformation that has turned the Arab-Jews into settlers by creating a new racial unity on the settlers' side. Whereas de-Arabization efforts aimed at distancing the Arab Jews from the contexts of their locality, and whereas the elimination of their Arabness (and their Arabic language) was perceived as the key factor in their inclusion into the Zionist project and into the settler collective (Shenhav, 2006; Shohat, 1999), these did not put an end to a racial ideology that has continued to marginalize, if not exclude them from the very project in which they were presumably included, and that has been accompanied with material, symbolic, and cultural marginalization.

Furthermore, as we showed here, at times, it was precisely the Arabic language, alongside the Palestinian locality that became a platform for the settlerization of the Arab-Jews through practices of purchasing land, reclaiming indigeneity, or claiming domiciles. Thus, even though the connection to Arabness was perceived as a threat to the Zionist enterprise, sometimes, it was precisely their ongoing racialization as Arabs, alongside their knowledge of Arabic, that was crucial for the development of the Zionist project itself, and for the formation of the settler/native matrix in Palestine. De-Arabization therefore was never meant to be fully accomplished.

Thus, the category "Jews" is decisive here in marking the line between settler and native, but it, too, is insufficient to set rigid lines of divisions due to its unsettled position in the oriental–racial divide between east and west (Anidjar, 2007). Perhaps "line" is an altogether wrong spatial metaphor.

We have seen, with Fanon, that these racial distinctions according to which the colonizer/colonized divide is organized do not fully hold. His use of the term "species" indicates the importance of race to the analysis, but for him, too, "in the colonies … the ruling species is first and foremost the outsider from elsewhere" (Fanon, 2004, p. 5). Ultimately, "race and place are inextricable" (Wolfe, 2016, p. 16). Mamdani makes this claim in regard to the movement of various groups in Africa: while it is primarily economically motivated, being a movement of a group *elsewhere*, it is racialized, rendering its members into settlers. Wolfe later took Mamdani's insight with respect to Africa (though without being familiar with it, or without referring to it), and further developed it within a more systematic critique of race. In a meta-dialectical move, after Fanon replaced economy with race as the foundation of the dialectical colonial order of things, Wolfe (2016, pp. 57–58) shows how, in the settler colonial setting, race emerges as a function of territoriality, which is itself a question of profit.[25]

It is through this understanding of race as entangled with territorialized profit that Wolfe (2012, p. 310) tried to solve the anomaly of the position of the Arab-Jews in the Zionist settler colonial formation. Comparing them with

African Americans in the USA or convicts in 18th and 19th century Australia, he saw them as examples of a workforce that was brought in from outside to replace native workers (as was indeed the case with the Yemenites in the early 20th century). This comparison, which others make use of (e.g. Shafir, 1989; Yiftachel, 2006) is valid, at least in part, in relation to the Arab-Jewish immigrants who arrived before 1948 and in larger numbers after 1948, but it is not valid to our case study of the native Arab-Jews. This is not merely because of the fact that they were not brought from anywhere—a claim that should be questioned in regard to other Arab-Jews as well, who are often characterized in the literature as immigrants even though for a long period they belonged to the same geo-political space. It is also not merely because the figures we met here cannot be reduced to cheap labor power at the disposal of the colonial enterprise—they were part of the intellectual and economical elite in local Palestinian society. It is also because, as we saw, the group in question (and by inference other groups), cannot simply and fully be aligned to the categories that the paradigm of settler colonialism dictates. This was certainly not true at the historical moment we examined, *before* the space has been more or less stabilized within a settler project, but, as a consequence of this, it is also not the case today, when different positionalities are being called for, both to fortify and challenge this structure.

7 | CONCLUSION

In this article we explored the matrix connecting language and land, in order to track the formation of the settler/native divide in Israel/Palestine and explore the different and sometimes conflicting narratives that this formation embodies. Examining the negotiations over the language of the land, the status and meaning of land itself, and relations between Jews and Arabs in the formative years of the pre-state era, we offered a critical analysis of the settler/native distinction in Zionist discourse, and proposed that these localized events were a basis for reconsidering these categories overall. For this purpose, we explored optional scenarios for a Jewish national existence in Palestine that were put forward by native Jews—scenarios that were not linked to a settler colonial mechanism, but instead to an indigenous logic of shared land based on multiple positionalities and a multilingual cultural sphere. Our analysis also revealed some of the first anti-colonial critiques of the Zionist settler project specifically by native Jewish intellectuals, of its negation of Arabic as the language of the land, and its negation of the native Arabs' rights to the land.

