

Exporting political theology to the diaspora: translating Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook for Modern Orthodox consumption

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Résumé de l'article

La récente augmentation du nombre de traductions en anglais des écrits du Rabbin Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), père incontesté du sionisme religieux, peut être considérée comme un tournant significatif pour les communautés juives israéliennes et américaines se réclamant du courant moderne orthodoxe. Cette étude analyse les caractéristiques de la traduction de textes théologiques dans le cadre de la relation « patrie-diaspora ». Elle propose ainsi une réflexion sur l'orientation dominante des traductions de la pensée de Kook dans les années 1990, véritable « exportation » idéologique de textes, essentiellement induite par les déplacements transnationaux. Les traducteurs de ces écrits étaient des rabbins américains installés en Israël. Quant au public cible de ces traductions, il était essentiellement constitué du nombre croissant de jeunes Juifs américains venus étudier pendant un an dans les yeshivot israéliennes avant de revenir à la vie universitaire américaine. Selon moi, ces traductions ont été faites dans le cadre d'une idéologie politique émanant du parti sioniste religieux de droite. Ce dernier visait en effet à donner aux ouvrages de Kook écrits dans un hébreu allusif, une interprétation fortement nationaliste et liée à l'actualité politique. Et ce parti cherchait à promouvoir cette interprétation auprès des Juifs anglophones du courant moderne orthodoxe, notamment les adeptes des voyages d'études de plus en plus répandus dans les yeshivot israéliennes – voyages qui sont liés à ce continuuel « glissement à droite » que connaît le judaïsme moderne orthodoxe américain depuis quelques décennies.

Exporting political theology to the diaspora: translating Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook for Modern Orthodox consumption

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RÉSUMÉ

La récente augmentation du nombre de traductions en anglais des écrits du Rabbin Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), père incontesté du sionisme religieux, peut être considérée comme un tournant significatif pour les communautés juives israéliennes et américaines se réclamant du courant moderne orthodoxe. Cette étude analyse les caractéristiques de la traduction de textes théologiques dans le cadre de la relation «patrie-diaspora». Elle propose ainsi une réflexion sur l'orientation dominante des traductions de la pensée de Kook dans les années 1990, véritable «exportation» idéologique de textes, essentiellement induite par les déplacements transnationaux. Les traducteurs de ces écrits étaient des rabbins américains installés en Israël. Quant au public cible de ces traductions, il était essentiellement constitué du nombre croissant de jeunes Juifs américains venus étudier pendant un an dans les yeshivot israéliennes avant de revenir à la vie universitaire américaine. Selon moi, ces traductions ont été faites dans le cadre d'une idéologie politique émanant du parti sioniste religieux de droite. Ce dernier visait en effet à donner aux ouvrages de Kook écrits dans un hébreu allusif, une interprétation fortement nationaliste et liée à l'actualité politique. Et ce parti cherchait à promouvoir cette interprétation auprès des Juifs anglophones du courant moderne orthodoxe, notamment les adeptes des voyages d'études de plus en plus répandus dans les yeshivot israéliennes – voyages qui sont liés à ce continuuel «glissement à droite» que connaît le judaïsme moderne orthodoxe américain depuis quelques décennies.

ABSTRACT

The recent boost in English translations of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), the undisputed father of religious Zionism, may be considered a revealing juncture between Israeli and American Modern Orthodox Jewish communities. Upon establishing the features of theological translation in this homeland-diaspora framework, my paper offers a discussion of a dominant translation trend of Kook's thought in the 1990s, an ideologically motivated "export" of texts which has been largely determined by the transnational movement of people. The translators were American rabbis who emigrated and settled in Israel and the main target audience for the translations was the growing number of young American Jews making the one-year study visit in Israeli yeshivas before returning to American college life. The translations, I argue, were framed as a political polemic on the part of right-wing religious Zionism, aimed at promoting a highly nationalist, topical political interpretation of Kook's suggestive Hebrew works among English-speaking Modern Orthodox Jews, particularly those making the increasingly popular study visit in Israeli yeshivas – visits that have been associated with the persistent "slide to the Right" of Modern Orthodox Judaism in America in recent decades.

RESUMEN

El reciente impulso a las traducciones al inglés del rabino Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), el padre indiscutible del sionismo religioso, puede ser considerado como una

coyuntura reveladora para las comunidades ortodoxas judías israelí y estadounidense. Al establecer las características de la traducción teológica en este marco patria-diáspora, mi artículo expone una discusión sobre una tendencia dominante en la traducción del pensamiento de Kook en la década de 1990, una «exportación» de textos ideológicamente motivada que ha sido determinada en gran medida por el desplazamiento transnacional de personas. Aquellos traductores eran rabinos estadounidenses que emigraron a Israel y se establecieron allí, y el principal público de destino de las traducciones era el creciente número de jóvenes judíos estadounidenses que realizan visitas de estudio de un año en las yeshivot israelíes antes de regresar a la vida universitaria estadounidense. Sostengo que las traducciones han sido enmarcadas como una polémica política por parte del sionismo religioso de derecha, con el objeto de promover una interpretación política altamente nacionalista y tópica de las sugerentes obras de Kook en hebreo entre los judíos ortodoxos modernos de habla inglesa, en particular aquellos que realizan la cada vez más popular visita de estudio a las yeshivot israelíes, visitas que han sido asociadas con el persistente «desplazamiento hacia la derecha» del judaísmo ortodoxo moderno en los Estados Unidos en las últimas décadas.

MOTS-CLÉS / KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVES

traduction de textes théologiques, sionisme religieux, judaïsme moderne orthodoxe, Rabbin Abraham Isaac Kook, relations juives israélo-américaines.

theological translation, religious Zionism, Modern Orthodox Judaism, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Israeli-American Jewish relations

Traducción teológica, sionismo religioso, judaísmo ortodoxo moderno, Rabino Abraham Isaac Kook, relaciones judías israelo-norteamericanas

1. Introduction

Often set against the backdrop of intercultural relations, the research on translation and symbolic boundaries tends to center on negotiations of group identity across ethnic, national or religious lines. The study of translation in Jewish contexts has been no exception, as works on translation in Jewish contexts have largely concentrated on Jewish/non-Jewish (mainly Christian) differences. In this framework, translation was considered a practice that reinforces, undermines or in some way shifts the symbolic boundaries of Jewish collectivity vis-à-vis a general non-Jewish society and culture. Against the backdrop of Christian otherness in different settings such as the Roman Empire (Seidman 2010), German religious culture in the Enlightenment (Gillman 2018), modern day Israel (Ben-Ari 2002), and American Jewish literary culture in the second half of the twentieth century (Norich 2014), translations were employed in varied ways to reveal the boundary negotiations pertaining to Jewish “particularity.”

