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Reconstructing a cultural heritage: The return of biblical personal names in Israel

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Abstract: The article shows a cultural reconstruction in Israel, which is evident in personal names used in recent years. Modern Hebrew names were compared to biblical names, regarding their grammatical and semantic characteristics. According to the findings of the study, a great number of names originate in the Bible, whether using existing names or adopting common biblical nouns as personal names.

From the grammatical point of view, new names present the same patterns as biblical names, i.e. combining roots with known templates or using existing words for compound names. The prefixes and suffixes used today to distinguish between male and female names are also the same as in the Bible. From the semantic point of view, the same domains as in biblical names are used in the modern ones. The main semantic fields are theophoric names, zoological and botanic nouns, names inspired by nouns from nature, as well as toponyms.

Keywords: Biblical names, Modern Hebrew names, cultural reconstruction.

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La reconstruction du patrimoine culturel : le retour des noms bibliques en Israël

Résumé : Cet article présente un cas de reconstruction culturelle en Israël, qui se manifeste par l'usage des prénoms pendant les dernières années. La recherche compare les prénoms hébreux modernes aux noms bibliques, en ce qui concerne leurs caractéristiques grammaticales et sémantiques. Les résultats de l'étude indiquent qu'un grand nombre de prénoms provient de la Bible, que ce soit par le choix des noms existants ou par l'adoption des noms communs bibliques en fonction de prénoms.

Du point de vue grammatical, les nouveaux prénoms présentent les mêmes schémas que les noms bibliques, notamment la combinaison de racines avec des schèmes morphologiques connus, ou l'usage de mots existants pour construire des prénoms composés. Les préfixes et les suffixes utilisés aujourd'hui pour distinguer les prénoms masculins et féminins sont identiques à ceux de la Bible. Du point de vue sémantique, les prénoms modernes favorisent les mêmes domaines que les noms bibliques. Les principaux champs sémantiques sont les noms théophores, les noms zoologiques et botaniques, les noms inspirés des noms communs liés à la nature, ainsi que les toponymes.

Mots-clés : Noms bibliques, prénoms hébreux modernes, reconstruction culturelle.

Rekonstruktion eines kulturellen Erbes: Das Wiederaufkommen biblischer Personennamen in Israel

Zusammenfassung: Der Artikel untersucht das Phänomen der kulturellen Rekonstruktion am Beispiel der in jüngster Zeit wieder aufgekommenen Verwendung von Personennamen biblischer Herkunft in Israel. Hierfür werden die grammatikalischen und semantischen Eigenschaften biblischer und moderner hebräischer Personennamen vergleichend analysiert. Aus der Studie geht hervor, dass sich eine Vielzahl moderner hebräischer Personennamen auf biblische Bezüge zurückführen lässt.

In grammatikalischer Hinsicht weisen die neuen Namen ähnliche Strukturen wie biblische Namen auf, die sich z. B. durch Komposition und Derivation auszeichnen. Die heute gebräuchlichen geschlechtsspezifischen Prä- und Suffixe stimmen ebenfalls mit denjenigen überein, die bereits in der Bibel vorkommen. In semantischer Hinsicht beziehen sich moderne Personennamen auf dieselben semantischen Domänen wie biblische Personennamen, insbesondere Gottheit (bei sogenannten *theophoren Namen*), Zoologie, Botanik und Natur im allgemeinen Sinne wie auch Toponyme.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Biblische Namen, moderne hebräische Namen, kulturelle Rekonstruktion.

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Reconstructing a cultural heritage: The return of biblical personal names in Israel

MALKA MUCHNIK

1. Introduction

The present article deals with the social and cultural onomastics regarding the use of personal Hebrew names in contemporary Israel. The aim of this study is to learn about trends in name-giving today, in comparison with the past, regarding biblical names. Statistical data are presented and analysed, following Ainiala's (2016) statement that they are of major relevance to the study of popularity of names.

When a considerable amount of new names are coined in a given society, we would expect that ancient names would gradually disappear. However, this is not the case regarding Israel as well as other societies today, where biblical names are gaining ground.

The claim that biblical names are mostly used among religious communities in Israel has been proven regarding the last decade of the twentieth century (Birnboum 2000; Schwarzwald & Birnboum 2001–2002). Notwithstanding, in later research, Landman (2014) shows that some of these names are also found among secular communities. According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2019 only 11.3% of the Israeli population were religious, and 10.1% were ultra-Orthodox, while 43.2% declared that they are secular. The rest declared that they are believers, but not religious.

In spite of the aforementioned, we should take into consideration that the average number of children born in recent years in secular families is 2.1, whereas among religious families it is 4.0, and among ultra-Orthodox families it is no less than 7.1. The growth rate in the ultra-Orthodox Israeli communities is very high, and almost 60% of them are under twenty years, as opposed to 30% in general population (Kahner & Malach 2019). Thus, we may expect a significant influence on the whole Israeli society regarding biblical names.

First names used in Israel include traditional names, mainly biblical, as well as modern names, many of them inspired by nature, and foreign names. The decision on which name to assign to newborns changes at different times depending on specific social and cultural communities or general fashions. Therefore, on the one hand, trends may introduce completely new names, while on the other hand they can return to old and traditional names.

