

# *Israel's Years of Bogus Grandeur*

FROM THE SIX-DAY WAR  
TO THE FIRST INTIFADA

*Nissim Rejwan*



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**OF BOGUS GRANDEUR**

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*From the Six-Day War to the First  
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FOREWORD BY NANCY E. BERG



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*To contemplate the social scene is as effective a purification as to withdraw from the world.*

SIMONE WEIL

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## *FOREWORD*

### *Israel: The Teen Years*

NANCY E. BERG

This volume of Nissim Rejwan's memoirs follows the years 1967–1988, the adolescence of the still-young State of Israel. Adolescence is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood, in which the formation of identity is paramount. Transitions and issues of identity are also the dominant themes of the Israel that is the context for Rejwan's letters, essays, and thoughts. The period covered starts on the eve of the Six-Day War (1967) and ends at the beginning of the first intifada, two events that serve as symbolic bookends. The outcome of the Six-Day War was interpreted as a David-like victory over the Goliath of the Arab countries. It reenergized Israel and inspired Zionist sympathy and even immigration among North American Jewry. On the other hand, it was seen as another catastrophe by the Arab nations, brought the territories—with all the associated moral, political, and demographic dilemmas—to Israel, and shifted the perception of Israel from underdog and perpetual victim to aggressor. The intifada, or uprising, by Arabs in the territories soon spread into Israel proper and could be seen as a consequence—perhaps even the inevitable outcome—of the 1967 conquest. The roles of underdog and oppressor were upended, an actual war replaced by acts of attrition and aggression, and instead of a conflict taking place over a short period of time, the defining “moment” became an ongoing series of events that seems endless.

This memoir follows these transformations, including many intermediary stages, and the accompanying struggles of identity, especially regarding categories of ethnicity, citizenship, and nationality. This introduction will provide a brief overview of the defining moments in the maturation of the Israeli state so as to prepare readers for the contexts from which this memoir emerges.

Shortly before the Six-Day War, Israeli demographics recorded a seismic change. For the first time ever, Ashkenazim (Jews of Eastern European descent) were outnumbered by those called Sephardim. Techni-

cally the term “Sephardim” refers to Jews who can trace their lineage back to the population exiled from the Iberian peninsula in 1492, but the word was casually used to include Jews from Arab and Islamic lands and their descendants as well. Today people are more likely to use the more comprehensive term *Mizrahim*, or *M'edot Mizrah*. This demographic shift was especially meaningful because the dominant culture was Ashkenazi. The founders of the state, the military heroes, the political leaders, the intelligentsia, and the bureaucrats were overwhelmingly Ashkenazi. They set the standards, defined the criteria, and established the networks. The Sephardim were disproportionately represented as the underclass, among the unemployed and the undereducated, and in the juvenile-justice system. While the ethnic question was declared dead in 1966 by a prominent politician, it soon became clear that the death announcement was premature.

April 1971 bore witness to the first official celebration of the Moroccan Mimouna festival at the end of Passover in Jerusalem. Since that event, the Mimouna celebration has only grown in size and in importance. Today it has become standard, nearly obligatory, for aspiring candidates and seated politicians to attend (especially for the Ashkenazim among them), thus showing support for—and, they hope, garnering support from—the Moroccan Jewish community. There are those who would point to this as an example of the mainstream embracing Sephardi culture. Others might view the event more critically, as fulfillment of an earlier prediction that the Sephardi immigrants’ cultural contribution would be “largely limited to some gustatory and esthetic symbols and preservation of a primitive folk religion in the lowest classes” (Samuel Z. Klausner, “Immigrant Absorption and Social Tension in Israel: A Case Study of Iraqi Jewish Immigrants,” *Middle East Journal* 9, no. 3 [Summer 1955]: 294).

Less than a month later, the Black Panthers (*HaPanterim HaShehorim*) appeared on the scene, conducting their first protest. A militant group composed of mostly Moroccan youth from the slums of Jerusalem, they protested their second-class status and their neglect by the government. Their feelings of neglect were exacerbated by what they perceived as preferential treatment accorded newcomers, especially (Ashkenazim) immigrants from the Soviet Union. The name was supposed to summon their American namesake, but unlike the original Black Panthers, their Israeli counterparts were not seeking to overturn society. Rather, they were seeking to be accepted in society, to be allowed to serve in the army like their peers, and to be given the opportunity to earn the same rights and privileges. The group suffered from a lack of experience and organization, and

was easily co-opted with minor concessions. The actual issues in large part remained unresolved, and would, in fact, contribute to political upheaval a few years later.

The demographic shift, the emerging voice of Sephardi immigrants, and the debacle of the Yom Kippur War (1973) led to the major political upheaval of 1977. For the first time since before the founding of the State of Israel, the center-left Labor was out of the government, and the right-wing Likud was in power. The move away from socialism, kibbutzim, and labor Zionism gained a great deal of support and led to a reshaping of Israeli identity.

Among the winners in this political upset was the Moroccan-born politician David Levy. He was first elected to the Knesset (Israeli parliament) in 1969, but gained importance—and some notoriety—with the ascendance of his mentor Menahem Begin and their Likud Party. He was a construction worker from Bet Shean and father of twelve, nearly the antithesis of the pioneers, military leaders, and intellectuals dominating the Labor Party. He was, in many ways, the face of Likud's outreach to the Sephardim. Yet the jokes popularly told about him, emphasizing qualities of naivete, ignorance, and boorishness, reduced the gesture to tokenism and spoke of the persisting challenges of ethnic prejudice.

While the Sephardi-Mizrahi identity seemed to be imposed from the outside, during this same period the Palestinians came to define themselves as a people. The PLO was formed a few years before the Six-Day War by Arab states, but it was not until after the “catastrophe” that the organization became fully independent. Yasir Arafat was appointed the leader in 1969. While world Jewry and its supporters dismissed the PLO as a terrorist organization—and indeed, the armed resistance to Zionism embraced attacks on civilians, including the 1974 massacre of twenty-one schoolchildren in the northern border town of Ma'alot—the United Nations recognized it as the sole speaker for the Palestinian people, granted it observer status, and asserted the Palestinian right to sovereignty. Although in the 1970s the PLO had defined itself as a force to be reckoned with, it was not until near the end of the next decade that it recovered from the blow of the Camp David Accords (the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt) and really began to function on the political level. In 1988 the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist (within pre-1967 borders), a precondition for later negotiations that would lead to the as yet unrealized Oslo Accords.

A sticking point remains the Palestinians' insistence on the right of return, much like that enjoyed by Jews. The Israeli Law of Return (1950,

amended 1954 and 1970) guarantees the right of all Jews to immigrate to Israel. This led to the question popularly known as “Who is a Jew?” The issue of Jewish nationality (*leom*), never totally resolved, was at the heart of several major Supreme Court cases of this period. In 1970 navy officer Benjamin Shalit petitioned the Interior Ministry to list his children—by his non-Jewish wife—as Jewish under the nationality category. (The “leom” category, different from that of “Israeli,” is defined as being a combination of citizenship and ethnic community. The usual categories are Jewish, Muslim, Christian, or Druze. Shalit was not attempting to define his children as Jewish in terms of religion, but rather proposed leaving that category blank.) The Supreme Court allowed his petition, despite the opposition of the minister of interior and the religious parties. The decision reinforced the distinction between a religious definition (someone is Jewish by being born of a Jewish mother or by halakhic conversion) and a civil definition (belonging to the specific ethnic community). The other side of this distinction was established by the Supreme Court in the early 1960s in the Brother Daniel case. In this case, a Jewish man (born Oswald Rufenstein) had converted to Christianity and become a Carmelite monk. The Ministry of the Interior—this time upheld by the Supreme Court—ruled against his request for citizenship. Although Brother Daniel was still considered a Jew by halakha, traditional Jewish law, the “common sense” definition identified him as Christian. (He was later naturalized as an Israeli citizen.)

Shortly after the Shalit case, the Law of Return was amended to define “Jewish” in a way that would have precluded the above case: a Jew was defined as one born to a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism, and not a member of another religion. The question regarding what constituted conversion remained unresolved, but came to a head in the mid-1980s. The then Minister of Interior (Yitzhak Peretz) wanted to add the word “convert” to the identity card of Shoshana Miller because she had converted to Judaism under the auspices of the Reform movement in the United States before immigrating to Israel. The Supreme Court ruled in her favor, and eventually the Ne’eman Commission was established to determine the status of Reform and Conservative conversions.

While the above cases focused on individuals, the very Jewishness of entire communities also came into play. Much like the question of Jewish identity regarding the Karaites (no) and the Bene Israel from Bombay (yes), the status of the Ethiopian Jews—brought to Israel in maneuvers with names like Operation Solomon—was not uncontroversial. In 1985 the Chief Rabbinate insisted that the new immigrants undergo ritual

(Orthodox) conversion. The racism was later given expression in the blood dumping scandal of 1996, when donations from Ethiopians were routinely and secretly disposed of in fear of spreading the AIDS virus.

While Israeli society experienced internal struggles to define its identity and the identity of its different subpopulations, it also underwent a transformation regarding how it appeared to those on the outside, and the period 1967–1988 was a time especially rich in such changes.

The Israeli economy suffered a deep recession in 1966, with accompanying high unemployment. The government authorized the first unemployment compensation, and the economy slowly recovered, inflation slowly inching up from single to low double digits. From 1968 to 1971 the economy strengthened, based on a policy that encouraged foreign and private investment. The economic benefits were not equally distributed; they disproportionately benefited the Labor strongholds of the Histadrut, kibbutzim, and moshavim (collective agricultural communities, similar to kibbutzim). The Yom Kippur War triggered another economic crisis in 1973 as the country faced huge jumps in oil prices and a large military budget for restocking. Triple-digit inflation took over, surpassing 500 percent annually. The shift in currency from the lira to the shekel (and the concurrent devaluation) did little to stem the inflation emergency. The failing economy exacerbated the crisis in the kibbutz movement, an emergency also fed by ideological disillusionment and a change in politics (see above). Recovery began with the implementation of the Economic Stabilization Program and, perhaps especially, the 1985 Non-Printing Law. This law precluded the Bank of Israel from printing money upon request and thus helped maintain the value of the new Israeli shekel (= 1,000 old shekels). Along with the tech revolution, it laid the ground for the reclassification of Israel from “emerging” to “developed” nation status. A liberalization of the currency policy certainly contributed to the economic recovery. Ironically, just two years before, Yoram Aridor, then minister of finance, had had to resign after his proposal to “dollarize” the economy was rejected.

While resignations may have been just as common as in other administrations, this period seemed rife with scandals, affairs, investigations, and commissions. The Agranat Commission investigated the debacle of the Yom Kippur War and found that many senior officers underestimated the possibility of a surprise attack. The commission’s report blamed the chief of staff and others, but absolved both Moshe Dayan, then minister of defense, and Golda Meir, then prime minister. Nevertheless, public criticism reigned, and Meir resigned ten days after the release of the report,

leaving the office open for Yitzhak Rabin, the first native-born Israeli to be prime minister.

Rabin resigned a few years later in the wake of the crisis resulting from the purchase of F-15 fighters from the United States. The jets' arrival after the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath led to opposition by the ultra-Orthodox and a vote of no confidence, forcing new elections. During the ensuing campaign, Rabin withdrew as the Labor Party candidate for prime minister when the scandal regarding his wife's dollar accounts broke. Leah Rabin's illegal bank accounts dated from her husband's tenure as Israeli ambassador to the United States. Since then the law has been changed, and Rabin, of course, returned to politics and to the prime minister's office.

The following decade presented serious moral issues that went beyond money and politics. The Kahan Commission (1983) investigated the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in southern Lebanon the previous September. Israel had invaded southern Lebanon in June 1982 to end the PLO's use of the area as a base for attacks on northern Israel. The United States sponsored a cease-fire agreement that committed Israel not to advance further into the capital city. Following the assassination of President Bashir Gemayel, the Israeli army reoccupied West Beirut and disarmed enemy militias and civilians, sealing off the camps. While the Christian Phalangists physically carried out the killings, the Israeli army was in control of the area. The commission concluded that senior officers were aware of the atrocity and thus carried indirect responsibility. Then-defense minister Ariel Sharon was singled out, found to bear personal responsibility, and declared unsuitable for holding public office. Critics of Israel dismissed the notion of Israel's ability to be objective in investigating itself, but the report's recommendations—including dismissing Sharon from office—were indeed carried out, and led to the resignation of Prime Minister Menahem Begin, who never returned to public office.

The Zorea Commission investigated the suspicious deaths of two terrorists who were involved in the hijacking of Bus 300 (April 12, 1984). The terrorists were found, as suspected, to have been captured alive, and then beaten to death during the interrogation. Avraham Shalom, the head of Shin Bet (the general security services), was pardoned by the president after his indictment, but he resigned under public pressure. Shalom later admitted that he gave the order to kill the two terrorists and claimed that he reported thus to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir; Shamir denied any such knowledge. While the immediate results of the investigation were somewhat discouraging—not one person involved was subject to a trial

(and Ehud Yatom, who confessed his involvement, was even appointed to head an antiterrorism council by Prime Minister Sharon)—the episode led to greater scrutiny of the secret security services, to less public acceptance of security needs as a carte blanche, and, belatedly, to reforms legislated by the 1996 Law of GSS.

While Israel attracts a disproportionate amount of interest and media space, a number of events thrust the country onto the world stage. A trio of raids during the years of Rejwan's collected pieces show the process of Israel finding its place in the world.

The excitement of the Munich Olympics was dealt a major blow when members of a terrorist group calling itself Black September infiltrated the Israeli section of the athletes' village. Two Israelis were killed immediately, the other nine were taken hostage. The kidnappers demanded the release of Arab prisoners from Israeli prisons and free passage from Germany. German authorities appeared to agree to their demands even while planning a rescue operation. The rescue itself failed, and all remaining hostages, two Germans, and five of the terrorists were killed. The three terrorists captured alive were released the following month in response to the demands of a hijacking of a Lufthansa jet.

In contrast, the raid on Entebbe, Operation Thunderbolt, was a remarkable success. An Air France flight originating in Israel was hijacked leaving Athens, and after being diverted to Benghazi, Libya, landed at the Entebbe International Airport in Uganda. The hijackers released all of the passengers who were neither Jewish nor Israeli. The captain and his entire flight crew, however, insisted on staying with the remaining hostages. After nearly a week of intelligence gathering and careful planning—some of which was facilitated by the fact that the airport was of Israeli construction—Israeli troops from the most elite units (Sayeret Matkal, Golani) surprised the hijackers and rescued nearly all of the hostages. Besides the hijackers and a number of Ugandan military, the only other casualties were Colonel Yoni Netanyahu (the brother of the former prime minister) and Dora Bloch. She was murdered at the hospital to which she had been taken earlier, ostensibly on Idi Amin's command. The operation to free the hostages and subdue the hijackers was redubbed Operation Yonatan in honor of Netanyahu's memory. The successful rescue coincided with the American bicentennial (July 4, 1976), and added to the celebrations in the United States. It helped erase the horrible feelings of victimhood left by the terrorist attack on the Olympic Village, among others, and restored both self-confidence and admiration from the outside.

The destruction of the Iraqi Osirak nuclear reactor five years later

(June 1981) evoked other, more complex responses. Publicly Israel's closest ally, the United States universally condemned the attack, as did other governments. In reality, the neighbors of Iraq were relieved that the threat of immediate mass destruction was erased; the United States was happy with the restoration of balance between Iran and Iraq; and France—which had helped build the reactor—was presumably delighted with the probability of a repeat contract. While this was undoubtedly not the first such episode, Israel has often been prepared to carry out unpopular tasks. It was yet another step away from Israel's image as a helpless victim, and another step toward its image as a "renegade" or an "aggressor."

The Six-Day War, as noted above, established a new image for the State of Israel. The situation of a small fledgling nation surrounded by hostile Arab countries and beating the odds fired the imagination of many. The combination of (perceived) underdog status and quick decisive victory, along with Western elements (European culture, political democracy) and—for those more informed—the Zionist icons of pioneers, sabras (native-born Israelis) and women soldiers, was unbeatable. Ironically however, victory in the Six-Day War led to the very erosion of this image, since the annexation of the territories created a situation in which the oppressed became oppressors, and eventually, in the days of the intifada, victims once more.

Underneath Rejwan's memoir, a portrait emerges of a more mature, albeit not necessarily better, nation, one that has weathered numerous events, ups and downs, scandals and recoveries. Despite—or perhaps because of—the experiences, Israeli society continues to face multiple contradictions and challenges. Its self-image is not always commensurate with its outside image—perhaps rarely so. The Zionist myths have fallen, given way to what is sometimes termed the post-Zionist era. This book bears witness to the end of hegemony by Labor and the Ashkenazim, and to the beginning of a newfound maturity. Rejwan provides human breath to the bare-bones chart of crisis and recovery scripted above.

## PROLOGUE

I left my job as editor of *Al Yawm*, a semiofficial Arabic daily owned jointly by the government and the Histadrut (General Federation of Jewish Labor), toward the end of 1966. I had worked there since 1959, and my departure, or rather my ouster, from the job found me in the same fighting mood that I had had throughout the previous several years, asking the same questions that extremely few seemed to dare ask or answer in earnest, questions having to do with the nature of the new state and the way it was run. Was Israel a Jewish state, a Jewish *and* democratic state, and what did these terms mean in actual practice? Were the non-Jewish citizens of the country being treated as equals and getting their due share of the national pie? Why did immigrants from the countries of the Middle East and North Africa fail to cope, and why were they subjected to a process of cultural cleansing? Why was there an almost obsessive preoccupation with the question “Who is a Jew?”—a question the authoritative answer to which takes less than a dozen words and is known to everyone with even an elementary knowledge of Judaism?

On the personal and social levels the situation began to deteriorate, and shortly after I left my job it began to dawn on me that I was left completely alone. All those who had professed concern—and at times even gave expression in public to that concern—over the state of things in the interethnic sphere deserted me one after the other as soon as they began to realize the extent of my isolation. Some of them were also deterred by the nature of my dissent and the direction it was taking. One Eliahu Aghasi, an Iraqi-born Histadrut functionary disappointed by his failure to get the directorship of their Arab department—and whom I had helped with his newspaper writings on the subject of ethnic discrimination—was especially full of malice. As administrative manager of the paper, he actually presided over the proceedings of my ouster and made things as unpleasant and as ugly as it was at all possible for them to be.

The situation was by no means better where my personal friends and

acquaintances were concerned. Aliza Levenberg, who throughout the years had been in full agreement with my position and a great admirer, threatened me one evening with “telling the *Shin Bet* [the all-powerful secret services],” after writing a vicious attack in a letter to the editor of *Ma'ariv* in reply to an article I wrote for the paper. Miriam Mechner, another of those who had been inciting me constantly against the Ministry of Education, was now in hysterics about my befriending the late Israeli Arab poet Rashid Hussein, whom she had met in our flat in my absence in London and in whose eyes she thought she detected “fire” when he referred to Israel and Israelis. Worst of all, my various Iraqi friends, who had been encouraging me to keep writing about the ethnic problem, and some of whom seemed far more extreme in their pronouncements on the subject in private—all these friends and “fellow sufferers” suddenly either fell silent or turned openly against me. Survival, it transpired, was what mattered most—and I cannot in honesty blame them, considering my own experience with the powers that be.

Privately, things were not much brighter. Jon Kimche, for whom I wrote scores of articles both on Arab affairs and on the ethnic problem, sent me a letter saying he had to cut on expenses and would therefore have to publish less of my work in the *Jewish Observer*. Walter Laqueur, whom I had known back in the 1950s when he worked as regular columnist for the *Jerusalem Post*, and who had promised to help me with a scholarship or grant from his newly acquired Wiener Library for a book on the history of Iraqi Jewry, backed out, and directed me to the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in New York, which had little to offer. People at the Arabic service of Israel radio, where I had worked before taking my job at *Al Yawm*, refused flatly, though deviously, to let me do a weekly survey of the Arab press for them at the ridiculous fee of 100 Israeli pounds apiece; *Midstream*'s editor, Shlomo Katz, was offended by some remark I made in one of my letters and decided to stop my bimonthly “Letter from the Middle East”; my articles were rejected one after the other by periodicals such as *Commentary*, *Judaism*, *Congress Bi-Weekly*, and other American and British Jewish periodicals; and Rachel, with three children aged eight, seven, and three to feed, was showing signs of impatience, telling me one day she was determined to “draw the line,” since even our grocery bill and modest living conditions were being seriously affected.

Amidst all this pain and confusion and disappointment, and with my income now limited to the meager 700 pounds a month I was drawing from the Sephardi Community Council in Jerusalem for doing a biweekly broadsheet called *Israel's Oriental Problem*, I decided to enroll at Tel Aviv

University, choosing sociology and the modern Middle East as my two main subjects. My choice of sociology and anthropology was of course connected with my current near obsession with the problems of culture, ethnic prejudices, and acculturation in Israel, problems which I was determined to grapple with, expound on, and perhaps even “settle.” This was why I decided to enroll as a freshman at the ripe age of forty-two—and I chose Middle Eastern studies as a second subject only because one had to take two main subjects to work for a first degree.

I cannot say I regret the experience. I learned a great deal about sociology and anthropology, always going beyond the reading list recommended by the department and delving into subjects and disciplines neither required by the lecturers nor necessarily relevant to the subject at hand. I read Robert Merton’s works and found his exposition of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” theorem fascinating as well as extremely useful. I was also duly drawn by the school in social psychology known as “culture and personality”; Georg Simmel’s sociology of conflict impressed me greatly, since I found it relevant to my other leading occupation, the Arab-Israeli mess; and cultural anthropology as presented by Ralph Linton and others was something of a revelation and helped me greatly in formulating my “final” verdicts on the state of things in Israeli society and culture, as well as in my research work on Middle Eastern subjects. Most of all, perhaps, I was deeply influenced by the classic, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki—and especially by Thomas’s dictum that “if men judged a situation as real then it would be real in its consequences.”

All this, of course, meant that I was neglecting my lessons, failing to do my homework. The real difficulty, however, was the subject of statistics, which was obligatory for sociology students and from which I failed to be exempted, though I tried. In the end—and in a typical attempt at rationalization—I formulated a pet theory about university studies. This says that, as a student, you can do either of two things: learn about the subjects and widen your horizons or get a degree—you cannot do both! To my surprise, I found I was able to “sell” this theory to a number of perfectly sane and unprejudiced friends and acquaintances.

The academic year—the first in this my third futile attempt at a university degree—started in October 1966. By the spring of 1967 I found I was already wondering what on earth to do with the problem of statistics. The difficulty was real: even elementary statistics turned out to rely on a minimum knowledge of some branch of mathematics or other that I either had never encountered in my secondary schools in Baghdad or had

forgotten all about. But I did not give up—not quite. What finally tipped the scales was the Six-Day War. That famous Israeli victory and its aftermath proved to be such a crushing blow to what I had been saying and advocating, and ultimately to me personally, that I found myself unable to act in any direction other than to make my lame attempts to save whatever could be saved from the salvage left by the war. I therefore refused to listen to the pleas, made by a classmate as well as by the sociology lecturer, just to go to the university and show my army reserve card. Apparently they were being extremely generous with students, distributing good marks and degrees as though they were part of the trophies of that war.

### **SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES**

The jubilation and the festivities that followed Israel's spectacular victory in the Six-Day War seemed to me to border on the obscene. No one in my immediate circle of friends and acquaintances, admirers and adversaries—with the possible exception of Shimon Ballas—would see what had happened in the way I tended to see it, namely, as a further step toward deepening rather than healing Arab-Israeli and Muslim-Jewish rifts, and therefore ultimately a bad thing. No Israeli, of course, wanted an Arab victory or an Israeli defeat, however partial, and once the first shot had been fired, Israel had no alternative but to win the war. What I regretted, and lamented, was the sheer *size* of the victory, the humiliation it brought on the Arab world, and the certain knowledge that the Arabs would never, ever contemplate peace and reconciliation with Israel from a position of such crippling weakness. It was only six years later, in the Yom Kippur War, that this was to become clear to the Israelis and to the world as a whole.

At the university my actual performance in class was not so good, to say the least, since I failed to follow the lecturers' instructions, let alone scribble what they said in their lectures word for word. But I did well on the papers I submitted, invariably getting an AA for them. Many of these had to do, directly or indirectly, with the subjects that had been exercising me for some years—culture, acculturation, in-groups and out-groups, sociological theory. The titles I chose for these papers speak for themselves: "Cultural Stagnation and the Working of the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," "Accent on Groups," "Erving Goffman's Contribution to Sociological Theory," "Role-Status Contradictions."

There was one quite heated discussion with the teacher: I think it was about this last-mentioned paper, in which the works of three lead-

ing American sociologists—Mirra Komarovsky, Everett C. Hughes, and Gerhard Lenski—were discussed. I don't recall the details, but I give here extracts from the paper. Citing Shakespeare's immortal lines, "All the world's a stage . . .," I go on to comment on the works of these three luminaries. Lenski, I wrote toward the end, in a way develops Hughes's thesis and brings it a step further—namely, to the sphere of political behavior and ultimately to the fields of social conflict and social change. Showing that the degree of stability in people's voting habits goes hand in hand with the degree of status crystallization they enjoy, Lenski reaches a number of highly significant conclusions:

1. The individual with a poorly crystallized status "is a particular type of 'marginal man,'" and a society with a relatively large proportion of such individuals "is a society which is in an unstable condition."
2. The more frequently that acute status inconsistencies occur within a population, "the greater would be the proportion of that population willing to support programmes of social change."
3. Persons of poorly crystallized status are to be found in all social strata, and—since leadership of successful revolutionary movements usually comes from the higher strata—such persons "may be an important source from which such leadership is recruited."

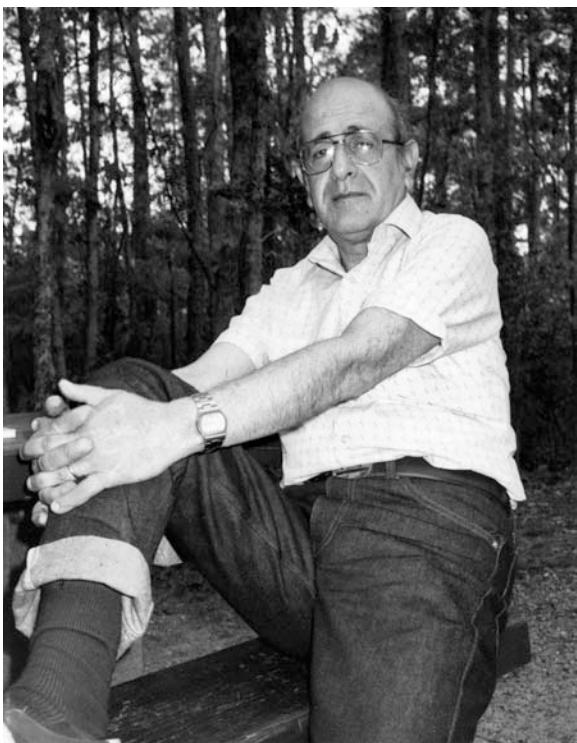
"In conclusion," I wrote,

one cannot help wondering how, things being the way they are, people at all manage to make ends meet socially in modern industrial society. Shakespeare's light-sounding solution ('They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts') no longer seems to apply here. Still, people do seem to manage. Komarovsky's college girls, especially those with 'the middle-of-the-road personality,' are now no doubt mothers of yet another generation of college girls—who now quite possibly suffer less from the specific type of conflict which beset their mothers. Hughes's non-white professionals and Lenski's intellectuals with their low degree of status crystallisation now no doubt supply leadership for the so-called Black Power movement, at last realising that their problems, being group problems, demand *group* solutions. Unfortunately, however, the chances are that once a certain set of role conflicts and contradictions is resolved, it very likely gives rise to other, possibly even more perplexing sets of conflicts. In other words, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—at least for the sociologists!

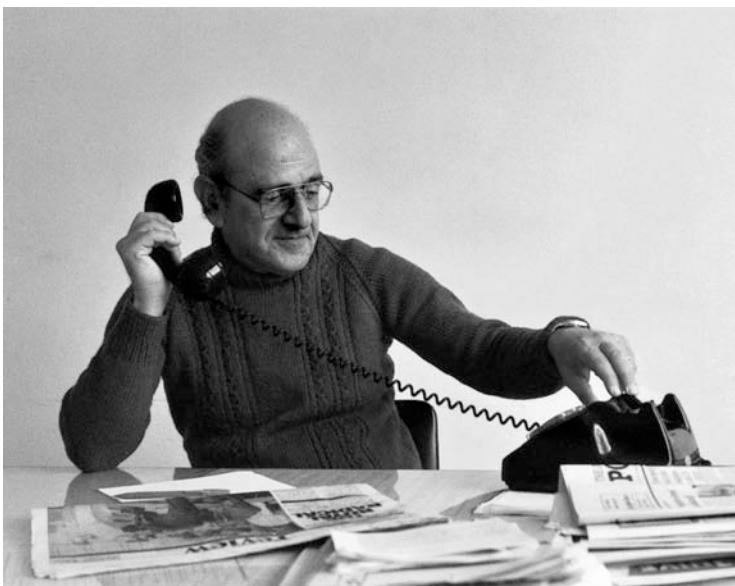
Study was not the only link I was to have with Tel Aviv University. One day, not long after leaving *Al Yawm*, Professor Shimon Shamir of Tel Aviv University called asking to see me. I met him over a cup of coffee, and after the usual chat about things in general, he offered me a temporary appointment as “senior research associate” at the Shiloah Institute for Middle Eastern and African Studies, which he headed. I said I would think about it, and eventually accepted the offer, deciding that combining studying for a degree with research would be a good idea, and the proximity to my home and family, quite convenient.



*The author and his wife, Rachel, at the entrance of the residence  
of some friends in East Jerusalem, 1973.*



*The author relaxing in a forest near Houston, Texas,  
summer 1981.*



*The author at a desk in the offices of Deutsche Welle (the international broadcaster), Cologne, March 1982.*



*The author dining at the home of friends, Cologne, Easter 1982.*



*The author and Rachel with their son Rony and his bride, Annie, on the night of their wedding, July 1987.*



*The author and Rachel aboard ship for a Mediterranean cruise, September 1988.*

*ISRAEL'S YEARS*  
**OF BOGUS GRANDEUR**

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**AN IRAQI MUSLIM’S LAMENT**

In its Winter 1966–1967 issue, the organ of the American Council for Judaism, *Issues*, printed a reader’s letter signed “K. Kishtainy, Embassy of Iraq, London.” The letter referred to an article the quarterly had published on the experience of Moshe Menuhin, author of an anti-Zionist polemic titled *The Decadence of Judaism in Our Time*, with whose views Kishtainy expressed agreement. He also deplored “the emergence of European anti-Semitism in the East.” I was touched by a reference in the letter to the Jews of Iraq. “Mr. Menuhin’s book,” wrote Kishtainy, “is a pointer for the Arabs. As long as there are people like him the Zionist concept of peoplehood and loyalty will stand in jeopardy. One of the saddest episodes of my life was to see the traditional fraternal relations between the Jews and non-Jews of Iraq poisoned by the intrusion of Zionism.”

Apprehensive of writing to him directly at such an address, I wrote a long letter to the editor of *Issues*—which for some reason I never mailed. In it I said, among other things:

As a fellow Middle Easterner I fully share [Kishtainy’s] feelings of dismay and alarm at the emergence of European anti-Semitism in the area. As a student of Judeo-Arabic history and culture I am as concerned as he is about the danger of further deterioration in the traditional amicable relations between Jew and Muslim in the Middle East. As one who, like Mr. Kishtainy, was born, brought up and educated in the pluralist society of Baghdad I have the same aversion to all monolithic nationalist doctrines based on “race,” religion or ethnicity. I believe that the peoples of the Middle East will find peace and security only after they have passed their recent nationalist phase and discarded all European-type “pan” concepts, whether Arab, Jewish or Kurdish. As a conscious and self-respecting Jew I consider the classical Zionist concept of a

"Jewish nationality" as at best an anachronism that is both theologically baseless and practically harmful—and believe that one can be a good Jew and a loyal, law-abiding American, Persian or Iraqi national. Finally, as an Israeli patriot I believe it is ludicrous of official Israel to claim anything like world-wide custodianship on Jewry. . . .

Men of good will, equipped with the proper historical perspective and knowing the Middle East at firsthand, would rightly dismiss manifestations of anti-Semitism in the Arab world as a regrettable but passing outcome of the recent tension between Israel and her neighbours. The fact remains, however, that patently anti-Semitic utterances of the coarse European type are offered almost daily both in print and over the air. These utterances cannot fail to influence a generation of Arab—and Jewish—youths whose memory does not go farther back than 1948. The evil, indeed, has become so widespread that in some circles Cairo is now viewed as the centre of anti-Semitic activity. In a front-page review of Norman Cohn's *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, February 23, 1967, the anonymous reviewer writes: "Professor Cohn ends his story in 1945 with the defeat of the Nazis. It is not, however, the end of the story of either the *Protocols* or anti-Semitism. . . . Today Nazi emigres in South America and Cairo spread the poison in the same way as the Russian emigres did in Europe after 1919."

#### KISHTAINY WRITES BACK

I still wanted Kishtainy to know that out there his letter was read and appreciated by a fellow Iraqi, and so on a flight to Tehran toward the end of March 1967 while on a study tour organized by Tel Aviv University, I made a decision: Why not send him a letter from Tehran? After all, no one at Tehran's post office will be shocked to notice a letter carrying the address "Iraq Embassy, London." And so, while in Tehran, I took a few minutes, went into a post office, bought an aerogramme, jotted some lines of appreciation and fellow-feeling, and sent it to Kishtainy's Iraq Embassy address in London. In the state of mind I was in, two things worried me. I had written my Ramat Gan address on the back of the aerogramme—and if Iranian censorship was as strict as it was said to be, who knew what could happen? Also, if Kishtainy chose to write a reply—what if, out of sheer habit, he should give his embassy address *on* the envelope? And what, worst of all, if he chose to put his letter inside an official embassy en-

velope? With no evidence whatever of what exactly I had written him, and with Israeli security laws being so draconian, I could easily and understandably be accused of “contacting the enemy” or some such nonsense.

My anxiety did not last too long, however. One day late in April I found in my mail box a familiar, innocent-looking British post office aerogramme from Kishtainy with his home address at Hammersmith Grove on the back (minus the name) and showing no signs whatever of having been opened or otherwise tampered with by the Israel censor. It was only then that I learned his full first name—Khalid.

I was impressed by what I read (and reread), and wished I could write a suitable response.

I am very pleased to receive your letter. . . . Of course I remember your name and have seen your articles in the *Jewish Observer* and actually felt proud that such a man came from Iraq and was educated in Iraq. . . . A few weeks ago I took part in a debate against two Israelis. One of the points on which we all agreed, including the Israelis, was that the present mess in the Middle East, the bitter relations between Arabs and Jews and the anomaly in which Israel finds itself, are partly due to the mishandling of the case by the Zionist leadership and its total ignorance of the Middle East and the Middle Eastern mind. So I advised my Israeli opponents that it is important for them to let the Oriental Jews have a try. The fate of Israel will not be decided in Washington or London but in the Middle East, and only Jews like Iraqis will be able to have a genuine appreciation of every aspect in the area, will be able to behave like some of its inhabitants at home and will manage to remove, at least, the psychological barrier between the East and the imperialist, foreign and white European intruders. The reply I got was that the Orientals are still backward and unfit for office. . . .

It is pitiful that many Arab writers, politicians and broadcasters are uttering now so many anti-Semitic words. I caused a lengthy and strong memorandum to be sent to various ministries in Baghdad by the Embassy in London on the subject. I waste no opportunity in taking up the cause of any Iraqi Jew who gets in difficulties with the Iraqi authorities. I also wrote a strong worded article in Arabic on this subject, reminding the Arabs of their historical Semitic alliance of Jews and Arabs and begging them not to lose their nerves in this passing stage. But you also should be quite aware of the facts. An Arab may say all sorts of anti-Semitic things but when he meets a Jew, he does not show the slightest sign that he actually meant what he said. As children we used to call the

Jew in Baghdad a dog, but then we used to call the Shi'i Muslim a pig, the Christian a "nazzah" [latrine cleaner], and so on. Yet we all played together, studied together, drank, went to brothels and did everything without asking who is who or who is what. The European, the Englishman, on the other hand, does not say a word against the Jew but he doesn't allow him in his club, invite him to his home, introduce his wife to him or even to play with his children. Thank God, we have never had that in the Middle East.

In London I meet many Iraqi Jews who are stranded in this land, by the same misfortune. Many of us are now married to European women, living here, carrying British passports . . . etc. But in the lonely nights of gloomy London, we ring each other, Muslim and Jewish Iraqis, gather together, open a bottle of araq, listen to Salima [Pasha, later Salima Murad, renowned Iraqi singer] and Afifa [Iskander, another famous female Iraqi vocalist] and damn the day which separated us.

Kishtainy's letter was to prove to have furnished the Shin Bet (Israel's secret security services) with conclusive proof of my guilt, a proof that justified my total ostracism. In the months, and years, that followed, I found I couldn't get any kind of work that had any connection to the government or the Histadrut. In a country in which very nearly every job or employment had to do with either a government department or with the almighty Histadrut, any applicant for such a post was subject to screening by the Shin Bet and depended on its approval. A "suspect" like the one I became after Kishtainy's letter fell into the hands of the security services had literally nowhere to turn for employment.

#### **KISHTAINY COMES TO JERUSALEM**

It was not until the summer of 1986 that I dared actually to write Kishtainy. Now a naturalized Briton holding a British passport, he visited Jerusalem the same year, and the two of us had a short meeting. At that time he had just published a book on Arab political humor, whose publication coincided with that of my book *The Jews of Iraq*. On August 7, 1986, I wrote Kishtainy that I had instructed the publishers to send him a review copy.

As a naturalized British citizen who no longer worked for the Iraqi embassy, Kishtainy felt free to associate with Israelis, and in a letter dated December 14, he wrote that if there was anything he regretted about his Jerusalem visit, it was the last evening he spent there. "Instead of spend-

ing it with you and seeing more of the city,” he wrote, referring to the invitation I had extended to him to have dinner with us, “I spent it with a bunch of families listening to their silly stories! I wish I can make another visit and compensate for that evening.”

December 30, 1986

Dear Khalid,

I too hope that you will be able to make it again to Israel, and that then we will make up for lost opportunities. I am sorry to say that, from my own personal experience as well, the stories many of my Palestinian friends (“stories” in more than one sense!) are prone to tell tend to be boring, repetitive and not always either credible or creditable.

By a remarkable coincidence, your letter reached me only an hour or so after I gave your address to a Hebrew University professor who has written—in collaboration with another Israeli academic—a book on Israeli political jokes. Knowing this, I asked him whether he read your book [*Arab Political Humour*]. Yes, he said, and a damned good book it is! And then: Do you know the man? I’ve been trying to write to him to ask if he would contribute to a work on political humour . . . And so on. The man’s name is Yitzhak Galnour; he’s going to write and if you ask me I would strongly recommend a positive response. You can simply cook up something from the book and send it to him. I don’t think there will be money in it; but I think the “honour” would be enough compensation!

Kishtainy eventually wrote a review of *The Jews of Iraq* in an Arabic weekly, *Al Tadamun*, in which for some reason—most probably because of the weekly’s extreme anti-Israel stand—he criticized me for having “bought” the Zionist thesis!

April 7, 1987

Dear Khalid,

You are no doubt familiar with the saying that in wars bridges are the first to get destroyed. It’s our fate—and I take the liberty of including you—that we should be the first to be hurt, foolishly trying as we have been to act as some sort of bridge in this mad war between two so-called nationalisms or nationalities.

Please don’t misunderstand me. I am not in the least angry or annoyed about being accused of buying the Zionist “thesis” and such; it’s not the first time anyway. As to the “nationalist Iraqi Jews,” I gave the

subject as much space as could be in the context of such a long record. (My actual aim, come to think of it, was a kind of *de-Zionization* of Iraqi Jewish history. The Zionist version has been that that history, roughly speaking, comprises one lone decade—between the Farhud of 1941 [anti-Jewish riots in Baghdad] and “Operation Ezra and Nehemiah” [the resettlement of 95 percent of Iraqi Jews in Israel], successfully concluded in 1951. I trust that there will be more work on the history of the Jews of Iraq, and that it will concern those points you raise. In the meantime I think I have managed to rescue that history from a great distortion—and forgive the immodesty.

### RABBI PETUCHOWSKI'S PREDICAMENT

#### DIARY

October 20, 1980

I could, if I would and if it were not too uncharitable to some of my erstwhile correspondents, put together a book with the title, *A Life in Letters*. The book would consist almost wholly of the text of the correspondences I conducted with various friends and acquaintances and certain perfect strangers. At any rate, I believe that a good bit of my adult intellectual life—especially during the 1960s and 1970s—can easily be told in the form of letters, the actual letters I wrote and received in those years.

In the summer of 1967, following Israel's famous victory in the Six-Day War and after a year of almost total isolation verging on ostracization, I found myself more than ever plagued by all those basic but stubbornly neglected questions about Israel, the Jews, the roots of the Mideast conflict, the religious situation in Israel, Judaism and Zionism, as well as a number of other topics pertaining to the Middle Eastern-Sephardic element and its place, if any, in this Jewish state of ours. It was during these troubled days that a friend of mine in New York sent me a copy of a book titled *Zion Reconsidered* by Jakob Petuchowski, a Reform rabbi and Professor at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. The book made a tremendous impression on me. Here at last, I felt, was someone who had managed to formulate the questions coherently, had undertaken to answer them, and had actually done so with a rare measure of clarity and effect. This prompted me to write to him what amounted to a fan letter.

September 3, 1967

Dear Rabbi Petuchowski,

I finally got hold of your book only a few days ago. I consider it a landmark, a true guide for the perplexed Jew of our time. Having myself pondered most of these questions for some years now, and sometimes even tried to formulate answers to some of them, I think I know what it must have meant to have grappled with them, cornered and quartered them and then put the result in coherent, even lucid English. My regret is that I did not see the book earlier; it could have helped in an article which I was working on, on the subject of Arabs and Jews. However I am glad to see that in some respects we think somewhat alike. (I conclude that the Jews are “a religious caste or remnants thereof,” for instance—and on the no less vexed question of Jewish culture I find we are in full agreement.)

I have, though, one point to make. It is not a criticism nor even a reservation, just a reflection. On page 130 you write that Judaism “has existed for millennia without benefit of an Israeli State and, conceivably, it could do so again.” No doubt about it. It is a sombre thought, though, that it has not yet been established—there simply has not been enough time!—that Judaism can survive *with* that benefit. You yourself give a hint to this two pages further on, where you state that what the State of Israel does . . . “will influence what the world thinks of Judaism as a whole.”

September 10, 1967

Dear Mr. Rejwan:

Having long been an admirer of your columns in the *Jerusalem Post*, I was most pleasantly surprised to receive your “fan letter” of September 3rd. Thank you very much indeed.

Your comments are particularly welcome in view of the fact that recent events in the Middle East have led many Jews here to the conclusion that my book is already *passé*; and a friend of mine, a leading Labor Zionist, has actually suggested that I withdraw the book from the market!

As a matter of fact, there are one or two things which I would now phrase differently in the light of the recent Israeli-Arab war. But I do not believe that the major thesis of my book has in any way been invalidated. On the contrary, I feel that, after tempers have cooled down again, the book may be even more “topical” than it was before. In your

kind letter, I see some confirmation of this. Meanwhile, of course, the Zionist-controlled press of British and American Jewry is in no mood to discuss the issues raised by my book.

September 18, 1967

Dear Rabbi Petuchowski,

The Zionists' obstinate refusal to discuss any of the basic issues raised by their own theory and practice is not a new phenomenon. In that bristling classic of social analysis, *Knowledge for What?*, Robert Lynd angrily speaks of a culture "preoccupied with short-run statements of long-run problems," and proceeds to recommend to social science the role of bringing the lagging culture "not peace but a sword." I am afraid a similar role has now fallen on our own generation of conscious, caring, thinking and therefore troubled Jews. Thus, 1) I am not in the least surprised that your Labour Zionist friend has suggested what he has suggested, and 2) I don't seem to agree that the book had appeared at the wrong time. Any time is the wrong time for long-run statements of long-run problems when the culture insists on short-run discussions and solutions—when, in fact, it lives and thrives on ambiguity.

What seems to make matters even more intractable is that ambiguity is becoming *institutionalized*. Some very intelligent people—some of them Zionists, some sympathizers, and some quite unconcerned onlookers—seem to have settled for the conclusion that Israel is "a paradox"—or "a *huge* paradox." Now paradox is something which I am capable of being philosophical about, even of enjoying—provided, however, that it does not step out of the realm of intellect, the other-worldly, the metaphysical or even, perhaps, the religious. I am no student of philosophy, but I refuse to believe that there is such a thing as a *man-made* paradox—and even if there is such a thing I maintain that it should not be tolerated, let alone *lived*.

But where do we go from here? I hope I don't sound trite, but I believe that one way of getting somewhere would be for an independent group of scholars and intellectuals, with or without overt Zionist affiliations, to work with a minimum of coordination towards no more a revolutionary end than *clarification of issues*. I am afraid this can be done only, or almost only, at your end, since ours is not the kind of mood which allows of such a world-shaking project. How is all this to be done, bless me if I know!

September 22, 1967

Dear Mr. Rejwan:

. . . I like your idea of an “independent group of scholars and intellectuals.” I am, however, rather doubtful whether the U.S. is a better place than Israel to get such a “world-shaking project” started. I have found, during my year in Jerusalem, that it is much easier to discuss this sort of problem with Israelis than with American Zionists. The former, after all, are often secure enough to face up to reality; the latter never get beyond slogans and emotion. And, by and large, the institutions of American Judaism (i.e., the source of any money which might be needed) are dominated and controlled by the Zionists. It might be much easier to get American Jewish funds for such a project, if that project were initiated in Israel itself. (Anything that comes out of Israel is *ipso facto* “good” and *betakhlich hakashruth!*—entirely kosher.)

September 29, 1967

Dear Rabbi Petuchowski,

. . . Many things have happened since 1899, but I cannot help thinking that Claude Montefiore’s formulation of the situation in that year—namely, that “it is the religious factor which must either be the rock against which Jewish nationalism will suffer shipwreck or must itself be ruined in the fray”—still holds good, and does this more today than four months ago.

However, I was not thinking of the American Council for Judaism, or of any other organization, when I wrote to you about my so-called “project.” I was really thinking of a body of people who could have read, made certain suggestions, and probably even “approved,” of a re-appraisal like *Zion Reconsidered* or a projected book of mine on Arabs and Jews. A body like this can also arrange lectures or symposiums the sole end of which is the clarification of issues.

October 22, 1967

Dear Rabbi Petuchowski,

Many thanks for your letter. I do not know whether you know about this, but the A.C.J. had invited me to their symposium (on “The Sephardis in the Middle East: What Future?”) and I duly indicated my agreement. However, they failed to tell me that the event is to take place as part of their annual festivities; that the previous day they will have [Anthony] Nutting speak on—all irrelevancies—the Balfour Declaration; and, what is even more serious, that up till October 16 they seemed not to

have known the name of a single one of those who are to participate! This among other more obvious reasons has decided me in finally declining their invitation.

This however does not mean that I have washed my hands of the Council. And in this connection your letter raises a number of points which have always given me some uncertainty and which I would like to discuss further:

1. When one proclaims that Judaism is only a religion does it necessarily imply that he is himself religious and a synagogue-goer? It is true that none of the Council's big shots is an academic bent on finding truth for its own sake; but supposing the finding that Judaism is merely a religion is a provable scientific one, is it wrong to use this finding as an argument and basis for action even though those who use it are not themselves believing Jews?
2. The politicization of Jewish life, so regrettable and so distasteful, has been forced on all of us by you know who. It is now inconceivable—is it not?—to try to depoliticise Judaism without engaging in some sort of politics oneself—and politics perhaps of the less palatable species. In the course of this endeavour many good reputations get smeared and many sensitive minds risk becoming crankish and monomaniac. The alternative of course is to shelve one's convictions and let the rot take its toll.
3. Finally, and more crucially, things being the way they are, is it possible to be anti-Jewish Nationalist and pro-Israeli? Theoretically it is (de-Zionizing Israel, etc.) but in practice it proves mighty difficult. Hence—though not merely because of this—the Council's hopeless situation, and its inability to be consistent and, ultimately, un-self-defeating.

October 24, 1967

Dear Mr. Rejwan:

. . . Yes, I have already received an announcement from the American Council [for Judaism] about your forthcoming visit, an announcement in which it is clearly stated that you would appear at their annual conference. I wonder how they are taking your change of plans.

You are, of course, quite right that it is logically possible to regard Judaism as a religion without oneself being religious. What strikes me as somewhat paradoxical, though, is the spectacle of non-religious Jews who, as Jews, declare Judaism to be a religion, and a religion only. As far as I am concerned, to be a Jewish secularist is to take the first step along the road of Zionism; since it is precisely the secularism inherent in Zionist philosophy which makes me object to Zionism in the first place. I would even go one step further. I would admit that, were I personally

a Jewish secularist, I might prefer Zionism to the other options open to me. After all, Dubnow’s “diaspora nationalism” has not proved itself viable, nor do I see much of a future for Reconstructionists in America. And if, in a pluralistic society like the U.S., a person born of Jewish parents wants to assimilate completely to the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, he can do so without having to affirm his “Jewishness.” Meanwhile, the mere fact that Jewish secularists exist would tend to support the Zionist claim that Judaism is “more” than a religion. . . . [Note: Simon Markovich Dubnow (1860–1941), Russian Jewish historian, postulated that Jews, as a cultural nationality, should organize themselves in autonomous social communities rather than in political entities like a Zionist state. Jewish Reconstructionism, the fourth branch of American Judaism, emphasizes “Judaism as a civilization,” which was also the title of a 1934 book by the movement’s founder, Conservative rabbi Mordecai Kaplan.]

But, in reality, even if, as happens to be the case, I regard my own Jewishness as a religious matter, I cannot deny the fact that Judaism is the kind of religion which includes a *religious* concept of “peoplehood” among its very fundamentals. I am not sure that the Council is always sufficiently aware of that fact. My *religious* concept of Judaism also obligates me to give my own children an intensive Jewish and Hebrew education. I wish that such an education were available outside of Zionist channels. But, alas, it is not—least of all in the kind of religious education sponsored by the American Council. I thus find myself in the unenviable position where, at one and the same time, I reject the basic premises of Zionism, and yet have to avail myself of Zionist schools to give my children a decent Jewish and Hebrew education.

. . . I have also been shaken by the Six Day War and, even more, by the events leading up to it (I have relatives in Israel); and I have been much more impressed by the moral and financial support with which American Jewry came to the aid of their two and a half million brethren in the State of Israel than I have been by the pronouncements of the ACJ which sounded like anything but an implementation of the *religious* dictum, *kol yisrael ‘arebim zeh bazeḥ*—Jews are responsible for each other.

October 30, 1967

Dear Rabbi Petuchowski,

. . . What you say—that it is untenable for non-religious Jews to argue, as Jews, that Judaism is a religion and a religion only; that to be a Jewish secularist is to take the first step along the road to Zionism, and that a

Jew who wants to assimilate into the culture of his environment has no business affirming his Jewishness—is absolutely logical, *provided one accepts the argument that the Jews constitute merely a religion*. Yet the fact is that neither you nor I seem to accept the validity of that definition—and I am in no small measure indebted to you for reaching this conclusion.

Now then. What are the applications of the definition that the Jews constitute a family—as far, that is, as they concern the Jew's attitude to Jewish Nationalism and political Pan-Judaism? Since, as you point out, there is in Judaism a religious concept of peoplehood—and since, in the long view and logically speaking, a religious kind of Zionism is quite conceivable (the present process in Israel herself may reasonably be described as one of Judaizing Zionism!)—I tend to think that a religious Jew *can* be a Zionist, and that if he happens not to accept the premises of Jewish nationalism it is not *solely* because of his religious conception of Judaism that he does that. In fact, he can have a whole assortment of reasons for rejecting Zionism: he can by temperament be anti-nationalist; he can have a different world-view, a different view of history and/or a different image of the future. As a member of the family he can simply be better off, more integrated in his physical and cultural Gentile habitat, to agree to live in a house or a vicinity which certain other members of the family happen to choose for their residence. In all this a religious Jew can find common ground with a non-religious one in resisting attempts made by certain far cousins to lure him to their chosen way of life, largely to promote their own views and interests.

Another reason why a religious Jew and a non-religious one can meet on such a ground is that *no Jew is just a Jew*. I am sure you will agree that the term “Jewish,” when used to denote human beings, cultures and communities can never be used without a hyphen: there is just no such thing as “Jewish” food, as “Jewish” literature, beauty, style, culture or group of people. To be sure, the relative weight and significance of the terms on both sides of the hyphen can differ widely with each individual, and the question as to how much “American” and how much “Jewish” there is in an American-Jewish citizen, work of art, or any attribute of anthropological culture remains open; but it seems to me that there is always something that remains in either of them which would make the bearers of the hyphenated adjectives behave and react in a more similar way than they would with any other, differently hyphenated Jewish group.

For all the reasons listed above I believe it would be quite logical

to say that Jews, no matter how they are hyphenated, can reject Jewish Nationalism and its premises as members of a family and not as adherents to the Jewish faith. To be sure, some of them would argue the religious case against Zionism—but the point is that those who do not—i.e. the secularizers—have as excellent a reason to do so as do the religious. In this connection I must admit that I do not see eye to eye with you when you imply that a person born in America of Jewish parents has the choice either to assimilate completely to the WASP culture or be a religious Jew—or, alternatively, be a Zionist. As a member of the family of Jews, it would surely be too much to ask such a man to opt out of that family just because he cannot or would not accept the assertions of one of the two main groupings in it.

November 5, 1967

Dear Mr. Rejwan:

. . . As to the main burden of your letter, I confess that I may have overstated the “religious” aspect of the matter. *Adam qarob la’azmo* [One is true to oneself]. And you are so right in insisting that the non-religious members of the “family” can express their views on Jewish Nationalism, too. But, on the other hand, I still have two major reservations. In the first place, I am not so sure that the “sense of family” is very pronounced in the ranks of the ACJ. In the second place, and this is even more important, there is the question of priorities. Every man has his own scale of priorities. In my individual case, I find myself involved on a number of “fronts.” Within the Reform Movement, I am a spokesman of the theistic “right wing” (as against the humanist “left wing”), and of the advocates of *halakhah* [the body of Jewish law] (as against the champions of *hefgeruth* [free-for-all]). Within the American Jewish community as a whole, I am an advocate of the consolidation of all religious forces, transcending the “denominational” lines (as against the vested interests of institutionalism) and a champion of “dialogue” with Christianity (as against an ostrich-type of exclusivism). Somewhere within my concerns, there is the rejection of secularist Jewish Nationalism; but it is *not*, at this very moment, my over-riding concern. It just fits in with my other “causes.” And the other “causes” happen to be of more importance to me right now. That is why I cannot conceive myself as sitting down with the Erich Fromms and the Hans Kohns to “fight Zionism,” when the very secularism of the Fromms and the Kohns represents, in my eyes, an ever greater threat to my “family” and its traditions than does Zionism. There are, after all, enough Zionists left with whom I can pray together

in synagogue, and with whom I can co-operate in furthering the cause of an intensive Jewish and Hebrew education. I find no such common concerns with the Fromms and with most of the members of the ACJ. [Note: Erich Fromm (1900–1980), Frankfurt-born Jew, psychoanalyst and social researcher whose theories blended the work of Freud and Marx; Hans Kohn (1891–1971), Prague-born Jew, professor of modern history and theorist of nationalism.]