Difference, however, plays an important role in intra-religious contexts as well. Internal competition and influences between social and religious segments of Judaism, as reflected in their textual production, has a bearing on the continuous shaping of Jewish identity and thought. So far, there have been relatively few studies of translation, or other forms of mediation and reception, in *intra*-Jewish frameworks. This article takes a step toward filling this lacuna by using intra-Jewish translation to touch on mutual influences and differences in discourses of identity, not across ethnic or religious lines but rather within them. In particular, the article deals with the translation of theological texts in a homeland-diaspora framework.

Broadly speaking, translation in the context of homeland-diaspora relations is defined by two conflicting forces: on the one hand, we have the perceived need of the two communities to maintain a connection, and their self-perception as belonging to one transnational entity; on the other, we have the divergent, often competing identity discourses rooted in their distinct geographical, cultural spaces (Asscher 2021). The dialectical features of friction and mutual inspiration between a diaspora and its symbolic or concrete homeland, as revealed through translation, characterize the Israeli-American Jewish cultural relationship as well.

The intra-Jewish translation I will consider here takes place in the confines of homeland and diaspora forms of Modern Orthodox Judaism. In particular, I examine the English translation of Israeli Religious Zionist thought, represented by its seminal thinker Abraham Isaac Kook, on route to its primary target audience, Modern Orthodox Jews in the United States and other English-speaking countries. Israeli Religious Zionism and American Modern Orthodoxy, the source and target cultures of our translation juncture, are historical counterparts of one decentralized religious movement of nebulous boundaries, straddling across Israel and the United States. Modern Orthodox Judaism can be broadly defined as the branch of Judaism that seeks to follow traditional Jewish Law (the *Halakhah*) yet, at the same time, to preserve a connection with modern life and society. In the words of historian Jacob Schacter, Modern Orthodoxy thus combines

a commitment to living a life shaped by Halakhah with an acknowledgement of the legitimacy, value, and, for some, even the necessity of ‘non-exclusively Torah’ disciplines and cultures to enhance one’s personality and even one’s spiritual religious persona. (Schacter 2016: xxvii)

A historical phenomenon of the twentieth century, Modern Orthodox Judaism has two main branches, found in the two major centers of world Jewry in the United States and Israel.

The religious ideas that anticipated and shaped Modern Orthodoxy in the United States can be traced back to the nineteenth century, but it is largely agreed that the 1950s and 1960s marked the resurgence and relative consolidation of the movement that resembles, notwithstanding some important differences, the Modern Orthodoxy we know today (Gurock 2009). Under the influential leadership of thinker Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993), Modern Orthodoxy in America broke from the Right-Wing ultra-Orthodox enclave, and was increasingly accepted by Jewish communities in postwar American culture (Sarna 2019: 290-291). In its support for Zionism, the belief in the need for advanced education for women, and the willingness to maintain a dialogue with other Jewish religious streams, Modern Orthodoxy differed from earlier thinkers and movements that wished to bridge traditional Jewish law and modern culture (Eleff 2016: xxxi). The smallest of Jewish streams in America (4%), Modern Orthodoxy’s primary social significance lies in the middle ground it occupies between the much larger liberal movements of Reform and Conservative Judaism, and the Right-Wing enclaves of the traditional Orthodox.

Rooted in developments in late nineteenth century Eastern Europe, the Israeli counterpart of Modern Orthodoxy, religious Zionism, also largely acquired its contemporary form in the second half of the twentieth century. Similar to American Modern Orthodoxy in its belief in the imperative of traditional Jewish law, yet con-

comitant wish to play an integral part in general (Israeli) society, religious Zionism marks a heterogeneous, amorphous middle space between secular Israeli culture and the ultra-Orthodox. However, while issues related to the role of women in Judaism, negotiating modern life with the constraints of ancient Jewish law, and the status of secular knowledge, among others, have preoccupied religious Zionism in similar ways to American Modern Orthodoxy, questions of a political nature have taken on a much bigger role in Israel. Highlighting and infusing the unsolved tension between religion and nationality rooted in Israeli Jewish identity, the father of religious Zionism Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), and his son and most influential interpreter Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891-1982), assigned primary religious significance to settling the (Greater) Land of Israel, sacralising Israel's national symbols, and, more generally, perceiving the contemporary historical period of statehood as *Atchalta De'Geulah* [the beginning of the redemption] (Waxman 2008; Schwartz 2009). In practice, this meant that religious Zionism would come to play a major role in Israeli politics, looking to participate in shaping the character of Israeli society and to influence Israeli policy regarding the occupation and settlement of the West Bank - the territories Israel conquered from Jordan in the 1967 Six Day War, where the Palestinian population remains effectively under military rule (Hellinger 2008).

This is not the place for a thorough comparison between the two religious branches. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note Zev Eleff's distinction that religious Zionism, with its obviously stronger emphasis on Zionism, has also had a much more inclusive approach to religion, transforming "somewhat secular elements like politics and business into religious experiences [...] for the sake of a fervent messianic Zionist agenda" (Eleff 2016: xxxii). To the contrary, modern Orthodox Jews in America have largely "preferred to abide by the separation of church and state, relegating Judaism to carefully circumscribed religious spheres" (Eleff 2016: xxxiii) such as synagogues and Jewish day schools. In short, while these shoots of the same branch are often considered closer to each other than to other branches of Judaism, there is a gap that separates them from each other that stems primarily from their different socio-historical conditions: religious Zionism in a sovereign Jewish state beleaguered by a continuous national geo-political conflict, the face of which religious Zionism has actively shaped; American Modern Orthodox Judaism in a liberal democracy with a majority non-Jewish society, where the bulk of the Jewish community is much more religiously liberal than Modern Orthodoxy (Liebman and Cohen 1990).

