IN SPITE OF PARTITION

JEWS, ARABS, AND THE LIMITS OF SEPARATIST IMAGINATION

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GIL Z. HOCHBERG

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To the memory of Inbal Perlson, a true peace advocate.
(1961–1999)

We must now begin to think in terms of coexistence,
after separation, in spite of partition.
—*Edward Said, "What Can Separation Mean?"*

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PREFACE

"In Spite of Partition," as the title suggests, aims at challenging the dominant ideology of separation that informs the current relationship between Arabs and Jews in Israel/Palestine with devastating ramifications on the relationships between the two people elsewhere in the world. But this book, it should be made clear from the very beginning, is first and foremost a literary study. As such, it offers an analysis of cultural imagination, not a political resolution.

Attending to contemporary literary texts written by and about Jews and Arabs—about, more precisely, the intricate relationship between the figure of the Jew and that of the Arab in modern times, and most notably in the context of Zionism—this book seeks to expose deep cultural and psychological frameworks that bind the Jew and the Arab to each other, despite, or even due to, their current animosity. When I speak of such bonds, or about the inseparability of the Arab and the Jew, I am not speaking about a reality that can be easily or directly mapped onto the current sociopolitical state of affairs. Clearly, Jews and Arabs today, and certainly so in Israel/Palestine, exist as radically separated and hostile communities. This grim reality is undeniable, and it is by no means my intent to suggest otherwise. My goal, however, is not to trace this hostile reality but rather to expose the conditions of repression and active forgetting that bring it about and make it seem pregiven and unchangeable.

Exploring the imaginative territory introduced by literature, and focusing, most explicitly, on the manner by which literature situates the names or signifiers "Arab" and "Jew" in close proximity (either as traces of each other or as integral parts of each other), this book aims to free these signifiers, at least partially, from their current deployment as semantically constrained markers of polarized identities, communities, histories, and cultures. This, while revealing, in turn, the strong attachments that bind

the Arab and Jew to each other despite the persistent political attempts to set them apart.

The focus on literature is itself, in part, a politically informed choice. It is my belief that in today's political atmosphere, the question of the relationship between Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians, cannot be adequately understood by an empirical analysis of the economical, sociological, political, or territorial realities at hand. There is no doubt that this reality is grim. But in simply describing the situation, even mourning over it, critics often end up not only mirroring the great animosities currently found "on the ground," but further perpetuating the image of these ethno/national/religious conflicts as pregiven and unavoidable. The analysis of the empirical realities must, I believe, be accompanied and *complicated* by the study of cultural imagination. The importance of a literary analysis, then, for the study of the current antagonistic relationship between Jews and Arabs lies in the fact that literature, thanks to its relative political autonomy, is both a product of the present, reflecting the dominant political agendas, and a means through which we may be able to critically revisit such agendas. In the words of the Palestine novelist Sahar Khalifah: "Literature [helps us to] transcend reality into another reality" (Nazareth 1980, 81).

To put it differently, it is precisely because, to quote Edward Said (199b), "an apparently deep and unquestioning desire on the part of most Israelis and Palestinians today seems to be to exist in radical separation" that we must, now more than ever, closely attend to literature and other cultural texts where we find a significantly more complex psychological and political reality: one that, while well informed by the current animosity between Jews and Arabs, nevertheless challenges the repeated attempts to set apart Arab from Jew, Hebrew from Arabic, Israeli from Palestinian, and the "Jewish question" from the "question of Palestine."

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INTRODUCTION

Between "Jew" and "Arab"

Probing the Borders of the Orient

> There was a time
> when I'd have said:
> I won't defile myself
> with this contemptible Orient,
> I'll relegate my ancestral
> home to oblivion [. . .]
> —Amira Hess, *Keys to the Garden*[1]

In a short story entitled "Ummi fi Shughl" [Arabic for "My Mother Is at Work"], the Israeli writer Orly Castel-Bloom follows her protagonist—a self-identified paranoiac—as she leaves her apartment to sit down on a nearby bench and "reflect."[2] The protagonist's stream of thoughts is suddenly interrupted when she feels a sharp sting on her leg. Terrified, she jumps and looks under the bench, expecting to find a spider or a scorpion. Instead, she discovers an old Arab woman who claims to be her mother. The two women quarrel for a while, the protagonist insisting that this is impossible ("my mother would never lie underneath a bench!"), the old woman repeating her claim: "I am your mother." Finally the protagonist turns to the old woman and asks: "so who are you really, some kind of a ghost?" At this point the dialogue shifts from Hebrew to Arabic, the old woman persistently claiming that she is the narrator's mother, and if not her mother then surely her sister, while the protagonist adamantly denies any such familial affiliations:

—*Ana Ummik.* [I am your mother.]
—*Ummi? Ummi mush huma, ummi fi shurl.* [My mother? My mom isn't here, my mom is at work.]
—*Ana ukhtik.* [I'm your sister.]
—*Inti mush ukhti, ukhti fi shughel.* [You are not my sister, my sister is at work.]
—*Ana ummik.* [I am your mother.]
—*Inti mush ummi, ummi fi shughel.* [You are not my mother, my mom is at work.][3]

This dialogue, we are told, is repeated about twenty times, after which the old woman asks the protagonist to please take her home with her. When the latter refuses, the old woman grumpily mutters "Yasater yarab" [so help you God] and slides back down under the bench.

Who or what is this ghostly figure—this old Arab woman who emerges from beneath the surface, proclaiming familial ties, between the Israeli-Jewish protagonist and herself? Who is she, who switches their language of conversation from Hebrew and Arabic? Who is she, if not the embodiment of a haunting repressed memory: the memory of the proximity, indeed familial ties, between Hebrew and Arabic, the Arab and the Jew? Castel-Bloom's absurd representation, itself typical of her Kafkaesque poetic style, unleashes this repressed memory (which could be called the repressed memory of the Semite) by introducing it as an unexpected threat: a fleeting memory that might flash up at any given moment and "bite." It is a memory that emerges from underneath momentarily, only to be immediately pushed back under the bench, sealed in the dark abyss of national amnesia.

This book attends to this national amnesia and its haunting ghosts, namely, the Arab and the Jew, or more precisely, the inseparability of the two. We are all well familiar with the image of the Arab and Jew as two polarized identities. Often and regularly we hear about the two peoples' "centuries-old" fight over the same strip of land or about their long-lasting "sibling rivalry" dating back to the "legacy of their common father Abraham" (Charney, 1988). But little is usually said about the historical, political, cultural, and, above all, libidinal ties that bind these identities together, even today, under the horrid circumstances in Israel/Palestine. This book seeks to draw attention to these "forgotten" ties. It argues that "Jew" and "Arab," rather than representing two independent identities, are in fact inevitably attached, each necessarily configured through or in relation to the other. They are, to borrow Derrida's term, always already "traces" of the other when only one of them is addressed.

Historically speaking, my discussion is limited to modern times. I follow this "logic of traces" as formed under European colonialism and at a time when the so-called Jewish question was crystallized in Europe itself, to the more recent reality in Israel/Palestine, where we find that "Jew" is always prefigured in relation to "Arab" (Muslim, Palestinian, the Orient), just as "Arab" emerges, for better or worse, in relation to "Jew" (Israeli, Zionism). Exploring the meaning of this inseparability against the current polarization of the Arab/Palestinian and Jewish/Israeli societies, I suggest that the radical separation of the two people is itself attainable only on the basis of repression and active forgetting. While such forgetting has long been perpetuated by the West for the sake of promoting its own imperial, colonial, and economic benefits, it is today further promoted and secured by an ethno-national separatist politics of memory as manifested most evidently in the case of Zionism, and arguably also by the leading trends of Palestinian nationalism.[4]

My focus, as stated earlier, is literature. If there are plentiful publications on the relationship between Jews and Arabs, or on the various aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these are predominantly historical, political, or social. Little attention has been directed so far to literary representation and to the manner by which it not only *reflects* historical and sociopolitical realities but further *competes* with them, introducing alternative actualities, which might find expression only at the level of cultural imagination, but which, as such, are nevertheless part of our times.[5] My interest, then, lies in exploring the manner by which Jews and Arabs imagine and write about the relationships between Jews and Arabs, or about the relationship between the signifiers "Arab" and "Jew" (as well as "Palestinian" and "Israeli") in modern times, and most notably in the context of Zionism.[6]

This is also the place to note that theology or religion, while certainly playing a growingly significant role in the construction of today's political reality in the Middle East, is not the focus of this study. Indeed, the literary texts I engage, whether written by Jews, Muslims, or Christians, all locate the question of the relationship between "Arab" and "Jew" within a cultural space that is primarily *secular*. Religion in this context functions as a component of one's cultural identity (along with, and in relation to, other components such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, and linguistic affiliation), but it does not amount to a privileged or a defined status, nor does it represent a divine order or a transcendental ideology. In other words, if the cultural space examined in this book is clearly secular, "secularism" itself must be understood *not* as the rejection of anything traditional or religious, but as a critical force through which familiar categories or names ("Jew,"

"Arab," "Muslim," "Israeli," etc.), used for mapping social belongings and classifying collective identities along national, ethnic, or religious borders, are liberated from their static positions and relocated in a cultural space articulated *between* and *across* such borders.[7]

The bulk of this book, then, is dedicated to close readings of literary texts, for which this introductory chapter provides a shared political, cultural, and historical context. This context includes, most directly, the legacy of partition as associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—a legacy that assumes and promotes a radical separation between the Israeli Jewish and Arab Palestinian communities—but it further expands to include the broader theoretical and historical debates concerning the possibility or impossibility of fully separating the Arab from the Jew, as reflected in the intertwined Eurocentric discourses of orientalism, anti-Semitism, imperialism, and colonialism.

A Stubborn History of Intimacy

> [Both] Zionism and Palestinian nationalism have not amounted to the philosophical problem of the Other, of learning how to live with, as opposed to despite, the Other . . . [the Other] who is always part of us, not a remote alien.
>
> —Edward Said, "What Can Separation Mean?"

The idea of partition has accompanied the Zionist-Palestinian conflict since its very early stages. It was first introduced by the British colonizers of Palestine in 1937 as Britain was losing its power in the colony, and it later gained the support of the United Nations in 1947.[8] Finally, the Oslo peace negotiations revived this political legacy in promoting the "two-state solution": the idea that the answer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lies in a territorial division that would allow the establishment of two separate neighboring nations, Israel as a Jewish state for the Jews and Palestine as an Arab state for the Arabs. But if this legacy of partition points at the continual attempts to separate Jews and Arabs, it also reveals the persistent conditions of *inseparability* that turn such attempts repeatedly into failures. Thus, despite the elaborate system of checkpoints, the numerous fences, walls, and roads, all set to police human traffic and separate Arabs from Jews, and regardless of how much most Israelis and Palestinians may wish to exist apart, the

demographic, territorial, and economic reality in Israel/Palestine is such that the two people are forced to share an inextricably linked life.

That this "linked life," which has so far been governed by extreme inequality, reflecting the power dynamics between Israelis as occupiers and Palestinians as occupied, upholds *alternative*, latent possibilities for envisioning social emancipation achieved across national and ethnic differences, is exemplified in Sahar Khalifah's gripping novels *Al-Tsubbar* (1976) and *'Abbad al-Shams* (1980).[9] Both texts focus on the movement of young Palestinians from traditional working positions as farmers and peasants to new positions as daily workers in Israeli factories, following the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. While Khalifah surely alludes to the harmful effects of this transition, revealing the manner by which it reinforces the fragmentation of the occupied Palestinian society, she also points at the liberating effects this transition carries in terms of breaking "the privileged class's patriarchal control over [the land]" (Yazili 1996, 88–89). Indeed, by centering her narratives on the question of work "in the inside" (i.e., is it a form of national betrayal? a sheer act of individual opportunism? or, perhaps an act of transgression and defiance?), Khalifah draws attention to the limits of the Palestinian national narrative, which casts the conflict in terms of Israelis versus Palestinians. This representation, her novels show, fails to account for other, not less prominent, social injustices, which take place across national differences and territorial borders. Most specifically, Khalifah shows how, by rendering the question of the land in exclusively territorial *national* terms (does the land belong to Palestinians or Israelis?), the national discourse draws attention away from the oppressive and most concrete labor and property divisions between the rich and the poor, as well as between women and men—between, that is, those who *own* the land and those who *work* the land.[10]

To be sure, Khalifah's novels certainly emphasize the importance of the Palestinian fight against the oppressive Israeli occupation, but they also stress the fact that a meaningful social fight against injustice and oppression must take place *against*, rather than in compliance with, existing separatist ideologies. Both novels, then, replace simplistic notions of national liberation with extensive contemplations on the very meaning of "liberation," entertaining, among the rest, the possibility of an Arab-Jewish cross-national collaborative fight against the military occupation (*'Abbad al-Shams*) as well as a shared Arab-Jewish proletarian fight against unjust working conditions (*Al-Tsubbar*).[11] Furthermore, Khalifah's daring exploration of the revolutionary potential imbedded in the growing daily interactions between Jews and Arabs, oppressive as they currently are, takes place not

only thematically but also linguistically. As other critics have noted, Khalifah's language is a pioneering mix of classical Arabic and Palestinian vernacular, which is further enriched by her extensive use of Hebrew words and expressions (Muhammad al-Mashayik, Barbara Harlow, Muhammad Siddiq). But if her use of Hebrew has been described as a "semiotic guerilla warfare" (Harlow) and explained in terms of the need of the occupied to "know all sides of the enemy" in order to use this vital information "whenever the need arises" (al-Mashayik), such combative accounts, I suggest, overlook one of the most distinct characteristics of Khalifah's bilingual expression: the fact that, for the most part, she limits her use of Hebrew to words that sound very much like their Arabic counterparts. In so doing, Khalifah accentuates the phonetic similarity between Hebrew and Arabic, calling attention to the "familial" (Semitic) relationship of the two languages, and further implying, not unlike Orly Castel-Bloom, that the two Semitic people might in fact be closer to each other than they realize, or wish to realize.

I take this brief detour through Khalifah's writings not to suggest that the growing economic relationships between Israel and the Palestinians, or the new territorial proximity between Jews and Arabs (especially since 1967), in themselves carry a promise of social or political transformation. For anybody familiar with the devastating living conditions of Palestinians in the occupied territories, it is evident that this is far from being the case. But the point I wish to emphasize, and which I believe Khalifah's novels powerfully illustrate, is that these relatively new territorial and economic realities, while so far working in the service of separatist ideologies, nevertheless introduce a level of social and linguistic familiarity that furnishes our cultural imagination with "new-old ways," to borrow David Shasha's term, for envisioning the relationship between the two peoples in terms of proximity and affiliation. Above all, these new conditions intensify the so-called drama of identification between the Jew and the Arab, as new libidinal attachments join older narratives of familial intimacy, bringing Jews and Arabs closer together despite, or even due to, their current animosity. Such attachments follow the general principle of differentiation by which, to borrow Judith Butler's words, "that from which I am differentiated returns to me at the heart of what I am" (2000, 35), and are further contextualized by Said, who observes, in one of his earliest essays on the question of Palestine, that the more the two people seek to separate, the more attached they become:

> Neither people can develop without the other [already] there, harassing, taunting, fighting; no Arab today has an identity that can be unconscious of the Jew, that can rule out the Jew as a

> *psychic factor* in the Arab identity; conversely, I think, no Jew can ignore the Arab in general, nor can he immerse himself in his ancient tradition and lose the Palestinian Arab and what Zionism has done to him. The more intense the modern struggles for [separate] identity, the more attention is paid by the Arab or the Jew to his chosen opponent, or partner. *Each is the other.* (1974, 1, my emphasis)

It is this "psychic factor" that interests me the most: the drama of identification that binds the Jew (or the Israeli) and the Arab (or Palestinian) together, making a clear differentiation between them impossible: "Each is the other."

The immediate historical and political context against which we must understand this drama of identification centers on the ironic "meeting" that took place in Palestine between modern Jewish and Arab histories or between two semi-independent narratives of oppression: that of anti-Semitism and that of modern colonialism. Thus, if for Jews the establishment of Israel was, to a certain degree, a "response" to centuries of anti-Semitic persecution, primarily in Europe, for the Palestinians it was a manifestation of yet another European-modeled colonial occupation; in fact, the harshest Palestine has ever known. Acknowledging the significance of this historical intersection, the Palestinian scholar and politician Azmi Bishara notes that "the question of Palestine [which is first and foremost a colonial question] is fully intertwined with the Jewish question. This might not be fair or just but it is true . . . any attempt to find a political solution in the Middle East must therefore attend to the history [of modern Palestine] as a *shared* history of these two people" (1995, 54).

Moreover, the shared history of the two people, reflected in the historical link between the Jewish question and the question of Palestine, or between the history of anti-Semitism and that of colonialism, does not begin with the actual encounter of Jews and Arabs in twentieth-century Palestine. Rather, it finds its origins in much earlier political and theological discursive practices by which Europe, or the Christian West, has differentiated itself from, and identified itself against, *both* Jews and Arabs.[12] Where we best witness this process of "doubled othering" is, without doubt, in the discursive practices Said has called "Orientalism." Indeed, it is through its orientalist imagination, I suggest, that the Christian West has indirectly, yet systematically, brought the Jew and the Arab, as well as the "Jewish question" and the question of the Orient (of which the question of Palestine is a clear example) together, by paradoxically pulling them apart. To paraphrase Jonathan Boyarin (1992, 77), if the Orient [Arab or Muslim] represented Europe's "Other from without," it is the Jew who for Europe came to represented the "Other/Oriental within." Most important to note in this context

is the fact not only that Jews and Arabs were both othered by Europe, but that their othering was directly linked to their *shared,* albeit different, status as Orientals. Indeed, the so-called Jewish question was itself articulated in terms borrowed directly from the orientalist discourse, the same discourse through which Europe justified its colonial domination over the Orient.[13] The actual question behind the "Jewish question," particularly in its German manifestation, was, after all: do the Jews represent a racial/ethnic group, and as such are they part of the Oriental people (and hence essentially Other to Europe) or, are Jews a religious group and as such capable of assimilating into European culture?[14] Moreover, if the Jewish question—as manifested in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe—was articulated through orientalist and, at times, even explicit colonialist terms, the orientalist discourse of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, directed primarily toward Arabs/Muslims, has itself borrowed directly from the European anti-Semitic discourse. As noted by Said: "The transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish to Arab target was made smoothly since the figure was essentially the same" (1979a, 286).[15]

If, then, the Israeli-Jew and the Palestinian are today locked in a circuit of identification in which "each is the other," such accounts of orientalism expand this claim to the broader historical context of modern Europe, where the figure of the Arab and that of the Jew appear to be "essentially the same." The continual impact of this intimate relationship between orientalism and the Jewish question or between anti-Arab polemics and modern anti-Semitism (both discourses, one must note, conflate the political and the theological as well as the ethnic/racial and the national) on the present relationships between Jews and Arabs, particularly in Israel/Palestine, cannot be overestimated. Indeed, what we notice as we follow the trajectory of orientalism from eighteenth- to twentieth-century Europe to contemporary Israel is that the very paradoxical effect of Orientalism, as a discourse that distinguishes between Arabs and Jews while simultaneously collapsing the differences between them, finds its most extreme and perplexing manifestations. Thus, as I attempt to show throughout the book, while the Zionist orientalist imagination clearly seeks to set apart the Jew and the Arab, and to do so by mobilizing Eurocentric orientalist binaries (West/East, Europe/Orient, civil/barbarian, modernity/tradition, etc.), these very binaries repeatedly crumble. This is due primarily to the ambivalent and unstable position of the Jew within the orientalist imagination, a position that reveals the stubborn historical intimacy between the two Semitic figures: the Arab and the Jew.

Orientalism, Judaism, Zionism *or* The Arab, the Jew, and the "New Jew"

> Despite their eager adoption of modern Western culture, the Jews' oriental provenance was never quite forgotten, or forgiven.
> —Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions*

> Zionism['s] persistence in oppressing the Palestinians is precisely its persistence in suppressing the Jew within.
> —Joseph Massad, "The Persistence of the Palestinian Question"

Originating in Europe of the late nineteenth century, it is well known that Zionism was greatly influenced by European modern nationalism and no less by Europe's patronizing and colonial relationship toward the Orient. Inspired by Said's *Orientalism* (1978), several critics have discussed the orientalist nature of Zionism as a settlement ideology, and the orientalist imagination that continues to inform Israel's national and ethnic/racial politics to this day.[16] The most elaborate analysis of this kind has been presented by Ella Shohat, who has convincingly argued that the issue of inter-Jewish racism, manifested in the discriminatory attitudes toward Mizrachim (Arab and African Jews), must be understood as part of Israel's broader antagonistic relationship with the Orient and the Arab world in general. Being an ideology of European provenance, Zionism, she notes, created a national reality modeled on the false idea that "Arabness and Jewishness are mutually exclusive" (1999a, 11) and has further falsely equated the Jew with Europe and the West, while identifying the Arab as the sole representative of the East.

Others have elaborated this argument, discussing Zionist orientalism not only in terms of its European heritage, but also in terms of sublimation and denial. Thus, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin (1993, 24) has made the connection between the Zionist notion of "the negation of exile" (*Shlilat ha-galut*) and Israel's discriminatory policy toward Palestinians and Arab Jews. At the heart of both, he suggests, lies "forgetting": if the negation of exile has shaped the Israeli-Jewish national collective identity by presenting the project of nationalizing Judaism in terms of a "return to history" and a "renewal of the authentic Jewish territorial existence," it has necessarily promoted the forgetting of Jewish history, presenting two thousand years of Jewish existence in exile as a mere "break" or "interruption" of an otherwise continual Jewish national consciousness. Furthermore, this process of

forgetting Jewish history is directly tied to the erasure of Arab-Palestinian history, for within the Zionist narrative, the "place of return" (i.e., Palestine) is itself imagined as an empty land "in exile from its people."[17] As for Arab Jews, if they wish to be integrated into the new Jewish national collectivity, they are required to first rid themselves of their Oriental part, that is, their "Arabness." Interestingly enough, the question concerning the ability of an Arab Jew to become a full member of the new Zionist national collective seems to echo very similar questions directed two centuries ago toward Europe's Jewish population. "In both cases," as Raz-Krakotzkin concludes, "the presupposition shared by those heading the debates, is the need to change and 'repair' the Jew (whether, as in the European context, it was the Ashkenazi Jew, or, as in the Israeli context, the Mizrachi Jew)" (1994, 125, n. 25).

What this ironic repetition of history teaches us, I believe, is that we cannot isolate the question of Zionism's orientalism from the broader question concerning the dubious status of the Jew within the European orientalist imagination. In other words, what might initially seem to be two separate if not opposed paths of research—one focusing on Jews as perpetrators of orientalism (i.e., on the orientalist nature of the Israeli-Zionist society), the other focusing on Jews as victims of Eurocentric and (Christian) orientalist discourse—must in fact be regarded as complementary investigations.[18] Indeed, I believe that it is only by bringing the two lines of research together that we can fully explore the paradoxes involved in the transformation of Jews from targets to perpetuators of orientalism and understand this process as part of the (failed) Zionist attempt to create a "new Jew": one who is "[finally] European and no [longer] an oriental" (Raz-Krakotzkin 2005, 166).

One of the first attempts to directly follow the trajectory of orientalism from eighteenth-century Europe to contemporary Israel is offered by Aziza Khazzoom in her informative essay, "The Great Chain of Orientalism" (2003). Basing her argument on sociological studies of internalized stigma and coping mechanisms, Khazzoom suggests that the current orientalization of Mizrachi Jews and Palestinians by Ashkenazi Jews in Israel must be accounted for, among the rest, in terms of "stigma-managed strategies" (484). According to Khazzoom, Ashkenazi Jews sought to overcome their past association with the Orient (as "Jews") by radically othering Mizrachi Jews: "by marginalizing Mizrachim [and associating them with the Orient], Ashkenazim were producing themselves and their state as western" (486).[19] This, however, is only one of many such projections and displacements of orientalism among Jews:

> The two past centuries of Diaspora Jewish history in Europe and the Middle East can be conceptualized as a series of orientalizations. Through this history, Jews came to view Jewish tradition as oriental, developed intense commitments to westernization as a form of self-improvement, and became threatened by any elements of Jewish culture that represented [their own] Oriental past. (482)

Previous accounts, attending to the role of the Jew within European eighteenth- to twentieth-century orientalist imagination, have similarly noted that western European Jews have often attempted to overcome their exclusion (as Orientals) from Christian Europe by identifying themselves as Westerners and differentiating themselves from their "East-European brothers."[20] Thus, Steven Aschheim (1982) has argued that the anxiety produced by the demands placed on German Jews to "prove" their ability to assimilate in modern Europe by shedding their Oriental "backward" traditions and communal infrastructures led to an explicitly orientalist spilt in the Jewish European community between East and West: "The idea of the *Ostjude* ('eastern Jew') was developed," he notes, "only over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, when western European, particularly German Jews, fearing their rights would be compromised, began to distinguish themselves from the East-European Jews, whom they associated with backward Asiatic traditions, superstitious belief, ugliness and 'social pathology' " (3, 6). The eastern Jew, then, was constructed as the German Jew's antithesis: his "mirror opposite" (5), through which the western Jew sought to secure his new self-image as modern, enlightened, and European. In a similar vein, Ismar Shorsch (1989) has shown that the identification of nineteenth-century secular-liberal German Jewry with medieval Muslim Spain was less about embracing the orientalist essence of Judaism than about avoiding the stigma of being identified with the *Ostjuden* and Yiddish, which the Jewish German intellectuals associated with the "abysmal state of Jewish culture" (54). German Jewry turned to the Sephardic mystique, Schorsch notes, not only to avoid "its East-European origins" (47), but also to "recover classical heritage in common with German culture . . . paradoxically, the contact with Islam had made Judaism part of the Western world" (66).[21]

If the casting out of the eastern European Jew was primarily enacted by German Jews, we find a parallel "Jew on Jew" process of orientalization taking place between the French Jewish community and the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East. Following the French model of colonial education, French Jews established the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU) school

system in an explicit attempt to "uplift," westernize, and modernize their eastern Jewish brothers.[22] Attempting to rid themselves of their stigma as oriental people (and hence essentially foreign to Europe), West European Jews, then, repositioned themselves in opposition to eastern Jews, onto whom they sought to displace their stigma as orientals. And yet, as Khazzoom observes (2003, 493), it may very well be "only when western Jews orientalized other Jewish communities in the mid to late 1800s that the characterization of their *own pasts* as Orientals crystallized." (493). In other words, the very attempt to overcome the stigma of the Jew as an oriental by displacing this stigma onto other particular groups of Jews ended up paradoxically reinforcing the oriental image of the Jew *as such*. Thus, both Jews and non-Jews in Europe seemed to have shared the opinion that Jews, as a whole, require a radical transformation in order to become valid members of the Western world. To put it bluntly, if Jews were to become Europeans in the full sense, they would have to become "less Jewish."

A very similar logic feeds the Zionist attempt to create a new national Jewish collectivity. Dismayed by the prospect of assimilation and integration into Europe, the first Zionists sought to find an alternative solution to the "Jewish question." Inspired by other European national movements, early Zionism replaced the Jewish Enlightenment's (*Haskalah*) integrationist project with a settlement ideology, which can be summed up as follows: if Jews cannot become European in Europe, they might as well become European in their own country, whether this is to be established in Latin America, East Africa, or the Middle East.[23] In other words, the Zionist national-colonial project, much like the preceding *Haskalah* plan of integration, was essentially about the Westernization of Jews: a final attempt "to bid for acceptance as equals in the European family" (Khazzoom 2003, 499). If, then, as Shohat (1997) justifiably argues, the Zionist construction of the false differential between "Jewishness" and "Arabness" has come at the expense of a complete erasure of the historical experience of the Arab Jew, we can now see that this erasure extends beyond the experience of the Arab Jew to include Jewish history more generally. Indeed, Zionism not only targeted and excluded the particular history of the Arab Jew; more accurately, it denied the entire history of the Jew *as* Arab (Oriental, Semite, eastern, Asian, half-Asian, etc.).[24] That is, for the Zionist "new Jew" to appear, both Jew and Arab, or, better yet, the configuration of Jew as Arab, had to disappear.

When Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, assures Europe that his government will "prevent Israelis from becoming Arab-like" (1966), and when the prominent Israeli writer Haim Hazaz echoes this idea by noting that Israelis "cannot afford to become Oriental people" (quoted

in Rejwan 1967, 100), they are surely expressing internalized European orientalist racist views. But the phobia captured in these expressions cannot be fully accounted for without taking into account the history of orientalism and the location of the Jew within it. Thus, as many critics have previously noted, if the Ashkenazi political and cultural elites in Israel considered Mizrachi Jews and Palestinians to be part of a "barbaric orient" that must be contained and blocked by Israel,[25] then I would insist that the fear of the Orient, as captured in the various racist expressions of the Zionist founders, is not only about "influence." More accurately, it is a fear of identification: the fear of being identified *once again* with the Orient, the Arab, Asia. Indeed, if Ben Gurion and others need to assure their followers and European supporters that Israelis will not be "Arab-like," it is not only because Israel is surrounded by an Arab population, or because half of the Jewish immigration to Israel is from Arab lands, but also because the racial or ethnic proximity between "Jew" and "Arab" itself continues to haunt the new national reality created in Palestine, a reality based on the false division between the Arab (or the Orient) and the Jew. If, then, in eighteenth-century Europe this proximity was articulated in the question: Are the Jews in essence oriental people, or can they be successfully Westernized? with the establishment of the Jewish state, this question takes a new, yet related form: Can the Jews who have "returned" to their ancient land in the East finally *become* European, or will their past status as Oriental people be exposed: will they remain, cease to be, or become (again) "Arablike"?

This question concerning the relationship between the Jewish settler and the local Arab (will the Jew become "Arab-like"?) is not only of strategic, political, or diplomatic gravity. Captured in this question is a fundamental tension embedded within the Zionist ideology. As a modern nationalist movement originating in Europe, Zionism aspires to establish a modern, secular, Western nation, based on the European model of Enlightenment. As a Jewish movement of reform, it aims at fighting assimilation by recovering an authentic form of Judaism. But how can the recovered "authentic" Jew remain Jewish; what is it that would be Jewish about him (or her), if he is to (finally) become European? Another way to put this is: how could the Jewish modern nation be Jewish *and* modern; Jewish *and* Western, when Judaism itself is associated with backward traditions, non-Western looks and behavior, and, most importantly, the looming connection to the Orient? Indeed, it is this Jewish aspect that Zionism seeks to overcome in order to create a national Jewish society and a new, regenerated Jew. In the words of the renowned writer M. J. Berdichevski, this transformed Jew was to become among "the last Jews and the first members of the new na-

tion" (1922, pt. 2, 20). The British novelist and critic Arthur Koestler (1948) further notes that the "Jew born in Palestine is better looking than both European and Oriental Jews [for he is] taller, robustly built, mostly blond or light brown haired, frequently snub-nosed and blue-eyed . . . [in short] he looks entirely un-Jewish."[26] The task of creating a new, "less Jewish" Jew, one must note, is further complicated by the fact that the very *basis* for this Jewish recovery is itself to be found in the Orient. As Yael Zerubavel (1995), Raz-Krakotzkin (1998), and others demonstrate, the Zionist project holds an apparent paradoxical relationship to the East, as it aims to rid Jews of their historical connection with the Orient while simultaneously relocating their true and original home in the East.[27]

In light of such tensions immanent in the Zionist ideology of "return" and "regeneration," we can better understand not only the racism, but also the irony and desperation found in Ben Gurion's statement: "Israelis will not become Arab-like." This statement, like many others delivered by Israeli officials throughout the last fifty-five years, not only expresses Israeli antagonism toward anything Arab; it also attests to a terror at the very heart of the Israeli nation's enterprise, haunting it from within. It is a terror associated with the repressed memory of Zionism's originary and most inescapable ghost: "the Jew." The Jew with the long history as an other to Europe: a Semite, Asian, half-Asian, Oriental, Arab. It is this historical figure, this configuration of identity, that situates the Jew *next to* the Arab or *as* an Arab, that truly threatens to collapse the Zionist attempt at creating and sustaining a new, Western, modern, and "Jewish" nation. In saying this, I am not suggesting that "the threat of Judaism" is bigger or more politically invasive to Zionist-Israel than the threat presented by "the Arab" ("the enemy," the Palestinian). What I do suggest here is that the two "threats"—that presented by the "Jew" and that presented by the "Arab"—are in fact one. Indeed, it is only by establishing a connection between these threats that we can fully uncover the internal phobia operating within the Israeli society still today: one that rejects anything "Arab," but also anything "too Jewish." Nothing can reaffirm this argument better than the words of the liberal journalist and politician Tommy Lapid, a secular "new Jew" who self-identifies as "an old-fashioned Western liberal." He warns Israelis against the spread of Levantinism, described in his words as "a thin coating of European lacquer spread over Oriental decadence," itself equally associated with the growth of "Arab influences" and the "appeal of Jewish orthodox traditions" (see Klein 1999, 14). Here, once again, we find that the two figures, that of the Arab and that of the Jew, while apparently separated, continue to be "essentially the same."

This proximity between "Jew" and "Arab," one must add, not only threatens Zionist aspirations, but it also challenges notions of Arab or Muslim separatist national aspirations manifested in the "Palestinian desire to exist in a utopian [Arab/Muslim] land without an obtrusive Jewish-Israeli presence" (Said 1999b). Indeed, one of the most pressing questions Palestinians have faced since 1948 concerns the role of the Jew within the newly formed Palestinian national identity. This question, which becomes particularly potent after 1967, can be articulated as follows: How can one assert a distinct Palestinian identity and fight decades of oppression while also acknowledging the inevitable centrality of the oppressor, the Israeli-Jew, along with his own history of oppression, at the very heart of this recovered identity? That this question is not only a matter of political pragmatism, but rather a question of great ethical importance is made clear in the writings of several key Palestinian writers, such as Rashid Husain, Fawaz Turki, Imil Habibi, Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish.[28]

If I emphasize the proximity between the Arab and the Jew ("each is the other"), it is by no means in order to draw a simplistic parallelism between these two figures. Clearly, neither can nor should be understood only through reference to the other. This focus must be understood within the specific context against which it is set, that is, the prevailing image of Jews and Arabs as opposed or polar political identities, separated by a current national conflict, which is equally portrayed in terms of a colonial division between West and East and further linked to a theological enmity between Jews and Muslims dating back to the biblical rivalries between Isaac and Ishmael or Jacob and Esau. My intent is to challenge the determinism of such common representations by tracing the relationship between Jews and Arabs along "a different and more creative logic of differences," to paraphrase Said (1985, 40). Such "creative logic" acknowledges differences but similarly recognizes the fact that "differences" as such are never simply that: they are never pregiven or "natural" but rather are an outcome of a preceding process of differentiation, itself created in the service of particular political interests and specific "ideologies of difference," to mobilize Said's term.

A Different Logic of Differences

> Literature should show life as it *should be* not just as it is. [It] should transcend reality into another reality.
>
> —Sahar Khalifah, "Interview with Peter Nazareth"[29]

It is in an attempt to capture the preceding and "forgotten" process of differentiation responsible for sustaining the current polarity between Jews and Arabs that I turn to literature. For literature, thanks to its critical distance from reality and its reliance on metaphoric language, may help us "see," if only momentarily, the intricate process of identification and differentiation that precedes and assures the becoming of the self in relation to otherness. In retracing this process of self-formation, literature, maybe better than any other discursive practice, is capable of supplementing the economy of identity (I versus You, Arab versus Jew) with an economy of relation (I as You, Arab as Jew). It is this haunting presence of alterity within the self, this belated return of the not-me-within-me, that I seek to trace in the following chapters, as I locate this dynamic within the specific cultural, sociopolitical and historical territory shared today by Jews and Arabs. The cultural space examined in this book, it must be further clarified, should not be confused with notions of "coexistence," "collaboration," or "hybridity," insofar as the latter stands for the junction of two predetermined national, ethnic, or cultural identities. What interests me is not the idea that we might have lost or that we may still create a space of "cultural dialogue" that would successfully bridge the Arab and Jewish distinct cultural systems or identities. Quite the contrary, my attempt is to free both "Arab" and "Jew" from their current status as markers of fully separable, if not radically opposed, identities. In other words, I am interested in the passage *between* the Jew, and the Arab: "the possibility or impossibility of the Arab, the Jew, and the Arab Jew," to borrow Gil Anidjar's words (2003a, 40).

In exploring this imagined space, created and examined discursively, I undoubtedly risk abstracting the very identities I set up to study. This is in some ways an unavoidable tension that accompanies any critical attempt to deconstruct existing sociopolitical constellations by questioning the very status of cultural identity or political agency as pregiven or fully identifiable. This said, I wish to emphasize that my intention is not to draw attention *away* from reality (i.e., "real" Arabs and Jews and their "real" experiences and histories), but rather to draw attention *back* to the silenced, obscured, and forgotten aspects of this reality, manifested in the libidinal ties that make up "the unspoken components of social belonging" (Rose 1996, 6). For if "Jew" and "Arab" are repeatedly and anxiously separated (with a particular intensity within the context of Zionism), these identities, I hope to show, continue to escape their assigned opposed position within this structure of differences. Indeed, it is along these lines, I

suggest, that we can best understand Anton Shammas's (1987, 26) provocative claim that Israelis and Palestinians are "organically attached," "each [being] an integral part of the other," as well as Mahmoud Darwish's (1996, 195) related observation that Jews and Arabs today continue to "dwell inside each other."

The following chapters call attention to this obscured, if not altogether denied, "dwelling." Each chapter, dedicated to a close reading of one or more literary texts, explores the manner by which the tie between "Jew" and "Arab" or "Israeli" and "Palestinian"—itself configured as a constellation of tensions between Self and Other, memory and forgetting, actuality and potentiality—directly challenges the separatist imagination and proves the disjointing of "Jew" and "Arab" to be at least partially impossible. We meet, for example, Shammas's "schizophrenic pair," the Israeli and Palestinian protagonists of his novel *Arabesques*, who "have not yet decided who is the ventriloquist of whom." In Albert Swissa's *Aqud,* we follow a young Moroccan-Israeli protagonist whose identity is located in the liminal and unspeakable space opened between the "Moroccan Muslim boy he *could have been*" and the "Jewish Israeli boy he has become." Other examples draw attention to the inseparability of the Jew and Arab (Muslim and Jew, Israeli and Palestinian) by emphasizing the intricate linguistic proximity of Hebrew and Arabic, the historical link between the traumatic memory of the Jewish Holocaust and the traumatic memory of the Palestinian Nakbah (the Palestinian uprooting in 1948), or the territorial reality that makes the two "enemies" necessarily function also as "partners."

Despite significant thematic and stylistic differences, the texts engaged in this book all share a fascination with the persistent presence of alterity within the self—the Jew within the Arab, the Arab within the Jew—and draw attention to the limits of partition, not only as a political model suitable for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but, more significantly, as a broader ethical and psychological principle accounting for the relationship between Jews and Arabs in modern times.

Chapter 1 introduces a comparative reading of two novels by North African Jewish writers: Albert Memmi's *La statue de sel* and Edmond Amram El Maleh's *Mille ans, un jour*, raising the crucial question concerning the status of the Arab Jew today in the context of Zionism: does this figure belong to a "lost history" and merely represent a current political impossibility, or does it (also) represent a futuristic antiessentialist and antinationalist cultural-political stance with direct implications for the

present? While the first part of the chapter focuses on the similarities and differences between El Maleh's and Memmi's positions, the second part opens the comparison of the writers out to a broader discussion about the political promise associated with the Arab Jew, understood as *both* an imaginary construct and a concrete historical figure. In so doing, the chapter explores the imagined territory opened between past and future, loss and hope, and the Arab and the Jew, suggesting that the figure of the Arab-Jew belongs just as much to "history" as to a futuristic reality yet to become.

The second chapter, dedicated to the writings of the Jewish-Egyptian writer Jacqueline (Shohat) Kahanoff and the Israeli author Ronit Matalon, further explores the productive tensions between past or "lost" historical identities and the potential for such identities to emerge anew. The chapter focuses on the elusive figure of the Jewish Levantine: a cosmopolitan figure formed in the intersection of Oriental (Arab) and Occidental (European) cultures, ethnicities, and languages and who, in many ways, represents the gray zone of the orientalist discourse, escaping its dichotomist worldview. In tracing the evolution of the terms "Levantine" and "Levantinism" from their initial derogatory use by the French and British colonizers of the Levant and the Zionist founders of Israel to the subversive reclaiming of these terms, first by Kahanoff and later by Matalon, chapter 2 exposes the political significance of Levantinism as a model of cultural belonging, which radically opposes both national separatism and ethnic monoculturalism.

In the third chapter I turn my attention to the figure of the Israeli-Palestinian, focusing in particular on his/her necessarily convoluted relationship to Hebrew, a language considered both "Israeli" (the language of all Israeli citizens) and "Jewish" (a language associated historically with the cultural heritage of Jews). The tensions arising from this dual status of Hebrew are at the center of Anton Shammas's maverick novel *Arabesques*, to which the chapter is dedicated. I explore the manner by which Shammas's astute criticism of the ethno-national imagination of Zionism (manifested, for example, in the maintained double status of Hebrew) is further accompanied by his criticism of Palestinian separatist aspirations, which, much like Zionism, overlook the experience of the Israeli-Palestinian and the challenges this figure introduces to the logic of partition and the prospect of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by means of ethno-national separation.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to *Aqud* [Bound], a novel by the Israeli-Moroccan writer Albert Swissa. The chapter expands the discussion initiated earlier in this introduction about the ambivalent status of the Jew

within the Eurocentric orientalist discourse. More specifically, it examines the manifestation of orientalism in contemporary Israel by looking at the phobic Israeli rejection of anything "too Arab" but also, no less, of anything "too Jewish." If Shammas threatens to destabilize the Zionist ethnonational culture by "un-Jewing the Hebrew language," Swissa, I suggest, presents the opposite threat: that of "un-Israelizing" Hebrew by rendering it both "Arab" and "Jewish." Making Hebrew language and culture Jewish and Arab, *Aqud,* I conclude, revives the repressed Zionist memory of the "Oriental within": the Jew, the Jew as Arab, the Arab Jew.

The final chapter addresses the so-called battle of memories between the Israeli-Jewish collective memory and the collective memory of the Palestinian people. For the most part, this battle has been portrayed as taking place between two competing and negating traumatic memories: the memory of anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust and the memory of colonial occupation culminating in the Nakbah. Through a comparative reading of two literary texts—Mahmoud Darwish's *Dhākirah lil-nisyān* [Memory for Forgetfulness] and Amin Maalouf's *Les Échelles du Levant,* I show how historical trauma in conjunction with a national politics of memory often serves as a social divider, artificially separating people, histories, and memories. Maalouf's and Darwish's texts, I suggest, allow us to "reremember" the fact that trauma, like history, is never "only or fully one's one" (Caruth 1996, 20–24), and that accordingly, the two histories and collective traumatic memories—the Jewish and Palestinian—are not, truly speaking, independent but must be resituated and understood along a shared historical trajectory.

Finally, if the literary texts discussed in the following chapters replace common dichotomist representations of Jews and Arabs with depictions that emphasize the strong affinities between the two people, or the impossibility of fully separating the Arab and the Jew, it would be wrong to suggest that they are overtly optimistic. For if these texts stress the potential for achieving or renewing a peaceful Arab-Jewish existence, they equally emphasize the hurdles that make this reality currently impossible. This "sober optimism," or better yet, "pessoptimism," like that of Imil Habibi's infamous protagonist,[30] calls attention to the present *impossibility* of being both Arab and Jew/Israeli and Palestinian, while further questioning the given status of this impossibility. It leaves us troubled but not hopeless, as it draws our attention to the present moment while furnishing our imagination with a vision of an Arab-Jewish future located beyond the limits of separatist imagination: "after separation, in spite of partition" (Said, 1999b).