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The most important Jewish cultural heritage goes back to the biblical epoch. The Old Testament includes about 600 personal names. Many of them were adopted in different times by Jews, Christians and Muslims worldwide, and are still used in numerous societies (Demsky 2016–2017; Hanks et al. 2006).

Bar-Asher (2002) asserts that Modern Hebrew has a strong linkage to the classical one and to the Jewish cultural heritage. He adds that there is an affinity between the ancient and the new language regarding the lexicon and the grammar. Moreover, he reminds us that the major part of the vocabulary in any Modern Hebrew text originates in the biblical language, and even most of new coined words are formed using classical roots and patterns. The reason for this is that the revivers of the language were proficient in the Holy Scriptures. It appears that the biblical lexicon is still in use even today, when most of the Israeli population is not familiar with ancient sources.

However, the connection between biblical and Modern Hebrew is not self-understood, and some scholars refuse to accept this assumption. Rabin (1999) contends that there is a disassociation between the classical and the revived language, and the relation between them is only social and psychological. He further states that Israeli people want to believe that they speak in the antique language, because this continuity gives prestige to the national language.

The discrepancy between scholars awoke again when Zuckermann (2008) published a book claiming that the language spoken today neither originates in the Bible nor in any other antique sources, because Hebrew was "clinically dead". He asserts that the new language is actually a hybridization between old Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Polish, German, English, French, Ladino, Arabic, Turkish and Aramaic.

In contrast to Zuckermann (2008), Schwarzwald (2010a) shows that the modern language vocabulary is similar to the biblical, although the meaning of some words has been changed. She states that Modern Hebrew draws the vocabulary from the Bible. In addition to the biblical source, new words are coined in the same patterns as the ancient language, and some foreign words are added. The word formation is based on biblical morphology, combining roots with templates, as well as prefixation, suffixation, nominal inflection and verbs conjugation. She concludes that while the modern phonological and syntactic systems differ from those of the Bible, the morphological system is similar.

According to Rosenthal (2018), biblical language is the substratum of Modern Hebrew. He demonstrates that many biblical words are used today, including a large number of personal names. He states that biblical names used in the past remind us of important figures, such as the male names *Avraham*, *Ya'akov*, *Yosef* and *Moše*, and the female names *Sara*, *Raħel* and *Le'a*. At the beginning of the twentieth century and until the 1950s, the trend was using names of tribes, like *Re'uven*, *Dan* and *Gad*; minor prophets, such as *Mixa* and *Naħum*; and judges and kings as *Ehud*, *Yoram* and *Gid'on*. Names of other figures came into use during the next decades, among them the male names

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Itai, *Uriya*, *Nadav*, *Itamar*, and the female names *No'a*, *Na'omi* and *Tamar*.

No extensive research was conducted to determine the real extent of biblical personal names[1] or common nouns used today as personal names, and this is the goal of the present study. The results may allude to sociocultural developments in Israeli society.

2. Hebrew names in the twentieth century

As shown by Beit Hallahmi (1998), the Zionist movement created a new secular nationalism, identity and culture, rejecting the past culture associated with the diaspora. We could expect, therefore, that names used in modern times will not be related to religion and to the Bible. Nevertheless, ancient Jewish history is joined with Zionism because of its pride and heroism. Indeed, in her research on Israeli names, Landman (2014) found that biblical names of heroes and glorious figures remained in use. In contrast, the 2000 years of diaspora associated with Rabbinical Judaism were denied, and there was no continuity of the culture of this time concerning names giving.

Beit Hallahmi (1998) asserts that only Israeli Orthodox Jews use historical names such as *Avraham*, *Yitsħak*, *Ya'akov* and *Moše*. He remarks that the general onomastic expectation is that of cultural continuity, whereas extreme changes in the choice of names are rare and reflect instability in identity. However, Israeli names introduced in the twentieth century were noticeably different from Jewish traditional names. When comparing the ten most popular names given in the years 1900, 1978 and 1991, he shows a clear decrease of biblical names, particularly among females.

In a sociocultural study regarding Israeli names (Whiteman 1988), three periods were distinguished. Until 1920 Jewish identity was central, and they used names such as *Avraham*, *Mordexai*, *Šlomo*, *Raħel*, *Sara*, *Yehudit*, together with biblical and Mishnaic[2] male names like *Yehoyaxin* and *Itamar*, and female names as *Bat-Zion* and *Avišag*. From the 1920s to the 1940s, they preferred names of biblical heroes, like *Asaf*, *Eitan*, *Ya'ir*. From the 1950s to mid-1970s, new names were used, hinting to youth, beauty, light and nature, e.g. *'Alma* ('young girl'), *Yafit* ('pretty girl'), *Šaħar* ('dawn'), *Hadas* ('myrtle'). From this time onwards, part of the Israeli society preferred Jewish names, whereas others gave precedence to international names.