The differences between these two spheres of Modern Orthodox Judaism is reflected in their theological thought, even as their theological thought has had a bearing on socio-religious aspects of their relationship, and of the Israeli-American Jewish relationship in general. As noted by sociologists and theology scholars alike, theology plays a social role and can be usefully understood in social terms, as it influences and is influenced by the social framework of which it is part (Francis 2010). This is surely the case with Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism, where leading thinkers have given, in line with the long tradition of Jewish religious thought in general (Kellner 1987), special emphasis to individual and communal praxis, thus playing a major role in determining the directions which the two movements in the homeland and diaspora have taken in the decades since the mid-twentieth century (Schwartz 2002). This makes the translation of their theological texts a revealing social-ideological juncture.

In a recent volume of *Religion* devoted to the topic of translation, Hephzibah Israel points to the relative lack of critical interest by religious studies scholars in socio-cultural approaches in translation studies that question the notion of translational equivalence and focus on translation's ideological determinants (Israel 2019: 328-329). She argues that the study of translation within religious frameworks could benefit from an approach that pursues translation as a source of "mechanisms of identity formation in a variety of cultural spheres," useful for "[unpacking] how the human phenomena understood as 'religion' is constructed and organizes social formation" (Israel 2019: 326). In what follows, I consider the English translation of the founding father of religious Zionism, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, based on this premise (for the sake of readability, from here on the use of the surname Kook by itself refers always to the elder, A. I. Kook, while his son, Zvi Yehuda Kook, is referred to with his full name). As background for the discussion, I offer a comparison between literary translation and theological translation in the Israeli-American context, so as to establish the translation of theology as a separate category that differs in its structural features from literary translation in our homeland-diaspora framework – arguing that it has largely, though not exclusively, been a form of intra-Jewish translation export. I then survey the history of English translations of Kook's thought in the context of the relationship between Modern Orthodox Judaism in Israel and the United States, characterizing the change that has occurred in the religious dialogue between the two streams in recent decades as reflected in theological translation. Finally, I concentrate on a dominant trend of translation export in the 1990s, led by translators David Samson and Tzvi Fishman, which framed Kook's original works as a contemporary political polemic on the part of Right-Wing religious Zionism. These translations, I argue, aimed at promoting a highly nationalist, topical interpretation of Kook's works among English-speaking Modern Orthodox Jews. Initiated by ideologically motivated American immigrants to Israel, and mainly targeting American Jews making the popular one- or two-year study visit after high school in Israeli yeshivas (Jewish religious institutions of high learning), the translations also demonstrate how the transfer and reception of theology between homeland and diaspora can be highly entangled with the movement of people across national borders.

While the translations of these theological writings represent an encounter between religious streams that are not the mainstream of Jewish culture in their respective countries, the Right-Wing element in both streams, and both Jewish cultures, has generally been on the rise. Moreover, there has been a growing influence of Israeli religious Zionism on Modern Orthodoxy in the United States, which has contributed to the latter's "sliding to the Right" (Heilman 2006). The translations that are part of this religious juncture offer a glimpse at the direction in which the conversation between these two segments of collective Jewry has been going, and may be going in the future.

2. Between the translation of literature and theology

Before we use the translation of theology to touch on the underlying interplay between religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy in recent decades, let us address some of the commonalities and differences between theological and literary translation in our broader homeland-diaspora framework. This will enable us to better

distinguish the unique features of our theological translation juncture. Literary and theological forms of expression both reflect major preoccupations of contemporary Israeli thought – but what happens differently, in sociological and ideological terms, in their mediation and transfer to the American Jewish diaspora, Israel's greatest and most thriving Jewish Other?

First, let us note some of the main features of the translation and reception of Israeli fiction in America for most of the second half of the twentieth century. By and large, the ideological aspects of this cross-cultural transfer reflected the representative role assigned to Israel in American Jewish life, as some translators, editors, and critics appropriated certain aspects of the source Israeli works for their (Jewish) American audiences. Most of these cultural agents were Jewish, and it is largely accepted that the works' readership has been predominantly Jewish as well (Alter 1991: 6; Amit 2008: 19–20). Translation and mediation processes, focused on charged issues such as Jewish morality and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the contested cultural hierarchy of the Jewish world, and the boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, altered some "problematic" representations of Jewish identity, both reflecting and reinforcing the dominant perceptions cultivated in American Jewish discourse regarding Israel (Asscher 2019).

Even when translation agents assumed a non-Jewish readership, their focus remained on how the Jewish minority was positioned within the broader American society. For instance, by assuaging unqualified accusatory depictions of anti-Semitism in Christian nations in some source Israeli works, cultural agents reflected concern with what non-Jewish readers would be thinking of their Jewish peers, attesting to the self-positioning of American Jews vis-à-vis general American society. In more recent decades, protective tendencies in the mediation of Hebrew literature have changed, particularly with regard to literary representations that relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as reviews attest to the moral critique prevalent in the intellectual sphere with regard to Israel. Still, the fact remains that the predominant target audience for Israeli works in translation "is, and will likely remain, American Jews" (Mintz 2001: 60).

This does not mean, however, that the translation of Hebrew literature in America should be understood as an exclusive intra-Jewish phenomenon. Since the 1950s and 1960s Israeli writers have been mainly published by commercial, not institutionally Jewish, publishing houses. The decisions made by these publishers with regard to the publication of translations, although done with a Jewish readership in mind, have been naturally governed by general commercial considerations. Ideological interferences in the translation seem to have taken place mainly on the editorial level of the publishing houses rather than on the more individual level of the translators and authors (Asscher 2019: 78–79). Moreover, the main site for the reception of Israeli literature, where the majority of reviews were published, was newspapers such as the *New York Times* or *Chicago Tribune*, or magazines such as *Commentary*, rather than "intimate" Jewish organs with an exclusive Jewish readership. And the teaching of these literary works has taken place in departments of comparative literature or Near Eastern languages and cultures in private or public American universities.

In short, the juncture of literary translation between Israeli and American culture mostly involved Jewish actors, mediating what was sometimes perceived to be

a “Jewish text” with “Jewish-Israeli themes” to an imagined Jewish audience, yet they were doing so in *general* channels of translation and reception. A crude yet effective image would be two Jews having a dialogue or negotiation of ideas in English in a public space, while sitting next to a person they presume to be non-Jewish who may or may not be listening. The negotiation of symbolic boundaries of Jewish identity in this largely internal conversation was done with non-Jewish America in mind.