But all of this may not really be the main point. I am increasingly beginning to feel that the whole discussion of Zionism vs. anti-Zionism has become anachronistic. Both sides are still operating with the categories of 19th-century thought. . . .

Be that as it may, I certainly enjoy corresponding with you about these questions. Perhaps, in your next letter, you could tell me something about yourself? Am I right in surmising, on the basis of your English, that you have had an English education? Oxford?

November 15, 1967

Dear Rabbi Petuchowski,

. . . Yes, I agree that this correspondence has been somewhat too impersonal. What I know about you comes exclusively from *Who's Who in World Jewry, 1967* (where I got your address, too). Beside the things you can learn about *me* from there I really have very little to tell, except perhaps that we now have a third son, Daniel-Amir, who was four in June. My English is completely "homemade." I went to a government school in Baghdad and was very undistinguished in my English. Which reminds me. At the end of this month I will have a huge article in the Hebrew quarterly *Keshet*, part of it is on "Jews and Arabs: An Attempt at Definition." In the Jewish part of this section I quote extensively—with acknowledgement—from your latest book. I will send you an off-print as soon as I have them. I read your *Issues* reprint of a lecture with great interest, and I was very glad you made that point about the East European Jews' adoption of the nationalist doctrine.

May 17, 1968

Dear Rabbi Petuchowski,

Your letter has given me much pleasure—as always—and much scope for reflection. Of course we are engaged in definitions. What's wrong with that? We are trying, I take it, to introduce, not to discover, some coherence, some logic, in the events that are sweeping us almost unawares. To give *that* up is to effect a kind of intellectual abdication, to lapse into

utter despair—despair of Reason and the capacity of Reason to give us some sort of guidance, of insight. I don’t want you to misunderstand me: I have nothing against those who argue that Reason has little or nothing to do with the processes of society and of history. For all I can tell they may be damned right. Yet I don’t seem, myself, to have reached that phase; when I do I shall probably join the Hasidic movement and start delving into the *Qabbalah*.

We have a certain obligation, to ourselves first and foremost but also to others—and I cannot in honesty see how we (and here I am speaking of we, meaning you and I, with your permission) can afford to evade this obligation *and* be at peace with ourselves. Of course I read the exchange in *Judaism*. [Michael] Rosenak is a perfect ass and a demagogic one into the bargain. But let us leave him alone. From your reply to him—reservations notwithstanding—and from what you write in your letter re your rejection a) of the secular-national definition of the Jew and b) of the Zionist rejection of the *Golah* [exile], from all this certain things emerge, certain commitments I mean and very, very clear conclusions. Equally clear conclusions emerge from my *Keshet* piece and, while I am perfectly willing to concede that one cannot take on the job of reforming the world (“Leave it to God, or the Government,” our friend Jack Neusner counsels!) I honestly cannot see myself just keeping quiet about the whole mess.

You are of course perfectly right—about “Jewish” education, Hebrew, and the hazards of Diaspora life. Zionism has been one huge self-fulfilling prophecy and there isn’t much one can do about it. But you yourself have already answered all these questions. What is Hebrew worth when it is stripped of its religious and even cultural garb? As to “passive assimilation,” I thought you dealt with that too in your book. Recently, the AJ Committee in Israel offered a translation of an article published in the June 1967 (!) issue of something called *Herder Correspondent*. It was a report on Jewish identity in Israel—which you must have seen—and I am blessed if I see much change in the situation as between the pre- and post-June period. Assimilation is going on at full force *everywhere*, Israel not excluded. The fact that in Israel it is made to masquerade as a kind of *Jewish* revival may fool some; it cannot, repeat cannot, fool those who reject a secular-national definition of a Jew. Again, I am willing to accept a secular-national definition of the Jews (cf. Sartre et al.). But before I have made up my mind on that point I cannot see anything specifically Jewish either in the Jewish education provided by the nationalists or in the pilgrimages made to the *Kotel* [the

Western Wall, i.e., the western retaining wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem]. (Yeshayahu Leibovitz, who is a true Jew I think, coined the word *Discothelle*, to rhyme with discotheque, so sick did he become of the new paganism!) [Note: Leibovitz (1903–1994), professor at Hebrew University, warned Israel in March 1969 of the dangers of occupying Arab lands.]

May 22, 1968

Dear Mr. Rejwan:

Thank you for your kind and interesting letter of May 17th.

Granted. As long as we are rational creatures, we shall be concerned with questions of definitions. But you do not live by definitions alone—certainly not if you want to lead a Jewish life, and if you want your children to lead a Jewish life. Nor, I sometimes tend to think, are definitions derived from history (as in *Zion Reconsidered*) necessarily relevant to changed conditions. When all is said and done, I would be forced to admit that I have still more in common with a non-religious Israeli than I have with a Protestant American. Yet the ACJ would not say that. On the contrary, they have banned a number of Jewish textbooks from their curriculum (because the books mention the two words, “Jewish people”), and have substituted for them books by American Unitarians. Of course, this is an absolutely consistent position for the American Council; and it also shows you what happens if you take definitions too seriously. But it is not a position which satisfies my own Jewish needs. . . .

I enjoyed Leibovitz's “*Discothelle*.” An interesting man, that Leibovitz. Everything he writes is challenging. Years ago, I had an exchange with him in *Beterem* [a Hebrew periodical]. His understanding of Judaism and mine are totally different; and it often amuses me how he can arrive at so many right conclusions on the basis of (from my point of view) wrong premises. As for the *kotel* itself, I sometimes wonder how I personally would react to the sight thereof—not from the rarified atmosphere of my Cincinnati study, but *in situ*, in the company of fellow-Jews. Will it be just a historical landmark, or will it awaken within me atavistic reactions? Hard to say. At any rate, there is a vague possibility of my visiting Israel in the summer of 1969, and then I shall be able to make the experiment.

## THE AMERICAN COUNCIL FOR JUDAISM

For all its faults and foibles, the American Council for Judaism—now defunct—was the only non-Zionist Jewish organization active in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. I had come to know of its existence only after reading *What Price Israel?*, a book by one of its founders and leaders, Alfred Lilienthal. Although I found its style crude and the case not quite well argued, the book contained certain statements and sentiments with which I found I could easily identify. Over the years, I also read the council's periodical, whose last transformation was called *Issues*.

The council and its leaders, viciously attacked and maligned on all sides, both in America and abroad, had thus little if any chance of making an impact or of even being heard. I never heard an American Jew, be he most critical of Israel and Zionism, who had a good word to say about either the council or its publications. And at long last someone of substance like Rabbi Jakob Petuchowski made his backing of the council known and published a book expounding the same principles on which it was established, yet even he retracted his support following the Six-Day War of 1967. As a matter of fact, it was the impact of that war that ultimately spelled the virtual end of the council.

In 1966–1967, however, what with its being the only organized Jewish body that would even listen to what Michael Selzer—and I—were saying, it was natural that he found his way to joining and working for the council. (Michael Selzer, a well-known Jewish critic of Zionism, is the author or editor of such books as *The Aryanization of the Jewish State* [1967], *Zionism Reconsidered: The Rejection of Jewish Normalcy* [1970], and *The Wineskin and the Wizard* [1970].) And indeed, as soon as he was established in New York, Selzer broke the news to me that he had taken a job with them. Relations between us were weakened, however, following the failure of his efforts to organize a council-sponsored symposium, in

which he invited me to participate, and following my declining the invitation. The last time I saw Selzer was on one of the last days of December 1971, the day I arrived in New York, on what was my first visit to the United States, to participate in the annual conference of the American Historical Association. The invitation came through my friend the historian Irene Gendzier, who had apprised Selzer of my movements. Selzer himself struck me as being “under the weather”—very much so. Indeed, he spoke of joining a certain group in a kibbutz-type venture somewhere in upstate New York.

### TRUDE WEISS-ROSMARIN AND I

#### DIARY

20 August 1994

I have always maintained that Iraqis and Yeckes (Jews from Germany) had a good deal in common—punctuality, attention to “order,” correctness. In the course of the years I discovered that the two groups shared something else as well, obviously not entirely unrelated to this seeming compatibility. I refer to the way they look at the dominant East European elite in Israel and the way members of this elite view and treat them.

Speaking for myself, I can safely say that this affinity, this similarity of approach and viewpoint, was best exemplified by the years of professional and “ideological” collaboration I was to experience with Dr. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, founder, owner and editor of the American Jewish monthly, the *Jewish Spectator*, for decades. In fact, after almost 20 years of friendship—which God knows had its many ups and downs—I was able to write to her in a letter dated June 5, 1985: “I often wonder how it ever came to pass that I, an accomplished Yecke if ever there was an Iraqi one, should be conducting business with you Trude, a Yecke of Yeckes, in such a scandalously un-Yecke-ish way!”

My association with the *Jewish Spectator* and its editor went back to late in 1967, when I was frantically looking for gainful employment and struck on the idea of adding the *Spectator* to the few periodicals and institutions for which I was doing freelance work—*Midstream*, *Hadassah Magazine*, *Judaism*, *Congress Bi-Weekly* in the U.S.; the *Jewish Observer*, the *Jewish Chronicle* and *New Middle East* in England; the American Jewish Committee, Israel Office; *New Outlook*; the Sephardi

Council of Jerusalem; and one or two Jewish Agency publications, in Israel.

With my first letter to Weiss-Rosmarin I enclosed no less than three pieces. Her response was immediate, in a letter dated November 10, 1967:

Why *should* we always see eye to eye, as you put it? I am not inclined to totalitarianism and the pages of this magazine are open to all who have something meaningful to say, regardless of whether I personally agree. Jakob Petuchowski has replied to what you consider “neither right nor fair” criticism of mine and I am happy to report that our personal good relations have not been disturbed by our difference of opinion.

I am glad that you realized the evil intentions of the American Council for (Stephen S. Wise used to say *against*) Judaism. The idea of that symposium was the brainstorm of Michael Selzer. He and the Council people labor under the mistaken notion that those who criticize certain aspects of Israeli policy are enemies of the State. When Selzer phoned to invite me to chair the symposium at which you were supposed to speak (I declined, of course), I told him that judging by what I have read by you and heard of you, I could not believe that you would participate in this symposium. [Note: Stephen S. Wise (1874–1949), Budapest-born American Reform rabbi, cofounded the American Jewish Congress.]

November 19, 1967

Dear Mrs. Weiss-Rosmarin,

. . . Far indeed be it from me to think that we *should* see eye to eye on every subject. I thought, however, that the point at issue between you and Rabbi Petuchowski had a bearing on “our” subject, namely the problematics of Israeli-Arab relations—and it was perhaps this that made me believe that I had a sort of right to make the comment I made. Be that as it may, I should like to see Petuchowski’s reply to your comment in case you have decided to publish it. May I take this opportunity of asking you to have sent to me a copy of the October and November issues of your monthly? Perhaps you put me on your mailing list?

It was not only the ACJ’s “evil intentions” that decided me in declining to attend their proposed symposium; it was also a hunch I had that the whole thing was *not* going to take place. Now I have reason to believe I was right. On the whole, however, I am inclined to think that the Council has been performing an essential though rather messy function. If only

they can be a little more *relaxed!* But you seem to dismiss them all and their activities as anti-Israel and even, *rahmana diletzalan*, anti-Jewish.

March 6, 1968

Dear Trude,

. . . I know, alas!, only too well about Aronsfeld's poisonous literary efforts. What can one do? Incidentally, James Parkes wrote Eliachar a letter expressing the acutest misgivings about a pamphlet by Trude W.-R. which is being widely circulated—and anxiously enquiring whether Oriental Jews propose to gang up with Moslems against the innocent Christians! True, Oriental Jews have something in common with those Moslems, but thankfully they are free from Islam's terrible fatalism. So *please!* I could hardly believe my own eyes. Has he written to you too? . . . [Note: Cesar C.

Aronsfeld (1910–1992) worked for the Wiener Library and the Institute of Jewish affairs and also as a journal editor. James Parkes (1896–1981) was an Anglican priest and expert on Jewish-Christian relations. Elie Eliachar (1899–1981), was a politician, an industrialist, and a spokesman for Sephardi Jews in Israel for most of the twentieth century.]

*Encounter* apologized profusely for not printing my article [“Israel as an Open Society”]. Between us, I was glad: so out of tune with the miserable, genteel British concoction which they finally produced! Any responses yet to the article from *J.S.* readers?

March 10, 1968

Dear Nissim,

. . . I have not heard from James Parkes, but our Jewish-Muslim Dialogue *here* does not go well. At our last appearance, Dr. Rauf referred to Israel as “that country” (several times) and he refused to put on a *kippa* or a *hat* as a matter of courtesy to the congregation where we spoke, for reasons of space, in the synagogue. Also, his attitude to me has changed since I was in Israel. It seems he misinterpreted my stand and my views.

June 6, 1968

Dear Nissim:

What am I to do about your ‘*akshanut* [stubbornness]’? It seems the name Nissim [miracles] and the non-European descent account for that particular type of ‘*akshanut*. You see, my husband’s name is Nissim, too, and he is even more stubborn than you are. By the way, he is a *Kurdi*, fought in the Palmach in 1948, worked for *Shin Bet* (and was caught in Syria but managed to prove his “innocence,” etc., etc.). He has the same con-

tempt you and I have for “Zionism,” but . . . well we’ll discuss this some other time. We married in 1954 and as yet I have not been able to wean him from his ‘*akshanut* (and the *Kurdi* temper). So how can I hope to get you to take a real look at that Council (have you seen those ugly broadsides Selzer, etc. sent out??). You are too well informed NOT to know that you can’t draw a line and separate what you call “Jewish nationalism” from “Jewish religion.” [Note: Palmach is short for Pelugot Mahatz, “shock forces,” which were heavily involved in the fighting during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.]

Sure, the “establishment” here is an *establishment*. As you know, I am not part of this establishment. United Jewish Appeal, the Jewish Agency, etc. have been trying hard to keep me from lecturing—but the rabbis, etc. don’t give a hang for that bunch (except a few conglomerating rabbis about whom I am writing in the June issue of this magazine). *But* the Council, as Selzer, etc. have revealed now, really collaborates with the enemies of Israel. Now this was known all along. Neusner contributed to that symposium BUT in a critical stance with respect to the Council.

Let us get this straight: the Jews *must* have a state. *If* we had had a state during the Nazi period six million would not have died. This is all I know. I also know that the nastiness of the Israeli bureaucracy, the corruption of the Jewish Agency, the ridiculous sabre-rattling of those claiming *Eretz Yisrael Hasheleimah* (the whole of the Land of Israel) do not disprove the correctness of the Jewish claim to peoplehood on the soil of Eretz Yisrael. As to Jewish secularity, this is “in the air” of the *Zeitgeist*, when “God is dead” and “The Secular City” is on the agenda. By the way, I prefer the secular *apikorsut* [unbelief] of some Mapamniks to the “religion” of Elmer Berger. [Note: Mapamniks were adherents of Mapam, a Labor Zionist political party active in Israeli politics until 1996. Elmer Berger (1908–1996) was an American rabbi and outspoken critic of Jewish nationalism.]

September 2, 1970

Dear Trude,

. . . I thought we were through with the Council For—or Against—Judaism. I was referring to articles I had submitted to the *Jewish Spectator* and rejected by you, not to anything remotely connected with the Council. However, your references to *Ahavat Yisrael* (love of Israel) provide an opportunity for me to say something which I have wanted you to know for some time—namely that I consider *Ahavat Yisrael* to refer to Jews as a

collectivity and not to every Jew individually or even to any group of Jews separately. A Jew can be a scoundrel and a thief and a killer—exactly like any non-Jew. A *group* of Jews, say a political gang or just an ordinary gang of smugglers, thugs or murderers, would get from me the same amount of love as any non-Jewish group of a like mind or inclination. So please . . . (Hannah Arendt, a woman of whom I think highly, once mentioned that some official in Jerusalem spoke to her about *Ahavat Yisrael*; she thought it was an “obscurity.” In one sense, at least, it certainly is.)

4 March 1971

Dear Trude,

. . . Re the American Jewish Committee. So far, so good, since I have not yet managed to get even the meanest job with the Radio and TV—and [AJC-Israel Office director Bernard] Reznikoff so far supplies “half my grocery bill” even at the modest rates he pays. The rest I try to muster from here and there—including those subsidized, institutionalized periodicals you always *rightly* sneer at. But what is a man to do? Incidentally, you credit the AJC people with too much intelligence and/or sensitivity in supposing that they would be affected by your criticisms of *Commentary* and its set. For one thing I do not think they are very happy with it themselves.

January 9, 1985

Dear Trude,

. . . The other day—three weeks ago or so—the Hebrew University with much pomp and circumstance awarded its First Annual James Parkes Award and a lecture was given by the recipient—a ludicrous fellow who is also a total and utter ignoramus named Nettler whose sole hobby-horse is “Arab-Moslem Anti-Semitism.” It was so irritating that I was moved to sit down and write a piece (enclosed) in defence of the man’s memory and expressed my utter disgust at the university which gave its support and publicity to such drivel. I will consider it an honour if this article is reprinted or, alternatively, the whole subject raised, in one of your future Notes. (The irony of the matter is that I, a bloody Middle Easterner, should be put in a position of defending what the recipient called “Western illusions” and refuting what he dubbed “Middle Eastern realities.” Can anyone beat *that?*) [Note: Ronald L. Nettler, a scholar of Muslim-Jewish relations, is on the faculty of Mansfield College, Oxford.]

Keep well and let me hear from you soon.

## EROSION

Gad Ben Meir was one of those Iraqi immigrants who were young enough to have the full round of what was considered successful “absorption”—high school, army service, university, and a brief spell of work for the powers that be. However, I first met him when he was in London in the mid-1960s, editing a periodical for the World Sephardi Federation, which was based in the British capital, though hotly contested by the Jerusalem Sephardi Council. He asked for contributions—and got them in bulk, so to speak. Eventually he became interested in the editorship of *Al Yawm*, but instead he chose to immigrate to Australia, where his wife’s family lived.

Meanwhile, by the spring of 1969 I was almost finished with my Shiloah Institute fellowship, the manuscript of my *Nasserist Ideology: Its Exponents and Critics* gone to the printer. On the strength of some offer I got, I was contemplating spending a year or two as fellow at St. Antony’s College in Oxford, partly because—as I wrote in a letter to Ben Meir—“I am deeply disappointed—disenchanted may be a better word—with my own fellow Orientals. Either the people are basically bad or have been made so by circumstances. In both cases the result is that no one is willing to lift a finger or to lose so much as one shilling for ‘the cause.’”

Be that as it may, the truth is that the erosion in my public standing—for what *that* was—had ultimately come wholly at my own initiative. Holding a fairly responsible, and answerable, public position as editor in chief of a semiofficial Arabic daily closely associated with the Histadrut—an aging, corrupt and fast decaying labor organization that openly presumed to act as a state within a state—was plainly hard to reconcile with an insistence on thinking and writing as one pleased. It amounted, in fact, to being part of an establishment with which one was openly at odds. This was because being “in the center of things” meant being answerable to people for whom one had little respect—functionaries, self-servers, and court jesters whose sole aim was to promote their own interests and who were willing to use any method and sacrifice any colleague or friend to attain that end. All the friends and colleagues I had—even those who claimed to share my views on the communal problem and who constantly incited and prodded me on to continue with my lone fight for change—were ultimately to desert me, some going to the extreme of personal betrayal. If, as one sympathetic outsider put it, the fierce campaign of boycott and ostracization waged against me by the powers that be was meant to be a lesson

for other Orientals to learn and to ponder, then that goal was attained with bright colors.

There were, to be sure, a few exceptions, though they were in the main those who had nothing to fear from the establishment, being either independent professionals or men who had decided to seek their future careers and the well-being of their families elsewhere. One of these was Rony Gabbay, a fellow immigrant from Iraq who, having opted out and immigrated to far-off Perth in Western Australia, beseeched me and my wife, Rachel, in a number of letters to take ourselves and our three sons and just get the hell out of the place. He was sure I would find it far easier to work and to care for my family in some English-speaking country. In one of his letters, in fact, Rony assured me that, what with finding all doors closed and with offers of jobs withdrawn following a brief period of silence, “someone has inserted a note in your folder at the *Shin Bet* and that’s the end of that!” He appealed to Rachel to influence me, evoking our friendship and reminding her that what was involved ultimately was nothing less than the future of our children.

But I was adamant, determined to continue and even to intensify the fight, though it was becoming entirely evident that the fight was lost at least on one of its most crucial fronts. As Gabbay himself put it in one of his letters: “You, Nissim, are not a politician; you are not seeking personal or material gain. You are fighting for your convictions. The trouble, however, is that the people for whose rights and whose dignity you presume to be fighting are themselves *just not interested*; they don’t give a damn!” It was also becoming fairly evident that the boycott against me was complete. It seemed that no position, no assignment, and no mission could be entrusted to a person holding the kind of views I held—and having the audacity and the ability to air them in foreign-language publications in the bargain. The list of the offers for work I got, and to which I initially gave my consent, is fairly variegated, but they were all to lead nowhere. After finishing my research fellowship at the Shiloah Institute at Tel Aviv University, I was invited by Professor Elihu Katz to head the Arabic Department of Israel Television, then actively being set up. I indicated my agreement and even attended the necessary “audition,” for a selection committee that included Yitzhak Navon, a Sephardi and a great admirer of my work on that particular front. After weeks of waiting for the committee’s verdict, however, I thought it was best to withdraw my candidacy with dignity rather than embarrass Katz with the unpleasant task of penning a rejection note. Accordingly, I wrote Katz and withdrew my candidacy for the post.

October 12, 1968

Dear Rony,

. . . Flung into a situation not of our making, some of us are sane and normal people who know their duty to their families and their kids and themselves, others are inclined to meddle in public affairs and have more or less made a life-work out of it, still others combine the two. Now I suggest that the first and third types can easily just opt out of it all—the first certainly and naturally, the third as a result of some hard thinking and soul-searching. As I think I told you once, I have the misfortune to belong to the *second* type (you belong to the third) and willy-nilly have to make my living from writing. Now there are two kinds of people who make their living from writing: the academics (who presumably also teach) and the “publicists.” The latter, to whom I belong at least so far, have, in this particular set-up, two choices: prostitution or integrity. I have refused to choose the first course, but I was caught unprepared for any other course!

Another point here: I am not fighting for the Orientals and their rights. Even if they do get interested and graciously agree to take power, I don’t think they will be better than the present Establishment and may even be worse. Nor is it the Arabs that I am fighting for; we all know what sort of people they are capable of being. Nor—and please don’t be shocked—is it my own kids, or their kids! I know it sounds infinitely silly and incredible, and certainly unconvincing. But the truth is that I am doing whatever I am doing just simply because *I have no choice*: How else can one preserve one’s dignity, integrity and self-respect? And I am not going to add any more to this, for the time being. . . .

There is one more point which I feel I would not be myself if I didn’t add. It is a difficult thing to spell out, and I have been hesitating a lot about it. But since we are by way of talking about my strange ways and temperament I will say it. It sounds simple: You, Rony, had far, far less reason to arrive where you have arrived than I had. I am talking completely “objectively.” You were younger than I was when we came; you were in the army; you studied here; you seemed fairly thoroughly “absorbed”; you even joined a political party. Above all, you were a Zionist, even in Baghdad. Moreover, were it not for the (traumatic?) episode with [Professor Benjamin] Aktzin, you were generally fairly well-received. (I still remember vividly our meeting in the small cafe just around the corner in 1961 or 1962 when you asked me whether you should accept an offer to be ambassador somewhere or other, and that you were refusing for chiefly financial reasons.) How, then, came the

Great Schism? And WHY? Now you will say that all this only goes to show what a stinking, monolithic society we have here—i.e., how a man like you should be made to feel so alienated and so finally fed up as to take the ultimate drastic step. Quite right. I am the last man in the whole world to have to be told this! Still, there is something which remains to be explained, and I believe it can be explained only in terms of temperament.

#### **ALL DOORS TIGHTLY SHUT**

There was, too, an attractive enough offer of a semiacademic position at the Truman Institute of Research for Peace, at Hebrew University. Zvi Zinder, then administrative director, approached me personally and on his own initiative, having heard I was out of a job. He was pleased, and surprised, he said, that a man like me was available and willing to take the kind of job he was offering—assistant director of the institute. The offer seemed fairly solid, pending the approval of his academic staff. Unfortunately, the academic committee was then headed by former Chief Intelligence Officer Yehoshafat Harkabi, with whom I had been at loggerheads on what he had then made his life mission and sole preoccupation—namely, “Arab-Muslim anti-Semitism.” Harkabi, who once, during a heated discussion on the communal problem in my own house in Ramat Gan and in the presence of a number of friends concerned about that issue, “threatened” to inform on me to “the services,” did not approve of Zinder’s choice, and the latter had the decency to tell me, in obvious bewilderment, of what actually went on at the academic committee’s meeting.

Harkabi, truth to tell, had good reason to be upset. Of all those who dealt with Arab affairs, academics and journalists alike, I was the only one to criticize his fancy newfound doctrine. Even those among his colleagues in the academic world who disagreed with his apocalyptic vision of the Arab-Israeli conflict did not dare challenge him publicly. Nor was he himself ever in the mood to conduct a public discussion. A long and fairly systematic refutation of his views that I persuaded Aharon Amir to publish in *Keshet*—and that I sent shorter versions of to publications in the United States, Britain, and France—went completely unchallenged by Harkabi.

It is ironic, by the way—and entirely typical of a certain type of Israeli academic—that sometime in the early 1980s, when even the right-wing,

“Greater Israel” Likud Party, then in power, had ceased to make capital of the Arab anti-Semitism bogey, Harkabi decided to make a complete volte-face, adopting and hotly advocating one of the most outspoken “dovish” stands on the conflict, openly calling for far-reaching compromises with the Arabs and warning that only such a policy could save Israel—duly and totally forgetting about the allegedly deeply entrenched “Arab anti-Semitism” that he had argued originated and found its full expression in the Koran.

Another ideological opponent, who served on a committee considering candidates for the quite innocuous job of news editor—one of many—for the Arabic section of Israel Television (a job I had filled temporarily in 1969–1970), was Shmuel Toledano, who at the time still served as the prime minister’s advisor on Arab affairs. Toledano was given the job a year or so before I quit the editorship of *Al Yawm*, for whose political line he was in a way directly responsible. Like almost all his predecessors at the post, Toledano came directly from one or the other branch of the secret services, in which his last job was to work at the embassy in Paris, under some assumed official title. Whether by accident or calculation, he took the job at the prime minister’s office when my “case” was being hotly discussed by the powers that be. His predecessor, Rehav‘am ‘Amir, had actually apprised me of the situation and gently advised me against associating with certain objectionable Arab writers and journalists and poets to whom, he revealed, “the services” took strong objection. Needless to say, this selection committee too found me wanting—and when a good friend of mine, the daily *Haboker*’s late editor Gabriel Tzifroni, approached the then-director of the Israel Broadcasting Authority’s governing body on the subject, the latter blandly responded: “Truth is, Nissim Rejwan was judged to be too good for that kind of job!”

Curiously, Toledano, like Harkabi, was eventually to reverse his stand on the question of the Arab citizens of Israel, and by the mid-1990s he had become one of the most outspoken supporters of granting them full equality, stopping short only when it came to the question whether Israel was a state for the Jews or one for all its citizens. Somehow, in one of those puzzling twists of mind, and like the general run of “liberal” Zionists, he manages to eat his cake and have it too, so to speak: for him, Israel remains “Jewish” in an ethnic-nationalist definition of the term “Jewish,” but at the same time is willing to grant its non-Jewish citizens “full equality.”

Unlike Harkabi, however, who continued to boast of having been the one to draw attention to the existence of a clear anti-Semitic streak in Arab-Muslim thought and tradition and who, in reality, never changed his

views, Toledano had the courage, and the shrewdness, to admit having made a volte-face. After some thirty years of complete silence, I decided one morning in August 1995 to sit down and write him a short letter, mainly condolences on the death of his wife—whom we had known socially and entertained at least once in our home in Ramat Gan. I also wrote that I followed his occasional articles in the Hebrew daily *Ha'aretz*, adding that perhaps the time had come for us to have a chat. I gave him the choice of place—our home, his, a cafe, a restaurant. His response was quick and positive, and he chose for us to meet over coffee at his home in Rehavia. I agreed, of course, and was pleasantly—and greatly—surprised to see that, after the usual civilities, he himself opened by saying, “Well, as you see I have come to your side of the fence!” Needless to say, that served to disarm me completely, and even when I started reminiscing about some of the things that went between us in the mid-1960s, he never once contradicted my version of what had happened or denied the role he had played in my fall from grace. Nor did he hesitate to admit that he had spent all his years in the civil service working for “the services.”

At least two other modest jobs I was offered were eventually denied to me. One came from the Ministry of Education and Culture, entirely at its own initiative: a job as inspector of Arab schools. I indicated my agreement, but was kept waiting for confirmation for weeks on end—until one day, under one excuse or another, I was told the position was no longer available. Another was the modest enough post of a news editor at the Arabic section of the Voice of Israel (which, like Arabic TV, is under the Broadcasting Authority). This time around, however, two of my friends sat on the selection committee—the late Yaakov Khazma and Amnon Kapeliouk—and the story that they told solved the mystery. Each related to me separately that when the committee was on the point of choosing me, the assistant to the director-general of the authority—who at the time happened to be Shmuel Almog—entered the room and handed the then-head of the Arabic Department a piece of paper. Reading it, the director blurted out that it was a message from the director-general, informing him that “the services” objected to Rejwan’s getting the job. Khazma and Kapeliouk protested strongly, and the decision was deferred; the two complained to the Israeli Journalists Association, which was eventually told that, no, there was nothing to incriminate Rejwan! The job, however, went to another candidate.

In the fullness of time, some quarter century later, Almog was finally persuaded to tell the whole story. Having left the Broadcasting Authority and chosen an academic appointment at the Hebrew University, Almog

eventually met me more as an equal. A few of his books and papers, mainly on European anti-Semitism, were given to me to review, and some of the publications sponsored by the research institute for which he worked I found most objectionable, and we had discussions and arguments about them. He also lived in the same neighborhood in which we lived, so some measure of social intercourse developed, and I managed finally to extract the real story from him. Well, to put it briefly, he did of course get word from “the services” objecting to my appointment. When he asked why, he was told Rejwan corresponded with Arabs to whom the authorities objected. However, when he said okay, but what if the fellow were to lodge an official complaint against me and my office—would you, “the services,” come to my aid with solid proofs? By no means, they were reported to have said, “in that case you will have to fend for yourself!”

This episode finally solved a long-standing mystery. It made it clear to me that the letter sent to me by Khalid Kishtainy, and to which I never dared reply, had somehow come to the knowledge of “the services,” since I was neither writing letters to nor receiving letters from any “Arabs.”

How was Kishtainy’s letter brought to the knowledge of “the services”? My letters were not censored, and I had made sure at the time to examine the aerogramme and had found it untouched. There is only one explanation, and on second thought I think it was largely my fault. To cut a long and bizarre story short, it all started when, shortly after receiving the letter, I showed it to a man I took to be a close friend—a fellow Iraqi who was then holding a senior position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I say it was largely my fault because I should have realized that I was putting the man, who, like the rest of the Orientals who had managed to attain fairly senior diplomatic posts, was extremely cautious and mindful mainly of promoting his career, in a difficult position: it seems that simply *knowing* of someone actually receiving a letter from an Arab—and an Iraqi working at his country’s embassy in London, to boot—and failing to report it was a cardinal sin and incriminating in the extreme. True, my friend could simply have refused to see the damning document. But he chose to take the letter to read—and after a few days he called, asking for more details. He said something to the effect that the important point was what I had written to the man to make him write what he wrote, and that he was curious to know what that was. I told him the truth—namely, that it was only a few lines scribbled in haste in some Tehran post office and whose exact wording I didn’t recall.

Needless to say, it never crossed my mind that the letter would end up being in the hands of “the services.” But it did—and the results were

to come in the form of petty harassment and in my failing to get any job anywhere in a country in which the government was ultimately the only employer.

#### TO A FRIEND WHO CHOSE TO ADAPT

Moshe (a pseudonym) was in his late teens when I first made his acquaintance; this was when he came into Al-Rabita Bookshop one hot afternoon in 1946. He introduced himself, said he knew my friend Elie Kedourie, and asked if we carried *The Trial* by Franz Kafka. This started a friendship, and he used to frequent the place and then join a few of us in our almost daily gatherings over a cup of coffee in Café Brazil or Swisse Café nearby.

He was a somewhat restless and excitable sort, judging from the frequent and often rather long phone calls he made from the bookshop. He lived with his family in a nice little house in one of Baghdad's middle-class neighborhoods where Jews, Muslims, and Christians lived side by side. Moshe used to be fond of Arabic poetry and literature, but was finally drawn to the kind of literature Elie and I were reading—poetry by, among others, Eliot, Pound, Auden, and Spender, and novels by Mann, Kafka, Orwell, Koestler.

Moshe eventually attended the Law College, spending a year or two there, then worked for a British concern somewhere outside Baghdad—and it was after leaving that job that he came to Israel in 1950, preceding me by less than a year. Like the overwhelming majority of newcomers from Iraq, he felt and spoke like a fervent Zionist, so much so that Elie in one of his letters to me quoted some of his remarks with amazement and derision. In the course of the coming years our roads crossed frequently and we became close, largely because we shared the same interests and had the same memories of our hometown and birthplace.

Throughout these years and decades, we had a running controversy on “the situation,” and on a few occasions I had the impression that we held roughly the same views, especially in those few years when I seemed to hold positions of high standing and especially when I worked as editor of *Al-Yawm*.

Moshe, however, never uttered a word about this in public, though writing was by no means foreign to him. Finally, in the mid-1960s, when the communal controversy came to the fore, he made contacts with the Sephardi Community Council in Jerusalem and started contributing a

column on the ethnic problem, with a strictly anonymous byline. He continued this for several years but never admitted his authorship, even to those, like myself, who learned about it from the president of the council himself. Outside of this, Moshe was the ideal conformist, grabbing what could be taken from the establishment and not hesitating to accept a number of rather sensitive tasks and missions connected with the Mossad (the intelligence agency also responsible for covert actions and counterterrorism) and other “research” outfits.

Relations between me and Moshe deteriorated suddenly after my ouster from the editorship of *Al-Yawm*—so much so that on one occasion he expressed amazement to a common friend that he “continued to receive and socialize with me.” This friend was himself perplexed by Moshe’s attitude when he related this to me some years later. I myself was not much surprised, but I continued to maintain relations with Moshe, almost solely because he was literally the only one of my old Baghdad friends who remained around and with whom I could still reminisce about things past and works of literature we both had read and enjoyed and discussed in those far-off days.

During one of our frequent breaks, I sat down and typed a rather long letter to Moshe, trying my best to answer some of his remarks about the views I held, but in the end decided it was not worth the bother. I give it here in full, since I find it tells a lot about us two.

April 20, 1975

Dear Moshe,

I am taking the rather unusual step to put in writing some of the things which for some years now seem to be causing misunderstanding between us two. Our friendly chat this morning has been a warning—though not the first one—of just how dangerous and how harmful it has been to make something of a mystery of “my views,” “my opinions,” “the sort of opinions I hold,” and all the rest of the unholy insinuations any healthy and well-organized Establishment makes to bury its opponents. As you well know, in Israel the Establishment refrains from debate and reasonable discourse; instead it simply indulges in mud-throwing and insinuation. “The kind of views I hold,” indeed!

Needless to say, the kind of views I hold—indeed the precise views I hold—are and have always been there for every literal person to see. But before coming to the substance of those monstrous views—which I will list in this letter for your own private benefit and so that we can do away with misunderstandings in the future—let me remind you of some

of the “points” you made in the course of the few minutes of our talk. It was only a few hours ago and I hope my memory does not fail me. I will quote only the most interesting of those points:

1. That I have to make up my mind. Either I “live here”—and supposedly do and think like the Romans do and think—or “go to Canada.” The reason given for this fascinating piece of advice is that I “cannot get the best of both worlds” (as presumably I have been trying to do all this time) but rather that I “stand to lose both worlds.”
2. That my situation—with “the sort of views I have”—was well-nigh impossible: I “work for Zionist newspapers and periodicals, write for the Zionist Radio”—in short get my livelihood from Zionist quarters—and yet keep criticizing and continue to hold “the sort of opinions” I hold.
3. When I said something about [there] being enough room and scope in Israel for the kind of views I hold as well, your prompt reply came construing “my views” as implying “the negation of everything.”
4. When I pointed out that all that vague talk about “the kind of views I hold” was dangerous and does me harm—especially when my views are seen to mean “the negation of everything”—you retorted that you were the only person in this land who had not done me harm—indeed that it was you who suggested to the Foreign Ministry to employ me as monitor of the Arab press for them.

Well, it seems that we hold two totally different opinions as to the nature of this state and this society. To put it bluntly: Whereas you take this society to be a monolithic, authoritarian, intolerant one in which only one ideology, one policy and one world view could prevail, I believe that there is—or ought to be—enough scope in it for more than one view. If there isn’t—and in the past there have been, God knows, instances of intolerance and monolithicity—then there simply should be.

You know, Moshe, I have always been struck by a deep, very deep paradox, which exists not only in this society but is I believe universal. This is that it is precisely the critics of a society or a social order who are usually the optimists, the people who take a more positive view of the kind of society they live in. They usually give the society—the Establishment if you like—the benefit of the doubt, in that they assume it will be amenable to change and reform and, most important of all, that it has good will towards the populace and means well by them. It is the conformists who take the bleak, pessimistic view of their society—especially the enlightened among them whom one *knows* to be secretly

discontented and who one knows have quite a few misgivings about the way things are and are run. I don't use the word "cowards" because, on a much deeper level, it is not cowardice but pessimism—together with an extremely *low* view which they take of the Establishment and its intentions—that makes them give up hope of change and try to make do by keeping their opinions to themselves.

What I am driving at here is very simple. It is that you, by judging this society to be monolithic for all time, virtually unchangeable through human effort, condemn it in a far [more] pronounced way than people like myself—even "with the kind of views" I hold—are alleged to be doing. Let us put it another way (but this is only a supposition and cannot apply in all cases): Those who hold that an Israeli citizen must choose between conformism of some kind and "going to Canada" betray the authoritarian personality in them rather than the authoritarian character of the regime. Unfortunately, the authoritarian approach—which usually comes from regimentation in childhood and early childhood in addition to a general background of authoritarianism—is common more among Israelis who come from Sephardi, Middle Eastern and North African countries than among those of European origin, even if we are talking of Eastern Europe.

What I list as number 2 above is even more terrible in its implications than the preceding item. It so happens that my profession is writing and my specialization is the Arab world. If the work of a specialist on the Arab world is a respectable one and not mere propaganda then it is a discipline like any other and one should market it wherever it is taken. Now it so happens, too, that I live in this country and that the outlets for the kind of work I do are confined to what you so disarmingly call "Zionist newspapers and periodicals and the Zionist radio." Of course I know what you mean; but I most energetically reject it. What you mean is that no matter what one does one lives on the charity of the Zionist Establishment and is perforce serving its ends. As I said, I don't agree with you there; to me the important point is that I hold no post of responsibility in which I have to conduct and/or interpret policies with which I am in essential disagreement. In short, I refuse rather than seek "to get the best of both worlds!"

Let me explain. The implication of what you say about having the best of both worlds is, plainly, that while I draw my livelihood from a certain source I keep being critical of that source. Had I been Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, the director of the Arabic radio, the editor of an official daily or an organ of the ruling political grouping—had I

been any of these and some others I think your argument would have made some sense. But you know full well that I gave up one such job in disgust precisely because I couldn't take it any longer; you know that I even stopped writing for *The Jerusalem Post* about the Arab world when I found out that what I had been supposed to be doing there was to be the court's jester and "*their*" specialist on Arab affairs. It was then that I *refused* to have the best of both worlds—since I was beginning to feel very critical indeed of official policies and attitudes especially in the ethnic and Arab fields. To the best of my knowledge, since then I have been confining myself to doing either technical work—as when I tried to get a job as news editor in TV and afterwards in the radio—or the kind of interpretation and comment on the Arab world which I can take full responsibility for. Your insinuation in this respect was thus as wrong factually as it was uncharitable.

I am not going to take up Point 4 in any detail. However, you know how these things are sometimes. Without meaning any harm one can do a lot of it—especially when one is dealing with the kind of people who, by a combination of cowardice, ill will and jealousy, would not mind making the utmost of even such a harmless hint as the one pertaining to "the kind of views I hold." To give you an example (with great reluctance, to be sure): a neighbor of neighbors of ours who are on very friendly terms with foreign ministry official Mrs. Yael Vered has on several occasions these past few weeks accused me—with any provocation whatsoever—of being "anti-Israel" and all that crap which goes with "the kind of views" I hold.

Presently I will give you a brief summary of those views. As long as they are disputed on their own merits and demerits—as far as they are comprehended as they are—I don't give a damn to what people would think of them or of their bearer. But I strongly resent, as dangerous, harmful and *silly*, all generalizations based on hearsay rather than a careful examination of the views themselves. I expect this not from everybody but from certain types of people, first and foremost those whom I consider friends and who, in addition, are preoccupied with the subject with which I have been dealing.

As I have said already, my views are on record, in writing and freely available to everyone who cares to know them. Since about 1967 I have taken every care to pass to you reprints of such articles which I have been writing and that have a bearing on what I think about this society and the way it was run. The reason for this may now sound paradoxical; but the fact remains that in our many and long conversations during the

Fifties and Sixties—in fact all through our life in this country—we tried to thrash out the subject. In the years which preceded my departure from *Al-Yawm*, especially, there seemed to me to be a virtual identity of views between us, and some time in 1966 or even in 1965 you actually started an anonymous column in one of the obscure Sephardi publications in which you continue to give vent to your views on the ethnic problems in Israel. (True, since my break with the Establishment you have become wary, going to the silly length of disowning authorship of the column. But this, though it seemed extremely insulting to me at the time, I managed to take in good humour. And you speak of having the best of both worlds!)

Now about my notorious “views.” I will be as brief as possible so that you read and contemplate them before you pass generalized judgment about the kind of views I hold.

\* I believe, and I have gone on record, that Israel is a Middle Eastern state—or should aspire to be such—in more than the merely geographical sense. Her history, her demography, her basic long-term interests, and the soundness of the health of her body social, all make it imperative for her to be, or try to be as sincerely and as energetically as she could, part and parcel of the Middle East and the so-called third world.

\* The status of Israel’s Middle Eastern element, comprising just over half of the population, is organically linked with the way the country sees herself, with her self-image. If this self-image is one of a European, allegedly Western community whose misfortune it has been to be plunged into a primitive Asiatic world then there is no real future for her non-European inhabitants—not for this generation and not for the coming ones.

\* The doctrine of “Arab antisemitism” is a piece of nonsense perpetrated by those Israelis who seek to deepen the conflict with the surrounding Arab world. Their aim is twofold—namely to prevent the Middle Eastern element from taking up its rightful place in the society (a development which would have been made possible by peace and which, in their opinion, would have led to Levantinization or Arabization) and possible self-aggrandisement and fortification, on the assumption that “time was on Israel’s side.”

\* The sorry state of the Arabs in Israel—and it was and is sorry—led me to reflect on the whole subject of the State’s so-called Jewishness. As you know, the concept of Israel had developed in the course of the past eight decades from “a home for Jews,” through “a national home for the Jewish people,” to “the Jewish State.” It is common among common people not to ask too many questions; but when one does ponder this concept of Israel as “the Jewish

State" what does one find? I own that the man most responsible for opening my eyes on this particular aspect of the problem was our mutual friend ex-prime minister's Advisor on Arab Affairs Shmuel Toledano, who in the course of a private conversation said verbatim: "It's altogether nonsensical to speak of 'Israeli Arabs'; they belong to another nationality!" Subsequently Toledano publicized his view although he formulated it a little differently. "It is," he declared some time in the summer of 1966, "impossible for an Israeli Arab to be totally loyal to the State of Israel because he belongs to another nationality." Enlarging on this novel theme, he at one occasion said it wouldn't be "fair" to ask an Israeli Arab to be quite loyal to Israel, because it would not be fair to ask him to believe in "Jewish national values." He also laid it down that an Arab living in Israel was "part of the Arab world."

Now all this talk was taken as somewhat liberal in its intentions—and good and sensible people took it at its face value. Come to think of it, however, what the man was saying was the most horrible monstrosity ever encountered in the sphere of human relations within the boundaries of a modern, allegedly democratic society. For what he was saying was this: Israel is a Jewish State in the same sense that France is a French State, Italy an Italian State, Britain British and Iraq Iraqi. It logically follows that only those who are designated as Jews can be Israelis—and that those who aren't Jews and who happen to live in Israel can never aspire to be full citizens from whom one can expect "complete loyalty", whatever that is. He made no mention of the Israeli-Arab conflict as a factor in the Arabs' present status in Israel (you know the talk about Arab taking up arms against Arab and all the rest of the crap). He did not say that the Israeli Arab's disability was something temporary. He did not even say that "complete loyalty" was to be expected from *some* Israeli Arabs. What he did was simply and flatly to deny the very feasibility of a non-Jew ever being a full-fledged citizen of this country.

Naturally I couldn't, and never would, take this for a final and authoritative definition of a state and a society in which after all we have chosen to live and bring up our children. Israel, of course, should be a state like any other; it should be like France, like Italy, Britain and Iraq. However, she never could be "Jewish" in the same sense as these countries are French, Italian etc. Indeed, the sense in which Israel is Jewish is not to be found any more in any country in this world. To find a parallel for an Israel that is Jewish in the sense France is French we will have to go far: It would be as if France would decide that it is a Roman Catholic State, the United States a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) State,

Iraq a Moslem State—and then announce that no non-Roman Catholic could be a French citizen, no non-WASP could be a U.S. citizen, and no non-Moslem could be an Iraqi citizen.

Since this would be a veritable monstrosity in any of these countries, I came to the conclusion that it was not less so in Israel. The result was that I started advocating—and continue to envisage—an *Israeli* Israel in which non-Jews can be equal citizens “completely loyal” to the State (which phrase I take only to mean observance of a State’s laws and regulations; “complete loyalty” to any State sounds too much like an obscenity to me).

Lest I be misunderstood, the Israeli Israel which I envisage will not by any means have to discard her Jewish majority or her status as a haven for Jews who want to come and settle here. Only perhaps that our immigration laws should be revised to be on the lines of those of the United States which are based on the quota system; Israel will thereby receive immigrants in proportion to her ethnic composition—say 85% Jews and 15% Arabs.

These are, very briefly, the kind of views I held prior to the Six-Day War, and which I consistently maintained throughout the chauvinistic-racial orgy which followed that war and which took a number of years to cool off somewhat. I do not deem them as being tantamount to “the negation of everything.” Mind you, I have full respect for those who, in answer to my arguments, have argued that they have their own life to lead, their families to support, their peace of mind to maintain, their personal affairs and interests to attend to. Some such approach you have propounded to me on more than one occasion—and I respected you for it. But this is a far cry indeed from the habit of dismissing my views as implying total negation—and an even farther cry from the admonition, “Go to Canada”—or the even cheaper “charge” of a split personality. Woe on a society in which people have only one choice—to conform or “go to Canada.” We both know which society presents this sort of alternative nowadays.

But what really gets me in your attitude of mind this morning was that it should be evinced *now*, over a year after the Yom Kippur War. As I said above, throughout the post-June 1967 period I never changed my views (in fact I always thought that the Six-Day War was a veritable calamity for Israel, in the long run); but I expect—and mostly find—a little openness of mind now to “the kind of views” I hold, especially that in my estimation the Yom Kippur War [of October 1973] has seen every single one of my views and premonitions justified and vindicated. I like

to think of myself not as the sort of man who would say: I told you so! I do not consider myself another Columbus; what I said was sheer common sense to me, and the fact that the powers-that-be here stubbornly refused to read the writing on the wall was incomprehensible to a man like me.

It is not true to say that "the world has changed," implying that what has been happening since October 6, 1973 is something of a *freak*, something which no one could have predicted. This is simply not true. Nothing has changed in the objective state of things. Arab oil, for instance, was always there; its importance as a potential political weapon was always there potentially and it was the job of Israeli policy-makers to take it fully into account. Also, Soviet weaponry was there for everybody to see, and God knows we had a very efficient intelligence service.

Even Arab solidarity was there in potential, since the Six-Day War and its aftermath were a crying insult to *all* Arabs and we should have been wise enough to realize that there is nothing as unifying as an injury commonly and collectively felt. Again, the Palestinians were there, very much so, and we should have realized that a policy of the kind we pursued in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—a policy which barred the emergence of any kind of leadership—was bound to leave the P.L.O. the only champion in the field. These factors, and others besides, were all there for every discerning man to see—and it was primarily the job of the politicians and the Government to see and to foresee. But this was prevented by factors which had to do with the whole attitude and ideology of this country—an attitude and an ideology against which my very modest efforts can be said to have been directed.

I want to conclude this letter-credo. "The kind of views" which I held during the past ten years or so—and which I continue to hold—seem to me to be *precisely* the ones which ought to be acceptable today more than at any time during the past decade. Far from amounting to "the negation of everything" I believe these views to be the only way out for Israel at this juncture—the only guarantee for her long-term survival in this area. It has been conclusively proved that Israel will never be able to live by the sword alone; that the Palestinians continue to be the core of the Arab-Israeli mess and that no amount of Pan-Arab preaching on the part of our Foreign Ministry can lead to the surrender of their right as a separate Arab entity; and that to survive Israel will have to be *accepted* by her neighbors.

**OFT-CELEBRATED VICTORY****DIARY**

Ramat Gan, November 30, 1967

What with the cheers and the jubilations that followed the country's resounding military victory of the Six-Day War and the endless talk of the "miracle" of Israel and its Jews managing to be saved from total annihilation, these past few weeks I have been trying hard to get interested in something not Jewish. Not in the least an easy task. I am a so-called Arab affairs analyst but, alas, the Arabs' chief problem these days is a Jewish one. Moral: there are no more any *Arab* problems to deal with! I have a literary "bent" and often read Arabic stories and poems, but during the past five months since the Six-Day War no Arab writer worthy of the name has written anything not connected with "the June Disaster." I am also an amateur sociologist, but all the sociology which interested me of late is Max Weber and Werner Sombart's literary efforts on . . . the Jews. And need one mention the newspapers? The other day I decided I had enough of the local press and started reading the London *Times*; well, all I read there concerns the Middle East, leaving the rest for the afternoon which never comes. This morning's newspaper has the Jewish story of the century: All the 57 Israeli-Jewish musicians and singers of the Israel Music Hall prefer *treife* to kosher food, so much so that the Pan American jet which started from London had to turn back to the airport to unload the kosher food (which someone had specifically ordered) and take an ordinary English menu. Over here, a number of rabbis have protested to Eshkol [Levi Eshkol (1895–1969), third prime minister of Israel (1963–1969)] et al.: "We regard this as a disgrace to the whole Jewish people," they lamented. What! Did they say the Jewish people?

February 10, 1968

An air of obstinate and ominous silence has always surrounded the subject of intercommunal relations in Israel. Russian-born veteran Israeli essayist and man of letters Shlomo Zemah finds this silence suspect and fraught with danger—and has therefore written a series of six articles for the mass-circulation evening paper *Ma'ariv* in which he articulates his sentiments about the subject.

As a man of letters, Zemah feels very deeply about his subject. "The Ashkenazi," he writes, addressing the Oriental Jew in Israel, "demands from you mutability and forgetfulness. And you wonder—and I share in this wonder: 'Why, O why? I am not willing to cease being myself and surrender my soul. I am of the Orient; why should I cease to be what I have always been? Why should I uproot myself from the Orient to which you, the Jews of the Occident, have returned and from which I never departed?'"

Thus, though he is no sociologist, Zemah manages to put his finger on the source of the malady. "The Ashkenazim think you have to adapt to them and to take from them, while they have neither to adapt to you nor to take anything from you. This is the great mistake and this is the terrible wrong." It is highly significant, in this connection, that Zemah links together the two equally objectionable concepts of "Fusion of the Exiles" (*Mizzug Galuyot*) and "Light unto the Nations" (*Or La-Goyim*). The idea common to both of these concepts, he writes, is that of "guidance to backward peoples so as to provide them with culture!" This misguided feeling of superiority, he implies, has done as much damage to the prospects of normal Israeli relations with the Arabs as it has done in the sphere of intercommunal relations in Israel.

It has often been remarked that the present frantic attempts by the Ashkenazi establishment in Israel to "re-create" the Oriental Jew in the image of its own members can lead only to alienation. Some call it "levantinization," and Zemah is fully aware of this danger. He warns against the danger of what he calls "fossilized easternness," which he says can result from too much emphasis on the outward trappings of westernism, such as technology and material progress. He shrewdly adds, however, that "levantinism" can be the lot of Occidental and Oriental Israelis alike; already, he points out, we have been witnessing its manifestations in the behavior of the so-called *sabras*.

February 21, 1968

The other day my doctor said something that set me wondering. I told her I had high temperature, something I never seem to have, no matter what virus gets hold of me. "Believe me," she said, "that this is good, it's good you got a high temperature. What on earth! Letting all those microbes roam inside your system without your body ever reacting!" The interesting thing about this is that I never seem to react, and not merely to viruses. So I spent a few days in bed congratulating myself that, at long last, I was actually *reacting*. And, who knows, maybe the act of reacting will, with time, go beyond mere microbes! . . .

In bed I planned to read a whole library, but in the end I managed "only" two books: Malamud's *Fixer* and Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, a thing of delight, a real gem which I don't know how I had missed for so long. I would like to know more about American Jewry, especially since I tend to agree with a rabbi-professor of mine who believes that "only in America is there hope that the Jewish religion will prove worthy of the Jews, perhaps even of the current age." As a matter of fact, I have far-reaching plans in this respect though they are so far mere irons in the fire.