Yablonka (2018) disagrees with Whiteman's claim and affirms that during all the existence of the State of Israel, the ten first male names are

[1] Biblical names and their meanings were corroborated using Mandelkern's (1977) and Even-Shoshan's (1980) biblical concordances, and Kaddari's biblical dictionary (2006).

[2] The Mishnaic language refers to the Rabbinic literature written from the first to the fourth centuries CE; it comprises the Talmudic, Tannaitic and Amoraic Hebrew.

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biblical, not necessarily hinting to heroes. She found that from 1945 to 1955, the most popular masculine names were *Moše*, *Avraham*, *Yosef*, *Ya'akov*, *David*, *Ħayim*, *Šlomo*, *Mordexai* and *Eliyahu*. All of them are biblical, except for *Ħayim*, a common biblical noun meaning 'life'. The biblical name *Yisra'el* (also a collective autonym of the Jewish people), only appeared in the ninth place when the state with the same name was established. The most popular female names were *Ester*, *Raħel*, *Sara*, *Šošana*, *Ħanna*, *Miryam*, *Rivka*, *Rut*, *Le'a* and *Dalia*. In this case too, most names are used in the Bible, except for *Šošana*, a common biblical noun meaning 'lily', and *Dalia*, a global name. Yablonka (2018) emphasizes the biblical origin of most names at that time, when names like *Uri*, *Nimrod*, *Dror*, *Tamar* and *Avigayil*, were left aside.

In a comparative study on name systems in different languages, Demsky (in Lawson 2016) describes the Hebrew onomasticon. He states that non-traditional biblical names came into fashion in the twentieth century, followed by names linked to the nature. He adds that the current trend in Israel is using non-religious monosyllabic unisex names, reflecting developments in Western societies.

In what follows, I will describe the research I recently conducted, provide new information about the current use of names in Israeli society, explain the changes and trends found, and try to state the linguistic and sociocultural motivation for that.

3. The present study

In this study, I have examined which biblical names are used nowadays. The corpus comprises the 400 most popular names, 200 for baby boys and 200 for baby girls born in 2018, as published by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. It includes all Jewish sectors in Israel. I also used the statistical data regarding the 600 most used names in 2018 for each sex, which shows the names that are disappearing. I compared these names with those given in 2000 and 2008, to see naming tendencies since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

I will present the results of the study, refer to the names' origin, describe their grammatical and semantic characteristics, and explain their use and the sociocultural motivation. Analysing grammatical and semantic aspects of the names found today makes possible the comparison with those found in the Bible. Names' meanings are generally presented in brackets, but the meaning of many biblical names is not known.

4. Origin of Hebrew names used today

The ten most popular names used for baby boys in 2018 were *David*, *Ari'el*, *No'am*, *Lavi*, *Yosef*, *Uri*, *Eitan*, *Dani'el*, *Yehuda* and *Moše*. Eight of them are biblical names, but not all of them remind us of famous figures. The

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other two names, *No'am* ('pleasantness'), and Lavi ('lion'), are common nouns used in the Bible. The name *No'am* is used today for both sexes.

The ten most popular names for baby girls were *Tamar*, *Maya*, *Avigayil*, *No'a*, *Ayala*, *Ya'el*, *Sara*, *Adel*, *Šira* and *Romi*, only five of them from the Bible. *Ayala* ('doe') and *Šira* ('song') are biblical common nouns. *Maya* and *Adel* are foreign names, while *Romi* may be a compound name from the biblical word *rom* and the suffix *-i* ('my altitude / pride'), but could also be a foreign name meaning 'Rome'.

As expected, the first 400 names have different origins, but my goal was to discover the proportion of biblical names and their distribution. Table 1 presents the origin of the most popular names of babies born in 2018, showing the difference between male, female and unisex names. The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics did not publish unisex names in a separated list[3], but they were included in the male and the female lists.

Table 1: The distribution of the most popular Israeli baby names in 2018[4]

	Biblical name	**Biblical word**	**Biblical compound**	**Mishnaic name**	**Medieval word**	**Modern word**	**Global name**
Male	94	73	39	6	1	--	13
Female	40	71	16	3	1	1	48
Unisex	2	34	5	--	--	--	1

We can see that most names originate in the Bible in three different ways: (a) original biblical names (94 for males and 40 for females); (b) biblical words transforming into personal names (73 for males and 71 for females); (c) biblical words combined to create compound personal names (39 for males and 16 for females). Names from other Hebrew sources, Mishnaic and Medieval, are scarcely found, but there is some use of global names (13 for males and 48 for females).

The reason for the great difference found regarding gender is that 93% of personal names in the Bible are male names, while female names only constitute 7% (Schwarzwald 2010b; Rosenthal 2018). This reflects the culture of that time, which was only ascribed to men. Moreover, many women are mentioned in the Bible without their names, such as *ha'iša haħaxama mitekoa'* ('the clever woman from Tekoa') or *ba'alat ha'ov* ('a woman that divineth by a ghost'). In many cases, women are only mentioned according to their relation to male members of the family, such as *Lot*'s, *Manoaħ*'s or *Potifar*'s wife, *Yiftaħ*'s or *Par'o*'s daughter. As female names were relatively scarce in the Bible, Modern Hebrew had to add many names (Muchnik 2015), and as shown in the above table, many of them are global names.