The English translation of Israeli religious thinkers followed a different dynamic. The great majority of publishers of the translated works were Jewish institutions or publishing houses that specialize in the publication of Jewish thought; some received support for specific projects from Jewish philanthropic foundations such as Targum Shlishi. Theological or Halakhic writings by religious Zionist Rabbis Abraham Isaac Kook, Zvi Yehuda Kook, Shimon Gershon Rosenberg, and others, were published by Israeli religious publishers such as Urim, Maggid (a division of Koren Publishers), Torat Eretz Yisrael Publications (of Merkaz Harav Yeshiva), Gefen Publishing House, Birkat Moshe Yeshiva and Siah Yitzhak Yeshiva – all located in Jerusalem or in yeshivas in settlements in the West Bank; and also by East Coast based American publishers of Jewish themed books such as Sepher-Hermon Press, Lambda Publishers, Orthodox Union Press, and Ben Yehuda Press. Some Israeli and American publishers collaborated in the publication of certain titles, and most Israel-originated publications offered publishing in or distribution to the United States.

The main sites of reception of literature and theology are also different. Unlike translated Israeli fiction, the reception and dissemination of theology in English translation takes place through teaching in synagogues, seminaries, and yeshivas (or other Jewish high education institutions) in Israel and America, and, to a lesser extent, in magazines and blogs devoted to Jewish thought such as Modern Orthodoxy’s long-standing journal *Tradition* and the more recent blog *The Lehrhaus*. These are venues for deliberation on Modern Orthodox Judaism that have little relevance to non-Jews. The fact that the acculturation of Modern Orthodox Jews to general American society has been more limited and guarded than that of the liberal majority of American Jews only accentuates the confined boundaries of the reception. Indeed, the copyright page of the translated works often notes the year of publication only according to the Jewish calendar (that is, 5756 instead of 1995). Unlike Israeli novelists, then, religious Zionist thinkers were read and received by Americans in a nearly exclusive Jewish sphere. If literary translation in a homeland-diaspora framework can be considered “nonexclusive” or “public” intra-Jewish translation, then we may think of theological translation in the same context as “exclusive” or “confined” intra-Jewish translation.

Another major difference between literary and theological translation in our homeland-diaspora framework is the driving force behind the translations. By and large, religious Zionist thinkers have been *exported* to American Jewish audiences by Israeli publishers while works by Israeli novelists were predominantly *imported* by local publishers. Translations of Israeli literature were published by American commercial houses, whereas translations of religious Zionist theology tended to be initiated and done by institutions and agents of the source religious culture, and were also often published in Israel before being distributed in the United States.

Finally, against the backdrop of existing differences between theological and literary translation across homeland and diaspora, it is also important to note that

both forms of translation share common features that challenge the generalizations put forward in recent discussions of the role of translation in world literature (Bassnett 2019; Felski 2016). For while *global* economic, political, and cultural factors may influence translation phenomena in homeland-diaspora contexts to some extent, they are not the most useful framework for adequately explaining them. Rather, homeland-diaspora translation phenomena are often better understood in light of the sociocultural, political, and, in our case, religious factors *internal* to their particular homeland-diaspora contexts. The economic and cultural hierarchy of languages that impacts translation across the globe, to name one example, leads to the dominance of English in the unequal movement of texts, yet, as becomes clear from the examples above, homeland-diaspora translation relations may be somewhat independent of these constraints or even work against them. This is even more pronounced in the case of religious translation, as some individual thinkers have taken it upon themselves to publish and disseminate Kook's thought as their life project, and were able to do so quite independently, persevering financial constraints. Translation and reception in homeland-diaspora frameworks, then, are largely defined by the specific needs and expectations of homeland and diaspora vis-à-vis each other in situated contexts. This makes translation a useful instrument for understanding the recent interplay between (homeland) Israeli and (diasporic) American forms of Modern Orthodox Judaism.

3. Kook's theology in English translation: a historical outline

As we have seen, the English translation of religious Zionist thought has been a largely exclusive intra-Jewish phenomenon, often initiated by homeland agents and institutions. In what follows, I outline the most important strand in this history of translation – that of the foundational thought of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935). Kook, who has been by far the most translated of religious Zionist thinkers into English, was a major Jewish theologian of the twentieth century, a canonical figure of Modern Orthodox thought and Jewish mysticism. Kook was also the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine, and founder of the highly influential yet in recent decades contentious Merkaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, which would spawn generations of religious-political leaders and followers of messianic religious Zionism (Ravitzky 1996: 79-144). Drawing on Kabbalist traditions, but open to influences from Western philosophy, Kook's writings offer a holistic theology of Jewish mysticism that blurs differentiation between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular, attributing divinity to all particularities of life while placing special emphasis on the redemptive meaning of the Land of Israel (Mirsky 2014). Kook anticipated in his theology the main concern of religious Zionism for years to come – how Judaism, as a religion, connects to the secular-political project of Jewish nationhood and the State of Israel – yet also covered a wide range of subjects on the encounter of traditional Jewish life and law with modernity: from issues of ethics to marital life to modern science to vegetarianism.

Kook published relatively little in his lifetime, yet most of his writings and teachings were compiled, edited, and published posthumously by his son Zvi Yehuda Kook. The mediated nature of his published work has thus been a central part of its historical reception. Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891-1982), who would become the spiritual

leader of the powerful Right-Wing Israeli movement *Gush Emunim* [Bloc of the Faithful] (committed to establishing Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War), taught and institutionalized his father's work throughout his entire life, making his legacy as significant as it has been controversial in terms of its political implications (Hoch 1994). The viability of Zvi Yehuda Kook's interpretation of his father's religious philosophy has been a subject of heated debate, public and academic (Singer 1996). My focus here on the English translation of the elder Kook's works relates to a different yet similarly crucial stage in their mediated reception, at least in terms of the mediation of this Jewish theologian to American readers.