February 22, 1968

Yesterday I had my first inkling of just how it must feel to be a "first generation" parent. Our Ilan, not yet nine, gave me the following lecture while I was trying to show him how to cut sausages into slices: "It's we who ought to show you how to do things. After all, you are Jordanians, sorry Iraqis!" "And what, pray, are you?" "I am a Jew, a veteran Jew from Israel!" "But you are less 'veteran' than I am; I have spent twice as many years as you did in this country!" "That doesn't count; the important thing is where you were born and brought up. Don't you know what seniority means?" Ample food for thought!

July 25, 1968

Professor Jacob Talmon is at it again! In an article in the June 1968 issue of *Commentary*, "Israel Among the Nations," he asserts that it is Israel's "good fortune" that there has been no serious, and certainly no effective, attempt on the part of the Oriental Jews to organize themselves into a separate political party. Because, he says, "any such attempt would have been fraught with grave danger from demagogues and rabble-rousers."

"As it is," the professor adds, "incidents of riots in the course of

twenty years can be counted on the fingers of one hand.” A cause for jubilation and thanksgiving! Talmon’s thesis, however, strikes me as a surprisingly shortsighted, not to say thoughtless, view of the situation—and indeed as inaccurate a historical appraisal as can be expected only from hand-to-mouth politicians and party functionaries. Surely our history professor is too well informed *not* to be aware that riots, even revolutions, usually break out in the absence of political organization rather than as a result of such organization? He must know, similarly, that demagogues and rabble-rousers usually thrive when the groups with which they choose to identify are unorganized, lacking in cohesion, inarticulate and non-vocal.

For myself, I honestly believe that, viewed in historical perspective, it would have been a piece of “good fortune” for Israel had the Oriental element in its population—now said to constitute more than half of the Jewish population—found their way to some sort of separate political organization set up on a communal-cultural basis. For the truth is that such organization continues to be the only way through which a group can get its share of the “national pie.” In the absence of this—with the Orientals virtually disfranchised—the dilemma facing Israel appeared to me to be far worse, namely how to get this half of the population to obtain its share of power without unrest and upheaval? After all, there was no way—barring an open dictatorship—in which these masses could forever be denied their elementary right to be represented by their own leaders, demagogues or otherwise, in the highest echelons of power.

I took the trouble to pen the draft of a lengthy letter to the editor of *Commentary* setting forth my thoughts on the subject—but I did not send the letter, out of boredom, disgust or perhaps sheer despair. In that draft, however, I tried to explain that the situation about which Talmon sounded so pleased and contented was “fraught with dangers.” “The few Orientals who are permitted by the present power structure to ‘represent’ their community in the government and the Knesset,” I added, “are viewed by those whom they are claimed to represent as the Uncle Toms they are perceived to be by their very patrons and bosses. They represent no one but the party machines that find it useful to include them in the Knesset election lists every four years or so.”

“One more point,” I went on.

A 20-page article in *Commentary* by the professor of modern history at the Hebrew University must be something very special indeed. However,

apart from a few perceptive remarks regarding the position of the Jews in America today, I find the article replete with the kind of habitual platitudes one constantly encounters in the daily press these post-Six Day War days. To give one glaring example: In the course of his attempt to prove how Zionism was “the richest of . . . all” nationalist movements, Talmon writes that Israel “has also exploded many of the most rooted and widely held fallacies about Jews.” Of these fallacies, he lists Theodor Mommsen’s conviction that the Jew lacked all talent for politics; Renan’s belief that Jews possessed no aptitude for philosophy, science and the arts; and the idea common to all Gentiles that the Jews could not fight, were all cowards, and knew nothing of military honor. All that, he adds, has now been changed by Israel.

It would seem quite superfluous to point out to a man of Talmon’s caliber, however, that all that has been accomplished in this field has been the substitution of one stereotype of the Jews by another, perforce equally false stereotype. . . . The episode which he cites in support of his thesis—the report about the open-mouthed French shopkeeper who, in June 1967, expressed astonishment that Poland could have been so quickly beaten by the Germans in 1939 “when there were so many Jews in Poland in those days”—itself furnishes a striking illustration of the absurdity of all stereotyping, whether “good” or “bad” for the Jews. To accept, as Talmon implicitly does, any part of this stereotyping as valid is to indulge in dangerous generalizations. There is nothing in particular that can be said to be “Jewish” or pertains to “the Jews” except the code of conduct called Judaism. Jews can be good soldiers or bad, wily politicians or stupid ones, morally and physically courageous or cowardly. They can also be as fanatical and as jingoistic a bunch of nationalists as exponents of any other nationalist movement past and present.

July 27, 1968

Talmon was not the only bona fide liberal Israeli whose views I had to contest in the period immediately following the Six-Day War. Abraham B. Yehoshua, the well-known Israeli novelist of some of whose short fiction I was very fond indeed, gave an interview in which he said that the Sephardim in pre-State Palestine had not known what Zionism was, let alone been guided by it. The tone was clearly one of blame, and I wrote him a letter late in May 1968 defending those Sephardim, who I said were busy scraping up a living, and also were free from that Central and East European rash I called ethnic nationalism.

His reply was prompt and detailed. While he and I are in agreement

on most of the issues I write about, he said, the real point of difference between us had to do with our respective views of Zionism. He, he explained, views Zionism as “a brilliant rescue movement whose mission remained far from concluded.” So far, though, the movement can boast of rescuing, in addition to the hundreds of thousands of European Jews, the communities of the Arab states which, “even without the State of Israel would have fallen victim to the caprices of the Arab nationalist movement.”

Yehoshua concluded, “No nostalgia can be of any help for us. I myself am not nostalgic about anything. We have to be protective of each other (*'arevim zeh la-zeh'*) and therefore [willing] to destroy one community in order to build two others.”

To this I replied saying that there was no certainty that the Arab nationalist movement would anyway have molested and/or expelled the Jews of the Arab world; that Zionism’s two cardinal sins were the cynical way in which it had bowdlerized Judaism on the one hand, and its belief that the end justifies the means, on the other.

August 2, 1968

I find myself engaged in another controversy! Michael Selzer’s book, *The Aryanization of Israel*, has been reviewed in *Commentary* by the well-known Hebrew University political scientist, Shlomo Avineri. The review was, of course, unfavorable, and to refute some of the points raised by the reviewer I jotted some notes which I thought I would send *Commentary*. I never did. I quote these notes here:

Dr. Avineri may be right in accusing Selzer of “ignoring the hard facts of social structure,” of “inability to confront sociological factors,” of “manic insistence that an ideology [‘Zionism’] is at the root of all that went wrong,” and of maintaining that “ideology can be discussed outside the context of social relations.” But surely he is overstating the case when he assigns “ideology” little or no significance at all? It was the great sociologist Thomas who made the observation, fifty years ago, that “if men define a situation as real, it becomes real in its consequences.” Merton said the same thing—in a different formulation, calling it the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Avineri is surely aware that ideology is one way of “defining the situation”—and when the ideology is the ruling one, its defining of the situation becomes correspondingly more and more real in its results! This is truer of the situation in Israel than anywhere else. Eliezer Livneh, a clas-

sic Zionist, once boasted that Zionism was “against history”; he further boasted that Zionism was “against geography.” This is only a layman’s way of remarking on how profoundly effective and fateful certain definitions of the situation can be, and how self-fulfilling a prophecy can turn out to be.

The basic issue here can be formulated in the form of two questions: Is or isn’t there such a thing as an Oriental culture? Does this culture materially and qualitatively differ from something else called Western culture? Does “modernization” mean “Westernization”? If it does not—if modernization is possible without Westernization, as it has proved to be in the case of Japan, say—then Avineri’s whole argument falls to pieces, and becomes the same sort of “interesting intellectual game” of which he accuses Selzer.

Dr. Avineri seems to be arguing not against Selzer but against Dr. Avineri. He repeatedly remarks on “grains of truth,” on cases that “might reasonably be made,” on “legitimate positions” in Selzer’s polemics—and characterizes the author’s three main points as “arguments which have some substance to them.” Yet in each case he eagerly seizes on the smallest detail, the least overstatement and most insignificant sign of sensationalism in order to “demolish” the argument. The sheer gusto with which he does this gives rise to a persistent suspicion, especially in the mind of one who is familiar with Avineri’s far from conformist views on the subjects dealt with by Selzer.

## SOUL MATES

One of the many Jewish intellectuals and academics I came to know in the immediate post-Six-Day War period was Irene Gendzier, a professor of history at Boston University and author of a book on an Egyptian-Jewish subject. I met Irene, I think, through the monthly *New Outlook*—and it seemed, as the cliche has it, a marriage of true minds. Excerpts from some of my letters to her follow.

Ramat Gan, September 20, 1968

The trouble with dissent, the refusal to accept things as they are, the fervent desire to see them changed, is not that they mean having to face great odds and make certain sacrifices and more or less opt out of “society.” The real trouble is that there is no way of knowing where precisely change may lead, the “young Turks” being invariably worse than

their fathers. I have been trying to promote the cause of the Orientals and of non-Jews in Israel, but I am blessed if I can say that any of these individually—or all of them as groups—need must prove any better than the present powers-that-be. In fact I suspect that they may turn out to be far worse!

Remember my merciless interrogation at the airport? You guessed right: I was speaking about—interrogating—myself. Here was I, not a Marxist, with a distinct distaste for “revolution” and all kinds of violence, detesting activism of any kind, a great skeptic where human nature is concerned, at least in politics; in short, totally apolitical. Still, I am in what people consider deep and radical “dissent.” I do not remember whether it was before or after you came to the Holy Land, but recently I had a curious experience. I gave an hour-long, almost 10,000-word talk to a group of American students on the communal problem. At the end of the talk and the ensuing discussion, a girl took me aside and said: “You know what? I think you are a *cynic!*” She said it in a friendly way—and the reason why she said it was that, when pressed on what was to be *done* and what was *I* going to do, I replied, in all honesty, that I didn’t know—that I on my part did not mean to *do* much about it by way of actual political organization or action.

Not a cynic, no—rather a dilettante, with a merely intellectual interest in things political! How does that sound? It reminds me of Julian Benda and his “*trahison*.” Why must intellectuals meddle in politics! Look at Marcuse. I did not tell you that one of the things which causes my present mood is Lasky’s article in the August *Encounter*; another is the landslide toward the right, recently in France, now in America. In the midst of the student revolution in France, Raymond Aron is reported as having recommended a rereading of Tocqueville. It strikes me as an excellent piece of advice.

One of these days I hope to convince you that Left—whether Old or New—does not in itself mean very much, especially in the kind of context in which we deal. The real test lies elsewhere. Also, I must warn you against equating Zionism with Judaism or with being “religious”; normally the contrary is true. For someone to say he so detests Zionists that he is an atheist is to fall head-on into the Zionists’ trap. The rape of Judaism by tribal nationalists and political careerists has continued for the past 80 years almost unabated and the time has come for a clean break. There lies the *only* real hope. . . .

Apropos Judaism and Zionism, you will be interested to know that Elie [Kedourie] is a deeply religious man. Which strikes me as curious,

suddenly! There is no doubt that our common upbringing and cultural background have something to do with our view of Judaism—and with the fact that that view is different from the one usually held by “Westerners,” who speak freely of “secular Judaism.” Needless to say, for a man like me, secular Judaism is an obscenity. But everything cannot be told in one brief letter!

October 7, 1968

I have a strong urge to sit down one of these days and type thousands and thousands of words about my experiences, memories, feelings, background—so that one day I can read the stuff and try to put two and two together: How did *I* get embroiled in “this mess.” In one of your letters you write that you were trying to organize your thoughts on this same subject. I hope you have succeeded, but I am doubtful—I mean about your ability to do it in one brief article or something. One has to go to the roots of the matter, to start from the beginning. I don’t know if I ever told you, but I had an idea of writing a book titled *The Growth of a Quagmire: A Journey to Israel* or some such wording, in which I would set out to tell the story of my involvement—to be interspersed with my collected works on The Problem during the past 16 years or so, i.e., since I started actually writing about it. However, I now realize that even such an enterprise would not be enough to tell the whole story, and that I shall have to start earlier. (This is a case study in How Not to Write a Damned Thing!) Tell me if you have the same sort of feeling about the subject, as we are dealing with the same sort of problem in our separate ways. Or better still, how does the idea strike you of actually trying to put on paper a record of those experiences that must have led to those particular involvements? You always speak of Memmi and Fanon. Do you think they managed to do this in their respective autobiographies?

[Note: Albert Memmi (b. 1920) and Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) wrote about the effects of colonization in Africa.]

October 16, 1968

You ask what I do with the kids. You couldn’t have touched a more painful spot: I almost don’t! And all the time I go around with a terrible guilt feeling—guilt towards the kids, toward Rachel and toward myself. When he finally decided that Dollinger had let him down, Acton wrote: “I am absolutely alone in my essential ethical position, and therefore useless. . . . The probability of doing good by writings so isolated and repulsive, of obtaining influence for my views, etc., is so small that I

have no right to sacrifice to it my own tranquility and my duty of educating my children. My time can be better employed than in waging a hopeless war. And the more my life has been thrown away, the more necessary to turn now, and employ better what remains.” [Note: Lord Acton (1834–1902) parted ways with his mentor, Johann Ignaz von Dollinger (1799–1890), when Acton asserted that historians’ writings must denounce evil, and Dollinger, who held that they need only be descriptive, demurred.]

Now to hell with one’s own tranquility, but that business about the kids robs me of my peace of mind. However, Rony is almost eleven, Ilan is 9 and a genius, and Amir is five and a *scream*. Apart from the fact that they are ours biologically, they are all creatures of this time and this place and this unspeakable culture—and it all *shows*, in their behavior, the incredible aggressiveness of their language, their unpredictability and their restlessness. But enough of that for this time. . . .

You ask what Rachel means by saying that I am naive. It’s a long story, and I may return to it in one of my projected Epistles. But you yourself provide something of an answer when you so wisely say that one creates a world, a world unto itself, but a world that is far better than the one which often exists outside of it. Well, to cut a long story short, it seems that I tend to create such worlds *about people* and, what is disastrous, proceed to act upon them! This Rachel calls naiveté. Got a better name for it?

November 12, 1968

You must know me enough by now to realize that I couldn’t be farther from being a fatalist. Do you seriously think that a “fatalist” would behave in the way I have been behaving? It is true that I do not like fighting—on the personal level, I mean. But that springs from disdain and a refusal to suffer fools or to keep repeating the obvious—and also this stupid refusal to accept the laws of the jungle. This may be arrogance—it isn’t fatalism. And if I frequently refer to my “fatalism,” it is only part of that corrosive cynicism about which you know so well. Like you, I too strive to keep a balance between too much self-confidence and too much resignation. I have had too many disappointments at one time to be able to digest them in one go. Yet I feel absolutely certain that I shall overcome them eventually. So I do hope—to the extent that you include me among those people to whom you are attached—that you will “derive strength from” me. If you will allow me to repeat myself for the millionth time, the feeling, the aspiration, the hope are mutual. . . .

Now do tell me: What's the alternative to self-restraint? I have been giving this matter more thought than either you realize or I would care to. Sometimes I begin to wonder if the corrosion is not too costly (because self-restraint in face of certain outrages is invariably corrosive), and that the balance of profit and loss would be the same, would perhaps even become favorable, if one occasionally comes out with it. At other times I wonder, however. And between one orgy of wondering and another. . . . Ah well!

January 6, 1969

What is the point of one's willfully and consciously destroying oneself—and a few others—for no clear or comprehensible purpose! The Arab-Israeli mess, to which I and to a certain extent you as well fell victim, is like nothing one can think of, neither past nor present; to try to influence it is far, far worse than being just quixotic. Of course one is right: One can even say that in this particular case one has a monopoly on good sense and right judgment. The Arabs have suffered, they have been driven stark mad; the Jewish nationalists are just about the worst tribalists-racists-culturists-ethnocentrists; obviously, the only and one hope for peace and quiet is de-Zionizing, de-Westernizing Israel, letting her Oriental element have its share in running its affairs. And so on. But ponder this: Peace with the Arabs is a sine qua non of de-Zionizing! And when you go around saying that it is the other way around—that de-Zionizing is a prerequisite for peace with the Arabs—where do you go from here? . . .

No, I am not surprised that minorities retain, or are encouraged to retain, a distinctive identity! What surprises me is that they feel so awkward about it—that they cannot do it naturally and without such a fuss. We lived in a predominantly Moslem society, but we took things rather lightly and, as I told you, I never for once used to feel worked up about it. And then you have this business about *secular* Judaism. You speak of Jews as a religion and of assimilation as conversion. Yet that does not seem to me to be the point, at least it is not the point that worries the alleged guardians of the Jews at your end. It's not the religion that they seek to preserve. As you know, Lewis Namier had a very kosher Anglican burial, yet he was a good Jew to these people. On the other hand, the Rebbe of Lubavitch may be an excellent Jew and retain his Jewish identity to the end of his days—but for these biological Jews he will be no more than a “self-hating Jew.” I am worried by this question because it has an obvious bearing on the situation here. Do I make myself clear?

[Note: Lewis Bernstein Namier (1888–1960) was a Polish-born British historian.]

January 15, 1969

“For whom? Who pays?” you ask. And my feeling is that I more or less answered that one in my last letter. Needless to say, most of the corrosive effects of what I call self-restraint come from the feeling that the sacrifice is just not worth it, neither politically nor personally. Precisely: For whom? Who pays? But also: To what end? Who *gains*? The disconcerting thing is, of course, that often he who ought to pay, receives—he who should lose, gains—and all that you have done is merely blown yourself cool! What a thoroughly nauseating situation!

In connection with my various literary efforts, you raise a cardinal point—I mean this business of my habit of quoting others. I have often wondered about this myself. Now you say my own opinion is, of course, as valid as that of those whom I quote. You are right as far as “opinion” is concerned. But then you say I quote “historians.” How then can I pretend that my own estimates, findings, strictly historical conclusions and so on are “as valid” as those of Baron, Goitein or [Montgomery] Watt? I think it is only *fair* to acknowledge one’s debt—and since I deal with terribly delicate topics I want no misunderstandings of any sort. I cannot pretend to match—not to speak of surpassing—the idiotic Cecil Roth’s knowledge or scholarship in his own field—as I invoke Baron and Goitein and call them to the witness box. I cannot masquerade as a scholar in Judaic studies, rabbinics and so on—so when I want to define who a Jew is (or, more crucially, what the Jews are), I have to go to some authority for that. And so on and so forth. I am dwelling on this at length because the question worries me too, and because I want your opinion again now that you have heard my plea. [Note: Salo Wittmayer Baron (1895–1989) was an eminent historian of Jewish history and society; Shelomo Dov Goitein (1900–1985) was a historian and an Arabist; Cecil Roth (1899–1970) was a Jewish historian and an expert in Jewish art.]

But, of course, I am being only partly right! Often enough my vice of quotation extends to *opinions*—as when I conclude my open society essay with that sentence from Popper about tribalism. This is less easy to defend I suppose—though my defense would probably take the same sort of line as the above. The formulation is so, so telling; the opinion is so damned good and novel; the man’s title to have his credit; and my own scanty importance. To be honest, I may add here that once I have

seen something nicely and tellingly put in words, I become somewhat “speechless” and my own powers of formulation become limited!

And again from what I see being done (with writers paraphrasing, summarizing, or just very nearly plagiarizing other writers’ ideas without acknowledgement), I feel uneasy about the whole thing. I will give you one example near at hand. I have, of course, always felt that when some Israeli celebrity and I speak of this vexed subject of nation and nationality we speak about two different things springing from our respective approaches to the subject. But it was only after reading Namier, Acton and [Bernard] Lewis that I gained enough self-confidence to spell it out in writing. Having done so, however, how in the world could I possibly ignore the debt I owed these three people? Besides, the amassing of such names is itself probably an advantage.

February 19, 1969

. . . Weird about Shimon Shamir and your being “pro-Arab.” I cannot believe that in our long correspondence I never told you what I thought of this whole business of being pro-Arab or pro-Jewish or pro-anything. It just simply fails to make any sense to me! What the hell does it mean—I mean how anyone with a modicum of intelligence and sense *can* be pro- any collectivity or anti- anything so anonymous, so indefinable, so variegated as the Arabs or the Jews or the Anglo-Saxons or the Slavs? *Are* you pro-Arab—I mean do you consider yourself such? You obviously don’t—and it is obvious that it is only your desire to be balanced and fair that gives people that impression. But you surely realize that there are a number—any number—of ways of being fair and balanced, and in a tangled situation like this Arab-Jew business one must be very careful not to tip the scales. To cut a long story short, I would say that the first step on the road to wisdom is to try to make things entirely clear to ourselves: Who are the parties to this dispute? Are they the Arabs and the Jews, the Arab Nationalists (Pan-Arabs) and the Zionists (Pan-Jews), the Israelis and the Palestinian Arabs? Then the job becomes easier—namely, to decide what each side must do to make it possible for the other to accept him. It is my view—as I have indicated in my last few epistles—that though the demand for de-Zionization is completely justified, it is totally impractical to make it now.

But before we deal with this point, let us first agree that the parties to this mess are the Israelis and the Palestinians. Now: for the past twenty or fifty years the issue has been presented in the wrong light. Whether by chance or by design it was both pan-Arabized and pan-Judaized—

and the job now is to de-Arabize *and* de-Judaize it. The June war has gone a long way in the direction of de-Arabization. Nasser himself in his January 20 address practically washed his hands of the whole business, handing the custody over to the “organizations.” What remains now is the other process—and this is where I think I have made up my mind. My conviction is this. No de-Zionization is feasible—not even *justifiable*—unless the “Arabs” (in this case the Palestinians) agree to make peace with the Zionists—with the Zionists since there is no one else and there will be no one else to make peace with, unless *after* peace has been made. So I think people of good will must strive to achieve two things: to draw a clear and rigid line between the conflict raging between Arab states and the Israeli state on the one hand, and the Palestine problem—namely, the problem of the Palestinians and their relations to the Israeli state—on the other. This calls neither for pro-Arab nor for pro-Jewish or pro-Israeli attitudes; it simply calls for bringing the Palestinians more and more into the picture—and as such is not apprehensible as a sign of partisanship. That’s about all there is to it.

March 28, 1969

Again late with my reply! It's not so much lack of time; it's a kind of dislocation, even perhaps a little change of emphasis. Part of this has to do with a feeling I had begun to have that the famous corrosion was becoming physical. For sheer survival as one whole I felt I had to take a drastic step—and an innocent remark of my doctor's proved the last straw: Who wants to get insane, “permanently and fatally,” as you put it? And for whom and what! A friend of mine, a young third-generation American of German Jewish extraction, once advised me to leave some of the problems “for God, or the Government” to worry about. Well at long last I think I am taking his advice . . .

One consoling thought: Our correspondence has contributed a good deal toward a clarification of the mess. I can even cite a concrete aspect of this. You have always insisted that there are no men—there are “situations.” In various and endless forms this means simply: A man's situation determines his attitudes. Hence your repeated plea that I “tell the story,” fully and in detail. Well, as you may recall, I at first objected to your philosophy, arguing that if that were so, then no opinions can be taken quite seriously—especially no non-conformist opinion. If a man's “situation” more or less determines the way he sees the world around him, then it stands to reason that one who is sexually frustrated, say, or unfortunate enough to have married a domineering woman, work under

a vicious boss, had a hard childhood or boyhood, may well for that reason become a revolutionary, a radical leftist or rightist, a warmonger, an Arab- (or Jew-) hater and so on and on. Well, if that were so how could anyone be taken seriously in such terms? Again, since you yourself are considered “radical” and hold views that are considered more or less “fringe,” you appeared to me to be positively inviting disbelief in your own views and stands. (What would have been easier and more natural than to say dismissingly: Ah, Irene—no wonder she has such ideas—look at her situation. Or take the imputation that I am “bitter”: Isn’t it just one step further to dismiss everything I say or write on the grounds of the situation that presumably led to my being so, so bitter?)

That’s why I objected to your philosophy initially. As time went by, however, I began to see your point. Applied to myself, it revealed a number of curious things, the most important being that it is self-fulfilling and self-accelerating: You start by being mildly at odds with your surroundings—which makes you a little more isolated and then more at variance with almost everything and ultimately more cut-off and (what’s far more important) less capable of seeing things as they are. In the end you tend to become practically blind. And here you have a paradox concerning you and me: Whereas, accepting your interpretation of the human condition, I hasten to draw logical conclusions, you refuse to do so. For, if a man’s views and his philosophy and outlook on life are so decisively influenced by his situation, I maintain that the thing to do for such a man would be to examine his situation every time he catches himself holding what others consider fringe views. How else? (Unless, of course, you maintain that this particular man’s situation is in fact typical of everyman’s situation—only that he is open-eyed and the rest are blind. Which leads us nowhere.) I hope this disposes of your question as to what I mean by “reality.”

. . . The long and the short of it is that I do not consider so-called fringe thinking a deviation (whatever that is), and I most certainly agree that it would be absurd to say that all dissent emanates from some personal trouble past or present. The reason why I was at sixes and sevens about it is that, while I can give others the benefit of the doubt, I cannot do that to myself. I see this needs some explaining. If someone should come and tell me that Marcuse—or Lynd or Sinyavsky or Trotsky, for that matter—are what they are and think the way they do because they variously suffer from an inferiority complex, sexual imbalance, a difficult childhood and so on, my reaction would be one of dismissal. Otherwise how could one take any opinion seriously? But I cannot be all that

liberal with myself—especially at a time when it can reasonably be said that I and/or the group to which I belong were *wronged*. Add to this the realization that (as you put it) it was necessary in order not to strain the nerves of life not to step beyond certain things—and you have the whole picture. The reason why *you* figure in the picture is that it was you who pointed out to me the significance of “situations.” This served to modify my tendency toward strict intellectualization and abstraction—and in part made me aware of the not totally negligible private aspects of my public situation. [Note: Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) was a Berlin-born U.S. political philosopher; Robert Staughton Lynd (1892–1970) was an American sociologist; Andrei Sinyavsky (1925–1997), a Russian writer and dissident, published under the name Abram Tertz—the historical Tertz was a Jewish gangster, though Sinyavsky was not Jewish.]

#### U.S. JEWRY'S ISRAEL TANGLE

Sometime in August 1967, barely two months after Israel's resounding Six-Day War victory, I got a call from Helen Weinberg, who presented herself as a contributor to *Judaism* and to *Congress Bi-Weekly* and said she was given my number by the latter's editor, whom I had met in the 1966 American-Israeli Dialogue.

I duly made an appointment, and to my delight and relief, I found that Helen and I shared an interest in things literary. She was then putting the finishing touches to a book on the modern American Jewish novel, and I was an avid reader of contemporary American fiction, including, of course, works by Jewish novelists. A friend of Cynthia Ozick's, then just beginning to produce her maturer work, Helen was thrilled by an approving remark I made about a long short story by Ozick that had just appeared in *Commentary*—“Envy; or, Yiddish in America.” Helen said she would tell her friend about it. She did—and that was to start a new and in many ways refreshing relationship and a correspondence replete with most emphatic differences of opinion on such of our shared preoccupations as Israel, Judaism, the diaspora, the “Arab problem,” and many related and equally unwieldy subjects.

March 5, 1968

To Helen:

I know people whose very mental balance was upset by the May-June developments last year, largely because ignorance of the power balance

in the area drove them into hysterics before June 5. One of these is certainly [Robert] Alter; another is a certain Professor Fisch, author of the jingoist article in *Judaism* entitled “Jerusalem, Jerusalem”—who has now joined forces with lunatics like [Eliezer] Livneh and [Israel] Eldad for what they call “the whole Land of Israel,” whose boundaries no one can delineate. These people have all sorts of pseudo-mystical arguments, fictitious “rights,” patently racist theories and an assortment of irrationalities to propagate ideas which no one in his senses can entertain. Mind you, their arguments have a certain impeccable Zionist logic of their own. (They say, for instance: “But if we have no right to stay in Nablus, Ramallah, Jenin and the Old City, then we have no right to be in Ramle, Acre and Jaffa!” Cute, isn’t it?)

May 17, 1968

After many long movieless months, I decided I had to go to two films currently on show. *Ulysses* is a landmark in moviemaking, not the slightest doubt about it. It’s a near miracle how the director managed to get almost everything in—and so intelligently and unobtrusively. I had read the book slightly less than a quarter of a century ago and going to that movie amounted almost to a whole rereading of it. The scenes in the tavern and in the brothel, and Molly Bloom’s concluding thoughts were really remarkable. With us there was a friend, a poet who is also a farmer from Kinneret. He said he didn’t like it, what damned business has the director showing such atrocities. . . . I told him this was more or less life (rather more than less!) and he disagreed. The Peasant . . .

You remember how Bloom defined a nation? A nation is the same group of people living in the same place, he laid it down with infinite Jewish wisdom. And what else could a nation be, I ask you. Yet I find it a tremendous paradox that the modern Jew in Israel—taken by all and sundry to represent Jews and Judaism—should nowadays be the most vocal and pigheaded proponent of a diametrically opposed concept of what a damned nation really is. Moshe Dayan versus Leopold Bloom!

Have you seen *A Man for All Seasons*—the play or the movie? I went there belatedly this week and I was so impressed I immediately bought the play and read it. I shall not hide it: I felt a lot of identification with More, although—or is it perhaps because—I fail to see how he let himself be driven into that horrible corner. Here you have a man of the world, wise enough to grasp the basic ironies and paradoxes of life, the vanity of human wishes, the essential mysteriousness of things worldly,

et cetera, et cetera . . . Here you have such a man suddenly, almost unawares, landing in a position from which he cannot extricate himself, making a last-ditch stand on what is after all a silly legalistic point not free from ambiguity. How, how in the name of the deuce did he *manage* to do it? The question (seriously) haunts me. How can a man of More's making so inexplicably and so disastrously lose his sense of humour? Above all, *was he sincere?*

August 30, 1968

Yesterday I got a letter from a friend who, after many years, has decided to emigrate and has just found himself a niche in Perth, Western Australia, as lecturer in something called Econometrics. He advises all Orientals like him to emigrate—because “they will never let us have what’s our due.” He has the most fantastic theory about it: It’s not good for the children, since parents who are failures and bitter may set a bad example for them; and it’s not good for the parents not to prove—at least to themselves—that they can “make it” if only they decided to get the heck out of here. Extremely depressing stuff I must admit. [Note: The friend mentioned in this paragraph is Rony Gabbay; see Chapter 2 for the story of his emigration.]

I like your dearest friend the novelist, Cynthia Ozick. I do consider her remark cute and generous (I mean her dictum that I can go on hating the Ashkenazim as long as I like E. M. Forster). But I must try and put the record straight: I do not hate—nor love—“the Ashkenazim” or any other human collectivity. Your friend places herself in an impossible position. How could anyone who likes Forster hate—or like—any such nameless group of people as “the Ashkenazim,” the Iraqis, the Jews or the Arabs! So I hope this puts the record straight.

September 11, 1968

Altogether you sound overapologetic for the powers-that-be: Helen Weinberg would never leave Cleveland for Western Australia for anything? Elementary! But how can you make the analogy? All said, I think you pay too little attention to the fact that people resent being told—explicitly or implicitly—that they are inferior, especially when they proceed on the idiotic assumptions which Jewish nationalism pretends to take for granted. If I may borrow your novelist friend’s observation about Forster: How could one who appreciates Forster fail so completely to see this point? (Poor Forster!) Honestly, I think the time has come when you sat up and gave the matter more thought . . .

Yes, George Steiner. You surely are aware that the *Jerusalem Post* is not the only Israeli newspaper. A woman by name of Shulamit Hareven (Hill of Stones!) decided to interview the fellow and published her interview in *Ha'aretz*, a far more important paper. She was provocative and cheeky and really, but really, narrow-minded, and all poor Steiner (on whom I do not waste too much respect) had to “give it to her” as they say in our parts. So he called the Israelis provincial, parochial and all that sort of stuff and again wondered why Israeli intellectuals make such a poor performance. Upon which the cream of our intelligentsia got duly excited, this attacking Steiner and that Hareven (mostly for the wrong reasons, of course). Besides, there still goes a protracted controversy in the *Post*'s letters column about that beastly self-hating Jewish cosmopolitan from Cambridge.

September 23, 1968

I have taken the day off to go through some stuff in connection with a passage I have to write on “nationalism.” What with one thing and another I reread Acton’s essay, “Nationality.” Just simply incredible! He wrote it in 1862 when he was only 28; it is a matter of thirty small pages, but it is packed so full of ideas, facts and reflections that it would be enough for two contemporary scholars to write two separate volumes just by enlarging, documenting and paraphrasing the piece. (As a matter of fact Lewis Namier, at the age of almost 60, shamelessly but rather smartly did it at least in two famous works of his—an essay he called “Nationality and Liberty” and in his small treatise on 1848.) Acton himself never managed to produce a book, though he died at a fairly ripe age. (“He knew too much to write,” Acton said about an old friend of his. “He would not write with imperfect materials, and to him the materials were always imperfect.” If he were candid about himself he would not have been able to put it better!)

However, the topicality of the essay is absolutely staggering. Ponder this:

Those states are substantially the most perfect which . . . include various distinct nationalities without oppressing them. Those in which no mixture of races have occurred are imperfect; and those in which its effects have disappeared are decrepit. A state which is incompetent to satisfy different races condemns itself; a state which labours to neutralize, to absorb, or to expel them, destroys its own vitality; a state which does not include them is destitute of the chief basis of self-government.

Who would not agree with this today! Yet who would really, practically take heed of it! Namier, a Polish Jew from a deeply disappointed assimilationist family, all his life masqueraded as a man who abhorred nationalism (using almost the self-same language used by Acton), yet he was an excellent Zionist up till his death. Still, when asked by a friend of his youth, a Gentile Polish historian, whether he would settle in Palestine after the Jewish state came into being, he answered: "No. I would not be able to feel at home there. Everything will be rough and ready, with no roots, with no organic cohesion, so provisional. No, I could not." The bastard. Not that he was not right!

October 1, 1968

Your reflections on the state of the world today raise a perennial question. Of course, the world is going to the dogs *everywhere*. Of course, it is as bad, or even worse, in the States and Russia and Iraq and Indonesia as it is in Israel. I would go even further and say that there is no guarantee in this whole world that if things are finally made to change—here or anywhere—what will come shall be better or even merely as bad. But then, SO WHAT? Of course, I too have my doubts, to put it mildly—and when I voiced them recently in a letter to a friend the reply came promptly: "The point is that you must fight against what is wrong now—and when the new world comes, you and I will have to continue fighting against what will be wrong then. How else?" Well, how else! You, Helen, as "a great admirer of *true* energy, of the mind or body," will no doubt find it difficult to answer that one. *I do!*

December 21, 1968

Is [Marshall] McLuhan an advocate of "barbaric tribalism"? Well, I am not in the least shocked! One of the brightest and most perceptive things I have seen said about him is that, hailing from some obscure small town in some outlandish region in America, he is somewhat free from the burdens of civilized discourse—or rather from its requirements. Hence his apparent boisterousness, his self-confidence, and his dogmatism. Any way how dare you cite such a phony? Obviously "primitive tribalism" means "participatory democracy"—of a kind. But a group practicing primitive tribalism lives in the same place and shares many other things besides. I myself am all for the sort of atomization implicit in what you describe as McLuhan's "global tribalism"; but surely you are aware that this is a very far cry from such innovations as Jewish or Arab "national-

ism”—having, as both do, no common habitat, no common tongue, not even a common past.

You keep using the term “my own”—“I won’t betray my own,” you say. “One may love the others, *must* love the others, but must love his own first.” What unmitigated nonsense! There is no such thing as loving all the others but loving one’s own first—except of course if “one’s own” is made to mean the only thing it had always meant—to wit, one’s kith and kin. You would be perfectly right if you loved your own kith and kin more than you loved the milkman’s daughter. It is when this business of “one’s own” is made to mean a whole tribe or nation or nationality that the crimes of history are usually perpetrated. This becomes more vicious—and meaningless—when what is being made the subject of loyalty and devotion and “love” is a faceless, dispersed, indefinable group of people—so that in the end one starts worshipping an abstraction.

March 25, 1970

I was intending to write earlier, but it has been a hectic time these past few weeks. It appeared that I got into TV by a side door so to speak; like all the others I was engaged on a temporary basis (as of the beginning of February 1969) and was told that “tenders” for the jobs will be announced in a matter of weeks—and that they can only be a mere formality. Well, the tenders materialized only a year later—last month—and the results came as a complete surprise: I am out as of next week! What with the bureaucracy and all the rest, no one can know for sure what precisely has happened. The standard explanation is that I am too good for the job; I am an internationally-known expert on the Arab world, an excellent publicist and columnist, a good research worker, and a man of ideas—and *that* is not what the station needs, exactly!

This is the official explanation; yet no one seems to realize that while I may be all of these things, my profession is journalism (25 years!) and that for over a year I have been performing not at all badly the job for which I am presumably too good. The argument is threadbare, to say the least and the kindest thing about it.

The most pressing point—besides the prosaic consideration of earning a living—is my position in this whole set-up. This is a highly-planned, semi-feudal society in which “the government”—or the establishment or the deuce knows who—is the sole employer, literally. If I—admittedly a dissenter—cannot even do a relatively menial job like edit-

ing news for TV—then I feel called upon to draw certain far-reaching conclusions. My tentative decision is to go all the way toward a clarification—and then not to take it lying down as I did last time (when I was chucked out of my job as editor of a daily newspaper). I shall keep you informed.

Footnote: A friend of mine had an argument with his boss, who he thought was persecuting him. "This is not Russia!" he protested. "I will prove to you that it is worse than Russia!" the boss responded. And, according to my friend, his boss damn well did.

February 26, 1971

I do not myself know Gershom Scholem—who is now in Europe doing the Zionist thing in Brussels; but it won't be difficult, especially now I am seeing a man named Hillel Halkin who I see has translated some work of his. Re your [Norman] Mailer lecture, I spoke to the director of Artists House—who often tries to widen the horizons of her clientele by giving them such literary evenings—and she said she was quite willing.  
[Note: Scholem (1897–1982) was an authority on the kabbalah.]

I was sorry I couldn't catch Cynthia when here: When I got hold of a telephone I forgot her real name, and when I was in possession of her real name, I was without a telephone. My impression, however, is that I like her better as a writer of fiction than as publicist-polemicist-ideologue. However . . .

[August 28, 1971]

The Panthers! Last night Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg gave a public lecture here under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee in which he declared that had he been a Jew living in Katamon in one room with a large number of children and an income of less than £400 a month "I might remain inert, out of hopelessness; but if there were an ounce of hope left in me I would demonstrate in the streets and, if necessary, make a riot." He then bitterly criticized Israel's religious leadership, its intellectuals and its middle class for their lack of sympathy, identification or even comprehension of the outcry of the Israeli poor. He was no less outspoken about the religious situation in Israel, which he called scandalous. I am quite impressed . . .

It looks as though this American Historical Association business is coming off. Their program will be held at the Hilton in New York, December 27–30 inclusive. I do not know on what day I will deliver my lecture, but it seems I shall more or less be there the whole duration. . . .

I have taken part in yet another *Dialogue* in Rehovot. This time it was really interesting; I met two nice people there: Arthur Cohen and Earl Raab—and altogether it was a far less strained and more lively affair than the 1968 one in which you were an “observer.” People—and especially this one!—seemed far more relaxed. My “presentation” was far less opinionated (!) and the reactions were less violent. The subject was “Contemporary Jewry as a Minority in America and a Majority in Israel”—and my main contention was that you cannot speak in the same breath about these statuses (unless you can remotely compare the lot of the Jews in America and the Moslems in Israel) and also that, though a clear numerical majority, the Jews of Israel still have the mentality of a minority and behave accordingly and therefore badly and nervously. A whale of a thesis, and I dare call it less opinionated!

[June 4, 1972]

I spent half that Tuesday in January calling your number in Cleveland. Nothing doing. However, what I wanted to say then can also be said now—to wit, how awed I was by your warm hospitality and helpfulness. I often think that, without you, Arthur [Cohen], [Ronald] Sanders and his in-laws the Gingolds, and a few others I would simply and literally have expired in that huge but terrible city. In London, of course, I had no time to see anybody but my “business” connections—and go up to Oxford to see Atallah Mansour and family. . . .

One of the things I have learnt from my stay in the States—there are quite a few—is that I am terribly lazy and, what is worse, have a tendency to total psychological paralysis when faced with new situations. I am of course referring to the fact that I found myself staying put and refusing to move around and have a look. Not Washington, not Boston, not Cleveland, not Philadelphia—not even the public library, the various museums, theaters and so on and on. And the remarkable ability to rationalize it all—and so neatly and convincingly! If I were an American I would promptly call my psychiatrist and try to find out why—as I gather Mrs. Teddy Kennedy did when she found she felt inferior to the Great Kennedy Tribesmen. But it is really not a joke at all. Only that I tend to accept myself with all those terrible faults I have.

Cynthia has sent me her book, which I find includes only two or three stories that I hadn’t read before in periodicals. I cannot stop marvelling at her bluntness of expression and the uncanny way she has of doing it almost without being noticed. Meeting her twice at such length—each time poor me being the focus of her vehement atten-

tion—I am not sure I have the answer. She probably told you about that dinner at Arthur's. To start with, we pledged each other I shall not under any circumstances be the subject of discussion. But she proved the irrepressible person she is and immediately launched some kind of attack on me, culminated by the queer accusation that I was propounding a “Counter-Theology”—whatever the deuce that may mean. The question, of course, is a double one: Counter to what theology and what's wrong with advancing a counter-theology? but by now you know Cynthia better than I do and thus know that it's simply no use. That is the way she feels and that is how she should be accepted. And, O, do I accept her!

**WESTERN VANITIES**

The second annual American-Israeli Dialogue that I attended was held in July–August 1968, but it was the first to be held after the 1966 dialogue, since the American Jewish Congress had canceled plans for the 1967 gathering because of the Six-Day War. I attended the dialogue as an observer, partly because Helen Weinberg was there—and I had no intention of making a proper “presentation.” But the provocations were too great, and I recall only two of them.

The first was somewhat personal—though not quite. In the opening session of the dialogue, when my turn came to introduce myself to the participants, I said that since technically I was there only as an observer, I would content myself with stating only my name and my profession. Subsequently, Helen asked me why I had not mentioned my place of birth. When I repeated my explanation, I noticed a certain look of doubt or disbelief—and suddenly it dawned on me that some of the participants had made quite an issue of the omission and that Helen was referring to something she had heard others saying. On pressing her, I learned that that was indeed the case—and that though she didn’t know who started the speculation, it could have been three participants, all of them Israelis. The “theory,” it transpired, was that I had tried to *hide* the fact that I was born where I was born—namely, Baghdad!

Now one possible reaction to this absurdity would have been to dismiss the whole idea as utterly silly and unworthy of a response. Another would have been just to wonder how incredibly arrogant it was of these “Westerners” even to conceive of the idea that a Middle Easterner may feel ashamed of his origins. However, I chose a third one: I tried to find out by just what process of thought and sentiment that participant—or those participants—reached the conclusion that my omitting to mention my birthplace was in any way significant. I referred to this dismal episode in the opening paragraphs of my statement. Among other things I said:

Three of the Israeli participants in this dialogue had it in them to suspect that I—and they knew full well who they were talking about—was in one way or another ashamed of saying I was born in Baghdad. In fairness I must add that as far as I can gather, these three Israelis—of whose identities I have not the slightest wish to know—ultimately blamed themselves and their society, rather than me, for the sorry state of affairs my alleged shame at my place of birth implied.

And that is precisely what they ought to do! For the sad fact is that they were wrong only in a marginal way and in a small matter of mere detail. The truth is that, while shame about my place of birth was in this case decidedly not the reason why I refrained from mentioning it, this does not mean that thousands of other Baghdad-, San'a-, Casablanca- or Damascus-born Israeli Jews could not have felt shame about their origins. My Israeli colleagues on this dialogue, then, were basically rather right in their assumption. They were also right to feel ashamed, and perhaps doubly so—first because theirs is that sort of society and secondly because they are patently too apathetic to try to do something to correct their kind of society! . . .

But at this point I propose to turn to my first worry of the day—namely the fact that I was born in a city called Baghdad. I happen to consider this fact to be of much relevance to what I am going to say about both of the issues of which the subject of this dialogue consists. These are, if I am not mistaken, the meaning of Judaism and Jewishness today and the position of Diaspora Jewry as Israel takes its place in the Middle East.

I am grateful to Rabbi Lelyveld and to Professor [Yeshayahu] Leibovitz, who between them have spared me the task of going into the first part of that formulation. Judaism consists of a collection of commandments ostensibly emanating from God; Jewishness consists of the basically technical fact that a person was either born of a Jewish mother or was converted to Judaism. In other words, there is in fact no inevitable connection between the two: Jews can live—and even prosper and conquer—without Judaism, while Judaism as a code of conduct, as an ideal and as a way of life, can survive without Jews.

I take it, however, that one subject of this dialogue is the meaning of Judaism and Jewishness *today*. What, then, do the above definitions of these two terms mean for us today as Israeli Jews, as American Jews, or simply as Jews. In the following paragraphs I shall try to explain what these terms—and what their combined definitions—mean to a Jew who was born and in large measure *made* in Baghdad.

1. If we accept as valid the claim that there is no necessary connection between Jews and Judaism, then it becomes self-evident that a Jew—or a collectivity of Jews—can be “Jewish” in either one of two ways: they can be “Judaic Jews”—meaning Jews who abide or aspire to abide by their God’s commandments, or “biological” Jews—denoting persons born of Jewish mothers who, while neither observing nor aspiring to observe the code of conduct called Judaism, base their Jewishness solely on what amounts to no more than an accident of birth. I take it that it is this category of what I choose to call “biological”—as against “Judaic”—Jewishness that Rabbi Richard Rubenstein has in mind when he speaks of *Pagan Judaism*—and since this is a far less cumbersome term than the one I have chosen, I will, with the Rabbi’s permission, use it in the sense I propounded above of “biological Jew.”
2. Since the definition of Judaism as a collection of commandments implies that these commandments come from an everlasting, *living* God, I think that it follows simply and logically that “the death of God” automatically spells out the death of Judaism so defined. I gather that the phrase “the death of God” is now an accepted one among Christian *theologians*—and that therefore it is possible at one and the same time to be a theologian and to break the news of God’s demise. Little as I know about theology in general and Christian theology in particular, I am inclined to believe that a so-called Death of God Theology, even if it can have a place in Christianity, cannot do so in Judaism. Prof. Leibovitz yesterday made a cardinal point in this context when he called Christianity “counterfeit atheism,” meaning no doubt that it was both theocentric and anthropocentric. In such a sort of theology you can—as does Rabbi Rubenstein—announce the death of God and proceed to be a theologian, since God in this case was as it were half-man, half-god. I don’t mean to be frivolous, but if I were Rabbi Rubenstein I would immediately start looking for another occupation: Judaism without God simply does not exist.
3. The pagan Jew—the Jew who has given up theocentrism but would not quite accept anthropocentrism—its only tenable alternative—has come to us with a new commodity, *ethnocentrism*. I must say I am full of admiration for Rabbi Rubenstein’s choice of words as well as for the consistency of the philosophy propounded in his paper. What he so approvingly calls “tribal nationalism” goes rather nicely with the Death of God; it goes even more nicely with his Pagan Judaism—and in his case these concepts form a consistent and logical whole. For, if you believe God to be dead and thus discard Judaism in its one and only acceptable sense—and in addition decide to cling to your Jewishness, then I suppose the consistent thing for you to do

is to advocate the sort of ethnocentrism that can best be designated “tribal nationalism.”

I am now going to try to link together the two subjects set for this Dialogue and relate them to the problems which stand at the center of our lives as Israelis and as Jews, as well as to the specific question of Israel’s place in the Middle East. Robert S. Lynd once spoke with some bitterness about a culture “preoccupied with short-run statements of long-run problems,” and proceeded to recommend to social scientists the task of bringing the lagging culture “not peace but a sword.” After so many years of preoccupation with such short-term statements of our problems, I believe the time has now come for seeking long-term statements of a few of our long-term problems. I myself consider these problems to be four in number: Israel’s attitude to itself; a definition of the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora; Israel’s relations with the Arabs; and the place of the Oriental Jew in Israeli society. I submit that these four problems are closely related to each other—and that in their relatedness they are indissolubly linked with the question of Judaism and Jewishness, and their meaning for us today.

A great deal of ambiguity, some of which [is] not entirely unintended, besets the issue of Israel’s very Jewishness. Israel has been designated a Jewish State—which it is in the sense that a majority of its inhabitants are generally designated as Jews. But some of us have been trying to make this fact mean far more than it possibly can, insisting—as Mr. Moshe Dayan insisted in a TV interview shortly after the Six-Day War—that Israel should be Jewish in the sense that France is French and Germany German. Now I submit that such a view of the Jewishness of Israel is tenable neither theoretically nor in practice—and that it also tends to place Diaspora Jews in a pretty impossible position. For one thing, only about 17 percent of all Jews live in Israel today. Moreover, about 14 percent of Israel’s pre-June 5 population are non-Jews. The paradox posed by these two simple data is obvious: Over four-fifths of Jewry are nationals of non-Jewish lands and cannot conceivably be regarded as Israeli nationals, while the non-Jewish inhabitants of Israel are legally full-fledged Israeli nationals whose main grievance is that they are not treated as such. It is plain, then, that by insisting on a narrow ethnic-racial concept of nationality we have in fact established here a society in which non-Jews can have no place. It is true that we try to do all sorts of good and fair-minded things for our non-Jewish citizens; but it is also plain that we don’t accept them as equals.

This brings us to an even deeper paradox. By insisting on the *nationally* Jewish character of the state we render it impossible for us to discharge our *ethically* Jewish duty of granting full equality to our non-Jewish citizens. The official view on this subject in Israel has been repeatedly explained by the prime minister's present advisor on Arab affairs. It is that one cannot expect "absolute loyalty" from the Arabs of Israel "since they belong to another nationality." As long as such a view prevails, we will not in honesty be able to claim that we treat our non-Jewish citizens as equals. My own feeling is that we ought to shift our emphasis onto an Israeli rather than a Jewish nationality. Only then can we offer a place, as equals, for those Israelis who are not Jews.

It has often been pointed out by critics of this approach that Israel cannot be an *Israeli* state and that it must be a Jewish state. Every nation, we are told, has its own homeland and Israel is the homeland of the Jewish nation. A Jewish state, we are told further, is a haven and refuge for the Jewish people. The confusion inherent in such a statement is typical of the rhetoric of pagan Jews—or more exactly of *political* pagan Jews.

#### **POSTSCRIPT: GEORGE STEINER RAISES A POINT**

What does it mean to speak of Israel "taking its place in the Middle East"? It *is* in the Middle East, ineluctably. The impress of this geographic-climatic fact on its manners of dress, dietary habits, uses of leisure are already patent . . . Montesquieu teaches us that a society necessarily mirrors the terrain it exploits, the landscape it moves in, the graphs of temperature, rainfall and wind. The white light in Rehovot, the ink-pools of shadow, are like those in Amman or Cairo or Tunis; the air here is not that of Hampstead, the Bronx or Modling.

Thus Dr. George Steiner, eminent literary writer and fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge, in a paper he read at the Dialogue. In the course of his address, Steiner said he realized that in speaking of Israel "taking its place in the Middle East" something deeper is meant than mere physical presence: "a reorientation of Israel, a gradual change in the habits of emotion, social flavour and spiritual caste of Israeli life—the possibility or, indeed, likelihood that a Jewish community whose character has until now been strikingly Western will become a Middle Eastern society."

The speaker was by no means dismayed by such a likelihood. "Let us allow," he said,

that the State of Israel will “go Middle Eastern.” Let us assume that the grandchildren of those who came from Europe will be completely housed in the Semitic, orientalizing genius of Hebrew, that they will share fewer and fewer memories, fewer and fewer intellectual reflexes, with their Jewish guests from America — that we will have less of a “dialogue” and more of an exercise in translation. Would this necessarily be a bad thing?

The rhetorical nature of this last question emerges later in Steiner’s paper, when he describes as completely obvious the “central fact [that] no solution of the Israel-Arab conflict is even conceivable outside a Middle Eastern context.” In order to make his point entirely clear, Steiner continued: “Here is Israel; here it must live. And by ‘context’ I mean a totality of psychological commitments, an internal recognition on both sides, Arab and Israeli, that for good or bad Israel is *here* to stay. . . . If ‘Levantinization’ be a step toward Israel’s acceptance of itself as a Middle Eastern community, let us have more of it! Only if one’s own identity is explicit can one seek acceptance by others.”

In an indirect reply, Abraham Avihai of the prime minister’s Office said he did not think that Israelis hailing from Arab lands constituted a bridge between Israel and the Arab world, since, he said, “I do not believe that the Oriental Jew can carry the message of Israel to the Arabs.” He further thought that the Oriental Jews will increasingly “dissociate themselves from their lands of origin even as the Jews of Germany in Israel do so.”

At this point I asked for permission to speak. Rejecting Avihai’s concept of “a bridge” as one-sided, I said a bridge was “a two-way proposition,” and that if Mr. Avihai’s own definition were to be accepted, then I agreed with him that the Oriental Jew is not likely to serve as a bridge in that very partial sense of the term. Moreover, I said, a bridge has to be firmly embedded on *both* sides of a gulf:

Unfortunately, however, no matter how well-established the Oriental Jew’s position in Moslem-Arab culture was or is, as a bridge he lacks one cardinal feature common to all useful bridges: He is in no way firmly established on *this* side of the river! I think it would be fair to say that unless the Oriental Jew becomes an integral part of Israel — and not only in the various physical senses of the term — he cannot even be approached on this thorny subject of bridges.

Referring to a question posed by one of the American participants about what Israel ought to do to attain the kind of reorientation advocated

by Dr. Steiner, I recalled that I myself was asked this question “hundreds of times and in dozens of different ways.” One form in which the question is frequently asked, I added, concerned what was “worth preserving” in the Middle Eastern culture of the Oriental Jew in Israel. My answer, I said, was this: “Since I do not believe in the feasibility of cultural selectivity I choose the pragmatic approach to this problem—and my answer is: *the man himself!* The Israeli Oriental—as he is here and now and not as a potential Westerner or a fake Eastern European—must be accepted by this society and received by it into all walks of life, not excluding the seats and the sources of power.”

Fundamentally, I added, Israel’s communal problem resides in the fact that, owing to its total rejection of Middle Eastern culture—and, by implication, of its bearers themselves—the dominant Eastern European elite allows the Middle Eastern element in Israel no share or say in running the country’s affairs or shaping its policies, attitudes, and cultural hue. Through a large assortment of devices and disabilities, I explained, the present power elite manages to exclude these Jews from all power and influence, and it is my feeling that this inevitably constitutes a serious obstacle on the road not only to true national unity at home but also to Israel’s “taking its place in the Middle East.”