[3] They began doing this in the list published in 2020, which confirms its increasing importance.

[4] The sum of all categories is more than 400 because some names appear in the male and female lists, and were also counted as unisex.

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When looking at the names given during 2018 in the Israeli religious cities, we find that the most popular name for girls was *Sara* and for boys *Aharon*. If we compare the names given in the last ten years, it is evident that there was an increase of biblical and traditional names all over the country. The male names that increased notably from 2000 to 2018 are *Yehuda*, *Refa'el*, *Aharon*, *Šmu'el*, *Šim'on*, *Yišai*, *Binyamin*, *Hillel* and *Nerya*, all of them biblical. Other names, that were not popular in the past decades, reappeared in recent years, like *Avi'el*, *Mal'axi*, *Levy*, *Adar*, *Ašer*, *Elimelex*, *Bo'az*, *Hadar*, *'Ovadya*, and *Yišayahu*. Eight of them are biblical names, while the other two, *Adar*, the name of a month, and *Hadar* ('splendour'/'citrus') are words found in the Bible.

Contrarily to male names, most of female names that increased between 2000 and 2008 are not biblical: *Ayala*, *Avigayil*, *Arbel*, *Ofir*, *Carmel*, *Šai-Li*, *Aviv*, *'Omer*, *Gefen*, *Libi*, *Hallel*, *Halleli*, *Mi'el*, *Ari'el*, *Ana'el*, *'Imanu'el*, and *Tohar*. The only biblical female name in this list is *Avigayil*, while *Ari'el* and *'Imanu'el* are used in the Bible as male names. Most of the other names are biblical but appear there as common nouns and not as personal names. The others are compounds of biblical words that became names. Except for *Ayala*, all other names in this list are used for both sexes, and we will deal with this below. Other popular female names come from foreign languages, like *Adele*, *Aria*, *Mila*, *Emily*, *Liv*, *Lenny*, *Emma*, *Gaya* and *Anne*.

As we can see, global names are much more prominent among female names. In addition to those, in religious places we find names in Yiddish, a Jewish Germanic language used as a vernacular among many Israeli ultra-Orthodox. Also in the Bible, there are some occurrences of foreign names, such as Egyptian and Persian, but they are included here under biblical names.

5. Grammatical aspect of names

Most Hebrew content words are disyllabic and formed by a discontinuous combination of a root, generally with three consonants, added to known templates. Personal names are formed in similar structures, whether mono-, di- or trisyllabic. Hebrew distinguishes between two genders, masculine and feminine, and there are no neutral forms. Almost all parts of speech are marked according to gender, and syntactic rules demand gender agreement. Feminine forms are regularly marked with the suffixes *-a* or *-(V)t* in nouns, adjectives and participles, verbal forms present the prefixes *y-* or *t-* for the future masculine and feminine respectively, while imperative forms use the suffix *-i* for the feminine (Muchnik 2015, 2017; Schwarzwald 2001).

Biblical names used today are mostly disyllabic, e.g. the male names *Adam*, *Matan* and *Yotam* (ultimate stress), or *Bo'az* and *Ohad* (penultimate stress). Among female names, we find *Ester*, *Mixal* and *Pnina* (ultimate stress), or *Dina* and *No'a* (penultimate stress). Modern Hebrew added disyllabic

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names, originated in biblical common nouns, like the male names *Šalom* ('peace'), *Lavi* ('lion'), *Alon* ('oak'), and the female names *'Alma* ('young woman'), *Hadas* ('myrtle') and *Re'ut* ('friendship'). However, most disyllabic new names serve as unisex, as we will see below. In Modern Hebrew, there is a shift in the use of stress, reflecting an Ashkenazic legacy, particularly in anthroponyms and toponyms, and many names with ultimate stress are becoming penultimate (Rosenthal 2018; Schwarzwald 1990).

Only a few monosyllabic personal names appear in the Bible, such as *Dan* and *Dvir* for males and *Rut* for females, which are still in use. Modern Hebrew added many monosyllabic names, e.g. *Dor* ('generation'), *Rom* ('height, altitude'), *Or* ('light'), *'Oz* ('courage'), *Din* ('law'), *Gur* ('puppy'), *Tsur* ('rock'/'God'), *Šai* ('gift'), all biblical common nouns (Landman 2015). Although they present no feminine suffix, many monosyllabic names are used today for both sexes.

We find some trisyllabic biblical names used today, like the male names *Efrayim*, *Naftali*, *Avraham*, and the female names *Yehudit*, *Avišag*, *Yoxeved*. Most trisyllabic male names are compounds, such as *Netan'el*, *Elḥanan*, *Uriya*. Compound names may even be formed by four syllables, which is very rare in Hebrew, e.g. the biblical male names *Yehošua'*, *Elimelex*, *Yehonatan*, and the female names *Avigayil*, *Aḥino'am*, *Eliševa'*. New female names may contain three or four syllables when derived from the masculine.