Considering Kook's stature as a canonical and highly influential Jewish thinker of the twentieth century, the number of English translations of Kook's works until the late 1980s has been meagre. From the publication of his first works in Hebrew in the late 19th century until 1986, only two full-length books by Kook appeared in English translation (Kook 1925/1968, 1978). Both of these were published in the United States, the first by Yeshiva University Press, and the second – a compilation of the thinker's essays, letters and poems – by the American Catholic publisher Paulist Press as part of their Classics of Western Spirituality series. This paucity speaks to little mutual interest on both sides of the relationship between Modern Orthodox streams in Israel and America, and a relative marginalization of Kook in Jewish religious circles in America. The dominance of Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the other major thinker of Modern Orthodox Judaism in the 20th century, and human pillar of the movement in the United States, with his general aversion to metaphysical notions of messianic mysticism (Schwartz 2006), and restrained support for political Zionism, did not leave much room for Kook's competing theology, even though Kook himself was greatly revered. On the other side of the ocean, the dearth of any translation export initiated by religious Zionists for the greater part of the 20th century reflects, apart from the relative social disconnect with Modern Orthodoxy in America, the deep-seated negation of the diaspora, a theological tenet of the Israeli religious Right. Following in the footsteps of Rabbi Kook himself, who saw life in the diaspora as the "limiting of the sacred," later religious Zionists who theologized about the redemptive role of the Land of Israel often aligned with the consideration of diaspora as a "gentile's world" in which national Jewish pride was suppressed, and Judaism abandoned (Don-Yehiya 1992: 239, 240). As diversified as religious Zionist consciousness in Israel has been, its proponents have largely shared a conception of redemption as gradually progressing in the political present of the State of Israel, rather than as a divine occurrence one waits for passively, surely not in the diaspora; and have believed that full redemption is founded on settling the (greater) Land of Israel, which represents an earthly manifestation of metaphysical holiness (Schwartz 2002, 2009).

The late 1980s and early 1990s mark the beginning of a continuous trend of translating Kook's works and making them accessible to American Jewish audiences. There has been a boost in the number of translations of full-length books since the late 1980s, with nineteen new translations (or adaptations, or commentaries that include translated excerpts) of Kook's works being published during that span – a new title every two years. Seven of these translated books appeared in just the past decade. This boom is part of a general growth in the number of English translations

of religious Zionist thought in recent years, including works by some contemporary rabbis such as Yuval Cherlow, Yehuda Amital, and Shimon Gershon Rosenberg. It represents a tangible attempt toward religious interaction between homeland and diaspora streams of Modern Orthodoxy.

The majority of the translation endeavours of Kook's writings during these years were initiated and published in Israel, and their common social and religious bedrock has been the ideological migration of American Jews to Israel since the 1967 Six Day War. American Jewish immigrants would come to occupy a disproportionate role in religious Zionist leadership and the settlement movement (Hirschhorn 2017). Indeed, nearly all of the translations were done by American Jews who immigrated to Israel and studied at some point in the abovementioned Merkaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, most of whom would go on to settle in the West Bank. Influenced by their encounter not only with the philosophy of Kook but also its tangible religious-political impact on Israeli life, these American immigrant rabbis presumably sought to promote Kook's religious convictions in their former diaspora community, while encouraging emigration to Israel. A primary target audience of the translations were the thousands of young American Jews who travel to Israel each year after high-school for the popular one- or two-year study visit in an Israeli yeshiva (Samson 2019; Berger, Jacobson, *et al.* 2007).

This is not to say that the twenty or so published translations or interpretations of Kook in the past three decades realize a uniform approach to his work. The opposite is true: the translation projects are diverse and attest to the different appeals of Kook's thought, demonstrating the very different roles his translated works can play in intra-Jewish contexts. The place of publishing (Israel or the United States), and type of publisher (commercial or institutional), naturally correlate with the divergent orientations of the translations. Translations of Kook initiated and published in the United States (including the two earlier ones from 1968 and 1978), for instance, tended to concentrate on more "purely" theological aspects of Kook as a Jewish mystic and philosopher while most, if not all, translations published in Israel were inclined toward a more political-ideological framing of his writings. Because of the limited scope of this article, the following section offers a discussion of what had been a dominant politically motivated translation trend in the 1990s, led by Rabbis David Samson and Tzvi Fishman, and does not expand on other translation projects in the past decades that represent different approaches to the English translation of Kook. As a point of reference, however, let me briefly touch on the two publishing enterprises of Rabbis Bezalel Naor and Chanan Morrison, who also stand out among Kook translators in quantity and longevity, providing a useful contrast to Samson and Fishman's translations.

Founder of the Orot Inc., an organization dedicated to the dissemination of Kook's thought, Naor is the translator of five volumes of Kook's works since the early 1990s. An established Jewish Studies scholar, Naor has been primarily interested in the mystical and philosophical dimensions of Kook; his commentary anchors Kook's religious thought both historically and sociologically, targeting a primarily intellectual, academic readership. His translations have been mainly published in the United States. Morrison has been publishing Kook's teachings in English, sometimes independently, since the mid-2000s. An author of five books, Morrison's are not translations per se but rather commentaries or adaptations based on Kook's writings,

although he does sometimes include translated excerpts from the original works. Morrison's books provide an accessible version of Kook's teachings on the Torah and Jewish ritual and practice (such as Sabbath, holidays, tefillin, etc.); simplifying the inherent difficulties in Kook's elevated and suggestive Hebrew style, he seems to target a more popular audience. His books have been mainly published in Israel, but are sold online on Amazon and Judaica Place.

Like most translators and commentators who have committed to making Kook accessible to an English-speaking readership over the past three decades, both Naor and Morrison were born and raised in the United States (Naor in Maine, Morrison in Pennsylvania), and later traveled to Israel and became rabbis, studying in the Merkaz Harav Yeshiva and settling and teaching in the West Bank (Naor would eventually return to the U.S.). For our purposes, the feature that most crucially separates Naor's translations from the 1990s translation trend (to be discussed below) is the near absence of topical political polemic. Along the same lines, Morrison's focus on the Kookian approach to everyday ritual and practice largely strays from the political, though Morrison does imply from time to time the general ideology of a religious Zionist worldview. Conversely, the 1990s translations of David Samson and Tzvi Fishman constitute a form of translation export that not only explicitly prioritizes a nationalist political agenda but also manifests a vocational impulse regarding very topical political issues.

Needless to say, the political and ideological aspects that are my focus here are only some of the many facets of theological translation to be explored; other theological concerns, as well as aesthetic and linguistic issues, allow for different categorization and analysis. The advantage of centering on Samson and Fishman's series of translations in the 1990s is the light they shed on the political underpinnings of the religious conversation between Israeli and American Modern Orthodox communities, perhaps during the most crucial decade in recent Israeli political history. In fact, this series of translations provides a contrast not only to other English translations of Kook but also to recent translations of other religious Zionist thinkers such as rabbis Yehuda Amital (2015) and Shimon Gershon Rosenberg (2018), whose work lends itself less to political interpretation, and was indeed framed by the publisher in markedly non-political terms. Not to mention the absolute ideological clash between Samson and Fishman's translations of Kook in the 1990s and the contemporaneous translated works of literary figures such as Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua, who represent, in their narratives and themes as well as their commentary as public intellectuals, the concerns of the secular liberal Left – like nearly all other major translated Israeli novelists. In short, Samson and Fishman's 1990s translations stand out in their overt Right-Wing political overtones, even as they enhance more generally our understanding of the role translation can play in the intersection between the religious and the political in a homeland-diaspora framework.