1

History, Memory, Identity

From the Arab Jew "We Were" to the Arab Jew "We May Become"

> We should remember that in the present "Arab Jew" does not refer [only] to a concrete cultural or political existence. It can be seen more accurately as a critical category. . . . [This] phrase does not refer only to the identity of Jews from Arab countries. It is the context of the discussion determined by the success of the Zionist endeavor to establish a Jewish sovereign entity within the Arab world.
>
> —Amnon Raz-Karkotzkin, "The Zionist Return to the West"

In his book dedicated to the relationship between Jews and Arabs, *Juifs et Arabes* (1974), Albert Memmi devotes one chapter to the figure of the Arab Jew. The chapter entitled "Who Is an Arab Jew?" suggests—somewhat surprisingly, in light of the fact that Memmi himself was born and raised in Tunisia—that, truly speaking, the Arab Jew does not exist.[1] "One should remember," Memmi writes, "that the term 'Arab Jew' is itself not a good one," for it hides the fact that "the term *Arab* is not a happy one when applied to [a non Moslem] population, including even those who call and believe themselves to be Arabs" (5).[2] Memmi supports this claim with a bitter "testimonial" negation of the Arab Jewish identity. "Yes, indeed, we *were* Arab Jews," he argues at the opening of his essay, "but must one remain an Arab Jew . . . if [one] is always denied a normal existence?" (5) This comment seems to suggest that the impossibility of the Arab Jew is an outcome of recent historical developments: we *were*, but can *no longer* remain, Arab Jews. Yet Memmi follows this comment with another claim: "there was *never* a time . . . in which Jews in Arab lands lived [peacefully]" (7). Thus, even if "logically" the Arab Jew is an attainable identity, the past,

beyond only recent (colonial or modern national) history, proves that this is not a realistic political possibility: "We would have liked to be Arab Jews [but] the Moslem Arabs systematically prevented [this possibility] by their contempt and cruelty" (6). In light of this grave state of affairs, Memmi firmly concludes that "it is now *too late* for us to become Arab Jews." Memmi's negation of the Arab Jew's existence is thus not based on Jewish unwillingness ("we would have liked to be Arab Jews"), but on what he associates with Arab-Muslim animosity toward Jews.

Commenting on Memmi's description of the "Jewish condition" in Arab lands, Eli Kedourie (1974, 103) notes that what is most interesting about Memmi's sweeping arguments regarding anti-Semitism in Muslim lands is "not *whether* what he says is true, but rather *why* he would be saying the curious things he does say." Memmi's argument that the condition of Jews everywhere in the world, whether under Christian or Muslim rule, has always been one of persecution[3] is a sign, Kedourie continues, "not only of [Sartre's] great literary influence [on Memmi] but also of the presence and influence of European anti-Semitism in North Africa, which was introduced and propagated by the French settlers" (104). Kedourie draws attention to the role played by European colonialism and European thought in creating the reality of animosity between Arabs/Muslims and Jews as described by Memmi. He does not deny this reality but points at Memmi's failure to address the main cause for this tragic state of affairs. It is indeed quite surprising that "Europe," or better yet the "colonizer," is missing from Memmi's account of the growing animosity between Jews and Arabs in the early to mid-twentieth century. The writer of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957/1965), who in that early work associates the North African Jews quite explicitly with the Muslims (describing them all as "the colonized" who have been abused by European colonialism), seems in his later essays to "forget" the role played by Europe in creating and sustaining the animosity between Muslims/Arabs and Jews and in making the Arab Jew an "impossible figure." Indeed, following Memmi's *oeuvre*, one notices that while the author continues to be preoccupied with both colonialism and anti-Semitism, the two major sociopolitical downfalls of European modernity, he nevertheless insists on locating the "tragedy of the Arab Jew" *outside* of Europe altogether—independent of Europe's colonialism and its long anti-Semitic tradition. It is this forgetting of Europe that eventually turns Memmi into an uncritical supporter of Zionism, blind to its evident Eurocentric disposition and explicit colonial implications.

I will return to Memmi's uncritical embrace of Zionism and to his somewhat surprising "forgetting" of the central role played by European

colonialism in differentiating and separating Jews and Arabs in his later texts, but before that I wish to examine his first autobiographical novel, *La statue de sel* (1966/1953), in which he is careful to examine the growing tensions between Muslims and Jews in light of French colonialism and growing anti-Semitism. Indeed, the novel examines the "meeting" between the two centers of oppression—colonialism and anti-Semitism—by focusing on the experience of the narrator, Alexander Mordekhai Benillouche, a Tunisian Jew, in the context of the French colonial education system during the Nazi occupation of Tunisia.

If in the French School the narrator experiences the brutal effects of colonialism in having to drop his Arabic and replace it with French ("[this] was no longer a matter of shades of pronunciation but of a total break. How will I manage . . . I've never learned French!" [31,44]),[4] he also experiences the mockery of other students due to his unique "relatively correct" Tunisian dialect:

> My mother tongue is the Tunisian dialect, which I [learned] to speak with the proper accent of the young Moslem kids of our part of town. . . . [Unlike] the Jews [who] drag out their syllables in a singsong voice . . . the *relatively* correct intonations of my speech earned me the mockery of all: the Jews disliked my strange speech and suspected me of affectation, while the Moslems thought I was mimicking them. (30, 43, my emphasis)

This state of being "in between"—alienated from both colonizer and colonizers—is even further aggravated once Tunisia is occupied by Nazi Germany. The acute state of emergency in which Jews found themselves betrayed by their neighbors, as well as their "French protectors," leads Benillouche to realize that the one identity he truly cannot escape is his Jewishness: "The first days after the declaration of the war . . . we found ourselves, all of a sudden, right in the middle of the tragedy . . . as soon as we tried to react we realized how weak and isolated we were . . . we [Jews] were left alone" (271–72, 292–93). Benillouche, who has previously "chosen the West over the East" (269, 290), realizes at this point that even if he wanted to, he could "never be a Westerner" (321, 352). Having "rejected the East and been rejected by the West" (321, 352), Benillouche becomes aware, for the first time, of "the reasoning of the Jewish nationalists" (269, 290). However, it is important to note that while Memmi's later political essays overtly endorse the Zionist national project as the *only* solution to the Jewish problem,[5] the narrator of this early novel, while aware of the Zionist option, chooses not to follow its ideology, but to flee instead to

Argentina, where he hopes to find remedy to his wounded identity as *both* Arab and Jew.[6] In other words, while Memmi's later polemics take comfort in the Zionist "solution," his early autobiographical text leaves us with an unresolved problem and a productive, albeit frustrating, ambiguity that makes the codependency between "Arab" and "Jew" visible and emphasizes the inseparability of colonial and racial (anti-Semitism) oppressions. It is through the tragedy of Benillouche's irresolvable conflicts and self-negation that we are made aware of the political complexity introduced by the figure of the Arab Jew, which remains throughout Memmi's novel a torn, suffocated, and displaced figure, always already "out of place."

The Arab Jew as a Figure of Loss: Looking Back at What We Were

> Don't look behind you and don't stop anywhere on the plain. . . . And his wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt.
> —Genesis 19: 17, 26

Is there a way to look back on one's own past without being paralyzed or consumed entirely by this past? This question propels *La statue de sel*. Recalling the "lesson" of Lot's wife, who by turning back to look upon her burning city was fixed and transformed into an immobile pillar of salt, narrator Alexander Mordekhai Benillouche associates memory with the force of death that threatens to win over life: "I am dying through having turned back to look at my own self [*je meurs pour m'etre retourné sur moi-meme*] . . . is it possible for me to survive my contemplation of myself?" (335, 368).

The novel opens with Benillouche sitting among his fellow students, preparing for a seven-hour exam that would grant him his French teaching diploma. Benillouche, staring at the white page, decides to write down his memories from childhood to the present instead of answering the question about John Stuart Mill's philosophy. This impulsive decision, he recalls, is his only chance to escape what he has long experienced as an oppressive past that threatens to consume his entire life. Putting his memories down on paper, he hopes to find "a way out of his own darkness" (13, x) and liberate himself from his haunting memories once and for all. A similar account of healing memory is captured in Freud's conception of "working through." As Laplanche and Pontalis put it, working through is

"taken to be a sort of psychical work, which allows the subject to accept certain repressed elements and free himself from the grip of mechanisms of repetition" (1973, 488). Through writing his memories into a narrative, Benillouche seeks to do this psychological work and put an end to his compulsion to remember: "Forgetting through writing. . . . [This is] the only thing that gives me some peace of mind. [. . .] Perhaps as I now straighten out this narrative, I can manage to see more clearly and *find a way out*" (ix–x, 12–13, my emphasis).

Structurally, Memmi's novel mimics this process of working through. Divided into three parts, it traces a movement from the first part, entitled "The Blind Passageway" (*l'impasse*), devoted to Benillouche's childhood memories in the poor Jewish quarter, to his immersion in French culture in an Algerian university, and finally to the third and final part, "The Departure" (*le départ*), in which Benillouche flees to Argentina.

The past, associated mostly with Benillouche's memories of the Jewish quarter (the *hara*), is conceived of as traditional, sensual, and mysterious, a time and place where Benillouche lived happily, secured by his own ignorance of the existence of the modern (Western, French) world. This paradise, however, does not last for long. Benillouche's immersion in French culture translates into his growing sense of ambiguity and displacement. He feels an increasing painful gap between himself and his childhood community: "a distance between myself and the tribe, the members of which had already found fulfillment in themselves as they were destined to remain ignorant of the very existence of light" (82, 98). He views the *hara* as an "impasse," an alley one literally walks *through* in order to progress *from*. This narrative of progression encloses the old Jewish quarter in its stagnant historical borders. Behind the shadows of tradition, it appears as a place indifferent to change and irrelevant to the present. It is from this stagnation that Benillouche flees: "I had to make my break with our blind alley—it is nothing but a childish dream" (334–35, 368). Leaving, however, Benillouche never manages to escape the past. Feeling torn, confused, and displaced, he becomes obsessed with the need to redefine himself in terms of cultural belonging. "Who am I after all? [*qui suis-je enfin?*]" (95, 109) he asks, "I whose culture is borrowed, my maternal language un-firm. I am Tunisian *but* Jewish, I am Jewish *but* of French culture. . . . I speak the language of the country with a particular accent and emotionally I have nothing in common with Moslems. I am a Jew who has broken with the Jewish religion and the ghetto. . . . I must re-find myself" (331, 364). His own name carries within it the very tragic conflict of his being: *Alexander* stands for Western influence, *Mordekhai* ties him unmistakably to the Jew-

ish tradition, and *Benillouche*, a Berber-Arab name, indicates that "[his] legal status is one of a native African" (94, 107). Benillouche's growing desire to "find" and define his identity is further articulated in terms of his struggle to resolve what he experiences as an impossible relationship with the Orient: he is at once "marked by [the Orient] forever" (169, 188) and "forced to reject it" (141, 158).

It is this conflict of identity "inside and outside the Orient" that Benillouche hopes to overcome, by finally putting in order and separating the past from the future and that which he was from that which he shall become: "I did not want to be Alexander Mordekhai Benillouche, I wanted to escape from myself. . . . I was not going to remain a Jew, an oriental, a pauper; I was [to become] a new being" (230, 248). Benillouche's fear of the past and his need to separate the Jew and oriental he was from the new self he seeks to create seems to be Memmi's early articulation of the same desire he depicts twenty years later in "Who Is an Arab Jew?": the desire to set apart "the Arab Jew he *was*" from the "Arab Jew" he cannot remain and must not become.

The fear of the past and of memory's harmful effects is, of course, not unique to Memmi. If Freud sought to integrate the past selectively through analysis and self-reflection, for Nietzsche memory presents an altogether serious threat to life. Against the power of "the dead [to] bury the livings," Nietzsche promotes the "power of forgetting" (1957, 6). The differences among Memmi's, Freud's, and Nietzsche's approaches to memory are radical and numerous, yet shared by them all is a great fear of memory, based on the belief in a set of oppositions between: remembering and forgetting, past and present, reflecting and living, death and life.

In her essay "Wounded Attachments" (1995), Wendy Brown draws on Nietzsche's notion of forgetting in warning us against the political stagnation that is often the outcome of social identities that are modeled on an attachment to the past. Exploring Nietzsche's ideas within a Freudian articulation of melancholia, Brown points out the harmful aspect of such identity construction, which "in its attempt to displace suffering . . . becomes invested in its own subjection" (70). Following Nietzsche, she speaks in favor of detaching from one's "history of suffering" (55). In many ways Memmi's novel could be read precisely as such an attempt at liberating identity from a past of injury. But what Memmi's narrative reveals, in contradiction to Nietzsche's and Brown's positive accounts of forgetting, is that the memory of loss is not fully a matter of choice, and that the attempt to

forcefully forget does not guarantee escape from self-subjection. On the contrary, Benillouche's attempt at forgetting leads him further into the spin of "deep hurt" (111). The same past that he desires to put behind him comes to haunt him in its absence. If Benillouche is at all successful in separating his identity from his investment in the past (as loss), it is only at the price of reconstructing his identity around the loss of that past. Having not found a way to integrate his past into the present, Benillouche remains "forever a stranger to [him]self" (316, 347).

Is there a way out of this tragic circle? Does the attachment to the past necessarily lead to a melancholic, narcissistic, and vengeful existence as Nietzsche would have us believe, and does it have to result in the kind of identity politics and self-subjection that Brown warns us against? Can we not conceive an altogether different investment in the past—in the *past as loss* to be more precise—that does not quite do away with identity's investment in loss, but rather radically alters our understanding of what such an investment might mean? In other words, could "investing" in what we *were*, even in light of what we can *no longer remain*, not alter the conditions through which we imagine what we *might become*?

In his essay dedicated to the writings of Marcel Proust, Walter Benjamin (1968a) emphasizes the involuntary nature of memory, distinguishing between what he calls "involuntary recollection" and the conscious effort at remembering. The first type of memory, he further suggests, is closer to forgetfulness than to what we call remembrance (*souvenir*): "Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory?" (202) The forgetting Benjamin is talking about here is radically different from the forgetting Memmi's narrator hopes to achieve through writing. While for the latter (as for Nietzsche and Freud) forgetting is directed toward the past, Benjamin's notion of forgetting is aimed at the present and can best be described as a momentary cognitive shock, experienced as the past "flashes up" and penetrates the present, arresting the natural movement of events (1968b, 262). For Benjamin, it is precisely this involuntary nature of memory that sets the conditions for radical political change. In the second segment of "The Theses," Benjamin describes the past as the source of future redemption: "Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption" (254). The place of redemption in our perception of the future reveals the actual and continual *presence* of the past in our present, and it is this presence that Benjamin wishes to translate into a practice of

writing that shall "seize hold of a memory as it *flashes up* at the moment of danger." One need not fear the abyss of the past and the possibility of it "pressing down on one's shoulders" (Nietzsche 1957, 6), but rather accept the (ontological) presence of the past *within* the present and the strings that tie the living together with the dead: "There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on Earth. Like every generation that precedes us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply" (Benjamin 1968b, 254).

The hold that the past has on the present also exposes the potential for change that lies *within* the present. If this potential is lost in *La statue* to the narrator's continual attempts to escape the past (the *hara*, the Arab, the Jew), in Edmond Amram El Maleh's *Mille ans, un jour* (1986), the lost past of the Moroccan-Jewish community (the Arab Jews "we were") is repeatedly inscribed into the present political climate, carrying with it a promise of a possible future redemption, itself figured through the multiple images of the always-becoming-self: Arab, Jew, and Arab Jew.

The Arab Jew as a "Lost Figure"

> He believed the doors of the Promised Land shall open and welcome him with great opportunities … a cruel disillusion … he was an Arab after all.
> —El Maleh, *Mille ans, un jour*

Published three years after the massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon in 1982, *Mille ans, un jour* traces multiple, conflated, and intertwined memories.[7] Partial accounts of memories shift constantly between different historical eras, individual names, and geographic locations, so that we are forced to reimagine and reconceptualize our understanding of time, space, history, and memory. Are we in Paris, Essaouira, Beirut, Tel Aviv, Argentina, Fez, or Holland? Paris's sky is colored by the sign of war taking place elsewhere, in Lebanon; Cairo cannot stay clear in mind for its image is blurred by memories of the "journey through the Moroccan desert" (16); Tel Aviv flashes up, bombed, in the midst of a movement across the Dades valley and the Atlas Mountains. Is it 1882, 1993, 1953, 1948, or 1982? Generations spin before us, taking us back and forward in time. Nessim, introduced in the very first pages of the novel, returns from Paris to visit his hometown in Morocco, the Jewish

quarter where he grew up. His "narrative of return," however, is constantly interrupted as his mind wanders, caught in an endless movement between the present and the past, between his memories and the memories of others, between stories he has heard in the past and the news he hears on the radio broadcasts, between the ruins of his home village in Morocco and the ruins of Beirut he sees on the news.

Looking at a newspaper photo of a Palestinian boy named Hammed, a survivor from the refugee camp of Shatila, Nessim seems unable to control the stream of images and memories that overcome him:

> Here! here in his birth town . . . he comes to spend the days of summer. . . . Nessim could imagine himself there, *residing there-here*. . . . Nessim, Nessimat, as his mother used to call him . . . where is he? Scattering in the margins, his return backward, far, far back into his past, this retreat opens an entire space of life . . . but where is this town in which he is moving? Among ruins of pain, advancing through the traces of that which continues to live, stubbornly. (38, 39, my emphasis)

The ruins of Nessim's old house, an empty synagogue, a faded Hebrew letter on a stone in a neglected cemetery, a word uttered in a Judeo-Berber dialect, all signify "the echo of absence" (208). This absence restages the no-longer-existing past, which Nessim experiences as a painful loss. But his own painful memories of the exodus of Moroccan Jews and the pain he feels in confronting the ruins of his old hometown are mere openings to greater sensations of loss: the war in Lebanon, the bombing of the Palestinian refugee camps, and the condition of Moroccan Jews once they arrive at "the promised land." These "events" are all staged side by side, no longer represented in a diachronic order or in temporal causality. Indeed, memory, the involuntary memory of the loss, to be more precise, appears here as a powerful force, breaking the logic of linear time and leading Nessim "out of himself [*hors de lui-meme*]" (35) and into a mental state where one's own "history of suffering," to borrow Brown's words, and that of another are no longer clearly set apart.

While for Memmi, writing about the lost past (about the Arab Jew "we were") is a defensive act against the threat this past presents to the future (it is now *too late* for us to become), for El Maleh, writing that is led by involuntary memory appears to be a means by which one enters the present and challenges narratives of historical progress. Nessim is caught in an endless movement between the painful memories of the past and the crimes of the present; between his hometown in Morocco and Beirut: "there, here . . .

here or there . . . here the narrative looks for connections, its arrangement . . . it fails again" (138–39). The "there" comes to reside in the "here" and the "then" takes us back to the "now," doing away with the division between past and present, there and here, life and death, self and other, as it moves us toward a place where the living and the dead, the past and the present, are intimately connected: "Among ruins of pain, advancing through the traces of that which continues to live, stubbornly . . . in search of Hammed . . . [toward] where the dead and the living hold to each other by the same hand" (70).

The old Moroccan Jewish quarter (the *Mellah*) in *Mille ans* emerges as a site of contradictions and ambiguities, which, thanks to its endless and continual transformations, seems to escape any restrictive historical borders. Indeed, the relationship between what "we were" and what "we might become" is complicated here by the very work of memory. Memory in *Mille ans* not only refutes the narrative structure of "working through" but further negates the very possibility of "narrative" altogether in suggesting that one's past cannot be adequately accounted for by resorting to a coherent, singular, or progressive description.

The novel opens with a cry: "The Lebanon war! [*La guerre du Liban!*]." This event, announced by an anonymous voice, vibrates into a warm day in June, in a pleasant Paris summer, and makes Nessim lose sense of his own location: "Is he there or here? [*là-bas/ici*] . . . he doesn't recall when he arrived in Beirut, nor if he has ever got there [at all], is he there or here?" (37). The novel "attacks" us with such unanswered questions as it proceeds fragmentally and shifts constantly between different historical eras, geographic locations, and languages: while the main language is French, many words and phrases appear in Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, and English. There is no discernible attempt to unify these fragments or even to arrange them in a particular logical or totalizing order. Such a totalizing act could not possibly capture the sense of sudden fracture presented in the novel's title—"A Thousand Years, One Day"—a fracture marked by the calm comma behind which lies, hidden, the violence of history and its unaccountable cruelty. The sudden split by which "one day" breaks the continuity of a "thousand years" (*Mille ans, un jour*) is emphasized by the repeated invocation of the phrase "one day, they left." The exodus of the Moroccan Jews is captured in this phrase alone, followed by no "historical explanation." It appears as a sudden fracture, a shock with no adequate historical explanation. The circulating question, "Why did they leave?" remains unanswered, pointing at the insufficiency of common historical explanations (the Zionist

agents tricked them and made them leave; the Arabs made them want to leave; they have always waited to leave, etc.) to account for this loss.

"The war of independence!" (110). Another cry is voiced. But which independence is Nessim mentioning —is it the independence of the Jewish state (1948) or of the Moroccan state (1956)? Is he speaking about the Arabs' war against colonialism or the Jews' war against the Arabs? It is precisely the inability to tell one war from the other, or the "Jewish story" (anti-Semitism and national recovery) from the "Arab story" (colonialism and national liberation), that grants the figure of the Arab Jew a special political status in El Maleh's text. The Arab Jewish figure appears in *Mille ans* not only as a (lost) historical figure, but also as a rupture of current sociopolitical maps, a category that reminds us that it is not quite possible to set apart "the Arab" from "the Jew," or to fully set apart the "Jewish problem" from the "colonial problem," and both of these problems from Europe.

In one of the few essays published on *Mills ans*, Ronnie Scharfman (1993) points out that El Maleh's novel traces "a double colonization simultaneously . . . that of Morocco by France and that of Moroccan Jewry by Ashkenazi Israel" (1993, 138). This is, of course, true, but even more significant, I would suggest, is the fact that the novel traces the vicious trajectory of violence accelerating from French colonialism and German fascism to the role of Israeli occupation over Palestinians: "Auschwitz, Tel Aviv, Beirut" (212). Breaking the monolithic commutation of violence from one pole to another, the novel traces the effects of historical violence as having no victims and victors, but only victims: "Auschwitz, Tel Aviv, Beirut . . . the vicious game of violence thrown into its trajectory" (214). Against such alarming trajectory, El Maleh presents the "return to the past" as a means to "punctuate the present" (223) and interfere with its natural progress. The search of an old home, a familiar face, a recognizable scent are here not mere nostalgic acts, but a desperate attempt to revive the past in the service of the present, as expressed by Nessim's repeated cry: "but now!" (51)

What is this "now"? In El Maleh's novel it is first and foremost the now of bombarded Beirut, and the horrors of Sabra and Shatila. It is these violent events that take hold over Nessim as he is overtaken by the horrors and loses his ability to think clearly about his "own" loss. But this "now" is also the accumulated history of suffering and oppression as it unfolds—fragmented and momentarily—in Nessim's mind, as each ruin is followed by another, each cry echoed by the next. Like Benjamin's "time of the now" (*Jetztzeit*), this "now" is by no means separated from the past. On the contrary, it is the image of the present as captured in the multiple and frag-

mented memories of past suffering and oppression, all of which appear in the novel as images flashing up momentarily without ever forming a coherent narrative. Discovering the ruins of his childhood town and home, Nessim becomes "further and further lost" (40). He gradually loses the ability to distinguish between his childhood memories and the memories of others; between the ruins of his own home and those of bombarded Beirut. This work of memory brings Nessim simultaneously closer to and further away from his own past, as it leads him to follow instead a path presented to him by the gaze of other: "Suddenly Nessim abolishes all traces of his past, this boiling mass of memories, of images and sensations attacks him from all sides. . . . Nessim looks at the child, who looks back at him. The child looks at him intensely, erasing his own traces . . . further and further lost . . . [this is] the only [possible] journey!" (40)

This process of intersubjective recognition as the "only possible journey" replaces the idea of memory as a movement of the self, turning reflectively "back" on itself. Instead of inner reflection that reaffirms time progression (past, present, future) and borders between places and psyches, such memory "loses the self," and in this sense it is indeed closer to what Benjamin calls "forgetfulness" than to "remembering": "Nessim came across the wounded child with a sudden pain. . . . At that instance he *abolished all traces of his past*. . . . A fiery compression of memories, images and sensations, approached him from all directions . . . multiplying lives." (*Mille ans* 33, my emphasis).

At the end of his long journey into the past, Nessim no longer knows the nature of his past or present. He no longer knows "himself": "Who is Nessim? . . . perhaps a stranger . . . the stranger [that] comes forward, closer, proximate . . . he is known in this absence . . . Nisismat! . . . Hammed!" (51). Who is this stranger coming forward: Is it Nisismat (Nessim's childhood nickname)? Is it Hammed (the wounded boy whose photo Nessim finds in a French newspaper)? Is it both? Can it be either, or is it precisely the movement *between* them: the intersubjective recognition that leads to the dissolution of the self, coexisting with a remembering of the self in the other?

"To see and to be seen constitute the double approach of identity," Trinh Minh-ha (1994, 23) tells us, for "this presence to oneself is at once impossible and immediate." It is this doubling of the self, which both loses itself and finds itself *in loss*, or *as loss* that El Maleh's novel seems to insists on: "One speaks from the back of another . . . an abyss . . . it is difficult to locate the axis of such spiral movement . . . [is it him or someone else], who can know with certainty, the story goes on" (122, 167). Nessim, whose

"name escapes anonymity" (11), is only "almost a character." He does not possess memory but rather is possessed by it, as he gradually grows amorphous, becoming nothing more than "A groan, this ear torn by an exposure, these eyes . . . a metamorphosis . . . rolling like a stone slipping with no end . . . no longer anything but a condensed energy . . . eruption of suffering. Another doubled gaze" (29, 140).

What is the meaning of this dissolution of the self, this metamorphosis into a "doubled gaze"? One answer is offered by Scharfman (1993, 139), who suggests that the photo of the wounded Palestinian child is what compels Nessim "to try and situate himself ontologically." "How are we to understand the hero's obsession with the Sabra and Shatila massacres," Scharfman writes, "if not as the locus of both displacement and condensation of one ethnocide onto another?" Following this logic, she seems to suggest that Nessim is able to finally locate his own "loss" through that of the other by means of analogy, or symbolism: "the recurrent image of the mutilated child *symbolizes* Nessim's own sense of fragmentation [as an identity] blown apart, [and] exiled from any stable identity" (my emphasis). Similarly, Beirut is said to function "as an externalization, a visible doubling": "The twin city [which is] paired in Nessim's mind with the destruction of his own community of origins. For Nissim, Beirut is the noisy, bloody version of the silent erasure and disappearance of his people."

In other words, Scharfman suggests that Nessim is able to mourn the loss of "his own" community (the Jewish community of Morocco) by means of finding *similarities* between his pain and that of the other, between his loss and the "externalized version" manifested in the case of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Against this reading, which turns the wounded child, as well as Beirut, into mere symbols of yet another story of loss, which in turn is presented as the "original" or "central" narrative of El Maleh's novel, I suggest that El Maleh's text presents an altogether different model of "loss" and intersubjective recognition: a model that escapes the narcissistic appropriation of the other's pain and refuses to treat identification as merely the mirroring of one's own excruciation.

The relationship between the opening sentence of the novel ("the war in Lebanon") and the following succession of Nessim's memories—between Beirut and the other locations mentioned in the novel; between the Palestinian exodus and the Moroccan-Jewish one—is based, I believe, not on analogy or symbolism, but on metonymy. The "there" of Lebanon and the "here" of Paris, the memories of the self and those of another, emerge side by side, fragmented and intertwined. They are no longer identifiable or analogous. They lose their independent status and hence can no longer be claimed, be compared, or symbolize each other. Similarly, the movement

"out of the self" does not result in the mirror identification of the self with itself *through* the other but, quite on the contrary, it results in "forgetting": the momentary forgetting of the self enabled through the meeting with an other. *Mille ans* illuminates this complex and momentary forgetfulness not only through its direct references to such loss (as in the repeated word "metamorphosis"), but also by adopting a structurelessness poetic composition that mimics the breakdown that such forgetfulness brings upon the self and the narrative of the self.

Captivated by the eyes of the wounded child, then, Nessim is not "reminded" as it were of the loss of his own community. Rather, this gaze, while triggering Nessim's memories of his lost childhood village, his grandfather's letters, and his mother's touch, also, and to no lesser degree, *interrupts* this nostalgic movement and makes Nessim unable to locate himself in a direct relation to any specific narrative of loss.[8] Rather than moving Nessim further along toward his past—his childhood memories and narrative of loss—the encounter with the other (the photo of the wounded Palestinian boy), while bringing back a momentary vision of Nessim's mother caressing him, forces this vision to quickly vanish as it is replaced by images of Beirut, where another mother is carrying another child.

To be able to remember, Maurice Halbwachs argues in *Les cadres social de la mémoire* (1925), "one needs others." If we take this claim seriously, we can further understand how memory can be articulated in terms of "meeting" with another rather than a process of self-reflection. Nessim's encounter with the images from Beirut enables him to "remember" things he cannot possibly remember since he has not been in Beirut to actually witness the bombs, Hamad's crying mother, or the screams in the streets. But the power of such involuntary memory makes Nessim's attempt at "actively remembering," or returning to his childhood memories, truly impossible: "Under the shocking impressions of these visions, under Hamad's gaze, Nessim feels [his mother's gaze] as an absence with no return" (122). This "absence with no return" moves the self, aside itself, or "out of its self" and toward the other: "Looking at the child who looks back at him, his black eyes fixed open [. . .] [Nessim] wonders where [is he] heading to? Who is he, this one moving forward, in proximity [to his self]. . . . Outside of himself" (51, 221).

The loss of the self in the very finding of an other is not so much a movement directed by the resemblance between self and other as it is a sudden experience of "losing one's ground": a stream of images that empties the self of its illusion of coherence, leaving it wandering restlessly. Thus, Nessim's leap into memory advances through a growing sense of losing him-

self and finding himself *as other*: "Nessim or maybe Yehuda Ben Youssef, is he the first or the other? The circles close on themselves, doubling themselves" (20). Caught in the eyes of the child, Nessim is "relocated" within the dynamic movement between these sites, opening "a hole in space that [also] denies time" (140).[9] Past and future, return and departure, and self and other are no longer separable but are rather pulled frantically in what seems to be a simultaneous movement in two opposite directions, where "to meet" (an other/an other self/the self *as* other) also comes to mean "to lose" oneself "as one."

To remember, in this sense, is to no longer be in possession of memory; at least not any more than one is possessed *by* memory. It means one cannot master memory or clearly define one's "own" memory, and by the same token, no one can, truly speaking, choose to forget. The relapse into memory appears in *Mille ans* as a profoundly unsettling inversion of one's identity, in which one loses the possibility to return to the place where one has come from and recover himself through "a narrative of origins": "wandering completely lost, abandoned! Erasing the traces of one's own . . . further and further lost . . . [this is] the only [possible] journey!" (40). This only possible journey is based on an always shifting point-of-origin. It is a movement "toward," rather than "from," a movement that leads to the imaginative merging point of Beirut and the narrator's Moroccan childhood village, the present and the past, self and other, the Jew and the Arab.

Inside and Outside the Orient *or* Between Arab and Jew

> We [Jews] wanted to love Algeria. But it was too early or too late.
> —Hélène Cixous, "My Algeriance"

Benillouche's struggle with his conflicted position, "forever marked by the Orient" but "forced to reject it," results, as I have argued, in his (failed) attempt to escape the Orient. This desire to break off from the Orient includes not only Benillouche's ties to Arab culture (or, in his own words, Arab music, scents, dance, and language), but also the Jewish *hara* and its "backward traditions." This double rejection of both Arab and Jew translates later into Memmi's polemic negation of the Arab Jewish identity. Holding on to this identity, he writes in his 1974 essay, is not only blind to history (i.e., to Arabs' continued hostility toward Jews); it is also an irresponsible act toward the present and future. While Memmi recognizes the subversive political potential embedded in the figure of the Arab Jew,

he explicitly wishes to disarm it, stating that the promotion of an Arab Jewish identity presents a serious threat to the creation of a new national Jewish collective. Referring to the theoretical possibility of future return of Arab Jews to live in their country of origin, Memmi thus writes: "Once reinstalled in our former countries, Israel will no longer have any reason to exist [and] the other Jews from [Europe] will also be sent back 'home'—to clear up the remains of the crematoria" (5). What we learn from this comment is that the Arab Jew, for Memmi, is not only a figure proved to be historically impossible, it is also an identity that must cease to exist for the sake of Jewish unity and, most explicitly, for the well-being of *European Jews*, who, without the existence of Israel would have nowhere to go but back "to the crematoria."

What strikes me as most interesting about Memmi's comment is not only the fact that he accepts without criticism the Zionist attempt to create a new Jewish solidarity based on the rejection of the Arab, but that his words end up reemphasizing the difference between the condition of Jews in Arab lands and their conditions in Europe, against his own claim that Jews have historically suffered as a chased minority, whether under Christian or Muslim rule. Whether Memmi intends this or not, his words bring back "Europe" and remind us that it is indeed impossible to speak about the tensions between Arabs and Jews, or about the current "impossibility" of the Arab Jew, without speaking about Europe: about Europe's role in constructing both the Jew and the Arab as its Others, and its role in polarizing these two identities, making them Other to each other.

Europe (the West, Christianity) as the dominant political colonial force of the last few centuries has been quite successful in nourishing the unbalanced triangle relationship among the Arab, the Jew, and the West. Colonizing Arab and African lands, Europe prompted and cultivated differences within the colonized population in order to increase its local power. Jews and Arabs were not the only differentiation colonialism promoted, but it has certainly been a central one, especially under French occupation. By creating inside allies or "natural mediators," the colonizers, perpetuating legal, ethnic, and cultural differences, were able to establish separate political communities and weaken the colonized society's political power as a whole. At the same time, Europe presented these ethnic/cultural differences as *natural* and pregiven, and itself as a "necessary mediator" between otherwise hostile ethnic groups. Naturalized and legalized under colonial rule, these differences became an inescapable reality. Hélène Cixous describes this reality in reference to her own experience as a young Jewish girl in Oran, Algeria:

> We always lived in the episodes of the brutal Algeriad, thrown from birth into one of the camps crudely fashioned by the demon of Coloniality. One said: "the Arabs"; "the French." And one was forcibly played in the play, with a false identity. Caricature-camps . . . in spite of themselves the Jews had become a political card used sometimes by the rights sometimes by the left etc. . . . We were those not really Jewish false French odd inadequate people who loved the Algerians who spurned us as enemy Francaouis, Roumis and Jews. . . . We were not separated [from the Arabs], no, we were *together in hostility.* Gathered together in hostility by hostility.[10]

Benillouche's identity crisis—being both inside and outside of the Orient, torn between West and East—should also be understood as a direct outcome of such promoted polarization. Jewish, Arab, and "somewhat French," Benillouche inhabits "the interstices between the colonizer and the colonized and seen by both as the other . . . [he is] an Arab Jew seeking his own [acquired] Frenchness" (Boyarin 1998, 43).

The Arab Jew Revisited

> The aim in hyphenating Arab Jewish identity is to call into question the Eurocentric nationalist paradigm that erased the hyphen and made it taboo.
> —Ella Shohat, "Rupture and Return"[11]

In a short essay published in 1999 Ella Shohat declares: "I am an Arab Jew" (1999b, 1). With this statement she directly challenges Memmi's negation of the Arab Jewish existence and indeed claims possession over the very identity he considers to be historically impossible and politically irresponsible. "It is crucial to say that we exist," Shohat continues, "some of us refuse to dissolve so as to facilitate 'neat' national and ethnic divisions. An Iraqi-Israeli woman, residing in the United States, Shohat has written extensively against the enforced forgetting of the Arab Jew and the erasure of this figure primarily by Zionist ideology, but also by modern Arab nationalism. Locating the Zionist national ideology in *relation to*, or as a *direct heritage of*, other prominent ideologies and historical influences (European colonialism, Pan Arabism, anticolonial nationality, anti-Semitism, and Western orientalism), Shohat successfully draws attention to the ideological intervention involved in creating the current polarization of Arabs and Jews.

If Memmi's Arab Jew is presented in his autobiographical novel as a tragic figure, and later in his polemic and pro-Zionist essays as a dangerous delusion, in Shohat's writings, ranging from the late 1980s to the present, the Arab Jew (or Mizrachi) is not only a legitimate historical figure and a memory that refuses to "dissolve"; it is also a political figure through which a current alternative—anti-Zionist, antiessentialist, and antinationalist—political position can be written. While Shohat is careful to distinguish between Zionist nationalism, which she associates with Western colonial influences and Arab nationalism, described as a necessary anticolonial rebellion (see 1999a, n. 8), she nevertheless points out that "*both* Jewish and Arab nationalisms share, in discursive terms, the notion of a single, authentic (Jewish or Arab) nation" and that "they both assume that the 'national' is produced by eliminating the foreign, the contaminated, the impure, so that the nation can emerge in all its native glory." If Zionism established the notion of a Jewish nationality and has propeled the idea that "Arabness and Jewishness are mutually exclusive," the adherence to this superficial binarism by Arab nationalisms has left the Arab Jew, Shohat argues, "on the horns of a terrible dilemma" (1999a, 11). He/she could no longer "be," for the "Arab" and "Jew" who used to mark cultural, ethnic, and religious categories turned into opposite *national* collectives. In line with Edward Said's criticism of Zionism and of the principle of national separatism more generally, Shohat suggests that an alternative historiography must be written, based on the historical case of the Arab Jew. Such historiography would "re-orient the debates [over Israeli society]" (1999a, 18) and challenge the Arab-versus-Jew binarism privileged by both Arab and Jewish nationalism (2003, 50).

Shohat's comments are enormously pertinent for the promotion of antinationalist and anti-Orientalist critical scholarship. Others have contributed to this critical discourse and like Shohat have emphasized "the urgency of reiterating not only the memory but the possibility" of an Arab Jewish coexistence, beyond or "after" modern national separation of Jew and Arab (Alcalay 1993, 1). But for the proposed study of Mizrachi history and of the revival of the erased hyphenated memory of the Arab Jew to be fully effective as a criticism of Zionism, colonialism, orientalism, and Eurocentric models of nationalism, I believe that the focus on the historical figure of the Arab Jew must be accompanied by a critical reexamination of the relationship between the identity categories "Jew" and "Arab" as such. In other words, while the historical, concrete, and empirical case of Arab Jews (Jews of Arab descent who are thus said to be "both" Jewish and Arab) "proves" the limitation of Zionist and Arab nationalist separatist ideologies, this historical figure must not draw attention away from the

fact that the two names "Jew" and "Arab" carry a long and convoluted discursive relationship, which makes a clear distinction between the two impossible. This "impossibility" results in various ironies, manifested, for example, in Zionism's contradictory approach to the Arab, who is seen both as "the enemy" and as a archetype for the "new Jew" to mimic: a model on the basis of which to return the Jew to his or her "lost" (oriental, native, rooted) true self.[12] This and other examples draw attention to the significance of exploring the relationship between "Jew" and "Arab," not only as this relationship unfolds through the particular history and memories of Mizrachim (Arab Jews), but also as it shapes the ways we think and talk about the relationships between Jews and Arabs more generally.

Along these lines, Raz-Krakotzkin (2005) has recently argued that the unique and complex cultural location of the Mizrachi, as he "embodies the combination of the Jew and the Arab, within a complex colonial discourse, and within the framework of Jewish sovereignty . . . a location that embodies the perspective of the colonizer and the colonized, as well as the interrelation between them," introduces a new and productive critical angel from which to write "critical history" (179). Such writing, he notes, cannot be limited to the history of Jews from Arab countries, for it must in fact reject the very notion of "History" altogether, presenting instead a "counter [narrative] that challenges the [very] distinctions of Europe and the East, the Jew and the Arab" (180). In his introduction to Jacques Derrida's *Acts of Religion* (2002), Gil Anidjar similarly suggests that (for Derrida) it is not the actual historical figure of the Arab Jew that carries significant subversive political potential as much as it is the "being together" of the two biblical brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, the two people, and nations, that is carried through the name of the "Abrahamic." This convoluted "being together," Anidjar suggests, can never quite assemble into a figure (the "Arab Jew"), for it is always more than this sum of names connected by a hidden hyphen. It is a "being together," he concludes, that results in "an impossibility, a *non-figure* that in its *invisibility and unreadability* reproduces and exceeds the so called 'Jewish Muslim symbiosis' at once ancient and new—more ancient and new than could, strictly speaking, ever appear or become manifested" (9–10, my emphasis). Anidjar expands this argument in his maverick study *The Jew, The Arab: A History of the Enemy* (2003), in which he suggests that the (impossible) history of the Jew, the Arab, and the Arab Jew is really the history of Europe: Europe as defined against its enemies—the Jew (the theological enemy) and the Arab (the political enemy). Directing attention to the shifts in the relationship between the Jew and the Arab as found in European theological and political

discourses, Anidjar challenges the "naturalness" of the recent animosity between the Jew and the Arab, exposing instead the discursive practices that operate behind its constitution. Europe emerges here as a third (silent, hidden, yet very active) party, creating and sustaining the separations between the Arab and the Jew, while rendering "its role in the distinction, separation and the enmity of Jew and Arab invisible" (20). This separation and enmity, Anidjar concludes, is produced not only lately, through European colonial practices. Rather, it has long served as the very core of Europe's attempt to articulate its own identity by means of separating the political from the theological and, accordingly, the Arab from the Jew.

What this analysis reminds us, then, is that the hyphen connecting and separating the Jew and the Arab is not only the one hidden in the case of the Mizrachi, but rather that this particular instance of erasure joins a long genealogy of hidden or erased hyphens, connecting and separating the Jew and the Arab: hyphens that stand for an always already forgotten link between Arab and Jew, a link that is erased at the very moment it is staged, whether in European colonial discourse, in modern anti-Semitic expressions, in current Western anti-Arab/Muslim politics, or in the Zionist project of Jewish recovery.

Returning to El-Maleh's novel, we find that his depiction of the Arab Jew oscillates productively between two poles: the Arab Jew as a concrete historical figure and the Arab Jew as a "nonfigure:" a metamorphosis, always already escaping historical representation. It is this "doubled status" of the Arab Jew that El-Maleh's novel mobilizes in order to expose the great political threat associated with this figure, both as a historical entity and as an imagined construction. This fear is best captured in a scene depicting the meeting between the Arab Jew (the Moroccan immigrant) and the Israeli authority:

> No, you are not Jewish, do not insist, you are an Arab. That is too bad, but clear as the day, your passport . . . [it says] Arab, Arab, do not try to defend yourself, too bad, that is too bad . . . Arab-Jews! [. . .] Not Jewish enough . . . not French . . . Arab . . . Arab-Jews! . . . Jews of different blood . . . Not Arab . . . not the same race, not the same *parole* . . . You are the flower of Zion . . . Idolaters . . . primordial . . . nostalgic beings . . . Not Arabs. (1986, 203, 206–7)

By "emptying" the Arab Jew of concrete positive attributes, presenting it instead as an excessive list of contradictory images (not Jewish or not Jewish enough, Arab, but also not Arab, a different race? Parole? Blood?), El Maleh

points at the tensions this figure embodies, as *the site of projected political anxiety.* The political significance of the Arab-Jew, then, is found in *Mille ans* in the tension maintained between "history" and "counterhistory"; between, that is, the Arab Jew as a specific historical figure and the Arab Jew as an "impossibility"—a constellation of radical contradictions and conflicting narratives that play themselves out *through* this name.

Similarly, El Maleh refers to particular traumatic historical events (the war in Lebanon, the exodus of the Moroccan Jewish community, Morocco's war for independence, the rise of nazism in Europe), not so much to tell the (hi)story of any clear nameable identity ("the Arab Jew," for example), but to expose identity itself as a movement between various points of reference: between past and present, here and there, self and other. In *Mille ans* this movement is best captured and given figure to through the hidden hyphen that connects and separates the Arab and Jew, marking not an "identity," or the crisis around the impossibility of attaining a coherent identity, but the breakdown of a narcissistic closure of the self, which is never identical to itself but is rather necessarily configured through a relation to alterity. Indeed, El Maleh invites us to attend, once again, the work of this hidden hyphen—the always already "forgotten" link between the Arab and Jew—and propels us to ask anew: What does the hidden hyphen in the Arab Jew do, or, more significantly, what *can* it do?