Some of the participants, mostly on the American team, mentioned the danger of “a second Auschwitz.” Amos Elon, of *Ha’aretz*, dismissed this notion as unrealistic and somewhat irrelevant since, he said, the Arabs were technically incapable of perpetrating such a deed, even supposing they had the desire to do so. A number of the participants did not share Elon’s “optimism.” In the course of my statement, I joined Elon in dismissing the analogy. “Whereas,” I said, “the Nazi holocaust marked the culmination and the logical conclusion of nearly 2,000 years of preparation and actual practice on the part of the Christian West, Moslem-Arab culture, history, religious ideology, and tradition have nothing in them to lead to that sort of infamous culmination.”

#### THE ZIONISM-JUDAISM MIX-UP

October 27, 1968

To Arnold Ages:

The point about that article of mine in the *Post*—and the view which I still hold—was that in the Arab world anti-Semitism is a totally foreign importation and it is thus risky to speak of without qualification when

referring to Arabic writers. Harkabi gives me the feeling that he wants to eat the cake and have it. He himself, as a Zionist, would not really make any distinction between Zionism and Judaism, Israeli and Jew—but he asks the Arabs to do so, and the trouble is that even if they do so, he would not agree; he would still call them anti-Semites since, as is often said here, you cannot draw the line between Zionism and Judaism as the former is the “national liberation movement” of the Jews. So I ask you . . .

It really seems to boil down to a rather simple proposition. Either one makes the distinction between Judaism and Zionism or one doesn’t. In the latter case, one cannot in fairness come up with charges of anti-Semitism against people who one knows are anti-Zionists and anti-Israeli rather than anti-Semitic. In short, those who have arbitrarily appointed themselves custodians of Judaism and Jewry cannot regard everything said against them something that is said against all those whom they claim to represent. However, I agree that it is a most tricky problem and I should be grateful to have your reasoned opinion on the subject.

November 25, 1968

To Shimon Shamir:

How are you, and how is the family? And the research? How is the sources situation? Do you think you will be finishing work on it within the year, or do you want to wait until we have taken Damascus? (It’s not so difficult, I am told!) For myself, I am certainly not going to wait for the fall of Cairo: I have three more chapters to go and then the revising, the updating, the footnotes—and we are through with Nasserist ideology. . . .

How much do you know about what’s going on here? To put it briefly: It gets curioser and curioser—and, what is more, I rather like it! . . . You have this absolutely first-rate business with the High Court recommending—would you believe it?—that the government just drop the “nationality” entry from both identity cards and population register—and the government meekly but absolutely with “no comment” refusing to be drawn and quartered! Now we all wait tensely for the High Court’s decision. . . .

I bet you like Harvard. What gossip can you furnish? How do you like Elie Kedourie? Where is Nadav [Safran] hiding? Who of my friends do you know? And who on earth is this Moslem Research Fellow whose name I forgot but whose subject is “a topic in Islamic science” and

whose title and position are not mentioned? [Note: Nadav Safran (1925–2003), a Cairo-born Jew, was an expert in Arab politics and a director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard.]

January 7, 1969

To Shimon Shamir:

I think the difference between us is more fundamental. You speak about “two national movements both of which must get satisfaction.” What national movements? Not the Arab and Jewish ones, certainly, since neither of us believes in that sort of nonsense. Then it must be that these two movements are the Palestinian and the *Israeli* ones (I do hope you don’t mean the Palestinian and the *Jewish* national movements—because if we start talking about Jewish nationalism then we will have to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Arab, meaning Pan-Arab, nationalist movement, in which case we shall have no business speaking about the Palestinians as such!). But if we are speaking about the Palestinians and the Israelis and their national movements then everything has to be crystal-clear: The national movements of both these groups centre on a territory and identity cards rather than on “race,” ethnicity, religion, culture or tribe. In this sense there is no reason in the world why both of these movements cannot get satisfaction from living together, in one blessed state, and sharing the same territory, the same passport and therefore the same *nationality*. I admit that the language question here will pose a difficulty. But it is not insurmountable: Unified Palestine will not be the only bilingual state in history. (Note: I don’t call it bi-national, which I consider a contradiction in terms logically and an obscenity politically!)

So, if you would only drive your premises—such as the existence of a Palestinian national movement—to their logical conclusion, you and I will not remain “poles apart” in our general outlook on this subject. (There is another way of putting it: In one sense, the Palestinian national movement can get satisfaction only when it has controlled all of Palestine, while the Israeli national movement—if it were to be identified with the original Zionist dream—shall get satisfaction likewise by controlling the whole of Eretz Yisrael. In this sense, of course, there can be no talk about two poor and peace-loving national movements both of which must be given its due, since this “due” is nothing short of the dispossession of the other side. Hence, it’s a perpetual or at best a hundred-years war. This is our mutual friend Harkabi’s doctrine.)

You are quite right: One has better put these things in writing though

the likelihood of influencing people and/or the course of history is very slender indeed. I read your first article in *Ha'aretz* very carefully. Well, I agree with you completely! Given the bad intentions, I too would rather let the poor devils get back their West Bank and have done with it. But then I would insist on giving them the whole lot—not excluding Arab Jerusalem—and not some sort of dismembered West Bank minus the Gaza Strip. How do you expect the Palestinians to obtain satisfaction from such a monstrosity? Or do you, too, think that we ought to get “the East Bank” for the Palestinians to have a reasonably viable state? However, since there is no one in sight, on this side of the fence, who is ready to give back everything (with very minor border adjustments, to be sure) what is the use of talking about the Palestinians *separately* fulfilling their national ambition? What I am driving at may be a dream—but it is, strangely enough, the one way that seems in any way “realistic.” I mean: a uni-national, bi-lingual, pluralist “Palestine” of which all Palestinians have the right to be citizens. However, since this is not likely to be swallowed at one gulp, I believe we ought to support a policy that is likely to lead up to it—such as Dayan’s and Gahal’s. [Note: Gahal (an acronym for *Gush Herut-Liberalim*) was a right-wing Zionist party formed in 1965; in 1973 it joined other right-wing parties in forming Likud.]

Utopian? Naive? Hopelessly wrong-headed? Well, I can only repeat what I said above—that, faced by messes such as the one we are dealing with, it may be most realistic to be a visionary. How else? . . . When you say someone is “confused” about the conflict I hope you do not mean it disparagingly. After all, who isn’t? So when I met Irene Gendzier in Tel Aviv last summer I rather liked her for her confusedness. I would say she just doesn’t *know* enough, though she has her heart in the right place. But then that is probably what you mean anyway . . .

More news about myself? I am finishing with the Shiloah Center (the famous £2,000 are now divided in three monthly payments for Jan-March, so I am taking the opportunity of keeping my room here until then!). Otherwise, I have not yet made up my mind about a job—given that I *can* get one if I wanted to.

November 30, 1968

To Joseph Meyer:

. . . I read your contribution in the Durkheim volume as soon as I got the book. I thought it was very compact, very full and extremely well-argued; I also remember musing how *noble* it was—in the sense that it attempted to defend Durkheim, who had been much and universally

maligned for his “reaction,” against the assault of his detractors on the Left. It’s an old Jewish impulse, coming to the aid of the underdog I mean. But, more relevant, it is difficult to think—after reading your paper—how Durkheim managed to invite the accusation. It does sound somewhat absurd today that a thinker should be charged with being a reactionary (not that the term itself is in any way clearly defined!) just because he insists on conceiving modern man in relation to his past.

Having said this I must, however, admit that I do not really put much store by all these labels: reactionary v. forward-looking, conservative v. progressive, pessimist v. optimist. I am often asked whether I am “left” or “right”—and I sometimes answer, not entirely in jest, that I am to the left of the Communists and to the right of Herut. But, seriously, is it relevant? A few pages following your contribution comes Coser’s paper, and there he shows “conclusively” that Durkheim was a “conservative” and that this tended to blur his sociological insights or at least to limit his interests. [Note: Lewis A. Coser (1913–2003), né Ludwig Cohen, was a Berlin-born U.S. sociologist.]

I may be becoming old-fashioned, but I cannot help thinking that the real point resides elsewhere. To give you an idea, I have been reading a book, a remarkable piece of work called *Hitler’s Social Revolution*, and I find it incredible how really “popular,” egalitarian, progressive and socialistic that beastly regime actually was in practice. And yet! Again, I watch with horror the current “tribalization” of some Communist parties—such as ours over here—and cannot but marvel: Do all these terms have any meaning any more? As I said, the trouble lies elsewhere, and by now I trust you know where I think it does lie.

#### LETTERS TO IRENE GENDZIER

November 8, 1968

Yesterday I got *Life Against Death*. I am very grateful. For some reason I never managed to get hold of it, and now I see what I have missed. I have not yet finished reading it, but I already have an idea of what impact it may have on me in my present moods. I took the book with me to the university yesterday but I forgot it there when I came home today (Friday) and had no way of going on with my reading. So I started digging in my library for related material, and have so far gone through *Totem and Taboo*, *Moses and Monotheism* and a book by one David Bakan called *S. Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*. Reading these three

works in that order has been quite an experience. For instance, there was the Preface to the Hebrew edition of *Totem*, which the translator thoughtfully includes in the English edition; then you have, in *Moses*, a most fantastic and unexpected view of the “nature” of the Jews and their “character traits”; and finally as a fitting climax you have Bakan’s fantastic revelations about Freud’s own attitude to his Jewishness and the influence of Hasidism and Kabbala.

Now I know that you will say: And what the excitement is all about? Well, I can only write in the most unsystematic way about it. There is, for instance, this virtually *racial* view of the Jew in Freud (there is no other way of reading into his *Moses*, pp. 131–176, and especially pp. 133–136). I do not pretend to know the difference between a “racial” and a “genetic” concept—but Bakan speaks freely of Freud’s “genetic view of the Jew” and uses italics for the adjective. Need I elaborate? I cannot, since I tend to link past and present—and I do not propose to do that yet. There is, further, this business of Freud’s very *style*. I have always found his writing peculiarly diffused and long-winded; and now comes Mr. Bakan and tells me that he, Freud, was influenced by the Zohar, Kabbala and Hasidism! There is a Hebrew/Yiddish word, *pilpul* (best rendered into English as “casuistry”), a quality of style and of argumentation which I both like and loathe. I like it when it is used in its original contexts, such as Talmudic and other commentaries, where use is made of it to reconcile two opposites or to outflank a difficult logical problem—all with a view to making life more livable and help men be more at peace with themselves and with their situations. I loathe it, if not more, when it is misused by politicians and people with power, when this essentially theological device is used *secularly*, out of its original contexts.

There is, again, the thought—not at all original, I know—that three European Jewish individuals some time between 1850 and 1900 A.D., because of various frustrations, disillusionments, sublimations, dis-simulations, manage to change man’s view of himself and of his world. And this, if you confine yourself to Marx, Freud and Einstein; if you add Weizmann and/or Ben Gurion; Herzl, Moses Hess and [Joseph Chaim] Brenner; M. Begin, Lavon and Dayan—well, what will you see? World-rocking energies and drives whose results no one can foretell. But I shall stop here since in all honesty I do not know how to continue. But you see the point I am sure. [Note: Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) was a Hungarian-born Austrian Zionist; Moses Hess (1812–1875), German, was the father of Zionist socialism.]

November 15, 1968

Your remarks about Elie—with which I tend to agree—made me decide to send you a certain short review I had written of his *Afghani and Abduh*, in which I say more or less the same things you say about him—though more obliquely for obvious reasons. Then I recalled that Elie had written a letter to the journal in reply to the reviewer (and very possibly to me). However, while looking for the letter, who should turn up there but moody you! For the time being, let me tell you simply that I liked your remarks very much indeed—so human and so sensitive and so insightful. You—I mean I—have only to compare it to the cold, “no-nonsense” approach of Elie’s chapter and article to see the worlds of difference that lie between you two—to see, in fact, everything. But let me tell you that Elie was not that way when he and I were what must have been the best friends in the world. He has changed; in fact he was already a different man when I saw him again, after eight short years, in 1955—when he actually derided the fact that I was “literary.” And I am blessed if I know what exactly had happened inside him. There are people whom traumatic disappointments and disillusionments refine, others whom they simply kill as human beings. I do not know what sort of trauma Elie had gone through; but let us see if you can unravel that mystery some day, somehow.

But let me continue with this trend of thought because it leads to so many places. Let me start with this business of being “literary.” In a sense, Elie is right—in that I not only do not grow up but I also *refuse* to do so! In its current usage I fancy that growing up means reconciling oneself to “reality”—to the world as it is—to be and behave like all other sane people do. The few chats we had together in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv persuaded me that you belonged with the category of people who stubbornly refuse to surrender to the requirements of worldly wisdom—to grow up. And while sitting with you in that sleazy cafe on the Mediterranean, you suddenly began to appear “intelligible” to me: not an ordinary Leftist with a passion for the underdog, not someone simply plagued by the difficulties and the imponderables of the Israeli-Arab mess, but a real, born rebel, a very youthful spirit that refuses to grow up and grow wise. And then, the next day when I decided to see you off at the airport and give you something that you would remember (and that would help you articulate your position), I could think of nothing better than Laing’s *Politics of Experience!* You were, of course, right: we had never discussed Laing or psychology or Freud, but then so what? And now I remember that I was slightly insulted when you expressed

surprise. "Why, but we never mentioned Laing?" And my angry reply was, if you recall: What do you take me for? How dared you imply that just because we didn't mention Laing I was not capable of choosing him, or rather of guessing that he would be the one for you!! However, it was at that cafe ("Nothing, Nissim, nothing comes after winter!") that I discovered you, and it was at the airport that my attachment to you started taking shape . . .

One of these days you will stop calling me "wise"! At any rate, I don't want my alleged "wisdom" to confuse and spoil your native rebelliousness. After all that is one of the things I so like in you . . . However, you ask a very pertinent question, then answer it very sensibly indeed, and then ask it again. Well, how can one appreciate the Laings of this world and yet counsel passive acceptance — say in the context of family life and such? Well, I figure I honestly don't know! Of course, the difficulty with your question is that it implies that we all have to practice our views and our predilections. But how is that to be done? If I and you were to take such a course, I fancy that you will be leaving your job and joining the hippies (where, for sheer old age, you will not even be received!), while I would be telling Rachel and the kids off and set out to some monastery in Sinai and there to preach peace and brotherliness between the so-called Jews and the so-called Arabs. So, I suppose, one has to make *some* compromise somewhere — and the point in which you are undoubtedly right is that one has to draw the line somewhere. That is it I suppose: Where does one draw that line? To perceive the truth of Laing's claims — and at the same time to see that one has other "obligations" — that one has to make ends meet intellectually — especially when one is a rather late returnee — to do this is simply to be minimally realistic, if I be allowed to use a dirty word. What say you?

November 22, 1968

Your letter, together with the one I wrote at about the same time, seem to conclude at least one phase of questioning and counter-questioning. So let's leave matters stand where they are. I must add, though, that your judgments and your insights often overwhelm by their accuracy.

Menahem Milson I don't know at all, except for a review or two he wrote. . . . But Shamir is a friend, and I had always meant to write to you about him — very intelligent and very present; by and large he also has his heart in the right place, I mean about the things that currently matter to us. But he is fortunate in that he has no hard convictions in that direction. He is also a good scholar and I am looking forward to seeing

the results of his research. One shortcoming though: He is no great lover of letter-writing and I shall have to write to him one of these days. (He would send a New Year card and ask there: why don't you write occasionally!!) [Note: Milson is a professor (now emeritus) of Arabic literature at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.]

. . . But I promised some explications! Well,

1. Dayan, like his sometime expert and mentor Harkabi, would seem to want nothing more than to see manifestations of Arab extremism: Look-how-hopeless-the-position-is-and-you-dare-talk-about-peace sort of thing. In fact, I suspect that he would actually teach Arabs to reject Israel and to advocate its destruction—for sheer livelihood!
2. It's the most curious thing, but currently we have the following paradox: Dayan, who is both a hawk and wants to keep Israel "Jewish," now advocates "integration" of the territories into Israel come what may; on the other hand, the doves, led by *shtetl*-born Pinchas Sapir, oppose integration on the ground that it would mean the end of Israel as a so-called Jewish state! (As I think I told you more than once: starting from despair I consider "casual" integration to be the best card we have; I simply don't want Sapir's ghetto! And so, my dear Irene, all considered I would opt for Dayan! I mean if I had no alternative to him but Sapir. . . .)

Did I ever tell you that I was absolutely the first person to publish and publicize Cecil Hourani's article? A friend of mine sent me a xeroxed copy in September 1967; on October 14, I had a summary of it in the *Jewish Observer* printed; on October 21, a larger summary with comments in the *Post* and the afternoon daily *Yediot Aharonot*. *Encounter* printed it in full in their November issue, changing only the heading, which was "Torero or Bull." It may interest him to know these details! [Note: Cecil Hourani, a Lebanese-born historian, wrote a 1967 essay calling on Arabs, especially Arab intellectuals, to reassess Arab-Israeli relations realistically after the Six-Day War.]

December 6, 1968

If your friend Gebran Majdalani has so far failed to procure things that are on every other newsstand in Paris, London and New York, then we are all in a pretty little fix. But more serious, though to me not at all surprising, is the "theory" that the only healthy Israeli—the only Israeli with whom you can deal—is the classic Zionist type. Why of course! What can be more natural than that these people accept the philosophy

of those who have caused them so much frustration, gave them so many blows? It only proves one of my pet theories: nationalism is indivisible. These people obviously believe in Jewish nationalism even as they believe in Arab nationalism; a non-nationalist Jew must be as despicable to them as a non-nationalist Arab. How could it be otherwise when the two literally live off the other's extremism?

I have a suggestion: Instead of sending Gebran the things he has asked for, go out and buy him a copy of Lewis Coser's *The Functions of Social Conflict* and send it to him, with the request that he read the whole thing through. Also, let him await Harkabi's book, an English rendering of which is to appear in Spring 1969. If he promises to read both carefully he might become a little wiser!

January 15, 1969

Your remarks are all quite valid—but again they have to do with my own peculiar way of mounting an attack or a counter-attack: I seem to stake too much on the subtlety of people and their ability to take a hint! But you are right: I really only now realize how bloody vicious professor Kemal Karpat's attack was—and how *personal!* It may interest you to know that Karpat is not *merely* a Turk but is also *Rumanian*; hence the name! (Can you beat that for race prejudice?) The fact is that his book [*Political and Social Thought in the Contemporary Middle East*] is far more replete with mistakes of all kinds than my review could impart. But who the hell has the time to do all that work just to locate mistakes? Hopelessly lazy that I am, I picked up those which I did completely at random. And the standard of the selection! You really ought to read the section about Local Nationalism: bloody unreadable. Well, so be it.

Got a letter from Ronald Sanders. My famous portrait in *Midstream* ("The Chequered Career of Ghassan Hamzawi") is "excellent." It will be the principal adornment of the February issue. But its just over 10,000 words are cut (don't know by what percentage!) though the political parts remain intact. I agreed to the cutting because the piece was really too wide-ranging (including an anthropo-sociological study in miniature of West Bank society and culture, which goes out, intact) and the "genre" is too new to me to resist ANY and all editing.

Let me hear more about your misgivings re my over-emphasis on culture and religion as factors determining a people's outlook, approach and behavior. Now that you have read some [Ruth] Benedict, what is your considered opinion on the subject? Far be it from me to insist on

my rightness; but damn me if I can see otherwise. (Was Stalin conceivable in England in 1935–53, Communism or not? Could a Hitler rise in India? Can you imagine an Arab Ben Gurion? What the heck!)

January 20, 1969

You speak of my “productivity.” I must put the record straight: I have been working for the past three years on a hundred things all at once and I published very little indeed. Now all I am doing is tailoring a few things here and there and the impression is great. So be it—but I just wanted to let you know . . . However by the time this reaches you, you will probably have read my other *Jerusalem Post* piece—on why Nasser wants an imposed settlement (in which by the way I sum up Coser and Simmel on Conflict to show why it is so good for Nasser to maintain the tension). Well, I am mighty amused by the results. An American lady in Haifa has written that she liked it very much and so on . . . but look, “I thought it applied to the Zionists too—and I actually wrote a memorandum three weeks ago on the same lines and sent it to Knesset member so-and-so, and if you will give me some of your valuable time while I am in Tel Aviv I shall furnish proof of it!” My friend in East Jerusalem “threatened” that he can just change the name Nasser for Israel and the whole thing would read even more convincingly. Can you beat that? [Note: Georg Simmel (1858–1918) was a German philosopher and sociologist.]

No I don’t think I *hate* neatness; I simply cannot seem to live up to it—and I don’t make a virtue of necessity. Neatness saves time and much trouble; it helps one avoid messy and unnecessary involvements; it very often means that one strikes while the iron is hot—make a clean break and forget about it, instead of proceeding on the forlorn hope that things may organize themselves, that people will eventually see the light, succumb to reason and to reasoning. I have the impression that the refusal to be neat—in human relationships I mean—has to do with a certain philosophy, a certain view of human nature. Neatness in the sense in which we are speaking of implies a certain measure of *misanthropy*; non-neatness, or inability to practice neatness, implies a refusal to despair of human beings. I admit that, in the sense that it is “easy,” neatness is a little despicable; but, the world being what it is and “human nature being what it is,” I can think of no safer time- and trouble-saving device. Moral: Don’t ever take neatness so lightly!

You ask a good question: How shall one convince the Arabs that de-

Zionizing will follow on peace and not the reverse? Well, my answer in my present “new” mood is very simple—and it is two-dimensional: 1) The only party one is obliged to convince of this or any other conclusion is oneself; 2) scholars/writers/journalists like ourselves have no business trying actively to change the world: their job is explanation rather than exhortation, analysis rather than advocacy, diagnosing rather than prescribing.

January 31, 1969

So you see I am not as stubborn as I sound (I am now turning to the other major debate: the importance of culture et cetera). I shall start with a rebuke! I may be a “cultural determinist,” but what you sound is like a socio-economic determinist. You say that to pose the question as to whether an Indian Hitler was conceivable—or an Arab Ben Gurion or a British Stalin—is not quite fair. What *would* be fair, you add, is to ask “whether or not India could undergo the conditions, economic, political, that made Hitler possible.” This is equivalent to saying—is it not—that given certain economic and political conditions (specifically, those that prevailed in Germany say between 1919 and 1933), a Hitler would rise anywhere. Well, *I simply don't agree!* What is more, this has nothing to do with my alleged cultural determinism; it does not take a cultural determinist to contest your interpretation.

But this is obviously too big a topic to be dealt with in brief. I would recommend a basic discussion of this with Harry Lubasz, who in connection with the situation here said that “modernization” does not have to take the identical cultural hue everywhere, and that even in Western Europe it took various forms in various countries. This is to say—obviously—that there is no necessary connection between modernizing and Westernizing. It again contradicts what you imply clearly—namely, that modernizing implies acceptance by the modernized of “the essential cultural patterns of the society whose technology they are seeking to imitate”—a view, again, which you surmise from Kemal Karpat’s remarks on ideology and culture.

Do not misunderstand me. I am perfectly willing to believe that people—and peoples—change with less difficulty than I am saying (in which connection you may read an article by Robert Jay Lifton in *Partisan Review* titled “The Protean Man” or something); but I seem to resist the view that people’s backgrounds are of no importance—especially, of course, people with the “wrong” background, like all non-Westerners. I resist it because it is inhuman, because it believes in sacrificing one or

four generations for the sake of some textbook abstraction. But I may well be wrong.

February 19, 1969

The other day my insurance people sent me to a doctor for a general examination. At the end of the tedious procedure the doctor said: "Well, Sir, one can say that you are a healthy person—only a little nervous!" I was taken aback. I said: When people in the street or in casual conversation call someone "nervous" we all understand what *they* mean. But what does the word mean when used in medicine, not in psychotherapy? This time the doctor himself was taken aback (not having expected this small measure of sophistication—not even that!). So, bowing to the inevitable, he said well, it all is related to problems of "adaptation"—we are all too aware of these problems etc.

Myself: "But these are psychological, not medical problems properly speaking." "Nonsense," he said, "the distinction does not exist. It first starts with the psyche or the mind or the heart but then it begins to affect a person in such ways that it can all be read in his so-called purely medical state." Then I exchanged a few other sentences with him on the whole business of adaptation—on two aspects of it in fact. First, I said casually, one bets the problems of adaptation are more acute amongst the Orientals than amongst "the Poles"! "You would be surprised," he snapped, "the Poles too have their problems of adaptation!" A good sign!! Second, I teased him about the famous "adaptation-to-what" argument, quoting Laing and the rest. "I don't know," he said. "It's in this world that people have to live and we can only help them adapt to living in this world." Banal and pedestrian—but there it is like a resounding slap in the face. My "reality principle"? I have no idea; you will have to be more specific.

February 27, 1969

I like your reflections on Elie. You have probably hit that particular nail on the head: I really may belong to a past that is either dead and gone for Elie or that causes him pain. One thing is to me entirely clear about Elie: A part of him at least is completely dead. Paradoxically, what I think I have been going through these past three years Elie had gone through sometime between 1947—when he went to London to study—and 1950, when he suddenly found himself a refugee and his family and community rendered completely destitute and homeless. One must start with that, I think.

I want very much to see you—to feel that you are there all right and that you are not “a walking myth” (as you implied you thought I was). I still may be in London some time in the summer—and you couldn’t be more welcome to Jerusalem and Ramat Gan. But there is ample time to plan. In a very real though inexplicable way, I *share* in your joys and torments and it makes very little difference whether you spell things out or keep them to yourself: I have the feeling that I am there. So don’t start making me any concessions or favors by refraining from “burdening” me with your queries and thoughts.

## NATIONALITY OR PAN-MOVEMENT?

### DIARY

Ramat Gan, September 15, 1968

When I hear people say that not only is the phase of nationalism not over but it has not really begun, I almost reach for my gun! Nationalism is so many things to so many people that one has to define one’s terms. The nationalism whose manifestations we now observe in Europe, in Eastern Europe, is surely not the same sort of thing as the force which drives the leaders of Biafra. Again, Egyptian patriotism is not the same as Arab nationalism—nor is Israeli nationalism the same as “Jewish” nationalism. It may well be just a pious hope, but when I say that the phase of nationalism is over, I mean that brand of tribalism perhaps best illustrated by Pan-Slavism, Pan-Arabism and Pan-Judaism. Local, socio-cultural nationalisms do not cause me much bother; Black nationalism is not nationalism. However, so much of this talk about the upsurge of nationalism belongs to the category of self-fulfilling prophesies, so much of it comes to justify one’s own fanaticism, that I rather become suspicious when I hear it argued, “What can you do? This is a mad world, and we have to behave like we behave. When, in fifty, 100 or ten thousand years, the world becomes less mad, we shall then be able to behave like the sweet and reasonable people we really are!” I have heard this argument made by people who must take a great deal of the blame for the world’s present madness—at least in this part of the world! Certain acquaintances, when they bring themselves to be in a charitable mood, often tell me that I am living either a century or two ago or about the same distance of time ahead. And I am usually not in the least surprised, either.

October 18, 1968

The other night I met a couple from Paris. Students. New Left. Interested in Middle Eastern affairs. Everything. We spoke of Flapan and his refusal to differentiate between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. The girl said she agrees with *that*—and also with Givet’s thesis—and when I started giving her the full treatment, she said it was a nice play on *logique* but little else. Said her Gentile friends argue with her endlessly: Why don’t you be *French* and have done with it, why do you have to be *Jewish*? You are not religious! And so on. Me: Why, isn’t it possible to be both French and Jewish? She: No, it appears not. Me: In what sense *are* you Jewish? [Note: Simha Flapan (1911–1987) was an Israeli historian and politician; Jacques Givet (1917–2004), né Jacques Vishniac, was a Russian-born French writer.]

The sheer absurdity of the whole enterprise! The girl is Jewish in the sense that those blokes consider her to be Jewish—and that is the end of that! So we have the most perfect situation: The Arabs help our fanatics and fulfill their worst prophesies; the Gentiles force the Jews to be Zionists and to equate Jewishness with Zionism. And N.R. and a few other dreamers go on insisting that the spade is not *really* a spade!

November 22, 1968

I was in Jerusalem this week for a whole day and more than half a night. Most of the time with Atallah [Mansour] and that friend of mine whose “composite” portrait I want to draw for *Midstream*. Had dinner at the home of the latter (who in the early good days actually came with his wife to Ramat Gan and spent an evening with us). The wife is charming, but getting sad: her relatives (in Amman) are “so near and so far”; how can this continue? Go away and we shall overcome—overcome Hussein, overcome our internal rifts and disunity. Said I doubted it; why don’t you try and overcome while “we” are here? . . . [Note: Hussein I (1935–1999) was king of Jordan.]

My friend wants to write a book on the refugees (he had worked with UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency]). Showed me the synopsis. He might as well have called it The Compendium, in the best tradition of medieval Islamic historiography; starts almost with Adam and Eve. But he is keen and I promised to help him with material. And so on. In the end, Atallah—who could not be there as he had unexpected guests—came to fetch me to the bus station. Was very excited about *Al-Quds* [the East Jerusalem daily]; said he was sure the Palestinians would “arrive.” Okay, the net result of all this was that I reached

Ramat Gan about one a.m.—and the next day the flu. My doctor wants me to stay home today, tomorrow and the day after, and then go and see her again.

November 25, 1968

We had dinner the other night with Nevil[le] Mandel and some very “healthy” Israelis; very depressing. They spoke about attitudes to the Arabs, and one remarked: Hatred? O no! Only contempt! However, you do find hatred among the Orientals—isn’t that so, Nissim? I said, perhaps, but I am not sure hatred was worse than contempt! This week Rachel and the kids gave me a modest birthday function which we celebrate together with our marriage day (December 12). Thus we proceed as though nothing were wrong with the world; we go on dissembling. How long can one survive this? Surprisingly long, I suppose! [Note: Mandel is the author of *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (1976).]

December 7, 1968

Monday evening I listened to the proceedings from Radio Cairo of the emergency session of the national congress of the A.S.U. Nasser, who opened the meeting, sounded worried enough and rather far from being either convincing or convinced. I had not estimated the scope of the Alexandria student riots correctly; I even was reserved about the use of the word “rioting.” But, man, was it rioting! Anyway, in that opening speech Nasser was very “reasonable” on the question of a peace settlement; simply said he was willing to arrive at such an arrangement but would not contemplate surrender (*salam* as against *istislam!*). That was on Monday evening. On Wednesday evening, closing the session, he was another man: Israel wants to take Mecca and Medina. It will have to return every last inch of territory; separate settlements between Arab countries and Israel are unthinkable; and so on and on. [Note: The ASU, or Arab Socialist Union, was an Egyptian political party founded in 1962 by Nasser; it was disbanded in 1978.]

Reminds me of a remark made by Shimon [Shamir] the other day about the Arabs—one of the shrewder formulations of a phenomenon not completely unknown: “Of course they are not ‘serious’: they don’t only not mean what they say, they don’t *do* what they *mean!*” And they have this maddening aptitude for earning a consistently bad reputation for themselves “without really trying.” An illustration: In the deliberations that followed Nasser’s opening address, one delegate after another

deplored the lack of political consciousness, revolutionary awareness, socialist education and what have you amongst the students. Yet the fact is that since 1960 courses in what is called “National Subjects” have been given to university students of all descriptions. These are compulsory courses and they are spread through *four* years of higher education—and no matter what you are taking, medicine, engineering, literature or commerce—you have to take them (first year: Arab Society; second year: the July 23 Revolution; third year: Socialism or Arab Socialism; and fourth year: General Arab Affairs).

On the face of it, this is indoctrination, brain-washing, thought reform of the worst kind, and it has duly harmed the reputation of the regime. Yet the whole enterprise is far, far less “terrible” than it sounds! For one thing, no one anywhere in any ministry or party bureau ever made it clear what the hell was to be taught in these courses! For another, no control of any kind was exercised upon the actual processes of the indoctrination (university teachers are not liable to inspection or control!!!).

For yet another, no uniform “textbooks” existed: each teacher, repeat each teacher, decided to write his own textbooks on each of the subjects—with the result that there are literally scores of books on Arab Society, the July 23 Revolution, Arab Socialism and the rest. These books present an incredible hotchpotch of ideas, doctrines and ideologies, ranging from the purely Islamic interpretation of Arabism and Socialism (especially in cases where the teacher chosen happens to be a ‘Alim and/or an instructor of Koran) through racial, ethnic and “political” definitions of Arab nationalism, to Social Democrat, Marxist, Fabian or even Nazi interpretations of Socialism.

All this, when the world is legitimately led to believe that an unspeakable process of brainwashing and indoctrination is going on the banks of the Nile! Much the same sort of picture obtains in matters related to writings on Israel and the Jews: the equation of Zionism with Judaism, Israel with the Jewish people, is part and parcel of the Zionist credo. In their boundless naivete—and also, of course, as a result of their being stung by the same nationalist bug—a number of Arab publicists and paid propagandists found this equation rather convenient (how else to explain the fact that a mere handful of Jews in Palestine managed to defeat all their armies in 1948?). The result: Not only are the Arabs becoming anti-Semitic but the very center of anti-Semitism has moved from Europe to Cairo! Plainly, then, the Arabs are not “serious”—at least not in the sense that the term is understood in the Wild West.

December 14, 1968

"I want to join the ranks of the Fat'h! I don't want to live among Jews. I want to live among Arabs because I am an Arab, even as you Jews prefer to live among Jews."

A 15-year old youth from the Israeli Arab village of Um el-Fahm to a Kol Yisrael reporter—quoted in *Ma'ariv*, Tel Aviv, October 21, 1968.

"Our Arab pride is deeply hurt by statements frequently made by Israeli leaders to the effect that Israel should withdraw from the [occupied] territories so as to preserve the Jewish character of the state . . . The solution to the Middle East conflict lies in the establishment of a bi-national state within the borders of Palestine. I am convinced that Jews and Arabs can live together in brotherhood and cooperation . . . But if you insist on a 'purely Jewish state' then I and I believe many other Israeli Arabs will demand a return to the [1947] Partition boundaries, with Acre included in the Arab state."

Muhammed Hubeishi, Deputy-Mayor of Acre,  
in a press conference in Haifa, December 1, 1968.

January 6, 1969

This has been a fantastic fortnight. I managed to finish my famous portrait and sent it to *Midstream*, though it turned out to be more a portrait of West Bank society than of Ghassan Hamzawi—with generous helpings about el-Baba, myself, and a troop of others. I can almost see the people there discussing it: it was no joke concocting and it's not going to be a joke printing, but I still have hopes about it. Finished too is the Harkabi plague. I am using two of its nine sections—one on the Uses of Conflict and another on the Arabs' language disaster—as groundwork for two long pieces for the *Post*.

January 9, 1969

Irene's six-year old son, so she tells me, has been restless about this business of Christmas-for-the-Christians, and at one point he even said something about wanting to go to Israel "to live among Jews" . . . This set me thinking: I, who reached manhood before leaving Baghdad, never once had anything like that experience there. It would in fact have been the limit of absurdity to moan about 'Id el Fitr-for-the-Moslems or any such nonsense. If I remember rightly we took it all in our stride, because we too had our own feasts and festivities. If 'Id el Fitr was for

the Moslems, so be it; Succot, Hanukah, Passover, Rosh Hashanah and several other goodies were “for the Jews.” I cannot of course go into this in any detail, but my first reaction is that what makes the difference was not so much the difference between the ways the Christians and the Moslems do things (though that must be there); not even the two religions’ quite different approaches to Jews and Judaism (though that too is there). It must, I feel, have something to do with the very nature of the Judaism practiced—and lived—in Boston and Baghdad. To put it briefly I feel that, while the Jews of Baghdad were more confident in their Jewish God and therefore more tranquil about the whole status of being Jews, the average American Jew lacks both that kind of confidence and the tranquility that goes with it.

I am not saying that this was absolutely peculiar to Baghdad Jews or to Jews living in Moslem countries: My guess is that it was the case too in the East European *shtetls* and that some of it survives in the Orthodox quarters of New York. What I am saying is that the restlessness, the nervousness and the lack of confidence which one notices among Jews nowadays are peculiar to *secular* Jews. Obviously, Jews who have lost their faith in Judaism in its only meaningful sense—and who in addition would either not “let go” of it or are not *allowed* to do so by the Gentiles—must feel uneasy and shifty about their situation. This may well be the background of Jewish nationalism, its source and its drive.

February 13, 1969

Suddenly one day late in January I get a call from Jerusalem: Arabic TV needs me “desperately”. I accepted the offer and two weeks ago actually started working there—full time—though not every day of the week. The job has the advantage of being completely “professional”; it entails no administrative or “political” responsibilities and it is not badly paid. Ultimately I figure it will not take more than three days of work a week (11 hours, plus two of commuting!) so that I shall still have my freedom half of the time. The work does not call for moving to Jerusalem, but since we have very little to tie us to Ramat Gan or Tel Aviv, and since I like Jerusalem and Rachel has her parents there, we may do it, as it will mean more convenience plus the possibility of exchanging our ageing flat for a new if less spacious one. However, there will be a period of transition and acclimatization and running about and some confusion before things organize themselves.

June 20, 1969

Paul Jacobs phoned the other day, frantically wanting to see me. Okay, he read my *Midstream* piece and—what is more—picked up my *Judaism* article in Beirut and so on, and would I agree to attend something to be organized by that Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions to which he is linked and whose location I never seem to remember? The something was to include a list of persons—which he recited—from Israel, Egypt and Palestine. I said yes, in principle. Asked me where I stood and I said I do not know where a man could stand in a situation in which Menahem Begin and the Greater Israel Movement are doing the work of Yasir Arafat. . . . [Note: The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, founded by Robert Maynard Hutchins, was a Santa Barbara, California-based forum that from 1959 to 1987 brought together experts to discuss problems facing American society.]

Just read a headline to the effect that Danny the Red insulted Marcuse in a public meeting somewhere. Good for Marcuse, nice of Danny the Red, and some consolation to me . . . [Note: Danny the Red, born in 1945 as Daniel Cohn-Bendit, was a French anarchist and student agitator during the late 1960s in Paris.]

I am now being constantly reminded of the suggestion that I start writing my own autobiography-obituary. The source is most unexpected: Ronald Sanders and Sh. Katz have decided I was so good in the genre they want me to supply them with chapters from life. Their proposal lies there and I don't know what to do about it. Meantime the current *New Middle East* is printing a part of my dissertation on Har-kabi; *L'Arche* is translating my *Judaism* article with great enthusiasm.

April 11, 1970

We are moving to the Holy City July 1 if all goes well! A smaller flat but nicer and more modern and I hope more accommodating and comfortable. Rachel really deserves a respite from this whale of a flat—and also some modern conveniences like central heating, central gas supply, and hot water that runs more regularly. Also the bulk of Rachel's family is there, and I like to think I have more friends and acquaintances there myself. Also the Hebrew University, the *Post*, the Sephardi Council and the East Jerusalemites. I know it sounds strange—I mean our doing this just as I cease to work for TV. But the fact is that when I started work for TV I started flat hunting in Jerusalem, which I now find difficult to stop.

“And so a great and unique opportunity was lost!” Ghassan Hamzawi (pseudonym) concluded, visibly moved by his own rhetoric.

It was not the first time I heard Ghassan lamenting thus. “As you know, the war caught me in Amman with part of my family. I had taken Nabil there for treatment and my wife was with us. Nabil suffers from asthma and was going through one of his severest attacks when the clouds of war started gathering. Then came the upheavals, as swift as they were stunning in their sheer scope. A few days after the cease-fire, when movement across the Jordan was resumed and people from Jerusalem and other West Bank cities were again visiting Amman, friends and colleagues came to me and said: ‘Ghassan, you just wouldn’t believe your own eyes! These Israelis are a thousand times better than Hussein and his administration. Just come and see for yourself!’ This was the kind of talk you heard everywhere in the first weeks. Believe me, the Palestinians would have become Israel’s best ambassadors to the Arab world, if only the atmosphere of those first weeks had continued to prevail! But Israel was to choose otherwise—and look what things have come to now. Never has so unique an opportunity been so stupidly and wantonly missed!”

It was no use trying to reason with Ghassan on this point. Wasn’t it the case, I tried to suggest on many occasions, that the inhabitants of East Jerusalem and the West Bank were initially greatly moved by the very fact that the Israelis didn’t . . . well, massacre them? Couldn’t one say, I went on, that it was only after a few weeks of tranquility that these inhabitants came to realize the enormity of what had taken place, the reality of foreign rule, the sheer impossibility of bridging the gap between their pre-June 5 dreams and the drab facts of post-war existence? It was only human for them to become disappointed, I kept telling Ghassan, and the opportunity might not have been as completely lost as he was suggesting, after all.

I remember those first days vividly, almost with nos-talgia. It was exactly a week after the cease-fire, on Friday, June 16, 1967, that I had made my first acquaintance with the West Bank. The whole tour had taken me just a little less than a day; I had confined my trip to Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah, leaving the less exciting places to another, more leisurely time. In Ramallah, a summer resort that on any previous June day would have been throbbing with the presence of wealthy vacationers from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and other oil-rich Arab lands, there was very little activity indeed. As I parked my car I was greeted by a middle-aged man who was peddling something I could not recognize at first. I asked him how it had all felt, how he saw things shaping up, what future he envisioned. Ah well, one thing at least was quite clear—or so he wanted me to believe. “No going back to Hussein and his Beduin regime! We want Israel! We want to be Israelis!” After all, he asked rhetorically, what divides us? “Don’t we worship the same God? Aren’t we all Semites? Don’t we all descend from the same father, Abraham?”

And so on and on. The pace with which the nicely-phrased sentiments flowed from his mouth was doubly surprising, considering that the voice was that of a shabby-looking peddler, and that he was trying to sell what turned out to be dice, at half a pound a pair. Furthermore, for the benefit of those who did not know Arabic he offered quite a passable Hebrew. Why of course, he had lived and worked—as a carpenter—in the Mus-rara Quarter, now in Jewish Jerusalem. He has—had—a house there, and another in Jaffa which he had inherited from his late mother. He was not idle about these properties, either. Just the other day he had approached the Israeli military governor and asked whether he would now be allowed to “go back home,” whether he would be able to get back his property. “But the Governor,” he said grinning like someone who had just done something naughty, “advised me to wait. The time was not yet ripe for that sort of question, he told me.”

But what did he do for a living? Had he always peddled dice in the streets of Ramallah? “Of course not,” came the reply, accompanied by that carefree grin. “I have a small shop just around the corner; but it was destroyed and emptied out a few days ago.” Trying to console him, I said that he would eventually be compensated by the insurance company. “Insurance? Yes, of course. Allah is my insurance. Allah is generous!” And again, that incredible grin.

“Look here, my friend,” Ghassan would say, largely ignoring my equivocal objections. “Where is it written that a man, a citizen of so-called ‘reunified Jerusalem,’ can be banished from his home, his wife, his children and his friends, placed in an army jeep, driven to the nearest frontier post on the Jordan and handed over to the guards on the other side—just like that, and for no better reason than signing a petition, coming together with a few other men to discuss the situation, or refusing to accept as final his new uncertain status as an inhabitant of Israel’s ‘capital’? You say this is a land of law and order, that no action is taken that would in any way violate existing laws. You claim that these banishments are ordered in accordance with an old law, a legacy of the British Mandate. Well and good! But can you tell me how it is that the Jews are now using against us regulations that were meant to oppress and silence them, and against which at the time they kicked up such a terrible fuss and sought to mobilize world opinion?”

“The plain fact is,” Ghassan went on, “that they want to humiliate us, to make us lose our dignity and pride, to prove how superior they are and how they are the sole masters of the situation! Did I tell you—I must have—of the doctor who, having received an urgent house call, had rushed to his car in his night gown? It was just before midnight, and as he was driving to his patient’s home midway between Jerusalem and Ramallah, his car was stopped for a routine check. Fumbling for his pass, he realized he had left it in his suit at home. He told his story, offered the men to drive them home in order to show them the card, explained politely that it was an urgent case that he had to examine, and in several other ways tried to persuade the security men to believe him. Nothing doing! He was taken to the police station right away—and had to spend the whole night there! Can you imagine?”

There was literally no end to these stories. You go to a government office “up there” (in West Jerusalem); you had been asked to be there at 8:15 a.m., and sure enough you manage to be there punctually at 8:15 a.m. But it is only after you had been there for fully two hours that the clerk would condescend to ask you what you wanted! Ghassan’s office, just off the main street of the modern section of East Jerusalem, is housed in the upper floor of a relatively new building. It is well-furnished. The huge desk is strewn with books, newspapers and magazines of all descriptions. Every morning, Ghassan would walk to the nearest bookstore and pick up, together with the *Jerusalem Post* and *Al-Yawm*, the Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *London Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*,

and other Israeli, British or American periodicals that happened to arrive. "I want to write a book about Israel," he would explain, a shade apologetically, when one of his many visitors would ask him what he needed all those publications for. "But have you seen Professor Talmon's article in the *Sunday Observer* this week? Did you read Charles Douglas-Home's series of articles in *The Times*?" His thirst for knowledge of Israel knows no bounds. He can enter a bookshop and simply buy every book dealing with an Israeli subject that he has not had occasion to buy before. He has become a familiar customer, not only in Jerusalem's bookshops but in those of Tel Aviv as well. Not quite able to find his way on Israeli roads, he usually arranges for friends to give him a lift to Tel Aviv and back, and gives me a call to tell me at what hour to expect him and where. Once in Tel Aviv the first thing he would ask for was to be accompanied to the city's three leading bookshops.

On my frequent visits to Jerusalem I usually spend some time with Ghassan at his office, sipping coffee, examining his new acquisitions in the literature on Israel and the Middle East, leafing through some of his magazines and periodicals—an incredible variety, ranging from *Penthouse* and *Playboy*, through *Evergreen* and *Ramparts*, to *Atlantic*, *Encounter*, *Commentary* and *Middle Eastern Studies*—or meeting his many interesting visitors. These are as variegated as his reading tastes: simple Christian pilgrims, who hardly can distinguish between Islam and Judaism, trying to fathom "the Mid-East situation"; American Jewish tourists eager to have some direct experience of East Jerusalem and its inhabitants; old friends and relatives of Ghassan's with nothing in particular to do with their time.

It was at one of these sittings, shortly after the war, that I had the opportunity of meeting Yusuf Hanna, the veteran journalist who worked on *Al-Difa'* in its old days in Jaffa, and who had many friends and acquaintances in Israel. In his mid-seventies and rather hard of hearing, Hanna had difficulty in getting my host's introduction right. "Rejwan?" he asked. "Nissim Rejwan? Where is he? You? Are you Nissim Rejwan? How can it be? I thought you were much older! Do you remember our running debate in the pages of the *Jerusalem Post* and the East Jerusalem daily *Al-Difa'* a few years ago? I used to read your articles and I have quite a folder of cuttings of them! Do you know Arabic? Why then are you speaking English?"

*Y*usuf Hanna—who is also nicknamed *el-baba* (father) as a token of respect for his age and prestige—had come to Palestine from Egypt, where he was born to Chris-

tian parents. He was then in his mid-twenties, and had already known some of the most renowned of Egypt's writers and intellectuals: Salama Mousa, Isma'il Mad-har, Muhammad Husein Haykal, 'Abbas Mahmoud Al-'Aqqad, and others. "Who in Egypt would then have spoken about Arabs and Arabism? No one! Who cared? It was only after you came here that Arabism and Arab nationalism became fashionable," Hanna would say, interrupting his own account. "Believe me, when the barriers were removed between the two parts of Jerusalem, I was so overwhelmed by emotion that I told whoever was around that it was the happiest day of my life. And you know what happened? The next thing I knew it was all in *Time* magazine: Yusuf Hanna, the grand old man of Jordanian journalism, told our reporter that the reunification of Jerusalem was the happiest moment in his whole life! And when the Cairo station Saut al-Arab got wind of it, its commentator cut me to pieces, but literally. The b——!"

One of the first things Hanna did after the war was to visit the *Jerusalem Post* premises. "The late Agronsky [Gershon Agron, founder and first editor of the *Post*] was a good friend of mine, may his soul rest in peace; but I also had known Lurie [Ted R. Lurie, then editor of the *Jerusalem Post*]. He asked me to contribute to his paper. But what shall I write? You just don't know how to make it up with us! You have become too fanatical! You are intoxicated with victory! What's the use? What glory is there in mere planes and tanks and fire power! The other day, on Mount Scopus, I met an old acquaintance, an American Jewish lady whom I knew from pre-Statehood days. 'Yusuf Hanna!' she called out, 'don't you hear me? Have you become all that deaf? Well, how do you like it?' I can't make head or tail of it, I said. What do you make of a country whose prime minister speaks constantly about peace while its highest religious authority issues a *fatwa* (religious edict) against returning a single inch of occupied Arab territory? 'What are you talking about, Yusuf?' the lady asked. And so I took out that day's issue of the *Post* from my pocket and showed it to her in black and white. On page one, Mr. Eshkol was saying that Israel's paramount aspiration was peace, that the Six-Day War was one which Israel fought in sheer self-defense and not as a war of conquest; while on page eight, you have Chief Rabbi Itzhak Nissim laying it down in no uncertain terms that, according to your religion, the government of Israel is forbidden to surrender any territory upon which Jewish fighters had set foot. What do you make of this, my dear lady? And do you know what her answer was? 'Ah, that Chief Rabbi. He is ignorant, he knows nothing. He's an Arab from Iraq who used to be a merchant. You don't have to pay any attention to what he says! How do you like that?'"

One day soon after the war, Ghassan called me from Jerusalem to say that he, his wife and Yusuf Hanna were going to be driven to Tel Aviv that afternoon by a mutual friend, that he, as usual, wanted me to accompany him on his round of the bookshops, and that Hanna wanted to be taken to the flat of Moshe Brilliant, the journalist, a friend from the old days. I invited Ghassan and his wife to have dinner at my house that evening. Hanna turned out to know the Brilliants rather well: their son, now at the university, used to sit on his lap, and he knew their daughter, now also grown up, when she was a baby. "We were as brothers," Hanna would say again and again. "Arabs and Jews could then live together in peace and amity. But these politics, politics. May God bring His curse on politics and politicians!" We left Hanna at the Brilliants and went book-hunting with Ghassan. "Ah, *The End of the Jewish People?* By Georges Friedmann? But is it about Israel? I'll take it, and also that U.N. Economic and Financial Report on the Middle East, and that paperback by Scholem on Jewish mysticism ("You have to know something about the background of it all," Ghassan whispered to me on the side, somewhat apologetically) and while we are about it why not Buber's two volumes of *Tales of the Hassidim?*" And so on and on. It was only some time after dark that we managed to reach my house, fetching el-baba on our way there. I showed Hanna some of the cuttings of his articles which for one reason or another I had decided to keep in my files. One of them concerned Arabic syntax and the beauty of Arabic prose. "Words, words," responded Hanna wearily. "Beautiful style and all, but look to what a pass the Arabs have brought themselves! One of the Arabs' many curses is their language; just notice how its very beauty sways them!"

The conversation was conducted in Arabic, and the kids, whose sparse Arabic vocabulary was of a differently pronounced dialect, quickly got bored and went to bed. My wife had made a point of preparing oriental dishes for dinner. But in the Arab world there often exists as many varieties of the same dish as there are different pronunciations of the same word in spoken Arabic—and what was really interesting was the widening gap which was already noticeable between the ways the same dish was prepared by Palestinians living on either side of the border. During the nineteen years of separation many things, it turns out, have changed in the manners, habits and way of life of the Arabs living in Israel. But it has been difficult to get an adequate impression of these differences, since surprisingly few acquaintances and friendships were struck up between these Arabs and their former compatriots from across the border. Ghas-

san admitted to me that for every fifty or even one hundred Jews he now met he probably met one Arab from Israel! I ventured to ask Ghassan why this was so—why, throughout the past year and a half or so of open borders, he and his family only once visited an Arab town in Israel, and then only to accompany a relative from Amman?

There was, he gave me to understand, a good deal of estrangement between the Palestinians who [had] lived in Israel since 1948 and those who came under Israeli control in June 1967. Several factors account for this. Apart from certain psychological ones, such as embarrassment on the part of the latter at their rather unimpressive performance in twenty years of Arab rule, there were two decisive socio-cultural factors that led to the apparent lack of communication between the two groups. One was the gap which had separated them from the very start. For while the vast majority of the Palestinians who remained in Israel after the War of Independence were illiterate villagers and agricultural workers, those who either fled their homes in Israel-held territory or had lived in Jerusalem and other West Bank cities and townlets were urbanized and relatively well-educated. If we take into consideration the fact that a rather wide gulf separates townsman from villager in Arab society as a whole, we can have a better idea of the importance of this factor.

But another, no less significant cause was the fact that the Palestinians of the West Bank, though they remain far more urbanized and cultured than their counterparts in Israel, have not had the experience of living in a quite modern, technological society, as their old compatriots have had in Israel. It is often quite striking to observe how, in a wide variety of spheres ranging from agricultural techniques through kitchen and bathroom installations to such things as reading habits and entertainment, the Arabs of Israel have quickly acquired the ways of the country in which they live. (The wife of an Israeli Arab friend of mine, whose work brought him and his family to East Jerusalem for a time, insisted on having Tnuva milk from the Jewish side of the city, though there are some fairly modern dairies nearby!) I think it would be fair to say that, farmer for farmer, worker for worker, and village home for village home, the Israeli Arab enjoys a higher standard of living and works more efficiently than his fellow-Palestinian from the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. This is not quite the case among the Israeli Arab townspeople and the professionals, however. Partly because they had started at a disadvantage—virtually the whole of the educated class had left the country in 1947–1948—and partly because they never really got around to being accepted as equal, full-fledged citizens,

the Arabs of Israel have so far failed to produce the sort of well-educated, experienced and potentially effective elite which the Palestinians outside Israel seem to possess.

**B**ut who, my dear friend,” Ghassan was asking, becoming visibly impatient with my frequent references to the idea of an independent Palestinian state. “Who is going to preside over your Palestinian State? How do you propose to convene your ‘First Zionist Congress’ for the Palestinians when there are more of them outside Israeli-held territories than inside?”

Well, one might as well ask who are the Palestinians—or at least what is their own idea of themselves and their status? To confront an inhabitant of East Jerusalem, or of any other town or village in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, with the question of whether he regards himself as a Palestinian, as one belonging to a coherent socio-political and geographical entity called “the Palestinians,” or as a citizen of “the great Arab homeland,” would in most cases provoke a sad, tolerant smile. Not only would he usually not quite grasp the significance of such a question; even when he did he would be unable to decide. “I am a Palestinian,” Ghassan would protest with no hesitation. “We are all Palestinians! There is such a thing as a Palestinian people, and this people has a homeland called Palestine. However, like several other Arabic-speaking peoples—the Egyptians, the Iraqis, the Syrians, the Saudis and others—the Palestinian people are part of the Arab nation. In this sense I am a Palestinian and an Arab at one and the same time. And I believe that a final settlement of the Palestine problem is conceivable only when we as a people have been granted our right to self-determination.”

And yet Ghassan has never given a satisfactory answer to my repeated queries as to how he reconciled his passionate pan-Arab convictions with his desire to add still another political entity to an Arab world so fragmented already into many such separate sovereignties. Yet I often find myself sympathizing with him, fully understanding his confusion. For that confusion is not his—at least not primarily his; it is virtually built into the whole Arab nationalist doctrine.