Anderson (2007) claims that proper names are unspecified as to word class, whereas Van Langendonck (2007) and Van Langendonck & van de Velde (2016) describe personal names as nouns or nominal expressions. They add that this differs depending on language-specific grammatical categories and criteria. Most biblical personal names can be described according to parts of speech, although in some cases they do not present a known morphological pattern. New coined Hebrew names mostly belong to the noun category.

Table 2: Name patterns as parts of speech

	Male Names		**Female Names**		**Unisex Names**	
	Biblical	**Other**	**Biblical**	**Other**	**Biblical**	**Other**
Noun	37	6	29	12	34	--
Verb	6	--	2	--	2	--
Adjective	5	2	3	4	--	--
Compound	39	--	16	--	5	--
Inflected	6	--	3	--	3	--
Derived	--	--	8	--	--	--

Table 2 summarizes the number of names found in my study presenting a specific pattern with regard to different parts of speech. We can see that most names have a nominal form, whether in simple or compound structures. All unisex names, which are actually masculine nouns, are known biblical words, although they were not used there as personal names. While female names in

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the Bible were very limited, new names were added in similar structures and parts of speech as male names. The only new formation is the derivation of male names to become female ones.

Hebrew names may have a verb pattern (Rosenhouse 2002), such as the male biblical names in the past tense form *Natan* ('he gave'), *Asaf*, ('he gathered'), *Hillel* ('he praised'). In the future tense we find *Ytsħak* ('he will laugh'), *Ya'akov* ('he will follow'), *Yosef* ('he will increase'), *Yiftaħ* ('he will open'), *Ya'ir* ('he will illuminate'), *Yig'al* ('he will redeem'). A few names are in the present tense, like the biblical name *Menaħem* ('he consoles'), the Talmudic name *Me'ir* ('he illuminates') and the new name *Koren* ('he shines'). The Hebrew present tense performs as a participle (*benoni*) (Berman 1978), and therefore these forms may also be understood as adjectives or nouns. Only a few female names were found in a verb pattern, all of them biblical words used as names in Modern Hebrew, such as *Tsofiya* ('she is observing') in the present, *Ta'ir* ('she will illuminate') and *Tahel* ('she will radiate') in the future, and *Halleli* ('praise!') in the imperative form.

In addition, we find adjective patterns, like the biblical male names *Barux* ('blessed'), *Eitan* ('strong'), *'Ivri* ('Hebrew'), and *Sagi* ('sublime'), *Adir* ('great'), *Šalev* ('tranquil'), *Na'or* ('enlightened'), biblical words used as names in Modern Hebrew. The name *'Adin* ('gentle') was used in the Bible but is not used nowadays. As for adjectives used as female names, only *Tova* ('good') was found in the present list. Until recent decades, we could also find *Yafa* ('beautiful'), *'Adina* ('gentle'), *Ahuva* ('beloved'), *'Aliza* ('joyful'), *Metuka* ('sweet'), all biblical adjectives not used there as personal names. The semantic difference according to gender is very suggestive, as we will see in the section on semantics.

Handschuh (2019) exemplifies symmetrical systems, where male and female names have an overt marker, as opposed to asymmetrical, where names for one sex are derived from these of the other sex. Only one type of asymmetrical system has been found – deriving female names from male names, and not vice versa. Hebrew is a typical example of this kind of system, because only feminine forms are marked, as they are derived from masculine forms. However, this is changing nowadays, and many unmarked forms are being used for both sexes.

As aforementioned, many compound names are found in the Bible, particularly male theophoric names, containing the words *el* ('God') or *eli* ('my God'), among them *Avi**'el*** ('my father is God'), *Mixa**'el*** ('who is like God'), *Yeħi**'el*** ('long live God'), *'Imanu**'el*** ('God is with us'), ***El**'azar* ('God helped'), ***El**ħanan* ('God pardoned'), ***Eli**melex* ('my God is the king'). A few compound male names coined in Modern Hebrew are theophoric, formed in the same way as biblical names, such as *Bar**'el*** ('son of God'), *Or**'el*** ('light of God'), *Ron**'el*** ('song of God'), ***Eli**'or* ('my God is light'), and the unisex name *Li**'el*** ('I have God').

Many new compound nouns contain the word *li* ('to/for me'). Among male names we find ***Li**'av* ('I have a father') and ***Li**'ad* ('to me for ever').

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Female names found are ***Li**hi* ('she is mine') and *Šai**li*** ('a present for me'). Compound names used for both sexes are ***Li**noy* ('an ornament for me') and ***Li**'or* ('I have light'). The previously popular female names *Or**li*** ('there is a light for me'), ***Li**'at* ('you [fem.] are mine'), ***Li**raz* ('I have a secret'), and the unisex name ***Li**ron* ('I have a song'), are less used nowadays.

A salient process in female Hebrew names coined in the twentieth century was deriving male names by adding the feminine suffix *-a*. Although this process is not productive any longer, as the new trend is using male names as unisex, these female derived names were found in the present list: *Ron**a*** (from *Ron*), *Alon**a*** (from *Alon*), *Tsviy**a*** (from Tsvi), *Noy**a*** (from *Noy*), *Dani'el**a*** (from *Dani'el*), *Mixa'el**a*** (from *Mixa'el*). Other female derived names used in the past are disappearing, for example *Gavri'el**a*** (from *Gavri'el*), *Ari'el**a*** (from *Ari'el*), *Refa'el**a*** (from *Refa'el*).