The Time of Becoming

> The story is given birth along the path of absence.
> —El Maleh, *Mille ans*

To ask what the hidden hyphen in the Arab Jew can do is not, strictly speaking, to ask a question of historical or documentary value. Similarly, for El Maleh, the writing of an Arab Jewish memoir is not a historical writing accounting for "what happened" in the past (Did Jews and Arab live together happily? Did they get along? Why did the Jews leave?), but rather a means of creating multiple competing realities, where multiplicity is positioned against "official" and factual historical knowledge. Accordingly, the multiple and partial narratives cast throughout *Mille ans* do not trace a single truth, nor do they end up presenting a "proof" or "evidence" of past Arab Jewish coexistence. Rather, the plurality of voices and fragmented narratives in the novel replace such authoritative accounts with

what could be called a "corrupted testimony." Such a narrative form, while seemingly "historical," escapes the unifying nature and the "authentic" testimonial value commonly associated with the genre of the memoir. Thus, in one of the novel's final scenes, Nessim is waiting for a chronicler to interview him about the history of Moroccan Jewry. But even at this point the text refutes any attempt at presenting an accountable, coherent, and authentic Arab Jewish testimony. Nessim waits eagerly, preparing to tell his story, but the chronicler fails to show up. In his absence, the promise of testimony is replaced by yet another textual journey. Nessim's eyes fall on a notebook that is resting on a nearby table, and he soon forgets all about his expected interview, losing himself yet again in someone else's story: "Nessim sat on the café's terrace . . . his gaze fell mistakenly on the table as his attention was suddenly captured by some pages of notes. Without asking himself how these notes arrived at him or whether they were destined to arrive at him at all, he picked them up anxiously . . . as if he were receiving an oracle" (222). If identity, as the Caribbean writer Edouard Glissant suggests, is based on *interdependence* rather than on independence; if that is "the other is in me, because I am me" (*L'intention poétique*, 101), then the writing of one's past, El Maleh seems to suggest, is a writing through which one's relation to the other is revealed to be precisely that—a relation—resulting in the "fusion of contained identity" (Mille ans, 17). Receiving the voice of the other "as an oracle," Nessim's own voice (his personal story of the Arab Jew) becomes no other than the possibility of recirculating and blending other sources: the letters of his grandfather, the painful testimony of a Moroccan-American Jew visiting his childhood town, the memories of his Muslim friend, Majid, who was arrested by the French, or a text left behind by an anonymous writer.

If this movement between voices (the finding of one's voice in between and through other voices) is the replacement of "one's voice" with "a voice," it is also the replacement of the "Arab Jew" as a concrete identifiable identity whose past is to be written "back into history" with the Arab Jew as a contemporary "critical category," through which to open the present to new and productive discursive networks.

No "Nessim" (Nessim mean "miracles" in Hebrew) comes into being at the end of the novel: no proud or battered Arab Jew emerges to affirm or reclaim this historical identity. Rather, a New York tour bus enters the space of Nessim's circulating memories and serves as a reminder of the futile attempt to revive the past as an authentic "return" or a nostalgic recovery: "Ladies and gentlemen . . . we are in the deep heart of the fabulous Atlas . . . in the very core of the Jewish Berber communities . . . a

thousand years of life, amazing, amazing" (154–55). It is no surprise that these words appear in English in the French text, thus further marking the superficial (external and touristy) effort to revive the past "as it really was."

In his introduction to Ami Bouganim's (a Jewish-Moroccan-Francophone Israeli writer) collection of short stories, *Récits du Mellah* (1981), El Maleh distinguishes between what he calls a "necrophilic relationship with the past" (8), which results in folkloric and nostalgic representations (as the one captured in the bus scene), and a productive form of remembering, which, he claims, "keeps the past alive as a speech that never ceases to circulate in the present" (9). In another essay, "Essaouira l'oublié" (1985), he similarly distinguishes between what he calls "nostalgia" and what he sees as a "productive relationship with the past." The latter he describes by turning to the Arabic root *gh-r-b*, which carries a dense constellation of different connotations. It stands for "exile" but also refers to echoes (fading sounds), journey, departure, immigrating, Westernizing, and the *Maghrib* (North Africa). This rich constellation of meanings allows for a reviving relationship with the past by bringing together home and exile; North Africa and the West; the joy of journey and the pain of immigration; the loss of the past and the persistent presence of its echoes in the present; the Arab Jew "we were" and the Arab Jew we can still "become."

El Maleh's views on the question of productive remembering might also explain why he is so careful in *Mille ans* to keep *losing* his character ("his Arab Jew") to metaphors, other historical figures, and other stories of loss. Following traces of various letters, images, memories, and names, Nessim ends up finding no identity of "his own." This, however, is not because Nessim, like Benillouche, the narrator of *La statue*, is torn between what he experiences as a conflict (inside and outside the Orient), but because Nessim is not to be found *but* as a movement between self and other, together "wandering in equal steps to a song which comes from beyond all [personal] memories" (224).

If Nessim gradually disappears from the novel, dissolving into a continual movement of metaphors and names, then, it is not (only) because the Zionist ideology (or French colonialism) has rid him of his otherwise past coherent identity, but because the story of identity, as told by El Maleh, is traced back to the story of the self's *becoming*. Writing a memoir as the story of one's becoming—a story made of endless meetings, interactions, fragmented journeys, and continual transformations—serves as a fight against forgetting: not the forgetting of the past as it "really was," but the forgetting of the past as an integral part of the present. Whether or not the Jews in Arab countries lived in fear and hopelessness, as Memmi argues,

or enjoyed the privileges of a special minority, as many others have suggested, is not El Maleh's primary concern. This is a matter of historical interpretation. Indeed, El-Maleh tells us less about "what we were" than about what we "could have been," reminding us that it is "never too late [for us] to become." That this lesson can be made into an evocative political position today is probably best captured in the provocative words of Edward Said, who has described himself—without apology, and to the great dismay of many Jews and Arabs—as "a Jewish Palestinian," thus liberating the figure of the Arab Jew from its empirical (historical) status ("we were"), allowing it instead to serve as a current and future political and ethical stance: we are and can still become.[13]

2

The Legacy of Levantinism

Against National Normality

> The figure of the Levantine plays a significant role in [reshaping] our understanding and representations of both identity and alterity … it carries a great impact on our understanding of the many tensions existing between pluralism and monolitism [as] it is a testimony of the persistent pluralism and Mediterranean cosmopolitanism [that runs against] the obsession of ethnic purity.
>
> —Claude Liauzu, "Eloge du Levantin"

In a brief essay published in 2003, the independent scholar David Shasha, a Syrian Jew currently residing in New York, encourages Jews and Arabs to embrace "the Levantine option," which he defines as "a radically new perspective based on a very old way of seeing things." This new-old way of seeing things draws on the memory of Arab Jewish coexistence and cultural collaboration in previous historical times (Andalusia, Ottoman Empire, etc.), but it can be reconstructed so as to directly engage the current political situation in Israel, Palestine, and elsewhere in the Middle East. "The promotion of the Levantine option," Shasha writes "is not merely a romantic exercise in nostalgia; it is perhaps the most progressive option that we now have to [defeat] what appears to be an utterly intractable inter-cultural dialogue."

Others have written, like Shasha, in favor of "the Levantine option," emphasizing the historical and political significance of reviving the cultural memory of the past associated with the Levant as a transnational, cross-ethnic, and multilingual region, shared by Jews and Arabs. Among

the most influential sources in this regard are the writings of the Iraqi-Israeli critic Nissim Rejwan the British-Arab scholar Elie Kedourie, and the Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf; the work of Shlomo Elbaz and Michel Elial, the editors of the short-lived journal *Levant*; and the informative work of Ammiel Alcalay, whose seminal 1993 attempt at reintroducing the Levant as a past and present regional cultural space shared by Jews and Arabs is still the most elaborate study of Arab and Jewish cultural and literary exchanges in and through the modern Levant.

This chapter looks closely at the Levantine option, examining the evolution of the terms "Levantine" and "Levantinism" from their initial derogatory colonial meaning to their more recent, reclaimed, and subversive connotations. I closely attend the writings of the Egyptian-Jewish novelist, essayist, and journalist Jacqueline (Shohat) Kahanoff (1917–1979)—the first writer to have promoted the Levantine option as an alternative to Israel's politics of self-seclusion—following this discussion with an analysis of a novel by a younger Israeli author, also of Egyptian descent, Ronit Matalon. Focusing on Kahanoff's legacy as it reemerges in Matalon's writings, while simultaneously examining the significant differences in the two writers' positions regarding the Levantine option and its political relevance to the modern Middle East, this chapter seeks not only to revisit Levantinism as a phenomenon of the past, but also to draw attention to its continual vibrant effects as a cultural and political stance, operating within and against the current reality of separatist homogeneous nationalisms and the prevailing "obsession of ethnic purity" (Liauzu 1997–98).

What Is Levantinism and Who Are the Levantines: A Brief History of the Terms

> Everyone who has lived in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean knows what "a Levantine" means, though a precise definition of this term is difficult, if not impossible.
>
> —Evelyn Baring, *Modern Egypt*

> The Levant is a cultural term over and above a geographical one [and] Levantinism is a state of mind. . . . Anybody can be Levantinized, or on the way to a perfect Levantine mood.
>
> —Nissim Rejwan, "What Is Levantinism?"[1]

The terms "Levantine" and "Levantinism" have always designated a state of in-betweenness. While the term Levantine was first introduced in the sixteenth century in reference to people who lived or worked by the Mediterranean Sea and who functioned as intermediaries between European (mainly French) merchants and the Ottoman local population, this concept of "capital mediators" soon gave way to a new and explicitly derogatory understanding of what it means to be located "in between cultures." From the nineteenth century and through the early part of the twentieth, British and French colonizers and travelers of the Levant used the term to denote the "meeting" between East and West in terms of racial, national, and cultural hybridity and impurity. The Levantines were commonly described as either "partly Europeans" or "semi-Orientals," and they were accordingly said to be culturally impure, to lack cultural authenticity and stability, and most importantly, to possess no distinct national characteristics. It might be difficult, if not altogether impossible, to define who or what exactly is a Levantine, Evelyn Baring tells us, but what is clearly evident is that for the Levantine, "nationality is of slight importance" (2000, 246–48, my emphasis).[2]

At times grouped together, at other times set apart, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Copts, Turks, Christian Arabs, Mediterranean Europeans, or European residents of the Levant appear in French and British colonial texts as "Levantines" and are distinguished from both (Christian, White) Europe and its imagined counterpart, the ("real") Orient. Time and again the Levantines are described as a "mixed race" or a "half-breed" and are judged accordingly to be morally, culturally, and intellectually inferior. The "typical Levantine" is considered to be a character of low morals (Baring); a member of an underdeveloped hybrid with week nervous and mental systems (Carrel); a manipulative and greedy person who takes advantage of the otherwise well-operated colonial system (Ninet 1865); and a cunning individual who is superficial, unreliable, materialistic, and above all, "without coherent origins or tradition" (Ehrenpreis 1928). Indeed, more than any specific group of people affiliated by class, ethnicity, race, or religion, the Levantines emerge within the European colonial literature as a dangerous hybrid between West and East or Europe and the Orient. More precisely, the Levantine is a *borderline figure* that marks the slippery lines between West and East and as such is found to be inferior not only to Europe but also to Europe's imagined Other, the Orient. If the Orient and Europe represent two opposite cultural entities placed in a hierarchal order, which is itself defined by the European orientalist imagination, the Levantine

represents a *failed* position located in between the two poles, a position associated with mimicry, impurity, incoherence, and the lack of coherent cultural/national heritage. Furthermore, within the colonial discourse, the dangers associated with the figure of Levantine and the process of Levantinization have much to do with the fact that the name "Levantine" does not, truly speaking, designate a pregiven identity or "an essence," as much as a condition of losing identity. In other words, one is never simply identified in the colonial discourse as "a Levantine" as one is said to be French, Oriental, Arab, German, and so forth. More accurately, one is always said to have *become* a Levantine by a process of loss: the loss of national affiliation, racial/ethnic purity, and cultural authenticity.

The perception of Levantinism as loss of authenticity and cultural coherence is most colorfully articulated by the Swedish writer and traveler Marcus Ehrenpreis (1928). Describing his travels in the Balkans, Egypt and Palestine, Ehrenpreis clearly distinguishes between "the real Orient" he finds in Cairo and Haifa and the failed "variant of the East known as Levantinism," which he ascribes to Prague:

> The Orient is already evident at the Masaryk railway station. Not the real Orient of the Azhar at Cairo or the one of Haifa's street cafes, but that variant of the East known as Levantinism; something elusive of definition—the body of the east but without its spirit. A crumbling Orient, a traitorous deserter from itself, without a fez, veil, or Koran; it is an artificial, trumpery New Orient, which has deliberately broken with its past and its ancient heritage. (46)

Levantinism, then, as this example clearly shows, is not merely understood as a loss of *European* cultural values. It is equally associated with the betrayal of the East: the "real Orient" with the fez, veil, and Koran. The Levantine serves as the site through which the imagined opposition between West and East solidifies. If this opposition is commonly discussed in terms of modernity versus tradition, progress versus decadence, or civility versus barbarism, through the Levantine this dichotomy is reorganized and rearticulated in terms of authenticity and mimicry, successful imitations and failed imitations, coherence and fragmentation; loyalty and betrayal. What makes the Levantine inferior to both Europe and the Orient, then, is his hybridity. In Ehrenpreis's words:

> The Levantine type is psychologically and socially, truly a "*wavering form*," a composite of Easterner and Westerner, multilingual, cunning, superficial, unreliable, materialistic, and

> above all, without tradition. This absence of tradition seems to account for the low intellectual and, to a certain extent, moral quality of the Levantines. . . . In a spiritual sense these creatures are homeless [as they] are no longer Orientals nor yet Europeans. (208–9, my emphasis)

"No longer Orientals, not yet Europeans," the Levantines, whose multilingualism is considered a disadvantage and part of their "wavering form," are morally and intellectually inferior, as well as spiritually "homeless." They are "homeless," because, within the modern European sociopolitical discourse, "being at home" means "belonging to" and possessing, a coherent, single, monolingual, identifiable, and authentic cultural heritage.[3]

But if the obsession with culture's authenticity and the fear of hybrid deformations can easily be traced back to modern Europe's fascination with the idea of dividing humans into "racial types" and characterizing collective personalities along lines of national behaviors or national cultures, the Levantine, as a borderline figure (a dangerous hybrid between Europe and the Orient) becomes suspected and feared not only by the colonizing West but also by anticolonial and pronationalist thinkers concerned with the future of the postcolonial, independent Levant. Indeed, it is only by realizing that the end of the European colonialism of the Levant has by no means meant the end of the European legacy—its emphasis on national, cultural, and ethnic purity—that we can understand how "Levantinism" emerges as a sociopolitical threat in the writing of the well-known anticolonial English-Arab scholar A. H. Hourani (who some would argue is himself a perfect example of a Levantine).[4] Writing about the process of modernization and nationalization of the Levant, Hourani warns Syria and Lebanon to "watch out not to become Levantines" (1946, 70). In a manner quite similar to that of European colonizers, Hourani describes Levantinism in terms of a dangerous hybridity between East and West, resulting in the failure to "belong to either" and an inability "to create" or to even "imitate correctly" any culture. To be a Levantine, or to be Levantinized, Hourani concludes, "is to belong to no community and to possess no [culture] of one's own." Again we see that Levantinism is figured primarily in terms of loss—the loss of cultural integrity and the ability to create—and with failure: the failure to imitate other cultures correctly.

But nowhere has this Eurocentric, orientalist and colonialist legacy, with its fixation of notions of racial, ethnic, or national-cultural authenticity and coherence, found a greater manifestation than in the newly established Jewish state. What for the French and British was part of a half-legitimate

colonial racist discourse found its way into the most authoritative dictionary of modern Hebrew language, *Milon Chadash me'et Avraham Even Shoshan*. The latest (2001) edition offers two definitions for the term "Levantine." The first refers to "a person who is of Middle Eastern descent"; the second, to "a person with superficial education who behaves according to false codes of politeness and lacks any real culture or spiritual stability." The noun "Levantinism" (*Levantiniyut*) is defined as "part of the characteristics of Oriental countries," or "a shallow education that lacks authentic and significant cultural and spiritual stability" (Even-Shoshan 2001). The two categorical definitions, the descriptive and the judgmental, are presented in proximity, leaving the relationship between them purposely suggestive. Within this context, the Levant itself, as a geographical area, and the people of the Levant ("of Middle Eastern descent") are both considered a source of great danger identified as "Levantinization" (*levantiniyut*)—a force "particularly elusive" and yet, as Nissim Rejwan (1961) notes, "used by all political opponents in Israel [. . .] whenever they blame each other for the deterioration of Israel." But not only Israeli politicians expressed their concern regarding the threat of the Levantinization of Israel. In 1948, the year the Israeli state was formed, the British writer Arthur Koestler published an essay in which he ponders: "in what direction would the Zionist nation develop? Will it be a continuation of Western thought and art and values, or [will it develop through] the superficial veneer of Levantinism?" The following year, after the first wave of North African immigrants to Israel, a French diplomat, who chose to remain anonymous, was quoted in the leading Israeli newspaper *Ha-aretz* warning the new state that "the immigration of a certain human material is liable to bring the Jewish nation down, and make it into a Levantine nightmare." He concluded by advising Israel to "learn from France's vast experience with similar immigrants" and to tighten its immigration laws before the nation "would be Levantinized, and fade out of history" (Gelblum 1949). A decade later the British daily *Manchester Guardian* published a piece accusing Israel's then prime minister, David Ben Gurion, of "plunging the new nation into Levantinism" (quoted in Rejwan 1999, 153), an accusation to which Ben Gurion was quick to respond, assuring his European supporters that he would "prevent Levantinism from creeping into [Israel's] national life!" (*Guardian*, Feb. 6, 1961) and that he was committed "to fight against the spirit of the Levant, which corrupts individuals and societies" (*Le Monde*, March 9, 1966).

As these examples reveal, the threat of Levantinism seems to have had a particularly potent impact on Israel, at least in its formative years. The pervasive and negative use of the term "Levantinism" regarding the

forming Israeli society served as the background against which Jacqueline (Shohat) Kahanoff—at the time a young Jewish-Egyptian immigrant to Israel—first published her essays in defense of Levantinism. Determined to transform the derogatory and colonialist connotations of the term, Kahanoff presented Levantinism not only as a form of rich cultural pluralism, but also as Israel's only true hope for surviving in the region.

Reclaiming Levantinism: Kahanoff's Vision

> Levantinization [is] a creative response to orientalisms.
> —Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*[5]

> The Mediterranean is another way of writing history.
> —Michel Eckhard Elial, "Commune présence"

Born in 1917 to a Jewish family of Iraqi and Tunisian descent, Kahanoff grew up in Cairo and studied in the French colonial education system, Alliance Israélite Universelle. She later lived in Paris and New York, where she published a novel and a few short stories. Throughout the 1960s and until her death in 1979, she lived mostly in Israel and published numerous cultural and political essays in the cultural journal *Keshet* as well as in leading Israeli literary supplements (*Davar* and *Ha-aretz*). While Kahanoff herself wrote in French and English, her readership today is limited almost entirely to Hebrew readers, whose familiarity with her writing grew mainly after her editor and translator, Aharon Amir, published a collection of her essays entitled *Mi-mizrach Shemesh* [*From East the Sun*].[6]

As a new immigrant to Israel, Kahanoff was quite disturbed by what she identified as the nation's "inner colonialism." Often addressing this problem, Kahanoff recognized Levantinism as an effective way to overcome the hierarchal and orientalist relationship between Ashkenazi (European) Jews and Mizrachi (Arab and African) Jews. Among her most powerful political essays was a cycle of four autobiographical essays entitled "A Generation of Levantines." In the first two essays Kahanoff uses the term Levantine to describe her personal painful experience of growing up in colonized Cairo, learning in a French school:

> At [the French] school we learned nothing about ourselves. . . .
> We never quite understood how come us girls—Jewish,
> Armenian, Muslim, and Greek—found ourselves learning about

> the French revolution, about *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*. . . . We were people with no language . . . we could not speak outside the language of Europe in which our inner self was well-hidden, buried under layers of European dialectics.[7]

But Levantinism comes to signify for Kahanoff not only the experience of a hidden self and loss of language, but also the way out of this state of loss. In the following two essays of the cycle she focuses on her experience as a new immigrant in Israel, presenting the first critical attempt to analyze the Jewish-Israeli society in terms of an explicit colonial oppression and racism. The meeting between the Ashkenazi authorities and the Mizrachi immigrants, she writes, must be understood in terms of "a complex illness based on racism and phobia." It is this illness that she hopes to "cure" by reclaiming Levantinism as a productive and desired state of being:

> As for myself, I am a typical Levantine in the sense that I appreciate to the same degree [what] I got from my Eastern background and what I later adopted from Western culture. Many dismiss this cultural blend, calling it impure or "Levantine." I myself see it as a source of enrichment. To live in a monocultural ghetto—*that* seems to me like a negative and obsessive kind of loyalty: a compulsion almost a neurosis! (121)

Levantinism—the process of becoming Levantine—is therefore for Kahanoff not only negative. The distinctive aspect of her essays is that while they are all organized around a sense of cultural crisis and loss, they simultaneously present a unique attempt to create a voice, not so much against the crisis but from within it, turning the crisis into an empowering point of departure.

Turning the very characteristics used by the European colonial discourse as well as by Israeli officials to undermine the Levantine—the lack of cultural stability, the absence of unified origins, and the lack of coherent cultural possessions—into the most cherished elements of a new cultural position that emphasizes plurality and hybridity, Kahanoff openly and without hesitation promotes "cultural impurity" while dismissing the very grounds upon which ethnic, racial, or national monoculturalism and separatism are constructed. Classifying monoculturalism as an "obsessive kind of loyalty," Kahanoff hits the nail on the head, describing the Zionist's dream of creating a monoethnic, monoreligious, and monolinguist Jewish national society in terms of a mental illness: "a compulsion almost a neurosis." Against Ben Gurion's promise to prevent the Levantinization of Israel,

Kahanoff urged Israel to embrace Levantinism as a cultural ethos, which she saw as Israel's only hope for integrating into the region: "Israel cannot expect to march on isolated to the end of times. . . . In stopping the fear of its Levantinization, Israel might open a path toward future regional peace" (9).

Embracing Levantinism, Kahanoff further suggests, could help Israel transform from an excluding colonialist and separatist national home to a "great cultural mixture resembling the great cultures of the past—Byzantine and the Islamic world" (53). Indeed, Levantinism, in Kahanoff's formulations, is first and foremost a cultural position that promotes fruitful cultural exchange and hybridity in accordance with the Levant's own essence and historical development:

> [While] the Levant cannot be sharply differentiated from the Mediterranean world; it is not synonymous [with it]. The Levant has a character and a history of its own. . . . Giving rise to world civilizations, fracturing into stubborn local subcultures and multilayered identities. . . . [The Levant] is not exclusively eastern or western, Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. . . . It is like a prism whose various facets are joined by a sharp edge of differences . . . reflecting or refracting light.[8]

Made of "multilayered identities" and never "exclusively eastern or western, Christian, Jewish, or Muslim," the modern Levant, Kahanoff suggests, presents an alternative to Zionist ethnonational separatism. Bringing together West and East but also the past ("the glorious ancient world civilizations") and the present (in which it is Europe and the West that are dominant), Levantinism, she concludes, enables the Levantine to "reevaluate herself through her own lights, rather than see herself only through Europe's [colonial] sights, as something exotic, tired, sick and almost lifeless" (72).

If these views might seem somewhat naïve today, it is important to realize how radical Kahanoff's voice was at the time, especially in the years following Israel's victory in the Six Day War in 1967 and the nation's growing sense of estrangement from its neighboring Arab countries. Kahanoff never ceased to believe that the geographic location of the emerging Jewish nation, and the nation's "mixed" population (made of Mizrachim and Ashkenazim), present a rare opportunity to revive the great Levantine multilingual and cross-ethnic culture she associated not only with the glorious history of Byzantine but also with her early childhood memories in Cairo, before attending the French school: "It seemed only natural to me [at that time] that people would understand each other although they spoke different languages and were categorized differently: 'Greek, Jewish, Islamic, Christian, Italian, Tunisian, Armenian' . . . we all were so familiar with each

other" (11). Such positive childhood memories are interrupted, she notes, by the presence of the colonialists: "Immediately after the English maid arrived at our home . . . I started to think about skin color and began to wander about [my own identity] was it: European? Native? Jewish? Muslim? Or Christian?" (11, 16). It is this danger of racist identity categorizations and social divisions that Kahanoff seeks to prevent from becoming the norm in Israel, by replacing Zionism's Eurocentric fear of the Orient with Levantinism. In opposition to a national identity that is based on a monolithic culture, Israel, Kahanoff enthusiastically suggests, could become the first nation in the Middle East that would be "not only tolerant to cultural differences, but, in fact, entirely *based on them*" (53, my emphasis).

Levantinism for Kahanoff, then, is both a traumatic outcome of colonialism and a means of recovery. It is a result of violent colonial meetings between West and East: first, the meeting between the colonial French and English and colonized Egypt, which she remembers as a childhood injury, and second, the meeting between European Jews and Arab Jews in Israel. The product of these traumatic "meetings" is the "Levantine," who she defines as "the son of the East who adapted to the new Western culture and yet is patronized by the European, mostly because the latter is threatened by him" (50). However, Kahanoff recognizes the threat this figure of hybridity presents to Europe as well as to the Zionist Ashkenazi authorities and suggests that the threat derives from the fact that the Levantine is in many ways superior to the colonizer, for the Levantine is the outcome of "a successful fusion of two or more cultures" (50). Presenting cultural hybridity as an advantage rather than a disadvantage, Kahanoff displays the "colonial inappropriate object" as a threat to the colonizer, not only for reasons of becoming too much *like him*, but also due to the likelihood of the Levantine to become "better than him."[9] Playing with the French meaning of the word *Levant* (rising sun), Kahanoff describes the Levantine as "a sun that rises and spreads its light into many different directions all at once" (56). What the French and later the Ashkenazi establishment viewed as "superficiality," Kahanoff presents as cultural "openness" and "flexibility," and the main condition for enabling continual cultural growth.

In an essay published in 1972 in *Ha-aretz*, Kahanoff (1972) extends her views on the significance of cultural impurity beyond the Israeli context, to include a more general comment on the decline of national cultures and the emergence of a "new understanding of culture":

> A new genre or group of works is created, one that cannot be defined by reference to any given national belonging, but which represents a "*culture-in becoming.*" . . . This might seem marginal

> from a national perspective, but from a larger social perspective, such literature directs our attention to a new era of cultural intersections and a *new understanding of culture* produced along numerous new and surprising "meetings."

Levantinism, then, appears in Kahanoff's writing not only as a particular hybrid made of East and West influences, but also as a new approach to culture, one that focuses on the process of cultural *becoming* and emphasizes relationships, interactions, and change rather than pregiven and presupposed cultural characteristics. With such insights, Kahanoff predicted a critical discourse that was to gain full momentum about twenty years later, with the publication of critical works by Caribbean writer Eduoard Glissant, French anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle, political scientist William Connolly, and postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha. However, following her death, Kahanoff did not receive the critical attention she deserves. Her legacy and critical thoughts on culture in general, and on the future of the Israeli culture in particular, were mostly forgotten, as her readership was limited to a very small group of critics, academics, and writers. It was only in 1995 with the publication of *Zeh im ha-panim elienu* [The One Facing Us], the first novel of the Israeli writer Ronit Matalon, that Kahanoff and her positions on Israeli culture were brought back to life and "the Levantine option" regained public attention.

"The Place Where the Photo Opens": The Ghost of Levantinism

> They left, each on his or her own way. Different countries, times, and personal experiences set them apart, opened large gaps among the few surviving photos.
> —Matalon, *The One Facing Us*

The One Facing Us follows three generations of an Egyptian Jewish family whose members left Cairo gradually from the late 1930s until the mid 1950s, when all Jews were forced to leave. The historical need to leave home forms the background for the novel's focus on the "new homes" the characters create, or fail to create, for themselves. Two narrators—first and third person—shift back and forth between the past and the present, between the family's scattering to different locations (Cameroon, Israel, New York, Paris, and Gaza) and the more current experiences of Esther, *la nièce*, who is sent by the family to her uncle in Cameroon, in order to "get some of that old world spirit into her" (23).

Most chapters open with a photo, supposedly found in Uncle Sicourelle's family album, followed by the personal writings of seventeen-year-old Esther, who spends her time in Cameroon writing a journal and looking at family photos, interweaving the "stories she finds in them" with the narration of her own daily experiences. Esther experiences the movement between past and present as a conflict between, on the one hand, her desire to "revive" her familial past and locate herself in relation to it and, on the other hand, her sense of the historical discontinuity that makes her attempt futile. This tension is manifested in the novel's complex use of the family photos as both a "gateway to the past," which the narrator enters in search of her own identity, and a "reminder" of how uncertain, indeterminate and necessarily partial this search must be:

> The place where the photo opens itself to its viewer is the place where the weak border between the real and the non-real flashes for a moment, revealing itself. This is the place where the photo announces not only its status as a witness of reality, but also its potential. Only this way can I see. I plant myself there from a distance of years . . . turning to myself in the third person . . . as a sign of agreement with the possible, if doubtful existence in relation to my uncertain familial identity. (10–11)

Viewing the family photos, Esther looks not only at what she clearly identifies but also at "what could possibly be." Vague shadows, partial particles, unrecognized objects draw her attention, destroying the photos' status as coherent and sealed "objects of the past." Thus, looking at the yellowing edges of an old photo, Esther notices the continuity between a yellowish picture seeb in the photograph and the fading color on the edges of the object she holds. This continuity, she remarks, "No longer allows the separation between that which is seen and the effects of time on it. The future has found its way into the photo. It has become part of the past, which likely invades the preset" (122).

Between the image captured in the photo and the reality that escapes the frame; between Esther's first-person narration and the third-person narrating voice describing the niece; between reality and "the potential," Esther's voice emerges—doubled and torn—in spite of or perhaps due to the impossibility of faithfully telling "her story," in a form of familial genealogy:

> [They lived] among real and fictive stories that wandered about with no citizenship, passing from hand to hand, from one house to the other. Names, attributes, smells, all these served as codes for something, as some clue, which the family photos proved

> right, wrong, or neither. *The photos presented another possibility*: a dazed twilight zone *between* right and wrong; true and false. In that dazed zone the error—the eye's mistake, the false stories and the illusion that creates them—grew like a culture of microbes. (35, my emphasis)

The story of oneself unfolds here, not as a "return" (a recovery of familial genealogy) but as a double and contradictory movement, locating identity in "the twilight zone" between fiction and reality, past and present, memories and fantasies.

Tracing the movement of the Jewish Levantine immigrants from the old home, "which was never a homeland but was a home," to the new homeland, which was "never a home" (121–22), *The One Facing Us* emphasizes the displacement experienced by each of the characters, which, while not directly introduced by the Zionist project, was certainly enforced by it. The family's photos—most of which are presented at chapters' openings, while others are declared missing—are followed by narratives in which the different family members' recent pasts unfold. Nona Fortuna, the grandmother, moves with her elder son Moise to Israel, "the place she hated since." Esther's mother, Inés, drags her husband Robert to a kibbutz they end up leaving due to "ethnic tensions." Esther's uncle, Sicourelle, settles in Cameroon, where he believes life is more suitable for the family's Levantine spirit. Edouard, the young uncle, becomes a chief commander in the Israeli force in the Gaza Strip, and the youngest sister Nadine moves to New York, where she disappears, never to be seen again.

In addition to Esther's family members, the novel presents the figure of Jacqueline Kahanoff by including two of her essays at full length, accompanying them with a few "fake" or "missing" photographs, such as a photo of two people standing by a railroad station in Warsaw, Poland, which is enigmatically entitled "Jacqueline Kahanoff, the Nile river, Cairo 1940." This photo, like other photos of unknown people in unknown places and times, "Wander[s] from one house to another," Esther comments, "like a story with no citizenship" (35).

In an interview conducted with her in 2001, Matalon dismissed the claim that her family knew Kahanoff personally and argued against the critics' misunderstanding of the place the photos have in her novel, reading them as carrying straightforward documentary value rather than presenting a zone between real and unreal, true and false. In the same interview, she further reveals that the photo of "Kahanoff by the Nile River" is only one of many fake photos in the novel. It is along the borders between the real and the imagined, "the true and false," as Esther comments, that the past "flashes for a moment reveling itself" (35), and it is within this shadowy

zone opened between right and wrong, true and false, past and present, memory and invention, Warsaw and Cairo, that the figure of Jacqueline Kahanoff is reintroduced. Her presence in the novel is elevated to the status of a cultural myth. She takes the place of the "spokeswoman of Levantinism," which as such can never be fully captured but rather forever remains a "missing photo." Her ghostly presence represents a world that Matalon's narrator calls "the Levantine fading dream." She describes remnants of this world within the Israeli present reality as nothing more than "shadows of gallant men," or "deserted memories of half real people in half real places walking through ghostly streets" (188), or the sounds of Arabic Esther hears often but does not understand (24). Indeed, if Kahanoff turned to the cultural possibility of Levantinism in order to offer a solution for what she identifies as "an inner colonialism" in the becoming-Israeli society, Matalon, writing thirty years later, returns to this cultural possibility (or its traces), not so much in search of a prescriptive solution but rather as an "alarming memory": a reminder of a lost historical opportunity through which the present victory of Zionist nationalism reemerges in the ghostly form of failed Levantinism.

Inscribing the failure of Levantinism back into the political taxonomy of the Zionist national-home, *The One Facing Us* exposes not only the failure of the first, but, no less important, the ideological limitations of the latter, revealing the "forgetting" that is located at the very heart of the nation's becoming. This national home, which for the young narrator has become, as she says, "her only possible home" (219), has never become a home for her Egyptian Jewish family, nor could it ever become a home for the "poor Muslims in Gaza who shake in fear whenever her uncle [the king of Gaza] crosses the street" (156).

Between Home and Homeland

> What of this being-at-home [etre-chez-soi] … toward which we never cease returning?
>
> —Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*

> "Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of difference even within oneself.
>
> —Minnie Bruce Pratt, *Yours in Struggle*

"Imagining home is in itself," Rosemary Marangoly George tells us, "a political act [and] a display of hegemonic power" (1999, 6). This claim is probably most true in the case of nationalism, where "being at home" is aligned with claims of territorial possession. Critical entanglements with the notion of "home" highlight the frequent use of its derivatives: "homeland" or "national home" (terms common in nineteenth- and twentieth-century national discourse), or "home-base" and "home-country" (frequently used within colonial contexts as well as in texts produced by immigrants and members of diasporic communities). Examining the use of "home" in national discourse, both Benedict Anderson (1983) and Edward Said (1983) show that the nationalist discourse commonly adopts an idealized image of "home" (as produced in reference to the "private sphere") and represents it in relation to the imagined "national family."[10]

Confronting this perception of home and belonging, Edward Said has distinguished between the experience of being at home and its territorial manifestations: "The readiest account of place might define it as nation . . . but this idea of place does not cover the nuances, principally of reassurance, fitness, belonging, association, and community entailed in the phrase at home" (1979a, 8). That home is always "more than a place" alludes to the irresolvable tension, articulated so clearly by Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat: "home *as an idea* appears locked within the fundamental ambivalence: 'home'—place or desire?" (1997, 2, my emphasis). To ask this question is to accentuate the same dissonance that the national conception of home aims to obscure. Home (and home*land*) is supposed to be *the place* where the self can, and should, meet his/her desire, as in Ernest Renan's words: "What constitutes the nation's soul is . . . *the desire to live together*" (1990, 19). With the distinction between home as desire or place, a new set of questions arises: What is the meaning of home as desire? What is this desire for? How are the notions of identity and belonging—which themselves tend to operate codependently—configured along this gap between home as place, and as desire?

It is into this gap that *The One Facing Us* inserts the memory of Levantinism and, through it, interrogates the notion of home as a site of desire and longing that is always already more than a place: What is a home; what is the desire for home; and what does it mean to "have" a home are among the questions raised by Matalon's novel. The difficulty of capturing the "true nature of home" and the ambivalence surrounding the meaning of the desire for home are introduced in the first scene of the novel. Looking at a photo of her uncle and his workers at the port of Douala in Cameroon, Esther recalls that there is "something strange about the empty plaza where

a wooden closet is placed." She relates this strangeness to the wooden closet, which "brings an air of home—*of a dim protected space*—to the plaza," while at the same time it "makes home and the notion of 'homey-ness' *empty and ridiculous*, rather than, as one would expect, making the plaza homey" (10).[11] "Home" as a desired yet elusive object circulates in *The One Facing Us* almost in an obsessive manner, drawing attention to the danger involved in conflating one's desire for home ("a protected space") with the projected appropriation of territory and the exclusions of others.

Following Esther's family's varied attempts to find and create new homes for themselves, *The One Facing Us* takes us back to the historical moment when Levantine Jews, like Kahanoff herself, had to leave their "Levantine world" and resettle. More than ideological reasons and personal preferences, what usually determined the place where the new home was sought was a pragmatic decision based on where one *could* settle. Israel was of course the easiest and therefore most natural choice for most Egyptian Jews, who either never had Egyptian citizenship (like Kahanoff herself) or lost it after 1948. Thus, while the novel emphasizes the *desire* for a home, shared by all characters, it also highlights the unsatisfying translation of this desire, into the attachment to the new national space. This gap between the desire for home and the inability to attach to a homeland is emphasized by the novel's frantic movement, back and forth, through many different, failing attempts to follow the promoted Zionist narrative of arriving at the promised land (*ha-aretz ha-muvtachat*). Moise, Esther's oldest uncle, and the only devoted Zionist, gradually grows bitter as he realizes his dreams of becoming an artist do not match the roles assigned in his new homeland to his ethnicity. Edouard, the young uncle, becomes a chief commander in the Israeli force in the Gaza Strip, taking all his frustration out on his subordinates, and Nona Fortuna, the grandmother, settles in Tel Aviv, where she "hated everything in sight. A real *cauchemar*: Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, the religious and the secular, the wealthy and the poor. They were all cruel and ridiculous in their endless war over a piece of land she considered not worth a spit" (241).

For Inés, Esther's mother, who more than any other character in the novel is determined to make a new home for herself and her family, "home" is a necessity that can and should be constructed at any given moment, at any given place, even under circumstances of transition, as within a tent in a transit camp for immigrants (*ma'abarah*): "After two weeks in the camp, Inés made their tent 'a model' . . . 'It is only a tent, Inés, it's only a tent,' her husband Robert insisted. But she did not want to hear. 'Tent, shment,' she argued, 'meanwhile, it's a home' " (188). This last phrase pre-

sents home as an answer to a very basic need for Inés. This need is again expressed clearly in her answer to her visiting American cousin Zuza, who asks her whether she misses her "roots in Egypt." Inés determinedly answers: "Roots, roots, whatever. What one needs is a home, not roots!" (294). Home, as clearly presented in Inés's answer, has nothing to do with "roots" or "origins." It is configured in Matalon's novel, as nothing more (or less) than the need for a point of reference or "a place in the world," to use Glissant's words (1997, 20).

From a national perspective, the idea that "home" is not based on shared origins, roots, or historical rights of territorial possession threatens to relocate the nation as just *one* site of social affiliation and personal identification, within what José Saldívar (1997, ix) calls "different cognitive maps in which the nation-state is not congruent with cultural identity, and belonging is distinguished from place." To differentiate, then, between the desire for home and the place of belonging, is to question the very foundation of nationalism. It exposes the dissonance that the national imagination aims to obscure in rationalizing the nation in terms of a "collective desire to live together," to borrow Ernest Renan's words (1990, 19).

Normalizing Jewish Identity

> The national claim for "normality" involved, among the rest, the normalization of apathy. It is not that one cannot live with such apathy, but it does cause [ethical] damage.
>
> —Ronit Matalon, *Read and Write*

Long before the Zionist ideological articulation of "home," the negation of exile and the inspiration for a return to Zion as the real "homeland" were central to Jewish thought.[12] And yet it is crucial to note that within the Jewish diasporic imagination, the place of the aspired "return" and the hope for "homecoming" were translated not to national activism but to a certain negation of, and distancing from, the present political reality. In other words, within this context, the envisioned return to the homeland occupied the place of desire but was not translated into an actual political investment in the possessing of a territory as a fulfillment of such a desire. In addition to this envisioned redemptive homecoming, an altogether different conceptualization of "home" developed within Jewish diasporic imagination, one that shifted the location of home from the land (of Zion) to the (Hebrew)

text.[13] It is important to note, then, that prior to the emergence of the Zionist national discourse, a great tension existed within Jewish thought concerning the actual meanings of both notions, "home" and "return": first, the desire for home and for a nostalgic return did not meet with an agreement concerning the actual fulfillment of such a return; second, and following the first tension, the understanding of home "as land" conflicted with the conception of home "as text" or "language." Within the modern Zionist discourse, however, these tensions have gradually dissolved, as both land and language have become explicit markers of *national* identity. "Being at Home" has become—like in any other modern national discourse—tightly associated with the occupation of specific territory by a specific people who possess the same land, language, and cultural affiliation.

It is this elusive coherence—the compatibility of place, culture, language, and rights of possession—that is advanced by the modern national discourse and promoted very explicitly in the case of Zionism as an attempt at "normalizing" the Jewish people. An example of such an attempt is found in the words of the prominent Israeli writer A. B. Yehoshua, who in 1997 expressed his concern for the future of the Israeli Jewish identity. To preserve the unique characteristics of this identity, Yehoshua suggested adding a precondition to the 1950s "law of return" (*chok ha-shvut*), which guarantees automatic Israeli citizenship to all Jews. Being Jewish, he claims, should no longer be a sufficient requirement for becoming an Israeli. Rather, the new Jewish Israeli identity must be based on the Hebrew language and therefore demands a "proficiency in Hebrew as the new principal criterion for receiving [Israeli] citizenship" (Horn 1997). Adding the criterion of language proficiency to the ethnic criteria, Yehoshua attempts to overcome the abnormal and "neurotic"—to use his own words—condition of the Jewish people, finally putting an end to the conflicts between "home—land or language?" as well as between "home—place or desire?"[14]

As a modern ethno-national ideology, Zionism has attempted to repair the distress of Jewish existence in exile, by bringing together one ethnicity (Jewish), one place (the land of Zion), and one language (Hebrew), thus creating a secure national home. Breaking down the oneness of time, place, and language, diffusing the borders between the past and the present, between various locations (Tel Aviv, Cairo, Dualla, Paris, New York, and the Gaza Strip) and among languages (Hebrew, Arabic, French, and English), *The One Facing Us* confronts the national myth of unity and accentuates the incompatibility of place, language, and the location of culture, thus challenging the Zionist nation's self-image of "normality." Centering on the shift from "a home that was never a homeland" to "a homeland" that "never

becomes a home," the novel exposes the violence of the national discourse in terms of its attempt to overcome the complexity of cultural identification by obliterating the conflicts between home and homeland, language and national language, the desire to belong and the location of belonging.

The dream of a normal national existence, as expressed in Yehoshua's model of the "newly made normalized Jew," is contrasted in *The One Facing Us* with a reality of racial and ethnic violence: Esther's uncle Moise's request from his kibbutz to support his studies is denied, while another member "with a different last name" (232) receives the money. Having proven himself to be the "toughest and cruelest of interrogators," the youngest uncle Edouard becomes head of the security service team in Gaza, where he is known as "the local King." Directing our attention to such antagonistic reality, *The One Facing Us* moves us away not only from Yehoshua's dream of national normality, but also from Kahanoff's dream of "cultural pluralism." Unlike the rest of the family, who moved to Israel, Uncle Sicourelle sees in his life in Cameroon "a natural line of continuity of himself and of his old Levantine world. A world where there is no room for national identity but ample room to carry out any conceivable human whim" (255/239). But this world, which seems to follow the Levantine spirit, is heavily dependent on the economic oppression and racial discrimination enforced within postcolonial Cameroon: Uncle Sicourelle and his wife enjoy the lifestyle of French colonizers, living in a huge house and served by locals they refer to as "our blacks" (51). The pluralistic dream of Levantinism, envisioned by Kahanoff as a fruitful meeting of different cultures from the East and the West, is thus shown by Matalon to be constructed upon colonial projections and social injustices.

Exposing the irreconcilable tensions found within the "Levantine option," itself a product of the colonial world, *The One Facing Us* hardly echoes Kahanoff's somewhat naïve hope for the growth of a productive pluralistic and multicultural Levantine society in Israel. Levantinism, like Zionist nationalism, is critically revisited in Matalon's novel as a concept born in, and sustained by, colonialism. But why then "return" to Levantinism and the Levantine option after all?