For Arab nationalism—and the pan-Arab doctrine with which it is normally identified—is more a mood and a state of mind than a legal, political, historical or geographical reality. It consists largely of a powerful desire to do away with all traces of foreign domination and influence on the one hand, and to attain military strength and economic growth on

the other. In this sense, Arab nationalism can be seen as being largely, almost principally, a reaction. However, while it rejects the West's influence and "cultural invasion," it must also aim at technological progress and economic development—and the paradox here lies in the fact that these goals can be attained only through modernization, i.e. the learning and application of the West's methods and techniques. But to master and apply Western techniques implies a certain measure of Westernization, which in turn signifies the success of the feared cultural "invasion." This further strengthens the nationalist mood.

The growth of nationalism is thus closely connected with the mechanics of modernization, and where Western ways and techniques make serious inroads, the nationalist mood tends to intensify. The West Bank—and prior to the 1948 war Palestine as a whole—is a case in point. With its towns and settled agriculture, its firm hold on commerce and its wide net of educational facilities, the area has for almost half a century been undergoing a fairly intensive process of Westernization. To this, however, was added the strong stimulant of the Palestinians' unexpected encounter and fierce clash with Zionism. Thus, even before 1948, the Palestinians had developed fairly clear notions of nationality and political independence, notions that related both to a strong local patriotism concentrating on the land of Palestine and to a wider, and vaguer, orientation toward Arabism. With the loss of their country after 1948—partly to Israel and partly to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan—the Palestinians became the most articulate and diehard devotees of Arab nationalism and Arab unity. Having no longer any political identity of their own, left with no definable homeland, and constantly fed on the hope that fellow-Arabs would eventually restore Palestine to them, they found their only outlet in '*Uruba*, (Arabism) on which they tended to pin all their hopes.

It is worth noting that this state of mind had become peculiar to the Palestinians. Other Arabic-speaking peoples, though they pay ample lip-service to notions of '*Uruba* and Arab unity, all have their own sovereign political entities, often display a high measure of local nationalism, and usually relegate pan-Arabism to second or third place in their political consciousness. Only the Palestinians, politically dispossessed and physically dispersed, remained faithful to the aspirations and goals of '*Uruba*. One of the very few good long-range results of the Six-Day War has been the apparent shift of emphasis among the Palestinians from an all-embracing and rather vague pan-Arab nationalism to one having its focal point in Palestine itself.

**V**iewed in the perspective of history, twenty years are but a brief, insignificant episode. But in terms of individual human lives they can make or break. Ghassan Mahmoud Hamzawi was born in the Talpiot quarter of Jerusalem in 1929. In his first nineteen years—up to 1948—he lived in Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa, Gaza and then again in Jerusalem. He received his elementary education in as many schools, but before the 1948 hostilities broke out he had finished his secondary schooling at Bishop Gobat's School, obtained the Palestine Matriculation Certificate, and attended a law college for one year. When the troubles started toward the end of 1947, Ghassan's family left its house in Talpiot to escape the heavy shooting and sniping, and sought refuge in Tory, another Jerusalem quarter, now known as Abu Tor. But the fighting pursued the family in their new home and finally—abandoning all their possessions—they left the house in Abu Tor and sought refuge in a convent in East Jerusalem. In May 1948, however, the family was again forced to move, this time to Bethany, there to stay for only a few weeks, when heavy fighting and shelling compelled them to move to Jericho, where they found a home in a Catholic convent. This part of their wanderings Ghassan describes as "sheer misery"; the father was sick and unable to work; there were nine mouths to feed; and members of the Hamzawi family, those uncles and aunts and in-laws on whose aid one usually draws in times of hardship, were likewise scattered and dispossessed. Suddenly everything was different. From a life of relative leisure and affluence Ghassan's family was reduced to near-starvation. Ghassan's father had left behind two houses, one of them built only a short time before, as well as partnership in a third building which was owned by members of the father's family. Abandoned, too, were an orange grove, farmland in the Beisan Valley, and practically all the family's belongings. The approximate cost of all this was in the vicinity of 90,000 Palestinian pounds.

As the elder son, Ghassan was the only one in the family who could go out to work. "I was desperately eager to pursue my education," Ghassan relates. Instead, he found himself hunting for a job. That was never an easy matter in Palestine; it was made immeasurably more difficult by the war and the dispersion. After many months looking for a job, Ghassan almost decided to volunteer "to fight back those who had usurped our property," when finally he was employed by the United Nations body which had just then undertaken to conduct a census of the refugees. He took part in the census, which lasted for several weeks, but received no pay besides the few sandwiches he was given every day. But he worked,

and worked hard, in the hope that after the census he would be given a regular job.

Finally, Ghassan was lucky enough to find himself among the few who were offered regular employment with the same U.N. body. He and his co-workers were charged with distributing basic relief rations to refugees. When the Red Cross organization took over, he was appointed Distribution Officer. Eventually, when UNRWA was established and it assumed relief work among the refugees, Ghassan was chosen as a registration clerk. By that time his father's condition became serious and he asked to be transferred to Jerusalem. After the usual delays and refusals his request was granted; he was given a promotion and posted in the Jerusalem area, where he filled various positions and eventually got senior UNRWA posts in Jerusalem and Hebron.

But Ghassan could not stand the bureaucratic life indefinitely. After some fifteen years of working among the refugees he decided he had had enough, and with the help of two of his younger brothers, now both in their early twenties, he took up business. After establishing himself in business he wrote occasional articles for one of Jerusalem's three dailies, though he never worked in journalism on a full-time basis. He was, and remains, extremely wary of "politics;" he would have nothing to do with what he calls the "prostituted" journalism of the old days, nor would he allow himself to be involved in the antics and machinations of the old West Bank establishment, which today, he says, under Israeli rule performs the identical sort of services it used to render "His Majesty" and is still composed of the same set of effendis and notables. What "gets" Ghassan, he says, is that Israel—"the progressive, democratic, egalitarian State of Israel"—should see fit to use the services of these "professional lackeys," most of whom now not merely play the old game with the new masters but have the dexterity to play a double game as well—vowing their undying loyalty to the Monarch in Amman and faithfully serving the Israeli authorities over here. "Do you see that man at the table over there?" Ghassan would suddenly ask, pointing to a fellow East Jerusalemite having lunch with an Israeli in uniform. "Well, he does literally nothing; he is in his late thirties; an illiterate, a thug and a known smuggler. And I bet you he draws a nice little salary both from His Majesty and from your own government!"

Like so many intellectuals of his generation Ghassan is a great believer in "the people." "These men are good and dead my friend, good and dead," he would say, enumerating all the resounding names of the West Bank—the Khatibs, the Nuseibehs, the Kan‘-ans, the Ja‘baris, the Tou-

qans and the Masris. "Who today would so much as greet these people in the street? Some leaders! Do you know that So-and-So, whose guest room was never empty of visitors, is now completely ignored by the inhabitants of this city? He and the likes of him no longer represent anyone or speak in the name of anyone. The Palestinians have no faith in them any longer!"

Who, then, are the new leaders? Who now represents the Palestinians of the West Bank? Ghassan would not even pretend to answer such questions. "I speak only for myself," he would protest. "I represent no one but myself!" No one, in fact, can speak for the Palestinians, he says, no one represents them. But, then, how are the Palestinians ever to enjoy self-determination—supposing they were to be given the opportunity—if they continue to be an inchoate mass of people acknowledging no leaders and owing allegiance to no authority? But I suspect that answers to such questions should not be sought from people like my friend Ghassan—or any Palestinian for that matter. They are to be sought, rather, in an examination of the character and structure of West Bank society, of its development both in the thirty years of the British Mandate and the two decades of Jordanian rule. Though this is hardly the place to dwell on such subjects, a brief sketch of some of the features of this society is indispensable for an understanding of its individual members and the mood which now prevails among educated men and women of Ghassan's age and background.

The overwhelming majority of the population of the West Bank is Sunni Muslim. Religion still plays an important role in Muslim-Arab society, yet few religious leaders seem adequately equipped to guide today's Muslims through the spiritual crisis arising from the need to harmonize the conflicting values of the old and the new way of life. As a matter of fact, Islam is often seen by some of these leaders as an impediment to such harmonization. As one *qadi* (religious judge) told a foreign interviewer not long ago, the trouble was that the Islamic tradition was often at odds with the processes and consequences of modern civilization, and he was not quite happy with the need to justify all activities in terms of the Faith.

His misgivings were completely justified. Islam, as its true followers see it, is the one road to salvation. Insofar, therefore, as the question at all arises of scrutinizing Islam or examining its strengths and weaknesses, it is in its own terms that the Muslim conducts such an examination of his faith. Islam, in other words, is its own unalterable yardstick—a phe-

nomenon that renders attempts at adaptation to new realities extremely difficult.

The family, whose role in Muslim-Arab society is probably second only to that of religion, presents another impediment to far-reaching change. On the West Bank—and in Middle Eastern society generally—the family plays a primary role in the life of its members, not only in childhood but throughout life. This (except in the rare cases of full-fledged Westernization which one seldom encounters in this society) puts the family at the center of some of the individual's most deeply felt values and loyalties. The type of occupation to which a man may aspire, his standing in the community, and his range of choice in selecting a wife are determined by the relative wealth, power and prestige of the family to which he belongs. The individual, in dealing with other groups, finds his only firm security in loyalty to his family, and this is the reason for the many blood feuds that mark village and tribal life in these societies. Family honor must be safeguarded, even at the risk of life.

The influence of these unusually strong family loyalties on public behavior is considerable. They account for an important phenomenon that is of relevance to our discussion—the ability to adhere to separate standards of behavior and morality in dealing with relatives and outsiders respectively. Thus within the family, certain norms of obedience and industry are required; but outside the family different standards of conduct and honesty may prevail. The attitude to government is closely related to this phenomenon. Like other Middle Easterners, the Palestinian tends to mistrust all government. Nevertheless official position carries with it high prestige, and a job in a government department remains the primary goal of an education for many Palestinians. Moreover, those in positions of authority are expected to make a forceful display of their power, and it is generally taken for granted that they will use it for their own advantage and that of their families. This goes for official positions of all levels, from messenger boy to director-general. It clearly makes social solidarity between ruler and ruled, leader and led, army commander and his men, virtually impossible. The failure of the ordinary citizen of the West Bank to see himself as in any serious way involved in what went on around him in the days preceding the Six-Day War can in large part be attributed to this lack of social solidarity or cohesion. So can many features of his behavior since the end of that war. It is notorious how rare was the West Bank Palestinian who would make any utterances involving his fellow-Palestinians without first stressing that he represented no one. When approached on a

question such as a Palestinian “representation”—not to speak of a state or other concrete political entity—the Palestinian’s reply is almost uniform: “But who is going to represent the Palestinians? No one here speaks for anybody but himself!”

Nor can this be attributed to illiteracy or even to lack of education. The fairly urbanized people of the West Bank place great value on learning and generally boast one of the highest levels of education in the whole of the Middle East. Speaking generally, the prestige attached to learning in Muslim-Arab society is enhanced by the fact that the learned man, as a person trained in Islamic theology, has often functioned as a religious leader, teacher or judge—all of which carry with them a great deal of prestige. Even today, despite the degree of modernization in Arab urban centers, in large segments of the population religious knowledge coupled with a mastery of classical Arabic is considered the highest attainment in learning. Most educated Palestinian Muslims still look to Al-Azhar, the great institute of Islamic studies in Cairo, as an intellectual center of the highest importance.

Like Ghassan, and I often lament the fate of his fellow Palestinians, who perhaps more than any other group of human beings in this century, besides the Jews, fell victim to forces over which they had no control. And I often wonder, and ask myself whether, in the present tangled state of affairs, they will ever find a way out. Ghassan and his circle of friends among the Jerusalem intelligentsia are skeptical. They would, to be sure, like nothing more than to see a Palestinian “entity” emerge, an independent state such as other Middle Eastern peoples enjoy. But they admit they cannot see how such an event can ever come into effect. King Hussein’s announcement—in an interview with Gavin Young of the *Observer*—that he is willing to relinquish control over the West Bank and let the Palestinians form their own political sovereignty “if the people so wishes” is not taken seriously, though few doubt that the statement was actually made. One young Palestinian, a teacher and journalist, assured me that Hussein would rather see the West Bank go up in flames, or surrendered to the Jews, than let the Palestinians have control of it. And then, he added sadly, even supposing an independent Palestinian state should emerge, he was certain that this would mean “going back to the days of the Mufti and the political assassinations and the bloody feuds.” Fully aware though he was that a return to Hussein’s rule would mean much suffering and tribulation, he said he preferred it to the chaos which the setting up of a Palestinian state would bring in its

wake. (He himself was quite certain that he would be thrown in jail for his current vocal advocacy of creating elected democratic institutions for the people of the West Bank — although, having spent five years in Hussein's prisons, he sounded strangely tranquil about the possibility.) [Note: The grand mufti of Jerusalem was an office of high political authority under the British Mandate.]

Ghassan does not share this pessimism, yet he does not seem able to decide in favor of a Palestinian entity, at least not "under the present circumstances." "How," he asks, "could you expect us to make any such fateful decisions when a few of us cannot hold a meeting at a friend's house or office without being questioned the very next day by your security people?" For him, free expression is indivisible. The day after the terrorist outrage in the Mahane Yehuda quarter in Jerusalem in which twelve persons were killed, I told him I thought East Jerusalem and West Bank leaders ought to issue a statement condemning the bombing. He said he couldn't agree more! "But do you think people, our own people, would take us seriously?" He obviously thought not. "These things must be two-way propositions or they would lose all effectiveness," he explained. "Had we been allowed to issue statements deplored summary expulsions and other official measures which we consider unjust and oppressive, then, and only then, could we hope that our voices [would] be heard with respect." And then he would once again recite his lamentations over "the lost opportunity."

Has the opportunity really been lost? I think not — though I must admit that there is a good deal of truth in Ghassan's complaints. However, the difference between us is one of emphasis. Quite a while before the 1967 war, I reached the conclusion that if the problem of the Palestinians was ever to find a solution it lay in de-Arabizing, or rather de-pan-Arabizing, the question. The Six-Day War offered a unique opportunity for helping such a process along. Not only the Arabs, but the Israelis too are beginning to realize that, no matter what Nasser, the Ba'ath and Hussein choose to say or do, the problem of Palestine is a Palestinian, not an Arab one. One of the strongest arguments today against a peace settlement concluded with Cairo and Amman over the heads of the Palestinians is that it may not bring satisfaction to the latter. Surely the only logical conclusion that can be drawn from this is that peace should be sought with the Palestinians themselves. If this opportunity were to be allowed to slip, then Ghassan's laments would be fully justified.

It is of the utmost importance that the Israelis realize this. Indeed, our whole approach to the subject of Arabs and Arabism has been mis-

guided and on the whole rather harmful. No one knows this better than the Palestinians, who have paid very dearly indeed for the confusion. The word "Arab" signifies a linguistic group of peoples of entirely different racial origins, inhabiting several distinct homelands and constituting as many "nationalities." What we habitually generalize about as "the Arabs" comprises a mixed population varying widely in physical character and personality traits.

There is practically no ethnic relationship—and certainly no legal-constitutional one—between the inhabitants of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, the Yemen and the countries of North Africa. To argue that the Palestinians belong to the Arab "nationality," and that they ought, therefore, to be at home in any part of the vast Arab "homeland," is a fallacy whose dimensions are only now being generally realized. Ghassan and his fellow Palestinians provide eloquent testimony to the fact that the Arabic-speaking people of Palestine have failed, after twenty years of life "among their own people" and "in their own cultural milieu" to find a real home in the Great Arab Homeland. To be sure, a full-fledged Palestinian state may still seem a distant possibility; but there can be no doubt whatever that a Palestinian "personality" is slowly but surely emerging. This is something that both Israelis and Arabs ought to welcome and even encourage. The Middle East has always been, it is now and it will remain a meeting-place of cultures, religions, tongues and "nationalities"; it is "a Middle East of motherlands"—and the Palestinians, along with other Middle Eastern peoples, must eventually have one of their own. It is only a question of time.

*MIDSTREAM, NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 1969*

**ISRAEL VERSUS THE UNITED STATES**

For four days, August 1–4, 1971, a group of American and Israeli intellectuals, writers, and public figures gathered in the main auditorium of the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot for a symposium dealing with some issues of common interest to the two sides. The discussion, which was organized by the American Jewish Congress in the framework of its annual American-Israeli Dialogues, had for its title “Contemporary Jewry as a Minority in America and a Majority in Israel.”

It was the ninth dialogue of its kind, and the third in which I participated. Among others, participants included Arthur A. Cohen, Irving Louis Horowitz, David Landes, Carl Gershman, Earl Raab, and Howard Sacher on the American side, and S. Z. Abramov, Yitzhak England, Simon Herman, Natan Lerner, Shlomo Shoham, and myself on the Israeli panel. I was asked to take part in the symposium only a few days before it opened—and it was on the strength of AJC President Arthur Lelyveld’s presentation, copies of which had been sent to the participants, that I hurriedly set out to prepare mine. My presentation was typed and mimeographed and distributed to the participants; the title I chose for it was “Israel and the Majority-Minority Syndrome.” Excerpts:

The thesis which lies at the core of our subject—“Contemporary Jewry as a Minority in America and a Majority in Israel”—as elucidated by the organizers, is that “there is a difference between the experience of a people living as a minority and the experience of that same people living as a majority.” I submit that, as applied to contemporary Jewry, this otherwise plainly valid thesis contains three basic assumptions that can be substantiated neither in fact nor in theory.

To start with, to speak about “*a people*” living as a minority, and about

*"that same people"* living as a majority, would be to beg the question. The group of people which we call the American Jewish community is plainly not "that same people" as the group or groups of people which today constitute the majority of Israel's population. This was true even before the state was established. Indeed—to paraphrase Isaiah Berlin—the state of Israel would never have been established "had there existed only the Jews of the Western world, or, perhaps, the Jews of the West and the Jews of the Eastern, Moslem countries."

The second basic assumption is that the distinction between majority and minority is a purely numerical one. This is definitely not always the case. Sociologically, where ethnic groups and ethnic group relations are concerned, a more important and therefore more meaningful distinction would be that between dominant and subordinate groups. It is therefore my contention that the would-be antithetical presentation in the very title of this Dialogue is rather shaky. For the fact is that one cannot speak in the same breath about Jews being a minority in America and a majority in Israel—any more than one can speak in the same context of Jews as a minority in Britain and as a minority in, say, the Soviet Union or present-day Egypt. The minute we start speaking of this majority-minority syndrome in the United States and in Israel, we in fact enter two quite different political and socio-cultural realms. To make my point clear I shall put it in another way: The Jews of America are not a minority in the same sort of context as the Jews of Israel are a majority since—to put it in a still different way—U.S. Jews are not a minority in the same sense in which Israel's Moslems are. Again, while Jews form a clear majority in Israel there is no corresponding group in the United States that constitutes a majority, either in terms of numbers or of political dominance. (Of course, there will be Jews who would say that the majority in the United States consists simply of all those who are not Jews. I feel certain, however, that none of those assembled here would maintain such a theory.)

The third and last basic assumption contained in the organizers' clarifications is that the Jews who do constitute a majority in Israel are one of a piece. This, of course, is true only in a most limited and extremely superficial sense; it cannot stand any serious scrutiny on the cultural, religious, socio-economic or even ethnic planes. I do not intend to engage in a detailed elaboration of this particular point. I will only point out that, insofar as ethnic group relations always tend to assume an ingroup-outgroup, majority-minority, or dominant group—subordinate group character, it is impossible to speak in this sense of the Jews of Israel forming a single in-group, a majority, or a dominant group. All that one can say with accuracy

is that the dominant group in Israeli society consists of members of the numerical Jewish majority.

In this connection it may be useful to remember that as far as ethnic divisions are concerned Israel is a multi-ethnic society rather than a bi-ethnic one consisting of a Jewish majority and an Arab minority, since the Jews themselves embrace many ethnicities and cultures. This may serve to explain the rather complex scale of group hierarchy which prevails in the society—a hierarchy in which each ethnic group tends to occupy a somewhat different social position. Louis Wirth has noted that in the United States “There is little doubt but that the Negro . . . has become the principal shock absorber of the anti-minority sentiment of the dominant whites.” Other ethnic groups within this white majority—Catholics, Jews, Italians and even Japanese—suffer far fewer disabilities and are more readily able to become full-fledged members of American society. Indeed, these groups often share anti-Negro sentiment and follow the usual patterns of discrimination and exclusion as does the dominant white group—and in pursuit of acceptance they may even outdo the latter in their hostility and prejudice against the Negro.

Similarly, various ethnic groups within the Jewish majority in Israel—knowing that they are not of the ingroup except in the limited and negative sense of not being non-Jews—often go out of their way to demonstrate their hostility to the “real” minority, the outgroup which constitutes the principal shock absorber of the anti-minority sentiment of the dominant Jews. I refer, of course, to the Arab citizens of Israel. Often in my personal contacts with Arabs from East Jerusalem, the occupied territories and even from pre-1967 Israel I am struck by the uniformity of their experience in this field: All of them complain that in their dealings with Israeli officials they find that those who hail from Arab-Moslem countries treat them far more harshly and with far less cordiality and consideration than do those who come from Europe. For the sociologist, this will simply offer another illustration of the workings of the pecking order—a glimpse of the group hierarchy system prevalent in Israel. For the Arabs involved in the experience, it remains a mystery.

(Here I feel I must append a footnote: This same phenomenon—so easily to be explained on the simplest sociological level—is often used by the ingroup as a proof that Arabic-speaking Jews are “even more hostile” to the Arabs than their European coreligionists—and that therefore one can hardly pin any hopes for peace on the alleged affinity between Middle Eastern Jews living in Israel and their non-Jewish neighbors!)

From these preliminary general observations we can now turn to the

more political aspects of the majority-minority syndrome in Israel. As has already been suggested, what marks a people as a minority is essentially the relationship of their group to some other group within the society in which they live. Moreover, many ethnic and “racial” groups are often described as “minorities” simply because they occupy a subordinate position in society—even when numerically they are larger than the nominal majority.

Besides, minorities are not necessarily always penalized or discriminated against—nor do specific characteristics make a group intrinsically a minority in the social sense. As Louis Wirth points out, “In pre-war Poland under the Czarist regime the Poles were a distinct ethnic minority. When they gained their independence at the end of the First World War, they lost their minority status but reduced their Jewish fellow Poles to the status of a minority. As immigrants to the United States the Poles again became themselves a minority.” Again, “During the brief period of Nazi domination, the Sudeten Germans of Czechoslovakia revelled in their position of dominance over the Czechs among whom they had only recently been a minority.”

However, it would seem that, though it is not ethnic or racial characteristics that mark a people as a minority, certain minority traits must persist even after a group has changed its status from a minority to a majority. This, to my mind, is what has happened to the Israelis—or rather to those of them who direct the country’s destinies, form its attitudes and set its general cultural tone. In his opening address, Rabbi Lelyveld rightly pointed out that those Jewish communities in Europe which were not granted the kind of freedom known in the liberal West and were cut off from the outside world “constituted an enclave”—and that as such they were minority communities which lived as if they were majorities within their own areas. However, though being a majority in a ghetto is not quite the same thing as being a majority in a multi-ethnic society, what Rabbi Lelyveld said was quite true until certain “enlightened” members of those ghetto communities started to lose that psychological security and religious faith which had induced in them the conviction that they, as a group, had a valid role to play and an important task to perform. Political Zionism was not invented—and the State of Israel was not established—by the psychologically secure, devout Jew of the ghettos and *shtetls* of the Pale of Settlement. They were the work of that disillusioned, confused and psychologically insecure Jew whom the onset of the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) and Emancipation had thrown off his feet spiritually.

Be that as it may, what I will try to say in conclusion is simple enough.

It is that the Jewish majority in Israel—or the dominant group, if you like—maintains the mentality of a minority. Paradoxically, this minority stance increases rather than decreases the hazards of majority living—self-aggrandizement, chauvinism, triumphalism, xenophobia, intolerance and loss of sensitivity to the opinion of others. But this is not really as paradoxical as it may sound. After all, these are not common majority traits or characteristics; they are the traits of a certain kind of insecure, minority-minded majorities ever fearful of being submerged or subdued numerically, politically and culturally. In Israel's particular case, the minority stance which seems to characterize Jewish majority mentality and behavior has been the result of two sets of reasons—one historical and one ideological.

The historical reasons are not far to seek. The various groups which make up Israel's Jewish majority—and especially those which constitute a majority in the socio-political and cultural rather than numerical sense—come from backgrounds where they were either persecuted minorities or what I would call ghetto majorities. Neither of these backgrounds would seem conducive to the kind of broad-minded, tolerant and pluralistic approach necessary to maintain a modern, open society in which the perils of majority living can be reduced to a minimum.

The ideological reasons are rather more complex. To put it with extreme brevity, according to the prevalent ideology, the Jewish majority in Israel—again in the sense of a dominant ethnic group—has reason to experience the feelings of a minority not once but three times:

1. By dividing the world into Jews and Gentiles, Jewry as a whole is seen as a minority since there are quite a few more Gentiles in the world than there are Jews.
2. By dividing the Middle East between what Mr. David Ben Gurion once described as two “world entities”—the Arabs and the Jews—the Jews of Israel remain a tiny minority in a sea of Arab “nationals.”
3. Finally, by viewing the Jewish situation itself in narrow cultural—or culturist—terms, the dominant East European Zionist Establishment in Israel has every reason to acquire a minority mentality vis-à-vis its own internal *Jewish* minority groups.

The foregoing remarks may well impart an impression of inconsistency. At one stage I seem to suggest that the Jews in Israel are very much a majority in the sense that their dominance is too pronouncedly felt. At another, I suggest that there is no such thing as a clear homogeneous Jewish

majority—and that it is a relatively small minority within the numerical Jewish majority that constitutes the dominant group. At still another point in my statement I criticize this group at once as possessing the mentality of a minority *and* as behaving in the worst possible manner a dominant ethnic majority could behave. I therefore believe it would be appropriate for me to present here in very brief terms my vision—and I use the word “vision” advisedly, since we are dealing here with complex historical processes—of the future of Israel as a state. Inevitably, such a vision must be formulated in terms of what Israeli society ought to be like. I shall sum this up in two main trends:

1. I believe that the emphasis should be shifted from the majority-minority syndrome to a pluralist multi-ethnic stance. Such a society would be able to embrace without too much effort the whole mosaic of cultures, religions, ethnicities and various shades of religiosity among the Jewish part of the population.
2. The problem of nationality—difficult and extremely vexed as it is—can be solved only on the basis of its complete equation with citizenship. In this way, Israeli citizenship can embrace—as it does now—both Jew and non-Jew living in Israel. But it would include non-Jewish Israelis as Israeli *nationals* rather than *Arab* ones. In this way, too, Israeli Jews will cease to be plagued by a feeling of being a minority—and thus, hopefully, will cease to think and behave like a hunted minority, with all the fear, the intolerance and the extremism that go with such a feeling.

Yesterday one of the participants in this dialogue quoted a passage from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Today I propose to cite something from *Ulysses*: When poor Bloom was asked to define a nation, his immediate reaction was, “A nation? A nation is a group of people living in the same piece of land.” I wholeheartedly endorse.

## TREMORS

### DIARY

Jerusalem, June 15, 1971

Ronald Segal was here. A self-exiled intellectual from South Africa and expert on Third World countries (*India, The Race War, America's Recent Future*). After a short chat he said, “I wonder how you manage to survive!” Not understanding I mumbled something about having such a nice army and so on. “No,” he interrupted. “I mean how you personally

manage to survive. You see, I was in South Africa fighting against Apartheid and all that; but it was an ongoing affair—we were a group and we were on the ascendant. But here—who do you have here to share your position?” And so on. I own I was taken aback, and said something about the need for an inordinate portion of “a sense of humor.”

Really! The night before last Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg (now Visiting Professor here) delivered himself of a remarkable speech about the Israeli poor, the Black Panthers and so on. Among other very impassioned things he said, he expressed his shock at the sight of religious leaders, intellectuals and members of the middle class being so complacent about the rotting situation. “In the U.S. Martin Luther King did not walk alone, for the most sensitive circles in white America were shaken and identified.” But *here!*

Well, here not only are these gentlemen all apathetic and think of nothing but themselves. Yesterday they managed to set black against black in the black Hatiqva Quarter—and now the police can boast of protecting the Black Panther leader from the anger of the black mob shouting: “Get Out of Hatiqva,” and “We Have Enough Troubles of our Own: We Don’t Want Black Panthers!” (this last one has a nice shade of irony to it, I thought.)

July 7, 1971

Irene Gendzier writes inviting me to give a paper at the annual conference of the American Historical Association to be held in New York late in December. One of the attractions of the offer is that Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, an old friend from Baghdad days, would give a paper in the same session in which I am scheduled to appear. I have more than half a mind to accept the offer—my first visit ever across the Atlantic. And to see Irene again.

November 23, 1971

Of Gil Carl AlRoy, an associate professor at Hunter College, I had known from a few contributions he had published in a number of Jewish periodicals—all rigidly “hawkish” and clearly influenced by the poisons Harkabi has been spreading re Arab and Muslim “anti-Semitism.” So I was not surprised when I got a letter from him earlier this month asking a number of loaded questions:

I have recently read with interest in Irene Gendzier’s *Reader* a paper you first published in *New Outlook* in 1966 on Israeli attitudes to the Arab world.

I noticed particularly your statement to the effect that there exists a false "Israeli image of the Arab as a half-barbarian, murderously inclined neighbor (an image which, it must be added in fairness, has partly been the product of empty and thoughtless Arab propaganda and threats)." . . .

As a student of warfare patterns of Arabs and Jews, I have rather come to the conclusion that Arab patterns coincide to considerable degrees with patterns well-known to anthropologists as "primitive warfare," i.e., the typical warfare behavior of pre-literate societies. In them one finds habitual, for example, the mutilation of slain foes and other ritual uses of enemy dead; for another, "war" in them is conceived very much in concrete terms—thus the killing of virtually all persons belonging to the enemy group when possible is common practice.

A mass of evidence, mostly first-hand testimony by foreign observers, would indicate to me that Arab patterns indeed conform to the above. (Regular military warfare is not included.) Am I to understand from your assertion that this evidence is false? If so, would you kindly indicate why one should dismiss it in this fashion.

Partly to organize my thoughts on the subject—again!—I decided to give his letter the full treatment in my letter dated November 23, 1971.

To Gil AlRoy:

. . . Obviously I cannot answer your query in the space of a letter. Part of the answer I thought I gave in my article on Arab anti-Semitism in the *New Middle East*; but I am aggrieved to find that you consider it an example of evasion. (Evasion of what, though?) Be that as it may, I will raise two points which might help: 1) I do not belong to that school of thought which considers the Arabs as one of a piece. I believe that to speak of "Arabs" in the general way you seem to do is as mistaken as to speak of "Europeans" in that way. 2) By excluding "regular military warfare" you land yourself on a very shaky ground. Someone might even ask where do you place "Jewish warfare patterns" if you exclude regular warfare—i.e., if you confine yourself to such episodes as Deir Yassin, Qibya (not so irregular, this) and so on? Where would you place Celtic warfare patterns if you judge by what the Liberation Army of Ireland are doing today? No: with all due respect to our anthropologists, I cannot accept your generalizations in this respect.

May I now take the liberty of asking you a few questions? As you can imagine, in the course of my work I too have been reading the things you have been writing. . . . You accuse almost everybody of not realizing the

depth, intensity and obsessive quality of the Arabs' hostility to Israel and their "utter inability to be reconciled to Jewish statehood."

This may well be the case. What I find unacceptable is the implication that you, AlRoy, are about the only one who does know about these things. I don't think this is a convincing posture for any scholar to take. The same applies where you speak of "awareness of the abject nature of Jewish subjection in Islam." How is the reader to be convinced that you know better than them all—than Goldziher, than Goitein, than [Eliahu] Elath? Of course, I might be mistaken: you may have the kind of knowledge which no mortal has yet claimed to have—concerning, among other things, what took place 14 centuries ago between Moslem and Jew; what motivated a diligent 19th century Jewish scholar in some city in Europe; and what takes place in the psyche of certain Jews and non-Jews who do not seem to have been aware of your omniscience. [Note: Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921), Hungarian, was a Jewish Orientalist and historian; Shelomo Dov Goitein (1900–1985), was a historian and an Arabist; Eliahu Elath was the first Israeli ambassador in the United States.]

One final point. You vehemently reject the suggestion that Arab hostility to Israel has nothing to do with the fact that Israel is a Jewish country—or that the Zionists happen to be Jews. This is tantamount to saying that had some Christian, Buddhist or Hindu sect managed to do in Palestine what the Zionists have done, the Arabs would have reconciled themselves to it. Do you seriously think so?

Incidentally, I personally know any number of "Arabs" who *have* reconciled themselves to Israel's existence. As a matter of fact, I will say, at my own peril, that from what I know of "the Arabs" and what I have learned these past four years or so I somehow believe in the "kiss-and-make-up" theory of which you enjoy yourself making such fun.

November 28, 1971

Met David Landes the other day at the Dialogue. Professor of History at Harvard but decidedly mediocre—and full of semi-mystical notions about such subjects as Jews, Judaism and Israel. No "chemistry" developed, certainly!

April 2, 1976

Landes in *Commentary*:

There are two theses that have won widespread credence in recent years as interpretations of the condition of Jews in the Arab world. The first,

strongly advanced by Arab and particularly Palestinian spokesmen, is that Zionism is the root of all evil. Islam, runs the argument, is of its nature hospitable to and respectful of other faiths. Judaism is no exception; on the contrary, Islam has always had a special regard for Jews as "People of the Book," has given them shelter from oppression in other lands, and has accorded them peace, freedom, and the opportunity for material and spiritual self-expression. Witness the prosperity and cultural flowering of Jewish communities in Muslim lands during the Middle Ages; the Gao-nate at Sura and Pumbedita in Iraq from the 7th to the 11th centuries, the Jewish "Golden Age" under the Caliphate of Cordova in the 10th and 11th centuries.

And so on. To this amalgam of sweeping claims and inflated boasts, the learned Harvard sage appends a footnote: "For Arab and Jewish statements of this thesis in the context of what has since become a classic exchange of views and polemic on the Middle East conflict, see Richard Hamzaoui, 'Les relations judeo-Arables au Moyen Age,' and Nissim Rejwan, 'La grande époque de la coexistence judeo-Arabe' in *Les temps modernes*, Vol. XXII [1967]."

Landes and his editors did not bother to back this reference by quotes or any other kind of evidence. The polemic, by the way, was published in *Commentary*, February 1976, under the title "Palestine Before the Zionists."

December 20, 1971

Irene writes:

I'm impressed by your letter to AlRoy. As for Landes, when you realize (when one realizes) that he is an important figure in the Professors movement [for peace] here, not to speak of being a very big VIP at Harvard History Dept., you have a full sense of the idiocy of it all. I've slowly acquired a reputation in Boston University of being unambitious academically—and that is not to be forgiven . . . Do you want to be contacted by Alan Solomonow of the Committee on New Alternatives for the Middle East? He probably will while you are here. Nothing frightening there either—kind of a combine of many types who are well meaning.

Not a word from AlRoy. I sincerely hope I haven't managed to hurt his delicate feelings. I just cannot believe he alone has been doing all his own researches. He is in political science—and I am damned if I know

how and why he should—or could—have read Lewis and Goldziher, Goitein and God knows who else. But we shall wait and we shall see.

February 21, 1972

Of my two nights in London, where I stopped on my way back from New York, I spent half of the first trying to find Jon Kimche's telephone number—with no avail since he lived in the country and I just didn't know *where*. The second night I did call him. He sounded bitter. He called his successor at *New Middle East* “a congenital liar” and told me menacingly not to come to him afterwards and claim I was not duly warned. I told him something to the effect that if [Carmi] Gillon would prove a liar and a traitor he will not be the first in my life.

But this is really not important. I was going to find out why and how the man was sacked. Well, I am afraid it's a combination of silly reasons. The first I am sure had something to do with Jon's own temperamental temperament. Some say he was a genius at making enemies—but he is certainly not the easiest man to get along with. He claims it was purely political. What I find is that it was partly political—but for completely the wrong reasons. Two factors were at play: his so-called Dayanist leanings on the one hand and the push he gave—chiefly my doing I am afraid—to the Palestinians and their cause.

I told him that the whole Dayan-Establishment quarrel was and remains only a potential affair at best, total fiction at worst. Jon believes otherwise—and in the pages of *NME* waged a war which really did not exist. What's more, he did it in a most obscure, vague, and insinuating manner—giving the impression that a fearful struggle was going on but without any attempt to specify.

I am afraid I have to conclude that, while the powers-that-be in fact felt ill at ease with his “politics,” the reason for Kimche's ouster was not *really* political in any meaningful sense of the word. Jon—as his rival and successor has put it to me—is “an instinctive Zionist” and by definition can have no great quarrel with the Establishment. I am afraid, too, that no substantial question of principle was involved in the affair.

March 20, 1972

The other day, in a study day, Hebrew University sociologist [Chaim] Adler said that there were two categories of Orientals now—the ones who had “made it” but still feel marginal and the ones who had not made it and form the ranks or the sources of the Panthers. He then said that the former ought to “guide” the latter and show them how best

to get what they want. The question which arises—and which I asked him—is how the hell can people who feel and/or *are* marginal give guidance to those kids, considering that they themselves belong by definition nowhere? Needless to say he could not answer that question.

Another recent experience. I was at Kfar Blum recently and had a long chat with someone there who was active in the Kibbutz movement and also had a head. He asked me what the way out was—and I said I didn't know. My impression, I said, was of an establishment that was screaming to be raped—an establishment which, knowing that it cannot give anything without pressure, was *inviting* pressure so as to be able to give something. Of course, all along it had behaved in a way that made Orientals simply *incapable* of exercising pressure! To this he answered that what the Orientals needed was to have two or three *Galitzianers* to teach them how to exercise pressure. He did not realize how sadly ironical it all was. [Galitzianers were Jews from Galicia in Eastern Europe (southern Poland and western Ukraine); they were stereotyped as practical, even cunning, in comparison with the Ashkenazim from Lithuania (intellectual and gullible) and Russia (romantic and sentimental).]

April 9, 1972

Got this brief missive from Cynthia [Ozick] saying she misses our morning "telephone quarrels." She then relates how, about a month ago,

sitting between Arthur Cohen and Irving Howe on a dais . . . and Howe leaned over me to Arthur to talk about you. "What a professional that Rejwan is," he said. "I wrote him asking for a piece and the next thing that came in the mail was not a letter asking this or that, but the finished piece itself!" O, that Nissim, I silently said to myself, he is a curmudgeon with intolerable views, even though he is as kissable as a teddy bear and as lovable. All right, Howe, praise him, go ahead, but next to you sits one who has *fought* with Nissim Rejwan! (Anyhow, you see what an indelible trail you've left behind here . . .)

To this disarming chatter I couldn't bring myself to actually mail the reply I penned, in which I wrote in part:

Now, loth as I am to describe *you* as a fanatic, I hope you will agree that at least since I met you some 10 years ago you have been showing a steady and perhaps increasing "preoccupation," like me in a way, though in a different context. You don't seem to be able to get rid of a certain near-

obsession: For you, humanity seems to be divided into two categories—Jews and non-Jews—and everything taking place in the world today is scrutinized and judged solely in that context. On the face of it this can be accepted though with regret; what troubles me in the phenomenon, however, is that such a state of mind tends to equate non-Jews with non-humans. In other, perhaps better, words, non-Jews do not really exist in any but the marginal sense of their treatment of Jews. When, for instance, I read the article you wrote for the *NYT* a few years ago—in the form of a letter to a terrorist, and my initial reaction was: But what about all those Palestinians—old, young and teenagers—who do get killed or maimed as a result of Israeli acts of violence, even though such acts are usually explained as taken in retaliation or self-defence. “Arab” they are, to be sure; but do they not have their own lives to live? Could it not be that some of them even learn to play the piano, the cello or whatever instrument that poor Jewish boy who was killed in the operation used to learn to play? And anyway is that to be the criterion for judging the value of a human being’s life—whether or not he or she was “into culture” of one kind or other?

June 4, 1972

Among acquaintances I saw in New York was the novelist and essayist Arthur Cohen, whom I had met at one of the AJ Congress dialogues. He and his wife Elaine literally feted me. Belatedly I wrote him this letter:

One of the things I tend to brood upon lately—a pastime for which I have lots of time—is what you told me that rainy morning in your studio about the seemingly unmanageable knot euphemistically called the Jews. I am beginning to think that the so-called Masada Complex is no monopoly of Grandma Golda. I do believe that in the end we will manage to drive the world so crazy that it will have no choice but to put an end to us. I have a friend—a Palestinian doctor and very, very incisive and critical of his own people—who said the other day: There are three disasters in this world, one more terrible than the other. One is called the Jews, the other the Arabs, and the third—and worst of them all—is the encounter between them in modern times. You must admit that even you will not beat that—though probably it was you who once said these two groups “deserve each other.”

I wonder what Cynthia would say to such heretical chatter. She has written. Lovable, kissable, she pours out—but with such, such strange and queer ideas! Do you recall that lovely evening we spent at

your house when she “accused” me of something like “propounding a Counter-Theology?” It sounded cute, and even you indicated some sort of consent. But I was too world-weary that minute to hit back. Counter-Theology to *what* theology? What kind of unholy theology is the secular, ethno-racial, purely political doctrine of Zionism? but of course it is impossible to argue with Cynthia—whom, mind you, I like very much indeed—since she literally embodies the same pristine type of Jew from which you and I manage sometimes to detach ourselves and hold for inspection as though we were outsiders. So much so, indeed, that I occasionally tend to view Cynthia as my alter-ego, if that is a good description of one whom one’s intellect tries not to be identified with.

Well, as befits my description of her, Cynthia here, Cynthia there, Cynthia everywhere!

June 5, 1972

Things are somehow slightly better. Without really wanting it I am now active in two embryonic groups, one called Academics of Oriental Communities and the other the Association for Human Rights in Israel. Usually I have neither the ability nor the inclination for public work, but I have decided to give myself and “them” a chance. As for work in the sense of things to do, I seem to have enough to keep us going—quite so—but not enough to give me satisfaction. I work fairly hard for say three or four days a week all in all, and the rest I spend reading modern novels and—Shakespeare. So far I have made one or two discoveries; one of them is John Barth, who really is a fiendish creator. Another is a less known writer, John Anthony West, who has written quite a masterpiece called *Osborne's Army*. In Shakespeare I discovered *Coriolanus*, a later work full of political invective and incredibly subtle at the same time. As Ernie Stock said the other day, trying to persuade me to accept Acting Chairmanship of the Association—in which he also is—“you are a man of leisure!”

Imposed leisure is also leisure of some kind. And of this kind of leisure many people are eager that I get more. When I was in London, *New Middle East* editor Gillon was stupid enough to tell me, “in strict confidence” of course, that when in Jerusalem recently he had a chat with the head of the Information Department at the Foreign Ministry. The man was not quite satisfied with the monthly, and Gillon subsequently asked him who did he think should write for the magazine. The reply was: “I don’t know who *should* write for you but I know who shouldn’t—to wit, Nissim Rejwan.” At the time I had no idea why

Gillon should tell me such a story—and in my innocence I took it to mean that he did not give a damn et cetera. Now I have conclusive proof that he does . . . I am now weighing the possibility of writing to the Foreign Minister and/or his Director-General—only as an opening move in a bigger scandal. For this, however, I need a minimum of material security—which I now believe I can get only by working for some daily abroad with no links either with Israel or Zionism. I can't think of any that doesn't have its own correspondent here.

October 25, 1972

Rather belatedly I decided to send Anwar Nuseibeh, whom I quote in my American Historical Association lecture, a mimeographed copy of the text. In response, he wrote, among other things: "Although we have not met, I read and like much of what you write in English. In fact, when I first came across your name in print I wondered if you could be any relation to the two Rejwan brothers, both tennis stars, whom I once knew and played against in the old days . . . As soon as Ramadan is over perhaps we may arrange to meet." (October 20, 1972)

On the contents of my AHA lecture, Nuseibeh wrote later, in a letter dated November 5: "It cheers me somewhat. After all, it takes two to make friends . . . I have always felt that, despite the bitter experience of recent years, and all claims to the contrary, Jews from Arab and Moslem countries know this to be the case, far more intuitively than Jews from other parts of the world. Thank you for your *Id* greetings and all the best."

January 5, 1973

The American Jewish Committee, for whom I have been doing some work these past three years or so, has suddenly become short of funds and that part of my income—quite half our grocery bill—is no more as of this month. But partial replacement is in the offing: Something called the Jewish Students Press Service, based in New York, has approached me for a syndicated twice-monthly article and I have agreed. They pay lously but they themselves are poor and trying to establish themselves.

Another project is the twice-monthly survey of Arabic press in Israel and the territories which I was doing for the AJ Committee and which was terminated the end of last year. I hope to talk Shimon Shamir and the Shiloah Institute into taking it over. It's quite the only thing of its kind in the whole world, but AJC distribution was so, so bad that hardly anybody knows of its existence though it came out regularly since July

1970. If I succeed with Shimon this will again help make ends meet.  
(Any bright ideas?)

Also, I suddenly became *Dissent's* Israel correspondent—sort of. But they are so poor they may stop altogether. So far I contributed two “letters,” the second is in the January issue. I like its editor, Irving Howe, and what is more, he is crazy about me! *New Middle East* is gone as far as I am concerned—and something happened with *Mid-stream* too.

May 28, 1973

Things keep being difficult. Had I not had it in me to withstand pressures and tribulations I would have collapsed long ago. Living from hand to mouth and with memories of wrongs done and indecencies committed and prospects crushed is no easy matter. But I am determined not to succumb and I hope I will be able to go on coping.

George Lichtheim, who has sadly taken his own life at the age of 61, wrote an essay entitled, “From Marx to Hegel,” charting the return from Marx to Hegel among disillusioned disciples of the former. However disillusioned with Marx, I still cherish the thought of the determinist interpretation of history, and what is taking place in the Middle East is nothing if not a striking illustration of that theory. The direction that deterministic course is taking is, needless to say, the direction of *my* ideas and fantasies!

Look at this business of the “territories.” No matter how one looks at it, the process of de-Arabization—and consequently and inevitably of de-Judeaization—of the issue seems impossible to stop. Dayan may keep protesting he wants to preserve the Jewish character of Israel; he may keep repeating that the West Bank should be in Israel’s hands while West Bankers remain Jordanian subjects. On the other hand, Sapir will keep shouting his concern about the Jewish character of Israel and that this can be preserved only by returning the West Bank and the West Bankers back to Jordan or Hell. What’s the use? Who is going to listen? Even Sapir cannot offer Hussein terms he can conceivably accept and survive. So, that far I am willing to go with the deterministic view of history. [Note: Pinhas Sapir (1909–1975) was a prominent Israeli politician.]

October 25, 1973

The war has somehow passed us by, I being now old enough to be good only for Civil Defence. So I served there for twenty grueling days and

was demobbed on the 26th. The sons are not old enough to be soldiers—though they are now old enough to make me feel the dismal width of the famous generation gap. Terrible, just terrible—and the worst is that it catches you completely unawares, and naturally equally unprepared.

My book on Nasserist ideology is going to press at long last. Reading it I am struck by the thought that much of the criticism I level against the ideology is—well, *Marxist* in essentials. A sobering thought, that.

October 29, 1973

What agitates me these days is the aftermath of this war, which despite everything I think was not without its blessings. Hopefully the Egyptians now feel a little less frustrated and the Israelis a little more mature in the head. The world as a whole is also being made a little more conscious about the situation and its dangers . . .

Reactions? Needless to say, at the start there was a general air of pervasive bafflement. People literally held stopwatches and waited for the supreme trick, the mystical move that the resourceful Israelis will spring to finish off the invading hordes. When it did not come soon enough, the feeling was that it was coming sooner or later—and when the ceasefire was imposed the blame was all laid at the door of the “Powers.” This is as far as October 22–23.

Then came the aftermath, with its revelations. Aside from the 2,000 dead, there have been indications of neglect verging on the criminal. Not only was intelligence information dismissed on the ground that the Arabs would never *dare* do it; no forewarning managed to reach the front even. Golda Meir was busy shedding tears on the Russian immigrants coming via Austria and everybody was cursing Kreisky the renegade, self-hating Jew . . . Dayan was busy with some internal Defence Establishment squabbles and feudings—and all were relaxed in the thought that it would take no time to beat any such lunatic attack as the Egyptians and Syrians may contemplate. All this is slowly settling in the minds of people here, and what was mere bafflement has turned into something very near despair. No consolation is found in the fact that a part of the western side of the Canal is in our hands—and none seems to be drawn from the fact that the Arabs have got what they got (amounting, they realize, to a total transformation of the political-military picture) not solely by their military gains but through all kinds of shady devices—oil, Moscow and the rest. The important thing is that they got what they wanted—or something perilously near.

All considered, I don't know how Meir, Dayan and Galili could survive all this. But the ways of the Establishment here are as mysterious as those of God. Two current flips: Since 1967, it is said, the Egyptians learned from us how to fight; we learn from them how to talk. The other one was told to me this morning by a man who was speaking in all seriousness. "You see," he said, "the trouble with Kissinger is that he's a Jew: He knows our various devices and evasions and he deals with us accordingly." Needless to say, the trouble lies elsewhere. Kissinger, and with him everybody who counts in this power-political world, knows that Israel's status as the uncontested master of the Middle East militarily is gone—and he acts accordingly. [Note: Israel Galili (1911–1986) was a leader of the kibbutz movement, a weapons designer, and an Israeli politician in the 1960s and 1970s.]

However I am still wary of being too optimistic about the future. I don't know if one can rely on the Arabs to have the kind of vision and the statesmanship to lead them to deal with things properly—in a way that won't frighten Israel too much and that would promise to accept it as part of the area, if not right away then in some foreseeable future. Again, I fear that something will happen that may upset the whole process. Not a renewal of hostilities which as of today seems to me to be far from feasible—but some earthquake or natural disaster (some would say a miracle!) that would bring us back to where we were October 5.

January 6, 1974

Things don't seem likely ever to cease being interesting. The "stance" of the Establishment now is the opposite of what it was after the 1967 war. On TV the other day I watched—almost throwing up in the process—a New York Rabbi at Kennedy Airport "briefing" a group of Jewish tourists just before taking off to Israel. The theme was that they were going to a stricken, spiritually mortally wounded people whom they will have to comfort and soothe and so on. The sermon was interspersed with "moving" descriptions ("You will meet young men who have experienced the most terrible thing a man can experience—seeing your comrade die and not being able to do anything to help him.").

I fail to see just what the line is these days—I mean why exaggerate things, when after all the official version is that the Israeli army has won one of its most glorious battles, everything considered. I can only recall something which Haykal said some time in mid-October, namely that Israel's position was such that any war with the Arabs that does not end in a resounding Israeli victory is a crushing defeat for Israel. There is much in this apparent paradox.

There is also a great fuss going on in the academic world as to the Arabs' real and final and ultimate goal vis-à-vis Israel. Incredible as it may sound, Harkabi's position is gaining force and those who had ever questioned it are under fire—mainly, believe it or not, Shimon Shamir. There is something vague called the Jerusalem School fighting another something called the Tel Avivians and including Shamir, Peled (and, vaguely, Rejwan) who allegedly have been misleading the innocent public into believing the Arabs really want something approaching peace. There is a lot of casuistry about *salaam* and *sulh* [two Arabic words meaning "peace"], which has reached the editorial pages of the London *Times*, no less. And so on. Shamir has just had an article in the evening paper *Ma'ariv* in which he sounds lamely apologetic in reply to those who accuse him of being among those whom they now call "disseminators of illusions" and "peace peddlers"—pleading he was not really among these but adding the significant remark that since none of the initiatives suggested by the culprits had been taken, no one can now accuse them of the terrible crime.

January 16, 1974

The question as to whether I qualify as an internal enemy of Israel is quite amusing. I see myself as a real Israeli patriot—far more so than the Establishment. But is that relevant? One day, I hope, when I am more relaxed and feel more at liberty to do so, I will tell the full story. And a very shocking one it will be. However, to my sorrow, I now do qualify as an internal enemy. A week or so ago Amnon Kapeliouk, the *Al Hamishmar* daily's Arab affairs expert, called and asked how I was. I said fine and he sounded incredulous. A friend of his, a journalist, got a letter from somewhere in the States asking him whether it was true Rejwan was detained for espionage!

#### **ELIE KEDOURIE AS A "ZIONIST HISTORIAN": FURTHER LETTERS TO IRENE GENDZIER**

September 7, 1970

. . . When are you going to stop being Chomsky's chief defender? I have been following some of his voluminous exchanges—in *Commentary*, *The Listener*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, and God knows where else—and I instinctively tend to suspect a person who is capable of so much polemicizing. Insofar as I could follow his duel with Schlesinger moreover, I concluded that he was not entirely honest or faithful in

his quotations. Altogether I now tend to be rather more wary of ideologues. I am also beginning to suspect something peculiar in all these American—and to an extent also European—Jews with all their neuroses and frustrations. Not that I have anything against neuroses and frustrations: I just don't want to get involved in other people's trouble when translated into political ideologies! [Note: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the American historian, sparred with Noam Chomsky in the pages of *Commentary* over the latter's apparent misquoting of Harry Truman.]

*Joke of the Year:* The *TLS*'s reviewer of Elie's *Chatham House Version* calls him a "Zionist historian" and "a member of the Zionist demolishing squad!" I almost wrote Elie I considered it a piece of poetic justice—what with his almost obsessive preoccupation with the Arabs.

Otherwise things are pretty much the same. I am doing a few freelance things, more or less fixed and regular, and the proceeds somehow add up. We try to live modestly but adequately in anticipation of the millions which my various MSs will bring when they become published volumes.

November 3, 1970

Re Chomsky, I repeat: There must be something wrong with a man who consistently makes such a sordid spectacle replying to his critics all over the place trying to prove that he quoted this or that source correctly and not succeeding in his endeavors. . . .

I am trying to outgrow certain things. For one thing, I must get rid of what for lack of a better term I would call my schematic thinking—my tendency to drive ideas—abstract ideas—to their so-called logical conclusions. Let me explain. Ever since I became acquainted with sociology I have been bandying around a "theorem" which I find absolutely fascinating (and true)—namely, that if people decide to define a situation as real then it is real in its consequences.

Now nationalism is cant, Zionism is ideologically, historically, logically and ethically indefensible. And yet the Jews—whoever they are and no matter how you define them—have decided that Israel is a Jewish state and all the rest of it. Like it or not, 22 years of state-building and Arab hostility (even if justified) have produced a state of things that cannot be ignored—unless you want to beat your head endlessly against a wall. Call it the self-fulfilling prophecy, the vicious circle, the Thomas Theorem. Nothing doing: The situation has been defined in a certain way and it has become real as far as its consequences are concerned! Conclusion: Rather than try to re-create the universe, take an atomized

view of things and try to begin from the small things. This is nothing to be sniffed at—such a lot remains to be done and/or rectified.