The compound names ending in *el**a*** are odd, because the basic male names were formed with the noun *el* ('God'). When deriving them, this turns into *ela* ('Goddess'), which is extraneous to the Jewish culture. Moreover, the name *Ela* is only used as a female name today, because it ends in *-a*, while in the Bible it is exclusively used for males. The common noun *ela* ('pistachio') is used in biblical Hebrew, and botanic names are mostly used as unisex names today, but this case is an exception, because of the final *-a*.

Female derived names based on male names are also known in other languages, as in English *Johann**a*** (from *John*), *Patrici**a*** (from *Patrick*), *Robert**a*** (from *Robert*), or in Spanish *Claudi**a*** (from *Claudi**o***), *Alejandr**a*** (from *Alejandr**o***), *Marcel**a*** (from *Marcel**o***). Although this process is not productive any longer, we find it in some names where their basic forms were already used in the Bible only for females, as in *Tamar**a*** (from *Tamar*) and *Ye'el**a*** (from *Ya'el*). The same process is seen in the coined name *Reħela* (from *Raħel*), but it was not used in recent years.

Until a few years ago, we could find other female names derived from male biblical names, like *Moš**it*** (from *Moše*). Some names were derived from biblical female names, which already ended in the feminine suffix *-a*, such as *Sar**it*** (from *Sar**a***), *Dvor**it*** (from *Dvor**a***), *Pnin**it*** (from *Pnin**a***), and from new names, like *Yaf**it*** (from *Yaf**a***), all of them scarcely used today. Another trend was deriving female names from male monosyllabic names, like *Gal**it*** (from *Gal*), *Paz**it*** (from *Paz*), *Or**it*** (from *Or*), *Dan**a*** or *Dan**it*** (from *Dan*), but none was found in the present list. This can be explained by the preference of female names without any grammatical marker, as for male names.

Some biblical male names can be seen as inflected nouns, such as Zimri ('my song'), *'Omr**i*** ('my sheaf'), *Be'er**i*** ('my well'), *Mal'ax**i*** ('my angel'). In the same formation, we find male names in Modern Hebrew, like *Ro'**i*** ('my pastor'), *Mor**i*** ('my teacher, my guide'), *Ošr**i*** ('my happiness'). Some female names could be analysed as inflected forms, such as *Gal**i*** ('my wave') and *Karn**i*** ('my ray'), but in these cases the final *-i* is probably used as a diminutive

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and affective nickname. The inflected name *'Ofri* ('my young deer') is still used as unisex. The names *Eli* ('my God'), *Gili* ('my joy'), *Libi* ('my heart') and *Roni* ('my song') were used until not long for both sexes but are now used exclusively for females. The name *Karmi* ('my vineyard') was also used as unisex but is scarcely found in recent years.

6. Use of names according to gender

Gender-neutral names are (or were) forbidden in different countries, among them Finland, Portugal, Denmark, Germany and Iceland, where the first name must not be used for persons of the other sex. In Denmark, for example, according to the law, names must indicate gender. Therefore, they do not regularly give names ending in *-a* or *-ie* to males, and names ending in *-i* and *-y* to females (Brylla 2009).

The case of classical and Modern Hebrew names is very peculiar regarding gender. Although the language has no neuter gender, and names were supposed to refer either to male or female persons, this is not the regular distinction. Male and female biblical names not always accord with grammatical gender. Some names were used in the Bible for males, but are only used in Modern Hebrew for females, like *Noga*, *Ela*, *Eliya*, *Braxa*, *Ya'ara*, *'Anat,* as well as *Šilat*, from Mishnaic Hebrew, most likely because the final *-a* or *-t* are not perceived as part of the word but as suffixes, which as aforementioned, are regularly feminine.

The Modern Hebrew usage of female names according to grammar, i.e. presenting a feminine suffix, is mentioned in a roman by Avigur-Rotem (2001). She writes about the first years of the State of Israel and tells that most female names were derived from male biblical names, such as *Yosefa*, *Ya'ira*, *Re'uvena*. These names seem odd, because *Yosefa* and *Ya'ira* present the masculine prefix *-y*, and *Re'uvena* includes the noun *ben* ('son').

The same may occur in compound names. For example, *Avital* ('father of dew') was a male name in the Bible, but there is no clear explanation for using it nowadays only for females. The name *Aviya* is used in the Bible and in Modern Hebrew for both sexes. This can be explained as a compound noun, *Avi* + *ya* ('my father is God'), where the final *-a* is not a suffix but part of the word, but the same could be applied for *Eliya*, *Eli* + *ya* ('God is my Lord'). However, while in the Bible *Eliya* is used as an alternative to the prophet's name *Eliyahu*, today it is only used as a female name, and the final *-a* is apparently the reason for this.