In revisiting the Levantine option, Matalon is invested in the lesson of this option's failure rather than in Levantinism as a productive solution. In Cameroon, Esther comes to terms with her own (previously unrecognized) displacement as she discovers that she herself is only "a guest" in her family's past, dreams, and languages: "My uncle speaks Arabic to me, enforcing an intimacy that was never mine" (24). Out of the irresolvable tensions between Esther and her family's experiences, between their past

and her present, between their home and hers, her native Hebrew and their "exilic languages," and "the ontology of [her] cultural identity and . . . the memory of [her family's] displacement," to draw on Bhabha's words (1998, 36), a critical approach toward home and cultural affiliation emerges as a practice of reevaluating the "normality" of one's own present, which, in this case, is the normality of the Zionist national existence.

This critical approach is not to be confused with the negation of the nation in favor of a romantic perception of exile. Matalon's revision of Levantinism is by no means a call for the (Levantine) Jews, or for anyone else for that matter, to pick up their belongings and return to a world that no longer exists. But her novel does seem to suggest there might be a way to *incorporate* Levantinism as a "state of mind" or a memory of failure *into* the nation. As an alternative to the binary between "homeland" and "exile," as well as between "present" and "past," Matalon's novel presents the possibility of mobilizing memory as a decolonizing force, or a memory that "uproots."

Situating the condition of "immigration," rather than either "exile" or "return," at the heart of modern Jewish history, Matalon confronts *both* the narrative of theological exile and that of national recovery, replacing them with a the narrative of immigration as a permanent condition that entailed no loss or "final arrival." Emphasizing resettlement, the narrative of permanent immigration is one of movement and dispossession: a narrative, which bases one's relationship to "home" on basic needs and reciprocal relationships rather than on historical rights of exclusive possession.[15]

Permanent Immigration

> In Israeli literature the possessor of language (*ba'al ha-lashon*) is the possessor of "home" (*ba'al ha-bait*).... He is the rooted Israeli who speaks *of* the immigrant because the immigrant cannot speak. The immigrant has no language. Caught between languages, his speech is "in suspense." He is dependent on *ba'al ha-bait*—the possessor of both home and language—to speak for him, to speak about him.
>
> —Ronit Matalon, "Language and Home"

In the above citation from her short essay, "Ha-lashon ve-ha-bait" [Language and Home], Matalon points to the fact that within Israeli literature, the master of language is also the master of home. He or she is the native,

the rooted Israeli, who has successfully made Hebrew his or her language and Israel his or her homeland. The immigrant, on the other hand, lacks language, for within the Zionist narrative of national revival (*tekuma*), his/her knowledge of other languages amounts to absolute lack: the total absence of speech. The immigrant, who is of course a Jewish immigrant, is foreign to both (national) language and land. He/she is bound to be homeless and speechless until he or she rids himself or herself of the exilic mentality of which he or she is suspected. In light of the fact that Israel is the only "modern diasporic nation," it is not surprising that issues concerning immigration (including difficulties adjusting to a new language, place, and changed living conditions) have been so widely explored within Israeli literature.[16] What comes as a surprise, however, is the successful and rapid radiation of "projected nativeness" that started to take place within the Zionist discourse even prior to the establishment of Israel as a nation. As the Jewish settlers arrived in the first major waves of immigration (*Aliyah*) in the early 1930s, the distinction between locals and immigrants was established. The early settlers quickly considered themselves the elders (*ha-vatikim*) and hence the possessors, as Matalon puts it, of both language and homeland. Furthermore, within the collective Zionist imagination, this process of projected nativeness functioned not only as a marker of the time the immigrants had already spent in the new homeland, but also as a sign of their presumed capacity to adjust to the new national ideology based on their "mentality," that is, their ethnic background, class, and education. As a result, while some immigrants were assumed to be "good candidates for going native," others, who were considered inherently "diasporic" (*galuti*), were viewed as a threat to the national development and treated as partial members of the new ethnonational community, in need of radical reparation.

Looking at some of the most pervasive images of immigrants or the "immigration problem" within Israeli literature in the writings of prominent novelists such as Yosef Haim Brenner, Moshe Shamir, Haim Hazaz, Aharon Meged, and Yehoshua Knaz, one notes that the immigrant is often presented as a diasporic Jew who is estranged from the local language and surroundings and whose successful integration is conditionally granted by "the locals" (*ha-vatikim*): Jewish immigrants who have already "turned native." In other words, the model we are confronted with is one in which the immigrant is a figure of crisis, who represents a stage from which one either moves successfully toward "joining in" or, if failing to do so, remains "not-quite-at-home," occupying the place of "the inner-outsider" and thus continuing to mark the border between the national identity and its projected alterity.

It is this image of the immigrant as a referent of crisis (the one who "cannot speak" and who can only be "spoken for") that Matalon confronts in the latter part of her essay. Directing our attention to the figure of Jacqueline Kahanoff and her generation of Levantine Jews, Matalon (1998) writes:

> These were people who arrived at Cairo [mostly] from Italy and Lebanon. They had no mother tongue. . . . [They lived] in a world of culture in crisis. A world made of torn identities and evident contradictions. . . . [But] this generation, which mastered no mother tongue, lived as *permanent immigrants*. Negotiating between different cultures, languages, and national borders, they did not experience their situation as a "temporary crisis" but rather as a "way of living" (*havaya*). "Being an immigrant" was not seen by them as a devastating condition. . . . It was national affiliation and being tied to one place that they considered "abnormal." (169, my emphasis)

It is from Kahanoff and her generation of Levantine Jews that Matalon seeks to learn a lesson about immigration and the political possibilities an immigrant mentality might bring about. If immigration is commonly viewed as "a temporary crisis and a traumatic stage one needs to overcome, [like] a childhood disease," it could also be considered as a permanent condition of "living in between cultures, languages, and places." Kahanoff's generation, Matalon suggest, presents a historical example of this possibility: the Levantines "never *became* immigrants. They *were* immigrants . . . their migrant existence embraced the perception of cultural identity as transportable" (169).

An echo to this view is found in Kahanoff's own words concerning monoculturalism, an option she defines as "a manifestation of an obsessive kind of loyalty, a compulsion, almost a neurosis" (121). In *The One Facing Us*, this opinion is best expressed by Esther's mother Inés, for whom being rooted and tied to one place is also a clear sign of unhealthiness: "She pulls out the roots of everything that grows around her plants and tries and shifts them from one place to another . . . attacking them with strange fanatic force . . . she pulls and pulls until their spirit comes out" (163). "It is bad for everyone to be stuck like that to one corner!" Inés explains to her astonished neighbors. Finally, in her latest book—a collection of autobiographical essays—Matalon adds her uncle's similar view, expressed in his half-joking response to his interviewer: "The only right place for us Levantine Jews is the mid-air," he says, "the Airplane is where we really feel at home!" (2001b, 42).

Permanent immigration as a way of living and a state of mind denaturalizes the bonds between cultural identity and location. That this state of being and this legacy of dislocation *could* paradoxically be practiced *within* one's own homeland is emphasized in the cynical words of the Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish: "Exile" he writes, "is so strong in me, I think I will bring it back home with me, to my 'homeland"' (*ha-galut col-cakh chazaka be-tokhi, ani choshev sh-avi ota artza iti*) (1996, 194).

Levantinism and the "Palestinian Question"

Jacqueline Kahanoff, as I have mentioned earlier, was the first to explicitly analyze Israeli society in terms of colonialism and define the cultural meetings between the Ashkenazi Jews and the Mizrachi Jews in terms of a "complex social illness" (1978, 48), racism, and phobia. It is this illness she hoped to "cure" by the promotion of Levantinism as political stance invested in "a correlation between the two major components [East and West] into a dynamic and creative unity" (53). However, while she seems alert to the similarities between the European colonialism she experienced as a child in Cairo and the interactions between Ashkenazi and Mizrachi Jews she recognizes in Israel, she fails to account for a similar colonialist violence between Jews and Palestinians. This radical difference in approach can be traced back to the special role Kahanoff ascribes to herself and other Levantine Jews within the colonial drama.

More than once the Egyptian Jews appear in her autobiographical writing as "mediators" between the French and English colonizers (the West) and the colonized Arab Muslim (the East). The latter are described as "poor and numerous. Servants and beggars . . . Arab masses" (11), whom the Jews "felt responsible for" due to "the advantage [they] had over them, thanks to the European education [they received]" (19).[17] To a great degree, then, Kahanoff's views about Levantinism as the "right balance between East and West" are themselves based on the internalized colonial assumption that it is the West that defines the precise nature of this "right balance."[18]

The distance Kahanoff's narrator maintains from the "Arab masses" is translated into the "forgetting" of the Palestinians within her optimistic vision of the emerging Israeli Levantine society. Indeed, the "national" and the "ethnic" remain radically separated in Kahanoff's writings, a separation that is translated into an absence of any actual and effective

Palestinians agency. The only time Kahanoff directly refers to the existence of Palestinians is after her first visit to east Jerusalem, occupied by Israel in 1967. Not once does Kahanoff mention the heavy military presence in the city, nor her own complex status as a "visitor." The one thing that does captures her attention is the fact that "the Palestinian women's skirts seem to have become shorter since 1967, they are much closer in length to the skirts warn by Israeli women" (111). Kahanoff's look at the meeting between [the Israeli society] and the occupied Arab woman is not, one might say, the critical look she maintains in her analysis of the meeting between Europe and the Arab colonies or the one she presents in her analysis of the inner colonialism between Ashkenazi and Mizrachi Jews. In the case of the "meeting" between the Israeli occupiers and the Palestinians, her astute criticism of colonialism gives way to an uncritical embrace of the Zionist national narrative of progress. Accordingly, the influence of the "West"—associated with the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem—is viewed quite positively by Kahanoff, who sees the shortening of the skirts as "a sign of cultural progress . . . an opportunity for a cross national dialogue" among liberated women.[19]

How, then, could Kahanoff, who experienced the colonial meeting with the French as a "loss of language and meaning" (17), forget this experience of alienation when writing about the meeting between the Israelis and the occupied Palestinian population? Or perhaps this forgetfulness is related, as Nissim Rejwan (1978) has ironically remarked, to her estranged relationship with the "Arab masses" and perhaps also with Arabic culture and language more generally: "The appellation "Levantine" suited Jacqueline Kahanoff superbly. . . . How else can one describe a Jewish woman who was born in Cairo of an Iraqi father and a Tunisian mother, got her schooling in Egypt and yet managed to speak not a word of Arabic." The main point, however, is not whether or not Kahanoff *knew* "a word of Arabic," but that she herself seemed unable to clearly answer this question. Arabic is mentioned a few times throughout her essays, and yet it seems to appear only to disappear immediately after. In her essay, "My Brother the Rebel," Kahanoff mentions Habib Bourguiba's enforcing of French in Tunisia's elementary schools, supporting his claim that "Arabic, in its current state, is not suitable to deliver modern thoughts and terms that are necessary for our times . . . for surviving in the twentieth century" (38). Indeed, she refers to Bourguiba as a "true Levantine" who gives expression to the "Levantine humanism," and as it seems, this "humanism" requires that he speak "French better than Arabic."

A more cryptic, yet very telling, example, which emphasizes Kahanoff's complex enigmatic relationship to Arabic (and to her own Arab iden-

tity), is found in her essay entitled "A French Journal." Describing her visit to Paris in 1962, Kahanoff writes about an interaction she has when noticing a group of Algerian manual labors working outside a museum she visits. She wonders how these people feel, working in Paris, speaking Arabic among themselves and French to others, and whether the gendarme is "supervising the Algerian workers or protecting them?" Kahanoff concludes that there is no way to decipher the "double meaning of such perpetual crossing back and forth between Arabic and French" (122). Where, however, does Kahanoff locate herself in this scene, along this "perpetual crossing" between languages, between French and Arabic, and between the colonizer and the colonized? We soon find out, as she is drawn into the scene by a question directed to her by one of the workers: "One of the workers asks me for the time, surprised I mechanically answer in Hebrew. 'What Arabic dialect are you speaking?' he asks me. I am shocked. For a moment, I forgot that I was in Paris. This man, a blue cap on his dark head, looked to me like so many of *ours*" (122). The worker most likely asked for the time in French, unless he too "forgot he is in Paris" or thought that Kahanoff looks like "so many of them," in which case he might have spoken in Arabic. What makes Kahanoff "slip" into Hebrew (which she is famous for *not* speaking very well)? Answering in Hebrew, I suggest, removes Kahanoff from the colonial drama (the perpetual movement between French and Arabic) and places her outside of her own "perpetual crossing back and forth," between her doubled-position as a colonized Arab Jew and a colonizing Israeli. While the initial intimacy Kahanoff feels toward the Algerian worker makes her "forget" she is in Paris, her slip into Hebrew rather than, as one could expect, into Arabic reveals her failure or resistance to locate herself on either side of the "colonial perpetual crossing." Furthermore, while the perpetual movement between Arabic and French is identified as the outcome of a colonial dynamic, her own slip from Arabic into Hebrew is located outside the context of colonial interaction and presented only in terms of a familial resemblance: "What Arabic dialect are you speaking?"

Kahanoff's inability, or refusal, to draw the connection between the "inner colonialism" she identifies between Ashkenazi and Mizrachi Jews and the colonial interaction between Jews and Palestinians has since been repeated by many who have discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in exclusively national (rather than colonial or orientalist) terms.[20] Even more disturbing is the fact that many recent followers of Kahanoff seem to confuse her vision of Levantinism with a form of Mediterraneanism, thus doing away with the "Palestinian problem" altogether.

Mediterranean Israel *or* The Levant without Its Arabs

> It is now time to explore the concept of a Mediterranean culture.
> —David Ohana, "Israel and the Mediterranean Option"

In the mid 1990s a group of Israeli scholars, artists, and writers established the Israeli-Mediterranean Culture Forum (Forum Yisrael Le-Tarbut yam Tikhonit), which they presented as a forum dedicated to the promoting of a "new kind of humanism [in Israel] as an ideology of tolerance, and dialogue between East and West" (Ohana, 2000a, 104). However, the members of the forum seem to fail to relate this "Mediterranean humanism" to the political and geographical reality of Israel, a state not only located along the shores of the Mediterranean, but also neighboring hostile Arab countries and itself occupying a large Arab population.

In an evening dedicated to the memory of Kahanoff (Jerusalem 1996), Aharon Amir, a poet, translator, and one of the forum's members, described the modern Levant, of which Israel is part, as the "cosmopolitanism of the Mediterranean. A colorful culture hybrid made of Jews, Italians, Greeks and Copts . . . a rich reality represented in the writings of the Greek poet Cavafy and Lawrence Durrell's" (1996). No Arabs or Muslims are apparently part of this rich cultural Levantine world. This failure to include the Arab and Muslim world, which has always been a central part of the Levant and is certainly a central part of Israel's current reality (far more than the Italians or the Greeks), is further elaborated by the liberal politician Amnon Robinstein (1997), who, at that same event, argued that the possibility of an Arab tolerant society "belongs only to the past": "Cairo and Alexandria—the centers of the old Mediterranean world—are now nothing but homogeneous-Arab-Muslim-reactionary places. . . . [The place to look for] the new Alexandria [today] is nowhere else but in Israel, with its lovely Mediterranean ports and blinding mixture of cultures united together under the strong sun." The Arab-Muslim world, as we see from the above quotations, is quite explicitly located *outside of* the praised Mediterranean culture, to which Israel belongs. Indeed, the reality of the Arab world (including that of occupied Palestine) appears in the writings of Amir, Robenstein, and other members of the forum, as either irrelevant or an obstacle to the future growth of a rich Mediterranean culture in Israel. Egypt, which was once a lively cultural center, is described as a site of "miserable ruins of

a once rich cultural world . . . the streets once filled with Jews, Christians and Copts are now mastered by fanatic Muslims and masses praying in public" (Robinstein 1997), and the only hope for involving the Arabs in the *present* Mediterranean culture is said to be found in Morocco, because "it is the most European of all Arab nations" (Nehemiah Lev-Zion, quoted in Robinstein 1997).[21]

Discussing Israel in term of aromas, Mediterranean ports, the sun, and the lovely coffee houses (not even the bombed ones) leaves little room for another reality: that of Palestinian refugee camps, second-rate Arab citizens, or poor Mizrachi Jews, who are not part of any such dreamy images. For a Levantinized Israel to be politically relevant, however, it must be envisioned, less as part of the dreamy "tragic humanism of the Mediterranean" (Ohana 2000a, 121), and more in terms of the present sociopolitical reality of Israel and the larger Middle East. The latter is unlikely to be found in the words of the great Greek poet Cavafy P. Constantine, writing about late nineteenth-century Alexandria, in the oriental images of Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*, or even among the reflections of the writer known as the frontier man of "Mediterranean humanism," Albert Camus, who writes passionately about the powerful "ancient Mediterranean sea" with its "warm Latin wind" and its "hitting sun above" (quoted in Ohana 2000a, 155). For the purpose of effectively Levantinizing Israel, it would be far more useful to attend to the writings of Palestinians, Israelis, and other Jews and Arabs, who explicitly express the need to promote new political discourses of coexistence, while changing or redefining the ways in which we think and talk about cultural identity, belonging, possessing, and "being at home." For if, as suggested by Michel Elial and Shlomo Elbaz (1991), the editors of the short-lived journal *Levant*, the modern Levant is above all "a model of interpretation" and "a way of writing, reading and thinking which carries some undetermined connections with the Andalusian school (*el'Andalus*)," we find a clear expression of such a "model" in the fiction of many contemporary Hebrew and Arabic writers, among which, to name just a few, are Imil Habibi, Sahar Khalifah, Mahmoud Darwish, Na'im 'Araydi, Anton Shammas, Orly Castel-Bloom, Shimon Ballas, Albert Swissa, Sami Shalom Chetrit, and Ronit Matalon.

Incorporating Arabic into her novel and having many of the dialogues take place in Arabic, accompanied by Hebrew translations in footnotes (all of which are lost in the English translation), Matalon "reminds" her reader of the continual presence of Arabic and Arabs within the Israeli society. Forcing readers of Hebrew not only to read the Arabic (transliterated in Hebrew letters), but to further "look up" the meanings of the words in the added footnotes, Matalon interrupts the common hierarchy that characterizes the "perpetual crossing" between these two languages within the Is-

raeli context, as translation now takes place from Arabic to Hebrew, which is located at the bottom of the page, itself a reminder of the colonial circumstances that alone can explain why most Israelis do not know more than a few words in Arabic.

Focusing on the colonial imagination that governs the "meeting" between Hebrew and Arabic and between Jews and Arabs in Israel, Matalon's novel further exposes the hidden continuity between the "inner colonialism" that takes place between Ashkenazi and Mizrachi Jews and the colonial interaction that takes place between Jews and Palestinians. It is the misguided separation between the two, Matalon shows, a separation that radically divides the ethnic (or the so-called ethnic problem) from the national (or the "national conflict"), that results in the Arab Jew's necessarily schizophrenic relationship toward his/her own Arab identity. Thus, Esther's uncle, Edouard, the mighty officer known by all as "the king of Gaza," proudly claims to be the only one in the family who is "entirely Arab" and who maintained the pride they left behind in Egypt (156). He refuses to speak Hebrew, insists on speaking only Arabic, and accuses his family of becoming too Ashkenazi-like. At the same time, and without realizing the contradiction involved, he protests against what he calls "their soft attitude toward the Palestinians," arguing that "these Arabs" need to be treated with discipline and violence, for that is the only language they understand (157).

As a memory that draws us back to the insufficiency of our present, Levantinism, as Matalon's novel suggests, forces us to think beyond the reality of the ethno-separatist nation. Taking us through the "narrow passage between rootedness and displacement" (Bhabha 1998, 36), *The One Facing Us* opens our current political and cultural maps to include not only what we can easily see and identify, but also the vague shadows of partially recognized particles, which—like "stories without citizenship"—hover over our reality, carrying a potential for political transformation and meaningful Levantinization. Such meaningful Levantinization, I would further suggest, cannot be aligned with the various theoretical attempt to revive the memory of the Mizrachi Jew as a natural or integral part of the Levant as seen in the seminal work of Ammiel Alcalay or David Ohana, both of which emphasize the Levant as "a space in which the Jew was native . . . an absolute inhabitant of time and space" (Alcalay 1993, 1) or as a space in which the Jew "was a natural son" (Ohana, 2000a, 22 143).[22] If both critics represent "nativity" and "natural belonging," as a historical proof or a model for the future possibility of re-creating a peaceful and culturally rich life shared by Jews and Muslims in the Levant, they overlook the limits associated with this discourse of nativity, origins, or natural belonging. After all, one must remember that it is precisely the figure of the "native Jew" that stands at the

heart of the Zionist claim of possession over the land and the Zionist theological-political narrative of return.[23]

A meaningful Levantinism, I suggest, must introduce the more radical move of deconstructing the Zionist agenda and rethinking the meaning of "Israeliness," by critically negating all notions of cultural authenticity, nativity, or natural belonging. If the figure of the Levantine, as we have seen, is an ambiguous figure that operates within the orientalist economy, it also has the capacity to challenge the very foundations of this economy. It could thus be mobilized against orientalism, or more specifically against the orientalisms that shape today's animosity between Jews and Arabs. One should remember that the Levantine is not this or that particular identity (the "native Jew," for example), but rather a marker of *the instability of identity*. Less an identity than a position of ambiguity, located between the "real" Oriental and the "pure" European, the Levantine represents impurity, hybridity and dispossession of authentic and coherent (racial, ethnic, or national) characteristics. His/her position continuously escapes the various attempts of the orientalist discourse to arrest identity along oppositional structures: he is Arab *but* Jewish, he is Oriental *but* European, he is European *but* Easterner, he is Arab *but* Israeli, etc. In other words, the Levantine marks the "difference within the difference"; an escaping gap that works within, yet against, the very binary oppositions set by the orientalist imagination: West/East; Jew/Arab; Mizrachi/Ashkenazi, etc.

In escaping a stable and fixed identification, the Levantine effectively challenges the "urge to identify" and the politics of identity that accompany such urge.[24] It is through this figure that we may hopefully be able to replace the fantasy of anyone being "an absolute inhabitant of time and space" with what Yigal Zalmona (2000) has recently described as the ability to embrace a "corridor mentality," which challenges the quest for national-cultural essence.[25] Such a mentality is itself the hopeful promise of Levantinism, an idea best captured in the autobiographical words of the Palestinian-Israeli poet Na'im 'Araydi (1989):

> Until the age of thirteen I studied in our local village school. I learn to ask: "what" and "who." After thirteen, my parents sent me to study in the city, in an Israeli-Jewish school where I learned to ask "why" and "how." Today people keep asking me if I am an "Arab Poet" (*meshorer Aravi*) or a Hebrew poet (*meshorer Ivri)*. This question makes little sense to me, but I fear it nevertheless. In order to overcome my fear [the fear of needing to identify myself with one or another position] I had to become very optimistic. This optimism is my Levantinism.

3

Bringing Hebrew Back to Its (Semitic) Place

On the Deterritorialization of Language

I do not know.
A language beyond this,
And a language beyond this.
And I hallucinate in the no-man's land.
—Anton Shammas, *Shetach Hefker*

The establishment of the Jewish state was considered by Zionism to be the territorialization of the Hebrew language.... The de-territorialization of the Palestinians in 1948 was done *in Hebrew*; 'the language of grace,' [which] for the Palestinian refugees is a language of confusion.
—Anton Shammas, "At Half-Mast"

Language as Territory

In their highly influential essay "What Is a Minor Literature?" Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986, 18) assert that "the deterritorialization of language" is one of the three characteristics of minor literature.[1] For the critics, Kafka is an example of a writer who chose to deterritorialize German (the hegemonic language of his time and place) rather than territorialize other languages by writing, for example, "in his Czech language or using popular, oral Yiddish" (25–26).[2]

For Deleuze and Guattari, writing in a hegemonic language is a precondition of minor literature. Others have already engaged this and

other assertions made by Deleuze and Guattari in their attempt to define minor literature, by either refining the definition (Lloyd 1987, 1990) or discrediting it (Kronfeld 1996). Without engaging the questions regarding the accuracy of these various arguments and definitions, I wish to stay with Deleuze and Guattari's important association of language with territory, and of political resistance with the *deterritorialization* of language. My own use of the terms territorialization and deterritorialization have less to do with the confinement of languages to any particular given space than with the metaphorical imagination of language as a territory: a well-defined terrain to which "one belongs," to which "one returns," and into which one does, or does not, allow others to enter. Thus, if land is the most immediate site over which national conflicts take place, language—imagined as a cultural territory—is similarly treated as a matter of exclusive ownership, as if it too needs to be protected and guarded against invasions and repopulation.

Within the context of modern European nationalism, language is often considered as the basis upon which the people's solidarity is constructed.[3] Benedict Anderson mentions, for example, that to facilitate the emergence of the independent modern national state, Gaelic had to be "elbowed out" of Ireland by English just as French "pushed Breton to the wall" and Castilian "reduced Catalan to marginality" (1983, 78). In other cases, where multilingualism remained a persistent precondition (as in the case of the Balkans), language became an explicit cause for deadly wars. Thus, as Bozidar Jaksic (1998) writes: "Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian became a symbol of the struggle for independent nation-states and was transformed into an instrument of war propaganda and a seed of destructive hatred." Along with many other victims of this war, Jaksic continues, "a language was killed: the Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian. . . . [Its] murder was committed deliberately and designedly, and served exclusively political goals."[4]

Many other examples reveal the central role that language—imagined as a territory and a cultural possession—plays in the construction of national identity. The anxiety around maintaining language's purity or reconstructing a monolingual community is part of all modern national movements. It can be witnessed in the case of North Africa (particularly Algeria), where Arabic was expected to replace the colonial French; in the case of Korea, which, after its creation at the turn of the century, devoted much time and energy to "purify" the Korean language of various "foreign elements" (mainly the use of Chinese orthography, and later the influence of Japanese); or in the case of India and Pakistan after the partition, when the shared standard language "Hindustani" was separated into Urdu and

Hindi, thus marking the cultural borders between the two new nations.[5] If multilingualism is commonly "equated with instability," the idea of a monolingual nation-state is often "taken as the unquestionable model for progress and development" (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998, 206). As a national political ideology, monolingualism is all about creating clear borders between national or ethnic communities and policing traffic among the different users of language. In other words, it is not only about *how* and *what* language is used, but also about *who* uses it.

As in many other cases, the establishment of the Israeli nation-state was accompanied by the nationalization of language. Hebrew was chosen as the main official national language, while other languages (primarily Yiddish, Arabic, German, and Russian) were defined as "exilic languages," and their use was considered a threat to the nation's unification and development.[6] But the Israeli case is unique in that the nationalization of Hebrew further reinforced the older perception of Hebrew as an ethnic, theological language. Thus if, as Jacques Derrida convincingly argues, any national claims of exclusive possession over a language must be understood as an act of historical violence and massive deception,[7] in the case of Israel this deception, or "miracle" to use Derrida's own term, was meant to preserve Hebrew's status as *both* a modern national language and a traditional ethnic-religious entity. This doubled status of Hebrew makes it clear that while Hebrew is considered "an Israeli language," it does not belong equally to all Israelis, for it is primarily viewed as a "Jewish language."

The tensions emerging from this dual status of Hebrew (is it Israeli or Jewish?) are at the heart of Anton Shammas's remarkable novel *Arabesques* (1986),[8] which further highlights the intrinsic place of the Palestinian and the Palestinian narrative of loss *within* the cultural space of modern Hebrew language and literature. While Shammas was certainly not the first Palestinian to write in Hebrew, he was the first to write a novel that was not only written *in* Hebrew, but also thematically *about* Hebrew or, more explicitly, about the intimate, if also painful, relationship between Israeli-Palestinians and the "Jewish language."[9]

The Language of Grace

In 1986 the well-established Israeli writer A. B. Yehoshua was quoted in an Israeli newspaper advising his colleague, the Christian-Israeli-Palestinian writer Anton Shammas, "to pick up his belongings and move a 100 meters east, to the becoming Palestinian nation where he could realize his Palestin-

ian identity fully." Shammas responded incisively, claiming he has no intentions of resettling and calling Yehoshua "a member of a Jewish terrorist group."[10] Against Yehoshua's implied perception of Shammas's conflicted identity (Israeli yet not Jewish; Arab yet Israeli), Shammas argued that no clear separation could be made between Jewish-Israeli and Arab-Israeli identities, as the two rely heavily on each other: "How can the Arab intellectuals in Israel conduct their culture when it is the Jewish majority which supplies them with the frame from which they come out and to which they return, whether they wish to or not. . . . What [Yehoshua] does not realize is that his own left hand is *already* an integral part of my own Israeli identity just as *at least* one finger of his right hand is my own" (1987, 26). A poet, journalist, novelist, and translator, Shammas has fulfilled an active role in Israeli cultural production since the 1970s with the publication of his Hebrew poems and essays and his multiple translations from Arabic to Hebrew. While Shammas has also published in Arabic and in English, he has chosen to write his only published novel so far in Hebrew, and to have its main narrator, Anton Shammas, present himself as an "Israeli-Arab poet."[11]

The conflict that took place between Yehoshua and Shammas, was followed by other, no less panicked reactions on the side of Jewish Israeli writers and critics who accused Shammas of writing his novel in what they assumed to be an exclusively Jewish language. Emerging from the debates was the question of Hebrew as a cultural space that is at present shared by both Jewish and Arab Israelis. While Shammas stresses the fact that Hebrew—as an Israeli language—belongs equally to all Israelis, Yehoshua and other Jewish critics argue that Hebrew remains, even as a national language, first and foremost a Jewish cultural territory.

To grasp the immense political implications of this debate, one must first realize the central role played by Hebrew within twentieth-century Zionism, and the significance attached to the notion of its "revival" as the national language of the "new Jew."[12] I have already discussed the notion of the new "un-Jewish-Jew" in the introduction, emphasizing the Zionist attempt at Westernizing and modernizing the Jew by paradoxically reviving his assumed "authentic" national existence in the East. This process, which involved a drastic shift in the body image of the Jew (who had to become less "Jewish-looking": less of a *Mauschel* and more of a *Muskeljude*), similarly involved a shift vis-à-vis the Jewish language. All "old" and "exilic" languages were thus expected to be replaced with Hebrew, which was itself considered not only "authentically Jewish," but also "masculine" (Harshav 1993, 21).[13] Indeed, to become "a man among men" living in a "nation among nations," the new Jew had to assure that his new national language Hebrew would prevail as a symbolic manifestation of a Jewish cultural-national revival.

Bringing Hebrew Back to Its Place

Modern Hebrew, being a "revived language," came back into daily use only within the second half of the twentieth century and mainly as a result of Zionist aspirations. Thus, until very recently, writing modern prose in Hebrew was considered a great cultural as well as a poetic and political statement. Anyone writing in Hebrew, even at present, cannot but be drawn into a dialogue with this recent history of linguistic and national revival, which in many ways is still in the process of becoming. Indeed, the fact that the mission of making Hebrew into the Jewish national language took place so recently means that Hebrew today enjoys within the Israeli national imagination a double status. As the Israeli critic Hannan Hever observes, "Hebrew functions as both the language of the majority in the state of Israel and as the language of a minority compelled to fight for cultural and political recognition" (1987, 48). The response of the leading Israeli novelist, Amos Oz, to the publication of Shammas's novel exemplifies this double status of Hebrew, presenting it in a somewhat ironic light: "I think of [the publication] as a triumph . . . not for the Israeli society, but for the Hebrew language. If the Hebrew language is becoming attractive for a non-Jewish Israeli to write in, then we have arrived!" (quoted in Hever 1987, 48). In light of Hebrew's double status as a historical exilic-marginal language and a present national language, the cultural and political implications involved in the writings of non-Jewish Israeli Arabs such as Na'im 'Araydi, 'Atallah Mansur, Muhammad Watad, Nazih Khayr, Muhammad Ghanayim, Salman Massalha, Sayed Kashua, and Anton Shammas seem to be especially complex, even more so than in the case of past colonized Arabs writing in French or English. Writing in Hebrew means, first and foremost, taking part in (without necessarily supporting) an ethnic-national attempt to bring Hebrew and Jews "back home" so as to assure, in Oz's words, "the arrival" of the national Jewish existence.[14] Why, then, would a Palestinian who is fluent in Arabic choose to write his novel in Hebrew? Shammas's own answer to this question presents an ironic spin of the Zionist negation of exile and the ideal of creating a new Jew by bringing Jews and Hebrew "back home."

"What I was trying to do [by writing] in Hebrew," Shammas explains "is to un-Jew the Hebrew language . . . to make it more Israeli and less Jewish, to bring it back to its semantic origins, back to its place" (1988). Shammas's words are intentionally ironic. They play on the central Zionist motif of nationalizing Jewish identity by bringing together in matrimony one ethnic/religious identity (Jewish), a specific national territory (Israel),

and a single national language (Hebrew). But unlike the Zionist attempt to revive Hebrew as a Jewish national language, Shammas's attempt to "bring Hebrew back to its place" emphasizes the Semitic and Oriental nature of both the place and the language, thus directly confronting the exclusivist bond between "Jewish" and "Israeli" as well as between "Jewish" and "Hebrew." If the main target of Shammas's criticism is the ethno-national separatist imagination of Zionism, it is important to note that his novel similarly challenges the separatist aspirations of Palestinian nationalists by showing how such aspirations overlook the existence of Israeli-Palestinians and the complexities this population introduces to the concept of the "two-state solution." Against both these narratives of seclusion, *Arabesques*, I suggest, tells a different story, one that emphasizes the inevitable relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, Hebrew and Arabic, occupier and occupied, and which therefore situates the Israeli-Palestinian at the heart of the conflict as a political figure that cannot be ignored (or erased by having him "pick up his belongings and moving a 100 meters east"), but should rather serve as an opportunity for rethinking the limits of national separatism and ethnocultural segregation.

In *Arabesques* the Israeli-Palestinian character (Anton) functions as a distinctive political agency that both the Israeli-Jewish character (Bar-On) and the character of the Palestinian writer from Nablus (Paco) have difficulties relating to, due to his "in-between" position. Thus Bar-On explains his preference for Paco over Anton as having to do with the fact that Paco "is a *pure* Palestinian" and that, as such, he represents a position against which he, as an Israeli, is forced to "form a clear stance." Anton, on the other hand, "makes it hard" for he represents an ambiguous position between self and other: between "fellow citizen" and "enemy" (168–69). The difficulty associated with the Palestinian-Israeli, which has all to do with his "impure" cultural and political status, is precisely what Shammas re-presents as an occasion through which to bring the dichotomies between Israeli and Palestinian or Jewish and Arab to collapse. His novel illuminates the fact that it is insufficient to challenge the current political antagonisms between Jews and Arabs / Israelis and Palestinians by mobilizing a rhetoric of rights and historical injustice. What is required, he seems to suggest, is a more radical approach, which challenges mythical narrative of origins, rights, and possession over land, language, and culture and directs attention instead to the possibilities of living with, among, and in between differences. For him, while the "meeting" between Israeli-Jews and Arabs clearly involves extreme violence and injustice, it also results in the production of new cultural interactions and fruitful exchanges. Furthermore, the fact that Israeli-Jews and

Palestinians share a small living space and a recent (very bloody) history means that the two people cannot possibly be "only" radical opposites, for they are necessarily, an integral part of each other's identity.

Shammas's choice to write his semiautobiography, which he calls "a Palestinian story in Hebrew letters," should be viewed, therefore, not only as an act of ethnic dispossession—"un-Jewing the Hebrew language"—but also as an attempt to undermine the disjunction between "Arab" and "Jew" that is prescribed by the very representation of Hebrew as both an "Israeli" and a "Jewish" language. If national struggles over land and territory are the most difficult to settle, language—construed as the cultural space people share—might be where we should look for alternative mappings of our conflicted sociopolitical reality. *Arabesques*, I suggest, invites us to seriously consider such a possibility.

Impossible Writing *or* the Writing of New Possibilities

Arabesques is divided into two main sections separating the narrator from his narrative (part 1 is entitled "the tale," while part 2 is named "the teller"), suggesting from the very outset that the relationship between writer and text, narrator and narrative is not straightforward, nor based on a clear sense of control or mastery. The first section, "the tale," depicts the history of the narrator's family, starting with their move in the early nineteenth century from Syria to Galilee, continuing with Anton's childhood in the village of Fassuta, and ending with Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967. The second section, "the teller," unfolds the story of the narrator, who is an accomplished writer participating in the annual international writing program held at the University of Iowa. The relationship between the narrator and the narrative is left purposely enigmatic. The enigma grows even more as the narrator becomes, in the second section, a character in others' texts: the "sample Arab" for the Israeli Jewish writer Bar-On, who writes a novel about "an intellectual Arab who speaks Hebrew" (150); and the hero of a fictional autobiography written by the "other Anton Shammas," known also as the journalist Michael Abayyad.

Many questions are left open: Who is the "original" Anton Shammas? What is the relationship between the narrative of the narrator as presented in the first section and the narrative that unfolds in the second? And what is the relationship between fiction and reality? The farther we advance in our reading, the further we get from answering these questions as we get

caught in a series of complex intertextual webs made of biblical allusions, partial citations from modern Hebrew literature, oral stories passed down from the narrator's uncle Yusef to his nephew, bits and pieces of childhood memories belonging to the narrator, his mother, her aunt, and his "double"—the other Anton. Thus, while the narrator tells us he is writing his autobiography, he also openly gives up the position of the originator of this autobiographical text, attempting instead to inscribe his voice by "borrowing" the voices of others. Indeed, the very act of writing one's self (writing an autobiography) appears in *Arabesques* as an impossibility, one that results in the writing of a "failed autobiography."

The impossibility of autobiography—that is, the impossibility of giving it a generic definition, but even more significant, the impossibility of distinguishing it from "fiction"—has by now become an established critical position. Paul de Man's celebrated essay, "Autobiography as De-facement" (1979), in which he suggests that "autobiography is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading," was one of many attempts to redefine autobiography in a manner that challenges the traditional understanding of it as a genre of reliable self-representation. Since the late 1970s, autobiography is more commonly viewed as a fictive presentation that brings about the illusion of a preceding reference. Anton Shammas is clearly in dialogue with this theoretical discourse as he explicitly negates the possibility of being "himself" the subject or immediate reference of his writing. Furthermore, his narrator, too, questions his ability to control the narrative and wonders whether he is a character *in*, or the writer *of*, the (autobiographical) text. But the impossibility of autobiography to which Shammas alludes has less to do with the disenchanted critical discourse about autobiography as an impossible genre, and more to do with the writer's investigation of the complex relationship between "language" and "identity," or more specifically, between *possessing* language and *possessing* an identity. Thus, the main questions standing at the heart of Shammas's novel are: What does it mean to write one's own story? What does it mean to write that story through writings of others? What does it further mean to write the story of the self in "the language of the other": does the writing of one's past, familial heritage, memories, and experiences require a level of presumed authenticity and intimacy, which is considered lost or betrayed once this writing takes place in a "borrowed" language and through borrowed voices? In other words: is the fact that Shammas's narrator, an Israeli-Arab poet, attempts to write his autobiography in Hebrew rather than Arabic itself the cause for his frustration and failure? The answer provided by Shammas's novel, I believe, is both yes and no. To understand this ambiguity, we must acknowledge the central

role that the "other" plays for Shammas as the source of writing. Thus, while his narrator complains about his inability or failure to write his autobiography, this "failure" is presented by Shammas not only as a loss but also as revelation and an understanding of an alternative possibility of writing: one that challenges the relationship between language and possession and directs critical attention to the role of originality, authenticity, and possession, in shaping and determining one's ability to construct a "narrative of the self."

"Borrowing," as a strategy of self-expression, then, appears in the novel not simply or only as an appropriation of others' memories, alphabets, or textual references. Rather, it suggests a new understanding of autobiographical writing, which redirects our understanding of what a self-narrative or a narrative about the self means, suggesting that it is necessarily a narrative about the other, or about the self *as* other. While such practice of borrowing disables the narrator from finding his "original" and "authentic" voice (and in that sense from writing his autobiography as a story of introspection and self-reflection), it does enables him to write, instead, the story of the self *as* a narrative made of multiple and incomplete voices, or, to borrow Gayatri Spivak's words, a narrative that "animates the story of [others]" (1992, 778).

Where One Identity Ends and the Other Begins

> It was the destiny of Benjamin Ze'ev Herzl that an Arab (*davka*) was the one to carve the black stone that was set as a memorial on his grave.
> —Shammas, *Arabesques*

Shammas's narrator moves back and forth between the past and the present, conflating his personal childhood memories with both written ("official") historical records and oral historical anecdotes recalled by his different family members. But the distinctions between the personal and the historical, the past and the present, the story of the self and those of others, grow indecipherable. Rather than a continual narrative of the self based on the tracing of one's origins, the novel unfolds through a dissolution of the self and its replacement with a multiple-level narrative made of "a profusion of lost events" (Foucault 1977, 145–46). Anton discovers he might actually be "the dead cousin he was named after." The past functions here not as an explanation for the present or a filling of its missing gaps, but as a rupture or a synchronic doubling: "It could very well be that the living boy who

supposedly is myself, is in fact the one who died in the late 1920s" (76). Elsewhere Shammas adds: "really, who knows who died and who is alive, or where identity ends and that of an other begins" (1988). In this configuration, identity no longer appears as preceding a "relationship" with alterity, but is rather viewed as the outcome of such a relationship, "a slippage between 'persons' *within* the same subject" (Bhabha 1997, 434).

Similarly, *Arabesques* highlights the interdependency of the two identities: the Palestinian and the Jewish-Israeli. Just as the narrator does not know where his own identity begins and that of his double (his dead cousin) ends, so do the stories of the two people appear in *Arabesques* to be conflated and intertwined. Thus, for example, Hertzl—the mythological prophet of the Jewish state—enters the story of the Arab stonecutter, Abu-Masud, who "was granted the great opportunity to make a name for himself by creating what he called 'the foundation rock of his life': the black tombstone which was placed on the grave of the nation's prophet" (36). The irony of having a Palestinian carving the tombstone for the great Zionist Prophet is even further emphasized by Abu Masud's proud statement, comparing this rock to the "holy black rock in the Kaaba in Mecca," both of which, he observes, "are equally sites of pilgrimage" (37). The closing two pages of *Arabesques* return to this black rock, only this time it is the Jews who are "working for the Arabs." Yusef, Anton's cousin, asks the proper authorities to help him blow up the rock, which interferes with his house renovation, and David, a Jewish licensed demolition engineer, is sent and presented as "an authorized boomer" (*chablan murshe*). This term, which is more commonly used in reference to a person who dislodges explosive devices, shares its linguistic root with the word *mechabel*, the Hebrew word for (Arab) terrorist. This linguistic familiarity turns the prosaic business-like exchange between Jews and Palestinians to a far more politically charged interaction. Hearing, for the first time, the term *chablan murshe*, Yusef's relative wonders whether this is the same term the Israelis use for an "authorized terrorist," and whether he could use it, for example, to denote professional *fedayee*.[15]

Living together under the shadow of fears, phobias, and mutual projections cannot possibly, Shammas argues elsewhere, leave the two peoples sealed in their autonomous identities (1987). The ongoing Zionist imagination, which sees the Israeli-Arab as an outcast at best and as a potential *mechabel* at worst,[16] "forgets" that the Hebrew-Jewish-Israeli culture is already an immanent part of Israeli-Arabs' reality and that this dominant "Hebrew-Jewish-Israeli culture" is from its very beginning shaped by another reality—a Palestinian reality, which is commonly thought of only in terms of an oppositional existence. In *Arabesques* this relationship is presented precisely as that: "a relationship." The Hebrew-Jewish-Israeli identity

is not set in opposition to the Palestinian identity as the enemy, but *in relation* to it. As such, these two seemingly independent, even opposed, identities are in fact deeply dependent on each other.

Shammas's choice to write his semiautobiography as "a Palestinian story in Hebrew letters" is therefore not only an act of transgression but also one of reremembering: an attempt to undermine the differentiation between Jew and Arab and between Hebrew and Arabic by reviving the lost memory of these two languages' "familial" proximity: "I live between two languages, both of which are written from right to left—a memory of good old Semitic days—but one of which, the Hebrew [today] moves from left to right" (1987, 24).