The same is true of our cousins the Arabs. I am quite bewildered how, after their bitter experiences of 50 years or so, the Arabs of Palestine still cling to the Pan-Arab nonsense. There was a time when I thought the “organizations” were going to break the back of the Pan-Arab doctrine (from which the only thing they gained was the loss of their homeland). But if I want to keep looking for the truth and not just to indulge in wishful thinking, I must admit I was mistaken.

One can go on and on. The pains of growth are by no means greater than those of out-growth—and the essential thing is that one tries and does it with the minimum of fuss and the least bitterness.

April 23, 1971

. . . So you are up to your neck with Fanon. I am, when I have free time, totally and with much reward submerged in the works and thoughts of another outsider—Simone Weil. I think I am fortunate in always managing to free myself from the day-to-day preoccupation with that dismal subject, Arab affairs—or the even more dismal one of Arab-Israeli affairs—and find some solace in things that really are of the spirit. Absorbed in Weil, I could not help wondering how—everything considered—Fanon would look in comparison, if at all. I know little of Fanon, and I do wonder now whether he was aware of Weil (was he?). But you can take my word for it: There is nothing that he said that was not, substantially, said by her. She could write in one paragraph what Marcuse has been saying in all those bulky tomes of his. Have you seen any of her things? If not—and if you want to do so—just let me know and I shall supply a short bibliography!

Elie. I maintain that the man is somewhat misunderstood—partly no doubt as a result of his own “extremism”—but if one delves deeper, one will find the core and that is something. I think I told you about his being accused of being “a Zionist historian.” Now I see that someone has claimed that he (Elie) had said that Afghani was a homosexual! This is the fate of those who do not identify with the one camp or the other. Which reminds me. Just the other day I met for the first time Abu Maizer (I hope I am spelling the name right, but I do seem to think you know him). And you know what he had to say about *me*? That I write “from a Zionist angle.” He could not, of course, substantiate the claim—and finally I showed him why he thinks so—namely because I am not a Pan-Arab or a sympathizer thereof. The poor, little, obsessed

creatures! [Note: Abdul Mohsen Abu Maizer (b. 1931) was a West Bank leader and former PLO spokesman.]

June 20, 1971

Have you seen my tepid piece in the May *New Middle East*? Not so tepid perhaps—but it had none of the punch which I am sometimes capable of adding. But I had to make it publishable—and Jon is not the independent agent he and I want to believe he is! However, one day last week I got an urgent letter from Irving Howe saying he thought the article (which was “not uncritical”) fitting in a book of essays he was going to edit for Bantam whose idea was that the survival of Israel was or should be the concern of the democratic socialist left. How my article fits in there I do not know—unless it is a collection of *studies* of the Israeli situation generally. In the event, I gave him permission to reprint. Though the company one keeps is an important matter, I did not see why such a point of view as mine on the ethnic situation should be withheld from tens of thousands of readers just because of *that*.

September 20, 1972

. . . I have a friend, not a great thinker, who the other day said he believed in genes—not human genes but *historical* ones. The “genes” of the Israeli-Arab mess were lousy ones to start with, and there is little one can do about it—unless it be systematic self-destruction. And that, as you well know, is what I have been doing these past ten years or so. Conceivably, mine is a coherent, full and systematic exposition of a certain view of the conflict and a vision of the way it could be resolved. However, beside bringing this to the attention of a few readers—who hopefully would read what is there and not what they wish to see in it—its publication would serve no useful purpose except perhaps to confirm its author even more deeply in his vision—a vision which at the very best is merely “right” or based on “correct” assumptions.

Not even that! The other day I was quite shattered to hear a Danish girl, who is doing her Ph.D. dissertation on some Islamic subject, tell me that a man who converts to Islam automatically becomes “an Arab”—or rather that you cannot formally convert to Islam without at the same time becoming an Arab—formally, at least. Hence you are duty bound to change your name, at least your Christian name, to an Arabic one. So much for my pet creation, “the Arab Jew,” and all the rest of the talk about Islam not being nationality-oriented! . . .

As you can imagine, one would like nothing more than to get away

from it all. But—again as you well know—there is no escaping the plague. Worse, as one gives up, one tends to feel frustrated and betrayed and just not at peace with oneself; one certainly becomes “cynical.” So the choice is really one between two equally deadly evils . . .

I suspect you are right about our friend [Menahem] Milson. All these up-and-coming young professors—most of them graduates of some branch or other of our security establishment—seem to thrive on whatever benefits they can get from the eternal mess. For a generously paid trip abroad they are willing to do anything, say anything. One whom we both know goes to places twice or three times a year, now at Foreign Ministry expense, now on Van Leer Institute’s account. Unless he wants to ruin his chances of seeing the world and join the jet set, our man is bound to be “okay.” And now I ask you: Can one blame the guy? I mean in the sense of saying that he is damaging the prospects of peace or harming “the cause” or something? Though I cannot imagine them thinking in exactly the same terms, I do not blame those people for considering the whole business utterly hopeless.

August 2, 1973

. . . It is good to learn that you don’t go for doctrinaire Marxism either. But you are a hopelessly political animal! I am referring to your gentle reproof about my article on the Gaza Strip and North Sinai. I remember your asking me how and on what grounds did I get my “new vision” of the situation there—a “vision” which you had encountered nowhere else in this here world. Now there may conceivably be something about American English which makes the use of the word “vision” justified in the context. But not in my old-fashioned English-English. Let me explain. I went on that tour completely on my own and put down on paper whatever I saw and/or heard. I pretended to include no *vision* of any kind there—only facts as I saw and perceived them. So what’s the fuss? Two possibilities; either I reported deliberately incorrectly or I *saw* what’s not there. I do hope I did neither.

I have been brooding on this particular point. The truth as I see it is that there seems to be a degree of misery—material, visible human misery—which goes far beyond “politics.” Very, very few indeed of those you encounter in Rafah, El Arish and Khan Yunis give a damn who sits there at the Presidential Palace or the Royal Court. It takes intellectuals to bring *that* in. But as I have been saying endlessly since the 1967 war, I refuse to consider the occupation or the withdrawal an ethical issue. I do not see these as involving moral values. You can be

an advocate of withdrawal and the blackest of reactionaries, and you can tolerate occupation and be a liberal among liberals or just a plain believer in historical processes—or just an optimist. So please don't let us quarrel about such nonsense!

February 10, 1974

William Novak is putting together an all-Israeli issue of *Response*. I will ask him to send you a copy to see my piece there on "Peace and the Palestinians." Nothing special, since it deals only with Jerusalem and the West Bank Palestinians. I don't think Novak failed to ask you to do something for *Response* because of your reputation: Fact is, we never discussed the possibility explicitly.

And speaking of reputations and such, bless me if I can understand just why you seem always to manage to be with the black sheep—and more significantly, what the hell is the whole point of it? I believe I have already discussed with you this vexed, tortured, nonsensical and totally irrelevant juxtaposition of "pro-Arab" and "anti-Arab." I have always maintained that no intelligent person—and I consider the two of us to be intelligent persons—can or should be pro-Arab or pro-British or pro-Russian or any such nonsense. Is this a play on words? I wonder. What I do know is that, according to my definition—or any rational definition—of the term, I am certainly no "pro-Arab." What is more, I think one must be an absolute and hopeless fool to be one.

I am being more than just my usual preaching self: I am being cantankerous. And you must have guessed there is a reason! Well, let me put it this way. There are Arabs and Arabs, Palestinians and Palestinians. Moreover, many Arabs, and especially Palestinians, have suffered a great deal because of certain political phenomena which I and you try to fight against as best we can.

February 25, 1974

I have really been very busy. Partly with Harkabi and his antics. I told you about the Arabists' Great Debate. Well, since I had already written a whole dissertation on Harkabi (most of which appeared in Hebrew but almost nothing in English) and since, instead of just disappearing from the scene and folding for having all his doctrines disproved, he now seems to be telling people, I told you so!, I have decided to reopen the whole controversy with him and prepared a two-part piece for *New Outlook*, the first to appear in the March-April issue. I have also done a piece for *Midstream* about—all things—the Egyptian national character, based on Egyptian sociological findings. Will be out in April.

To top it all, I had to write a lengthy review-article on Raphael Patai's *The Arab Mind*, a piece of despicable acrobatics presented with all the attributes of a scholarly work. You should see it to believe it.

And this, of course, in addition to the daily chores which earning a living entails when you are not on anybody's payroll.

October 20, 1974

I was going to write to you when your letter arrived. I thought you must be left some time to digest all the impressions you gathered while visiting here. Have you? Are you still your same agitated self about this mess? Of course, I was simply being facetious and playing the cynic when I preached what I preached to you—about discarding the whole disgusting business and leaving it to the Pan-Arabs and Pan-Jews to settle it themselves. Still, I continue to maintain that one must attain some measure of disengagement and I was, almost with sorrow, watching you here spending hour after hour and day after day trying to make head or tail of the situation. Now that some weeks have passed, I am very curious as to how you see the picture. . . .

I don't think I can be very enlightening about the situation over here. Only that I am through with my pessimistic period and am again optimistic about the future. Trouble with me, I continue to believe in people's basic common sense—even in the Zionists' basic common sense. Beat that if you can! Lately, Penguin Books brought out a tract by Maxim Ghilan which I happened to purchase (it's not for sale much in our bookshops and I don't know why). You must know the man or of him. The book strikes me as a speaking example of the difficulty of tackling this mess from a dissenting point of view. (It is titled *How Israel Lost its Soul*—but reading it I couldn't find a trace of soul to have been lost.) However, it is a good thing that such a work should have come from a Jew and from an Israeli. Have you seen it?

#### **IRVING HOWE AND DISSENT**

I had, of course, known Irving Howe from his books and the numerous articles and reviews he published in periodicals I used to read regularly. Toward the end of May 1971, I got an urgent letter from him asking for permission to reprint an essay of mine, "From 'Mixing' to Participation," that had just appeared in the May issue of *New Middle East* and that seemed to Howe and his coeditor "a good, clear, and not uncritical analysis of the 'ethnic' problem within Israel." During the thirteen months that fol-

lowed, Howe ordered two or three more articles, some of which I didn't get the chance to write.

To Howe's suggestion that I let him delete my opening paragraphs, I replied, in part, that the piece would lose some of its "punch," especially where I implicitly blame the powers that be for first being responsible for the present situation and now shedding crocodile tears over the "sorry" gap. The Panthers, I added, may well fade in a year or two, but they were the occasion for writing the piece. Excerpts from some of my letters to him follow.

January 12, 1972

I fully share your regret that we didn't get to see each other in New York. The truth is that many times I was on the verge of calling you—but some experiences in NYC taught me that people have the most improbable times for getting up, having their siestas, and going to bed at night. Every time appeared to me to be the wrong time.

However, I left New York on the evening of the 18th, after three weeks of "fun" made possible largely by the many friends who I discovered I had in that impossible city. On one plane, I left with mixed feelings. As an Israeli and a writer on Middle Eastern and Israeli affairs, I was harangued by an assortment of people who seemed to think they were fighting the Mideast war in New York all over again. I told a friend I was going back to Jerusalem "to get a respite from the Israeli-Arab conflict." As our youngest boy, who knows no English, puts it (in English), "It's not funny!"

March 20, 1972

As you no doubt know from personal experience, it is always a pleasure to be appreciated—and what's more, praised. I am glad you like that piece, though I know it will cause you some headache and me even more than that. But these things had to be said, and to be said with "punch." It is amazing how people here are ready to abdicate their intellects once the subject turns to a "Jewish" theme or problem. The other night I was speaking to a Hebrew University professor of philosophy—no less! Among the things he said were the following:

1. He finds it "difficult"—"I just can't find my bearings," he said—to think in terms of an "Israeli state;" "Jewish state" he finds much easier to comprehend and assess. After all, he added, it's only twenty years since Israel was established!

2. Chiefly, he is impressed by the unpredictability of “Jewish history.” Who knows what surprises this history is laying in wait for us!
3. The Arabs? Well, they are *citizens* of this state. Okay, then, they are not, strictly speaking, citizens. He is willing (he added) consciously and with all responsibility to discriminate in favor of Jews and maintain the Law of Return as it is.

And so on. Mind you, the man was intelligent, is native-born, had just come back from one-and-a-half years at Princeton. He makes every impression of having given the matter quite some thought. Yet he could not help being a little bit mystical about such terms as Jewish history.

April 25, 1972

. . . Too sad about this wholesale onslaught on Carl Gershman. But I will be the last to sit in judgment. The Arabs, collectively I mean, are so dismally stupid, and the Israeli establishment is so clever that very few people seem to withstand the pressure. Remember, bridges are usually the first to be demolished by one or the other of the warring parties, and those who choose to stand somewhere in the middle place themselves in the line of fire.

And with this profound philosophical reflection let me wish you and *Dissent* health and prosperity.

My “business relations” with Howe continued and, in response to a suggestion I made to do a piece on the Yom Kippur War and its aftermath, he wrote in a letter dated November 3, 1973:

You probably know, but I should emphasize nevertheless, that from here, right now, things look bleak . . . I was asked by the *NY Times Magazine* to do a piece on domestic repercussions of the new war—I was a little alarmed since at the moment the Jews seemed to have enough troubles, yet I also felt an obligation to agree to do it. So I stalled. But for the American Jews, the untroubled post-war decades are over—anyway, it was a mass hallucination to suppose that directly after the Holocaust we could live in a new sort of security: why should we have? I mention all this, in case it might in any way affect what you propose to write.

After a year or so of protracted correspondence, Howe wrote, in a letter dated November 29, 1974: “You are, bless your soul, a true intellec-

tual, which is to say, a true Jewish intellectual, in that you can't imagine, really, that a response or lack of it to an intellectual statement can have any cause or substance other than an intellectual one." After assuring me that nothing in my letters had given him offence ("I've been in the intellectual 'business' long enough not to get too outraged . . ."), he concluded: "So please be sure that all is well between us. People who value ideas as much as we do should never let them come between them."

The "intellectual statement" Howe referred to was penned by me in a long epistle I had sent him almost exactly a year before; but his letter came in response to a "reminder" I sent him on October 20, 1974. In this latter communication I gave vent to my general feelings of disappointment and disillusion with American Jewry as a whole. I wrote, among other things:

What really gets me is that a splendid, rich, well-established community of about five million souls *living in an open society*—and on the face of it suffering no disabilities—should feel so dependent on what after all is a political entity like any other, or destined to be like any other, perhaps only more so. It may sound incredible, but I worry far more about the fate and welfare of Diaspora Jews than about the State of Israel—and I think it's time Jewish communities there stood on their own feet. Not excluding the Jews of the Soviet Union. The lunatic dream of some Zionists to liquidate all these communities and make them "ascend" to Israel would, if it came about, be a veritable disaster.

The original "epistle" I sent Howe, on March 1, 1974, read in part:

A friend of mine in the States told me about an article you just published. I kept vaguely hoping to see it somewhere, and at last I have succeeded—though only in a Hebrew translation (*Davar*, February 22). This is not praise or flattery, but like almost everything you have written—and I read—it is brilliantly conceived and elegantly executed. However, my reservations about it are so basic that I find I must put some of them down in writing.

At the root of your "scenario"—based as you write on Hans Morgenthau's premonitions—I detect two basic premises:

- a. That Israel can survive only as long as it maintains military supremacy over all its Arab neighbors.
- b. That no matter what Israel says or does its Arab neighbors will always take the first opportunity to wipe it off the map of the Middle East.

[Note: Hans Joachim Morgenthau (1904–1980) was an influential theorist of international relations.]

At the root of these two premises I find two basic assumptions which are also in a way corollaries—and with which I find I am equally in disagreement. Respectively, these are, first, that somehow the law of cause and effect does not work where the Arab-Israeli conflict is concerned, and second, that Israel is doomed forever and ever to remain the totally alien element in the Middle East which its rulers have so far openly proclaimed it to be.

There are, of course, other basic assumptions in your article with which I do not seem to agree—such as that the full screening of the scenario you draw would spell the end of the Jewish people everywhere—and with it, presumably, Judaism itself. The equation of Israel with the Jewish people and of Zionism with Judaism—equations which are now habitually taken as truisms—have caused a great deal of intellectual confusion both among Jews and among non-Jews. And while we are about it, let me make this my starting point in dealing with one aspect of this horribly vexed business of Arab attitudes to Israel.

In the past decade or so, the term “Arab anti-Semitism” gained currency in Israel and abroad. On the face of it, the charge was justified: Hundreds of books in Arabic purporting to be about the Arab-Israeli conflict have been published, and many, many of them are replete with anti-Semitic arguments all the way up to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Let’s, for the sake of argument, concede that the fact that these are almost wholly taken verbatim from European Christian sources is irrelevant and that the dissemination of this anti-Semitic literature has been deliberate, well thought out, and official (witness Saudi Arabia’s reported distribution only last month of copies of the *Protocols* amongst a French delegation headed by French Foreign Minister Michel Jobert).

All this granted, for me it remains almost the ultimate in irony that what Arab anti-Semites have been doing is nothing more horrible than accepting Zionism’s own definition of itself! Does this need elaboration? Since its inception, Zionism has been calling itself “the movement for national liberation of the Jewish people;” it has been identifying itself with Judaism and Jewishness; it has practically appropriated the Jewish Bible, the Talmud and the whole of Rabbinic Judaism and made them its own; and it has turned Abraham, Moses and the Prophets into the first Zionists. After 1948, Israel—the consummation, however partial, of Zionism—defined itself in such a way and promulgated laws and regulations of such a nature that it virtually turned all the 90 percent

of Jews living outside its borders into Israeli "nationals." Who are we, then, to accuse Arabs of anti-Semitism when all they have done is fallen right into the ideological trap which the Zionists set for them?

Now let me go back to what seems to me to be the basic premises of your—and Morgenthau's—scenario. The argument that Israel can survive only as long as the Arabs are kept aware of the blood and destruction which they will suffer if they so much as contemplate harming it is not a new one. At no time in the past 26 years was this argument correct. At no time has it been *seen* to be incorrect, almost to the point of being positively lunatic, as it has since October 16, 1973. (And yet as recently as last month, addressing something called the Prime Minister's Economic Conference or some such name, Mrs. Golda Meir reiterated the time-honored cliche—to wit that the Arabs will make peace with Israel only when they realize they cannot beat her on the battlefield.)

As a mere cliche which also happens to be convenient in pursuance of a certain line of policy, I expect this to be accepted by two categories of humans—the utterly ignorant and the totally committed. You and I—and I hope Morgenthau as well—belong to neither of these categories, and we can therefore afford the luxury of asking the simple question: Has there been in known history, let alone in this third third of the 20th century, a single case of a nation or a state which managed to survive on such utterly crazy terms? And why should Israel be an exception? (I guess Morgenthau is the most qualified of us three to answer this question. However, judging from a television interview screened here I don't think he is quite in the picture as far as the Middle East is concerned. I say this because he made a crucial error of fact—crucial to his argument—when he said the Egyptians have since 1967 refused a settlement which would entail demilitarizing Sinai. The simple fact is that Cairo officially and formally—in the form of the ill-fated Jarring Memorandum of February 8, 1971—agreed to the demilitarization of the god-forsaken desert!)

Be that as it may, I am fully aware of the fact that the above argument—namely, that peace between Israel and the Arabs depends wholly on the former's maintaining unmistakable military supremacy over the latter—is justified by those who maintain it on the ground that the Arabs *a priori* want to destroy Israel no matter what physical boundaries were involved and regardless of the politico-cultural posture it would take. In other words, the validness of the whole argument (let me call it Argument A) depends on the validness of the thesis (which I shall

call Argument B) that “the Arab attitude” to Israel is in no manner of way a function of what Israel says or does.

As I have indicated, I disagree with Argument B and therefore consider Argument A totally non-valid even in the quite unique situation with which we are dealing here. By sheer accident, on the same day I read your article I was leafing through a mimeographed text of a speech delivered at the recent meeting of the Zionist General Council (Jerusalem, February 20). The address was given by Emmanuel Neumann, and it was a tribute to David Ben Gurion. “Above all,” said the speaker in his tribute, “Ben Gurion was the exponent and personification of that ‘activist’ policy which led the *yishuv* and the Zionist movement to their most hazardous adventures and greatest triumphs.” To demonstrate this, Neumann added that “rather early in his career” Ben Gurion expressed his activist temper in these words: “In Palestine (Eretz Israel) I learned that when there is an important Zionist enterprise on the one hand, and logic with its logic procedures on the other—the Zionist enterprise must take precedence . . . A start in Transjordan can prove decisive and if an opportunity arises, we must seize it . . . If we are possessed by fear, we will achieve nothing in this country.” [Note: “Yishuv” refers to the Jews living in Palestine before the founding of the State of Israel.]

Needless to say, in the context of Ben Gurion’s statement the word “fear” was only a euphemism and must be replaced by “logic with its logic procedures”—whatever that is. But having thus dismissed “logic” as irrelevant, some of Ben Gurion’s closest associates went on record as dismissing morals and ethics with equal ease. Arthur Ruppин, undoubtedly one of the finest minds in the Zionist movement and a man who at one stage believed fervently in reconciling Zionism’s aims and Arab rights in Palestine, subsequently came to the conclusion that it was well-nigh impossible “to realize Zionism and still bring it continually into line with the demands of general ethics.”

Between them, then, Ben Gurion the man of action and Ruppин the man of intellect and conscience, decided to relegate both logic and ethics to a far corner and set about “realizing Zionism.” There is no reason to suppose that any of these two men’s contemporaries, or successors, in the Zionist movement paid any more attention to the requirements either of logic or ethics. What this combination of virtual moral blindness and lack of rationality was to entail was only too strikingly depicted in Ruppин’s own questionings with which he followed

his statement quoted above. "I was well and truly depressed," he wrote. "Will Zionism indeed deteriorate into a pointless chauvinism? Is there in fact no way of assigning, in Palestine, a sphere of activity to a growing number of Jews without oppressing the Arabs? I see a special difficulty in the restricted land area. Surely the day is not far off when no more unoccupied land will be available and the settlement of a Jew will automatically lead to the dispossession of an Arab *fellaḥ* [peasant]? What will happen then?"

This was written in 1928, and if the events of the past 45 years proved anything, they have proved that the law of cause and effect does work in this particular conflict as inevitably as it does elsewhere. Now since I must finish this letter, let me turn to the second and last premise which I detect in your scenario, and Morgenthau's. To say that the Yom Kippur War and its aftermath have started a process whose net result will be the elimination of Israel is to say, in effect, that Israel as it had been until October 6—and as it seems to continue to be today—is the *only* Israel conceivable. Once this thesis has been accepted as valid, it becomes easy, very easy indeed, to conclude that doomsday is near at hand. In fact, I believe that *that* Israel did indeed expire on that date. What is more, I believe that since there had never been the slightest chance that that kind of Israel could possibly survive, its demise should be welcomed by all those to whom the survival of Israel's Jews matters.

This seemingly monstrous statement is based on the conviction that a) those who have been running Israel's affairs have stubbornly maintained—and have done everything in their power to prove themselves right—that Israel is and should remain an alien creation in the Middle East; and b) that Israel as it is now not only can but ought to make an effort to become more adapted, more integrated, and more acceptable in its Middle Eastern surroundings. What is more, Israel has all the requirements to be so accepted; indeed, it has taken much effort, much suffering, much repression even, to render it so utterly alien and therefore unacceptable to its immediate neighbors. Some academics have been talking about the Crusaders and their rejection by the Muslim Arabs even after almost a century of presence here.

This to me is utter nonsense: It's maintained only by those who sincerely think that we Israelis are—and should remain—as totally foreign to the area as the Crusaders managed to be all through. The truth, of course, is that at least 60 percent of us—and if you include the native born, as much as 85 percent—are from and of the area. (I, of course, include the non-Jews in our midst.) The way things have been done in this

country can be put very simply: The so-called Western Establishment has been doing a twofold wrong. By insisting on the alleged Western character of the state it has alienated the Arab or Arabic-speaking 60 percent of the population; by doing this, again, it has been alienating the country from its immediate surroundings.

In your last letter you speak of a possible “difference of perspective” between us (because I failed to notice that the hardening of Zionist attitudes in the 1940s was “in part a consequence of what was happening in Europe”). I agree—though of course I don’t see that the sins of the Europeans should have been visited on the Arabs. (In her own disarming and animally impulsive way Cynthia once accused me of presenting what she called “a counter-theology”—and this probably is also due to that famous difference in perspective.)

However, since we have started with a scenario, let me expound my own scenario for the future—one which is immeasurably less bleak than Morgenthau’s. The way I see things happening is that as a result of Washington’s frantic efforts (and understandably frantic since it was the main culprit in that it had encouraged Israel to believe that it can get away with literally anything in the jungle which the Middle East became between 1967 and 1973)—and after all the disengagement agreements have been signed and duly implemented, the talks in Geneva will concentrate on two leading subjects—Israel’s withdrawal from the rest of the territories occupied in 1967 and the so-called “legitimate national rights of the Palestinians.” (Unlike the pessimists, I do believe that what most Arabs—and the majority of the Palestinians—now mean by this latter phrase is at most the sum-total of all those U.N. resolutions passed on the subject since 1948, beginning with the one giving the refugees the choice between returning to their homes in Israel and receiving compensation.)

I hope and believe that with a certain measure of flexibility on Israel’s part both questions can be settled—especially if for once it would take the initiative and make offers and present new ideas rather than waiting for somebody to impose an even worse settlement on us. I refer here to this business of the Palestinians. My feeling is that were we to stake everything on Hussein [King Hussein of Jordan]—because he is more convenient—and continue doggedly to ignore the Palestinians—we stand to lose both Hussein and the Palestinians. On the other hand, if we hasten to acknowledge the right of the Palestinians to choose between a federation with Hussein, an independent state of their own in the *whole* of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, or a federation with

Israel, we will at least have gained a semblance of reconciliation with the Palestinians.

With these two thorny problems behind us, we will have a long spell of something which, while not “true peace,” will be peace enough to allow us to collect our breaths—and thoughts. I submit that it will be then—and only then—that we will determine the future of our relations with our neighbors and, ultimately, our future existence in this area. If we keep proceeding on the assumption that the only viable Israel is a so-called Western Israel and thereby condemn ourselves to remain forever an alien creation then I wholly subscribe to Morgenthau’s scenario. If, on the other hand, we choose to adapt ourselves to, to integrate, and to be accepted by our surroundings, then I see a very promising future for us here. One encouraging thing about all this is that it will take us far, far less effort to take the latter course than to follow the former!

One final note or two. You rightly dismiss those Jewish “internationalists” who are afraid of anything they say or do smacking of their Jewishness. I don’t mean to be cheeky but I couldn’t for the life of me help being reminded of the fact—stressed twice in your last two letters—that the coming issue of *Dissent* is the twentieth anniversary issue and *therefore* in some way closed to any discussion about Israel or the Middle East—and this at a time when the Middle East is literally a fateful issue for the whole world, dissenters not excluded. (*Please* take this in good humor; I never dreamed of being offensive.)

But the second footnote is more to the point. You mention Chomsky and Berrigan. Chomsky and his binational antics I trust as little as you do, if not less. (I don’t even know what in the world a binational state *is* and I am all for a *uninational* one in which all ethnicities live together.) But I don’t seem to follow your argument about Berrigan. Let me not talk of freedom of speech in Israel (it’s a long, long story). But as far as socialism and the welfare state are concerned—and all the other benefits which all this brings with it—I have, alas, again my own different perspectives. Many of my non-Jewish friends in East Jerusalem and the West Bank often point out to me, with admiration bordering on envy, how wonderful Israel is—always adding however “but for the Jews!” No, my dear Irving, socialist or no socialist, I am not going to settle for *national* socialism—even if it be the Jewish brand. [Note: Daniel Berrigan (b. 1921) is a Roman Catholic priest and peace activist in the United States.]

**GOLDA MEIR REDEFINES JUDAISM**

Toward the end of January 1972, after ten days of deliberations and not a few scenes of pandemonium, the 28th Zionist Congress concluded its sessions in Jerusalem with a resolution requiring Zionists outside Israel to “fulfill their Zionism” by immigrating to Israel and by “imparting to their children Jewish and Zionist education.”

A few days earlier, the well-known Tunisian-born French Jewish writer Albert Memmi had demanded that the Zionist movement divorce itself from the Jewish religion, on the grounds that “the Jewish national movement cannot be ruled by values which belong to a world that is no more.” On the same day and from the same podium Prime Minister Golda Meir had laid it down with a grave scholarly air that “there is no difference between Jewish religion and Jewish nationality.” This affirmation, which, according to the local press, “drew warm applause from almost all the delegates,” was described by Mrs. Meir as “the ABC.” The no-nonsense prime minister added: “An American can be an Anglican American or a Buddhist American, but I have yet to meet an Anglican Jew or a Buddhist Jew.” For reasons best known to Mrs. Meir and her speechwriters, she refrained from mentioning the far less dramatic spectacle of “American Jews” or French, Argentinian, Georgian, British, and Brazilian Jews—all of whom carry passports testifying that they belong to other “nationalities,” though they are all bona fide Jews and may even be Zionists.

The fact, of course, is that in speaking of “nationality,” Mrs. Meir was referring to “ethnicity” and “race.” On this reading of the term, it would seem, a person of the Jewish faith and French, American, or Brazilian “nationality” simply cannot exist—although, speaking strictly, even this cannot be maintained, since any person belonging to any ethnic or “racial” group can lawfully be converted to Judaism. Moreover, according to this ethnoracial definition of “nationality,” an Anglican or even a Buddhist

Jew is indeed feasible, since someone born a Jew will remain of Jewish "nationality," regardless of any later religious convictions. In the same way, an atheist Jew is certainly feasible, and Mrs. Meir could not claim that she had yet to meet one, since most of her associates in her party and in the government could have been so described.

#### DIARY

February 2, 1972

The Tel Aviv correspondent of the London *Times*, Moshe Brilliant, printed a dispatch headed: "Israel court decides that atheist is still a Jew." It was a report concerning a drawn-out case in which Dr. Georges Tamarin, a Tel Aviv psychologist, went to court and demanded that the state registrar change the "nationality" classification on his identity card from "Jewish" to "Israeli." The Tel Aviv District Court rejected his application on the ground that "an individual cannot found a new nationality solely by talk." Subsequently, Dr. Tamarin took the case to the Supreme Court which, sitting as High Court of Appeal, also rejected his appeal. The *Times* report said that the Israeli court ruled that "to yield to his demand could lead to a schism in the Jewish people," and quoted Justice Agranat, the Court's president, as saying that "the wish of a handful of Jews to break away from the nation and to create a new concept of an Israeli nation was not a legitimate aspiration."

This, I decided, was something to be clarified more fully, and I decided to go through the local newspapers. The item carried by the *Jerusalem Post* was even smaller—and far less helpful—than that in the British paper. "There is no Israeli nation separate from the Jewish people," the paper quoted the Supreme Court as stating. "The Jewish people is composed not only of those residing in Israel but also of Diaspora Jewry." Examining the rest of the morning press, I discovered that all of them printed the same item prepared by a local news agency! The only interesting detail was to be found in that day's *Jerusalem Post*. Reporting Mrs. Golda Meir's address at the Zionist Congress, the paper added in parentheses: "She was apparently referring to the High Court decision earlier in the day to the effect that religion and nationality are inseparable."

The Supreme Court's verdict in the Tamarin case, then, was a major ideological decision. One evening newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot* opened its story thus:

Does an Israeli nationality [*leom*] exist separately from a Jewish nationality? Is it possible, for instance, that a Jew can come forth and plead: "I

am an Israeli by nationality and an atheist by religion”? Dr. Tamarin . . . believes it is possible. Through his counsel, Mr. Amnon Zichroni, he has argued: “When I immigrated to Israel (in 1949) there existed only a nucleus of an Israeli nation [*leom*] in the process of crystallization. Today, to the best of my understanding, such an Israeli nation already exists.” What he intended to argue is that in the course of the years a separation from the Jewish nation has taken place—so that in addition to it a separate Israeli nation has been created. The State’s Attorney Gabriel Bach argued that no such separation is possible between the two: Jewish nationality and Israeli nationality are one and the same thing.

October 30, 1973

Everybody now claims they were proved right—the Harkabi fatalists who had insisted the Arabs meant to annihilate Israel and exterminate her Jews, and the optimists—like Mattityahu Peled and myself—who had the temerity to claim that Arab attitudes are partly a function of Israeli actions and behavior. One result has been “The War of the Midwest Experts.” For some reason best known to themselves, people like Moshe Ma’oz, Yehoshua Porath, Mordechai Abir, Immanuel Sivan and some other luminaries have gone over to the Harkabi camp. Shamir, Peled and very few others are under fire because they allegedly spread illusions and lulled the public into indifference and inalertness! As though the Yom Kippur War of October came to destroy Israel! But there really is no point at all in argument: Everybody is dead set on the soundness of their doctrines and there is no argument that is not being used. Take this business of *salaam* and *sulh*: suddenly *salaam* does not mean peace—and that’s why the Arabs speak of *salaam*. *Sulh* is real peace and conciliation—and therefore the wily Arabs don’t speak of *sulh*. Very smart, that!

Needless to say, I too stick to my guns. Indeed, I think everything will now depend on how Israel behaves and acts. If it goes on insisting it is part and parcel of Europe, the West, Western culture and civilization, I suppose the Arabs will not want to have either a real peace, a *salaam*, or *sulh* with her. The only hope Israel has of turning the expected settlement into real peace and coexistence is by showing it is not an alien element in the region.

November 22, 1974

Some people are blessed with a certain attitude which I will call “uncaring.” It is a quality that I would be the last to dismiss as bad or negative. After all, as the more articulate among them are in the habit of

saying, "In the overall design of things, what could be the significance of this or that opinion?" Or, as a friend put it to me the other day in a different context, "In face of eternity many of these things tend to lose their importance."

The attitude is known and is understandable in people who do not pretend to hold opinions. But I find it intolerable in those who, while not giving a damn, insist on pretending they hold opinions. Since they don't take these things seriously, they cannot by definition be consistent, and they hop from one stand to another without even realizing that their conduct verges on dishonesty.

One of my best and oldest friends, Moshe, is like that. Even on those rare occasions when drawn into a serious discussion, he tends to vacillate; but then, having taken a certain line of argument, he would go to extremes, without however feeling any obligation to hold on to these the next time around. On one of these occasions, we somehow got into a discussion of me and of my stand, and the obvious discrepancy between "the sort of opinions" I held and the fact that I earned my bread as a free-lance journalist writing for various organs of an Establishment with whose views and actions I was long at loggerheads. The result was a letter which I never sent, possibly because I had no hope of really drawing Moshe into any kind of serious discussion.

May 7, 1975

Moshe Kohn is currently editor of the *Post's Weekly Review* and, to settle some point in dispute between us, I decided to send him a copy of the paper I read at the 1971 annual conference of the American Historical Association. In reply to a letter in which he made certain comments on its contents, a short exchange followed. Excerpts from three of the letters I wrote in reply to his various reservations:

May 6, 1975

In my American Historical Association lecture I quote the views of Anwar Nuseibeh, Musa Nasser and others merely as illustrations and I hope you don't seriously think that I should have verified the truth of them. I called them "claims" and gave examples of counterclaims made by [Cecil] Roth and [Saul S.] Friedman—though my attitude was, and remains, that the former's claims came nearer to the truth than the latter's. As to [George] Antonius's speaking of "the Jewish race" while [Isma'il Sabri] Abdullah claiming that the Arabs never considered Judaism a race, this I would attribute to the jargon then current among Europeans, Jews not excluded.

On Islam and ethnic nationalism I will say this. Islam is against *all* ethnic nationalisms including the Arab variety. Iraq, Turkey and Egypt are “sovereign entities” and they oppose, naturally and understandably by their own standards, all these minority groups with “national political aspirations” deemed by them as separatist in character. Okay! But neither Iraq or Turkey nor Egypt can be equated with Islam. So where is the contradictions you impute to my argument?

I must say that I am glad my lecture was so “beneficial,” especially when it comes to eliminating almost completely the alleged inferiority complex you had felt vis-à-vis the likes of me. Believe me, this is not a riposte—but the truth is that I did not intend to change your views or attitude on this subject by the simple device of giving you a paper to read. I had already felt that it wouldn’t do—not to speak of my ingrained revulsion to preaching. . . .

To sum up, the purpose of my lecture was twofold. I wanted to warn against the error of applying our own standards to events of the past or measuring the norms of one culture by those of another. I also wanted to say that the issue today is no longer between Muslims and Jews, and that those who study the Israeli-Arab conflict should have the minimal decency not to embroil Islam and Judaism with a dispute which goes on between essentially post-Muslims and post-Jews. There has been enough prostitution of religion—all the three of them—as it is, without the shameful spectacle of scholars and would-be scholars having to invoke Islam and Judaism ostensibly to help this side or the other in their respective stands. . . . To me, it is as repulsive to see an Azhar ‘alim generalizing about Jews on the strength of Zionism’s performance as it is to watch the likes of Chief Rabbi Goren kneel before the pagan gods of ethnic nationalism. (And of course you only have to watch the National Religious Party to realize what the politicization-nationalization of Judaism has brought on our heads.)

May 12, 1975

You slightly contradict yourself in asking *me* to account for what my authorities say. Goldziher, Goitein and Rosenthal spent life-times studying the subject, and were I to be in a position to conduct my own researches—as they did—I wouldn’t be leaning on their findings. (Incidentally, neither Harkabi nor AlRoy, nor any of the other “ideologues of the Conflict” even *pretends* to have studied the subject on their own. So if your sole wish is only “to find out what to read in order to counterbalance the things [you] have read that have led [you] to [your] present views

on the Conflict,” why the thing to do is to read those who were free of the current fevers and prejudices and who have devoted their lives to the study of the subject. Like I—another layman—have done!).

May 15, 1975

Even without accepting my outlandish formulation re post-Jews and post-Muslims, I think you will agree that “the Conflict” in the Middle East today is not between Muslims and Jews in the sense that the two sides are guided, motivated or driven by any sort of *religious* fervor but it is a dispute between two *secular* forces, two Pan movements based on and deriving from similar movements having their origins in Central and Eastern Europe some time in the nineteenth century.

You will say, with some reason, why then drag in Muslim-Jewish relations in the past and go to the length of reading a paper about them. Well . . . as far as I am concerned, I made it clear in my paper that I don’t want to see the subject of past relations between Jews and Muslims crowded into the squalid debate between Pan-Arabs and Pan-Jews.

June 8, 1975

Throughout the years—since the early 1960s, when he asked me to meet him for a private discussion of his work on “Arab anti-Semitism”—I had on several occasions expressed my total rejection of Harkabi’s very thesis, maintaining that anti-Semitism is an invention of the Christian West with which neither Islam nor the group called Arabs could be associated. But it was only in June 1975 that I had a chance to appear with him on a public forum.

This was on one Saturday somewhere near Jerusalem—on June 7, 1975—and I opened my presentation with a brief summary of the points on which I found myself in sharp disagreement with Harkabi. I also submitted a brief outline of my own views on the subject, which must have struck the listeners—a small crowd consisting mostly of young men with skullcaps usually identified with the national-religious movement—as somewhat outlandish.

But the reactions coming from the audience were as nothing compared to the venom evinced by Harkabi himself, the mildest of whose charges against me was that I was “pro-Arab.” With certain members of the audience taking the clue, I felt only inches away from being mobbed. What added to the mess is that I am a bad public speaker, so that there were moments when I felt positively speechless.

I had indeed known Harkabi for over ten years. We had met socially

at mutual friends' and he visited with us in Ramat Gan twice or three times (on one of which he actually threatened he would turn to the internal security forces—the Shin Beth—with information about my views!). However I never imagined he would be so vulgar on a public forum.

In days to come, Harkabi was to take a sharp *volte face*, changing his views from one extreme to the other, turning his fire even against the Jewish faith, which he claimed had something to do with the Establishment's current "hawkish" and uncompromising attitude toward Israel's neighbors! He loved to be commemorated as a great "dove" and an indefatigable advocate of peace.

But I don't think this change of stance in any way served to repair the damage done by his earlier views. By the time he recanted the paint was cast, and it would be no exaggeration to say that Israel and the Israeli public still suffer from the results.

December 8, 1975

In the course of a study day at the University of Haifa yesterday, [writer and former Communist Knesset member] Emil Habibi delivered a lecture in which he seemed to me to be adopting the customary Zionist ideology concerning the respective status of Jew and Arab in Israel. I wrote to him expressing surprise at the terminology he used, calling the Jews of Israel "Israelis" while insisting on terming its Arabs variously "Arabs" and "Palestinians."

The question is, I wrote, "Are the Arabs of Israel part of the Israeli entity or does that entity comprise only Jews? In other words, am I to understand that you accept the definition of Israel as a Jewish state or a state for Jews only? Or do you perhaps accept the definition I favor—namely of Israel as an Israeli state inhabited by an Israeli people consisting of Jews and non-Jews?"

To this apparently unexpected query Habibi—then a Knesset member on the Communist Party list—replied that of course one can speak of the Israeli people as "Jewish," Israel's Arabs being simply "a national minority."

But I didn't let go of him at that. "You no doubt realize," I wrote back, "that what you are saying means that you accept a definition that you yourself have termed in another context 'reactionary nationalist chauvinist'—the self-same definition that Israel's 'reactionary rulers' advocate. As to the term 'national minority,' it is a logical conclusion that follows from your definition of Israel as a 'Jewish' state. And the question now is, given that you accept this definition, can you in fairness ask

a so-called ‘reactionary nationalist chauvinist’ state to treat ‘a national minority’ better than Israel in reality treats its Arab citizens?”

Habibi refrained from answering; he only tore the piece of paper to shreds—which I managed to collect from the ashtray and paste together later.

August 15, 1976

I first met Amnon Rubinstein almost exactly ten years ago—at the 1966 American Jewish Congress “Dialogue” in Rehovot in August 1966. I have the impression he then thought I was a so-called “Canaanite” or Young Hebrew—a tiny group of Israelis who speak of the Middle East, or at least of the Fertile Crescent, as a Hebrew “domain.” Rubinstein was once invited to give a talk at the short-lived “Club for Hebrew Thought”—an unsuccessful attempt to resuscitate the Young Hebrews Movement which had been dormant for some time. At one of the weekly meetings of the club—on June 26, 1966—he gave an opening presentation entitled “The Arabs in Israel”—and it must have been there that he got the impression I was active in the Canaanites’ movement.

At the Dialogue, Rubinstein’s contribution was considered by Zionist maximalists—especially Eliezer Livneh—too liberal, and some of his points were criticized. Whereupon he sent me a note saying: “You see! For you folks I am a Zionist and a Jew. Here I am a Canaanite!” Canaanite or not, however, I have always felt uneasy about the way Rubinstein managed to have the cake and to eat it—to masquerade as a great liberal, defending the rights of the Arab citizens of Israel, sometimes even criticizing the Establishment’s treatment of the Orientals and the Sephardim, and at the same time carefully drawing the line somewhere so that he won’t be accused of actual heresy. (I especially remember his extremely wavering, studiedly ambiguous article in *Encounter* on the ethnic problem in Israel.) His stands following the Six-Day War were to veer clearly to the “hawkish,” too.

Today I am fascinated by an extract from a book by David Schoenbrun, *The New Israelis*, included in a new volume which I have been given to review—*Modern Jewish History: A Source Reader*, edited by Robert Chazan and M. L. Raphael. In this selection, given in a subsection on the State of Israel, there are accounts of talks with “new Israelis”—a student leader at Tel Aviv University and Professor Amnon Rubinstein, among others. At one point Rubinstein allows that “it’s good for us to listen to new immigrants. That is how our society will continue to improve itself.” In the meantime, the professor’s handsome

brunette wife, Rowena, had made a fruit punch and was suggesting a “spike” of vodka.

August 17, 1976

When I came to Jerusalem late in the winter of 1951 I had known Martin Buber only through his *I and Thou*, which I had managed to get in a paperback edition published—if my memory does not betray me—by an Edinburgh publisher of considerable obscurity. I had also read some fragments of his work in the *Commentary* of those days—the latter half of the 1940s. For a host of reasons which cannot be gone into here, the work struck me as extremely interesting and rather novel—and in this I was more than encouraged by Elie, who like myself was then just discovering European, and Jewish, literature and thought. Once in Jerusalem I bought a copy of Buber’s two-volume *Tales of the Hassidim*, and later when I was able to read Hebrew, a few of his books in Hebrew. It was after reading parts of this collection that I decided Buber was not quite my cup of tea.

The first opportunity I had of giving Buber and his admirers a piece of my mind came when I was asked to review a book that deals with the venerated “philosopher” only partly. Excerpts:

“The sad fact about Buber and Gershom Scholem,” writes Ignaz Maybaum in *Triologue Between Jew, Christian and Muslim*, “is that they are both responsible for the turn towards an irrationalism which hailed the mystic as an equal to the biblical prophet. The lights went out in the tents of Judah, too.”

Of Buber’s whole approach and style Maybaum has nothing kindly to say. Buber, he asserts, “was a different person at different times.” He “had a fine ear for what was in vogue and this is often the secret of his success.” Maybaum can be quite merciless in his own way:

Buber as a Zionist writer is master of the art of being misunderstood. One type of reader approves of the Zionist Buber and is made to ignore the humanist liberal in him. The other type respects the humanist liberal in Buber and does not recognize the crude nationalism, strongly inherent but hidden in Buber’s lectures and essays. Thus Buber as a propagandist enjoys the best of two worlds: he is liberal to the liberals and a Jewish nationalist to the Zionists. A similar ambivalence arises in Buber’s description of the Hassidim. They recommend themselves to the liberal Western Jew as religious groups, and to the Zionists as a

movement which, like any national movement, brings ‘people’ (*Volk*), not ‘merely’ individuals, on to the stage of history.

In the tents of Judah, the author laments, discursive thinking came to an end. “The generation around Buber held the mystic in high esteem. Eventually the mystic became the guide for those who were ready to opt out from civilization.” In one of his sub-titles Maybaum opposes theology to mysticism, opting for the former. Mysticism he considers “the end of European personalism”—and adds, typically though I believe completely unwarrantedly: “It means a Europe swallowed up by Asia!” Let us, he implores, turn away from the temptation of the mystics! “They advise us to opt out from European civilization and to find salvation in Asia’s religious nihilism. Let us be faithful to Europe and let us hope! . . . Let us turn to theology, let us reject ecstasy!”

October 8, 1976

Another opportunity presented itself a year later—again in the form of a book review:

Twenty-nine essays, some very short and some far too long but all typically rather wordy and lacking in cogency, are collected in *Pointing the Way*, by Martin Buber (translated and edited by Maurice Friedman, N.Y., Schocken Paperbacks, 239 pp.).

According to Buber, in a foreword dated 1957, the essays included are—with one exception—“those that, in the main, I can also stand behind today.” The one exception is “a treatise” with the title “The Teaching of the Tao”—and the reason it is none the less included is that it “belongs to a stage that I had to pass through before I could enter into an independent relationship with being.”

It is a 28-page affair written in 1910—and it is anyone’s guess why Buber felt some five decades later that he could “stand behind” it any less than he could stand behind the others. These deal with such things as “Productivity and Existence,” “The Demon in the Dream,” “Brother Body,”—grouped under the section titled “Towards Authentic Existence.”

The section titled “Politics, Community and Peace” contains pieces whose styles range from the reflective through the discursive and conversational to the deductive, and which treat of “Hope for this Hour” (1952), “Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour” (1954), and

“The Demand of the Spirit and Historical Reality” (Inaugural Lecture, the Hebrew University, 1938).

For this reader, at least, it must remain one of the great riddles of modern European Jewish thought how a man with so little of substance to offer ever came to be classed as one of its great luminaries.

## MOOT POINTS

April 23, 1971

To Elie Kedourie:

. . . Almost a year ago Aharon Amir gave me *The Chatham House Version* to review. You may be familiar with the kind of reviews he prints— notices with initials under them. Now the book in question contains the work of half a lifetime, and no such review can really tell anything about it. Two weeks ago Amir phones and says well what about that review—and you know there is another book (*Afro-Asian Nationalism*) and so on. I gave the matter a thought, and to cut a long story short I told Amir that what was needed was an article on E.K., not a review.

Now I want to tell you why I thought that was needed. The *TLS* incident was not an isolated affair. Ask any Zionist and he will say Ah that man; he's brilliant—and see what he writes about “the Arabs.” (Herzog of the P.M. Office was the other day looking frantically for *England and the Mid-East* and presumably I was the only one who had a copy, so Isaac's wife snatched it!) Trouble is, the Zionists are clever enough to utilize E.K. and the Arabs idiotic enough not only not to do the same but also to be led by the nose ideologically. Conclusion: a balanced picture is needed.

January 14, 1975

. . . You recall my writing some time ago that I intended to do an article on you for *Keshet*? Well, that was three or more years ago. Last year I was given *Arabic Political Memoirs* to review and was pleasantly surprised to see that the two articles from the *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, on which I intended to base much of my dissertation, were included. I decided to open the folder again and started work immediately. There was no question about Amir accepting the article, though it took a few months since his forthcoming issue was devoted to—Proust! You realize, of course, that the piece is specially written for the Hebrew reader (hence the copi-

ous quotations) and that as it stands no English-language journal would accept it. . . .

Another more serious difficulty was that as it stood the article seemed to me to be one-sided—in that it dealt only with your contributions on Jews and Zionism and thus read like an anti-Zionist tract. So in the end I decided to make it Part II of a two-part article, the first dealing with the Arab Question plus the British, Toynbee etc. That made it appear more “balanced.”

Elie's reaction verged on the enthusiastic. “To me personally,” he wrote in a letter dated January 28, “[the account] was very useful because I had myself never considered these ideas in their historical sequence as they appeared over a period of nearly a quarter of a century . . .”

February 12, 1975

. . . Sorry for being garrulous—but doing the first part of my article I found myself again in an area of disagreement. It's about that famous last page of *Afghani and Abduh*. It is simply not true to say that Christianity and Judaism—unlike Islam—produced “systematic, determined and informed criticism of secularist claims and assumptions . . .” At least, they have not done so in any greater measure than Islam has. (To my mind all three have done rather lamely and too shrilly.) It is a reflection on the dearth in Judaism of such literature that you yourself had to cite just one example—and that from a work in progress, and judging by Emile [Marmorstein's] finished work (*Heaven At Bay*), I don't for the life of me see in what way other than the stylistic are these superior to the works of [Hasan] el Banna and Qutb. The fact, lamentable as it is, is simply that true and authentic religion or religiosity exists only in reservations: Look at Mea She'arim, *look at Emile!* Look at the various surviving small churches. The prostitution of religion seems to me to be common today to both Islam and Judaism—and in equal measure. [Note: Hasan el Banna (1906–1949) founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928; Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) was an Egyptian theoretician of Islamism.]

I first met Perla Butbul through friends in Paris. I found in her a reflection of my own situation. Hailing from one of the countries of North Africa, she left Israel early in the proceedings and now lives and works in Paris, a sort of an Israeli émigré—or exile.

December 11, 1977

To Perla:

... I promised to send you two or three things I had written on some of the subjects we discussed and which I thought you hadn't seen. I am sending you only one—an article which I wrote in November-December 1966 on the communal problem in Israel. Not to persuade you of the validness of my views nor to show you how right I had been in my diagnosis; I just want you to share my feeling about the sheer futility of this kind of thing when it comes ahead of time. I also want to illustrate a point I was trying to make in our discussion at that cafe in Paris—namely, that events can overtake us in ways completely unexpected, so that it may ultimately prove best to let things take care of themselves. I know you will dispute this violently, but hope that before you pass judgement you will consider the matter with the seriousness it deserves.

Seriousness? When you immediately decided I was not serious? Well, I was completely serious! What made me sound somewhat curt and probably even mocking was a combination of fatigue and lack of time. The first made me a little impatient, the second eager to stick only to the essentials of the "argument" and quickly dispose of the points of difference. I now know it didn't work—and knowing the little I know about you I now realize it couldn't possibly have worked.

You may well wonder why I am taking all that trouble to explain the situation. Well, to tell you the truth, I saw in you something of myself—there was nothing you said, no idea you expressed, that I hadn't held at one point or other during my years in Israel. I know the dangers—largely spiritual and psychological, to be sure—of sticking to one's guns when events are actually overtaking one's attitudes and ideas and surging ahead of them. Who cares what [Mordechai] Ben-Porath says about immigrants from Islamic countries? Who now remembers what the Ashkenazis said about the Moroccan Jews when they came to Israel? Or the Iraqis? Or the Yemenites? Similarly, if a reasonable number of Palestinians agree between them that the PLO is not their "sole legitimate representative" who are we to take issue with that? (I have always said, in reply to the silly and annoying question as to "how representative the PLO are of the Palestinians," that they were not less representative of the Palestinians—probably more—than the First Zionist Congress was of the Jews of the world back in 1897 . . .)

Thing is, you see, I am really not in the least ideologically oriented.

I have had such experience of certain quarters claiming to be Left—including, especially, Jewish and Zionist ones—that I no longer hold to be in any way meaningful the habitual distinction between Right and Left.

April 22, 1978

To David Caute

... No, I cannot claim to be active these days. Well, I do do some writing, but it's about tenth of what I used to do ten or 15 years ago. The rest of my time I spend reading novels and poetry and some autobiography. I don't know about the most recent poetry, but I keep being impressed and surprised by the high quality of some of the novels being produced in English—mostly in the States. I am now reading something called *Kinflicks* by an American lady called Liza [Lisa] Alther, and I must say I like it very much. A book of selections from a London periodical called *Bananas* has also just come my way and I find the fiction part quite good . . .

What do you read for relaxation? Or is it Rhodesia and such disasters all the while? God, do I sound cynical and world-weary? But surely you see that these things are happening in one form or other all the bloody time and thousands of books and articles are being written about them. What, I keep wondering, is there that can be said and hasn't been said already? (This by the way accounts for the fact that I find it such a drag these days to write about my Arab cousins and their affairs.) My friends say I am lazy. Which I probably am; but that is not the reason why I have developed this breed of indifference to what's actually happening in the world of politics and power. Or is it some sort of defence mechanism!

## REVIEWS

### *Fury Misdirected*

Michael Elkins's *Forged in Fury* (New York, Ballantine Books) is a deeply-felt account of the agonies and tribulations of a group of Holocaust survivors who pledged themselves to revenge the six million Jews exterminated during World War II. In a rousing back-cover praise of the book, the publishers say, among other things, "When you have read it, you will understand the fiery heart that holds Israel together."