4. Theological export as political polemic: translating Kook in the 1990s

Published through the 1990s by the publishing branch of Merkaz Harav Yeshiva, a hothouse for religious Zionist thought and political activity since its establishment (Hellinger 2008), rabbis David Samson and Tzvi Fishman's translations of Abraham Isaac Kook are express cases of the Right-Wing political theology of the abovementioned

tioned *Gush Emunim* movement. Their four publications include Abraham Isaac Kook's *Eretz Yisrael: Lights on Orot* (1920/1996), *War and Peace* (1920/1997), and *The Art of T'shuva* [repentance] (1925/1999), as well as *Torat Eretz Yisrael* (1991) by Zvi Yehuda Kook, Kook's son and most influential interpreter. The latter, Zvi Kook's book, is a selection of and commentary on excerpts from various sources, and does not have a distinct, single Hebrew source text. It is included in this list because, in several meaningful ways, it does not present itself independently of the elder Kook's work: Zvi Kook himself considered and presented his work primarily as a continuation of his father's. It is no coincidence that in his foreword to the book, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner makes a point of noting that "in our generation, this brighter learning [of the Torah] burst to light through the channels of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda" (Aviner 1991: xvii); indeed, the book cover is comprised of two pictures of Abraham Isaac Kook, and one picture of Zvi Kook couched between them. Rabbis David Samson and Tzvi Fishman, themselves immigrants from the U.S. (Samson from Maryland, Fishman from Los Angeles) and members of the Merkaz Harav Yeshiva, collaborated in preparing all of these translations. According to Samson,¹ the books have been an ongoing success, selling consistently about a thousand copies a year, tens of thousands of copies altogether. Written originally for American Modern Orthodox students visiting Israeli yeshivas and sold primarily to them, the books have subsequently found their way to Jewish communities all across the United States as well as in other English-speaking countries such as Canada, England, Australia, and South Africa.

Samson and Fishman's hybrid form of translation and interpretation is anything but new in the tradition of Jewish religious translation, as epitomized by translations of the Bible by German Jewish rabbinical thinkers in the mid-nineteenth century. As Abigail Gillman shows, these translations – including that of one of the most important predecessors of Modern Orthodox Judaism, Samson Raphael Hirsch, which remains in use in English translation today – served as an ideological vehicle of commentary aimed at educational goals, reflecting power struggles within German Jewry over the right direction of Judaism in modernity (Gillman 2018). "Translation with commentary," as Gilman (2018: 143) further notes, "remains the method of choice in the American Jewish twenty-first century." Along the same lines, Merkaz Harav Yeshiva's publications of translations embedded in accessible commentaries of Kook in the 1990s provided David Samson and Tzvi Fishman with a useful tool for framing Kook's works in ways that emphasize and promote contemporary political positions. The political orientation of the publications is reflected in Samson and Fishman's selection of the general topics of the different books, and in the particular selection made in each book. Kook's writing on the religious significance of the Land of Israel, his perception of the contemporary historical period of political statehood as *Atchalta De'Geulah* [the beginning of the redemption], and his contemplation on the subject of war, receive pride of place and are presented thoroughly (A. Kook 1996, 1997). The varied themes Kook wrote about that do not have an immediate topical political implication, on the other hand, receive a marginal place in these publications (for a later, very different approach that emphasizes the non-political, mystical-philosophical aspects in Kook's thought, see Ari Ze'ev Schwartz's recent collection of Kook essays in translation, A. Kook 2018). The official seal of approval of the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Avraham Shapira, precedes the preface of the first three

published translations (Shapira 1991, 1996, 1997), granting further authority and religious prestige to their political goals in the English language.

When examined against the backdrop of the 1990s, the selection of excerpts for translation and accompanying commentary on Kook's thought in (at least the first three of) these publications seem to suggest a response to two contemporary – intertwined yet different – challenges for the religious Zionist leadership: one political, and one theological-intellectual. These challenges were the charged public debate on the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ensuing evacuation of the settlements from the West Bank, and the more esoteric, yet also heated, intellectual altercations over Kook's spiritual legacy.

On the political front, the early 1990s saw the Israeli government begin to consider and implement territorial compromise with the Palestinians, a process which culminated in the Oslo Accords and continued in the gradual implementation of the accords until 1995, when the Israeli Labour movement leader, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, was murdered by an extremist Right-Wing Jew. During these years, mainstream Israeli society and politics moved away from the position advocated by religious Zionist leadership; for the first time since 1967, it seemed politically plausible that Israel would evacuate the settlements in the West Bank and proceed toward a two-state solution. Until the aftermath of the Second Palestinian Intifada in the mid-2000s, which gradually lead to a significant shift to the Right in Israeli public opinion (D. Waxman 2012), the fervent opposition of Right-Wing religious Zionists to territorial compromise was not the consensus; the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, perhaps the greatest social and political crisis for the religious Zionist camp, was largely supported by the Israeli public.

Second, and not unrelated to these political trends, the 1990s saw an intellectual and theological polemic evolve around the meaning and legacy of the writings of Abraham Isaac Kook. Leading scholars of Jewish thought and liberal critics of the *Gush Emunim* movement, such as Jerome Gellman and Aviezer Ravitzky, contested the Merkaz Harav interpretation of Kook's thought, decrying "nationalistic excesses and religious fervor that too often sin against morality, sometimes in [Rabbi Kook's] name" based on "a selective reading of his texts" (Gellman 1995: 288). These scholars of Modern Orthodoxy in Israel and the U.S. questioned Zvi Kook's interpretation of his father's writings, arguing that "the messianic Zionist stress on sovereignty and territory [...] is simply misplaced" (Singer 1996: 16). At the same time, doubts from within the religious Zionist camp began to arise, as political reality seemed to disagree with Kook's deterministic theosophy of national-religious revival: "the trajectory of divine unfolding seemed stymied or even reversed, [as] history seems to contradict the biblical promise."²

Considering that this intellectual-theological polemic, and, on a much larger scale, the political debates on a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian, were a source of contention in American Jewish circles as well, the translations can be understood as a means to impact English-language discourse. The model of translation as political-theological export is indeed demonstrated in the uncharacteristic copyright page of the translations and commentaries of Kook published by the Merkaz Harav Yeshiva: "This publication may be [...] reproduced [...] in any form or by any means [...] in order to magnify and glorify Torah, without prior written permission from the copyright holder" (Z. Kook 1991: iv; A. Kook 1920/1996: iv;

A. Kook 1920/1997: 4). Furthermore, some of the prefaces to the books commend the translation especially for making Kook's philosophy accessible to Diaspora Jewry (Shapira 1996: x).