In one of the novel's finest scenes, the Jewish writer Yehoshua Bar-On takes pleasure in secretively calling his Palestinian colleague "my Jew": "if he only knew, this proud Palestinian, that privately I call him my Jew" (72).[17] What does it mean for a Jewish Israeli to take pleasure in secretively naming a Palestinian colleague "my Jew" and in further enjoying the thought of the latter discovering this secret? Does the pleasure derive from confronting the Palestinian with a title that stands against his ethnic/national pride? Or does Bar-On take pleasure in the historical irony by which the Palestinians become the "new exiled Jew" or the "Jew of the Jews"? It is important to notice that Bar-On chooses to use the patronizing possessive phrase "*my* Jew." In so doing, he also calls forth a long history of European racist discourses directed toward Jews. This fact complicates our ability to "locate" the place of the wound, for it is not quite clear whether it is insulting to be a *Palestinian* named "my Jew" or simply *to be* "a Jew."

Calling his Palestinian colleague "my Jew," Bar-On, intentionally or not, draws an analogy between the condition of Palestinians within the Israeli society and that of the Jews in anti-Semitic Europe. It is precisely this sense of historical confusion based on analogy that Shammas, in a different context, refers to as "the Babushka doll effect," whereby the dynamics between Jews and Palestinians are so twisted around and invested in historical loss and trauma that "one can no longer tell who is the majority and who the minority, nor where or when homeland ends and where and when exile begins" (1986b, 45). What might, therefore, first seem to be a sign of directed antagonism ends up being a "strange embrace" that ties Bar-On and his past as a Jew to his Palestinian colleague and his present condition as a second-rate Israeli citizen. Indeed, Anton Shammas (the character) and Bar-On are attached to each other through an ambiguous reciprocal relationship of attraction and curiosity, sharing, though not necessarily by choice, intense feelings of mutual identification that bring others to relate to them as "one." The two are described by their Dutch writer friend Henk as "a schizophre-

nia" or "two that are in fact one person," while another writer comments that "the two still haven't decided who is the ventriloquist of whom" (130).

The schizophrenia that links the Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli, making them "one person" or two persons "within one subject," is based on the drama of identity that Bhabha associates with the bizarre colonial figure, "the point which the black man slips to reveal the white skin" (1994, 62) or where, in our case, the "proud Palestinian" becomes the "Jew's Jew." Out of such complex mutual identifications and tight intersubjective relations, a strategy of subversion is enabled, at least at the level of discourse and through manipulation of representations, that is, within the cultural space of language.

Corrupt Language

Throughout *Arabesques*, Hebrew references, both modern and biblical, are reintroduced and playfully altered or "damaged." Accounting for the Israeli decision to expel the Arabs from the village of Fassuta to Lebanon in 1948, the narrator describes the successful attempt of the village priest to bribe the Jewish commander: "The priest went forth and came before the commander. He laid an envelope on the table and said: 'This is all we have.' And the commander's heart *held to* the money (*va-yechezak lev ha-mephaked ba-cesef*) and he *did not* expel the people out of their village" (115–16, my emphasis). The line is a direct allusion to the repeating biblical phrase from the book of Exodus describing the Egyptian King Pharaoh's refusal to liberate the Israelites: "And the king Pharaoh's heart was hardened (*va-yechezak*) . . . and he refused to let the Israelites go" (9: 35). Not only is Shammas drawing attention to the fact that the Palestinian villagers are asking to "stay" rather than "to leave," by playing with the double meaning of the Hebrew word "and," as with the various connotations of the verb "*yechezak*," he introduces further ironic twists while mimicking one of the most classical Hebraic syntactic structures. The common biblical use of the conjunction "and" (*ve*) marks negation, meaning "but" or "however." Mimicking the biblical verse, Shammas creates a false expectation, and his Hebrew reader is most likely to be surprised when realizing that Shammas uses "ve" in its modern meaning of "and." Another false expectation is created by Shammas's use of the verb "*yechezak*." Within the alluded to biblical verse it means "harden" or "stiffen" and refers to the king's heart "closing up" to Moses's request. Shammas, however, uses the verb in its literal meaning: "to hold

to," describing the opposite effect on the Jewish commander, whose heart was "softened" by holding to the bribe.

"Writing in Hebrew these days requires a lot of *chutzpah*," Shammas (1988) notes. "I didn't bring this *chutzpah* from my childhood village. There is no *chutzpah* there. I borrowed it from other places." From whom Shammas borrowed the chutzpah to write in Hebrew is quite clear. The Zionist aspiration to revive Hebrew as a modern national language required not only a strong belief in the project, but also an aggressive language policy that assertively promoted the use of Hebrew at the expense of excluding all other languages. Shammas has personally experienced this Zionist chutzpah, as he attests elsewhere: "Everybody—us, in our small village and our Iraqi and Yemenite Jewish neighbors from the village (*moshav*) near by—shared the endeavors to [cover up our past] and master the new language of the new state" (1991, 216, 222). If the Zionist oppressive monolingual-national language policy was clearly effective, Shammas's sarcastic comment about borrowing the chutzpah to write in Hebrew suggests that this policy might have become "too effective" since even an Arab from a small village has now joined the forces of modern Hebrew writers.

It is indeed partially as a response to Shammas's mastery of Hebrew and Jewish literary sources that many Israeli and Jewish critics reacted in various degrees of panic to the publication of *Arabesques*. The leading question, which appeared repeatedly in reviews, was whether "the novel belongs organically to Hebrew literature or not" (Hever 1989, 191). The question itself reveals the degree of anxiety with which the critics viewed the prospective of losing exclusive Jewish possession of Hebrew. While not everybody joined Yehoshua's recommendation for Shammas to move to the Palestinian territories where he could become part of a national majority, many critics echoed such rhetoric, even as they were supposedly embracing the novel.[18] Thus for example, Hillel Halkin, a translator and critic, praises the novel not hiding his astonishment at the ability of an Arab to write so successfully in Hebrew:

> And the Hebrew: a rich, lyrical, sinuous prose. . . . Not the least surprising thing about it moreover was its "Jewishness," its allusive sounding of biblical and rabbinic texts to make complex unstated statements in a manner typical of Hebrew literary tradition. . . . And who was playing on the Hebrew Bible in a time-honored Jewish way? . . . A Christian Arab narrator named Anton Shammas! (1988, 28)

But Halkin does not end with the compliment. Repossessing Hebrew as a "Jewish language," he reminds Shammas that his status as a writer of Hebrew is forever one of an exile:

> Having no prior experience of minorityhood, Israel's Arabs must accept the fact that such a condition is not intrinsically degrading. . . . It is this condition, however, that leaves Shammas feeling homeless . . . an exile in Hebrew [which is considered] a Jewish language. Yet Hebrew *is* a Jewish language, and homelessness, as has often been observed, is not the worst address for a writer. (32)

If the compliment derives from the critic's astonishment at the Arab writer's mastery of Hebrew, the pedagogical tone that follows voices not only the Jewishness of Hebrew, but also the Jewishness of exile. The Israeli Arabs who have never experienced being a minority ("having no prior experience of minorityhood") mistakenly believe it is necessarily degrading. They should, therefore, learn from others who seem to have more experience and know that "homelessness" can be a fruitful position, if not politically, then at least poetically.

Reoven Snir, one of the finest Israeli scholars of modern Arabic literature, also appreciates Shammas's poetic talents, yet he finds the use of Hebrew to be an indication of the writer's personal pathology:

> The nature of contemporary Hebrew literature . . . does not leave any room for doubt that the hope to expand the boundaries of Hebrew literature and to create a new Israeli cultural identity is nothing but a daydream. . . . Shammas's activities in Hebrew culture only serves to confirm it. . . . He is not only marginal in his natural cultural milieu, but also does not enter the gates of Hebrew literature as a proud Arab-Palestinian. On the contrary, as lost and lonely people [Arab writers such as Shammas and Arayidi] slowly lose their connections to their roots and are caught in an acute identity crisis; they enter a demanding cultural system that labels them as exceptional . . . and compels them at the same time to be adaptable. (1995, 174–75, my emphasis)

Fortified in the static image of Hebrew literature as a "Jewish literature" and of Israeli culture as "Jewish culture," Snir ascribes the "identity crisis" to non-Jewish writers of Hebrew (Shammas and Arayidi), rather than to the

Zionist Israeli-Hebrew culture itself. He thus overlooks the productive effects of non-Jewish writings in Hebrew, which, as Shammas describes it, "Un-Jew the Hebrew language, making it more Israeli."[19]

Yet Snir is not the only one concerned with Shammas's "identity crisis" and responding defensively to his use of Hebrew. The well-known poet David Avidan not only offered his "translating services" in order to help turn Shammas's Hebrew into what he calls "more natural and correct Hebrew" (*ivrit tivi't ve-tiknit*), but he further explains: "Shammas's first problem, which undermines everything he proceeds to say, is his very low awareness of [his own] identity. From this *confused and blurred sense of identity*, he wonders about the identity problems of Hebrew writers and about the confused relationship between 'Judaism,' 'Israeli nationality,' religiosity and Zionism" (1986, my emphasis).[20] The anomaly of the Israeli case in which the dominant language of Hebrew is not imposed from the "outside," as in the case of the colonies, but rather takes root through a national revival of both land and language further intensifies the common territorialization of language. The revival of Hebrew has often been depicted as a "recovery of native sounds," whose reunion with the land "echoes those sounds in return" (DeKoven-Ezrahi 1992, 485). In this process, Hebrew becomes a national Israeli language while still maintaining its status as a Jewish language that "has finally returned home." Non-Jewish Israelis, following this logic, do not share the same "rights of ownership" over Hebrew, but they are "invited" to use it, as long as they behave as trustful guests.

Shammas ironically represents such "generosity" by creating in *Arabesques* the character of a Jewish-Israeli writer (Bar-On) who is writing a novel about a Palestinian and is planning to offer the latter "salvation through the Hebrew language," a language he also refers to as "his space": "[My Palestinian] shall be an educated Arab who writes and speaks pure Hebrew. . . . We need an Arab who speaks the language of grace. . . . My Arab will build his confused tower *in my space*, in the language of grace. That is his only possible salvation!" (82–83, my emphasis). Less amusing is the fact that in an essay on *Arabesques* published only a few years ago in the *PMLA*, Yael Feldman seems to uncritically share Bar-On's views, as she considers Hebrew not only to be a Jewish language but also a source of salvation for the Arab writer. *Arabesques*, she informs us, is not only about the history of Palestinian occupation by Israelis, but about "the two hundred years of [Arab] Christian memory . . . [for which] the center of identity crisis is not 1948 but 1936" (1999, 383). Hebrew, she argues, is what enables Shammas to voice these repressed memories, which otherwise would have

most likely stayed unvoiced: "Shammas has dared in Hebrew, what has been done only rarely in Arabic literature . . . to force into the open a memory in a minor key, the memory of the Arab Christian minority, by tracing its roots to an Arab-Arab conflict." (385). Furthermore, Hebrew, in Feldman's account, appears to offer salvation not only to the writer and his memories but also to Arabic literature, by enriching its scope of themes: "Amazingly, this theme [of Christian Arab minority] is absent in Arabic literature at large, even in the literature of Arabs in Israel" (387, n .27).[21]

In response to his Jewish critics' attempts to reconfirm the presumed exclusive Jewish possession over Hebrew, and the idea that Hebrew is "generously offered" by the master (the Jewish "owner" of Hebrew) to the Arab for the sake of his own salvation, Shammas, resorting to irony, describes himself as an "ill-mannered guest": "I am like a guest in the home of the Hebrew language . . . one who politely volunteers to wash the dishes after dinner but who does so with the great pleasure of knowing that he *might*, even if just by mistake, break one of the host's most beautiful dishes" (1985a, 31). What does it mean to write as "a guest" in what is presumably someone else's language? Shammas describes it as an act of transgression: "invited into language, the guest already begins the process of conquering" (Grossman 1993, 194). This transgression, I suggest, is best understood as an act of *decolonialization:* a fight against the ethno-nationalization of language, which is itself colonial in nature. It assumes an exclusive ownership over language, enforces a language on "a people" as a mark of their coherent identity, and violently excludes linguistic differences and various users of language. Shammas's depiction of himself as an "ill-mannered guest" in the "home of the Hebrew language," then, illuminates not only his "illegitimate" hold over a language that isn't "his own," but also the very absurdity of speaking about language in terms of ownership and rights of possession. Indeed, what would it mean for a language to be legitimately possessed? It is thus not simply the reversal of the power relationships between hosts and guests, possessors and unwelcome visitors, Israeli-Jews and Palestinians that concerns Shammas, but rather the very *illusion of ownership* over language and the misguided perception of inclusion and exclusion that informs it.

Finally, Shammas's criticism of the Zionist Jewish illusion of ownership and its exclusion of Palestinians from the cultural space of Hebrew is productively accompanied by his no less skeptical approach toward his Arab narrator's own investment in narratives of mastery, origins, and ownership. It is a reciprocal transformation of initial subjectivities and cultures, Shammas seems to suggest, that is necessary for both Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, and Arabs, to accept for a new shared future to emerge.

An Arabic Soap Opera

> The bars between reality and fiction already fell apart and I found out that what I used to think was a half fictive mask woven over reality, had taken total control over its weaver.
> —Shammas, *Arabesques*

Gradually problematizing his narrator's attempt to recover the lost roots of his family and find his "true origins" and "authentic self" (before they were tentained by the interaction with the Jewish Zionists), Shammas leads his narrator to a bitter discovery: his true origins and "authentic" self is found nowhere else but in "an Arabic soap opera": "What would you say if one day you discover that the man, whose double you are, the man after whom you were named and under whose shadow you have always lived, whose memory you carry and treasure, was really the hero of a foolish Beirut-style love story: the main character in an Arabic soap opera" (52). In accordance with the fictive nature of a soap opera, we follow the narrator's gradual loss of control over his narrative as he becomes the main character in a "fictive autobiography" (150) written by Michael Abayyad, who claims to be "the real" Anton Shammas. The irony grows as the two "Antons" try to track each other down in order to decipher the true story behind their confused identities and find out who is the original Anton Shammas. Their attempt to find such authenticity results, however, only in a continuous series of doublings and masquerades as each of them decides to become the other: "I have decided to write my own autobiography in your name, and to insert myself in it as the little dead baby [the Anton Shammas you were named after]. This will be something that will confuse even King Solomon of the Palestinians" (233). Referring to *Arabesques*'s circular and highly confusing narrative, Hannan Hever (1987, 60) claims that "Shammas chooses the Arabesque as a figure of minority discourse." This could indeed be Shammas's attempt to make peace with the figure of the arabesque, which he elsewhere laments as forever lost.[22] The narrative, like an arabesque, leads the narrator time and again to the very same point where he began his search for origins: "Once again, I find myself standing at the entrance of the big gate. My life followed the path of a winding arabesque that has led me to the very same place where I began my journey. It is as if [my family's] flight from the village of Khabab in southern Syria back in the 1830s was only an introductory sketch to the journey that awaits me now" (203). But by employing the arabesque as a figure of minority discourse, Shammas is also pointing at

the orientalist approach toward Arab culture within Hebrew literature—a literature that, as Shammas ironically comments, "is written from right to left, but is read from left to right" (1987, 24). The arabesque, like Scheherezad, or the old oral tradition of storytelling, is a common representation of Arab culture within Hebrew literature. Shammas "returns" to this narrow world of representations in what he calls "an Arab story written in Hebrew letters," thus offering his own cynical representation of representation. Indeed, in most "Arab stories" written in Hebrew, the Arab is to be found in preexisting folkloristic images: "a foolish Beirut-style love story," an "Arabic soap opera" (52), or "as one of the heroes of *A Thousand and One Nights*" (64).[23] It is interesting to notice in this context that quite a few Israeli critics strongly preferred the first part of Shammas's novel ("the tale") over the later part, where the folkloristic quality is dramatically violated. "Shammas is at his best," the prominent critic Dan Laor (1986) informs us, "when he writes a provincial story and focuses on the [daily life] in an Arab village. . . . Everything else he adds later just ruins it for him." Similarly, the critic Heda Boshes praises the "tale part" of the novel but argues that the second part "lacks the magical effect" of a moving Arab childhood village story (1986, 12).

Bar-On, the Jewish-Israeli writer in *Arabesques*, is also well-aware of these stereotypical representations of Arabs and promises to do a better job in depicting *his* Arab:

> My Arab will not ride a horse like the protagonists of the "Hawaja stories." He will not be a prisoner, nor a young boy lost in love.[24] He will speak and write in Hebrew although only within the permissible. I must keep some realms sealed and closed for him, otherwise I will be blamed for creating a corrective stereotype. . . . I can't really remember where I read about the Arab "as a literary solution" . . . [but] someone is sure to accuse me of using the Arab to solve my personal literary problems. . . . this time, however, the Arab is necessary. He is a response to silence. We *need* a Hebrew speaking Arab, one that speaks the language of grace. . . . yes, I shall write about the loneliness of the Israeli-Arab Palestinian. . . . It might open like this: "He arrived in Jerusalem from his village in Galilee." (82–84)

The silence Bar-On refers to is that of the Arab in Hebrew literature, whether it is the protagonist of A. B. Yehoshua's story "Mul ha-ye'arot" ("Facing the Forest"), whose tongue is damaged during the war, or S. Yizhar's silent Arab victims in his story "Hirbat Hiza." Shammas does not confront these "si-

lences" by presenting alternative images of "real" Arabs or by voicing the "authentic" voice of the silenced Arab, but rather by parodying previous attempts to do so. Focusing on the representations of identity and on the possibilities and limitations of speaking for and about Arab-Israeli-Palestinian identity under such constraints, Shammas replaces the discourse of identity—commonly based on authenticity, roots, and origins—with a discourse of representations based on projected and contradictory desires and fears. Thus, the Israeli-Arab-Palestinian is found in *Arabesques* only as an "image," caught between the stereotypes and the corrective stereotypes, between a "literary solution" and a "necessary response" to silence.

Forbidden Love Letters

Writing in Hebrew, a language Bar-On and many other Israeli-Jews (as clearly revealed by the critics' responses to the novel) assume to be "their own," is presented in *Arabesques* as an act of unresolved ambiguity. For the narrator it is an experience resulting in both liberating and harming effects. Such duality is best revealed in the exchange of love letters carried on in Hebrew between the narrator and his married Jewish lover, Shlomit.

Sitting by the bed of his dying father at his childhood village in Galilee, Anton writes love letters to Shlomit that are for him the "summit of their passionate love." This exciting exchange is, however, what also brings their love affair to its end. Returning from his hometown to Jerusalem, Anton discovers that Shlomit's husband, an Israeli Army officer, has found the letters, that his love affair has ended, and that "everything went back to normal: *Hebrew, Arabic and Death*" (83). This dreadful "return" to normality poses Hebrew and Arabic as well as the Jewish and Arab lovers on two opposite sides, separated by death.

Standing by the open window, Anton, consumed with pain, tries "to cry for help" but falls victim to his own confusion and silence, "not able to remember the right word, nor in what language he should say it" (85). In the scene immediately following, the narrator is overtaken with the memory of another "confusing event" involving a meeting between the "two worlds": the one conducted in Hebrew and the other in Arabic. Walking peacefully along the streets of Haifa, "happily satisfied with his little-village-world that he carried in his mind and in his pockets" (86), the narrator is stopped by a car loaded with a noisy group of young Jewish Israelis. The window opens and "a young woman sitting by the driver asks him teasingly

in Hebrew: 'want to join us at a party?' " Before he even has the chance to answer, the youngsters drive off laughing, leaving Anton confused and humiliated, with an unfulfilled invitation "to the exciting world located behind the fence, a world full of miracles awaiting just around the corner" (86). This memory stays with the narrator, who years later, when meeting Shlomit, tells himself that their love affair, carried on in Hebrew, must be the "pricey fulfillment" of that mocking invitation to the "party he was once promised" (87).[25]

But if indeed "everything returns to normal," and if this "normality" is expressed in terms of a reseparation of Hebrew and Arabic, Jews and Arabs, one must note that this dreadful "return" escapes the full separation between the two languages and worlds, for ironically, this "return to normality" also marks Shammas's *reentering* into the cultural space of modern Hebrew literature. The words "Hebrew, Arabic and Death," are themselves a line borrowed from an early poem by one of the leading modern Hebrew poets, Yehuda Amichai: "A boutique window colored with beautiful women's dresses / in bright blue and white. And everything / in three languages: Hebrew, Arabic and Death."[26] Thus, while the two lovers in the novel are separated—each to his or her own language and "world," divided by death—the use of Amichai's words introduces an intertextuality that brings these worlds closer to each other, relocating modern Hebrew literature at the heart of a contemporary Palestinian novel and reemphasizing Shammas's own "forbidden love" for Hebrew language and literature.

Risking the expression of love in and for the "other's language" works against the imperative of "ethnic/national loyalty" and against the understanding of "identity" in terms of cultural authenticity, origins, and exclusive cultural possessions. Such a writing is directed against the static antagonism between self and other, one culture and another, and in favor of the Levantinization of culture: its *dis*possession and redistribution across and beyond ethnic, national, or religious dividing lines. When asked why he chooses to write in Hebrew over Arabic, Shammas answers: "If I were to continue to write in Arabic I might have found myself trapped in the existing state of affairs. . . . Writing in Hebrew, I hope to break through this reality and move in unexpected directions" (1988, 78). Elsewhere he adds:

> Never since the book of Genesis had Hebrew so much power as it carries today. Then it was the language of creation; today it is the language of destruction in which military operations are ordered. The sacred language became the language of kitsch and death; the language of bullets. So why *do* I write in Hebrew?

> Because I believe in language. Language itself is innocent. [Furthermore, my own identity,] that of the Arab-Galilean, which was first called "Israeli-Arab identity," and now is called the "Palestinian-Israeli identity," was itself created in the Hebrew language, despite everything. (1989, 14–15)

Shammas's belief in language allows him to find salvation—not in the manipulative and colonizing attempt of the Jewish-Israeli, who like Bar-On, pretends to own Hebrew and thus to "offer" it as a means of rescue to his Palestinian colleague—but in language itself: in its ability to transcend the violence of colonialism, including, above all, the colonialism of language. In a similar manner, Mahmud Darwish opposes the idea that Hebrew is the language of the enemy and insists on his genuine intimacy with it: "Hebrew does not signify for me the language of the occupier because it is my language of love and friendship . . . the language of my childhood memories" (1996, 198).

The deterritorialization of Palestinians in 1948 was executed in Hebrew, which continues to function today as the language of occupation and military vandalism. But Hebrew, as Shammas's and Darwish's words indicate, is not a "military language." By the same token, the fact that it has always been used by Jews does not make it an exclusively "Jewish language." As a cultural space that remains open to "intrusions," language moves in unexpected directions. It cannot be possessed, but it can surely possess: it can possess one's childhood memories, secret love, and hidden dreams, which are often shared across borders and even among enemies.

"Language," Edmond Jabès (1991) tells us, "offers us the right to love it." This right, Shammas's novel emphasizes, is indiscriminately offered and thus defeats any attempt on the part of the master to claim language as his own personal, ethnic, or national property. The recently published novels *Aravim Rokdim* [Dancing Arabs] and *Va-yehi Or* [Let There Be Light], written in Hebrew by the young Israeli Palestinian Sayed Kashua,[27] undoubtedly strengthen this claim as they join Shammas's groundbreaking text in reminding us that, contrary to the repeated Zionist attempts to appropriate Hebrew as an exclusively Israeli Jewish language, the cultural space of Hebrew *already* includes the Palestinian and his past, present, and future dreams.

4

Too Jewish and Too Arab or Who Is the (Israeli) Subject?

> Unlike the case with the worst human material arriving from Europe, there is not even the slightest hope for *their* children.
> —Arieh Gelblum, *Ha'aretz*

> Of all Ethnic groups (*edot*) the most ethnic is the Moroccan. This group has perpetuated its segregation already in the sixties, and has since become the center of the ethnic conflict [in Israel].
> —Ariel Hirshfeld, *Ha-aretz*

> [As children of Arab and African immigrants,] each of us had to become something: a saint, a tortured saint, a victim, a lost soul, a hedonist, or, as in many cases, a reflective schizophrenic.
> —Albert Swissa, *Politica*

If Shammas's novel threatens to destabilize or Levantinize Israeli culture by un-Jewing the Hebrew language—"making it less Jewish and more Israeli," Albert Swissa's *Aqud* [Bound],[1] published in 1990, presents the opposite threat, that of un-Israelizing Hebrew by making it both "too Arab" and "too Jewish."[2] Focusing on the figure of the Jewish-Moroccan as a failed immigrant, indeed as Israel's prominent "foreign within" (Lowe, 1996, 5), *Aqud* explores the manner by which this figure functions as a national marker of alterity, against and through which the "legitimate" Israeli subject who is secular, Westernized, not-Arab, and not "too" Jewish is constructed.[3] In other words, the Moroccan-Israeli-Jew emerges in Swissa's novel as an abject being: he is the "not-me-not-other," through which the dichotomized borders between self and other, subject and object, West and

East, Jew and Arab, the "old (exilic) Jew" and the "new (national) Jew" are sustained. His Hebrew, as *Aqud* reveals, is accordingly seen as a foreign linguistic form and a source of contamination: too Jewish and too Arab to be "fully" Israeli.

On Arabs, Africans, and Sabres

Lost children: roaming the streets aimlessly; escaping home and school; straying through unfamiliar places; haunted by appalling images of being contaminated, mutilated, chopped, and devoured, or of themselves polluting, torturing, humiliating, and devouring, fill the pages of *Aqud*.[4] The novel joins a relatively small, yet steadily growing, group of Israeli literary works that focus on the question of immigration and social integration from the point of view of Arab Jews, and it is the first and most prominent Hebrew novel to concentrate exclusively on Moroccan Jews, referred to within the text as both "Arab" and "African."[5]

Aqud features a third-person narrator whose point of view is filtered almost entirely through the minds of three young protagonists: Yochai, Beber, and Ayush. The three live in a poor slum in Jerusalem built especially to accommodate North African immigrants and named, as if mockingly, Irganim (The City of Gardens).[6] The three characters experience themselves as "strangers," living among the Israeli natives or, as they are called in the novel, "the indigenous sabers" (82). Exiled in their own homeland, prisoners of their isolated neighborhood, the young boys fear and detest a reality of poverty and racism, which they are too young to fully understand, but more significantly, they fear and loathe themselves, having repeatedly sensed that they are frightening and disgusting to others.

While almost all Jewish immigrants from Arab countries have received a humiliating welcoming by the Ashkenazi Zionist authorities, Moroccans seem to have received a "special treatment" (Cohen 2002, 36) and were considered particularly dangerous from the perspective of the Zionist national interest. We find evidence of this in the words of the prominent Israeli journalist, Arieh Gelblum (1949), who, less than a year after the establishment of the state of Israel, published his concerns regarding the first Jewish Moroccan immigration: "The Maghrebian Jews are only slightly ahead of the Arab, Black and Berber populations among whom they lived. . . . From the standpoint of their primitiveness, their level of education and

their ability to absorb anything spiritual, these Africans are even worse than the Arabs in Palestine." "Slightly better than some Arabs, even worse than others," the Moroccan immigrants, Gelblum concludes, present a great threat to the newborn Jewish national community, for unlike the Yemenites and other Arab Jews, these immigrants seem hopelessly inadaptable.

Calling his characters African and Arab (never Jews or Israelis), Swissa is clearly positioning his novel in a direct dialogue with Gelblum, Ben Gurion, and many other liberal Zionists who have for years treated the Moroccan Jewish community as an unwelcome intruder, slightly better than some Arabs, but worse than others. If, as Ronit Matalon has argued, modern Hebrew literature has a tradition of silencing the immigrant by having "his story" narrated *for him* by the patronizing rooted Israeli (1998a, 170),[7] *Aqud* clearly presents an attempt at rewriting the story of the immigrant by reviving his own voice and doing so in his (religious, Oriental, foreign, and hybrid) language.

Accordingly, the Zionist national mythical notion of Jewish unity, presented in the image of a welcoming approach to all new Jewish immigrants and a successful "melting pot," known in the Ben Gurionian Hebrew as "merging of the various Jewish diasporas" (*mizug galuyot*), is stripped in *Aqud* of all its romantic connotations. It is presented instead as empty propaganda used as a cover-up for a crude plan of ethnic segregation. Thus, looking at the crowded, overpopulated, ugly cement blocks and the dirty streets of Ir-Ganim, Beber's father recalls how he and the rest of the Moroccan immigrants were taught one of the most popular national Zionist slogans: "we all learned to say together, loud and clear *Anu ba'ano artza livnot u le-hibanot!*" ("we came to this land to build and be built!"), thinking to himself that what this slogan *really* meant was: "Here we shall build houses to settle down all these savages. . . . The Persians and the Moroccans, the Tunisians and the Algerians, the Iraqis and the Chochins, and even a few [unlucky] Ashkenazi families" (31–32). Swissa's act of "writing back," however, is further enriched by his choice of telling the story of immigration, ethnic discrimination, and failed integration from the point of view of young children for whom reality is experienced in its most immediate, raw, and nonsublimated level. Indeed, rather than offering us a clear narrative about social injustice or ethnic/racial discrimination, *Aqud* presents us with a set of "failed narratives," which follow the inner psychic reality of the young protagonists and mimic their fragmented, incoherent, and terrified state of mind, which in Lacanian terms reflects their failure to transition successfully from the imaginary state into the symbolic order.[8] These failed narratives are hallucinatory, catastrophic, and abject: they draw us to "the

place where meaning collapses," and it is from this erratic place, located "outside and beyond [the laws of the symbolic] and with disagreement to the latter's rules of the game," that these narratives "beseech a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out" (Kristeva 1982b, 2).

Refusing to tell the story of the Moroccan Israeli immigration in the manner by which it is most commonly told (i.e., in terms of a "cultural clash" between Ashkenazim and Mizrachim, East and West, tradition and modernity), Swissa tells us a different story, one that alludes to the inability of any such coherent, lucid, sensible, decodable, linear, or fully readable narrative—that is, of any narrative as such—to faithfully expose the crude structures of social exclusion that operate behind the so-called ethnic problem (*Ha-baaya ha-adatit*). No narrative that follows clear social categories such as "ethnic group," "culture," or "cultural difference," Swissa seems to suggest, could effectively capture the continual process of signification through which hierarchical differences (between self and other, subject and object, Ashkenazi and Mizrachi, or Jew and Arab) are produced, only later to appear as natural or pregiven.

Failed Narratives: On the Power of the Imaginary

> The space with which the outcast is preoccupied is never one; it is neither *homogeneous* nor *totalisible* but essentially divisible, pliable, catastrophic.
> —Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection"[9]

> If the narrator is crazy, let the listener be wise.
> —Jewish Moroccan saying[10]

Aqud is divided into three parts, each of which centers on one protagonist. Yochai, the protagonist of the first part ("Aqud"), is a young boy who serves as the vice-commander to the neighborhood's "chief in command," the mighty David Ben-Shoshan, "whose inspiration was driven directly from the Bible" (12). After engaging in too many violent activities headed by Ben-Shoshan, and after "even the Ashkenazi teachers from the neighboring wealthy town Bait va-gan could not control him" (13), Yochai is sent away by his father to study in a Yeshiva in the Ashkenazi religious town Bnai-barak, where his parents hope he will finally be disciplined. The second character, Beber, the protagonist of "Blessed Orphanhood," is the youngest of Mr. Sultan's eleven children, and the one he is most proud of: "a real

man, an authentic child (*yeled giz'ee*)," who Mr. Sultan associated with the men he met at parties in Casablanca or Agadir: "handsome men who groomed their hair and carried their well-maintained mustaches with pride . . . not like the useless men here in [Israel]" (52). But Beber grows alienated from his father and his failed attempts to maintain his "lost patriarchal authority" (71), ending up as a local criminal. Finally, Ayush—the protagonist of the final and longest part, entitled "A Futile Attempt to Hold to a Fading Memory," is a young boy about the age of Bar Mitzvah (thirteen years old). Like Yochai and Beber, he spends most of his time in the neighborhood's streets playing with empty plastic bags and cans, old car tires, and exposed wires, or torturing the stray dogs or the old neighbor Gersha, a Holocaust survivor and the only Ashkenazi living in Ir-ganim. But most of Ayush's time is spent alone, in his own imaginative private world made of biblical kings and prophets (81), sleepy Africans and happy native-Israelis (82), preachers and pious men (*tsadikim*) (85), cowboys and Indians, tigers and thieves (152), and a speaking "little man," a Barbie-doll Ayush turned from female to male and with whom he gradually withdraws into an idiosyncratic and hallucinatory dialogue presented over the novel's several final chapters.

While the three sections or narratives can certainly be read as separate stories, they are all connected by the repeated long descriptions of the neighborhood, all of which emphasize the claustrophobic nature of the layout and the general decay of the exposed cement buildings and narrow streets. By introducing these descriptions over and over again, Swissa successfully mimics the catastrophic and prisonlike feeling created by the overcrowded cement buildings and the enclosed and enclosing reality of the neighborhood, a reality so ugly that "no one with a dreamy heart could possibly believe it is 'actual' and not simply a fake-model made for the purpose of Army aircraft artillery practice" (95).

In addition, the three parts are connected through the repeated references made to the theme of the *Aqeda*—God's demand of Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. This is a popular theme in modern Hebrew literature, which is most often used as a national allegory, alluding to the sacrifice of sons on the altar of the nation. In *Aqud*, however, the Zionist allegory is absent and no clear alternative is provided. Thus, while several critics offer different interpretations as to the meanings of this theme in *Aqud* —that it is an allegory of the Moroccan father who sacrifices his sons by demanding that they follow his old ways (Hirshfeld 1991); that it symbolizes the sacrifice of the Mizrachi Jews by the Ashkenazi authorities (Gover 1994); or that it represents what Menachem Perry has called an "existential sacrifice" experienced in the passage from childhood to adulthood (Swisa 1990, back cover

blurb)—they all overlook the manner by which the novel explicitly rejects the very possibility of any such closure. Presenting the theme of the *Aqeda* from within the catastrophic world vision of its young protagonists, Swissa strips this literary trope of all stable allegorical or symbolic meanings, presenting it instead as a figure of ambiguity located at the heart of a reality that itself escapes reason. Within such a perspective it becomes impossible to understand "who is victimizing and who is the victim" (264), or why:

> Daddy is going to be slaughtered. They are going to slaughter me too, mother will cry. . . . But, no! Father is the criminal, and something is wrong with him! Father is afraid. But Father is himself the slaughterer; he is an authorized slaughterer . . . [and] what a terrible crime he has committed, very terrible. . . . What do they want from him now? What has he done? Why is my daddy crying like this, why, make him calm down!? (10)

Such incoherent circuits of projected fears are staged in *Aqud* repeatedly, unfolding a senseless and terrifying social reality. The failure on the part of the young protagonists to map out the causes and effects of such "mad" reality eventually leads to their own gradual regression into madness.

Structurally speaking, one could depict the novel as presenting a battle of sorts between two different levels of representation: the first belongs to the adults and conveys the story of immigration and failed integration in more or less familiar terms, focusing on cultural differences (between West and East, tradition and modernity, patriarchal authority and liberal values, or Mizrachi and Ashkenazi communities). The second belongs to the young protagonists and undermines the authority of the first through repeated fragmentation and resignification. In other words, while the adults' narratives obey the rules of the symbolic (they are coherent, decodable, familiar, and reasonable), the "failed narratives" of the children direct our attention "backward": away from the already sublimated cultural mappings of the symbolic and toward the multiple, fragmented, and contradictory rules of the imaginary. Furthermore, this battle over representation results in an apparent victory of the imaginary, which gradually takes over the more schematic presentations of the symbolic.[11] Thus, *Aqud* unfolds by gradually becoming less and less readable, as the linear and coherent narrative structure is progressively replaced with the fragmented, hallucinatory, and explicitly abject images the young protagonists circulate. Trapped in an imaginary space that, to paraphrase Kristeva, is essentially divisible, pliable, and catastrophic, the protagonists never cease attempting to decode and define a reality that always escapes them. No explanation for their condition, their

social reality, or their suffering, whether offered by their parents or by their teachers, seems to stay with them for more than a split second. Unable to decode their conflicted sociopolitical reality, the young characters become the generators of their own conflicting interpretations of reality, withdrawing ever more deeply into a world governed by nightmarish delusions.

The victory of the imaginary that I am referring to is not found at the level of the plot and should not be confused with any claim made about the condition of the young characters. They are by no means "winners," as they end up losing their dignity and sanity. This victory is found at the level of the novel's structure, whereby the hallucinatory and explicitly abject and fragmented narratives of the children overtake the sensible narratives delivered by the adults' short monologues. Indeed, improper images of decaying, tortured, twisted, and polluted bodies and vivid depictions of shitting, peeing, bleeding, sweating, rotting, and vomiting gradually take over the entire space of the novel, drawing us further into "the place where meaning collapses," further into the "the divisible, foldable and catastrophic space" in which the outcast dwells (*Powers* 2, 8). A visit to the synagogue turns into a performance of a mocking androgynous angel, and a singing rabbi is abused by a giggling dwarf in a white Arab gown (*jalabiya*) (186); a cement column becomes a wild, dangerous horse (151); and a group of yeshiva boys turns into wild Indians who urinated on Ayush and set his parents' house on fire (152).

But *Aqud* is not only a novel *about* madness and abjection; it is itself mad and abject. By this I mean that the novel resists any attempt on the side of the reader to solidify or stabilize a coherent, reasonable, or totalizing meaning. The characters' distorted mapping of their reality and their repeated self-positioning on two opposing poles—sacrificing and being sacrificed, slaughtering and being slaughtered, abusing and being abused, frightening and being fearful—frustrate our desire to decipher the novel or make it fully readable. Like the abject itself, *Aqud* refuses "to be assimilated": it does not respect any clear "borders, positions, rules" (*Powers*, 1). If the young protagonists question the boundaries between the real and the imagined, their inner psyche and external environment, they also make it impossible for us, as readers, to distinguish one from the other. What are we to make of this impossibility, which is clearly reinforced by the novel's "progressive regression" from the symbolic back to the imaginary?

While most critics writing about the novel have certainly addressed its unique fragmented and imaginative nature, they have commonly explained this characteristic by relating it back to the children's young age and poor mental condition, the latter aspect itself portrayed as the outcome of

the intense social tensions they experience. The children are thus seen as victims of multiple and unresolved conflicts: the conflict between the Ashkenazi authorities and their Mizrachi fathers; between their fathers and their mothers; or between their traditional Moroccan background and Israel's national-secular nature.[12] Such readings are perfectly sound, as it is indeed clear that at the level of the plot (if "one" can be identified), *Aqud* portrays the young protagonists as the victims of cultural combats they cannot fully grasp. However, these readings seem to pay little if any attention to the manner in which Swissa's novel further deconstructs all such cohesive narratives about cultural battles, or cultural differences, drawing attention to their inability to tell the full story of ethic/racial discrimination. Indeed, the more interesting question, I believe, is not why the children do not grasp their sociopolitical reality, but rather why Swissa would choose to tell the story of immigration and failed integration from this "incomplete" perspective. Why, in other words, would he shy from telling a (readable, sound, and coherent) story about ethnic conflicts and failed integration, presenting instead the fearful and perverse hallucinations of his young protagonists? My answer, which I elaborate in the following sections, is that in turning to abjection as a *poetic strategy*, Swissa directs our attention to the drama of identification and differentiation that escapes the conventional representation of the so-called ethnic problem. Telling the story of ethnic discrimination from within the realm of the imaginary, Swissa, I suggest, is capable of doing what has never been done before in Hebrew literature, that is, animating the pervasive workings of (ethnic/racial) abjection that is involved in the production of *both* the legitimate national Israeli subject and his "failed counterpart": the ethnically marked abject-being.

Approaching Abjection

> The abject [is a] structural notion of boundary constituting taboo form the purposes of constructing a discrete subject through exclusion.
> —Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*

According to Kristeva, while subjection (the becoming of the subject) marks the successful transition from the imaginary to the symbolic (by means of entering language and completing the separation from the other/mother), abjection (the becoming of an abject-being) stands for a failure to make the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic, and hence the inability to

complete the separation between self/other, object/subject, inside/outside, need/desire.[13] The result of this uncompleted transition is the inability to achieve a sense of bodily integrity and to decode social meanings. Without the illusion of separation (between self and other), the abject-being is trapped "in the space of hallucinations," obsessed with his own fragmented body and bodily byproducts. He becomes the producer of a language that escapes any sublimating discourse (7).[14]

But beyond the level of the psychopathology, Kristeva also accounts for abjection in terms of a *process of differentiation* that secures both the borders of the subject and the borders of society, or culture: "There, abject and abjection are my safeguards, the primers of my culture" (2). It is this structural aspect of abjection ("abjection is that which disturbs identity, system, order") that makes the term relevant not only for a psychological analysis but also for a sociopolitical one. Thus, while Kristeva described the abject primarily in terms of a dynamic between the different parts of the self ("a certain 'ego' that merges with its master, a superego, [and] has flatly driven it away . . . [refusing] to play the latter's rules of game"), her description—much like Freud's argument about the mirroring relationship between the inner structure of the psyche and that of culture or civilization—surely invites a sociopolitical reading that aligns the subject's inner divisions with the external structures and distributions of social power. It is, however, only with Judith Butler's analysis of abjection that such a sociopolitical rendition of abjection has been fully developed, one that turns away from the question of psychological development and toward the social structures of inclusion and exclusion that are responsible for the very production of the subject by means of constituting its borders.[15]

Informed by Mary Douglas's (1966) pioneering study of defilement and in alignment with Kristeva's perception of abjection as a process through which the proper subject is created through exclusion, Butler (1990, 133–34) suggests that we understand abjection as a process that consolidates culturally hegemonic subject positions through radically "othering" others and rendering them non-subjects or less-than-subject. The abject, she suggests, functions as "a boundary tenuously maintained for the purpose of social regulation and control," while abjection "is the mode by which Others become shit." In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler similarly argues that the "exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings [as] the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject." The abject

> designates those "unlivable" and "unhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. . . . The [abject] constitutes the site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the subject [becomes]. (3)

Bringing Butler's structural analysis of exclusion into a closer dialogue with earlier accounts of abjection that focus on the strong link between abjection and filth or waste (Bataille 1970; Kristeva 1980; Douglas 1966), one can see that abjection does not stand for the process of social exclusion as such but rather signifies a specific mechanism of social differentiation, which necessarily involves the circulation of images associated with dirt, ugliness, and the ability to (quite literally) contaminate others. This perception of abjection is enforced by Iris Marion Young's (1990, 201–2) description of racial abjection as always involving the circulation of phobic images associated with "involuntary, unconscious judgments of ugliness and loathing [that are] locked into the subject's identity anxieties." The exclusion of certain individuals or communities from hegemonic positions, she further notes, is secured by a psychological sensation of "repulsion," the most damaging effect of which is the "internalization" on the part of the abject-being "that he or she has an ugly, fearful, or despised body" (208). As I have already mentioned, fear, loathing, and disgust are the main feelings available to Yochai, Beber, and Ayush, who are all fixated on bodily fluids and see themselves as sites of pollution. They are either polluted—Ayush imagines that a group of yeshiva boys are "biting into his flesh and peeing on him" (148)—or polluting—Yochai forces another boy to drink his urine (12).

While it is true that the negative self-image of the body, as experienced by the young protagonists, is a direct outcome of the process of internalization described by Young, it is also important to note that the effects of this excruciating and painful process of abjection appear in *Aqud* to exceed a mere narrative of victimization. Indeed, if Swissa emphasizes the violent effects of abjection, manifested in his protagonists' repeated failures, madness, and loss, he also reveals the power of the abjected-being to disrupt the hegemonic social order by means of linguistic corruption and menace. In other words, if Swissa emphasize failure (his protagonists' failure to read their social reality and to master cohesive narratives), he

further reveals that such failures are also means of resistance: "a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility" (Butler, 1993, 3).

On Abjection and Resistance

> To have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power.
> —Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*

In his essay about the nonadjustable Moroccan immigrants, which I have previously mentioned, Gelblum (1949) describes the great danger associated with this population: "Nothing is safe from the social space of the Moroccan immigrants. In the corners of the dwellings of the Africans' transit camps [*Ma'abarot*] you will find filth, gambling, drunkenness and prostitution. Many suffer from serious eye diseases, skin diseases and sexual ailments . . . nothing is safe from this asocial space." That "nothing is safe" is precisely what *Aqud* is about: as a narrative about abjection, the novel invites us to look more closely at the inner world of the abject-being, where everything is "essentially divisible, pliable, catastrophic." As narratives of abject-beings (told from the liminal position of the outcast), the novel overwhelms us with "a whole lot of nonsense which has nothing insignificant about it . . . crushing [us with] hallucinations that respect no limits or rules" ("Approaching Abjection," 126–27).