This seemingly innocuous attempt at linking the terrible experience of European Jewry to the current Israeli-Arab conflict is reinforced, prob-

ably quite unwittingly, by some of the author's own assertions—as for instance when he writes at the end of his short Epilogue:

The memory of the Jewish agony in Europe endures and will go on echoing through the ages because justice was not done. And this separates Jew from non-Jew. The people of Israel today will not entrust any measure of their survival to the non-Jewish world, and what is contained in this book is part of the reason . . . Men denied justice will, themselves, take however much of it they can and in whatever manner open to them. All men. The Jews not least.

These are legitimate and perfectly understandable sentiments as far as they go. Read in the context of 1971, however—when the confrontation between Jew and non-Jew seems to be confined exclusively to the various front-lines of the Israeli-Arab war—such remarks cannot but bring to mind the popular outcries heard in Israel so often in the days preceding the Six-Day War—to the effect that “we shall not allow another Auschwitz here!”

To this reviewer, indeed, it is a sad and deeply ironic commentary on the human condition that the very title of Elkins's book should impart the impression that the State of Israel and its Jews—whom else could the title refer to?—were forged in the fury they felt, and continue to feel, at the barbaric ways in which their brethren had been treated by Europe—and that in the end the fury was to be directed at a third and blameless party. All of which seems to lend credence to what the Israeli author of a recent book on Israel has pointed out—namely that the price for a Jewish homeland was partly paid by the Arab inhabitants of Palestine, and that the Arabs, who bore no responsibility for the sufferings of Jews in Europe, in the end were punished for this suffering.

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1972

### *Bible and Nationality*

J. Schoneveld's *The Bible in Israeli Education* (Amsterdam, Van Gorcum, Assen) is exactly what its subtitle claims it to be—“A Study of Approaches to the Hebrew Bible and Its Teaching in Israeli Educational Literature.” However, while the author succeeds in giving a number of valuable glimpses into cultural and religious currents in Israel today by examining the various approaches to the teaching of the Jewish Bible in Israel's schools, he studiously and consistently refrains from drawing con-

clusions. His main interest, indeed, is not the way in which the introduction of the Bible to Israeli children reflects on the image the Jews of Israel have of themselves as “Jews of Modernity,” but rather his own seemingly overpowering ecumenical preoccupations. Thus, the five-page “Postscript” is devoted wholly to “the question of what bearing the conclusions reached may have on Jewish-Christian relations.”

The answer, of course, depends on where one stands. For instance, as Schoneveld writes, while “the process of secularization . . . has an important bearing on approaches to the Bible and on Jewish identity,” it is also a major challenge for Christian identity. However, he adds, since Jewish identity “has both a religious and a national dimension,” it therefore has the advantage over Christian identity — especially in Israel. This is because Jewish identity “need not rely entirely on religious content, but it can fall back on its national dimension and express itself in secular social structures.”

This is an extremely controversial point to make, though admittedly one tends to encounter any number of non-observant Jews who would entertain such fancy concepts as “secular Judaism” and “secular Jews.” (Indeed I once met a Reform rabbi from the United States who blandly described himself as “a pagan Jew.”) To be truly authentic, a fruitful interchange between Christians and Jews must obtain between Christians and Jews who are themselves “authentic.” However, it is extremely difficult even to imagine what form such a fruitful interchange can take between such Jews and such Christians.

To avoid imparting an unfair impression, let it be added that Schoneveld’s study is immensely valuable on its own merits. It is meticulous, thorough and quite exhaustive. The first three chapters deal with Jewish Bible teaching in the (European) Diaspora and in pre-state Palestine, followed by chapters on its teaching in each of the three educational “trends” in Israeli schools (General, Religious and Labor). A chapter dealing with critical views of Israeli Bible teaching concludes Part One. In this part, too, the reader will get a glimpse of the kind of difficulty the education authorities in Israel have had in their attempts to instill “Jewish consciousness” in children growing up in a secularized society and surroundings. The reference, of course, is to the so-called “deepening of Jewish consciousness,” about which a paragraph had been included in the Government’s educational program submitted to the Knesset in 1955.

It is noteworthy in this context that Israel’s late Minister of Education, Zalman Aranne, was to furnish what may be considered a classic definition of the secular Jewish posture. In a speech summing up a 1959 Knesset de-

bate on the subject of Jewish consciousness in schools, he declared: “We respect religion, because religious faith in its pure form elevates man. We adopt the Jewish tradition which embodies both national and religious elements, because it epitomizes the glory of former times and ancient glory never wanes . . . Therefore love and respect for tradition must permeate our national schools—*not in order to educate for religion but in order to uphold the national character of our educational system*” (italics added).

As the late Zvi Kurzweil commented in his book *Modern Trends in Jewish Education*, Aranne’s remarks meant that “pupils are merely to be instructed about the various facets of Jewish life and customs” rather than be offered an education towards religion and the observance of religious commandments. No wonder then that the whole project failed dismally and complaints continue to be sounded periodically concerning the lack of “Jewish consciousness” among Israeli children and youth. It is to be noted that the author of the present book himself takes a rather shabby view of this venture, including it in what he terms “unauthentic attitudes and facile solutions.”

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1975

### *Boomerang*

For well over ten years now Yehoshafat Harkabi has been apprising the Israelis of “the Arabs’ stand” in the Israel-Arab conflict. He has also explained, in copious detail, the nature and extent of “Arab anti-Semitism,” warning repeatedly of such ominous things as the Arabs’ “politcidal” and “genocidal” blueprints against Israel and its Jewish population. It is therefore refreshing that in *Palestinians and Israel* (Tel Aviv, Keter; New York, John Wiley), a collection of occasional articles and papers originally published in Hebrew in the years 1969–1974, he lets the reader in on some of his own thoughts and reflections on the subject.

He does this in two articles—“A Dream of Israel” and “Toward a National Stocktaking”—which he wrote for the evening paper *Ma’ariv* in November 1973 and in April 1974, respectively. In the latter, more recent article he finds it “painful to realize that the moral stocktaking by the Arabs after the Six-Day War was more profound and incisive than any manifestations of soul-searching by the Israelis after the 1973 War, even though the Arabs also published a considerable amount of trivia.” Though in this preliminary attempt at a national stocktaking he himself offers extremely scant “soul-searching,” Harkabi has a few interesting things to say. He writes, for example, that while “we certainly have historical links to Judea

and Samaria, I believe that realistic considerations should make it clear to us that we cannot maintain the present borders and refuse to withdraw or refuse to abandon settlements."

Again,

Israel's proclaimed unwillingness to negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization seems to me misguided. The P.L.O. has been recognized by close to 100 states and . . . I believe it would be wise to proclaim our consent in principle to conduct discussions with the Palestinians, headed by the P.L.O., while voicing the demand that the written settlement specify that it marks the end of the dispute . . . and be regarded as signifying recognition of coexistence with Israel . . . Readiness to negotiate with the Palestinians would facilitate the adoption of a more accommodating position by the Egyptians.

In "A Dream of Israel," written immediately after the Yom Kippur War, Harkabi offers, not a national stocktaking, but a settlement of largely personal accounts with those experts and commentators who held views and offered appraisals different from his own. Among other things, he dreams of "an Israel that recognizes that political conduct is influenced by the public mood, which in turn is shaped by leaders and opinion-molders." The implications of this statement are explained by the author himself when he expresses the wish to see "an Israel in which opinion-makers feel that they speak for the record and that a man's standing is not established by statements that momentarily gratify the public, thereby relying on its short memory, but by the lasting significance of these statements." Only thus, he adds, "can a sense of a (*sic!*) responsibility be developed, with opportunism and frivolity rendered reprehensible rather than useful. Otherwise everybody will eventually return to his old views as these stem not so much from rational considerations as from personal psychology. The division into doves and hawks was not always relevant on the Israeli scene, but 'chameleons' must cease to be a condition for gaining prominence."

This statement bristles with difficulty. For one thing, who is to decide precisely at what point in time, or at what stage of the conflict, would one be able to judge the validity of a certain appraisal or "opinion" expressed about the Israeli-Arab dispute? The great vicious circle generally known as "the Arab-Israeli conflict" works in very strange and devious ways indeed: What today might be intrinsically right, could easily seem wrong tomorrow through the conduct of those who possess the power to make

their (intrinsically wrong) appraisals and prophecies come to consummate fulfillment.

For another, the charge brought by Harkabi against what he terms “the moralizers” who, he says, “once contributed to the general mood by denying the possibility of war and claiming that peace was within reach,” turns out to be something of a boomerang, since he himself seems to have indulged in such “moralizing.” For even in this carefully selected and translated collection of articles we find him asserting, in a paper written toward the end of May 1973:

For most Arab actors the present situation of no solution is not at all intolerable, so that they may not feel a compulsion to seek a settlement. True, for Egypt the termination of the present situation has become an obsession. Golan is not less important to Syria than Sinai is to Egypt. Still, Syria is not so preoccupied with ‘the battle to regain the lost territories’ as Egypt is. Egypt may try to lower the importance of Sinai in national priorities, i.e., act deliberately to Golaniize (alias Taiwanize) Sinai and thus allow the present situation to go on.

Just over four short months after this confident verdict was passed, Egypt and Syria fired the first shots in the Yom Kippur War: Syria appeared to feel even more strongly about the Golan Heights than Egypt did about Sinai, showing no more predilections to “Taiwanize” Golan than did Egypt to “Golaniize” Sinai. Are we, then, to assume that Harkabi was writing out of opportunism and frivolity, “chameleonism” and “personal psychology”? And are we to bring him to account and warn him that he “speaks for the record”—to use his own phrase, which by the way sounds far milder than it should be as a translation of the Hebrew originally used by the author, namely his stern warning to the effect that “*yesh yad roshemet*”? (A better rendering would be something on the lines of George Orwell’s coinage in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “Big Brother is Watching You!”)

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1977

### *Some Uses of History*

A central part of Professor Bernard Lewis’s stimulating book *History Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (New Jersey, Princeton) is devoted to the way present-day Moslem Arab scholars and historians tend to view the

way Arabic Islam had treated the non-Moslems who lived in its domain. One of the qualities which these historians “particularly delighted in ascribing to Spanish Islam,” he writes, “was the virtue of tolerance.”

“The myth of Spanish Islamic tolerance,” he goes on to say,

in itself provides an interesting example of the dangers and ambiguities of historiography. First there is the question of what precisely the word means . . . If tolerance means the absence of persecution then, on the whole, Spanish Islam was a tolerant society and it is not surprising that the European liberal historians of the early 19th century, contrasting it with the practice of medieval Europe or even of the Europe of their own day, were able in good faith to describe it as tolerant. If however tolerance means the absence of discrimination, then Spanish Islam never was nor pretended nor claimed to be tolerant.

Lewis does not tell us precisely at what points in history, and in what societies, “tolerance” in the sense of a total absence of discrimination was practiced. However, since he speaks of medieval Europe, and even of 19th-century Europe, as a place where that pure type of tolerance was not practiced, he seems guilty of judging one society and one period of history by the standards of another when he persists in speaking of “the myth of Spanish Islamic tolerance.” This is because if that tolerance be a myth, it is a myth only by virtue of the author’s own recent and relatively novel definition of the term; by the standards then prevailing—and they are the only ones by which a historian is entitled to pass judgement—Spanish Islamic tolerance was no myth but a reality of which present-day Moslem Arabs are fully entitled to remind their contemporaries.

But it is not only contemporary Arab “historians” that Lewis takes to task. “The myth of Spanish Islamic tolerance,” he asserts, “was fostered particularly by Jewish scholars, who used it as a stick with which to beat their Christian neighbours.” Here the author refers us to his essay, “The Pro-Islamic Jews,” originally published in 1968. However, the suggestion that 19th-century Jewish scholars invented “the myth of Spanish Islamic tolerance” from scratch is not made in that essay. Instead we find the following passage in the concluding paragraph:

Gratitude, sentiment, fellow-feeling—all play their part in the growth of pro-Muslim sentiments among Jews. But underlying them all there was something more powerful—an affinity of religious culture which made it possible for Jews, even emancipated, liberal West European Jews, to

achieve an immediate and intuitive understanding of Islam. It is fashionable today to speak of a Judeo-Christian tradition. One could as justly speak of a Judeo-Islamic tradition, for the Muslim religion, like Christianity, is closely related to its Jewish forerunner . . . The same word, *din*, means religion in Arabic, law in Hebrew . . . A Hebraist could learn Arabic, a Talmudist understand the *Shari'a*, with greater ease and with greater sympathy than his Protestant or Catholic colleagues.

In the same essay, moreover, he even speaks of Moslem tolerance in general without qualifications. "In medieval Spain," he writes,

there had indeed been a great age of Jewish creativity, which owed much to Muslim tolerance; in modern Turkey many Jews, fleeing from Christian persecution, had found a new home under Muslim rule . . . In medieval Spain, at least so it appeared, there had been a degree of social and cultural communication between Jew and Gentile such as was impossible in medieval Christendom, and was only just becoming possible, against many obstacles, in Europe (of the early 19th century).

Tolerance, then, is a highly relative concept—and the only sensible way of gauging the extent of tolerance in a given society or culture in a given period of time is to compare it with that prevailing in other societies and cultures of the same period. Judged by this criterion, "Spanish Islamic tolerance" turns out to be much less of a "myth" than Lewis would have us believe—and the fact that contemporary Moslem scholars and "historians" now use it for their own doubtful purposes ought not to affect our balanced judgement. As an illustration of the abuses of historiography in our own time, the author cites an example from the work of a Moslem scholar, a Pakistani, which he calls "the ultimate in absurdity." And indeed it turns out to be quite absurd; all we learn from it, however, is that the only plausible conclusion one could draw from the whole debate is that, while Jewish life in Moslem Spain—and under Islam in general—was not exactly the idyllic paradise some would want us to believe, it was far from the veritable hell that was the Jews' consistent lot under Christendom.

Another, and final, conclusion concerns history and the uses to which it is put sometimes. Lewis remarks somewhere in the course of this book that Ranke's famous injunction to write history "like it really was" is "neither as simple nor as easy as it sounds." "What happened, what we recall, what we recover, what we relate," he adds wisely, "are often sadly different, and

the answers to our questions may be both difficult to seek and painful to find. The temptation is often overwhelmingly strong to tell it, not as it really was, but as we would wish it to have been."

This being the case, those Moslem Arabs—historians and others—who today harp on their people's tolerant treatment of the Jews under their rule in the past, as well as those who make the rather novel claim that being Semites themselves the Arabs cannot be anti-Semitic, cannot and ought not be contradicted. They cannot be contradicted because there is more than just a grain of truth in their claim, everything else being equal; they ought not be contradicted because their particular version of Moslem-Jewish relations in the past is bound to work as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To impede such a beneficial process is in no one's interest. Moreover, considering the apparently insurmountable difficulty of telling it "like it was," it is obvious that even the academic cause of historical truth is not likely to be served by such reservations.

*JERUSALEM POST, 1976*

### *Divergent Problems*

Somewhere in the course of his *A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, Jonathan Cape), E. F. Schumacher quotes Descartes's dictum: "Deal only with ideas that are distinct, precise and certain beyond any reasonable doubt; therefore: rely on geometry, mathematics, quantification, measurement and exact observation." Dr. Schumacher's book—the last to be published in his lifetime—can be said to present the exact antithesis of this Cartesian approach. It is his belief that this "scientific rationalism," this emphasis on provable and certain knowledge, has increasingly obscured from view various aspects of life that confront us in reality. He calls Descartes "a mind both powerful and frighteningly narrow," and cites with approval Jacques Maritain's comment that the Cartesian evidence mechanizes nature, does violence to it, and annihilates everything which causes things to symbolize with the spirit. "The universe becomes dumb."

It is worth noting that Schumacher's real objection is not to rational thinking as such—he himself writes very rationally and lucidly—but to the supremacy accorded to rationalism by philosophers. "There is no guarantee," he writes, "that the world is made in such a way that indubitable truth is the whole truth. And whose truth, whose understanding would it be? That of man, of any man? Are all men 'adequate' to grasp all truth?" The truth, he asserts, is that the mind of man can doubt everything it cannot grasp with ease, "and some men are more prone to doubt than others." His conclusion: "If in doubt, show it prominently."

*A Guide for the Perplexed* is written so compactly and concisely that it is well-nigh impossible to summarize. It falls into three main parts. In the first, Schumacher distinguishes between four “levels of being”—matter, life, consciousness and self-awareness—four elements which, in their fundamental nature, are different, incomparable, incommensurable and discontinuous. The thrust of his argument is that only one of the elements—matter—is directly accessible to objective, scientific observation by means of our five senses. The other three are known to us because we can verify their existence from our own inner experience.

These four great “levels of being”—where the higher level always “comprehends” the levels below it—constitute the first landmark Schumacher has chosen for what he calls his “philosophical map and guide-book.” The second is the corresponding set of structures, senses, abilities and cognitive powers. We thus come to what the author terms “the four fields of knowledge”—a division which comes down to a significant distinction between knowledge used for instruction and understanding and knowledge used for manipulation of things and people. However, while distinguishing between four fields of knowledge, Schumacher is aware that knowledge itself is a unity—and explains that the main purpose of showing these four fields separately is “to make the unity appear in its plenitude.”

The third and last main subject he deals with is problems and problem-solving. Here he invites us to distinguish between two types of problems, namely, “solved problems” and “unsolved problems.” While the former do not seem to present any problem, Schumacher wonders—as regards the latter—whether there are problems that are not merely unsolved but insoluble. He prefers to give these two types of problems a new description, and distinguishes between “convergent problems” which, like a crossword puzzle, can be solved, and “divergent problems,” which cannot. Man’s life, he believes, can be seen and understood as a succession of divergent problems which are inevitably encountered and have to be coped with in some way. “They are refractory to mere logic and discursive reason, and constitute, as it were, a strain-and-stretch apparatus to develop the Whole Man, and that means to develop man’s supralogical faculties.”

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1979

### *Orthodox Dissent*

Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz can deservedly be called the gadfly of contemporary Jewish Orthodoxy. In *Judaism, the Jewish People and the State*

of Israel (Hebrew), he assembles some 60 articles, lectures, epistles and interviews written or spoken during three decades. One could almost say it's too much of a good thing.

It may be useful to list here very briefly some of Professor Leibowitz's many novel and rather outspoken views. He is on record, for instance, that Israel's present religious parties are "the kept woman of the country's political establishment"; that had he been in charge of such things he would immediately have ordered the demolition of the Wailing Wall—the *Kotel Ma'aravi*, which he further jeeringly designated "the diskotel"; that Judaism as a religion entails no "moral values" and orders no particular code of moral behavior but is concerned solely with observance of the *mitzvot* (religious prescriptions); that the State has no intrinsic value but only an instrumental one; that the conflict between religion—in the sense of Judaism of Torah and *Mitzvot*—and state is "of the essence of both religion and the State"; that every state, including the State of Israel, "must by definition be secular"; and that in Israel state must be separated from religion. Indeed, his call for the separation of religion and state in secular Israel stems from the vital religious need to prevent religion from becoming "a department of a secular government, a tool of governmental administrative bureaucracy which 'supports' religion and religious institutions not out of any religious motivation but as a concession to certain pressure groups out of transient and shifting interests of government."

Leibowitz speaks with feeling of the dismal state of religion in Israel today. He asserts, convincingly, that there are few spectacles that are more mortifying or more harmful to Judaism than religious institutions being "kept" by a secular state, or than "investing secular functions with an official religious aura," or than "religious laws included like aberrations in a code of secular legislation," or, finally, than "a secular government which imposes an arbitrary selection of religious practices on the public without obliging either itself or the public to recognize the authority of religion."

The list of the author's grievances against the religious establishment in Israel is virtually endless. Their gist is that the whole situation creates an atmosphere of lies and hypocrisy, and that in such an atmosphere "all concepts are forged and falsified."

A severer verdict on the religious establishment is hardly possible—and on the face of it, it is a just and well-deserved judgement. One wishes, however, that Professor Leibowitz were more consistent and more willing to draw ultimate logical conclusions from what he asserts with such feeling and conviction. This reviewer is a long-time reader and admirer of the

author's writings—and had occasion to reflect at length on the subjects discussed in this book.

On one point, however, I must declare myself perplexed by Professor Leibowitz's general argument. It is obvious that he considers Israel a secular state and, along with all other states, "of no intrinsic value." Moreover, asked at a 1970 symposium on Zionism whether he thought the State of Israel was "the answer to the problem of the Jewish people," he said categorically that Israel had not managed to save "even one single soul," and that "of all places in the world the one place in which the greatest physical danger for Jews exists is precisely the State of Israel." Israel, he added, is not an efficient instrument for the salvation of Jews; "its meaning and the justification for its existence is the extent to which it is needed for the Jewish people."

What then, in the author's view, is the justification for the State of Israel? "The State of Israel," he asserts in the same symposium, "has not been established because of the danger posed to the survival of the Jewish people. It was established as a result of the wish of a minority of Jews—they were a very small minority—who declared: 'We have had enough of living under Gentile rule!' This is why the State of Israel was established."

On the same occasion he took strong exception to a representative of "the national religious orthodoxy" (the inverted commas are his) who implied that Zionism was an organic element of Judaism through the ages. Pointing out that there was no necessary link between the continuing survival of Judaism and Eretz Yisrael, he also took to task another Orthodox speaker at the symposium for overlooking the cardinal fact that in his religious system Maimonides, the great pillar of Jewish *halakhah*, assigned no place for Eretz Yisrael, omitting even to include in the *mitzvot* that of settling in Eretz Yisrael.

The argument that Zionism—his own version of it at least—is simply an expression of the feeling of some Jews that they have had enough of Gentile rule is a central one in Professor Leibowitz's thinking. In an interview with Ehud Ben Ezer printed in 1966, he was asked whether "from a Jewish point of view" he was disappointed with Zionism. "God forbid!" he answered. "On the contrary, I see in the achievement of Zionism a full realization of all that I could have expected from it: the political independence of my people." On numerous other occasions he reiterated this in different forms, asserting once that he was a Zionist only in the sense that, having been "fed up with living under Gentile rule," he wanted to live in "the State of the Jewish people."

Here, I must admit, I find the author's argument rather difficult to fol-

low. On the one hand, he proclaims Israel to be a secular state like all other secular states, implying even that settling in Eretz Yisrael is not one of those *mitzvot* which he would care to observe. He also argues, all along, that the very essence of Judaism is the observance of a set of prescriptions, and that the Jewish people is a people only by virtue of the Torah and the *mitzvot*.

On the other hand—and here is where he presents a difficulty—he seems to be saying that even though it is not in any meaningful sense of the term a Jewish state, Israel is still a state of the Jewish people, in which he, for one, feels happy by virtue of the fact that he lives under “Jewish rule.” To a layman, like this reviewer, this sounds like a contradiction in that it suggests a merely “biological” and therefore un-*halakhic* definition of what a Jew and what “Jewish” mean. For the fact is that, according to his own otherwise sufficiently cogent point of view, the State of Israel and those who run it are Jewish only in the most strictly accidental, technical or, if you like, “biological” sense of the term. Extremely eclectic, even fastidious, as he is in his special brand of Judaism, I find it difficult to believe that Professor Leibowitz would settle for such haphazard, pedestrian view of the term “Jewish.”

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1976

**A GLIMPSE OF THE LAND OF THE TEUTONS**

**DIARY**

Cologne, January 7, 1982

. . . I arrived here the night of December 6 and after three or four days of running around and seeing people and so on, I spent a week or so in a deep depression, partly because of the language and partly because the telephone at my flat was disconnected and I was without one for some days. Now I am getting to know the city and some interesting people, while my German lessons have so far failed to produce any tangible results.

I am here on some sort of exchange program between Deutsche Welle (Germany's world service) and Kol Yisrael, and I work in that part of the station which broadcasts to Africa in English. Since I don't like politics I am now doing for them a program called *Man and Environment*, a subject which happens to interest me these days. I am pretty much on my own and can go around, but the weather is lousy and I am waiting until I have settled down and then I will visit London, Paris and of course certain places in Germany.

Some family here invited me to their Christmas evening's celebration and dinner and so I attended such a function for the first time in my life. New Year's Eve was also memorable; I spent it at the home of the local paper's drama critic—a so-called "assimilated" Jew who is active in Jewish-Christian dialogue and understanding, and who had both a Christmas tree and the Chanukah candles when I visited him the first time. Anyway, what with meeting this and that and the other fellow, I am now in possession of the maximum social contacts and social life I am capable of managing.

. . . When I came here I had many plans; but the weather is unspeakable. Today we have a little sunshine but it is something like 8 degrees below zero. Altogether I think Central Europe is a terrible place and I

am not surprised all the wars—or almost all of them—started in this part of the world.

As for the Germans, a friend of mine said the other day something to the effect that they are so bloody methodical, so well-organized, that in the process they often forget what they are so systematic and well-organized *about!* Fancy the other day I went into a bank and asked to open an account. Okay, they said, have you got a passport? I showed them the passport, where only the year of one's birth is stated. They said it was not enough, and what about the day and the month. So I gave them the day and the month! Eventually a German acquaintance told me by way of explanation: "Suppose another chap with the same name opened an account, and suppose the man was born in the same year—one of you could then conceivably come into the bank and draw the other chap's money. But if they have the day and month then the probability of this happening will be much less since it may be hard to find someone with the same name and born on the same day of the month and in the same year." Go figure!

Cologne, January 22, 1982

Last night I was at a reception—quite a sumptuous one by any standards—which was given by a man who celebrated his 25 years "back in Germany." (He spent "those years" in England and came back in 1956 to the homeland. He is Jewish, of course—and he is 77; but still very alive and kicking and working as drama critic for the local paper.) The man—his name is Wilhelm Unger—is a local celebrity; he has plenty of money, said to have been inherited from his late Israeli wife (whom he says the weather had killed); he has a brother aged 80 who lives in London and a sister who, though married to a Christian, was forced into hiding during the war together with her son, who describes himself as city editor of the local daily—a bachelor of 45 or more who lives with and acts as driver-companion for his mother.

Unger is one of the two aspects of Jewish life in this city which are beginning to obsess me—the other being the synagogue. Like the synagogue—an imposing building centrally located and lavishly furnished and decorated at the expense of the authorities of course—Unger strikes me as a kind of symbol, a relic of a past which the Jews here don't seem to want to take for what it was, namely a total break with at least this part of Europe. Both Unger and the synagogue seem to me to stand there, monuments of defiance of nothing and no one in particular and built and being kept up by Germans who think sincerely that this is the least

they can do for the ravaged race. Apart from the synagogue and Unger, there are many survivors who continue to live here—off reparations and compensations and business and this and that. At least one Israeli by name of Rony runs a thriving business owning a restaurant by name of Macaroni! (It's supposed to be an Italian restaurant but the pizza I had there was terrible and the prices are incredibly high.) A woman who must be in her early seventies owns the best men's clothing shop in town and lives with her daughter I think in what here must be considered a palace. She heard I was unhappy with my flat and has offered to give me accommodation in what seems to be a separate upper floor flat but she wouldn't hear of accepting money! She consistently apologizes for her bad English but says by way of inducement that her daughter is "English" or British—having had been married to a Scotsman whom she duly divorced.

Cologne, April 21, 1982

In one of the three issues of the *Post* which came in the mails today a certain Professor Smith, currently spending a semester in Israel, writes a letter to the editor criticizing Menahem Milson's stands and going so far as using the term "betrayal." I find the phenomenon so novel I sit down and type a full-length letter to the Professor, volunteering some comments on his letter. Excerpts:

Normally I should be writing to the Editor of *The Jerusalem Post* to say what I have to say on the painful questions you raise in your letter to that paper; but I have long since given up trying to influence events, and sometimes even murmur to myself with approval a dictum which I think originates in the States and which says something to the effect that if you want to destroy the world try to change or reform it. Nevertheless, I have been so moved by your letter that I feel impelled to write to you personally to thank you for taking the courage to give expression to thoughts which happen to be fairly identical to mine. What is more, I do believe that it is useful and necessary to spell things out from time to time even when there is no hope. (In fact even I do it now and then.)

I don't know if I qualify as a "scholar" or if I am merely a journalist—and with scholars considering me a journalist and journalists a scholar, I guess I belong nowhere . . . The point I want to make is that I know many of the Israeli scholars you address, especially those who, like Milson, specialize in Arabic and the contemporary Middle East—and that on the basis of this knowledge, I find it quite arguable that *Milson is no accident*.

It is true that Milson has somehow stretched the point a little too far and that his bad luck—and what must be a pathological thirst for power and position—has landed him where he has landed (I wonder if he himself sees it that way); but he is not the first and certainly not the last of his generation of Arabists willingly and eagerly to serve the Establishment—and specifically the defense establishment and in the occupied territories. I don't want to name names but I will only remind you of Harkabi and the deadly poison he spread in the 1960s and 1970s about “Arab anti-Semitism” and “the Arabs’” determination to throw the Jews into the sea—which he termed their “genocidal” designs. (That he now talks like a coy dove is quite beside the point.) He worked as advisor to the Minister of Defense—and beside him I can recall four who advised the military governor of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, not counting Milson.

You are no doubt beginning to wonder what on earth I am trying to say! I think that what I am trying to say is that no meaningful debate on any substantial political-ideological subject can be started in Israel without touching on the roots of the problem—and that is untouchable! In a society where dissent only starts with the virtual rejection of the basic ideological tenets of the whole structure, one can hardly expect people, scholars or otherwise, to engage in a controversy of any real consequence. To give only two or three examples:

If the *raison d'être* of this state is the return of Jewry to its ancient homeland, go and prove to me that Yamit—not to speak of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Transjordan—is not part of the Land of Israel.

Again, if Israel is a Jewish state (in the sense, as some of my most liberal Israeli friends are fond of saying, that France is a French state and Germany is a German state) then go and convince Begin or Peres or Rabin that a non-Jewish citizen of the state has a title to full equality.

Finally—and on a different plane—if Israel be a Jewish state why then is it wholly run by a particular group of Jews to the virtual exclusion of over half of its Jewish population?

All this may seem to be irrelevant to the subject at hand—namely Milson's “betrayal.” I think they are relevant. All the three aspects of the problem which I list above have a bearing of some kind on the subject of peace with the Arabs, the way we treat our Arab citizens, our attitude to the occupied territories, and the position of the non-European Jews in Israeli society and government. Milson knows this well enough—and so, I believe, do most of his colleagues and fellow-Arabists. The controversy cannot possibly stop at such a negligible matter as Milson's behavior or his views.

Cologne, April 2 1982

“You live in the wrong part of the world,” said the man, a German journalist and one of the few with whom I thought I had established some sort of common language. It was in response to some complaint of mine about the high rate of custom duties and other assorted taxes an Israeli had to pay for owning a car. What he meant, precisely, I don’t know. He may have been referring to the incredibly easy conditions of life for a journalist in West Germany—with income tax not exceeding 25 per cent even on salaries that in Israel would have been considered impossibly high and would easily have reached the 60 per cent tax bracket. And he may have been hinting at my allegedly “Western” manners and attitudes of mind.

Whatever his intention, however, he had it wrong, and I found myself on the point of protesting that I would probably be found living in the wrong part of the world no matter where I happened to live. Nevertheless, later that same day I started wondering. For one determined to understand, to argue, to analyze and to draw analogies, to grapple with problems on the assumption that they are capable of being mastered and finally solved—for a creature of this type, I reflect, Israel really would be “the wrong place” to be and to work in.

I am somehow reminded of a lecturer on modern Middle East history at Tel Aviv University with whom I had a chat one day in 1966. Like many of his colleagues and my acquaintances in the academic and journalistic worlds, he found it difficult to comprehend how a person like myself, holding such a high position as editor-in-chief of a daily newspaper, would choose to give up his job on a matter of mere opinion. But he also had another message to impart to me—a piece of advice which I chose to dismiss at the time (and which I may still dismiss today) but whose practical wisdom I have come to appreciate. Hinting at the basic questions-problems that seemed to haunt me at the time and which naturally touched upon the very roots of Israel as a state and as a society, I said something to the effect that I was determined “to crack this particular nut.” “Nissim,” he said warily and with evident concern and apprehension, “Nissim, don’t! Don’t even begin to try!”

At the time, I thought the implications of this piece of advice so absurd and so enormous that it seemed to me to verge on the superstitious. Was Israel, then, such a monstrous creature, such a mystery or such a dark conspiracy that no man in his right senses ought to try and find out what it was all about? And provided it was, was this the result of human effort and calculation or was it simply a matter of Providence,

some terrible phenomenon of history and nature that was best to leave alone and keep a safe distance from? Or was the man simply making a rational, historical analysis of the situation and reaching the conclusion that Israel represented some sort of historical process that will have to take its course until it had spent its force?

Be that as it may, and no matter what precisely did my friend have in mind when he volunteered that piece of advice, one thing has become quite clear to me during the 15 years or so that have passed since that conversation: Israel has consistently and persistently defied any kind of sustained rational analysis, let alone definition and predictions. I see that Flora Lewis of the *New York Times* has somehow managed to pinpoint this phenomenon in a short dispatch from Jerusalem (reprinted in the *International Herald Tribune* of April 23, 1982). She speaks of changing "myths" and of myths destroyed. Two of these are worth pondering: "Many came from Oriental countries (they are perhaps a majority now)," she writes, referring to Jewish immigration into Israel, "and the myth was destroyed that Israel's problem among Arabs was its Western, modern character in an area swamped in tradition. When the Israelis become more Levantined, more integrated with the climate and geography—so went the conventional wisdom—they and the Arabs will get along better. The opposite happened. It is the people who brought their memories from Moslem lands who have the most strident, emotional hostility to Arabs."

Again:

When a new generation rises—went another myth—it will have learned to live without complexes in the neighborhood. And then when Israel is more securely armed, argued Henry Kissinger, it will be more generous. But the expanded armaments and the sense of power haven't diminished the fear; they have transformed so that now when Arabs come to fear Israel, many Israelis come to fear peace. "Our country is shrinking," complained one early Zionist about the impending Sinai withdrawal, although he is a man of great gentleness with little taste for acquisition.

And so on. It all sounds so convincing. Had we then been all wrong—those of us, I mean, who argued that a Middle Eastern Israel as against a self-proclaimed culturally and politically "Western" Israel would finally find its place in "the neighborhood"? That such a positive process would be helped greatly by accepting the Orientals in Israel as equals and by giving them their rightful place in the country's represen-

tative and executive bodies—without asking them in effect to discard their culture and their very identities and become some sort of pseudo-Westerners? Was it so totally wrong to maintain that a whole new generation of Israelis, the offspring of Oriental and East European Jewish immigrants alike, would find its place more easily in a Middle Eastern environment and finally accept and be accepted by Israel's neighbors? The evidence which Flora Lewis presents, and the way in which she formulates her argument, gives the impression of an entirely unanswerable thesis. I hope, however, that I am not being merely pigheaded when I say that there is more, much more, to the subject than that.

## REVIEWS

### *Futile Pursuit*

Somewhere, somehow, Franz Kafka managed to sum it all up, years before the event. The poet Oskar Baum, a friend of his and a fellow Prague Jew, was permanently blinded in a fracas with Czech school children because of his German schoolbooks. "The Jew Oskar Baum," mused Kafka some time later, "lost his eyesight as a German—something in fact which he never was, and which he was never accepted as being."

The story of the Germanized Jews of Prague does not differ fundamentally from that of the Germanized Jews of Berlin, Munich or Frankfurt. As the 19th century drew to a close, Prague Germans remained a dominant cultural force, although numerically they were a declining community. In many ways, they were dependent on the Jews for infusions of wealth and talent. However, as Carole Fink writes in a paper on "Franz Kafka and the Dilemma of Ethnic Nationalism" (*Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, Spring 1981), the so-called Prague German-Jewish symbiosis produced no entente. "German nationalism was based on racial exclusiveness," she explains. "The Germans fraternities routinely rejected Jewish applicants, and the German section of the Charles University was segregated into *volkisch* (German) and 'liberal' [Jewish] student organizations."

There is a chapter on Kafka and the Jews of Prague in Frederic Grunfeld's sobering survey of the many futile attempts made by Jewish intellectuals, artists and men of letters to be accepted by the more general fraternity of the Germans in their own land, *Prophets Without Honour*. Though strictly speaking a work of "popularization" and written in a style obviously meant to attract a less sophisticated reading public, Grunfeld's

work is basically solid and full of substance. Nevertheless, many of his generalizations and sensationalisms ought to be taken with a sizable grain of salt.

More restricted in its scope but far more satisfying as a scholarly effort is Peter Gay's 1978 collection of papers, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans*. Gay states candidly that this collection of essays is a deeply personal book, "And I would acknowledge that it is a piece of autobiography, part of reckoning with my origins and my changing life's experience." He would, however, reject the suggestion that it is a merely subjective report. He believes, he explains, in the proposition that from subjectivity, objectivity can grow—and thus "I am using myself, in this book, as a guinea pig for the same proposition."

This conceded, however, Gay's essays remain eminently works of history. In chapter after chapter, whether dealing with Freud—who was "doubly marginal, both as an Austrian and as a Jew"—or Hermann Levi, "the most accomplished conductor in the German Empire who was also a Jew," the author is visibly torn between detachment and engagement. But he writes with impeccable scholarship, albeit with a cutting edge. Levi's Jewish self-hatred, he reminds us, antedates the currency of the term by nearly half a century. *Selbsthass*, "the frantic urge to escape one's Jewishness not merely by renouncing but by denouncing Judaism," entered general circulation in 1930, through a book written by Theodor Lessing—"part diagnosis and part display of a distasteful mechanism which, it seemed, was more widespread among Jews than among other despised or persecuted groups." (Shortly before World War I, Lessing wrote Freud an ugly letter denouncing psychoanalysis as a typical "abortion" of the Jewish spirit. "I turned away from the man in disgust," Freud recalled later. "Don't you think," he went on to ask his interlocutor, "that self-hatred like Lessing's is an exquisite Jewish phenomenon?")

Gay's book also helps us see how well-nigh impossible, hopeless and thoroughly intractable the position of the Jews in Germany was. The Jew, of course, "was the most insidious enemy because he was the most insinuating." The psychological mechanisms of anti-Jewish sentiment, however, were far from simple. "Many German anti-Semites feared and detested the Jew because, they said, he insisted on retaining, and parading, his differences . . . But other anti-Semites disliked the Jew for precisely the opposite reason: for making such strenuous efforts to erase all boundaries between themselves and their gentile fellow-citizens." It was a classic case of "damned if you do, damned if you don't."

Neither Gay nor Grunfeld finds it fit to deal with the phenomenon known as *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, best rendered as the Scientific Study of Judaism. The movement, which began in 1822 with the publication of part of the *Zeitschrift fur die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, aimed at the scholarly investigation of the literature, history and language of the Jews. It was a direct product of the encounter between Jewry and modernity and, since this encounter first took place in the orbit of German-speaking Jewry, it was founded in Berlin. However, although it had no direct relation to either assimilationism or *Selbsthass*, the movement was clearly addressed to the subject at hand. A hint at this is to be found in one of the many weighty contributions to the latest Leo Baeck Institute publication in English, *Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship*. The anthology is selected, edited, introduced and partly translated by Alfred Jospe, and in the second selection, “A Century of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,” written by Ismar Elbogen in 1922, the reader is offered a much-needed background survey of the movement and of the aims and aspirations of its founder, Leopold Zunz. Zunz’s model, Elbogen writes, was *Altertumswissenschaft*, the “science of antiquity,” created by his university teachers.

“Paralleling his high esteem for that branch of scientific studies,” he continues,

Zunz’s ideal was to create, through its *Wissenschaft*, high regard for Judaism in the eyes of the educated, Jews and non-Jews alike. In his mind’s eye he saw the enlightened and noble spirits among his coreligionists rally around it, as they once had done with Talmudic studies. This appeared to him as the surest guarantee for the continuity of Judaism under the changed conditions of modernity; from its recognition he expected the fulfillment of the fondest dream of his age, the civil and social equality of the Jews. “The equality of the Jews as custom and life,” Zunz wrote, “will emerge from the equality of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.”

The dream, of course, was not fulfilled—and the rest of the sordid story, so ably and feelingly told by Gay and Grunfeld, is known to all.

*Studies in Jewish Thought* offers between its two covers what must be considered the cream of German-Jewish scholarship in the field of Jewish studies. The names of the contributors alone furnish sufficient proof. Apart from Zunz himself, with whose short dissertation on Rabbinic literature the volume opens, there are studies by Leo Baeck, Julius Gutt-

mann, Max Wiener, Isaak Heinemann, Gershom Scholem, Alexander Altman and several others. A totally different kind of compilation though likewise obviously aimed at “immortalizing” the cultural contributions of German Jewry is *Vergangene Tage: Jüdische Kultur in München* (*Bygone Days: Jewish Culture in Munich*, edited by Hans Lamm).

Dr. Lamm, now President of the Jewish Community of Munich, seems to have left no stone unturned. This volume, a monumental production by any standard, with numerous illustrations and including a mini-history of the Jews of Munich written in 1979, contains no less than 150 pieces and its contributors include such names as those of Thomas Mann (on his friend Lion Feuchtwanger, plus two short contributions); Nachum Goldmann (“On the Psychology of Eastern Jews”); Chaim Weizmann (auto-biographical fragment); Albert Einstein (on anti-Semitism, among other things); and Rudolf Franck (on his Munich years). Other contributors include Martin Buber, Erich Kastner, Stefan and Arnold Zweig, Leo Baeck, Max Reinhardt and many, many others. In fact, it seems easier to list those who aren’t included than those who are.

All in all, it is a sad and dismal story and—like the imposing edifices of the vastly enlarged and renovated synagogues of Cologne, Munich and other large German cities of our own day—the book rests there, all by itself, a fine monument of a doubtful bygone glory signifying little, representing even less, and standing in mock defiance of nothing and no one in particular.

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1982

### *News from Nowhere*

The explanatory note appended to the last essay in Emil Fackenheim’s *The Jewish Return into History* (New York, Schocken), a collection of papers and lectures, reads as follows:

Reprinted from the *Encyclopedia Judaica Yearbook 1974* (Jerusalem, Keter, 1974), pp. 152–57. I have deliberately divided the three parts of this article into two parts, of which the second had two subparts, in order to emphasize that the beginning of Part II (IIa) deals with a radical break rather than a mere “antithesis,” and in order to forestall any suggestion that the end of Part II (IIb) is a “synthesis” in which the “antithesis” is transcended. I have also deliberately placed this article at the end of the book and, just prior to it, two essays in which, once again, the Holocaust is central.

The article in question is titled “The Holocaust and the State of Israel: Their Relation,” and it occupies 13 pages in all. I cite the full text of the footnote merely to show how thorough, how elaborate and how pains-taking Professor Fackenheim usually is. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that nowhere in the 17 pieces collected here does the author take the trouble to elaborate on the title he chose for this volume.

The Jewish return into history? What does it signify? When did the famous event take place? Above all: Where in the world had the Jews been prior to this alleged comeback “into history”? Or are we expected to seek the answers from the book’s subtitle? Are we to conclude that the Jew returned into history with the onset of “the age of Auschwitz” and “a New Jerusalem”? Or is the clue to be found in the dedication (“To the Memory of Lieutenant-Colonel Yonatan Netanyahu, Deliverer of the Entebbe Captives and Student of Philosophy”)? Are we to understand that it was Entebbe that finally brought us back “into history”?

To do Fackenheim justice, it must be added that as one reads on, one does get an idea of what he is driving at. For the Jewish thinker, he asserts, there are two cardinal duties today. “One is to confront the Holocaust honestly, without seeking refuge in a hundred available distortions. The other is to recognize the centrality of Israel in contemporary Jewish life, without seeking refuge in a hundred available equivocations.” “And whoever affirms,” he explains, “that there are today two Jewish centers—or three, five, or none at all—averts his eyes from the fact that, had there been an Israel in the years 1933–45, not one Jew able to flee from Hitler’s gas chambers would have died in them.”

Further glimpses are supplied throughout the book, much of it is too repetitive or too wordy or both. The gist of the general argument is to be found scattered in the text, though it is adequately summed up in the subject-matter of the concluding essay, which is the relation between the Holocaust and the State of Israel. Incidentally the essay, which was printed originally in an *Encyclopedia Judaica* yearbook, is written in a style that seems to me to be a little too argumentative, even polemical for that kind of supposedly purely informative publication.

Fackenheim, in this collection of essays, seems to have turned from an attitude of fascinated non-commitment to full commitment—the kind of commitment that is generally equated with the none-too-clear concept of “the centrality of Israel in Jewish life.” The late Hannah Arendt, in the course of almost four decades in which her interest in Jewish affairs never diminished, seems to have taken a somewhat different course. The essays and papers brought together by Ron Feldman in *The Jew as Pariah* (New

York, Grove Press) show a remarkable consistency and singleness of mind. In their totality they embody a concept of Jewishness and of Zionism that is a far cry from what Fackenheim, for one, would consider natural, logical and acceptable.

All along, Arendt argued the case for what she termed a “non-nationalist” approach to the problems of the Middle East in general and to the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular. In a lengthy article entitled “Peace or Armistice in the Near East?” published in January 1950, she described the alternative facing the peoples of the area as being one between federation and Balkanization. Nationalist insistence on absolute sovereignty, she argued, “in such small countries as Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt” can lead only to the Balkanization of the whole region and its transformation into a battlefield for the conflicting interests of the great powers “to the detriment of all authentic national interests.”

On Judaism and Jewishness, Arendt would have none of the shallow ethnocentric proclamations habitually presented as an argument for complete conformity. To Professor Gershom Scholem (“Dear Gerhard”), who wrote her a letter about her controversial *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she says bluntly—in reply to his assurance that “I regard you wholly as a daughter of our people, and in no other way”—that her stand in these matters must surely have been known to her correspondent, and that “it is incomprehensible to me why you should wish to stick a label on me which never fitted in the past and does not fit now.” To his reference to *Ahabat Yisrael* (love of the Jewish people), she reacts: “You are quite right—I am not moved by any ‘love’ of this sort . . . I have never in my life ‘loved’ any people or collective.” Moreover, “this ‘love of the Jews’ would appear to me, since I am myself Jewish, as something rather suspect. I cannot love myself or anything that I know is part and parcel of my own person.”

It is refreshing, almost soothing, to turn to Bernard Bamberger’s short, well-organized and unpretentious *The Search for Jewish Theology* (New York, Behrman House). This reviewer does not belong to those who think Judaism is in need of “a new theology” or, for that matter, of what the author calls a “systematic theology.”

However, for the kind of audience the author addresses in this book, it may well be that there exists a need for a work setting out to “examine every theological proposition and test it by reference to all the realities of human life.” One tends to accept Rabbi Bamberger’s position, namely that such clarification and systemization are especially needed at this juncture in

Jewish history, when “the need, thrust upon us to establish a Jewish state grounded in secular politics, has weakened our trust in ancient promises.”

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1980

### *Lost and Found*

By “Jewish presence,” as she explains in the preface to *The Jewish Presence: Essays on Identity and History* (New York, Rinehart & Winston), Lucy S. Dawidowicz means “the preoccupation of Jews with themselves and with their Jewishness.” She also means, she adds, “the space that Jews occupy in the minds of non-Jews and the ambience that Jews have created in the non-Jewish world.”

Now about that “ambience” very little can be added here with profit. But for this reviewer the seemingly pervasive talk about Jews being preoccupied with themselves and with the nature of their Jewishness has always been rather puzzling. What Jews is Ms. Dawidowicz really talking about—and at what stage of their history or of that of the Jews as a whole?

To the best of my knowledge—and within my admittedly limited experience as a Jew born and brought up as a member of the Jewish community of Baghdad—the only Jews thus plagued by a preoccupation with their Jewishness have been those “sons of the Enlightenment” who, for reasons best known to them and to resolve problems peculiar to their position, sought virtually to transform Judaism when they themselves failed to be received as equals by the Gentile world. Denied entry into the societies in which they found themselves, failing to gain admittance even as apostates, some of these unhappy souls took to brooding over their misfortune. In a variety of desperate attempts, some sought to change the very nature of Judaism and tried to bestow on their fellow-Jews a new “identity,” others opted out completely; but the majority wanted to have it both ways—namely to remain Jewish at the same time as they sought to “modernize” Judaism out of all recognition.

It is the sum-total of these efforts that I take Mrs. Dawidowicz to mean by the alleged “preoccupation” of Jews with the non-problem of their identity. I find it highly ironical that Part I of her collection of occasional essays and reviews—which she calls “Full Life: Being Jewish”—is taken up largely by the life, thoughts and fortunes of two Central European Jews who remarkably illustrate the point I have been trying to make.

One of these is Arnold Schoenberg, the composer—a Jew who must have been obsessively preoccupied with himself and with his Jewish-

ness. Schoenberg was born in Vienna's Jewish quarter in 1874; his father Samuel, a shopkeeper, had come from Pressburg, described by the author as "the stronghold of Jewish Orthodoxy in Hungary." Until 1889, when the father died and Arnold was 15, the family continued to observe the Jewish holidays. In 1898, however, at the age of 24, Schoenberg became a Lutheran. This, we are told, was a deep shock to his family, and while "no one knows exactly why he converted," the author tends to accept the theory that his conversion "was promoted by cultural rather than by religious motives."

To cut a long story short, when Hitler came to power, and after the Reichstag passed the notorious Enabling Act which gave the Nazis the power to enact any legislation at will, the Jews were driven by Nazi law from their positions in government and cultural institutions. Schoenberg was accordingly dismissed from his post at the Prussian Academy of Arts and he left Berlin for America. En route to the U.S., in a simple ceremony at the Liberal Synagogue in Paris, Schoenberg "was readmitted to the Jewish community," his two witnesses being Marc Chagall and David Marianoff, Albert Einstein's son-in-law.

Thirty-five years a Lutheran, Schoenberg was still able to write a friend—in October 1933: "As you have doubtless realized, my return to the Jewish religion took place long ago and is indeed demonstrated in some of my published work . . . and in [the opera] 'Moses and Aaron'." However, Ms. Dawidowicz asserts that Schoenberg himself "considered his return to Judaism to be a political rather than a religious act." Religion, you will have noticed, here plays no role whatsoever: Having converted to Christianity out of "cultural rather than religious motives," Schoenberg now "returned" to Judaism in what was "a political rather than religious act."

That the simple act of conversion was not enough—neither politically, nor culturally, nor even religiously—was a lesson that Franz Rosenzweig was to learn before it was too late. But his problem—his "preoccupation" with himself and with his Jewishness—was no less acute than that of Schoenberg's. One evening in July 1913, when he was 26, Rosenzweig had a "decisive conversation" with a friend of his, a convert to Christianity; as a result, he decided to become a Christian, having come to the conclusion that in the reconstructed world depicted by his friend "there seemed to me to be no room for Judaism."

However, a chance attendance at Yom Kippur services in an Orthodox synagogue in Berlin shortly afterwards made him change his mind. In that synagogue, it seems, he "encountered a Judaism he had never known, a faith that transformed him." Not only did he find his way back but he was

to immerse himself in the study of Judaism and become one of the great Jewish thinkers of his time.

Between them, then, Schoenberg and Rosenzweig help us learn an important, two-fold moral. It is, first, that the pressures exercised by Western society on the Jews—especially in Central and Eastern Europe—led many personally and intellectually ambitious members of the Jewish community to seek fulfillment outside their religion and their community. Secondly—and far more importantly—the moral is that a diluted version of Judaism, as many a Schoenberg and a Rosenzweig found themselves heirs to, cannot be expected to help its followers stand such enormous pressures.

The point I have been trying to make, as far as the volume under review is concerned, is that in the world of today such pressures no longer obtain—and that, rather than being ungainfully preoccupied with himself and with his Jewishness, all a contemporary Jew is called upon to do is just to go on being himself. Who ever heard of a contented, believing Jew—or just a Jew living in a stable, tolerant Gentile society—being plagued by a preoccupation with himself or with his Jewishness? Schoenberg's father certainly did not suffer from that affliction, nor did his forefathers in Pressburg. Nor, one assumes, do the observant Jews of New York, London, Paris or Bnei Brak.

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1980

### *Nazi Delusions*

At the trial of the Race and Settlement Head Office which opened at Nuremberg, in the American Zone of Occupation, on October 10, 1947 one of the principal characters was missing: Heinrich Himmler had committed suicide on May 23, 1945.

Himmler was the head both of the Race and Settlement Office and of something called the *Lebensborn*—a Nazi neologism composed of *Leben*, “life” and the medieval *Born*, “fount,” “spring” or “source.” In point of fact, a *Lebensborn* was a sort of human stud farm created by Himmler during World War II. To some, the *Lebensborns* were maternity homes for unmarried mothers; to others they were brothels for the exclusive use of the SS; but all seem to agree that the real aim of these institutions was the breeding of a Nordic super-race with the aid of men and women carefully selected in accordance with the racial principles of the Third Reich.

At the trial in Nuremberg, the court decided that the *Lebensborn Society*, which had existed long before the war, “was a welfare organization,” and that “from the start it cared for mothers, both married and unmar-

ried, and children, both legitimate and illegitimate." The prosecution, the court decided, "has failed to prove with the requisite certainty the participation of the Lebensborn, and the defendants connected therewith, in the kidnapping program conducted by the Nazis."

Marc Hillel and Clarissa Henry, the authors of *Pure Blood* (New York, McGraw-Hill), are, however, convinced that—in the words of Goethe whom they quote—"the most important things are not always to be found in the files," and so they decided to conduct their own enquiry and to find out just what had been the outcome of that particular Nazi enterprise and what had become of all the children born as a result of it.

They have done a thorough and a highly praiseworthy job combining considerable leg-work with a certain amount of historical and documentary research. World War I, by decimating the ranks of the young men in all the principal participants, affected Germany to the extent that after the war only one of every four women between the ages of 25 and 30 could hope to find a husband. The result was a drastic drop in the birth rate, aggravated in the post-war period by unemployment, inflation and uncertainty about the future.

Statistics published by the Nazis in 1936 showed that births in Germany between 1915 and 1933 showed a drop of 14 million in comparison with the period between 1896 and 1914. Even more serious was the fact that a population of 37 million in 1885 produced the same number of children as the population of 67 million in Germany of 1935. This state of affairs made one Nazi luminary envisage what he called "the human garden," which was to be "a country settlement with about 1,000 women and 100 men chosen by specialists for their racial superiority to the average civil community." A mere 300 such "gardens," he added, would produce a yearly influx of 100,000 "unbroken human beings" and cause "a turn of the tide throughout the life of the nation."

The new situation also resulted in a complete change in women's role. Woman was to be eliminated from public life and forced back into the home in accordance with the old principles of the three K's—*Kuche, Kinder, Kirche* (kitchen, children, church). As Goebbels put it: "A woman's duty is to be attractive and bear children. The idea is not as vulgar and as old-fashioned as it might seem. A female bird makes itself beautiful for her mate and hatches out her eggs for him. The removal of women from public life . . . is only to restore their female dignity."