The Israeli trend of using unisex names is not new. Avinery (1964) reminds us that in the Bible some men used female names, but he complains about women who use male names. This is what he writes: "Our wives and daughters are conquering what they deserve from grammar contrary to tradition,

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and what they deserve from tradition contrary to grammar" (Avinery 1964: 164, my translation). A witness on this is also found in the literature. In a book by Amos Oz (1994: 20), a teacher says that all her female students are called *Tal*, which was previously a male name, and is used as unisex until this day.

Unisex names are very salient in Israel today, and most of them are common nouns found in the Bible. In fact, these are male names also used for females, but not the other way around (Muchnik 2016, 2017). Only one name ending in *-a*, which conforms to the regular feminine suffix, was found for both sexes, *Simħa* ('joy'), but is rarely used now for females. One masculine verb appears in the future tense, ***Y**ahel* ('he will shine'), in addition to the parallel feminine form, ***T**ahel*, only used for females[5]. A few unisex names present a compound form, such as *Li'ad* ('mine for ever'), or an inflected form, like *Libi* ('my heart'). Only in these cases the grammatical gender is neutral, because the first person is used for both sexes[6].

7. Semantic aspect of names

According to Van Langendonck & van de Velde (2016), names do not necessarily have a clear sense, but they can have connotative meanings, and this is highly culture specific, as are the principles that guide the choice of a name. Contrarily to this claim, Nyström (2016) demonstrates that personal names do have meanings, mainly in words used in a proprial function, creating connotative, associative and emotional meanings.

Regarding the semantic aspect of biblical personal names, we do not generally know their exact meaning. In some cases, the Bible itself offers explanations, but they are not always accurate from the linguistic point of view. We can only understand the meaning of these names when they present a known grammatical pattern. On the contrary, modern names are clear to Hebrew speakers, not only because of the morphological patterns, but also because of their semantic characteristics.

One of the most known semantic fields in biblical nouns is the theophoric domain. Contrarily to Landman's (2016) findings, theophoric biblical names used today are not the most popular ones. Theophoric names are mostly evident in compound names using the words *El*, *Ya* or *Yeho*, all meaning 'God', or *Eli* ('my God'), such as ***El**'azar* ('God helped'), *Netan'**el*** ('given by God'), *Yedid**ya*** ('God's friend'), ***Yeho**natan* ('God gave'), ***Eli**'av* ('my God is the father'). New theophoric names can be found today, like ***El**ro'i* ('God is my pastor') and ***Eli**'or* ('my God is light'). Only one feminine theophoric name

[5] The prefix *y-* is used in the future tense for the third person masculine, while the prefix *t-* is used for the second person masculine and the third person feminine.

[6] The compound biblical names *Dani'el*, *Ari'el* and *'Emanu'el* are also used in Modern Hebrew as unisex, but the reason for this seems to be the parallel use in French.

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was found in the Bible, ***Eliš***eva (‘my God + seven’, a magical number), but a few feminine theophoric names are used in Modern Hebrew, such as *Šir’**el*** (‘song of God’), *Bat**ya*** (‘daughter of God’), *Odel**ya*** (‘I will thank God’). Some unisex names are theophoric as well, like *Li’**el*** (‘I have a God’), *Ari’**el*** (‘God’s lion’), ***Eliya*** (‘God is the Lord’).

Other semantic fields used for personal names in the Bible, such as zoological and botanic domains, are also used today. For instance, in biblical Hebrew we find the male names *Ze’ev* (‘wolf’), *Layiš* (‘lion’), *Dišon* (‘addax’), *Ħamor* (‘donkey’), *Naħaš* (‘snake’), *Ħazir* (‘pig’)[7], and the female names *Raħel* (‘ewe’), *Ya‘el* (‘mountain goat’), *Dvora* (‘bee’). Following this idea, we find male modern names such as *Tsvi* (‘deer’), *Dov* (‘bear’), *Arie* (‘lion’), *Kfir* (‘young lion’), *Re’em* (‘ram’), and *‘Ofer*[8] (‘fawn’), and some female names like *Ayala* or *Ayelet*[9], both meaning ‘doe’, and *Tsviya*[10] (‘gazelle’), all used as common nouns in biblical texts.

The word *Yona* is used in the Bible meaning ‘pigeon’, as well as a male personal name. In Modern Hebrew, it was previously used for both sexes, but it is scarcely used for any of them in the last decade. Two female names were derived from it, *Yona**t*** and *Yon**it***, but they are not used any longer. The name *Dror* (‘sparrow’), a biblical bird, was first adopted in Modern Hebrew as a male personal name, and nowadays as unisex. The derived female names, *Dror**a*** and *Dror**it***, used in the past decades, are not found in recent lists.

Names of trees are used in the Bible as personal names as well, such as the male name *Alon* (‘oak’) and the female name *Tamar* (‘palm’), used until today[11], while among modern names we find for example *Erez* (‘cedar’) and *Oren* (‘pine’) for males, and *Hadas* (‘myrtle’) for females, which are biblical common nouns. Trees’ names also serve as unisex names nowadays, such as *Rotem* (‘furze’), *Šaked* (‘almond’), *Gefen* (‘vine’), as well as other botanic names like *Neta‘* (‘seedling’) and *Nitsan* (‘bud’), all biblical masculine common nouns. The botanic biblical noun previously used in the modern language as a female name, *Smadar* (‘blossom’), ceased to be used, as well as the unisex name *‘Einav* (‘grape’). Other biblical botanic nouns used as personal names were the male names *Tsemaħ* (‘plant’), *Tapuaħ* (‘apple’), *Tiras* (‘maize’), *Šamir* (‘dill’), but are not used today.