The contemporary political motivation for the translation, and the ensuing educational role assigned to it, is made explicit in paratextual material as well. The first paragraph of Samson's introduction to the English translation of *Eretz Yisrael: Lights on Orot* (A. Kook 1920/1996), which argues for the importance of getting acquainted with Kookian thought, reads:

The past several years, many of my students have asked me the same question: how are we to understand that after longing for the Land of Israel for nearly two-thousand years, a government in Israel began giving away sections of the country? Biblical cities that once inspired awe in the hearts of the Jewish people are often spoken about as problems which have to be discarded to save the modern-day State. (Samson 1996: xv)

Samson goes on to detail a historical moment in 1930s Jerusalem when Rabbi Kook "stood firm" and chose not to compromise on the status of the Western Wall – the holiest site in the Jewish faith – in spite of "insistent appeals" from the leaders of the Jewish community and of the British government, who feared his insistence would risk reigniting bloody clashes between Arabs and Jews (Samson 1996: xv-xvi). Samson then quotes from Kook's writings to support a contemporary political approach that negates territorial compromise. "Since God has promised to give the land of Israel to the Jewish people as an everlasting inheritance," Samson writes, "our weakened connection to Eretz Yisrael must be seen as a political crisis as well as spiritual dilemma. Our willingness to surrender the very portions of Eretz Yisrael where the Bible unfolds is symptomatic of this spiritual malaise" (Samson 1996: xvi). The educational role of the translation is revealed in this context:

For [a] great [religious and national] revival to occur, education is needed. [...] We must strengthen our connection to *Eretz Yisrael* [Land of Israel] by taking a more penetrating look at our sources. In this reawakening, Rabbi Kook's writings in the book of *Orot* can be our inspiration and guide. (Samson 1996: xviii)

Arguing for the significance of Kook's work to contemporary times, Samson's inferences from Kook's thought to the present involve a measure of interpretation that is presented as objective knowledge. One example of many is Samson's reference to the following, intentionally broad statement by Kook:

Retreating from all of our [Jewish] enhanced specialty is a cardinal misconception, representing a crisis in the understanding that "You chose us from all of the nations." ... if we shall know our towering stature, then we will know ourselves, and if we forget our greatness, we forget ourselves, and a nation which forgets itself is certainly small and debased. (Samson 1996: xvii)

This deliberately non-concrete statement is quoted without context, serving Samson to express a theocratic negation of the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which he describes as the "prevalent vision [that] sees financial prosperity as the foundation of the new Middle East, at the expense of abandoning our own Jewish specialty" (Samson 1996: xvii).

The connection between theology and political action – namely, establishing Jewish settlements in the territories of the West Bank – is similarly celebrated in Samson's commentary on Zvi Kook's translated excerpts in the 1991 compilation

Torat Eretz Yisrael. The book boasts that under Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, Merkaz Harav Yeshiva (which, we recall, is the publisher of the translation)

was the spiritual center for the rebuilding of Israel, not only for its role in clarifying the proper Torah approach to the Geula [redemption] which is unfolding in our time, and to teaching the love for all our people, but in being the catalyst for the establishment of settlements and Torah institutions all over the country [...] The people who brought the settlement and Torah back to Judea and Samaria, to places like Bet-El, Shilo, Elon Moreh, Ofra, Gush Ezion, Kiryat Arba, and Hevron, to name just a few, were students of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda. (in Z. Kook 1991: 38)

The nationalistic convictions in Zvi Yehuda Kook's thought are further revealed in his notion of "compulsory war" (Z. Kook 1991: 167), which, in his view, may constitute "the beginning of redemption. [...] Though wars are only waged out of necessity, if the occasion demands, the Torah commands us to go to war. Tzahal, the Israel Defense Forces, is a precept of Torah!" (in Z. Kook 1991: 168). For him, this conception rests on religious foundations, as "the important thing to realize is that the institution of Jewish statehood, in its enabling the Jewish people to settle in Israel, is Kadosh [sacred]. Out of the Kedusha [sacredness] of the mitzvah comes the Kedusha of the State" (Z. Kook 1991: 343). The translation therefore includes a plenitude of assertions such as that "each new settlement in Israel is a witness to the eternal chooseness of Am Yisrael [the Jewish people], to the truth of Torah, and to the word of Hashem [God] and His prophets" (Z. Kook 1991: 352). Importantly, the topical implications of this political theology are made explicit in the translation, as Zvi Yehuda Kook proclaims, with reference to the budding peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians at the time, that

[a]ll types of "Agreements" concerning sections of Israel, the Land of our life, are null and void like the dust of the earth [...] Any coercion to transgress this command (that Eretz Yisrael be under our sovereignty), whether on the part of the Israeli government, or on the part of a gentile government, obligates us to rise up against it with all of our life and souls... and all "decisions" which come to steal away parts of this Land... are null and void. (Z. Kook 1991: 358)

Elsewhere in the book, the translation even uses the typographic means of all-capitals (an option unavailable in Hebrew typography) to convey the urgency of Zvi Kook's declaration: "WHERE IS [...] EACH PART AND PARCEL, AND FOUR CUBITS OF HASHEM [God]'S LAND?! IS IT IN OUR HANDS TO RELINQUISH ANY MILLIMETER OF THIS?! GOD FORBID!" (Z. Kook 1991: 339).