Language plays a crucial role in our discussion. It serves as the litmus paper by which the complexities and multiplicity of the racial divides can be tested. In the Zionist settler project language served as a racial marker, separating Hebrews and Arabs; it played a crucial role in the negation and elimination of Arab Palestinians' history and their connection to the land, mainly by erasing Arabic as the language of the land and replacing it with Hebrew. Language also marked the transition of Jews from Europe to the Middle East and from being Semites to being Europeans. Finally, language was an optional vehicle for preventing or reversing the settler mechanism by replacing the erasure of Arabic with bilingual or bi-national political and cultural options.

This article, then, offered a historical account of the transformation of identity; but it could also be taken as a more conceptual analysis of the foundational categories of the settler colonialism paradigm. In this respect, our story is only one piece within a much larger mosaic of categories that have been transformed along the settler/native divide, along similar or very different ways, with the formation of the Jewish state. These categories include the Druze, who were largely "turned into settlers" via their interpolation into the militarized ideology of the Israeli space; the Bedouin, who also joined (in a smaller numbers compare to the Druze) the Israeli army, and who face continuous struggles over the right to settle on their own lands while their status as natives has been negated and denied (Yiftachel, Roded, & Kedar, 2016); and the Samaritans, who hold dual (Palestinian and Israeli) citizenship, and wander between multiple loyalties and affiliations across the settler–native matrix. Telling each of these stories will complicate the categories further, and will require consideration of other factors that "settle" the settler/native divide.

In the wake of the Nation State Law, these issues have resurfaced more bluntly and lucidly. The law makes a claim—that is thereby anchored in a legal order—that Jewish people have an exclusive historical right to own the land and live in it. Significantly, the law does so by also removing the formal status of Arabic as the second official language of

the state. Whereas this status was often but the empty letter of the law and did not reflect social and political reality, there was still a symbolic change in declaring that Hebrew was the sole official language of the land. Joining other legal changes, the law reinforces the settler colonialist order "in which civic rights are the settler rights," (Mamdani, 1998, p. 2) manifesting, yet again, the centrality of language for this project, which we examined here from its inception. But while the Nation State Law seeks to entrench and protect settlers' rights even further, it also brings again to the fore the fact that the story of the Arab-Jews of Palestine/Israel is yet unfinished.

NOTES

[1] We would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust for two individual grants that have made this research possible: the Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship for Yuval Evri, and a Research Fellowship for Hagar Kotef.

[2] We decided not to confine ourselves to a single term such as "Sephardi Jews," "Arab-Jews," "Palestinian Jews" or "native Jews," but to allow the many terms used to mark the Jewish native-born in the discourse of the time. For further discussion on these multiple categorizations, see Tamari (2008); Shohat (1999); Jacobson and Naor (2016).

[3] One of the distinctions that is at times made between settler colonialism and colonialism is based on their racial logic. Whereas colonialism is based on the rigid divide between the colonizer and colonized, the assimilatory racial logic organizing the settler/native divide is not dichotomic. At least in the case of Israel—indeed the *Jewish* state—assimilation is not considered an option. One can argue that in this sense, Israel is situated on a junction between colonialism and settler colonialism. However, looking at many other settler colonial contexts, we see that assimilation often does not erase racial—and colonial—distinctions. Therefore, the rigid native/settler divide keeps surfacing over land and resources struggles in North America, Australia, and elsewhere.

[4] Fanon wrote before the paradigm of comparative settler colonialism had been stabilized and he therefore does not think in these terms. Moreover, some (e.g., Veracini, 2010) have explicitly distinguished between the Algerian case and the classic cases of settler colonialism, based on the tendency of French colonists to identify with the French metropole, marking it as a "colonial" rather than a "settler colonial" case. Others, however, have maintained that the status of Algeria as a settler colony must be considered seriously, and there was even a special issue of *Settler Colonial Studies* (Vol. 8, No. 2, 2018) dedicated to Algeria as a settler colony. A similar approach to that was expressed in many of that issue's articles, see: Barclay, F., Chopin, C. A., & Evans, M. (2018); and following Stoler (2006), we believe that such distinctions between "classic" and non-typical cases of settler colonialism are based on a misleading unifying claim. See Section 2 of this essay.