The phobia expressed so vividly in Gelblum's description of the Moroccan immigrants' camp as an "asocial space" is turned in the hands of Swissa into an all-consuming "literary nightmare." One finds here no corrective or positive images of Moroccans. On the contrary, filth, disease, violence toward women, ignorance, vomit, shit, and other forms of dirt fill the pages of the novel, which thus *redirects* the force of racist projection toward its readers. Indeed, if *Aqud* is written in response to racist phobias like those expressed by Gelblum, it is surely not written in a defensive mode. Mimicking and embellishing the very contaminating force ascribed to the abject-being, *Aqud* exposes the fact that the effects of abjection necessarily exceed a mere narrative of victimization, for they paradoxically grant the abject-being the ability to "endanger" and "contaminate" others.

Ultimately one cannot deny that *Aqud*, in exploring the "unlivable world" of the abject-being, presents us with painful stories of failure, madness, and loss. Trapped in an endless pursuit for sources of identification

through which they would be able to assign meaning to their otherwise fragmented sense of self, Swissa's characters easily fit Kristeva's description of the abject being as a "lost soul" ("Approaching Abjection," 131). But it is paradoxically through these very stories of madness, abjection, and loss that Swissa is able to further introduce deception, masquerade, and "linguistic corruption," as effective means of political protest and resistance.[16]

From Linguistic Failure to Aesthetic Catastrophe *or* Losing the Real

> People expect that if I'm writing about life in development towns, the language has to be scarred, a stammering, limping Hebrew.
> —Albert Swissa

> I write poems to you
> in my Moroccan-neighborhood's Hebrew [*Ashdodit*]
> so you won't understand a word.
> —Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Shirimbe-Ashdodit*[17]

Questions of madness, deception, and linguistic corruption play a central role in *Aqud* and are explicitly brought to the forefront in the critical debates surrounding the novel. While written mainly in Hebrew, *Aqud* includes phrases in Jewish Moroccan Arabic and a Judeo-Berber dialect, which make the reading of the novel challenging even for native speakers of Hebrew. In reading the critical debates about the novel, one notices, however, that it is not so much the presence of other languages that captures the critics' attention and raises their antagonism, but rather the novel's Hebrew. Indeed, most critics focus on *Aqud's* hybridized Hebrew, which is a mixture of contemporary informal Israeli vernacular and rabbinic, mystical, and biblical Hebrew, discussing it in terms of failed representation.

In the storm of criticism that followed the publication of the novel in 1990, many (including supportive reviewers) accused Swissa for his use of surplus language, some claiming that such over-rich Hebrew is unsuitable for describing the reality of a poor development town ("*Ayeret pituach*"). In this vein, one of Israel's leading critics, Ariel Hirshfeld (1991), points out the "frustrating quality of the novel's language," which "prevents the reader from being able to really "see" the horror of living in a poor neighborhood like Ir-gamin: "The bitter, broken, vulgar and violent world described in Swissa's novel is delivered through an eloquent language . . . which covers

this world with Amazonian rhetoric." "It is painful," Hirshfeld continues, "to peek at such pieces of harsh truth through the ugly streams of 'beautiful' words . . . such archaic syntax and such dizzying and ear splitting vocabulary, what a blinding whirlpool. . . . It turns the reading of *Aqud* from a shocking experience into a very tedious one." As this quote suggests, Hirshfeld expected to be shocked by the harsh reality of the poor neighborhood and does not want this truth ("the broken, vulgar, and violent reality") to be covered with archaic syntax and dizzying rabbinic and biblical vocabulary. What Hirshfeld finds especially disturbing is the manner in which Swissa uses complex, "too-beautiful Hebrew" to describe the most indulgent images of shit, vomit, and dirt. This dissonance, he regretfully concludes, prevents *Aqud* from "satisfying the existing thirst for a literary voice that would finally convey the special spirit of the Moroccan ethnic group (*eda*) . . . a group that makes so much noise that it simply cannot be ignored."[18]

The novelist and critic Batya Gur (1991) similarly argues that *Aqud*'s "linguistic density" and its "surplus of pretty words" fail to convey the harsh reality of a neighborhood like Ir-ganim in a "trustworthy and deep manner":

> Albert Swissa casts a veil over the reader's eyes with endless words and metaphors, blocking his view . . . even he who is willing to spend time reading one sentence or paragraph again and again cannot possibly enjoy it. . . . you cannot possibly stay with any of Swissa's sentences and read them thoroughly . . . his narrator spoils it all . . . [with his] use of long paragraphs and wild association that are too complex. . . . can it really be that Ayush experiences reality in such a manner, using such poetic and high registered language?

A third critic, Heda Boshes (1991), joins the criticism, noting that reading *Aqud* is an exhausting experience: "the images chase each other, piling up meanings, making you want to escape . . . to breathe lighter air." But the most explicitly racist criticism is offered by Razya Ben Gurion (1991). While joining the other critics in criticizing the novel's linguistic richness, Ben Gurion adds an elaborate discussion of what she considers to be the novel's "oriental rhetoric," a rhetoric she ascribes to both Swissa and Saddam Hussein:

> It is so happened that I have been reading Swissa's *Aqud* at the same time that I have been listening to Saddam Hussein on the radio, threatening war. And as I have been listening to Hussein

and advancing in reading Swissa's novel, I became suspicious of (Swissa's) and repulsed by (Hussein's) oriental rhetoric (*Ofen ha-bituyi ha-mizrachi*). Their rhetoric, while different, nevertheless shares one origin: the Orient. And how does this Orient manifest linguistically? [First] in the use of words as ornaments. Words are not used to convey truth or any deep meaning but only to express linguistic "richness" [which] follows no internal logic. This [richness] makes it impossible for us to see what [Swissa's] characters *really look like* or what they *really think*. . . . [Finally] there is ridiculous contradiction between the stagnant, ugly, violent, and claustrophobic reality of the cement neighborhood Ir-ganim and the celebratory and rich language through which this reality is described. This brings me to another characteristic of the oriental rhetoric: its richness lacks the ability to distinguish between expressions of joy and sorrow. All is one big moaning. . . . But there really is no surprise here. After all, those who do not recognize the value of the individual clearly do not know the intricacies of the human soul . . . . To conclude, not only is it impossible to understand what is the connection between *Aqud's* chapters or the novel's characters, it is also impossible to figure out the author's relationship to the reality he depicts. . . . Tainted by linguistic "richness," which has nothing to do with reality, or the ability to tell any truth related to any specific time, place, or personality, [the novel] leaves us with nothing but linguistic bravado and [empty] celebration that could easily fit any time or place without any difference. (my emphasis)

Hirshfeld, Gur, Boshes, and Ben Gurion all suggest, albeit with various degrees of explicitness, that the density of "oriental richness" of Swissa's Hebrew hides what they call "the truth" or "reality": the outer appearance and inner life of the characters (what they really look like and really think). Swissa's language is said to block and interrupt perception (it is "eye blocking" and "earsplitting") and to further create an undesired dissonance between a harsh reality and the pretty words: between "the neighborhood's consciousness in its authentic ethnic and mental limitations" and "the linguistic virtuosity of the narrator" (Hirshfeld). What all these critics seem to overlook, however, are the subversive implications of such "failed representation."[19]

Filth, gambling, drunkenness, prostitution, disease, and above all "Moroccan shit" is what Swissa's novel introduces to the Hebrew reader. His characters, whose "real nature" we cannot see, love to shit and talk about shit. This fixation on the anus, both "at the level of metonymy [through] sounds of running gutters, old gutter pipes and exposed sewage . . . and at the metaphoric level [in terms of] the kinds of sexual attraction, violence and humiliation of oppression," as Hirshfeld observes, "belong[s] to a different and foreign evolutionary stage"; but even more disturbing, he continues, is the fact that such "violent, bitter, vulgar reality" is delivered with the most "coquettish Hebrew." Thus, while the critic praises Swissa for "recognizing the real basis of the ethnic style and position that he attempts to describe" and for "not looking away from the hard truth: people who are animal-like [who live in] a limited world controlled by a childish if not infantile consciousness," he concludes that this brave look into the "true nature" of this "ethnic neighborhood" loses its credibility due to Swissa's Hebrew, which hides the "authentic neighborhood mentality with its ethnic and mental limitation" behind the barriers of "pretty words and archaic syntax."

What this and similar comments reveal is the persistent failure on the part of the critics to acknowledge the fact that the violence and vulgarity they find in the novel (what Hirshfeld identifies as "a foreign evolutionary stage"), accompanied by the "mismatched" language register, is none other than Swissa's redirection of racist violence transcribed into a new and "foreign" kind of Hebrew text. Alienated and alienating, *Aqud* brings the inverted logic of abjection to an extreme as it moves the "ethnic problem" (*ha-baaya ha-adatit*) "back" into its original location within the imaginary: the catastrophic, terrifying, and phobic space made of feared identifications; a space from which the abject returns as a haunting filthy and contaminating threat: "I [Ayush] who ran away from kindergarten, and ran away from school, and ran away from the wizards and the dogs, and ran away from the praying, and ran away from my bar mitzvah, I tell you . . . that wherever you'll go, there will be nothing but cement and your whole life will be nothing but shit!" (*Aqud*, 267).[20] With *Aqud*, then, the (harsh, bitter, and vulgar) reality of the Moroccan neighborhood is no longer safely contained in the "corners of the dwellings," to borrow Gelblum's phrase. It is no longer out "there" for us to see, analyze, or pity. Rather, it is now placed at the heart of the text, from which it threatens to corrupt and contaminate modern Hebrew, even in its "most coquettish forms." Under "piles of meaning," blinded and dazed by Swissa's dense, overwhelming, and misplaced language, we find no defined meaning, but rather the very collapse of meaning. Refusing to play into the orientalist imagination of its readers and satisfy their thirst for horror (the desire to see the neighborhood's harsh truth with

its "limited ethnic mentality"), Swissa strips his characters of their typical (and expected) ethnic and class characterizations, hiding them, as it were, under rich "oriental language" that blocks the penetrating gaze of the voyeuristic readers, preventing them from finding the Moroccan character they have themselves invented in advance.

In a long essay devoted to *Aqud*, Yerach Gover (1994) sets out to fight the Ashkenazi liberal criticism of the novel by arguing that the novel's importance lies first and foremost in its political stance as a radical text, which, unlike any previous Hebrew text, "disturb[s] *even* the Zionist liberal discourse" (153). However, in insisting on the dichotomy between "the social reality" and "the linguistic presentation"—the very same dichotomy affirmed by the liberal critics whose readings of the novel he attacks—Gover ascribes the political strength of *Aqud* to its social message over and above its literary and linguistic qualities. Determined to valorize Swissa's novel and defend it from what he calls "the Ashkenazi reader," Gover chooses to overlook the unique linguistic aspects of the text all together: "It is the [political] voice and not the words that must be seen as defining *Aqud* as a novel of resistance" (155). By turning to such an artificial division (between voice and words, the political and the aesthetic), Gover, who is absolutely correct in identifying the novel's subversive political position, fails to acknowledge the novel's most powerful and daring aspect: its use of language as a means of political resistance.

As part of his attempt to purify the novel and "protect" it from racist readers, Gover even goes as far as to deny the presence of madness and abjection in the novel altogether: "Swissa does not treat the victims as abject . . . like Swissa himself, the characters are children raised in homes in which love is expressed" (152). Against Hirshfeld, Gur, and other Ashkenazi critics, Gover recommends that we look for "perception rather than derangement" and for "honesty instead of madness" (154). Along these lines, Gover—in what seems a self-defeating move—also denies the presence of linguistic violence directed toward women. That women are referred to within the novel as "dogs in heat," "whores," and "wild cats" is for him a sign of "a joyful expression of their freedom, only degrees removed from that of the children . . . and unthinkable in a traditional Ashkenazi home" (155–56). Such a sublimated reading of Swissa's most overt treatment of both racism and sexism can only be read as symptomatic of the desire to escape from the catastrophic and horrifying space forced upon the reader by the novel's explicit madness, and the madness of its language, which, invested in abjection, refuses to play by the rules.[21]

In contrast to Gover, who directs our attention away from madness ("we need to look for honesty instead of madness") and away from language ("it is not words"), I suggest that *Aqud* is all about madness, language, and "mad language." Thus, for example, Ayush discovers that he can bring his own "mad world" made of cowboys and Indians into the classroom in order to defeat his teacher. When the teacher mocks him, as he regularly does in front of the entire class for being unprepared and dreamy, Ayush bursts into the following hallucinatory monologue:

> Oh yeah! I am riding a horse: Di-giding, di-giding, di-giding, digidigidigidigi, and shooting a gun: piuf, piuf, ta-da-dada-dadam, bom! *yur ah fuckin blond and blu ayez gerel, yeh!* Di-giding, di-giding, di-giding, piuw, piuw! I am killing a few farmers and kidnapping the blonde. . . . I am rai-ai-ai-ping her . . . rai-ai-ai-ping her, rape, rape, do you understand?! (154–55)

The monologue, composed of a mix of Americanized Hebrew, sounds of gun shooting, and broken English (the parts in italics appear in transliterated English in the original), makes his teacher, in turn, "lose control . . . shout, sweat and shiver" (155).

Rather than ignoring or denying the presence of madness, mad language, and abjection in *Aqud*, then, we should explore the manner by which Swissa presents madness and the "corruption of language" as the only available means for surviving abjection and fighting social exclusion, which is always an exclusion both through and from dominant, normative language. If language is the force through which social order takes form, and if, following Lacan and Kristeva, the abject marks a failure to participate in the normative production of language (the symbolic), it is precisely from this failed position that the outcast delivers his most effective threat: "without either wanting or being able to become integrated in [the symbolic], the abject reacts, abreacts, and abjects. . . . From its place of banishment [it] does not cease challenging its master (*Powers of Horror* 3).

Not Just Too Oriental but Also Too Jewish?

> The Hebrew Swissa writes in, is not learned in Talmud classes in high school nor in Hebrew literature or Jewish Studies departments at the university. Only someone who has grown-up speaking this Hebrew as a Yeshiva student and who still wakes up in the middle of the night to the

> sounds of readings from the Kabala (*tikunai ha-zohar*) could possibly have access to such sacred Hebrew.
>
> —Naomi Gotking, "*Aqud* and the Bounding of Hebrew"

If Swissa's Hebrew is associated with "oriental richness," it is not less important to note its Jewishness. A mixture of contemporary colloquial Israeli vernacular with rabbinic, mystical, and biblical Hebrew, Swissa's Hebrew is quite different from that of other Ashkenazi leading Israeli novelists such as Haim Hazaz, Amos Oz, or Amalia Kahana Carmon. Indeed, while there is nothing particularly surprising about the use of Jewish sources—the use of rabbinic and biblical sources for vocabulary, allusions, and citations is quite common in modern Hebrew literature—what is significant about Swissa's hybridized Hebrew is that besides utilizing rabbinic and biblical coinages (mostly from the *sidur*, *machzor*, and *mishna*), he, unlike other Israeli writers, draws heavily on Jewish Sephardi liturgy (*piyutim)* and sayings (*divray chakhamim*). This type of sacred Hebrew is mostly absent from contemporary Hebrew literature and is commonly considered a derogatory form of Jewishness or a "less advanced" spiritual heritage. Emphasizing the specific Moroccan Jewish tradition, spiritual icons, vocabulary, and local leaders and making them into the most immediate references available for his characters, Swissa reintroduces into modern Hebrew literature a form of religious Jewishness that is explicitly "located outside the realms of the [Zionist-national] valued Jewishness (*ha-yahadut ha-reuya*)" (Cohen 2002, 21). Both "too oriental" and "too Jewish" to be considered truly Israeli, *Aqud*'s Hebrew, I suggest, directly confronts the Zionist narrative of national recovery (which includes the recovery and modernization of Hebrew) by returning to the forgotten memory of a Judeo-Arab Hebrew and the "oriental within": the Jew, the Jew *as* Arab, the Arab Jew.

The Israeli poet and critic Yitzhak Laor writes about the threat this memory of the oriental within introduces to the hegemonic Israeli subject, a threat associated quite explicitly with the Arab Jew's status as the embodiment of a terrifying "in-betweenness," neither subject nor object, neither self nor other, neither inside nor completely outside:

> The Israeli intellectual is very afraid of the "ethnic problem." . . . The fear that this raises has everything to do with the issue of identity and identification. To identify with the Palestinian does not require the Israeli to give up anything that constructed his identity as an "Israeli." He is not asked to negotiate his definition of himself or to give up anything of his "self"

> [because] the Palestinian is *already* othered. One can feel for the Palestinian [and even support his political struggle] without having to change anything about what one believes makes him an Israeli. . . . In this sense . . . the Arab Jew introduces a much harder demand, [he presents] an ideological obstacle, for his very existence generates the unavoidable question: "*Who is the [Israeli] subject?*" (1996, 22–23, my emphasis)

Thus, if the Palestinian serves as meaningful opposition against which the Jewish-Israeli subject defines itself, the Arab Jew threatens to bring such a structure of oppositional identification to collapse, as he is never other enough "to allow a secure differentiation" (Kristeva 1982b, 7).

"Who is the Israeli subject?" is the question that the distinct linguistic qualities of Swissa's novel force us to engage critically. The novel's unique mixture of *lashon kodesh* (biblical, rabbinic, and Moroccan lithography language) with contemporary street Israeli Hebrew, used for describing the most abject entities—shit, urine, sperm, and other bodily byproducts—delivers a double and somewhat paradoxical challenge to many readers of modern Hebrew-Israeli literature. First, this hybridized language threatens to "contaminate" the most sacred elements of Hebrew language that, for the most part, have not been secularized (and certainly never "abused" in a similar manner). Second—and it is this threat to which I believe most critics responded with great alarm—it threatens to overtly "Judaize" Israeli culture with a religious and moreover Sephardic traditional language, which stands against the Zionist attempt to modernize and Westernize both Hebrew and the Jew.

Interestingly enough, Swissa provides his own indirect explanation for his use of prenationhood, premodern, and explicitly religious Hebrew vocabulary and syntax. In one of the novel's most ironic moments, the narrator reflects on the nature of modern Hebrew and the sources of its vocabulary. While modern Hebrew is commonly presented within the Zionist national narrative as a miraculous rebirth of the "dead" old Jewish language, in *Aqud* modern Hebrew is seen as a completely new invention: a modern, national, and alienating language that has little, if anything, to do its Jewish origins:

> And where did they come up with so many new words, these Jews? (*u-minayin la-hem la-yehudim, kol-kakh harbe milim?*) They built themselves a state like all other states and supplied it with a new dictionary to support it (*he'amido la milon le-sharta*). Into this new dictionary, they poured all the words

> that are necessary for a modern citizen. Hebrew didn't have such words, so they had to invent them, in order to be able to call the new citizen to attend PTA meetings; to join regional committees; to help other citizens, to go to the police; to report to the tax authorities, and, of course, to go to war against our enemies. (74)

In a national reality based on the political motto "Jewish *but* modern, Jewish *but* Western," the traditional, Oriental Jew as well as his Hebrew, Swissa illuminates, has no place. Both he and his language are seen as foreign entities, posing a serious threat to the hegemonic Israeli subject position. Indeed, if the characters of *Aqud* are seen as threatening "others within," their Mizrachi Yeshiva language is equally suspect, as it threatens to "pollute" the Zionist modern national imagination with traditional Oriental forms of Jewishness.

Surviving through Exile: The Memory of Other Times and Places

> The greatest chance for the second-generation Moroccan Jewish immigrant to survive is exile: exile within Israel.
> —Albert Swissa

> There is nothing more foreign to you Africans than the land and the idea of working the land.
> —Gersha, Ayush's Ashkenazi neighbor, *Aqud*

In one of his final attempts to successfully incorporate the Zionist ideology into his daily reality, Ayush, walking back from school, attempts to decipher the meaning behind the cover of his "homeland textbook" (*sefer moledet*). Carefully examining the cover, he nevertheless fails to make sense of the images: a group of young Israeli men and women holding scythes and riding horses, all smiling happily, each with an Arab kaffiya (head-wrap) wrapped around his or her necks. Beneath the image appear the words of the early national poet Rachel: "Hoy, my beloved *Kinneret* [Sea of Galilee]" (148). Puzzled, Ayush concludes that it is a mystery. Ayush's "failure" to decode the Zionist image, like Swissa's own "linguistic failures," is a telling one, for it directs attention not only to Ayush's own inadequacy, but also to the absurdity of the reality he attempts (and fails) to decipher. An absurdity

reflected, for example, in the perplexing, yet quite common, early Zionist images of young, blond, Aryan-looking Jewish pioneers [*chalutzim*] wearing Arab kaffiyas.[22]

If we get lost trying to make sense of *Aqud's* condensed, mad, and idiosyncratic narratives; if we are blinded and dazed by piled-up meanings, endless transfigurations of identity, spinning adjectives, figurative descriptions of shit, pee, and vomit delivered through archaic syntax or mismatched linguistic registers, it is not simply because these narratives fail to deliver coherency. More accurately, these stylistic "failures" are the means by which Swissa redirects the discursive power of racial abjection, inviting us to question "the very terms of symbolic legitimacy" (Butler 1993, 3), that is, the legitimacy of *other*, authoritative, and hegemonic narratives about, for example, the nature of the Israeli subject.

Replacing normative language with linguistic corruption, "common sense" with the failure to comprehend, and lucid narratives with perverse and incoherent abject accounts, *Aqud* rescues the so-called ethnic problem from its common representations in terms of a clash between opposed cultural values or irresolvable cultural differences (themselves presented along all-too-familiar binaries: modernity/tradition; civilized/barbaric; future/past, us/them, West/East), exposing instead the process of exclusion and abjection, which precedes "culture," and which is made of nothing but horror and power: the "horrors of power," to invert Kristeva's phrase, through which certain individuals—their bodies, language, communities, and living zones—are excluded and rendered abject, as well as the "powers of horror," with which the abject-being, the one who is denied the status of a full subject, never ceases to fight back.

Fighting back does not necessarily translate into a confrontational model. In *Aqud* it involves, among the rest, a process of "reremembering," to borrow Toni Morrison's term, through which the present is infiltrated with repressed and "illegitimate" memories and longings. Thus, Ayush is haunted by the thrilling memory of himself being kidnapped by his Muslim nanny back in Morocco, only to be rescued at the last moment by his mother. The few steps that separate the *mellah* (the Jewish quarter) and the *medina* (the Muslim quarter), which also separate his present Jewish identity from the "Muslim boy he could have been" (84), reappear in Ayush's dreams as an exciting fantasy through which he is able to locate his identity in the imaginary space opened between Muslim and Jew, past and present, what "is" and what "could have been":

> One thought kept him occupied. He kept hearing that one hesitant, tired and desperate cry that separated him from the Muslim boy he could have been. The voice kept ringing in his

> head. . . . He remembered, although he could have not remembered the few crucial steps that separated him from the corner of the *mellah*. . . . Those steps that would have separated him from his parents forever, if that desperate cry didn't make him turn back. . . . He was following his Muslim nanny, away from Judaism and toward Islam . . . away from his parents' house and toward the Muslim quarter. . . . He was holding [his nanny's] dry and warm hand, walking with her smelling her familiar smell. . . . Only one step separated them from the *Medina*. . . . [But] then he heard that cry, his mother's cry that stopped them and brought him back from Ishmael to Israel. (84–87)

The proximity between the Jew and the Muslim, Ishmael and Israel, the *mellah* and the *medina*, is thus reinscribed into the reality of the Zionist Israeli nation as a ghostly memory that refuses to let go. It is along these lines that we can best understand the prophetic words of the "little man" (the Barbie doll Ayush turns from female to male), with which the novel closes:

> [Remember] all those other places and times . . . where people are still missing us without us even knowing about it; people who were left by us, when we came to this place [Israel]. People who are also a source of longing for us and for all of those who are now here: a longing for other places and for the people we once were. A longing for the life we once had or could have had, and that now, we can no longer remember. (270)

In an interview published soon after the appearance of his novel, Swissa, asked to elaborate on this closing paragraph, had this to say:

> I am also an Arab child. I am almost obsessed with the thought of myself living in a completely different place from the one I am in today, of myself as an Arab boy. I often imagine myself as an Arab child . . . [an image] that overcomes even the force of my Jewish existence. I refuse to deny such longings, especially in light of the hatred that prevails today between Jews and Arabs. (quoted in Sarna 1991)

If *Aqud* introduces one of the sharpest, most astute literary criticism of Zionism's "domestic orientalism" (Piterberg 1996, 125), it is partially due to its ability to draw attention to abjection as the sign of the "insufficiency of [our] own present" (Molesworth 1993, 20). Once exposed, Swissa addresses this insufficiency by reviving repressed and "illegitimate" memories and hopes such as those captured in the narrow space of longing opened between Israel and Ishmael, the Arab and the Jew.

5

Memory, Forgetting, Love

The Limits of National Memory

> The land is but a train of dust
> Love alone
> Knows how to marry this space
> Cities break apart.
> —Adonis[1]

> The essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things.
> —Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation"

The Battle of Memory

In an essay published a few years after he left Israel in 1969, the acclaimed Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1973, 64) argues that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while focused on the question of territory or ownership over the land, is best understood in terms of a "battle of memories:" a battle between the Israeli-Jewish memory, which establishes the relationship to the land of Israel on texts and archaeology, and the Palestinian memory, which, he suggest, preserves an organic connection to the land by a people who "know the time of the rain from the smell of the stone." The articulation of national conflict in terms of a battle of memory is in itself not out of the ordinary. "The destruction of the collective memory of the Other, through the construction of one's own, is a central element in the formation of *all* national identities," Ilan Gur-Ze'ev and Ilan Pappe remind us (2003, 93). Other prominent critics have drawn attention to the fact that national iden-

tity is itself primarily a question of memory, or better yet, of selective forgetting. Writing about the creation of the modern nation, Ernest Renan (1990, 18), for example, notes that the "possession in common of a rich legacy of memories," is an important part of what constitutes the "nation's soul." This memory, however, is itself based on forgetting, which Renan finds to be the most "crucial factor in the creation of a nation. It is for this reason, he elaborates, that "progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality [as] historical enquiry brings to light [forgotten] deeds of violence, which took place at the origin of all political formations." Similarly, Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that the nation's "imagined community" depends on a "simultaneous remembering of the dead and forgetting of the political conditions of their demise."[2] But what makes the Israeli-Palestinian battle of memories particularly potent is that this battle is articulated not only in terms of different qualities of memory or opposed narratives of original ownership ("who was here first"), but also in terms of suffering and victimhood ("who has suffered more"). While Gur-Ze'ev and Pappe describe this battle as resulting in a tragic *mutual* negation—"each side sees itself as a sole victim while totally negating the victimization of the Other" (2003, 93), Darwish stresses the manner by which the visible Jewish history of suffering erases the Palestinian memory of loss, becoming, in his words "the condition for Palestinian forgetting" (Darwish and al Qāsim 1990, 110).[3] Elsewhere he writes similarly: "Armed [with the] legend and the uniform of the victim, the Israeli empties the Palestinian memory of its ties to the Arab place, history and space" (1987, 46). Like Darwish, Edward Said (2000b), without in any way minimizing the Jewish traumatic past, draws attention to the inequality of the Israeli-Palestinian "battle of memories" by reminding us that while the history of suffering experienced by the Jews (a long history of anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust) has no direct link to the Palestinians or the history of Palestine, the current suffering of the Palestinians is a direct outcome of the Israeli-Jewish occupation. Other writers and scholars, among which are Azmi Bishara, Anton Shammas, Imil Habibi, Dan Dinar, Tom Segev, Ella Shohat, and Joseph Massad, have since discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in similar ways, emphasizing the role of traumatic memory in shaping the terms of this conflict and its public image.[4]

It is by now no secret that the Zionist leadership has systematically mobilized the memory of the Holocaust in order to gain exclusive control over the representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The memory of the Holocaust has played a major role in establishing the Zionist national-theological narratives of *mi-galut le-geula* (from exile to redemption) and *mi-shoa le-*

tkuma (from the shoah to resurrection), and it continues to be used retrospectively to justify contemporary political injustices and violence carried out by Israel on Palestinians. Indeed, even within the newly constructed narrative of national revival and bravery (*Tekuma u-gevura*), the position of Jewish victimhood has been carefully maintained, as "the Palestinians became the present-day Amalek [the biblical enemy of the Israelites]" (Gur-Ze'ev 2003, 35).[5] As Tom Segev and others have convincingly argued, Israel has made strategic use of the Holocaust and has exploited the figure of the Jewish victim for political purposes, while mobilizing a nationalist discourse of revival that more or less directly justified the dispossession of Palestinians. Without undermining this fact, it is important to note that some Palestinian and other Arab accounts have indirectly contributed to the success of this instrumentalization of memory on the part of Zionism by denying or minimizing the gravity of recent Jewish suffering. Thus, in an essay dedicated to the historical development of Arab reactions to the Holocaust, the Palestinian critic and politician Azmi Bishara (1995, 64) notes that "The fifties and the sixties were the years of establishing an exclusive narrative of 'Jewish evilness' throughout the Arab world . . . some texts justified the Holocaust, others denied it and presented it as a Zionist myth. . . . [Still today] when Nazi Germany is criticized it is rarely tied to Jewish history and the word 'Shoah' is never mentioned." Said too (1997) has accompanied his astute accusation of Zionist historiography with a criticism directed toward Arab intellectuals, whom he accuses of being blind to the Jewish traumatic collective memory: "One is as impatient with Israeli posturing about 'psychological security as with recent Arab efforts to enlist people like [the Holocaust denier] Roger Garaudy in order to cast doubt on the six million victims. Neither advances the cause of peace, or of real coexistence between the people whose share of historical suffering links them inextricably." Elsewhere (1998) he writes in a more pragmatic tone that by denying or minimizing the gravity of recent Jewish suffering, Arab intellectuals directly harm Palestinian's interests:

> There is now a creeping, nasty wave of anti-Semitism and hypocritical righteousness insinuating itself into our political thought and rhetoric. . . . The history of the modern Arab world . . . is disfigured by a whole series of out-moded and discredited ideas, of which the notion that the Jews never suffered and that the holocaust is an obfuscatory created by the elders of Zion is one that is acquiring too much, far too much

> currency. Why do we expect the world to believe our suffering as Arabs if we cannot recognize the suffering of others, even [if they are] our oppressors?

One can of course explain Arab intellectuals' denial or marginalization of the memory of the Holocaust in terms of anger and bitterness, for it was the Arabs (or Palestinians) who were made to pay a still unrecognized high price for crimes committed by others. Thus, Azmi Bishara (1995, 54) argues that "it is absurd that not only have the Palestinians lost their land, they were also made to take responsibility over the Jews; a role passed down to them by Europe." Nevertheless both Bishara and Said, while acknowledging the unjust treatment of Palestinians, suggest that any solution to the "battle of memories" between Israelis and Palestinians requires the mutual recognition of each side's memory of suffering. In Bishara's words, "[Even if] it is unfair and unjust . . . [the truth is that] the question of Palestine is intertwined with, and inseparable from, the Jewish question and therefore, any attempt to find a political solution in the Middle East must directly attend to the collective memories [of suffering] of these two people" (54). Said (1997, 3) similarly argues that the collective memories of both people—Israelis and Palestinians—should be resituated and understood along a shared historical trajectory: "Unless the connection is attempted which shows the Jewish tragedy as having led directly to the Palestinian catastrophe by letting us call it necessity rather than pure will, we cannot coexist as two communities of detached and uncommunicatingly separate suffering."

Bishara and Said, then, emphasize the necessity of the two people not only to acknowledge the suffering of the other, but also to recognize the historical and political ties that connect the collective memory of Jewish suffering (figured by both as mainly "the Holocaust") and the collective memory of Palestinian suffering (figured as the forced exile of 1948, "the Nakbah"). Gur-Ze'ev and Pappe agree with this opinion and add that making "the connection between the Holocaust and the Nakbah . . . [would in the long run] help overcome nationalism and ethnocentrism on both Israeli and Palestinian sides" (2003, 64).

A somewhat similar suggestion seems to be articulated by the Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf, in *Les Echelles du Levant (Ports of Call)*, one of his latest novels.[6] *Ports of Call* depicts the conflict between the two people in Palestine (referred to in the novel as "Jews" and "Arabs") before and after 1948 as resulting from the inability or failure on the part of both sides to recognize the suffering of the other. But if Bishara and Said, like Darwish

and others, emphasize the continual aspect of victimization (i.e., the fact that the Jews who *were* victims became victimizers of the Palestinians, who thus became the "new" victims), Maalouf's novel seems to suggest that Jewish and Arab sufferings are further connected by a shared past of victemhood in Europe. Replacing the Arab/Jewish dual conflict with a triangular model that includes Europe (itself figured mainly as Nazi Germany and its allies), Maalouf's novel presents the tragedy of 1948 in terms of a double failure: the failure to see the suffering of the other, and the failure to see that the other is in fact "not quite other," for in the eyes of the "third party" (Europe or Nazi Germany), Jews and Arabs are virtually the same:

> So soon after the fall of the Nazis, the "*two groups detested by Hitler*" [take] up arms against one another, kill one another, each of which is convinced of being the only victim of injustice. The Jews because they have just suffered through the worst that any people can suffer, an attempt to annihilate them, and were now determined to make it impossible for this to be repeated; the Arabs because the reparation of the evil was to some extent carried out at their expense, even though they had had no part in the crime committed by Europe. (102–3, my emphasis)

In presenting the Arabs and the Jews as "the two groups detested by Hitler," Maalouf breaks the Jewish monopoly over the memory of the Holocaust and emphasizes the *racial* affiliation between Jews and Arabs as (detested) Semites. With this presentation he offers a counternarrative to the many existing narratives of mutual suspicion and accusation preceding and continuing after 1948: Jews' condemnation of Arabs for their collaboration with Nazi Germany, on the one hand, and Arabs' criticism of Jews for their collaborations with the British Empire, on the other.[7] Europe, as the "third party," appears then as the "real" enemy of both Jews and Arabs, who are too quick to forget their shared destiny by becoming enemies of each other. Indeed, in an attempt to confront the "battle of memories" or rather the "battle over the position of the victim," Maalouf's novel presents a narrative of projected collaboration, a Semitic affiliation of sorts, which is promoted through the novel's main narrative: a love story between an Arab Muslim man and a Jewish East European woman, both fighters against European fascism. Clara, a Jewish survivor, publishes the memoirs of Jews and Arabs "who had fought together against the Nazis in various occupied countries" (106), while Ossyane, her Arab Muslim lover, presents his own memory to his documenter as "a useful testimony" and a "historical proof" for Jewish-Arab collaborations (106). In many ways, *Ports of Call* itself reads as a fic-

tional testimony of sorts that depicts the current Arab/Jewish animosity in terms of a "love going astray" or a (Semitic) bond *interrupted* by an unfortunate historical juncture.

Love Along the Shores of the Levant

> [And this] time when all men of all origins lived side-by-side along the ports of the Levant . . . was this a memory of times gone by, or a harbinger of the future?
>
> —Maalouf, *Ports of Call*

Amin Maalouf's novel follows the memories of Ossyane Ketabdar, a Lebanese Muslim man (the son of a Turkish father and an Armenian mother), as narrated by Ossyane to a stranger he meets "one day in June of 1976 on the Metro in Paris." Ossyane's narrative begins with his parents' escape from Turkey and their resettlement in Lebanon at the turn of the century, and it ends with his departure from Lebanon to Paris, following the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975. Most of Ossyane's memories, however, are centered on his relationship with a Jewish woman who later becomes his wife. Sent to Marseilles to study medicine, Ossyane joins the French Resistance movement during World War II, and it is there that he meets Clara, also a member of the Resistance. Following the end of the war the two move to the Middle East: he back to his father's home in Beirut, she, accompanied by her uncle Stephan (her only surviving family member), to Haifa. Their love soon reunites them, and after they are married, they choose to settle between their two beloved cities: "we chose to stay in that part of world between Haifa and Beirut" (123). A great bulk of the novel is dedicated to the few years of joy shared by the lovers and their families, set in Haifa and in Beirut, but mostly in the *continuous* space opened between these two locations: "from Haifa to Beirut it is no more than a hundred and fifty kilometers. At that time it took us about four hours by car, stops included" (116). The families travel easily and constantly between these cities for parties and gatherings. In 1946 the couple rejects the advice given to it by friends and family and refuses to leave this "part of the world." In light of the growing antagonisms between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, they decide "to make [their] love a *symbol* of another way out" (122). The growing conflict, however, does not allow for their "living in-between" to continue for much longer. In 1947 "feelings ran so high that it was no longer possible to express conciliatory

opinions out loud . . . with each journey to and from Haifa the road became more and more dangerous" until finally, in 1948, "it has become unthinkable to venture on the road from Haifa to Beirut" (125, 134).

If Ossyane and Clara's love—which is explicitly presented as a symbol for the possibility of Arab-Jewish coexistence—is "enabled," as it were, by the effects of World War II, this love, we learn, falls victim to yet another war: the war that situates Arabs and Jews as enemies, and that reaches its first peak in 1948. Following this year, the lovers are separated, each restricted to his/her family's home, divided by new national borders that are accompanied by a new segregated national-ethnic order. Ossyane, who spends the first few days of the war in Beirut visiting his sick father, can no longer cross the border back to be with Clara, who, seven months into her pregnancy, stays at her uncle's home in Haifa. The "world between Haifa and Beirut," the space of continuity, which has been the lovers' shared home, is demolished with the establishment of a new national order:

> Now, with the war, it was [all] finished. The frontiers became hermetically sealed. No travelers, no mail, no telegraphs, no telephone. We were still in the same distance from one another, three or four hours by road, but these were now hypothetical hours. We were years of light apart; we were no longer [even] on the same planet. (137)

Realizing he cannot join his wife back in Haifa, Ossyane suffers a nervous breakdown and is placed in a Beirut asylum for the mentally ill, from which he escapes only thirty years later, thanks to another war—the civil war in Lebanon. A bombing near the asylum and the chaos around the city enable Ossyane to escape from Lebanon to Paris where he meets the anonymous narrator and tells him about his hope to finally reunite with Clara and to meet, for the first time, his twenty-nine-year-old daughter Nadia.

While Maalouf's novel successfully confronts the binary opposition between the Jewish and Arab collective memories by introducing a *third memory* of collaboration that belongs to both, the limits of this presentation are also evident. First, Maalouf's depiction of the past—conveyed mainly through the notion of Arab-Jewish collaboration against nazism and manifested in Clara and Ossyane's love—is not only overtly nostalgic, it also overlooks the complexities of "Europe" in its relationship to the Middle East. Thus, while fascism and anti-Semitism have been major forces in Europe in the twentieth century and have drastically shaped modern Jewish history, it is European (later followed by Zionist) *colonialism*, more than any other force, that has left its mark on the Middle East and shaped modern Arab

history. Focusing only on Germany and its allies in destruction, while completely ignoring the colonial history of the Middle East, *Ports of Call* ultimately locates the 1948 war and the Zionist occupation of Palestine, completely outside the context of the region's own history of continual colonial occupation and the struggles against it.

The other problem with Maalouf's presentation of the Arab-Jewish "love affair," has to do with the manner by which his novel mobilizes the "personal" story of Ossyane and Clara's love as "an exemplary event," explicitly suggesting that it is a "symbol" for the two collectives' possibility for living together. Such presentation ends up situating the "personal" and the "national" as parallel (hence also clearly separable) narratives, ones that are connected primarily by means of analogy: the two collectives are thus said to find the possibility for their coexistence through the reflection of a correlating "model in miniature" associated with the two lovers. This parallelism, however, overlooks the complex correlations, attachments, and codependencies between the personal and the collective, which does not allow one simply to mirror or symbolize the other.[8]

In turning now to Mahmoud Darwish's *Dhā kirah lil-nisyān* (*Memory for Forgetfulness*),[9] I shall trace the "memory of love" (between the Arab and the Jew) as it cryptically emerges in this text, not as a symbolic representation of the political, nor as a "memory of collaboration" belonging to a lost and better past, but as a "memory of forgetfulness" that is part of our current antagonistic present. While the theme of love might initially seem foreign to Darwish's "war diary" accounting for his memories of Beirut under siege in 1982, love, I suggest, plays a major role in this text in breaking down and complicating a set of binary oppositions: personal, national, past/present, memory/forgetting, self/other, Arab and Jew. While *Memory* by no means centers on love, or on a "love story," it is the repression of love (the love for the Other, to be more precise), and its forgetting, that emerge in Darwish's text as the preconditions for the construction of national memory.

"I Remembered I'd Forgotten You"

> Time will come when the Jew will no longer be ashamed of the Arab within him, and the Arab won't deny that he is made, among the rest, from Jewish elements.
>
> —Mahmoud Darwish, "Interview with Yeshurun"

Written in 1985, three years after Darwish left Lebanon for Paris, *Memory* is a complex, fragmented, and "nervous" or "edgy" (*mutawattir*) text, to borrow Darwish's own words (quoted in Muhawi's "Introduction," xx–xxi). Such nervousness and fragmentation mimics and translates into writing the sensation of being trapped in a city bombarded and attacked daily. Indeed, Darwish does not reveal his own conditions of writing (in Paris, three years after the siege of Beirut) but rather plants his narrator in Beirut, back in August 1982, when the city was placed under siege for two consecutive months by the Israeli Army. Presented as a personal journal written at a time of conflict and war, Darwish's *Memory* is a protest: a cry of fear and anger set against a reality made of death, an imprisoning siege, years of humiliation and devastation, and above all, forgetting. The text has been commonly read as a national testimony: "a battle against oblivion . . . the collective amnesia about Palestine," to use Muhawi's words (xix), and an offspring of Palestinian "resistance literature" (*adab al-muqâwama*), to rephrase Barbara Harlow (1990, 189–90).[10]

There is no doubt that *Memory* engages such a process of national remembering, protest, and witnessing. However, read *as a testimony* and a "battle against oblivion," the first "forgetting" that is recovered (as a memory *of* forgetfulness) in Darwish's text is not that of Palestine or the Palestinian tragedy, but that of the narrator's Jewish lover: "A while ago I remembered. I remembered that I'd forgotten you." The narrator, waking up from a dream, recalls telling this to his past lover, whose image suddenly appears in his dream (4). It is indeed this memory of the lover—a memory of forgetting and later remembering this forgetting ("a while ago I remembered that I'd forgotten you")—that appears in Darwish's text as a *pretext* for all other forgettings, memories, and remembered-forgettings to follow.

The voice of the once forgotten, now remembered lover takes the narrator by surprise: "Are you well? I mean are you alive . . . what ever happened. . . . When did we meet, when did we part?" (3) It is this voice of the lover (we soon learn that she is a Jewish lover whom the Palestinian narrator has forgotten "thirteen years ago, when [he] left") that awakens the narrator, demanding his recognition and forcing him to remember: "What ever happened . . . when did we part?" With the memory of the lover, which is the narrator's first memory of forgetfulness, *Memory for Forgetfulness* begins. That the "first memory" in this text is that of the forgotten lover/other suggests that it is this love (and its forgetting) that the narrator must remember, "before he can remember."

In a rushed attempt to associate Darwish's text with a (Palestinian) political cause, most critics have failed to acknowledge Darwish's *deconstruc-*

tive and critical account of "national memory," an account he develops as part of, and along with, the text's construction of a Palestinian counternarrative.[11] Disregarding *Memory*'s opening scene and the reoccurrence of the lover's voice throughout Darwish's text, critics have largely limited their analysis of "memory" in this text to a national perspective, identifying the theme of "forgetting" mentioned throughout the text and in the text's title *solely* with the overwritten memory of the (Palestinians) as imposed by "the history of the winners."

Yet, the significance of the memory of the (once forgotten) lover with which Darwish's text opens cannot be overestimated. This memory, which stages "the other" as the first forgetting, breaks down the rivalrous politics of national memory (as a battle between two competing and separable collective memories of loss), not by introducing a memory of collaboration in addition and beside the other two collective memories, but rather through a deconstructive *re*-presentation of the national politics of memory, as a politics of selective forgetting and forbidden loves.