Finally, as noted above, this use of translation as topical political polemic cannot be seen separately from the heated clashes over Abraham Isaac Kook's legacy in the 1990s. In the translations of Kook the elder published in 1996 and 1997, paratextual material asserts Zvi Kook's reputation as the leading interpreter of his father's thought, implicitly challenging the competing, more liberal understandings of Abraham Isaac Kook that appeared at the time. At the same time, Zvi Kook's hegemonic status within religious Zionist circles was used to lend credence to the translation itself. This is exemplified in Israeli Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira's preface to the 1996 translation of the elder Kook's first part of *Orot ha-teshuva*, titled *Eretz Yisrael: Lights on Orot* (Shapira 1996). Shapira establishes the authority of the translation by noting that David Samson was for many years a student in the Yeshiva "under the personal tutelage" of Rabbi Zvi Kook, having thus

absorbed in a close and intimate fashion an encompassing understanding of the teachings of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda's father [...] the Rabbi of all Bnei Yisrael [children of Israel]. This explanation of our Rabbi's teachings was given over to Rabbi Samson by Rabbi Kook's foremost pupil, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda, the Righteous of Blessed Memory, himself. (Shapira 1996: ix)

Apart from bestowing religious authority on the translation, then, Shapira's preface implies that the most valid among competing interpretations of Abraham Isaac Kook (in Shapira's absolute term, "explanation") is that of his son, Zvi Yehuda Kook.

5. Contexts of reception

By and large, evidence of the reception of Samson and Fishman's translations of Kook's thought has been meagre. The main newspapers and magazines of Orthodox and Modern Orthodox Judaism, *Tradition*, *Young Israel Viewpoint*, and *Jewish Action*, did not publish reviews of the translations. Popular blogs and websites of recent years on Modern Orthodox Judaism, which do tend to comment on new publications of religious Zionist thought, did not exist in the 1990s. This circumscribes our ability to talk about the discursive, public reception of the translated works – but it does not mean their reception was insignificant. Rather, it places the primary site of reception of the translations within the purview of yeshivas and seminaries, where, as noted above, their main impact was originally intended, as part of the one- or two-year study visits of American Modern Orthodox Jews in yeshivas in Israel.

Having persistently gained in popularity in recent decades, these years of study in Israel are considered by social scientists to have had a transformative effect on the Modern Orthodox community in America. Samuel Heilman noted the increasing halakhic observance of American Modern Orthodox Jews upon returning from these stays, as well as their growing religious Zionism and attachment to "an Israeli nationalist" version of yeshivish Orthodoxy that is "to the right of American Modern Orthodoxy" (Heilman 2006: 120). It is largely agreed that the alumni of these programs become more strongly associated with religious Zionist "values and lifestyles" (Heilman 2006: 120). This includes, as Shalom Berger shows, a closer affiliation to the Land of Israel and a rise in support for "involvement in the settlement movement" and for "nationalistic political positions" (Berger 1997: 73). There has been a relatively large number of American Modern Orthodox Jews, approximately 20% of all attendees, who even immigrated to Israel following their stay (Wertheimer 2019; Ferziger 2012: 113). The cumulative effect of these visits, then, should not be underestimated. It also pertains to one of the main differences between homeland and diaspora streams of Modern Orthodoxy, namely, American Modern Orthodoxy's compartmentalization of the religious sphere as opposed to the Israeli blurring of boundaries and sacralization of state politics. This difference may have, to a certain extent, diminished as religious Zionist influences, particularly of the Kook brand, have left an imprint on American Modern Orthodox Jews.³

Whereas social scientists portrayed the sociological and psychological factors for the strong influence these visits had on American students (Berger, Jacobson, *et al.* 2007; Heilman 2006: 114-117), the role of language, let alone of translation, in the encounter was rarely mentioned. It is true that the English rendering of religious Zionist thought was intrinsic to the overall experience of many of the students, and

it would be difficult to distinguish the particular effect of the translations from the general context of the visits. It is also true that the main impact of the stays has been the unmediated, everyday experience of Israeli life. However, it would be wrong to ignore the access that the translations provided to the students, particularly to works as suggestive and even cryptic as those of the elder Kook. Moreover, we must remember that the vast majority of students (80%) return to the U.S. after the visits. While it is impossible to determine the exact number of books translated by Samson and Fishman that have travelled back to America, a survey of the major online used book stores shows that the large majority of these books are offered for sale within the United States (in Georgia, New York, Texas, Maine, New Jersey, California, New Hampshire, Indiana, and Tennessee, among others), and only a very small minority of them are sold in Israel – hinting that many of the purchased books indeed make their way to the U.S. Their relevance may not at all diminish there. As the Israeli experience of Modern Orthodox returnees becomes “the focus of nostalgia” (Heilman 2006: 120), their newfound religious tendencies are expressed in American settings, and in English; it is in this linguistic setting that returnees wish to continue to “connect with that past [in Israel] and feel true to it” (Heilman 2006: 120). The books could even play a role in the decision of some American students to immigrate to Israel after their stay. Translators David Samson⁴ and Tzvi Fishman⁵ each informed me separately that dozens of people told them that they had immigrated to Israel after being positively influenced by reading the books.

The movement of texts and people across linguistic and national-geographical borders, evinced in our case study, has only been intensifying in recent years. A global phenomenon, it is true of the Jewish world as well. The political-theological export explored in this paper may in fact be seen as a precursor to some contemporary transnational developments, particularly in religious Zionist outreach. Much of Jewish religious discourse today, including the dissemination and reception of theology, takes place in blogs and websites. Israeli religious institutions in particular have been using the internet to expand their connection with American audiences (Ferziger 2008, 2011, 2019). In retrospect, we may think of Samson and Fishman’s translations as forerunners of these more recent transnational developments. The dramatic rise in the translation of Kook’s thought for English-speaking audiences in the 1990s, in which Samson and Fishman played an important role, indicated the intensification of exchanges between Modern Orthodox Jewish communities in the homeland and diaspora. What most distinguished Samson and Fishman’s translation projects in this framework, as a form of religious export, was their fervent political polemic. The topical political framing of Kook’s theology in their translations has reflected and contributed to the growing influence of the Kook brand of religious Zionism on American Modern Orthodoxy – an influence that persists to this day.

NOTES

1. SAMSON, David (25 September 2019): personal communication, phone call.
2. MAGID, Shaul (15 March 2019): Kahane Won. *Tablet*. Consulted on 4 May 2020, <<https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/281388/kahane-won>>.
3. See Kaplan (1999) on the differences between Soloveitchik’s earlier brand of religious Zionism and the proximity of contemporary American figures of Modern Orthodoxy to the Kook tradition.
4. See note 1.
5. FISHMAN, Tzvi (26 September 2019): personal communication, email.

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