[5] Ella Shohat (1988) was the first to identify the relations between the Zionist colonial-racial mechanisms used towards the Arab-Palestinians and those used towards the Arab-Jews.

[6] For the analytical and political benefits of applying this framework to the Israeli case, see Jabary-Salamanca et al. (2012). See also other chapters in the same volume. Patrick Wolfe (2016) dedicated a significant segment of his comparative account of settler colonialism to the Israeli case, marking it as a settler colonialism case par excellence. For a somewhat more nuanced application of the paradigm to the case of Israel/Palestine, see Veracini (2013). For the limits of this paradigm in this context, see also Busbridge (2018).

[7] We are fully aware that our position over the settler colonial theory could be mistakenly understood as a reckless conflation of colonialism and settler colonialism. What we propose here, however, is a different reading of the settler colonial paradigm that problematizes some of its fundamental assumptions and calls to understand it, notwithstanding its important comparative dimension, as a category that should be more attuned to particular contexts.

[8] For more on the Ottoman sectarian divide see Makdisi (2000).

[9] The project of the settler state is to "construct . . . indigenous people as racially fragile," so they can be easily assimilated into the settler cohort (Wolfe, 2016, p. 39). Racial ambiguity is a regressive, rather than progressive, project when racial boundaries are "historical rather than biological": indigenes are the "prior owners of the land" (Wolfe, 2016, p. 57), and assimilation would eliminate them as owners.

[10] On the shift of approach see Morris (1987). Cohen (2015) claims that the turning point of the imagination is actually 1929.

[11] In so doing we tap into a rich seam of literature in the Israeli/Palestinian context, including Azoulay (2014), Doumani (1992), Shenhav (2012), and Tamari (2008).

[12] Gil Eyal (2006, p. 44) offers a more complex picture of the Zionist settlers during the movement's early stages in Palestine. He points out how, in the process of negation of exile and the quest for internal change in the figure of the Jew, belonging to the land was at times expressed by an imitation of native Palestinian culture and customs as being representative of ancient Jewish culture and identity. The trajectory of movement ("westbound") is therefore also more ambivalent than a clear-cut movement from east to west, as our schematic outline suggests. See also Saposnik (2010).

[13] For a somewhat alternative analysis, see Leshem (2016).

[14] Evri (2019), Behar and Ben-Dor Benite (2014), and Behar (2017).

[15] On this transformation, see Cohen (2015); Jacobson (2011).

[16] On the ethos of shared homeland in the local Sephardi discourse, see Campos (2010); Khalidi (1997).

[17] Eyal (2006, p. 10), for example, argues that during the early Zionist era, different types of hybrids "at one and the same time marked and transgressed the boundary between Jews and Arab in the pre-state period." He categorizes the native Sephardim who were "well integrated into urban Palestinian society" as one of these hybrid types (2006, p. 11). See also Svirsky and Ben-Arie (2017) and Halperin (2015).

[18] This debate has recently received some scholarly attention. See Behar (2017), Campos (2010), and Jacobson (2011).

[19] Following Mamdani's (1998) important distinction, we can say that rather than being settlers who came to change the law of the land, they were immigrants who had come to inhabit this law.

[20] The Sephardi involvement in land purchase took place mainly during the end of the Ottoman era, and declined significantly after World War I. By 1917 the Zionist movement had managed to purchase more than 420,000 dunams of land; most of the sellers were Arab (absentee) landlords (see Cohen, 2008, p. 31).

[21] These were the words of Khalil al-Sakakini, the famous Palestinian educator who was also one of these teachers.

[22] On Meyouhas's translation and political model, see Evri, 2019.

[23] This was not the settlement of Jewish immigrants in Palestine during imperial times, but the illegal settlement in the West Bank, as part of what is now known as the settler movement.

[24] Both white and African settlers are therefore defined by a movement that ultimately becomes indistinguishable from race: "The word for the white settler in Kiswahili is mzungu. Mzungu, however, does not literally mean a white person. It simply means a restless person, a person who will not stay in one place" (Mamdani, 1998, p. 2).

[25] This is why in places where land generated maximum profit (such as in relation to the indigenous peoples in North America or Australia) we find one type of racism, whereas in societies where labor generated more profit we find another (as in the case of African Americans and in the history of slavery). Often the two coexist, in differentiable, even if integrated, economies.

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