Opening his text with the memory of the lover, Darwish alerts us to the libidinal attachment to the other and exposes the forgetting of this attachment as the precondition of national memory. In other words, the memory of the once forgotten other/lover is a reminder of the libidinal attachment that is "made forgotten" in the service of national memory, and that is replicated and reinforced by a critical discourse that "forgets" the continual presence of, and desire for, the other, in situating: self against other; us versus them; one people's memory in separation from that of an other. Only such a successful forgetting can explain the fact that even Bishara, Gur-Ze'ev, and Pappe—all of whom share the belief in the importance of mutual recognition of the other's memory of suffering—find themselves in disagreement when the two supposedly "separate" memories ("the Jewish" and the "Palestinian") are examined vis-à-vis each other. Thus, Bishara seems to insist on the supremacy of the Palestinian suffering, presenting the Palestinians as the "ultimate victims" in the drama involving the "meeting" of Jewish and Palestinian memories, while Gur-Ze'ev (2003, 62) enforces a different hierarchy, arguing that "the Holocaust is the story of death, while the Nakbah is the legacy of suffering: the first is a manifestation of *total evil* and has no justificational moderation or dialectical dimension [while] the second is a manifestation of injustice and thus totally different." Finally, even Ilan Pappe, who adds to the debate the important notion of "the colonial and postcolonial history of the place," utilizes a hierarchical rhetoric, suggesting the application of "different levels of deconstruction vis-à-vis the [memory] of contemporary victimizers [Israelis] . . . and vic-

tims [Palestinians]" (2003, 63). These critics, turning to "memory" in hopes of thus overcoming the battle between the two people, end up (some more explicitly than others) utilizing a combative rhetoric that continues to stage memory as a coherent and national entity, *already without* the other.

Thus, even if there is "enough suffering and injustice for everyone," as Said (1997) humorously suggests, the call for each side (Jewish, Arab) to recognize "the suffering of the other," while significant, is still politically and ethically insufficient, as long as such recognition maintains the essential differentiation between the two sufferings, that is, as long as the memory of the other is recognized *only* as that: a memory that is already separable and distinct from the memory of one's self. In other words, the mutual recognition of the other's suffering or the realization of the historical continuity of victimization, which links the Israeli Jew and the Palestinian, must be accompanied by an altogether different approach to memory: one that accounts for memory—and a traumatic memory at that—as already including the desire for, and loss or forgetting of, the other.

"Not Love, or Love"

> The other reminds me of myself. . . . I am the result of his visit.
> —Hélène Cixous, "Stigmata"

In her essay "Injury, Identity, Politics" (1996, 152), Wendy Brown employs Nietzsche's notion of *ressentiment* to discuss "the wounded character of politicized identity's desire." For Nietzsche, any identity that is modeled on, and invested in, its own history of suffering is bound to further perpetuate and inflict suffering on others. Such, he writes, is the logic of *ressentiment*, the ("instinctual") need to sublimate one's own suffering by transforming it into revenge:

> For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering, more exactly an agent; still more specifically; a *guilty* agent who is susceptible to suffering—in short, some living thing upon which he can on some pretext or another vent his affects, actually or in effigy: for the venting of his affects represents the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering to win relief . . . this alone constitutes the actual psychological cause of *ressentiment* . . . a desire to deaden pain by means of [savage] affects . . . to drive [one's own pain] out of consciousness at least for the moment. (1989, 127)

Drawing on Nietzsche's account, Brown adds that the formation of (collective) identities on the basis of an attachment to a past of suffering and injustice, runs the danger of perpetuating "self-subjection" and promoting "*not only* a psychological but a political practice of revenge, a practice that reiterates the existence of an identity whose present past is one of insistently unredeemable injury" (73).

Observing the current state of affairs in Israel/Palestine, one does not need much imagination to see the perpetuation of self-subjection and the growing dependency on a politics of revenge. The repeated transformation of "suffering" (the past suffering as well as the present suffering experienced by both Israelis and Palestinians, albeit to different degrees) into acts of revenge is manifested in the already-too-known cycle: "targeted assassinations," long sieges, house demolitions, along with many other daily humiliations are followed by "suicide bombings," which in turn are followed by more "targeted assassinations" and so forth. Today, maybe more than ever before, the two communities are enclosed, each attached to its own narrative of suffering, invested in revenge and denial of the other. What concerns me here is the similar dynamic of *ressentiment* and the discourse of blame that seem to dominate the debates over the question of memory in the Israeli/Palestinian context (i.e., "whose Holocaust is worse," "who is responsible for what," "who is the victim of all victims," "who should pay the price," etc.). The only way out of such a dynamic of subjection, guilt, and attachment to suffering, I suggest, is to develop a more radical politics of memory: one that goes beyond the perception of memory as a personal or national possession and even beyond the ethical demand for the recognition of "the other's loss," in further situating "the memory of the other" as the condition for, and an integral part of, one's *own* memory.

In her own attempt to rescue the politics of memory from the dangers presented to it by the tendency to form collective identities based on an attachment to suffering and injustice, Brown (1996, 163–64) suggests supplementing the discourse of identity ("the language of being") with one that emphasizes desire ("the language of wanting"). The desire or "wanting" that Brown speaks about is located in the unintelligible time that precedes and conditions the becoming of the self. In her words, it is "the memory of desire within identificatory processes, the moment of desire . . . prior to its wounding." The wounding is what her essay earlier describes as the closure on identity and the insistence of the fixation of positions: self/other, us/them. A similar idea is conveyed by the Algerian writer Assia Djebar (1985, 73), who seeks to prolong the fleeting moment located in what she calls "the hesitant courtship dance," which precedes the final separation between self and other. To present the two collective memories—the Jewish-Israeli mem-

ory and the "Palestinian memory"—as enclosed and antagonistic separated collective memories of loss, then, is already to assume, if not reinforce, a radical separation between the two people, at the expense of forgetting their "courtship dance." Forgetting, that is, "the memory of desire within the identificatory process," or, to use Darwish's words, forgetting the two people's "dwelling inside each other" (1996, 195).

In *Memory*, the memory of such preceding desire takes the form of the memory of the forgotten lover/other. This memory, with which the text opens, reappears throughout the text as a dream that haunts the narrator. Waking up in Beirut amidst "chaos of shells . . . steel that howls . . . the fever of metal" (4), the narrator wonders: "who is the one rising out of my dream? Did she really speak with me before dawn, or was I delirious, dreaming while walking?" (20) For the most part, the fragmented memories of the lover are buried under elaborate depictions of bombed Beirut, life under siege, and deserted streets. Their recurring appearance, however, establishes a trajectory of memory, or rather a trajectory of "a memory of forgetting" that brings the "there" (Haifa) into the "here" (Beirut) and a "then" (1969) into the "now" (1982), thus breaking the homogeneity of time and place. In Beirut, the narrator dreams of Haifa; in 1982 he reflects back on the time "thirteen years ago" when he left not only "his city" but also his love. The voice of his once-forgotten lover pierces through his daily walks in the "empty streets of Beirut," turning a text that is "all about war" into a discussion about love: "You love me. Confess that you love me. Tell me you love me!" (72), or: "I still want you, and when you come back to life, I want you to call me" (6).

Toward the end of the text, the narrator recalls an elaborated dialogue he once had with his lover, this time directly engaging the question of their love and its relationship to the questionable possibility of love between the two people: the Arab and the Jew. "Is the Arab sleepy?" the lover asks and after finding out that "the Arab is still awake," she goes on to ask: "Do you hate Jews?" a question to which the narrator replies: "I love you now." Their exchange proceeds as follows:

> SHE: That's not a clear answer.
>
> HE: And the question itself wasn't clear, as if I were to ask you, "do you love Arabs?"
>
> SHE: That is not a question.
>
> HE: So why is your question a question?

SHE: [Because] we have a complex and we have more need for answers.

HE: Are you crazy?

SHE: A little, but you haven't told me whether you love Jews or hate them.

HE: I don't know and I don't want to know [. . .] Jews are not a question of love or hate.

[. . .]

SHE: What do you dream about?

HE: That I stop loving you.

SHE: Do you love me?

HE: No. I don't love you. Did you know that your mother, Sarah, drove my mother, Hagar, away into the desert?

SHE: [. . .] Is it for that you don't love me?

HE: No. You are not to be blamed, and because of that I don't love you, or I love you. (104–107, 124–126)

The conversation continues for awhile, during which the narrator tries to get some sleep before having to report to the police station in Haifa ("I have to get back to them to prove that I exist"), while his lover teases him ("does the Arab get sleepy again?") and questions his love for her and for "the Jews" in general. The lovers, turned into "the Arab" ("is the Arab sleepy?") and "the Jew" ("we have a complex"), are bound to each other not in love but in "not love, or love" ("I don't love you, or I love you"). This condition, itself an outcome of a long history and collective memory of animosity, going far beyond 1948 to the biblical story of the conflict between the two mothers, is not to be confused with the absence or impossibility of love. "Not love, or love," tells the story of desire within the identificatory process: where self and other are not yet fixed as such, but are still caught in a "hesitant dance." It captures the ambivalence found in the moment of transition, when one lover *becomes* a "Jew with a complex," while the other turns into "the son of Hagar."

"Not love, or love" is precisely the ambiguity and instability of identity that identity politics and the politics of national memory tend to erase and make forgotten. In an interview with the Lebanese poet Abbas Beydoun, Darwish refers to a line that repeats throughout the lovers' final dialogue in *Memory*, itself a quote from one of his earlier poems: "And each of us kills

the other outside the window."[12] The killing, he says, is the death of love brought about by growing conditions of alienation and animosity between the two people: "The 1967 war has destroyed any possible positive relationship between the Arab and the Jew . . . such love became impossible [since] the idea of the enemy already penetrated this relationship; the enemy was hiding under the lovers' bed [*l'ennemi était tapi sous leur lit*]" (1997, 15–16). "The enemy," Darwish further suggests, is necessarily also "the enemy of love" (*l'ennemi de l'amour*). The ambiguity introduced by "not love, or love" is replaced here with "the idea of the enemy," which fixes the two lovers in separable camps: self/other, Arab/Jew, and turned their love or their "not love, or love" into a forbidden and impossible love.

And yet, even if love is made impossible when it is governed by the idea of the enemy, the memory of a (once forgotten) love for the other, can never be fully eliminated. Indeed, in *Memory* it emerges, not only "within" the text but also as the *condition for* this text to evolve as a reflection about memory and forgetting. Introducing the memory of the love for the "enemy," as a memory that is impossible to fully forget (this memory escapes the narrators' consciousness as it infiltrates his dreams and daytime hallucinations), and furthermore, as a memory that *enables* the narrator to remember all his other forgotten memories—the repeated exile, displacement, and loss experienced by his people—Darwish forces us to think against and beyond the common binary oppositions between enemy/lover, self/other, us/ them, Jewish memory/Arab memory.

This reading of Darwish's text, should not be misunderstood as an attempt to romanticize it. There is no doubt that *Memory* presents an angry protest and a painful cry, decrying both the Israeli occupation and the Arab world's indifference to Palestinian suffering. None of this is lost, however, in pointing out the manner by which Darwish complicates and enriches this "resistance text" by incorporating into it a discourse of (forbidden and forgotten) love. Thus, while it is undoubtedly the acute state of despair found in Beirut 1982 that stands at the heart of Darwish's text, it is the traces of memory of love and the broken dialogue with the lover that challenge the status of *Memory* as a mere national testimonial text. Indeed, in reintroducing the forgotten love for the other, *Memory* asks us to view "the national" itself with more suspicion, reminding us that for memory to appear as a national possession (e.g., "Palestinian memory" versus "Jewish memory"), the memory of the love that precedes "the idea of the enemy" must disappear.

The Right to Love *or* Love That Isn't Right

> If love is crippled, I will heal it
> with exercise and humor
> and with separating the singer from the song.
> —Mahmoud Darwish, "A State of Siege"

In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1989), Freud attempts to trace the social process through which desires and love are monitored in the service of creating sustainable communities and solidifying collective identities. "Civilization threatens love with substantial restrictions," he writes, but it also "incite[s] people into identifications and aim-inhibited relationships of love" (55, 66). Civilization, then, restricts some loves and promotes others. According to Freud, love is the outcome of selection and discrimination:

> A love that does not discriminate seems to me to forfeit a part of its own value. . . . My love is something valuable to me which I ought not to throw away without reflection. . . . Love is valued by my own people as a sign of my preferring them, and it is an injustice to them if I put a stranger on par with them. (55, 62–63)

Elaborating on Freud's perception of love both as policed by civilization and as one of civilization's foundations, Jacqueline Rose writes:

> My love is precious to me, the result of the finest discriminations, selections, and histories, without which, in some sense, I cease to be. I diminish it, and myself with it if I offer it to every comer on the ground. "A love that does not discriminate [does] an injustice to its object [. . .]" furthermore, it is only on the basis of such fine discriminations that collective identities are made. (1996, 90)

If love is the outcome of the finest discriminations, and if, as such, it functions as the basis for one's own identity ("without which I cease to be") and as the foundation of one's collective identity, we can see why love that escapes or precedes the process of discriminations and elimination must be "forgotten." Such love, it would be safe to assume, threatens to destroy one's own identity, both personal and collective, if the two are in fact separable. But no matter how strong the illusion of one's identity and belonging to a

collective is, it is nevertheless haunted by the memories of excluded loves or loves that are not right.

If Maalouf's novel presents the Arab-Jewish couple and their love as a force that can operate *against* ethno-national antagonism and the stories of Arab-Jewish collaborations as a model for future Arab-Jewish coexistence, Darwish's text presents the "couple" and their love as a story of a continuous "forgetting" that creates and sustains the antagonistic present. What his text invites us to remember, then, is not the "power of the individual" or the ability of individuals to overcome national forces with (symbolic) love and collaboration, but *the forgetting of love* that precedes and conditions the present animosity between Jews and Arabs and which, more generally, conditions the becoming of the nation.

Interestingly enough, Darwish's text explicitly draws attention to the link between (the restrictions on) love (itself the outcome of "the finest discriminations") and the idea of "a people." In one of the text's earlier scenes, the narrator recalls an exchange between himself and "the domineering wife" of his poet friend (37). The wife, who is Christian Lebanese, argues forcefully against the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, when the voice of Fairuz (a highly acclaimed Lebanese singer) rises from the radio, singing *I love you, O Lebanon.* The narrator is quick to express his love for the poem but meets his host's strong opposition: "By what right do you love [this song]? Don't you see how far beyond the limits you Palestinians have gone?" (41) "Going far beyond the limits" here means "beyond the limits of permitted or suitable love"; it means loving that which one supposedly has no right to love. The anger voiced by the Lebanese woman (who like all other women in Darwish's text remains nameless) reveals her anxiety about the idea of "sharing" her love for Fairuz, and, of course, for Lebanon, with a Palestinian refugee, who in this case takes the place of Freud's "stranger." In this context, the fear of "losing identity" is particularly vivid and explicit since it is manifested as a fear of losing possession over culture and territory: "You ought to love Jerusalem!" the hostess continues, thus attempting to align the borders of love with the assigned territorial borders of culture. In another text, Darwish (2002, 8) relates to the political conflict between Israelis and Palestinians by expressing his appreciation of the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai: "I like the conflict between me and Amichai," he writes, noting, "we compete over who is more in love with this land, and who writes about [this love] more beautifully." Articulating the political battle between the two people (a battle, which is, after all, about the possession of land) in terms of a shared love for the same object, Darwish ridicules the perception love as an exclusive and policed national, ethnic or religious "right."

Writings about the memory of lost love, a love that in today's political climate is clearly "not right," both Darwish's and Maalouf's texts confront "the idea of the enemy" by exposing it as an "idea": a construction based on selective memory and forgetting. Their texts re-create ties between the past and the present; Haifa and Beirut; the Arab and the Jew, *against* the continual and determined political attempts to seal these borders and separate the "enemies" once and for all. Reinserting the memory of love into the present moment, which is undeniably governed by hostility and *ressentiment*, both texts, each in its own way, help open our present to include forgotten pasts and more hopeful futures.

Future Memories: Another Time *or* the Time of Writing

> The future will be that which we make it and the Mediterranean is a central element of this future, because it is an ideal laboratory for an identity based on meetings, and because it still needs to be made.
> —Maalouf, "Construire"

> I want to create a stage for poetic spaces … where people can roam around with no boundaries, and where the search for identity will take place within a [space] of mixture, confrontation and cohabitation.
> —Darwish, quoted in Hadidi, "khiyar al-sira"

In a brief essay about the prospect of the Mediterranean-Levantine world, Maalouf (1998, 89) writes:

> Lovers of the Mediterranean often make the mistake of speaking about it as if it were an existing entity rather than an entity to be constructed. . . . [But] in evoking the Mediterranean, one alludes to a long path that still needs to be followed . . . [and] the first step along this path requires the construction of a certain regional Mediterranean consciousness.

Later in the essay, Maalouf explains that his notion of a Mediterranean consciousness is not exclusive, that he is not talking about a coherent and easily defined concept, but about a process of "doing away with" and "re-creating" plural and local sites of identification, through which the Mediterranean belonging (*appartenance*) will "articulate 'identity' in terms of gatherings and meetings" (90). What seems to me to be the most important

claim Maalouf makes in this essay is his insistence on "finding" such identity in a *future*, itself envisioned by means of pragmatically selected "symbols, people, ideas, acts, and relationships found in the past," in order to combat existing "ethnic identitarian mythologies" (92). Maalouf expresses a somewhat similar "pragmatic" approach in accounting for Ossyane's overt nostalgic attachment to the past: "the only means for imagining a future," he argues "is recreating a past [in the image of] a lost paradise" (Jureidini 1996).

It is through the path opened *between* memory and imagination, then, that Maalouf sees the possibility for constructing a future memory of the Mediterranean with which to fight current ethnic and national identiterian ideologies. If *Ports of Call* is to be read as taking part in the construction of such future memory, it is mainly due to the novel's ability to maintain a productive tension among history, memory, and fiction. Indeed, even Ossyane's memories, which serve as the guideline for constructing the history of the Levant prior and after 1948, are introduced by the novel's anonymous narrator not as "historical facts" or even necessarily reliable memory, but as a "story" that "like any other story, contains its *own truth*" (3).

Darwish, for his part, similarly suggests that "the future [can only] emerge as the plurality of the past once articulated in the path opened *between* history and myth: "entre l'historique et le mythique" (1997, 28). Elsewhere (2002, 69) he notes that only by fusing "memory" (or historical "facts") with imagination, can writing escape the absolutism of the present: "[To prevent] falling into mere actuality . . . you [need to] know how to break through the present moment . . . to fuse reality with imagination . . . to avoid being a captive of the present [. . .] is the hardest thing of all."

In *Memory*, too, the tension between the factual and the imagined is purposely sustained. Although the text has been often read as a war chronicle or a testimony in the service of documenting erased history, one cannot overlook the dreamy and hallucinatory nature of this text. Opening with "a dream born out of a dream" sets the tone for *Memory*'s delirious nature, putting into question the "factual" quality of the text. Quoting a variety of historical texts (mainly medieval chronicles such as Ibn Kathir's) only highlights the difference between such archival reports and Darwish's own hazy writing, through which "the present fades away" (139/121).

In a letter sent to his friend, the Palestinian-Israeli poet Samih al-Qāsim, Mahmoud Darwish writes:

> [So many texts] convey to us that no individual could today carry within him the two: the Arab and the Jew. But why, why? Is it because writing about such duality as it finds itself in a time of conflict and a place of war needs *another time?* [And] after the

> wound of identity heals, will [we] have the right to be Arab and Jewish, without symbols, betrayal, defeat? (*al-Rasāil* 102, my emphasis)

Darwish's comment refers specifically to two literary texts: one by the Israeli author Yoram Kanyuk (*Aravi Tov*, 1983), the other by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani (*A'id ila Hayfa*, 1970). In both texts the meeting between the Arab and the Jew takes place within the self and is seen as a tragic impossibility in which "one identity" ("Arab" or "Jew") necessarily eliminates the other.[13] To fight this unfeasibility and imagine the possibility of one being "both Arab and Jewish," Darwish suggests, writing is in need of "another time." One could understand Darwish to be saying that under the current circumstances of war and conflict, writing can do nothing but reflect the impossibility of such identity or coexistence. But we can also read Darwish as suggesting that it is *in writing* that another time can and needs to be created: a time that is capable of transgressing "the wound of identity" and the limitations presented by the current state of conflict and war.

If for Maalouf such a possibility of "another time" is figured through the tension raised between memory and imagination, articulated most explicitly in the manner by which the "old Levantine world" emerges in his novel as part of "a future dream" shared by both "reactionaries and visionaries" (1999, 35), for Darwish in *Memory*, this alternative time is figured, first and foremost, through the memory of forgetfulness: a memory of an always already forgotten "genealogy of desire" (Brown, 1996, 164). It is this reconfiguration of identity through the revived "forbidden" (and hence "forgotten") desire for the other that opens Darwish's somber and overtly pessimistic text in the direction of future hope.

"Hope," one should note, is by no means introduced in *Memory* in the same manner we find in Maalouf's far more optimistic novel. It emerges in Darwish's text *indirectly*, by means of recovering the moment *prior* to identity's foreclosure and against the forgetting of "forbidden loves."[14] Thus, if *Memory* joins other texts, such as the previously mentioned texts by Kanyuk or Kanafani, in exemplifying the current *impossibility* of an Arab Jewish coexistence, it is careful to present this impossibility not as a given, but rather as an outcome of a forgotten memory of desire, which in Darwish's hands is tuned into a productive "memory of forgetting."

The Place of Wandering

Writing between fact and fiction, memory and imagination, dream and reality, history and myth, Darwish's and Maalouf's texts open present (cogni-

tive, historical, and geographical) maps to include past configurations and new imagined spaces. It is in Paris that both write about Beirut and Haifa: about the painful current political reality that separates the two cities but also about these cities' shared past and possible future. Through a series of fragmented memories, Beirut reemerges in both texts as a "shadow of what it once was . . . like other lost cities dreamt about . . . like Haifa" (Gonzalez-Quijano 1998, 189). It is worth mentioning in this context the words of the acclaimed Syrian writer and critic Adonis: "Devise words for place and they become time" (1995, 196), he writes, adding that in pre-Islamic poetry "place" is always already figured as time, since place is always "the place of wandering" (198).[15]

It is indeed "the place of wandering," I suggest, that we follow in both Maalouf's and Darwish's texts. In Maalouf's novel, this wondering place is associated first and foremost with the journey between Haifa and Beirut. In *Memory*, time takes the place of place most explicitly, while place itself *becomes* the time of wandering. In the Arabic edition of *Memory*, published in Beirut, this convergence of time and place "takes place" most explicitly in the subtitle: "The Time: Beirut / The Place: One day in August 1982."[16]

The place/time of wandering includes, in the case of Darwish's text, the restless wanderings of the narrator in the empty streets of Beirut, but also his mind's wandering to other places and times, leading him back and forth though a dense textual labyrinth "overlooking fields of history" (139 / 121).[17] Time and again the "empty streets of Beirut" fade into a dreamy space, where the narrator finds himself dislocated and disoriented: "I emerged, but I did not know where I was. I didn't know my name, nor the name of this place" (42). The recurring appearance of Haifa (as dreams, memories, parts of stories the narrator delivers or hears) in Beirut brings these cities—whose separation is mourned in both Darwish's and Maalouf's novels—"back together," not only through the trajectory of the narrator's forced exiles from one city to another, but also as a yet-to-be-written, imagined, and re-created (poetic) space: the space of wandering between Haifa and Beirut.

Reflecting on the relationship between imagination and memory in her own writing, Toni Morrison (1998, 120) suggests that "the act of imagination is bound up with memory" and that writing about the past involves "remembering where [one] was *before* [being] 'straightened out.' " (120). It is along the path opened between memory and imagination, past and future, history and myth, loss and hope, Haifa and Beirut, the Arab and the Jew, that both Darwish's and Maalouf's texts (while radically different

stylistically) present an attempt at creating a poetic space of "mixture, confrontation, and cohabitation." Inscribing the memory of a forgotten/forbidden love into a political reality dominated by aggression, revenge, and war, these texts, each in its own way, invite us to reremember where or what we were before we were "straightened out," and to imagine a future made of love—the kind that transgress even the "finest discriminations."

AFTERWORD

Going Beyond the Borders of Our Times

> What is lost in the Arab world today is the presence of a tolerated Judaism. … Those among [the Jews] who appeal now to the nostalgia of their "lost" Arab identity must feel within themselves the state of ghosts and phantoms that I [as an Arab] experience in turn. This phantasmagoria, this dismembering of Semitic archaicism, excites my imagination. … Perhaps it is among and through these ravages that our [shared] relationship to the letter tempts its chance: without return to the Book, and beyond the end of the Book.
> —Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Même Livre*

Mourning the loss of past Arab-Jewish coexistence, the Moroccan writer Abdelkebir Khatibi draws attention to the ghosts, phantoms, and ravages through which he hopes the lost "Semitic bond" might be re-created. Like Castel-Bloom, Khatibi mobilizes the figure of the ghost, a figure that collapses the clear distinctions between reality and fiction, presence and absence, past and present, in order to introduce the bond between the Arab and the Jew in historical terms, but also as part of a futuristic social constellation. In a similar manner, my own investment in the forgotten memory of the bond between "Arab" and "Jew" or in their "dwelling inside each other," to borrow Darwish's expression, aims at drawing attention to the historical marginalization of this intimacy, while further using this notion of intimacy as a means for "interrupt[ing] the performance of the present" (Bhabha 1994, 7) and affecting the ways we envision the future.

To speak about memory in such futuristic terms means, above all, to replace synchronic notions of time and progressive conceptions of history with a cultural understanding that pays particular attention to discontinuities, ambivalences, and paradoxes. My turn to literature as a means for studying the present relationship between "Arab" and "Jew" should

accordingly be understood as an attempt to replace coherent and static images of this relationship (manifested, for example, in the repeated descriptions of the "centuries-old" rivalry between the two people) with a perception of the present as a disjointed and fleeting configuration "pregnant with tensions," to borrow Walter Benjamin's term (1968b, 262): a dense juncture of multiple past and future political compositions. Most notably, my readings seek to resituate the question of the present relationship between the Jew and the Arab within an imagined territory that bridges the gap between social constellations or identities that *no longer* exist and others that do not *yet* exist. If the Arab Jew—a member of a once living community who now in effect no longer exists because the two components of his identity have become mutually exclusive[1]—is an example of the first, the genuine citizen of a future unified Arab-Jewish state—a figure that at the moment is nothing but a creature of political imagination, indeed to many of utopian thinking—surely represents the second.

Unfolding the imagined space opened between these two ends of the spectrum, between, that is, past and future, actuality and potentiality, loss and hope, history and imagination, the Arab Jew "we were" and the Arab Jew "we might become," the literary texts discussed in this book revisit forgotten narratives and figures and missed opportunities as a means for envisioning the future in counterhegemonic terms. Such is the work done, for example, by the ghostly figure of the "Arab mother" introduced by Castel-Bloom; the "deserted memories" of the Levantine Jews as captured in Matalon's novel; the phantom of the Jewish lover we repeatedly encounter in Darwish's war diary; the image the young Palestinian refugee whose piercing eyes refuse to leave the mind of El Maleh's narrator; or the recurrent "impossible memory" of Swissa's young Jewish-Moroccan narrator who longs for the childhood "he could have had" if only he lived a few blocks away in the Muslim quarter.

If these and other examples revive familiar "Semitic bonds," they do so only to lose these bonds to yet other, new, and more convoluted configurations of culture and possibilities of being. Articulated in terms of a restless movement across borders and in between familiar precincts—Haifa and Beirut, Hebrew and Arabic, the *Mellah* and the *Medina*, lover and enemy, Islam and Judaism, the Arab and the Jew—such possibilities of being escape the limits of the separatist imagination, revealing instead the strong libidinal ties that continue to bind the Jew and the Arab to each other despite or even due to their current animosity.

In light of the elaborated system of partition that currently separates Israelis and Palestinians by means of checkpoints, parting road systems, walls, and fences, and considering the growing enmity and distrust between Jews and Arabs more generally, any attempt to envision the relationship between the two peoples in terms of proximities, attachments, and identifications runs the risk of seeming politically irrelevant if not altogether delusional. And yet, it is precisely this monstrous reality with its devastating effects that makes the need to think beyond the prevailing logic of separation "part of the necessity, not a nostalgia, of living" (1994, 7). It is with this sense of urgency, then, that I turn to literature to find an alternative to the logic of partition. If my readings suggest that the criticism of partition (as a concrete political solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, but also as a broader ethical principle accounting for the relationship between Jews and Arabs more generally) is immanent to the literary texts under discussion, then my choice of bringing together contemporary Jewish and Arab texts is itself an attempt to further confront the disciplinary partition that currently sets apart the study of modern Hebrew/Jewish/Israeli letters from that of contemporary Arabic/Islamic/Palestinian letters. It is only by going across all such imposed borders—geographical, cultural, and disciplinary—that we can begin to think beyond the "impoverishing perspectives of what partition and separation can offer" (Said 1999b), envisioning instead an expansive space of living where old Semitic bonds are transformed into new social attachments and impossible identities, like that of the Arab Jew, may flourish anew.

NOTES

Introduction: Between "Jew" and "Arab"

1. This is part of a longer poem. Translation from the Hebrew by Ammiel Alcalay.

2. The story is included in the collection *Sipurum lo retsoniyim* [Involuntary Stories] (1993). Translations from Hebrew and Arabic are mine.

3. The Arabic appears within the Hebrew text in Hebrew transliteration. What makes this dialogue particularly absurd is that it mimics the level and nature of dialogues found in "Arabic for beginners" textbooks or in TV language programs.

4. The comparison between Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism is not meant to overlook the clear difference between these national movements. The first, even if it has emerged as a liberation movement driven by the search for a homeland for the stateless and persecuted Jewish people, is equally aligned with the history of European imperialism and colonial violence as it resulted in the violation of Arab rights in Palestine. The latter, in comparison, emerged most explicitly as a resistance movement against forces of empire and colonialism (first Ottoman, then European, and finally Zionist). Without overlooking this significant difference, one must note that Zionism and Palestinian nationalism seem to share "[at least] in discursive terms the notion of a single, authentic (Jewish or Arab) nation," to borrow Ella Shohat's words (1999a, 11). Thus, the idea of a binationalism remains marginal among both Israelis and Palestinians, while notions of "natural," "historical," and "exclusive" ownership over the land are voiced by all: by those who consider Palestine to be the ancient land promised to the Jewish people (theological Zionism); by those who consider Israel to be Jewish by forces of political necessity propeled by the need to find a modern solution to the "Jewish question" (pragmatic Zionism); by those who consider Palestine to be an "Arab entity" belonging to the larger Arab nation (Pan Arabism); and by those who consider it to be part of the Islamic land entrusted to the Muslims until Judgment Day (Islamic nationalism). In sum, the comparison between Zionism and Palestinian nationalisms is restricted here to the notion of national purism and the reliance on excluding narra-

tives of origins and natural belonging, whether these are accounted for in national, imperial, or theological terms.

5. Among the few literary studies dedicated to the question of the relationship between Arabs and Jews in literature are Ammiel Alcalay's *After Jews and Arabs* (1993); Kamal Abdel-Malek and David Jacobson's *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature* (1999); and Abdel-Malek's *The Rhetoric of Violence* (2005). In addition, there are several books that focus exclusively on either the figure of the Jew in Arab literature (Adel al-Osta) or the figure of the Arab in Hebrew literature (Ami Elad-Bouskila, Risa Domb, Gila Ramras-Rauch). Finally, I must note that for the most part these studies offer informative surveys of texts that are mostly unknown to American readers, but as such they tend to limit their treatment of the literary material to descriptive and factual accounts, offering few close readings or substantial theoretical engagements.

6. Throughout the book I use all the terms—Jew, Arab, Israeli, and Palestinian—first because some of the texts I address are written by Jews and Arabs who live outside of Israel and Palestine, but also because the membership categories "Israeli" and "Palestinian," when not accompanied by the ethnic/religious markers "Jewish" and "Arab," hide the complexities existing behind them, that is, the fact that there are Palestinian Israelis and that there are also Jews in Israel, born before 1948, who continue to identify as "Palestinian Jews" (for example, the anthropologist and political activist Uri Davis).

7. This understanding of secularism is greatly informed by Edward Said's notion of "secular criticism," first developed in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983). Accounting for the meaning of this Saidian term, Bruce Robbins (1994, 26) has suggested that for Said the *secular* stands in opposition not to religious beliefs per se but to the nation and nationalism as a belief system. Aamir Mufti has elaborated on this point, arguing that for Said the secular "carries the insight that nationalism does not represent a mere transcending of religious difference . . . but rather its reorientation and reinscription along national lines" (2000, 14), and that secular criticism accordingly "struggles with the imposition of national (or civilizational) molds over social and cultural life, against all unmediated and absolute claims of membership in a national (or civilizational) community" (2004, 3). For more on Said's use of the terms "secular" and "secular criticism" and the importance of these terms as means of revaluing modern nationalism, also see Stathis Gourgouris (2004) and Emily Apter (2004).

8. One cannot overlook the role of British imperial power in setting the conflict between the Jewish and Arab population of Palestine before 1948 in explicit national terms. Already in 1917, Britain initiated the Balfour Declaration, which granted Britain's support for the establishment of two independent nations, one Jewish, the other Arab, in Palestine. The partition idea was adopted by the United Nations in 1947, after its multilateral committee returned from its visit to Palestine. The majority of the committee recommended the partition of Palestine into two states: one Jewish, the other Arab, with Jerusalem delegated to an international trusteeship. For more histori-

cal background, see Hurewitz (1976). For a comparison of the UN suggestion and the earlier British ("Peel") partition plan, see Cohen's (1987) and Fraser (1984, 130–91). For a summary of some Zionists' and Arabs' responses to the various partition propositions, see Perlmutter (1985). For critical accounts concerning the UN partition plan, which has awarded more than 50 percent of the land to the proposed Jewish state, even though Jews at the time constituted less than one-third of the population of Palestine, see Said (1979); Shalim (1998); Pappe (1992); and Masalha (1992).

9. *Al-Tsubbar* (the Cactus) was translated into English under the title *Wild Thorns* (1984). *'Abbad al-Shams* (Sunflower) has not been translated yet.

10. This point is made most explicitly in one of the opening scenes of *Al-Tsubbar*, depicting a short confrontation between the young Palestinian nationalist, Usama al-Karmi, and an old peasant. Usama, who has just returned to his hometown Ramalah after years of working in various Arab countries, discovers, to his shock and dismay, that the old man's son, like many other young Palestinian men, stopped working with his father on the farm and prefers to work in an Israeli factory, where he makes much more money. "[But] who looks after this land now?" Usama asks, alarmed, only to meet the old man's angry answer:

> [Why should I care?] This land belongs to the landlord. I am just hired here. I've been all my life. I don't own any land. I don't own anything. My son Shahada was hired here too . . . this land isn't Shahada's, or mine so why should we care about it? Why should we die for it? . . . Nobody ever asked us anything when we were nearly dying of starvation [before the occupation]. But now, now you come! Why? (42)

11. To grasp how radical it must have been for Khalifah, writing from within the occupied territories less than a decade after the Israeli occupation, to point at the limits of the Palestinian national narrative by emphasizing the manner by which class and gender inequalities operate across national borders, one needs only to be reminded of the harsh criticism she earned, even from the most leftist, Marxist Palestinians. After the publication of *Al-Tsubbar*, for example, Imil Habibi published a fierce attack in the literary journal of the Israeli Communist Party (Rakah), accusing Khalifah of drawing attention away from the "primary issue," the colonialist Israeli occupation, concentrating instead on the "secondary issue" of workers' rights. Khalifah responded by restating her position, arguing that class oppression is more acutely felt by the poor (at least on the Palestinian side) than the national conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and that working in Israel was therefore not only a form of submission (surrendering to the new economic conditions created by the Israeli occupation), but also "an act of social defiance," through which many Palestinian peasants challenged traditional structures of class oppression (see Siddiq 1987, 147–48).

12. For an innovative account of such discursive practices, see Anidjar (2003a). Anidjar traces the theological-political discourses through which Europe has systematically differentiated itself from the Jew (as its theological enemy) and the Arab/Muslim

(as its political enemy), while further othering Jews and Arabs from each other. This deceptive division (between theology and politics, as well as between Jews and Arabs), Anidjar further shows, ultimately collapses, as Jew and Arab are repeatedly prefigured in Western discourses through their resemblance to each other.

13. Both Jonathan Hess and Susannah Heschel have previously explored the intricate relationship between imperialist-colonialist orientalism and anti-Semitism, arguing that Jews in Europe were treated as a colonized population and were subject to quasi-colonial domination. See Hess (2002, esp. chap. 2) and Heschel (1999).

14. We find each of these opinions in the words of two of the most prominent German critics of the late 1700s: Christian Wilhem Dohm and Johann David Michaelis. While the former argues that Jews are essentially a religious-spiritual group that can become integrated in Europe, the latter insists that Jews are essentially Orientals—the "Asiatic residents of Europe"—and as such can never become Europeans but should rather be sent to live in the West Indies colonies, where they can labor and benefit German's economy. For an extended discussion of both thinkers, see Hess (2002).

15. Elsewhere in the book Said calls Orientalism the "Islamic branch" of anti-Semitism (28) and notes that "hostility to Islam in the modern Christian West has historically gone hand in hand, has stemmed from the same source, has been nourished at the same stream as anti-Semitism" (99). Jonathan Hess has similarly observed that "Orientalism and modern anti-Semitism come onto the scene as interrelated inflections of enlightenment colonialist discourse" (2002, 89). If the term anti-Semitism itself was introduced in Germany only in the late 1870s and presented itself as a secular doctrine and a political ideology that targeted Jews, not for theological reasons but for their "Jewish race," Hess notes, "it did not derive solely from nineteenth-century pseudo-science [but] . . . it also had its roots in that 'Orientalist' branch of theological scholarship that from the late eighteenth century on had concerned itself with 'Semitic' languages, 'Semitic' people and the 'Semitic' race" (51).

16. See Shohat (1997); Piterberg (1996); Raz-Krakotzkin (1998, 2005); Alcalay (1993); Gover, (1994), Shenhav (2003); and Chetrit (2004).

17. Joseph Massad (2000, 56), puts forth a related argument, suggesting that the Zionist manipulation of history and its nationalization of memory are equally harmful to "Palestinian *and* Jewish histories."

18. Kalmar and Penslar (2005, xv) make a similar point and further argue that the reason behind the common separation between these two discourses must be political. While most Jewish studies specialists identify with Israel and thus reject Said's arguments about the orientalist nature of Zionism, they note, there is also a converse lack of enthusiasm among students of orientalism for talking about the Jews as victims since "these students generally see Zionism as an example of Orientalist ideology in the service of western colonialism" and fear that "focusing on Jews as targets rather than perpetrators of Orientalism might decrease the effectiveness of the argument [against] Zionism as a form of anti-Arab Orientalism."

19. It is interesting to note in this context that not only Arab Jews, but also low-income eastern European Jewish immigrants to Israel/Palestine were labeled "east-

ern" and marginalized on the basis of their Oriental nature. This is particularly true for Romanian and Polish Jews, who together with Jews from Arab countries were stigmatized as "primitive." It is therefore quite misleading to continue to discuss the effects of orientalism and ethnic discrimination in Israel in terms limited only to the experience of Palestinians and Arab Jews. As Moshe Zuckerman notes (2001, 11–12, 203–6), the very binary "Ashkenazi/Mizrachi" overlooks the tensions between West and East European Jewry as well as the fact that the Zionist national movement harshly attacked and stigmatized Ashkenazi Yiddish culture as "Oriental," at least as much as the Arab culture of Jews of Arab descent.

20. See Mendes-Flohr (1991); Heschel (1999); Kramer (1999); Biale (2002); Hess, (2002); and Kalmar and Penslar (2005).

21. It is important to note that while the eastern European Jew was conceived as a "half Asian" or "semi-oriental"—the site of alterity against which the western German attempted to construct a modern western identity—this structure of differentiation further served the orientalist imagination by enabling the western Jew to maintain a fetishistic relationship toward the "real Oriental Jew": the authentic Sephardi Jew residing in Palestine or associated with the glory of medieval Spain. Thus, we find that Herzl himself, while adamantly denying his own eastern European origins, proudly claims to have an authentic Sephardi heritage, suggesting that "he was a descendant of noble Spanish Marriños" (Elon 1975, 14).

22. The AIU was initially founded by six Parisian Jews in1860 as a "society for the protection and improvement of Jews," focused mainly on the well-being of Jews in East Europe, North Africa, and Asia Minor. The establishment of the alliance educational system was the organization's most vital activity. Schools where established in Morocco, Turkey, Tunis, Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, Bulgaria, Rumania, and other locations. For more on the nature of the alliance school system and its dedication to the project of Westernization and "Frenchezing," see Tsur (2001), Benin (1998), Laskier (1983), and Rodrigue (1993).

23. Theodore Herzl, known as the "Father of Zionism," was not particularly dedicated to Palestine as the site for establishing the Jewish homeland. After failed attempts to purchase a portion of Palestine from the Turkish sultan, Herzl promoted forming the Jewish state in Argentina and later in Uganda. The Lionist Congress ultimately rejected these suggestions.

24. It is along these lines that we can also best understand Raz-Krakotzkin's claim that "to write Mizrahi history is not merely to write the history of the Mizrahim, nor to simply write them into history . . . rather to write Mizrahi history means writing Jewish history as critical history. This history must be written from the place where the Jews were defined as such: from the Orient, from that ambivalent place that combines the perspective of the colonizer with that of the colonized" (2005, 179).

25. For Theodor Herzl, the Jew in Israel is to fulfill a strategic role as a sort of human border between the East and the West, a border that is to protect European civilization from the barbarism of Asia (see 1896, 29).

26. For more about the invention of the "New Jew" and the negation of the exilic Jew's tradition and looks, see Evron (1995).

27. See part 1 of Zerubavel's *Recovered Roots*, 3–36; and Raz-Krakotzkin (1998, 44–48). In this essay, Raz-Krakotzkin further explores the manner by which the orientalist vision continues to shape the Jewish-Israeli paradoxical relationship to the East, one which "denies the realistic [Arab Muslim] East while 'inventing' an ancient-mythical East, which reflected the, so to speak, authentic sources of Jewish existence" (45).

28. I will discuss this point in length in the final chapter, focusing primarily on Darwish's text *Dhākirah lil-nisyān* [Memory for Forgetfulness], but also briefly examining the manner by which this complex task informs Ghassan Kanafani's *A'id ila Hayfa* [The Return to Haifa].

29. I have modified the quote, which in print appears in the form of an exchange between Sahar Khalifah and her interviewer.

30. Imil Habibi's coined word *Mustasha'il* (pessoptimist) by combining the two Arabic words: *mustasha'im* (pessimist) and *mutafa'il* (optimist) to describe the Palestinian Israeli protagonist of his acclaimed novel *Al-Waqai al-Ghariba fi Iktifa Said abi al-Nahs al-Mutasha'il* (*The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptomist*).

Chapter One: History, Memory, Identity

1. Albert Memmi was born in the Jewish *hara* of Tunis, Tunisia, in 1920. He was educated in Tunis and at the University of Algiers before his studies were interrupted by World War II. After the war, he completed his education in France before returning to Tunis, where he taught philosophy, worked as a journalist and practiced as a psychologist until Tunisia gained independence in 1956. He then returned to Paris, where he continues to reside.

2. I quote from the English translation, which was reprinted and published as an independent essay by the Israeli Academic Committee on the Middle East in 1975.

3. Memmi develops this theme in his book *Portrait of a Jew* (1962), where he investigates the "Jewish condition" in terms of a universal state of despair.

4. Page numbers refer to the English translation (*The Pillar of Salt*, 1992), followed by the original French.

5. The grave circumstances of continued anti-Semitism, Memmi argues, point to Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish nation as the only political solution available to modern Jews. The existence of Israel, he insists in his political writings from *The Liberation of the Jew* (1966) to his 1995 essay "Condition juive et littérature," is the only solution for the helpless distress and melancholia experienced by Jews all over the world. "The national solution [alone] can fight back our own *ghostly existence*," he writes in *La terre intérieure*; "only Israel can make us again into *flesh and blood*" (214, my emphasis).

6. Choosing "Argentina" as Benillouche's final destination, Memmi is most likely alluding to the proposal presented in the 1904 Zionist Congress to establish a

home for the Jewish people in Argentina (or Palestine). Presenting Argentina, then, as the chosen "new location," Memmi indirectly calls attention to both the colonial and the practical aspects of the Zionist movement, which at its early stages considered various sites (Palestine, Argentina, Uganda) as potential locations for the establishment of a Jewish state.