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7 Names with a negative connotation, like *Ħamor* (‘donkey’), *Naħaš* (‘snake’) and *Ħazir* (‘pig’), are not used nowadays.

8 The parallel feminine form *‘Ofra* is also used in the Bible and today as the name of a town. While in biblical Hebrew it is used as a personal male name, in Modern Hebrew it is only used for females, most likely because of the final *-a*.

9 The form *Ayala* is in free / absolute state, while *Ayelet* is in bound / constructed state, as in *Ayelet haŠaħar* (‘morning/dawn star’), also used as a female name (Nissan 2013).

10 The personal name *Tsiviya*, used in the Bible for both sexes, is only used for females in Modern Hebrew, in this case too, probably because it ends in *-a*. The name was later changed into *Tsviya*.

11 The name *Rimon* (‘pomegranate’) was used in the Bible as well but is not found any longer.

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Names inspired in botanic nouns were also found in an Australian survey of baby names born in 2018 (Mccrindle 2019). Examples of names of flowers used as female names are *Lily*, *Violet*, *Poppy*, *Jasmine*, *Rose*, *Daisy*. Contrarily, among the first hundred male names, no botanic influence was evident there. Until recent decades, names of flowers were used in Modern Hebrew as female names, for instance *Vered* (‘rose’), *Nurit* (‘buttercup’), *Kalanit* (‘anemone’), *Rakefet* (‘cyclamen’), *Ħavatselet* (‘pancratium’), *Sigalit* (‘violet’) (Muchnik 2017). However, flowers’ names are not found as personal names in the present list, except for *Šošana* (‘lily’), a biblical feminine common noun, and *Yasmin*, a global name, both used for females. No names of flowers were found as male or unisex names. The clear difference between male and female names in the Bible and in Modern Hebrew is also evident in the use of adjectives as personal names, as we have seen in the grammatical section.

Most unisex names used today are taken from the field of nature, such as *Tal* (‘dew’), *Yam* (‘sea’), *Peleg* (‘brook’), *Yuval* (‘stream’), *Šaħar* (‘dawn’), *Ma‘ayan* (‘wellspring’), *Ofek* (‘horizon’), *Gal* (‘wave’), *Aviv* (‘spring’), *Stav* (‘autumn’). In this case too, all of them are biblical masculine common nouns. The name *Pnina* (‘pearl’) was used in the Bible as a female name. Among Modern Hebrew names we also find biblical nous of gemstones, not used there as personal names, like *Sapir* (‘sapphire’) for females, and *Šoham* (‘beryl’) and *‘Inbar* (‘amber’) for both sexes. *Topaz* (‘topaz’) was previously found as a female name but is not used any longer.

Toponyms may turn into anthroponyms, as well as the other way around, as stated by Garagulya et al. (2013), Mullonen (2017), Rantakaulio (2017), Raunamaa (2017) and Tóth (2018). For instance, in Australia (Mccrindle 2019), we find names such as Avalon, Brighton, Arcadia and Adelaide, representing local places, as well as names of overseas locations, like Victoria, Georgia and Eden.

The name *Eden* is used in Modern Hebrew as unisex. Other biblical toponyms used today as unisex anthroponyms are *Yarden*, the Jordan river, *Carmel* and *Arbel*, both names of mountains, the male name *Dan*, a river, and the female names *Moriya*, a mountain, *Kineret*, a lake, and *Eilat*, a city. The name *Gil'ad* was already used in the Bible as the name of a city and a region, as well as a personal male name.

8. Conclusions

The main finding of the present research is that in most cases Modern Hebrew names are based on the Bible, whether using existing names or words or creating new names in similar morphological structures and semantic fields. This contradicts the claims of Rosenhouse (2013) and Landman (2014), that Modern Hebrew names present new linguistic characteristics. As I have shown, although the use of some names is different nowadays, particularly

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regarding gender distribution, their basic grammatical and semantic aspects are very similar to the biblical ones.

In his study on the amount of biblical language been used today, Rosenthal (2018) infers that despite the renewal in Modern Hebrew, we perceive a reappearance of classical sources in different fields. He emphasizes the new popularity of books and lectures dealing with comments and interpretation of the Bible, and the use of biblical stories and vocabulary even in satiric programmes. Nevertheless, he wonders if this development is an illusion, or does it witness to a deep process undergoing in Israeli culture.

The presence and reappearance of a great number of personal names inspired in the Bible, as found in the present study, reinforces the feeling that we are experiencing a reconstruction of cultural heritage, reflected in the language as well as in onomastics. We may conclude that in spite of the new social and cultural trends, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun" (*Ecclesiastes* 1:9).

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