7. All translations from the novel are mine. El Maleh was born in Morocco in 1917 and currently resides in Paris.

8. Nessim himself mentions that he is following two contradicting paths. The first is the "line of fracture" (*la ligne de fracture*), for which he uses the Arabic word *al-inchiqaq* (split, dissension, dissociation). The second is that of convergence: *la ligne de convergence.* Together these two opposing paths of eruption and continuity maintain and emphasize duality and ambiguity as counterforces against linear narratives and clear categorizations.

9. This finding of oneself outside of oneself in the gaze of the other might seem at first to echo the scenario of the "emerging self" as envisioned by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, but some significant differences should be pointed out. For Sartre, the self acquires being only under the eyes of the other. But the self is at no point stripped of its own agency and desire and therefore can—in what seems to be a rather instrumental view—make use of the other's gaze in order to move from the mere position of an object (objectified by the gaze of the other) to that of affirmed subjectivity (an agency of freedom). For Sartre, the other, while it threatens the self's own being, cannot really rob the self of its existence as subject, for the self has the ability to protect itself from the appropriating gaze of the other. It is this act of "protection" that Sartre associates with freedom manifested in the recovery of the self's subjecthood and its finding itself against its "momentary" loss as the possession of the other: "the other has stolen my being" (364). Moving from the state of "being seen" to the responding act of "seeing"—looking back—the self "recovers [its] own being" (364). Thus, if El Maleh depicts the self as lost *to an other* in a process of metamorphosis through which the very opposition between self and other dissolves, for Sartre the self already exists in a constant conflict with its status as an object-for-the-other, and its desire is to repair its status as subject (and gain freedom) by reaffirming the borders between itself and the other; between subject and object.

10. Cixous (1998, 156, 158, 171). In another essay, "Stigmata, or Job the Dog," Cixous returns to her early childhood in Algeria, noting that "For the Arabs we [Jews] were French [even though] Jews during the war were thrown out of French nationality . . . the history of nationalities made [Algerian Jews] turn French, de-French and re-French" (183). Jacques Derrida describes a similar scenario in accounting for his early childhood in Algeria in *Monolingualism of the Other* (1998, 16–18). Also see Emmanuel Sivan's chapter, "Hating the Jew as Arab," in *Interpretations of Islam* (1985, 189–206). Sivan argues that Algerian Jews were othered by all: the Muslims, the Berbers (or, as he calls them, "the natives"), the French colonizers, and the Pied Noirs, who accused the

Algerian Jews of "contributing greatly to the rise of anti-Semitism in France" (189). While Sivan's essay effectively shows the ways by which the French colonizers of North Africa "othered" both Muslim-Arabs and Jews based on the comparison between them, it is nevertheless quite problematic in that it tends to naturalize the orientalist attributes the French assign to the Muslim Arab population, while suggesting that these attributes were mistakenly assigned to the Jews, who were thus "hated *as* Arabs."

11. It is important to note that when Shohat talks about the "erased hyphen" between the Jew and the Arab, she is emphasizing the need to remobilize this construction not in order to point out two essentialist identities ("Jewish" and "Arab"), but to offer an alternative critical framework to the current privileged cultural mapping introduced, for example, by the hyphen in the "Judeo-Christian" legacy ("Rupture and Return" 59). Other critics have also written about the hyphen that connects and separates the Jew and the Arab, but not all seem as aware of the risk of essentializing either pole of this hybrid identity, if not the "mix" itself. Thus, for example, Scharfman (1993, 136) argues that El Maleh's fragmented writing reflects the loss of his "original" coherence and "unified" identity: "The *unity that [was] once obtained* . . . has been sundered by the political. The Hyphen, the 'trait d'union' that designates this *bicultural* diglossic subject as 'judéo-arabe' or "arabo-juif,' has been severed by the departure and dispersal of this ancient Jewish community from Morocco." Such a description fails to take into account the criticism presented by both El Maleh and Shohat against the very notion of an imagined original and authentic "unity" (whether Jewish, Arab, or Arab-Jewish). Furthermore, by describing the Arab Jew in terms of biculturalism, Scharfman naturalizes the idea of cultural essence and overlooks the fact that every culture is in itself always already at least "bicultural."

12. In the first Zionist Congress in 1905, Ze'ev Jabotinsky spoke about the "Palestinian Personality" in terms of natural belonging, an "extension of the land," and nativity, all of which he presented as a model for the reparation of the exilic Jew. This and many other examples by no means negate the fact that early European Zionists usually considered the East and the presence of Arabs in Palestine as a threat. What it does suggest, however, is that Zionism's relationship to the East and the Arab is made of abstract longing, identification, and fetishization, on the one hand, and fear, rivalry, racism, and alienation, on the other.

13. Edward Said, "Zekhut ha-shiva sheli," interview with Ari Shavit, published in *Ha-aretz* in 2000. The interview was translated into English and reprinted in *Power, Politics, and Culture* (2000) as "My Right of Return."

Chapter Two: The Legacy of Levantinism

1. Rejwan, an Israeli-Iraqi critic, published this essay in 1961 in the *Jerusalem Post*. This essay represents the first attempt to critically discuss the meaning of the term Levantinism and its particular negative use within the Israeli context.

2. Baring was the first Earl of Cromer and served as the British consul-general in Egypt from 1883 through 1907. In the same text he further notes that the Levantines are people who once *were* Europeans, but whose contact with the Levant resulted in their loss of their "special [national] characteristics of their country of origins . . . they

have become semi-Orientalized Europeans" (246–48). Similarly, for the French doctor Alexis Carrel, who became a respected socio-scientific theorist, the Levantines inhabiting the Mediterranean are the "product of once white people who have adapted to the light and heat of the coast at the expense of their nervous and mental development (1939, 214). Less directly offensive are the accounts of William G. Palgrave, an army officer and missionary priest, who defines the Levantine as "one [who is] born in the Levant, with a moiety of Greek or Armenian blood in his veins [which] dilutes the other half, the French, English, or Italian" (1872, 8), and the sociologist André Siegfried, who describes the Levantine as: "a section of the white race [that] is also a section of the brown race . . . a part European, part Oriental" (1947, 104, 211). Later accounts, while escaping the explicit scientific racist approach of these early definitions, still hold to the understanding of the Levantines in terms of a "mixed race." In *"Les origines du protectorat français en Tunisie"* (1968, 496–98), Jean Ganiage describes the Levantines as people of mixed identities: part Greek and part Roman Catholic, born in Cairo to parents of Syrian, Italian, or Algerian descent. Jacqueline Kahanoff articulates similar ideas, referring to the Levantines' "mixed blood." Unlike the other writers, however, she presents this mix in positive terms, arguing that Levantinism should be promoted as a "means of refreshing the blood and improving future generations" (1978, 63).

3. If the antagonism and fearful approach toward the Levantine (as a symbol of cultural hybridity) reaches its pick during modern colonial times, it begins, according to the linguist and historian Martin Bernal, even earlier, when in the eighteenth-century Europe expunged, and radically denied, all Levantine or Semitic aspects of classical Greek culture. In his massive, controversial book *Black Athena* (1993), Bernal argues that it was Europe's racism that replaced what he calls the "ancient model" of Greece with a new Western or European model, which he calls "Aryan." Situating ancient Greece at the "base of western civilization," he writes, made it "simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen not merely as the epitome of Europe but also as its *pure childhood*, to have been the result of a *mixture* of Europeans, Africans, and Semites" (2). Along the same lines, see Victor Bérard (1902–03). Bérard argues that Western culture did not develop from Greek culture, as commonly understood by classics scholars, but along the Phoenician coast and through strong "mixed" Mediterranean influences. For a recent account of the dynamic hybridic relationships between "the West," Africa, and the Mediterranean prior to colonial times, see Jean-Loup Amselle (2001).

4. The fact that Hourani does not associate his "hybrid identity" (Arab and British) with Levantinism only strengthens my claim that "Levantinism" has never been directly associated with any specific identify or hybrid identity (say, Arab and European) as with the threat of "losing identity." The "emptiness" of the term "Levantine" (that is, the fact that it does not mark any specific given identity) is what also explains the ease with which this term was redirected—in Western European discourse—during the mid-twentieth century to signify people of the Balkans and other parts of Eastern Europe, without, however, changing the Eurocentric and negative meaning of the term. The "new Levantines" were still considered to be failed imitators of *both* the "real Orient" and the "real West" and, like the "original" Levantines, were considered a serious social threat, as Brian Newsome argues: "During the interwar years, East Europeans including the Czechs [become] the Levantines. . . . They lived in the *new Levant* also

called Eastern Europe. [And] just as the Levantines [before] threatened to spread the disease of degeneracy . . . so did [the new Levantines] threaten to spread a similar disease . . . with [their] inferior, degenerate cultures categorized by barbarity and pseudo-Orientalism" (2002, 48, my emphasis).

5. Aravamudan uses the term Levantinization to mark a "critical deformation [which] enables subjects to fashion their agency from *unpromising materials* . . . [by using] ambivalence and the malleability of orientalist topologies while challenging orientalism's quest for national-cultural essences" (1999, 159–60). While Aravamudan's discussion is restricted to British eighteenth-century texts, his definition of Levantinization is opened to include "the time of the Crusades as well as the discourse of contemporary Zionism" (21). The inclusion of modern Zionism, of course, makes his return to Levantinism (as a strategic means with which to fight orientalism) particularly relevant to my own book. Where I disagree with Aravamudan, however, is in his attempt to identify "Levantine writings" with a "a kind of Euro-Islamic heritage"(189). Here, I am afraid that Aravamudan overlooks the historical evolution of the term "Levantine," which, as we have seen, has hardly ever been used to mark a direct influence of "Islam" on Europe or vice versa. More accurately, the Levantine has almost always been explicitly distinguished from both Europe and Islam (according to Elie Kedourie [1987, 71], the Levantines are best categorized in British colonial texts as "any non-Muslim residents of the Orient"). But the importance of these historical facts lies not in the need to better identify the Levantines as this or that particular cultural hybrid, but in the need to emphasize the inability to fully identify the Levantines. The inability to pin down the Levantine is precisely what grants Levantinism its subversive political potential as a practice that directly challenges the colonial and orientalist desire to identify and classify. Rather than marking the particular hybrid associated with the Euro-Islamic heritage, the Levantine, is the figure associated with the more radical position that continually escapes the various attempts of the orientalist discourse to arrest identity along oppositional structures: the Levantine is Arab *but* Jewish, Oriental *but* European, European *but* Easterner, Arab *but* Israeli, etc.

6. Kahanoff's original writings, aside from the novel *Jacob's Ladder* and a few essays and short stories that appeared in American journals, were published only in Hebrew.

7. Kahanaoff (1978, 16). Hereafter all page numbers following Kahanoff's quotes refer to this text, unless otherwise mentioned. All translations from the Hebrew are mine.

8. Quoted in Alcalay (1993, 71–72). The original text is available as an unpublished manuscript held by Kahanoff's literary executor, Ms. Eva Zeintraub of Tel Aviv. This quote appears in pages 4–5 of the preface to the manuscript.

9. This claim is very close to what Homi Bhabha (1994, 87) describes as a subversive potential opened to the colonized through the manipulation of mimicry, the very same strategy the colonizer uses with the intention of regulating power by reforming "colonized others" as "*almost the same but not quite*."

10. A nation is a spiritual family," writes Ernest Renan in "What Is a nation?" (1940). National borders are often imagined to enclose the extended secure, stable, and authentic place of origins, which, just like the "family home," unites people who are supposedly connected through natural kinship relationships (hence the recurring reference to "blood ties" within national discourse). For detailed accounts, see Anderson (1983) and Said (1983).

11. I failed to find an appropriate English translation for the Hebrew word *beitiyut* (the noun derived from the adjective *beity*—"homey"). In an attempt to convey the wide range of connotations this Hebrew word carries—implying a sense of familiarity, security, warmth, and belonging—I coined the term *homeyness,* hoping thus to allude to at least some of these sentimental meanings.

12. For background readings on the place of the "myth of return" and "homeland" within the modern Jewish Diaspora, see Etan Levin (1986), William Safra, (1991), Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin (1993), and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's innovative essay "Galut be-toch ribonut" (1993–1994).

13. For a discussion of this trope in modern Jewish thought and literature, see Sidra DeKoven-Ezrahi (1992, 2000). Also see George Steiner (1985). For a critical discussion of the trope of the Jew "at home in text" and its manifestations within both modernist and postmodernist discourses, see Caren Kaplan (1996) and Amos Oz (1982).

14. For an elaboration of his views, see A. B. Yehoshua's collection of essays *bi-zkhut ha-normaliyut* [In Defense of Normality] (1980). This Hebrew title could also be translated literally as "In Favor of Normality," or less literally, but probably more accurately, as "The Right to Normality."

15. If the notion of exile already includes within it a loss (of homeland, of belonging, of an authentic past), "permanent immigration," I suggest, transforms the notions of home and belonging altogether, keeping the desire for "being at home" at a critical distance from the manifestation of this desire in the form of projected possession over land, past, culture, or language.

16. For this definition of "diasporic nationalism," see Smith (1995). Smith claims that Zionism is a unique case of modern nationalism for two main reasons. First, he argues, it is an attempt to "bring together West and East," and in that it goes against the spirit of postcolonial nationalism. Second, he notes that as a "diasporic nationalism," modern Zionist ideology is founded on premodern, religious sources and not only on modern European political thought.

17. This mediating position of the Jew, especially under French colonialism, is of course not limited to Kahanoff's self-presentation. Alliance Isráelite Universelle (AIU)—the school Kahanoff attended in Cairo—was established in most of the French colonies in Middle East and North African countries and presented itself as an attempt to "uplift and modernize the Jews of the Middle East by imbedding them with French education and culture," to use Joel Beinin's words (1998, 49–50). "Jews," as Daniel Boyarin, following Albert Memmi's writings, notes, "have always played a mediating

position under French colonialism inhabiting the interstices between the colonizer and the colonized and seen by both as the other" (1998, 43).

18. Kahanoff never truly questioned the superiority of the West, a position she ascribes to other Levantine Jews as well: "Being Levantine we Jews looked for fruitful compromise. We felt that the end of the colonialist occupation will not solve any basic problem, unless [the East] would adopt European concepts and change its own ways so that it too could become free" (29).

19. For a fine essay about this double-faced approach to the question of cultural colonialism, see Doli Benhabib's informative essay "Skirts Are Shorter Now" (1994).

20. Exceptional to this is Edward Said's groundbreaking essay, "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," first published in *The Question of Palestine,* and Ella Shohat's following essay, "Sephardim in Israel." In describing the cultural and political clash between Israelis and Palestinians as well as between Ashkenazi and Mizrachi Jews in terms of a conflict between the East and the West, Shohat presents one of the first attempts to explicitly connect the national and the ethnic conflicts in Israel and reveal the Orientalist imagination that informs both.

21. The fascination with the western Mediterranean, particularly Italy and Greece, itself has a history, insofar as the future of Israel is concerned, as revealed in a recent essay by Eran Kaplan. His essay "Between East and West" (2005) traces the central role of the Mediterranean as a cultural model for the future Jewish state, as it appears in the writings of the 1930s' Zionist revisionists. Not that different from the members of the new Israeli Mediterranean Forum, the revisionists seem to have imagined the future Jewish state as part of the "thriving Mediterranean world" (129), which for them had little if anything to do with the history or present of the Arab Middle East. Indeed, for the leader of the group, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the "Mediterranean option" represented an alternative to what he considered to be "the orientalist tendencies of some Zionists" (133). Accordingly, Jabotinsky suggested that modern Hebrew must "rid itself of Arabic sounds and adopt the noble sounds of the Mediterranean languages [mainly Italian] that are not only more aesthetically pleasing but are historically closer to the ancient Hebrew tongue" (133).

22. In this context it is important to note that the figure of the Arab Jew and the claim of nativity and "natural belonging" have indeed been mobilized in the past by some Arab Jewish supporters of Zionism in order to "prove" Jewish possessive rights over the land of Israel. Thus, the first chair of the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC), Mordechai Ben-Porat, has claimed that "we want to prove that we are part of the Middle East. We are not Foreigners. We lived here *before* the arrival of the Arabs, before their conquests" (June 6, 1975, quoted in Shenhav 2002 31). Echoing the same idea, the secretary of the organization, Oved Ben Ozer, has written that the mission of the WOJAC is to "implant the awareness of the Jews' historic and legitimate rights in [the Middle East] and their presence here for more than 2,500

years, before the Arabs and before the rise of Islam" (WOJAC, Letter to Foreign Ministry, June 30, 1989).

23. Alcalay's argument about the importance of reviving the image of the Jew as native is part of his astute criticism of a certain critical trope, which he ascribes to Derrida and other Jewish thinkers writing from/about Europe. Within this trope, Alcalay (1993, 1–2) argues, the Jew is equated with "text" or "writing" and is thus made into a *condition* of history ("history's fold") rather than an *integral part* of history: a symbol rather than an actual historical being. My criticism of Alcalay's investment in the notion of nativity is not meant to undermine this and many other important observations he makes.

24. The "identity" of the Levantine varies, depending on political or historical context. In various texts the Levantine is described as "the semi-Oriental," the Arab Jew, the Israeli Arab, the "Fallen European," the Copt, the Armenian, the North African, the Turk, or the Eastern European. What is shared in all these historical cases is the special location of the Levantine in between "self" and "other," where "self" is always identified with the West and "other" with the Orient—an object of both fear and admiration. Thus, whether he is associated with this identity or another, the Levantine always functions as a borderline figure and a threatening site of identification and projection. He is the "not-me-not-other," the ambiguity that escapes the orientalist binary structure and marks the moments of the orientalist discourse's disorientation, paradoxes, and failure to identify.

25. The expression "corridor mentality" effectively revives Kahanoff's description of Levantinism as a gateway, a passage, or a link between spaces, times, languages, and cultures.

Chapter Three: Bringing Hebrew Back to Its (Semitic) Place

1. "The connection of the individual to a political immediacy" and "the collective assemblage of enunciation" are the two other characteristics mentioned by Deleuze and Guattari.

2. Chana Kronfeld (1996, 10–11) rightly argues that the fact that Deleuze and Guattari do not even mention the possibility of Kafka writing in Yiddish, but only in "an oral popular Yiddish," indicates that they "uncritically adopt the view that Yiddish is in principle just an oral resource . . . not a full fledged language."

3. According to Benedict Anderson (1983, 70), it was only in the nineteenth century that languages were divided into national and racial "families." Anderson further associated the unification of linguistic vernaculars under nation-states with the "growth in literacy, industry and state machineries" (77). For further readings on modern nationalism and language politics, see Jernudd and Shapiro (1989); Thomas (1991); and Barbour and Carmichael (2000).

4. With the forming of the new Yugoslavia, Croatians were no longer to speak the same language as the Serbs, and vice versa. Croatian language (limited to its official

usage) has been made as different as possible from any "Serbian" language, which itself was estranged from Croatian by Serbia's rejection of the previous bi-alphabetism (Cyrillic and Latin), making Cyrillic the only official alphabet in Serbia. See Jaksic (1998).

5. While both languages are considered linguistically "the same," they are written in different scripts and draw on different sources for vocabulary. Hindi, the official federal language of India, is written in Devanagari and has developed by replacing many words of Arabic and Persian origin with Sanskrit words, while Urdu, Pakistan's official national language, is written in Arabic script and draws heavily on Persian and Arabic.

6. Israel does not have a law defining language policy, but even during the British mandate the Zionists convinced the British authorities that Hebrew (in addition to English and Arabic) must be recognized as an official language in Palestine. Before the establishment of Israel, the British regulations were thus published in Arabic for Arab populated areas and in Hebrew for the Jewish areas. With the establishment of the state of Israel, English was dropped as an official language, which left Hebrew and Arabic Israel's official national languages. While this might be the "official story," the reality represents a clear imbalance between Hebrew and Arabic, which in many ways resembles classic colonial language policies. Thus if Israeli Palestinians must learn Hebrew in order to survive and integrate in Israeli education systems, the labor field, etc., there are very few Jewish-Israelis who learn or know any Arabic.

7. In *Le monolinguisme de l'autre (1996),* Jacques Derrida looks at the status of language as a personal or national possession, pointing at the intervening manipulations through which language is made to appear as property belonging to the master (the conqueror, colonizer, or father) by means of historical appropriation. "There is *inside* language a terror," he writes, "for contrary to what one is often most tempted to believe the master . . . has no exclusive possession of anything" (45). Yet, it is precisely the fact that the master *does not* possess language exclusively and naturally that makes him anxious to perform his mastery: "Whatever he wants or does, [the master] cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with language . . . he therefore *pretends* [to own it] *historically,* through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which is always essentially colonial. He believes it is 'his own' and he wants to make others believe it as well, just as they believe a miracle, through rhetoric, the school, or the army" (45, my translation).

8. The novel was published in 1986 and translated into English in 1989 by Vivian Eden. All page numbers refer to the original text in Hebrew. I choose to translate the text myself in order to emphasize certain points that seem to get lost in Eden's translation.

9. The first Palestinian novel published in Hebrew was *Be-or chadash* (In a New Light). The novel, written by 'Atallah Mansour was published in 1966 and received little, but quite positive, critical attention. Since then a number of Palestinian-Israelis have published fiction, poetry, or essays in Hebrew, and some are regular contributors to Israeli Newspapers or literary magazines. Earlier writers include Rasid Husayn, Imil Habibi, Samih al-Qasim, and Salim Jubran, while younger writers include Nazih Khayr, Na'im 'Araydi, Siham Dawud, Asad 'Azzi, and, most recently, Sayed Kashua.

10. On the debate between Shammas and Yehoshua and other who have joined them, see Shammas (1986c, 1986b, 1985b, 1987); and Yehoshua (1986). Also see Herzel and Balflour Hakak (1986); and Michael (1986).

11. Anton, the narrator, is advised by his colleagues to change his self-title, "Israeli-Arab poet," so as to satisfy the public's need: "People might miss the word Palestine," he is told (185). Shammas himself said in an interview following the publication of the novel: "I am an Israeli, not a Palestinian, writer, and this is something the Israeli readers find hard to understand" (Amit). Not only Israeli readers, however, found Shammas's statement difficult to understand. While only a few essays have been published in Arabic about Shammas's novel, most of them have praised the novel for its poetic value but accused Shammas of betraying his identity as a Palestinian and an Arab writer by choosing to express himself in Hebrew and call himself an Israeli writer. See Sharbal Daghir (1988); Ibrahim Khalil (1986); and Yumnā al-Īd (1990).

12. It is important to note that the founders of Zionist national movement in the late nineteenth century and the majority of Zionists even in Palestine prior to the mid-twentieth century were not invested in Hebrew as a national language. German, for example, was seriously considered a possible national language for the future Jewish state. While Hebrew was recognized by the British mandate as one of Palestine's official languages already in 1922, it was only after the establishment of the state of Israel that the ethno-nationalization of Hebrew took place as part of the general attempt to nationalize the Jewish people.

13. A particular distain was reserved for Yiddish, which was considered a "linguistic mix" lacking coherent origins: an impure and hence feminine linguistic heritage. For more on this point, see Dan Miron (1973) and Benjamin Harshav (1993).

14. There are other, more prosaic differences between the case of Palestinians writing in Hebrew and the more common case of the colonized or ex-colonized writers who chose to write in the language of the colonizer or ex-colonizer. To begin with, one must acknowledge the different status of French, English, or other European languages and that of Hebrew. Unlike French or English, Hebrew has never been associated with the power of an empire, and while it is clearly the dominant language in Israel, Arab Israelis have never been fully depended on Hebrew for participating in intellectual and cultural circles. This is partly because most Israeli-Arab writers associate themselves with a wider pan-Arab intelligentsia operating in Arabic. In other words, while the appeal of French or English is largely associated with the status of these languages (high, Western, literary, cultural) as well as with broadening readership, Hebrew—even if it is considered to be for some devoted readers of Dante "the language of grace"—does not enjoy such high cultural prestige, and the choice of writing in Hebrew, while possibly opening a few doors among Israeli intellectuals and publishers, clearly limits one's readership quite drastically, especially for writers who could publish in Arabic.

15. In the Hebrew of the 1950s and 1960s, the word *chablan* was used in exchangeable reference to both terrorist and demolition engineer. I thank Chana Kronfeld for bringing this to my attention.

16. Before leaving Israel, Mahmoud Darwish (1969) commented that "every Arab [in Israel] is suspected and criminalized." Imil Habibi describes a similar feeling in his last novel, *Ikhtiyah* (1985): "There is not a single Arab in this country that is not haunted by the doubt that maybe, deep inside, he is a *mechabel* [a terrorist]; and maybe they believe that his feeling of discrimination facilitates his potential to become one" (47).

17. Some critics have argued that Bar-On's character is an ironic presentation of the writer A. B. Yehoshua, although Shammas has adamantly denied such speculation.

18. A similar approach of embracement and rejection can be found among the few reviews published in Arabic. Thus, for example, the prominent critic Yumnā al-Īd praises the novel for its complex structure and unique use of time and space, following these praises with an attack on Shammas's choice of language: "Anton Shammas wants to write in the language of his country Israel. . . . [But he thus gives] Hebrew the authority to write the reality of the land and shape the biography of [his] Arab-Christian family" (1990, 149). Similarly, the Lebanese-French poet Sharbal Daghir (1988, 75) argues the novel is "exceptional" from a stylistic point of view and in terms of its techniques of narration but finds Shammas's choice of writing in Hebrew quite problematic: "while Shammas has the right to use whatever language he wishes [one wonders] what is this need of his to recognize the presence of the [Israeli] other in himself. [We are] particularly concerned about [his use of Hebrew] in light of the fact that we all know that language is a fundamental element in the shaping of one's national identity." The limited number of reviews written in Arabic about Shammas's novel has to do, I believe, with the fact that the novel was not translated from Hebrew to Arabic. Most Arab criticism was therefore first limited to readers of Hebrew, while some later reviews followed the translations of the novel into French or English.

19. It would be interesting to compare Shammas's call to secularize and Israelize Hebrew to the call put forth by the Lebanese poet Sa'id 'Aql to separate Arabic from Islam and create instead a secular Arab Lebanese culture.

20. One of the leading scholars of Hebrew literature, Dan Miron (1986), also expressed his concern for Shammas's mental state. The writer, he argues, "has yet to have digested and internalized his bitterness . . . for the moment he lives under the barrenness of displacement and alienation." (1986, 26)

21. The well-known Israeli writer Sami Michael also emphasizes Shammas's Christianity in his attempt to dismiss, or at least undermine, Israeli responsibility for the Palestinian writer's frustration. The "*real problem*," he determines, "is that of the Christian Arabs . . . the Christian intellectual [suffers because] he is trapped between the Islamic hammer and the Jewish nail" (1986, 14).

22. In "Kitsch 22," Shammas focuses on "the Arab wall" as the site "where one can observe what has happened to the Arabic culture in Israel since the early fifties." Since the war of 1967, these walls, he writes, are "not only illegal" but also "a real celebration of kitsch . . . covered with wall-paper which vaguely *imitates the Arabesques* . . . an illusionary feeling of living in peace with the past" (1987, 25, my emphasis).

23. All these quotes are from *Arabesques.*

24. For readers familiar with Hebrew literature, the intertexual references here are evident: "Hawaja Mussa" is the pseudonym under which Moshe Smilansky published his collection of stories entitled "Arab stories"; "The Prisoner" is S. Yizhar's most famous story, in which he depicts a sentimental interaction between an Israeli soldier and an Arab war prisoner; and the "lost boy in love" refers to the attractive young Arab protagonist "Naim," who is in love with a Jewish woman, in A. B. Yehoshua's *The Lover.*

25. The narrator relates to this love correspondence, first and foremost, in terms of a rivalry with Shlomit's husband, an Israeli Army officer. Mapping national, ethnic, or racial conflicts along the lines of a male rivalry over women, or, to put it differently, along the lines of "a crisis of masculinity," is itself a common and problematic literary trope, which Shammas appears to use uncritically.

26. This is my literal translation.

27. *Aravim Rokdim* was published in 2002. Following its great success among Israeli readers, it was translated into numerous languages. An English translation appeared in 2004. *Va-yehi or*, published in 2004, has not yet been translated. A comparative study of Kashua's novels and Shammas's text merits a separate study. Most interesting are the great differences between Shammas's high registered mixture of contemporary and biblical Hebrew and Kashua's "thin" colloquial Hebrew. It would also be interesting to compare the negative, even hostile, reception of *Arabesques* by the majority of Israeli critics with the enthusiastic reception of Kashua's novels. How, one wonders, are we to understand the shift in the critics' position toward the issue of Palestinian-Hebrew writings in light of the immense political changes that took place in the two decades that passed between the publication of Shammas's and Kashua's novels, changes that include the differences between the first and second Palestinian intifada.

Chapter Four: Too Jewish and Too Arab

1. The novel's title, *Aqud*, is connected with the theme of sacrifice (*Aqeda*) that runs throughout the text, alluding directly to the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac.

2. As I noted in the introduction, the threat represented to the hegemonic (secular, modern, and Westernized) Israeli subject by either "Jew" or "Arab" is closely related. Following modern European thought, Zionism associates Judaism itself with a form of antimodernization and with traditional, backward, and Oriental influences, all of which are similarly ascribed to the Arab.

3. For more on the way the binary secularism/religiosity works within the Israeli society and on the orientalist aspects of the secular, see Jonathan Boyarin (1992), Daniel Boyarin (1997, 2)71–312; and Amnon Raz-Karkotzkin (2002).

4. Swissa's novel has not been translated into English. All translations from the novel are mine. I have, at times, included the original in transliteration in order to give readers of Hebrew a better sense of the text's distinctive linguistic quality, particu-

larly its mixture of various linguistic registers, including archaic biblical Hebrew, rabbinic-scholarly syntax, and contemporary slang. In addition, all translations from secondary sources in Hebrew are mine.

5. Shimon Ballas, who immigrated to Israel from Iraq, in 1965 published the first novel in Hebrew about the Arab-Jewish immigrant experience in the new homeland. *Ha-ma'abara* [The Transit Camp] (1964) depicted the humiliating process of the initial integration of Arab Jews into the new national society. Sami Michael, who emigrated from Iraq, also centered his early writings on the life of Arab-Jewish immigrants in the hostile environment of the Israeli society. See particularly his novel *All Men Are Equal but Some Are Worth More* (*Shavim ve-shavim yoter*), published in 1974.

6. The narratives take place in the years 1970–74. For more background about the policy of ethnic segregation and special housing at that time, see Sami Shalom Chetrit (2004).

7. On this point also see Eitan Cohen (2002, 17), who notes that within the Israeli sociologist discourse hardly any attention has been given to the experience of the immigrant. Rather, immigration has almost always been studied from the perspective of the Israeli "welcoming society" and in terms of the local's "gains or losses." As a result, Cohen concludes, "the trauma of immigration is seen [in the Israeli context] as a trauma experienced by the locals rather than by the new arrivals."

8. I refer primarily to Lacan's "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." Lacan describes the imaginary as an early phase that precedes the linguistic phase in the development of the psyche. This phase is associated with early childhood and is characterized as the first transition the infant makes toward (the illusionary) identification of himself or herself as whole ("I"), and as separable from others. Thus, if the infant starts out unaware of his or her separate existence apart from the other/mother, it is during the "mirror stage" (6–18 months) that he or she will first recognize—or accept the illusory vision of—himself or herself as separated from the other/mother. Nevertheless, the imaginary stage is still characterized by confusion and repeated attempts at securing a stable vision of reality based on the separation I/Other. It is only as the infant moves away from relying solely on vision and toward a complete dependency on language that he or she finally achieves a coherent perception of himself or herself as a subject (an "I") and of the other as a separate being.

9. "Approaching Abjection," the first chapter of Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980), is also the title of John Lechte's (1982a) translation of this chapter, which appeared as a separate essay in the *Oxford Literary Review.* When quoting from Lechte's translation I will use the title of the essay; otherwise all of Kristeva quotes are from *Powers of Horror,* translated by Leon Roudiez (1982b).

10. This Jewish-Moroccan proverb is quoted at the opening of *Aqud*'s third and final part (80). It is written in both Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew.

11. The connection Lacan makes between the psyche and language (as expressed most explicitly in his infamous statement: "the unconscious is structured like a language") makes his psychoanalytic account of the imaginary and symbolic orders

particularly relevant for the study of literature. My use of the terms "the symbolic" and "the imaginary" to discuss Swissa's novel is further based upon Abdul JanMohamed's (1985) distinction between imaginary and symbolic colonial narratives. However, while JanMohamed uses this distinction to question the political value of texts that are organized and structured around scenarios of imaginary identification, I suggest that it is precisely this failure of the imaginary level to be transformed reflectively into a symbolic realm of discourse that makes the political commentary of *Aqud* particularly effective.

12. See Zehavi (1994), Gur (2003), Hirshfeld (1991), and Gover (1994). Aside from Gover's text, the essays are in Hebrew.

13. I borrow the heading for this section from Kristeva's opening chapter of *Pouvoirs de l'horreur.*

14. Both Kristeva and Georges Bataille refer to abjection mainly in terms of a psychological developmental stage. For Bataille, abjection is a natural infantile stage of development in which one is obsessed with one's own bodily by-products. However, if abjection exceeds the period of this normal developmental stage ("anal eroticism"), it amounts, according to Bataille, to a sexual perversion (see 219–21). Kristeva similarly relates the fascination with the abject to an early infantile stage, associating it with the fear of being separated from one's mother (see *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 126–27), and like Bataille, she considers growing out of this stage to be a necessary condition for the development of a healthy subject.

15. If, for Kristeva, abjection cannot reenter the field of the social (the symbolic order) except as psychosis (the complete dissolution of the subject), Judith Butler's social analysis proposes that abjection exists within the social realm and that it delivers the "threat constituting zones of unihabitability which the subject fantasizes as threatening to its own integrity" (1993, 243 n. 2).

16. When Kristeva (1982a, 130–31) writes that the abject is a "lost soul," she also suggests that "The more [the abject-being] is lost, the more it is saved." How should we understand this peculiar logic of salvation? In what sense might "loss" (or "being lost") bring anyone closer to salvation? To begin answering this question, we need to remember that while "losing oneself," as the idiom suggests, is losing one's dignity, sanity, and place in the world, it also means losing—as in *letting go of*—one's "self": the identity, or names that render one identifiable, such as "Moroccan," "immigrant," or "African." Being lost, then, also means "hiding" or preventing the possibility of being found by others. It is in this sense that Swissa's characters find respite from a racist discourse that renders them always already identifiable by "getting lost."

17. From the poem "Shelo Tavino Mila," my translation.

18. Hirshfeld's essay opens with a dismissal of another Moroccan writer, the poet Erez Bitton. With the publication of Swissa's novel, Hirshfeld tells us, there was a hope to finally have a literary expression of the Moroccan community that we fail to find in Bitton's poetry, which "while sensually expressing the traditional world of the Moroccan community . . . fails to answer the need for a real [Moroccan voice] due to its analytical minimalism (*pikachon minori*) and syrupy melancholia."

19. Yishayahu Shen's review of the novel (1991) presents an important exception to this line of criticism. Shen notes that Swissa's mix of modern Hebrew with biblical, rabbinic, and mystical images and connotations presents "an alternative linguistic model of heterogeneity against the privileged linguistic homogeneity that characterizes modern Hebrew literature." Swissa, Shen concludes, "breaks the homogenous norm brutally, not only by using a wild and lawless Hebrew but also by moving constantly and without warning from past to present, fantasy to reality, and from one aspect of the present to another through changing perspectives."

20. The last words translate literarily from Hebrew as "and your life is in the garbage" (*ha-chayim shelakem ba-zevel*).

21. There is no question that violence against women is a major part of the reality depicted in *Aqud*, and that such violence is itself presented as a means through which social power is redistributed and regulated: "Women like this should be forbidden by law to give birth, an army officer once told Mr. Sultan, who heard only 'should be forbidden' and thereupon agreed immediately" (*Aqud*, 38). Women, as this example shows, are seen as the first target of violence, directed toward them from "outside" (the army officer) and "inside" (the husband). Time and again Swissa returns to such violent moments in order to explore how power is distributed, and how, to paraphrase Paul Gilroy, "the integrity of race [becomes] interchangeable with the integrity of masculinity" (1993, 194). This circulation of violence, from that which is imposed through racial, ethnic, and class differentiations to that imposed on women, has nothing to do with what some critics refer to as "the Mizrachi man's fear of castration" (Gur 1991). The use of such naturalizing terms ("castration anxiety," "emasculation," or "effeminization"), not to mention the orientalist depiction of the Mizrachi man, simply hide the fact that gender differences do not exist independently and prior to racial/ethnic differences but are equally and simultaneously produced discursively. In other words, one does not simply experience an archaic "castration complex" as an outcome of an ethnic confrontation. More accurately, racial and ethnic differences are translated into gender conflicts (and vice versa) for the sake of redistributing power and creating new social hierarchies. Thus, the fathers in *Aqud* teach their sons that the stronger one is, the more authority "one should have," and that it is therefore natural for men to control women: "his mother had such a small and fragile hand . . . his father had therefore the natural right over her and whenever she did anything that transgressed her modesty even just a little she ran away from him looking for a hiding place" (65). Following this logic, Ayush figures that in order to protect his beloved Barbie doll, "made-in-Englander," he must turn her from a "delicate, soft and fragile [female]" (172) into a little man (222).

22. By embracing the "look of the enemy" who was also "the native," these images served the early Jewish settlers' massive denial of Zionism's colonial aggression. These images helped promote the icon of the "new Jew," who was no longer exilic and foreign but was rather an innate inhabitant of the land, just like mimicked enemy—the Palestinian.

Chapter Five: Memory, Forgetting, Love

1. The poem is included in a bilingual collection of poems by Adonis, Darwish, and Al-Qasim (1984). I have made slight changes in the offered translation.

2. In this regard, also see Homi Bhabha's appreciative yet critical readings of both Renan and Anderson (1990, 291–322).

3. This written exchange between Darwish and his friend, the Palestinian poet Samih al-Qāsim, was first published in the Palestinian London-based journal *Al-Yawm al-Sābiai.* The letters were later collected and published as a book under the title *al-Rasā-il* [The Letters] (1990). All translations from this collection are mine.

4. While most critics seem to portray the "battle of memories" as taking place between two competing collective memories of loss, presented either as equal (Gur Ze'ev) or as radically uneven (Darwish, Said, Habibi, Bishara), some critics reject this narrative of "two competing suffering" altogether, denying the historical connection between the Holocaust and the Zionist colonial enterprise in Palestine (Massad). The exact role of the Holocaust in enabling or facilitating the establishment of the state of Israel is, however, not the issue that concerns me here, for it is the power of collective memory, rather than the accuracy of any historical or factual account, that I am interested in.

5. "The Holocaust became," Gur Ze'ev writes, "one of the peaks of a *continuum of the history of Jewish victimhood.* . . . Hitler was paralleled with the eternal essence, which the historical *Amalek* represented . . . this figure [is] still set forth at home too, in Israel" (2003, 34). About the Israeli consciousness of victemhood, also see Tom Segev (1993), Dan Diner (1996), and Yair Auron (2003).

6. The novel was published in 1996 and translated into English by Alberto Manguel in 1999 under the title *Ports of Call.* Page numbers refer to this fine English edition, unless otherwise mentioned.

7. This issue is particularly convoluted since the Arab anticolonial nationalist movement and the Zionist political movement have indeed "met" over the question of Palestine in a manner that has resulted in the two people fighting each other's opposed interests. By now there is little doubt regarding a few grim collaborations between nationalist Arab movements (fighting European imperialism) and the Nazi forces, with the help of which some Arab leaders have sought to overcome the British and French control over the region (among the most known of these cases are those of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husaini, and the connection with Germany that was pursued by the nationalist government in Iraq). That the early movement of Zionism, as well as later Israeli officials, had strong ties with British and French colonial forces, which were explicitly anti-Arab, is also very well known.

8. For an elaboration on the problems involved in presenting the "personal" as a symbol of the "collective" or national, see my essay "National Allegories" (2000).

9. Darwish's text, published in 1987, was translated into English in 1995 by Ibrahim Muhawi under the title *Memory for Forgetfulness*, henceforth *Memory.* Page numbers refer to this excellent English translation, aside from a few occasions in which I offer my own translation. In these cases, page numbers refer first to the original (Arabic) followed by the corresponding English edition.

10. The term "resistance literature" was coined by the Palestinian writer, critic, and spokesman for the PLO Ghassan Kanafani, in reference to early Palestinian responses to the establishment of Israel after 1948.

11. For criticism in Arabic, see Ghali Shukri, *Mahmoud Darwish* (1995). The only reading I have found of *Memory* that suggests another (nonnational) interpretation for the text's title is that of Ibrahim Muhawi, who suggests that Darwish has attempted to "use memory for the purpose of forgetfulness," that is, as a "recollection in tranquility" (1995, xix). But this reading still ignores the "first remembered forgetting," mentioned in the text, and avoids questioning the meaning of the lover's opening scene.

12. From Darwish's early poem "A Beautiful Woman of Sodom."

13. Kanafani's novel unfolds the story of a Palestinian couple who returns in 1967 to visit the home they fled in Haifa back in 1948, where they also left a five-month-old baby boy. At their arrival they discover that their house has been resettled by an elderly Eastern European Jewish couple, survivors of the Holocaust, who have also adopted their son. While the meeting between the Palestinian couple and the Jewish Israeli woman who occupies their house is warm, if hesitant, the meeting between the couple and their son is truly devastating: raised and brought up as a Jew, Khaldun, now named Dov, is an Israeli soldier who refuses to recognize his biological parents or his Arab origins. Certainly this figure represents the impossibility of being *both* Jewish and Arab, as noted by Darwish. But a closer look at the novel reveals a much more complex treatment of the question concerning the relationship between modern Arab and Jewish identities. In fact, *Returning to Haifa* might be the earliest literary text to tackle this relationship by explicitly exploring the manner in which the intersection between the Palestinian memory of the Nakbah (the catastrophe of 1948) and the Jewish memory of the Holocaust necessarily complicates notions of separatist national existence. Thus, in opposition to the common reading of the novel as a didactic and overtly political text in support of the Palestinian armed national struggle (see Siddiq 1984; Camphell 2001; and Abdel-Malek 1999), I would suggest that *Returning to Haifa* is not so much an exemplary "national narrative" as it is a narrative about the *becoming* and *shortcoming* of national narratives: about, more precisely, the manner by which each national narrative (whether, in this case, Israeli or Palestinian), requires the active forgetting or erasure of the other. In this sense, Kanafani's novel might be best understood along the lines suggested by Barbara Harlow (1986, 19), that is: "less [as] an attempt to restore, or even invent, a historical legitimacy to the Palestinians' claim to their homeland," than as an attempt to explore the possibility of achieving social liberation without reinforcing "ethnic, racial and religious boundaries."

14. About such political hope Brown writes: "Rather than opposing or seeking to transcend identity investments [. . .] the replacement . . . of the language of 'being' with 'wanting' [the language of desire] would seek to exploit politically a recovery of

the more extensive moments in the genealogy of *identity formation*, a recovery of the moment prior to its own foreclosure against its want, prior to the point at which its sovereign subjectivity is established through such foreclosure and through eternal repetition of its pain" (1996, 164, my emphasis).

15. Pointing at the root *Kana* shared by the two Arabic words *makan* (place) and *kawan* (being), Adonis argues that "to be" in Arabic is "to take place," but that "place" is itself figured in pre-Islamic poetry as "the place of wandering," through which place becomes (also) time (1995, 196)

16. This phrase appears as a subtitle in the Arabic edition of *Memory* published in Beirut (a later edition, published in Rabat, does not include this subtitle). In one of his latest poems ("State of Siege"), published in Ramallah in 2002, Darwish similarly suggests that: "Under siege, time becomes a location / solidified eternally / Under siege, place becomes a time / abandoned by past and future."

17. *Memory* includes various textual sources, among which are Arabic medieval historical accounts; Biblical and Koranic sources; pre-Islamic poetry; recent political accounts and newsletter essays; and Darwish's own previously published poems and short essays.

Afterword: Going beyond the Borders of Our Times

1. On the current political "impossibility" of this figure, see Ella Shohat (1999a, 11), who notes that the notion of Jewish nationalism coupled with separatist Arab nationalism has left the Arab Jew "on the horns of a terrible dilemma": he/she can no longer "be," for the "Arab" and "Jew" who used to mark cultural, ethnic, and religious categories have turned into opposite national collectives.

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