However, despite all the propaganda and offers of reward, the birth rate had increased only slowly in the first years of the regime. It was then that the discovery was made that the best results were to be obtained from

unmarried girls of Nordic type who felt it their duty to contribute to the multiplication of the race and to whom “biological marriage” in the service of the Führer became a state institution in which the male was only a reproducer while woman was a living source of pure blood. And so the decision was taken, the administrative task involved being entrusted to the SS—and by the mid-1930s these “sources of new life” were actively being set up and the Lebensborns were born.

The most shocking part of the whole enterprise—and the one with which Hillel and Henry are mainly concerned—is that following their occupation of most of Europe in the early years of World War II the Nazis extended their campaign, determined now to breed or “recover” some 100 million Nordics and thus attain the total of 250 million Aryan Germans aimed by Himmler and his experts as their goal for 1980. Himmler, in the course of an address before SS and police chiefs on September 16, 1942, actually spoke of the repatriation of German stock from America and Africa after the war, so that in the course of the century there would be from 400 to 500 million people of German stock to populate the *Lebensraum* that Germany would have acquired.

The Lebensborns were to be one of the instruments for this grandiose and lunatic design. However, by 1946 the Lebensborn children were to become “orphans of shame,” left to their fate and entrusted to anyone willing to take care of them. Himmler is quoted in this book as saying: “Every finished job on which there is no possibility of going back will be a victory for Germany.”

Some job! Some victory!

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1982

### *Perils of Retrojection*

*History and Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism*, edited by David Berger (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society), is a collection of six papers whose authors between them manage to cover the subject intelligently and with considerable tact and erudition. Apart from the editor’s opening “Overview,” the topics included deal with anti-Semitism in the ancient world, medieval anti-Semitism, anti-Semitism and the Muslim world, modern anti-Semitism in the West, and American anti-Semitism. The book evolved from a conference sponsored jointly by the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai Brith and the Center for Jewish Studies, City University of New York.

Of these six contributions—and the two responses which follow the

papers on ancient and medieval anti-Semitism—three seem to me to be of utmost interest and especially worthy of mention. Shaye Cohen's comment on Louis Feldman's presentation on anti-Semitism in the ancient world deals with the cardinal problem of definition and is full of insights.

One of the most important objectives of the historian, Cohen reminds us, "is the interpretation of the past on its own terms, and not on the terms of the interpreter." Contemporary scholars, however, generally don't adhere to this rule and often tend to retroject—to use Cohen's term—modern conditions upon past happenings.

This is especially true of modern historians of antiquity, and Cohen believes that the notion of "anti-Semitism" is the most serious example of such retrojection. After all, he explains, the Greeks and Romans did not have a conception of "race." Their division of humanity into "Greeks" (or "Romans") and "barbarians" was "a product not of racism but of cultural snobbery." Moreover, the Greeks and Romans knew nothing of "Semites," and their statements about Jews and Judaism "must be compared with their views of the Egyptians, Syrians, Indians, Germans and Gauls; with the Roman views of the Greeks; and with the Greek views of the Romans." Cohen shows convincingly that the use of the term "anti-Semitism" to describe the anti-Judaism of antiquity is not only anachronistic but also misleading.

This kind of retrojection against which Shaye Cohen warns is perhaps nowhere indulged in more commonly and habitually than in recent writings on anti-Semitism in the Muslim-Arab world, and it is thus something of a relief to find that Jane Gerber in her paper, "Anti-Semitism and the Muslim World," deftly avoids such pitfalls. She rightly rejects out of hand analogies and comparisons usually made between the respective attitudes to Jews in Muslim lands and in the Christian West.

"The institutionalized and frequently systematic anti-Jewish discrimination confronted by European Jewry through the ages," she explains, "stands in marked contrast to the smooth flow of life of Jews under Islam."

The place of the Jew, she adds, "was entirely different in the Muslim *Weltanschauung* from the Christian one."

Moreover, "the gaps between theory and practice, between anti-Jewish ideology and anti-Jewish behaviour, were always wide in the lands of Islam." Gerber believes that anti-Semitism in the Muslim world, for what it is, ought to be studied *sui generis* and recommends that consideration of the subject can best be achieved through a division of Islamic history into four parts which she perceives as appropriate for purposes of study and analysis.

The third and last paper which can be mentioned in this brief review is Todd Endelman's "Comparative Perspectives on Modern Anti-Semitism in the West." In 20 short pages, Endelman manages to illuminate a number of issues as well as to demolish some myths.

He is—to cite one or two examples—in total disagreement with the general proposition (maintained by Professor Jacob Katz, among others) that the surge of anti-Semitism in the West from the 1870s on was attributable to "the very presence of the unique Jewish community among the other nations." In other words, the decisive factor in that surge was the failure of the Jewish people to disappear of its own volition as a self-conscious particularistic group—as it was expected to do, after the onset of Emancipation, by both friends and foes.

Endelman rejects this analysis, arguing that if it were correct "it would follow that in those countries where Jewish solidarity and particularism remained strongest in the post-Emancipation era, anti-Semitism would have been at its deadliest." What happened, however, was that precisely where assimilation had taken an extreme course—like in Germany—public anti-Semitism was the strongest.

Altogether, in his comparative perspectives Endelman finds German anti-Semitism to be the most endemic and deep-rooted. Anti-Semites, he asserts, played a greater role in public life in Germany than anywhere else in the West. Nor was this coincidental, since anti-Semitism was "endorsed by social and political elites clinging tenaciously to pre-Industrial, feudalistic values; it was a major ingredient of the illiberalism characteristic of so much of German political culture before 1945."

The pervasiveness of illiberalism in the society and the polity is best described in a passage Endelman quotes from an essay by Fritz Stern. "At every juncture in his career," Fritz writes, "a German would learn illiberal attitudes or see illiberal models in positions of authority; there were few, if any, accepted models of playfulness or tolerant dissent."

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1988

## *Chapter 9* | JEWS AND MUSLIMS

### REVIEW

#### *The Jews of Palestine*

Two new books on the Jews of Palestine throw much-needed light on the situation of Jews who lived under Islam and on Islam's attitude to the Jews generally. In *The History of the Jews in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (London, Oxford University Press), the renowned historian of the Crusades, Joshua Prawer, covers the period from the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 until the fall of the Latin Kingdom in 1291.

Prawer's account is comprehensive, and it includes such aspects of Jewish life in that period as the community's internal organization, the attitude of the Jews to the Crusader conquerors as well as to the neighboring Moslem rulers, contacts between the authorities and members of the community, and cases of interfaith relations and cooperation. In this detailed and illuminating account of a fascinating but little-known chapter of Jewish history, Prawer has drawn on documents and archival material much of which [was] hitherto unknown to Western historical scholarship.

Some 500 years on, at the turn of the eighteenth century, the Jewish community in Jerusalem experienced a growth in numbers on an order which Tudor Parfitt, author of *The Jews in Palestine, 1800–1882* (London, The Royal Historical Society) terms "remarkable." The main reason for this growth was the special attraction Jerusalem held for Jews throughout the Diaspora.

"The centrality of Jerusalem for Judaism and the yearning for Jerusalem with which the Jewish liturgy is so redolent are too well known to require discussion," Parfitt points out. According to him, however, the startling increase in Jewish immigration to Jerusalem in the nineteenth century took place "not because the attraction of Jerusalem as the holy city grew, but because political and other factors made such immigration increasingly possible."

It must be emphasized here, however, that the lot of the Jews of Jerusalem, irrespective of their number, was far from being an easy one. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the community was “small and oppressed.” In 1799, when it was feared that Napoleon would turn his troops against Jerusalem, a wave of hostility against the Jews started, on the ground that they were in league with the foreign invaders.

After Napoleon withdrew his army from Palestine following its failure before the walls of Acre, the situation of the Jews improved but little. “The community suffered continually from the extortions of the Pasha of Jerusalem which further exacerbated the grinding poverty of the community,” according to the author.

Nevertheless, the Jerusalem community continued to grow in numbers. The greatest growth took place in the 1870s, when some estimates put the number at 13,000. What is more, the immigration of between 1,200 and 1,500 annually was such that by the year 1882 the Jewish population of Jerusalem was somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000—out of a total population of between 30,000 and 40,000.

Apart from Jerusalem, which in the nineteenth century was the largest Jewish center in Palestine, Parfitt devotes separate chapters to the communities of Hebron, Tiberias and Safed, and one to other cities of *Eretz Yisrael*. There is also a chapter devoted to the relations between the *yishuv* and the European consuls of the day.

The attitude of the Ottoman authorities to the Jews, and the difficulties and discriminations to which they were subjected, are surveyed in Chapter 9, which Parfitt opens with a quote from Lord Stafford de Redcliffe: “What they most felt . . . was the arbitrary use of power, the unauthorized exaction, the oppressive or humiliating treatment of individuals.”

What follows is a detailed and workmanlike exposition of the status of the *dhimmis* (Jews, Christians, Sabaeans and Persian Zoroastrians) in general and of the Jews in particular. As Parfitt points out, the most important aspect of that status was the measure of religious toleration shown by the Moslem government to these *dhimmis*. In the nineteenth century in Palestine, he adds, such tolerance was “a consistent part of the relationship between the Ottoman authorities and the Jews.” He quotes European travellers as remarking on “the perfect religious freedom” that prevailed under the rule of Sulayman Pasha and later. One of these, J. Wilson, is quoted as saying that “entire freedom of worship . . . is now accorded to [the Jews] and they are left to manage their own internal affairs without interference from any other quarter.”

However, although the Jews enjoyed freedom of worship and a limited

measure of self-government, there were certain limitations, one of them the prohibition on *dhimmis* as a whole to build houses of worship—which was a matter of importance to the Jews particularly since, with the growth of the community “both the number and the size of the existing edifices began to prove insufficient for their needs.” And this, apart from the fact that even this measure of religious toleration “had to be purchased,” and at a considerable price. However, the tax which according to Parfitt “purchased” religious tolerance for the *dhimmis* was the *jizya*, which originally non-Moslem believers in one God—*ahl al-kitab*, people of the book—were made to pay in exchange for the “protection” the Moslem state was supposed to provide for them and implicitly for their exemption from military service.

Moslem-Jewish relations in nineteenth-century Palestine, like Gentile-Jewish relations anywhere in the world in those days, were not characterized by perfect amity or even good neighborliness. Parfitt, on his part, tends to depict an even darker version, quoting Burckhardt’s “the Sabbath men, or the Jews, are doomed to hell fire by the Koran” and an unidentified Arabic “proverb” which he translates as follows: “May it be his lot which is the lot of the Sabbath men.”

Parfitt concedes, however, that the attitude of Moslems in Palestine towards the *yishuv* in the nineteenth century “was to some small extent influenced by geographical factors,” in that “the more remote from Western influence a town was, the more ‘bigotry and intolerance increased.’” This, he adds, was especially true of Hebron and Nablus, while in Jerusalem “there was said to be more tolerance than elsewhere in the relations between the various sects.”

Parfitt also touches upon the subject of “Moslem antisemitism.” “It has been argued with justification,” he writes,

that Christian dogma is at the root of much Christian antisemitism. Can the same be said of Muslim antisemitism? Certainly the Quran contains verses directed against the Jews and the early relations between the Prophet Muhammad and the Jews of Medina were not such as to dispose the Prophet’s disciples to incline favourably towards the Jews. . . . But although the Quran and the traditions of Islam can be used for political ends to invoke deep religious hatred of the Jews, Islam does not bear the responsibility for galvanizing the general dislike of Jews that we have described above into the violent hatred that flared up in Jerusalem in 1799 and 1834, in Tiberias in 1934, and in Safed in 1799 and 1934. The reasons for these outbreaks were quite different.

No single factor can be said to have been at the root of this animosity. To be sure, the fact that the Jews were viewed by many Moslems and Christians in Palestine “with a certain superstitious awe” complicated the psychological relationship between Arab and Jew there. There was also what Parfitt terms “the underlying xenophobia of the Muslims of Palestine,” expressed at the time in a general dislike of all foreigners whoever they might be, and a feeling that in times of difficulty the Jews were “likely to be in league with the enemy.”

Summing up this point in his discussion, Parfitt writes: “The Jews were disliked because they were Jews; they were also disliked because they were, as often as not, foreigners, in the sense that they spoke another language, had different customs, beliefs and so on. At times of tension . . . this dislike turned into hatred,” especially during invasions or wars in which the Ottoman Empire was involved, when minorities generally were suspected of being in league with the enemy.

On their part, the Jews who were living in the four Holy Cities of Palestine—Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed and Tiberias—“did not feel that they were living in an administrative area of the Ottoman Empire. They lived in *Eretz Yisrael*.” As Wilson, quoted here, wrote, “They connect the place with persons and events . . . they lived in the past.”

The lives of many of these Jews were encompassed by the physical boundaries of the Jewish Quarter and the intellectual boundaries of the Talmud. “Thus, in the same way as a crude sort of antisemitism formed the basis of the Muslim and Christian Arab’s view of the Jews, so a crude stylization of the Arab fashioned the attitude of the Jews towards the Arabs. In Hebrew books and newspapers of the period the most usual designation of the Arabs was ‘Ishmaelites,’ . . . those who bought Joseph as a slave, the enemies of Gideon; they were negative figures in the Bible and, as Arabs, were still viewed as such.”

The account so diligently and conscientiously presented in *The Jews in Palestine* ends in the early 1880s. In the course of the three decades that followed, the Arabs of Palestine were to be made aware of the political ambitions of the Zionists. As Parfitt puts it in a concluding paragraph, “The fears that were thus generated were converted by the traditional alchemy into the highly complicated and violent hostility that marked the attitude of Arab to Jew in the years to come.”

## LETTERS TO ESTHER COHEN

May 6, 1983

. . . One subject which fascinates me and which we came upon by sheer accident is this business of "gays"—specifically the question as to why some people (apparently including you) believe that to be a feminist or a believer in women's liberation ought to entail an endorsement of homosexuality or at least a refusal to consider it an affliction. I myself don't see the connection, not for the life of me, and since I put so much store by your opinion I would have liked to hear that particular case being put by you. And please don't confuse the point by talking about bisexuality! As I told you I am talking about homos, especially the males of the species and those who cannot *touch* a woman. (Bisexuality is another story and could be dealt with on another level. My hunch is that it's some sort of whim or perhaps a snobbery—just for the hell of it so to speak—although even on that level I would not call it normal.) But I still wonder how these attitudes now affect people's behavior in actual life—in "liberated chic" circles I mean. (Gosh I must sound extremely old-fashioned!)

When I said I liked Cynthia's "Rosa" I had read only half of it. I like it as a piece of work no less now that I have finished reading it. But I am now more convinced than ever that the author is as peculiar as her heroine, if so, so much cleverer! Did you notice what a caricature she makes of Rosa's attitudes and upbringing and family, and the way in which she makes her responsible for the destruction not only of her own life but of that of her niece Stella, whom she had "saved" from the clutches of those Zionists who four decades back came to abduct her to Palestine? How crude can one be—but on the other hand how subtly and insinuatingly does Cynthia try to sell us these crudities! I have written her to say she apparently can get away with anything—possessing such a command of style and imagination. (I want to be clear about my objections. I am not saying that Warsaw Jews never included the likes of Rosa's parents and the kind of environment in which she grew up. What I think I am saying is that you cannot, in fairness, depict such an extreme case of assimilationism and Jewish self-hatred and inferiority complex as just about the only alternative to Zionism—and in the process make things even worse by depicting one particular product of that environment as totally crazy.)

On and off I have been taking a look at material pertaining to Weidenfeld's Jews of Iraq assignment—and I am a little frightened. Not that

I had not known the task would be difficult; but it now seems to be far more so. There is first the twin problem of deciding on the sort of book most needed (to put it crudely: scholarly or popular, carefully researched and annotated or straight narration, dry and colorless or “human interest” stuff)—and then to find out whether you are capable of writing in that kind of style. An even more tricky problem is that—along with the whole of the Near East and the Arab-Moslem world—Iraqi Jewry sank into near-oblivion during some three centuries preceding the First World War. Thirdly (I see I am just organizing my own thoughts at your expense!) there are no records to speak of—and those that *are* there must be somewhere in Baghdad, to wit, inaccessible.

June 8, 1983

. . . Has Sara actually said your novel was not Marxist enough for Pantheon? The reason I am asking—aside from the absurdity of the whole idea—is that it may solve a problem I have been having with this lady’s use of the word *focus*. I was dumb not to have thought about it before (knowing Pantheon and their editor-in-chief) but can it be that insufficient “focus” and not being Marxist enough are one and the same concept? Translated in terms of my ms. it would go like this: This work is sufficiently critical of Israel and Zionism and the ideology of ethnic nationalism in general but where on earth is this fellow driving at? The whole thing doesn’t seem to have a clear direction, certainly not a Marxist one. It lacks focus! (Incidentally, in my late teens I toyed with the Marxist ideology, moving from Stalinism to Trotskyism and then becoming disillusioned with the whole package. Now I no longer know what’s Right and what’s Left and all I aspire to know is what’s right and what’s *wrong*. In this sense watching the politico-social scene in Israel has been a great education. But of that at some later date) . . .

I too used to be an avid letter writer and I think half of my writing has gone into letters. What vanity! (But perhaps one day I will put them to some use—in a novel or something.) Now I write very few indeed. By the way, you should not praise my letters. Believe it or not it has an inhibiting influence, so perverse am I by nature it seems. I loved your letter, but then I am rather prejudiced.

. . . Our friends’ baby son, Saul, is described by his parents as “reflective, fastidious.” What a misfortune no one, but no one, had the idea of keeping a record of my moods since I was a few days old. It could have helped with my autobiography. All I managed to gather from my parents and sisters is that I was “naughty, spoiled and fastidious”—

traits which later developed by my elder brother to become “critical, hair-splitting, naggingly probing” and so on. I didn’t even have a grandmother to write me a weekly letter about the weather. And talking about the weather, did you know that the difference in temperature between here and New York was almost nil? So there.

You are right. To hell with homosexuals (“Especially the male of the species”—do you know that poem by Lawrence?).

April 30, 1984

It has taken me four days to adjust—or readjust or renonadjust or whatever it might have taken for me to settle down to the peculiar sort of *balagan* [mess or chaos] euphemistically called the State of Israel. It is really incredible and I won’t blame you for not believing it, but literally every day there has been a new shock, a new sensation. How can anyone produce any work in such circumstances?

Letters, yes—and angry, loving letters even more! Angry? Of course. If anything, I am even madder at you than I was last time I spoke to you. And for more reasons. You see, they accumulate—especially when you are confronted with one and when your answer-explanation turns out to be nothing better than an insult added to the original injury.

You want an example? (Unfortunately it’s the only *new* one I have.) Take this business of milieu. Talking of milieus, I asked you whether the crowd you invited to your dinner party that evening were what you would call your milieu. No, you said promptly—and equally promptly you added something like “I invited them because of you!” Ergo: You thought they were *my* kind of milieu. Ergo: I am not *your* kind of milieu, and not one amongst those you took the trouble of inviting belonged to your milieu. Dear lady: Will you kindly now explain, in clear English, why go to the trouble first of throwing a dinner party for someone with whom you have nothing much in common and then invite a whole crowd of doctrinaires-paranoiacs (partly your description) so that he or she should feel at home? As an appendix, will you also kindly describe your milieu, the kind of company you usually keep? But in detail. We both love detail!

. . . Your “random thoughts” about my efforts at autobiography are too serious and too deeply thought-out to be called random. So far I have managed only to answer one of them, the one in which you say that I seem to place far more emphasis on women than on men. My answer—i.e., that I have always been fascinated by women—I guess only adds to the problem, since it does nothing more than enforce your

impression. But I guess this is a subjective piece of work and ought to be so. As I always say when asked what I thought about the physical appearance of this male or that: I leave it to women to judge. (This of course is closely related to sex—and to your query as to whether the importance of sex was peculiar to Iraq or universal. I should think it was peculiar to the kind of society in which I grew up. But who knows?)

Each of your other queries is both more difficult to answer and somewhat easier to deal with. To start with, the very general question as to what the hell I am doing this *for*. Well, I think that at the root of the enterprise is the wish to clarify—for myself no less than for the benefit of others—how I happened to be the kind of person I am, to hold the kind of views I hold, to be caught in the kind of traps I am always caught, to be in the position that I am in today. In short, I guess this is—at least in its original conception—an *apologia*. (What's the title of Cardinal Newman's book?)

This, by the way, is why I find myself at dead ends trying so much as to organize this work. As soon as I am through with my Baghdad days and into the Israeli mess I no longer know what to include and what to exclude and I become completely bogged down trying to put some order into the controversies, the fights, and the various disputations that have been the bane of my life for the best part of two decades. (Do I say “have been”? Correction: They *were*. I’m no longer agitated or unduly moved by such disputations.) Essentially I am totally apolitical. I don’t believe in ideologies and I don’t think it is possible materially to improve the world or change it—or change people or even persuade them. I find myself at loggerheads with the very ideology—*raison d’être* of the state I live in and whose passport I carry with me in my travels. And so on and on. The question as to how in the world I finally—some time in the early 1960s—found myself caught up in this mess still puzzles me. One of my future projects which I will call *Israel in the Middle East* I intend to write exclusively for my own benefit: To get the whole thing out of my system after I had organized my thoughts on the subject the best way I can.

. . . Well, what else? Of course “food was a major factor”—partly because it is everywhere a major factor but largely because of the prevailing poverty. Apart from food, the two things that were most important to my life there (your phrasing) were sex and books—or women and ideas, to avoid any misunderstanding about the kind of sexuality (bi-, homo-, and other such afflictions) and the sort of books. I sure will look for [Claudia] Roden’s cookbook.

**REWRITES****DIARY**

Jerusalem, May 15, 1981

In the clean and well-organized State of Oceania, created by George Orwell in the late 1940s, The Party rules by the agency of four ministries enjoying absolute power—the Ministry of Peace which deals with war, the Ministry of Love which deals with law and order, the Ministry of Plenty which deals with scarcities, and the Ministry of Truth which deals with propaganda. Picked out on the white concrete face of this last ministry, in elegant lettering, are the three slogans of the Party: War Is Peace, Freedom Is Slavery, Ignorance Is Strength.

We are now nearer to 1984 than Orwell was by over 30 years, and I believe that had such words not been banned by the inventors of Newspeak, Oceania's official language, a fourth slogan could have been added: Left Is Right. Or, if you like, just the other way around. Speaking for myself, I must confess that in these past 20 years or so I never managed quite to make out the difference between the two, certainly not in the Israeli context. So much so that I always tell my interlocutors that I know not how to tell the difference between Right and Left though I hope I can tell right from wrong. To give one example, I completely fail to see what is so "left" about certain things that the Israeli Labor movement (also known as the Zionist Left) preaches and does—and at the same time I feel quite at a loss as to the "rightist" character of the teachings and performances of the so-called Zionist Right—the General Zionists and the Liberals.

In this connection, I recall an encounter I had some years ago with Yosef Saphir, one of the veteran leaders and ideologists of the General Zionists. One morning in the spring of 1969 I received a phone call from Saphir's secretary—he was then Minister-without-Portfolio—asking whether the Minister could see me for a chat. A lifelong General Zionist, Saphir by then had become the leader of the Liberal Party which, as a partner in the Gahal bloc with Herut, had joined the National Unity Government under Levi Eshkol's premiership—and then during Golda Meir's term of office.

If I am not mistaken, the Minister and his staff occupied two rooms in the building of the Prime Minister's Office, which to an outsider seemed shockingly modest—and when I was shown in I found this sun-tanned man with a slim figure and a somewhat jaded face sitting behind a small, nondescript desk speaking on the telephone. He seemed to be pleading

with and trying to pacify some acquaintance or friend who apparently was seeking *protektzia* or complaining about some wrong done him by a certain government department.

Having finished with his caller, Saphir apologized and told his secretary not to pass any more calls, and then finally turned to the business at hand. He had read, he said, with great interest an article of mine in an American Jewish periodical in which I had drawn a composite profile of an East Jerusalem intellectual, his personal story, and his thoughts and sentiments after more than a year of living under Israeli rule, as well as something about his vision of the future. And what Yosef Saphir wanted me to do was to enlighten him as to a good way by which we Israelis can “draw nearer to us” members of the West Bank intelligentsia in general and of that of East Jerusalem in particular.

I have to admit that now, twelve years after the event, I feel a mixture of regret and shame for having refused quite to cooperate—even though I now know as I did then, that my cooperation would have made no difference whatsoever. In any case, I inwardly tended to resist being involved in any practical way with the powers-that-be, and my answer, though polite, was unhelpful.

Be that as it may, having given my non-committal answers I proceeded to ask the Minister questions of my own that were—then as now—clamoring for coherent answers. One of these I formulated in some such way: “You, Mr. Saphir, are a Cabinet minister, your party is a partner in Gahal, and I assume you know what Herut and its leadership really think and plan. And now that we are talking about ‘integrating’ East Jerusalem and the West Bank, are you in a position to tell me whether or not Menachem Begin is serious in saying that his plan for annexing the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to Israel guarantees that the local inhabitants would enjoy exactly the same rights and privileges granted to all Israeli citizens?”

Saphir’s answer came without even a hint of hesitation, and I recall being quite satisfied it did not come simply to get rid of a naive *nudnik*. “You know,” he said, “Mr. Begin is an honorable man, and if he says he is willing to grant these inhabitants full civil rights then I am convinced he means what he says.”

Naturally I did not stop there and turned to my second and last question, wondering how, this being his real intention, did Begin propose to tackle the demographic problem bound to be created by such an annexation—and what about the Jewish character of the State?

In response, Saphir said something about the prospects of mass *aliya*

*[Jewish immigration to Israel]*—and when I suggested that this was nothing solid to build on, his reply was: “Well, I cannot in fairness speak for Mr. Begin and his perception of the problem. But if you ask me then I will tell you quite frankly that I no longer believe in a compact Jewish state (*medinah yehudit kompaktit*).

I remember quite clearly that when he said this, Saphir seemed aware that he was making a highly significant statement—something of a personal credo. And indeed the word *kompaktit* suggests far more than the English “compact,” giving as it does in this particular context added suggestions and impressions of “small,” “homogeneous” or even “closed.”

This obviously was—at least to me—a sentiment no Israeli of the “right” could possibly utter, and I left Saphir feeling at a loss as to the actual meaning of such terms. What added to the confusion was that, at the time this veteran intellectual of the Israeli Right was making his statement, the late Pinchas Sapir, a man of the Zionist “Left,” was being lauded by the “doves” for warning against the dangers to the Jewish character of the State inherent in what was then described as the “creeping annexation” of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Which of these two stands—still held by the Likud and Labor respectively—is “Right” and which “Left”? Or, if you like, who’s right and who’s *wrong*?

July 8, 1981

The dust has finally settled on the notorious *gefilte fish* affair, I cannot help noting that one rather important aspect of the subject has drawn little if any attention. I take my cue from a remark made by MK [Member of Knesset] Ra‘anan Naim himself in an interview with *Yediot Aharonot*’s Eli Tabor. Naim told the reporter that he had not said *gefilte fish* made him throw up; he had simply appealed to the assembled Alignment MKs saying: “Don’t serve me a dish I cannot force down my throat! However, if you insist on serving political *gefilte fish*, then serve the genuine article and not one prepared by an Iraqi!”

A sensible enough plea and perfectly understandable too. Seen in perspective, however, this remark by the Libya-born MK seems to me to be yet another sign of the fall from grace of Labor’s Iraqi establishment-within-establishment. Naim’s “Iraqi” in the remark quoted above was of course Moshe Shahal, leader of the Alignment’s Knesset faction, who had been incautious enough to argue that failure to include Naim and other “North Africans” in important Knesset committees was due

merely to the fact that membership of such committees needed certain “qualifications” as well as entailing a great deal of hard work. One need hardly add that this sort of argument has been used since time immemorial by in-groups desperately trying to deny out-groups what is rightfully theirs—namely a share in the “national pie.”

Shahal was being over-zealous, and as is often the wont of those who try “to cross the line” he was in fact out-Ashkenazing the Establishment itself. I was fascinated to note that Shevah Weiss, a fellow Labor MK and a *bona fide* Ashkenazi, was on record the very day after Shahal expounded his strangely ethnicist thesis as saying that talk about qualifications was “exaggerated,” and that it was perfectly understandable and natural that an ethnic group as large as the North Africans should demand their fair share of power within the Alignment and ultimately in the State.

I think it would be fairly accurate to say that the decline and fall of “the Iraqis” in Israeli politics occurred on the same day the Labor Alignment lost its grip on power just over four years ago. You can consider it a paradox or a perfectly natural development—depending on how you choose to look at it; the fact remains that, with their remarkable capacity for adaptation and adjustment and what was taken as their “advanced cultural condition,” the Iraqis had managed in a very short time to become part and parcel of the country’s exclusively Ashkenazi establishment—or at least to *seem* to have become such a part. The result was that when the sudden change came in May 1977 and the establishment of the day was duly ousted from power “the Iraqis” automatically went down with it. This was also partly because, insofar as the Iraqis took an active interest in politics, it was with the ruling parties of the Labor Movement that they largely identified, and especially with the all-powerful Mapai. When the Likud came to power, therefore, its leading component—Herut—could not, even had it wanted to, find in its ranks even one politician of Iraqi origin to put in a position of power. It was only thanks to the Liberals that such a candidate was chosen for a ministerial post—Justice Minister Moshe Nissim.

But “the downfall of the Iraqis” has deeper roots, which I think should be sought in a certain ambiguity under which the political establishment labored since the State was founded and probably long before that. The dilemma was a real one. On the one hand, with their tall talk and sloganeering about *mizzug galuyot* (mixing the exiles), Mapai and the other Labor-Zionist groups could not possibly allow themselves to appear to be making “ethnic appointments.” Israel, they argued with

a perfectly straight face, was after all a democracy and everybody was free to organize themselves politically—and yet the Orientals had not chosen to do so on an ethnic basis, and this was very sensible and patriotic of them since such a decision would have been “a stab in the back of the nation.” Besides, they argued, candidates are chosen strictly for certain merits and qualifications they must have rather than on the basis of their ethnic origin.

On the other hand, there was no ignoring the crying need for some ethnic faces in Parliament and the Cabinet. These were duly put there, but the Establishment kept blowing hot and cold over the bothersome question as to whether the choice of Sephardi-Orientals for positions of power was made to satisfy ethnic needs or on the strength of objective, purely “national” considerations of merit and qualifications. This vacillation and lack of clear criteria naturally resulted in an even greater dilemma for the Establishment’s ethnic candidates themselves, who must have gone through a good deal of soul-searching and agonizing. The idea that they were being chosen simply as “representatives” of their respective ethnic groups was made to sound quite obnoxious—for personal as well as public considerations. For one thing, their own parties’ dominant ideology of “mixing the exiles” excluded any serious talk of “ethnic representation”; for another, it was much nicer to be chosen for one’s merits and qualifications than because of what ultimately was an accident of birthplace.

In retrospect, one can only sympathize. A classic illustration of the kind of inner conflict in which the “ethnics” of Labor used to find themselves is instructive in this context. The occasion was Shlomo Hillel’s appointment to his first cabinet post. It was in those far-off days of 1969, following the elections to the Seventh Knesset. What for lack of a better term must be called the Iraqi lobby within Mapai was understandably jubilant since Hillel was to be the first ever of their fellow Iraqis to get a ministerial post. David Petel, a veteran Mapai lackey among the Iraqi community and an ex-MK, therefore promptly proceeded to organize a small function to celebrate the occasion—a gathering at the Ahvah Club in Tel Aviv to which the Iraqis of Mapai and other friends and sympathizers of Iraqi origin were to be invited.

Shlomo Hillel however would not hear of it! He protested that he had not been chosen to fill the new post on the strength of his being an Iraqi but for other, “objective” reasons and that it would thus be both unfitting and unseemly to make of the event a purely Iraqi celebration. He was adamant and Petel and the Iraqi lobby were at a loss how

to persuade him. In the end he accepted a compromise: The planned reception would be given in honor of *two* newly-appointed cabinet ministers, himself and Shimon Peres, and the excuse would be that both of them had been joining the cabinet for the first time!

I remember that evening. I went there uninvited, in the company of a friend, also as a journalist and fellow Iraqi, after having heard the story; I wanted to see for myself how this particular dilemma would be resolved in real life. If I am not grossly mistaken, Hillel subtly but clearly reiterated his conviction that he was chosen not because he was an Iraqi; with humor and some elegance he found a way out of the crying contradiction. On his part, Peres, looking embarrassed and completely out of place in that exclusively Iraqi crowd, managed to mumble something about how he himself was practically an Oriental since he had stayed for some time in Morocco or some other North African country helping with the exodus of Jews from there.

This drew just the right amount of chuckling from the audience—Iraqis to a man—and the evening ended on a pleasant note. Twelve years later it was Shimon Peres himself, now Labor Party chairman, who told Beersheba Mayor Eliahu Nawi he could not get a safe place in the party's Knesset list because “there were already too many Iraqis there.” A mere glance at the list shows that Peres was right; yet this did not prevent Nawi from kicking up a fuss about what he claimed to be Peres's “ethnicist attitude” (*'adatiyyut*)!

## REVIEWS

*Little New to Impart*

Halfway through his book, *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (London: Andre Deutsch), V. S. Naipaul concedes that it is “possible to understand” what the fundamentalists mean when they say Islam is a complete way of life.

The Islamic fundamentalist wish is to work back to such a whole, for them a God-given whole, but with the tools of faith alone—belief, religious practices and ritual. It is like a wish—with intellect suppressed or limited, the historical sense falsified—to work back from the abstract to the concrete, and to set up the tribal walls again. It is to seek to re-create something like a tribal or a city state that—except in theological fantasy—never was. The Koran is not the statute-book of a settled golden age; it is the mystical or oracular record of an extended upheaval, widening out from the Prophet to his tribe to Arabia.

Towards the end of his book, Naipaul records a conversation with the editor of the *Teheran Times* in the course of which he claims he said, “Mr. Parvez, you are a good Muslim and a good Shi‘a. Your paper used to be full of criticism of materialist civilizations. Why are your sons studying in the United States?” From Parvez’s garbled reply Naipaul concludes that “deep down, he was divided. With one part of his mind he was for the faith, and opposed to all that stood outside it . . . With another part of his mind he recognized the world outside as paramount, part of the future of his sons.” According to Naipaul, it was in that division of the mind, as much as in the excesses of the Shah, that the Islamic revolution had begun in Iran—and it was there that it was ending.

Two very good though closely related points, these—and between

them they sum up the theme of this long, sometimes rumbling, and often rather long-winded account of Naipaul's Islamic journey. The journey, which he began in August 1979, took him to Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. Contrary to my expectations, I found the part about Iran the least interesting, possibly because the subject is so topical that Naipaul is here trying too hard to live up to his readers' expectations, possibly because the Iranians proved to be evasive and intractable. An excellent example of this latter difficulty is the author's non-interview with Ayatollah Khalkhalli, the notorious hanging judge of the Khomeini regime. Khalkhalli asked for the questions to be written out and Naipaul duly obliged: "Where were you born? What made you decide to take up religious studies? What did your father do? Where did you study? Where did you first preach? How did you become an ayatollah? What was your happiest day?" Well, as Naipaul says in what seems to me to be a misplaced tone of surprise and disappointment, "It didn't work." The most "revealing" of the Ayatollah's statements was this: "The *mullahs* are going to rule now. We are going to have ten thousand years of the Islamic Republic. The Marxists will go on with their Lenin. We will go on in the ways of Khomeini."

Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia, where Naipaul next visited, produced no Khalkhalli-type *mullahs* but turned out to be laboring under basically the same sort of difficulties. In them, too, Naipaul finds that the West and what it stands for are emotionally rejected as a threatening and undermining factor; but that at the same time it is needed for its machines, its goods, its medicines and its warplanes, not to speak of the remittances which come regularly from emigrant workers living there.

He makes fun—and tells me something I hadn't known—of Maulana Maudoodi, the patron saint of the Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan. Having campaigned for Islamic laws all his life ("without stating what those laws should be"), Maudoodi died while Naipaul was in Pakistan.

But he didn't die in Pakistan. The news of his death came from Boston. At the end of his long and cantankerous life the Maulana had gone against all his high principles. He had gone to a Boston hospital to look for health; he had at the very end entrusted himself to the skill and science of the civilization he had tried to shield his followers from . . . Of the Maulana it might be said that he had gone to his well-deserved place in heaven by way of Boston; and that he went at least part of the way by Boeing.

I confess that I am rather at a loss to decide whether this passage should be taken as reflecting on Naipaul's own intellectual attainments or on those of his prospective readers—who will almost certainly not include any of those at whom he directs his jeers and sneers. We all know that to be a fundamentalist today is to court trouble—and it doesn't really matter what sort of fundamentalist you choose to be—Islamic, Jewish, Christian or Marxist. It is quite possible that the would-be Islamic revolution in Iran signifies no more than the death pangs of religious fundamentalism in that hapless country. It is almost certain that after the Khomeini experiment no Muslim society will ever produce the kind of configuration of political forces that brought that demented *mullah* to power. But it is also true that these movements, like so many others before them everywhere, will have to be let alone to spend their force. In this sense they are deserving of charity rather than ridicule.

Like his previous non-fiction works, especially his book on India, Naipaul's new book is well-written, informative, instructive and useful. But it breaks no new ground, has little new to impart, and is basically monotonous both in tone and matter. Also, coming as it does from a man who belongs to the so-called Third World himself, his approach to these lands and to their cultures leaves a strange and rather unpleasant taste in the mouth.

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1980

### *Edward Said's Reservations*

The term “Orientalism” in the sense of Oriental scholarship is nowadays used very rarely, if at all. Nor is it used very often in its other, more acceptable sense, i.e., as denoting the whole Oriental character, style and quality. In *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon), Professor Edward Said uses it mainly as meaning Oriental studies, but I have the feeling that he has chosen to use it in a deliberately ambiguous sense, since the whole point of his book is that what has since its beginnings in the 18th century been taken as Oriental scholarship is much, much more than that.

It is essential first to give an inkling of what this is. Said, Parr Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, would in the normal course of events have little indeed to interest him in Orientalists and Oriental studies. However, as he explains in a long Introduction, there is a “personal dimension” to the subject.

Much of the personal investment in the present study, he asserts, derives from his awareness of being an “Oriental” as a child growing up in

two British colonies (Palestine and Egypt). “All my education, in these colonies and in the United States, has been Western, and yet that deep early awareness has persisted. In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals.”

As a Palestinian Arab, Said says, his life in the West, “particularly in America,” is “disheartening.” “There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically [the Palestinian Arab] does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental . . . The nexus of knowledge and power creating ‘the Oriental’ and in a sense obliterating him as a human being is therefore not for me an exclusively academic matter.”

The ways in which Orientalism has managed to dehumanize the Oriental are explored by Said with the help of an impressive canon of literary erudition and an awareness that society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together. Consider, for example, the remarkable use he makes of a passage from Flaubert in which he describes an encounter with an Egyptian courtesan, Kuchuk Hanem. This encounter, Said asserts, “produced a widely-influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke for herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was ‘typically Oriental.’” Professor Said’s argument here is that Flaubert’s position of strength in relation to the Egyptian courtesan was not an isolated instance—that in fact it fairly represents “the pattern of relative strength between East and West,” and the discourse about the Orient that this made possible. For him, in short, Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of “European-Atlantic power over the Orient” than it is as “a veridic discourse about the Orient.”

“Strength” and “power” are keywords in this powerful polemic. Orientalism is “an exercise of cultural strength”; so far as the West was concerned, during the 19th and 20th centuries “an assumption has been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West.” In this sense Orientalism is “knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental in class, court, prison or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing.”

In this unseemly enterprise almost everybody stands accused—Dr. Kissinger no less than Lords Cromer and Balfour; Morroe Berger, Har-

kabi, Gil AlRoy and Harold Glidden no less than Alfred Lyall, Hamilton Gibb, Bernard Lewis and von Grunebaum. Here I find it necessary to remark on what I consider one of the weaknesses of Said's presentation. This is that in his eagerness to marshall evidence to support his thesis he sometimes resorts to the work of authors who could hardly be described as Orientalists. Glidden and AlRoy are two cases in point—and it is simply not convincing to remark in passing that the tone and content of the former's essay which Said quotes "argue a highly characteristic Orientalist bent of mind." The point is that Glidden, who is identified as a retired member of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the Department of State, makes such sweeping remarks about "the Arabs" (in much the same way as Har-kabi and AlRoy do) that it is patently unfair to describe anything he writes as "the apogee of Orientalist confidence."

On the whole, however, the point which Said is trying to make here is both valid and valuable. In one formulation, it is that all those "Oriental attributes" that the Orientalists have been so busy studying and enumerating are supposed to be applicable to the behavior of Orientals in the real world. As he puts it: "On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things." Of particular power is his reference to Gibb and the subject of Islamic reforms. Why, he asks, was Gibb so implacably hostile to modern Islam? The answer is that, since Islam is flawed from the start by virtue of its permanent disabilities, the Orientalist will find himself opposing any Islamic attempts to reform Islam, "because, according to his views, reform is a betrayal of Islam." How, then, can an Oriental slip out from these manacles into the modern world except by repeating with the Fool in *King Lear*: "They will have me whipp'd for speaking true, thou'l have me whipp'd for lying; and sometimes I am whipp'd for holding my peace."

When reading this book I made the usual notes, emphasizing passages and points which I thought had to be cited in this review. I now find it simply cannot be done since there are so many of these. One last point must be cited, however. In the personal note he incorporates in the Introduction, Said writes that in undertaking this survey of Orientalism he found himself "by an almost inescapable logic," writing the history of "a strange, secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism." He explains: "That anti-Semitism and, as I have discussed it in its Islamic branch, Orientalism resemble each other very closely is a historical, cultural and political truth that needs only to be mentioned to an Arab Palestinian for its irony to be

perfectly understood.” Elsewhere, referring to Leon Poliakov’s critique of Renan’s Aryanism and anti-Semitism, Said expresses surprise that in doing this the French historian of anti-Semitism omits any reference to the fact that “the ‘Semites’ were not only the Jews but the Muslims as well.”

Whether or not you agree with its main thesis it is immediately clear that this is a very important book. The least that can be said of it is that it is bound to usher in a new epoch in the world’s attitude to Oriental studies and Oriental scholarship. Prior to the publication of this book there were a few voices — Anwar Abdel Malek, Abdullah Laroui in the Arab world — who attempted partial critiques of the works of some Orientalist or other. Never, however, had there been so sustained and so persuasive a case against Orientalism as Said has produced here. For better or for worse, rightly or wrongly, the point of view so eloquently and passionately presented by him will be with us for a long time to come. It will be widely misused, to be sure—bowdlerized, inflated, politicized, presented in a far less subtle manner. But it will be there nevertheless, haunting every serious student of the East, Islam and the Arab world.

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1979

### *Misinformation, Disinformation, and Ignorance*

Shmuel Katz, Prime Minister Menahem Begin’s estranged information advisor, has been bombarding *Post* readers with a seemingly endless, wearying and tediously monotonous variation on one single theme which can be said to have lost all semblance of novelty. This is that peace between Israel and its neighbors is no more than a pipe dream, and that “the Arabs” continued to be intent on pursuing their old and unalterable goal: the destruction of Israel.

This, of course, is a state of mind rather than a reasoned argument, and as such it would be quite pointless to argue with it rationally. Equally clearly, Mr. Katz is entitled to his own opinion even though some *Post* readers may just wonder as to the sheer waste of space entailed. However, in yet another tortuous rehash of his thesis recently (“The Existential Fact,” *J.P.*, January 23) he manages to be so blatantly ludicrous — combining total ignorance with boundless arrogance — that some sort of reply is called for not in any vain hope of convincing him of his error, but lest some of his readers are led astray.

As a would-be expert on information, it is to be assumed that Mr. Katz knows what he is talking about when he uses such bombastic words as “misinformation” and “disinformation.” Here, however, I propose to

dwell on yet another aspect of information, namely the state of total lack of it—or, in less polite terms, ignorance. For the sad fact is that Shmuel Katz is quite ignorant of the subject he presumes to deal with—i.e., relations between Judaism and Islam and the feasibility of a fruitful dialogue between them. Judging from the content and tone of Mr. Katz's article, this ignorance seems to be both “existential” and academic.

Katz rails against President Yitzhak Navon for calling on Jews to establish a dialogue with Islam. He describes the remark variously as “thoughtless,” “dreaming aloud,” “degrading,” and “fatuous”—and proceeds to tell us that “the relations between the Jewish people and Islam do not stem from some mutual misunderstanding but from a historic, deep-rooted, unbridled Islamic hostility, now reinforced by great wealth.” Concluding his diatribe, Katz actually speaks of ignorance. “Ignorance,” he writes, “and consequently misdirection about the content and the systems of Islamic thought is rife in the West—to its own peril as well as Israel's. Bland, off-the-cuff, ‘even-handed’ advice such as Navon's only helps to foster that ignorance.”

What are the facts (existential and otherwise), and where and with whom does ignorance rest? The trouble with the kind of bland, off-the-cuff generalizations about history and culture which polemicists like Mr. Katz are in the habit of tossing about is that they can take volumes to disentangle and refute. I will therefore make use—as far as past relations between Judaism and Islam are concerned—of some appraisals of the subject made by a number of contemporary Jewish historians and Orientalists whose scholarship is considered impeccable and who are equally at home in Jewish and Islamic studies.

There are three great civilizations with which Jewry came into close contact after developing a most unique culture of its own: Greek civilization, Arab-Moslem civilization, and the civilization of the Romanic and Germanic peoples of Western and Central Europe. Of these three encounters, according to Professor Shlomo Dov Goitein, the one which Judaism had with the medieval civilization of Arabic Islam produced the closest and most fractious symbiosis, inextricably linking the fortunes of Israel in the past with those of Moslem Arabs, their culture and their civilization. This encounter spanned a period extending over a whole millennium, from the seventh to the seventeenth centuries. The reason for this, writes Goitein, was that whereas modern Western civilization—like the ancient civilization of the Greeks—is essentially at variance with the religious culture of the Jews, “Islam is of the very flesh and bone of Judaism.”

Another noted authority, Professor Erwin Rosenthal of Cambridge,

writing of the same period asserts: “There was never more similarity between a tolerated Judaism and its adherents and a civilized, masterful overlord until the post-emancipation period . . . The Jews adopted the Arabic language of their conquerors and with it many a norm and quite a few ideas. And yet, despite all assimilation to the Muslim mode of life and to Muslim ways of thought, the Jews under Islam maintained, even enriched, their distinctive character as Jews with a vigour and determination hitherto unknown.”

When it comes to comparing the respective attitudes of Islam and of Christianity to Jews and Judaism, students and scholars both Jewish and Christian agree that the fortunes of the Jews under Islam were by far the better and less bleak. Salo Baron remarks of the situation of the Jews in Islam that “the mere fact of not being the sole minority, as Jews often were in Christian Europe, mitigated some of that oppressive feeling of living alone in a hostile world, which was to characterize so much of medieval Jewish thinking in Christian Europe.” Nor must one lose sight, he continues, “of the fundamental difference that, under Islam, the Jews were never treated as *aliens*.<sup>10</sup>

To be sure, Baron adds, in the troubled period of Islam’s decline, life generally was insecure, but “there was none of that feeling of personal insecurity which dominated the medieval Jewish psyche in the West.” Again, while the Middle Eastern, Moroccan or Spanish Jew may have legitimately feared some sudden invasion or civil war, “he knew that he would then suffer not as a Jew, but together with other inhabitants of his locality.”

Such a view of the historical record is shared by specialists like Leon Poliakov, James Parkes, Bernard Lewis and others. Hamilton Gibb and Harold Bowen, in their monumental book, *Islamic Society and the West*, assert that under Ottoman Islam, which by the beginning of the sixteenth century dominated Syria and Egypt, the conditions under which the Jews were permitted to live contrasted so strikingly with those imposed on their coreligionists in various parts of Christendom that the fifteenth century witnessed a large influx of European Jews into the Sultan’s dominions. The degree of the Jews’ integration into the life of Ottoman Islam was such, indeed, that Gibb and Bowen are able to conclude that there was “something sympathetic to the Jewish nature in the culture of Islam,” since “from the rise of the Caliphate till the abolition of the ghettos in Europe the most flourishing centres of Jewish life were to be found in Muslim countries—in Iraq during the Abbasid period, in Spain throughout the period of Moorish domination, and thereafter in the Ottoman Empire.”

So much for past relations between Jews and Moslems, between Juda-

ism and Islam. What of the present—and the future? Katz dismisses the feasibility, as well as the propriety, of a dialogue between Jews and Moslems in our own day, quoting copiously from contemporary anti-Semitic literature in Arabic. Two points are worth making in this connection:

In the first place, the parties quoted, and partly misquoted, by Katz are not Moslems—and in those cases in which they are Moslem by origin their pronouncements are not made in their capacities as Moslems or as exponents of Islam. The diatribes against Jews and Judaism in Arabic publications in recent decades come not from Moslems against Jews *qua* Moslems and Jews; they emanate from secular Pan-Arab nationalists and are directed against secular Pan-Jewish nationalists. The distinction is sufficiently pronounced even for the most bigoted of either side to comprehend.

Second, when Arab nationalist ideologues—secular, non-Moslem or just plain pagan—rail against Jews and Judaism, using *bona fide* anti-Semitic terminology borrowed directly from the Christian West, what they actually do is merely accept at face value Zionism's own definition of itself and of Jews. In other words, along with their Jewish nationalist counterparts, they acknowledge no distinction between Zionism and Judaism, Israel and the Jewish people. It is only in recent years that some of the more sophisticated of these would-be anti-Zionists are becoming aware of the nature of the trap into which they had allowed themselves to fall.

If by a Jewish-Moslem dialogue we mean, as Mr. Katz and other like-minded Israelis choose to infer, an amicable understanding between Jewish advocates of a Greater Israel on the one hand and Arab ideologues of a secular, multi-faith, unitary Palestinian State on the other, such a dialogue would be plainly impractical, unfeasible and hardly worth the effort. If, alternatively, what is meant is a dialogue between followers of the two faiths—which is what I take President Navon's appeal to signify—then such an enterprise is both useful and practical. To quote Rosenthal again:

The strength or otherwise of the Muslim consciousness will largely determine whether or not long-term self-interest will bring the Arab states nearer to Israel. On the Jewish side, more than a return to the ancient homeland, more than a physical return to the cradle of the religious Semitic civilization is needed. One of the preconditions for a positive solution of the present conflict is at any rate the conscious realization on both sides that to a large measure they share a good deal of common ground in the religious ordering of their lives in the past, and that much of their cultural achievements in the past springs from the same spiri-

tual roots . . . To become aware of one's roots is the first step for believer and agnostic alike on both sides towards forging a new link for the future on a basis more solid and stable than political expediency and material aspirations.

These words were written 20 years ago and 17 years before a Moslem leader of power and status was to extend the hand of peace and reconciliation to Israel. But they are still worth pondering.

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1980

## VINDICATIONS

### DIARY

Jerusalem, May 1, 1984

Back from a short visit in New York I am again struck by the general confusion among American Jews about their Jewishness. Indeed, with few exceptions, all these Jews seem to have some sort of hangup where their Jewishness and what precisely it means is concerned. This phenomenon continues to baffle me. In over 20 years of conscious life as a Jew in Baghdad I don't recall one instance in which a Jew expressed bewilderment or concern or perplexity about his or her Jewishness or Jewish identity—or tried to emulate the Gentiles or overreacted to them by being obsessed with his or her ethnicity. I keep wondering whether this was so because the whole society was “primitive,” not articulate enough, not sophisticated enough, or whatever—or rather because there is a fundamental difference between the respective situations of Jews living in a Muslim–Middle Eastern–Mediterranean land and the Jews who grew up in a Western-Christian environment.

March 10, 1986

I once reviewed a book titled *The Jewish Return Into History*, by Emil Fackenheim [the review is reprinted in Chapter 8]. The title struck me as odd. Supposing the Jews *have* finally managed to return into history, where in the world were they hiding all this time? Fackenheim, of course, was referring to Israel, whose birth he sees as marking that famous comeback.

It reminds me of the time recently when I wrote my history of the Jews of Iraq, which I open practically with Abraham's emigration from the land of the twin rivers to the land of Canaan. Throughout this long

period, spanning almost 3,000 years, the Jews of Iraq—like the Jews of Palestine before them and like those of Spain, France, Germany, Russia and Poland after them—were very much in history—unless one subscribes to the theory that ethnic or religious groups are condemned to be outside of history as long as they have no states of their own.

It is now easy for me to speak about the book since, from the reactions I have seen so far, I've seemingly managed to do something unique. Put briefly, the claim for the book has been that what it actually does is to bring the Jews of Iraq back to history.

The fact, of course, is that I had no such aim in mind. The reason why I appear to bring the Jews of Iraq back to history lies somewhere outside both my conscious intentions and the objective truth. It lies in the fact that, in the consciousness both of the Israelis and of the Jews of Iraq themselves—especially those of the younger generation—the history of the Jewish community of Iraq extends to some 60, 70, 80 or 100 years. As a matter of fact, it will be no exaggeration to say that in Zionist historiography this history spans little more than one decade, which starts somewhere in 1941, with the so-called *farhud* [the anti-Jewish mob riots in Baghdad, which came in the wake of the Rashid 'Ali revolt against the British in May 1941] and ends with the conclusion, in 1951, of the so-called Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, which brought the bulk of the community to the newly-established state of Israel.

April 9, 1986

My good friend professor Alvin Rubinstein of the University of Pennsylvania asked me to give a lecture on Religion and State in Israel. Not being a good public speaker—to make an understatement—I hastened to jot some notes. Excerpts:

I guess you are all familiar with the following sentence, comprising the first 16 words of the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

I first encountered these words only the other day, in a column by George Will, who said that those two concepts, or topics, “establishment” and “free exercise,” can become interestingly tangled, to quote his own words. As proof Will cites the case of the Jewish chaplain in the U.S. Army, Simcha Goldman, an Orthodox Jew and ordained rabbi who decided to fight Air Force restrictions on the wearing of yarmulkes. The

gist of it, as Will shows, was that while Goldman won on the strength of his plea for “free exercise” of religion, he ultimately lost in the Supreme Court on the government’s plea that “establishment” of religion was prohibited by law as represented in the same first sentence of the First Amendment.

Now we in Israel have no first amendment—not even a constitution. But we labor under a great deal of ambiguity in these as well as in other leading matters of religion and politics. Israel, to cite one example, is a Jewish state—at least so it defines itself; and yet Israel is governed almost wholly by secular laws and is Jewish only in name. As a matter of fact, in every case in which individuals went to court seeking a decision on the cardinal question as to who a Jew is, the courts decided against the strictly Jewish religious (*halakhic*) law. There were three such cases, in all of which what the courts actually said was that Israel is ruled by secular laws, no matter how it is defined. In one case, indeed, the court’s verdict directly contradicted what the *halakhah* and the Rabbis ruled through the ages—namely, that Jewishness is ultimately a family matter. Let me enlarge a little on this point, especially since it has some bearing on the second and last point at issue now in Israel and which also comes under the overall topic of religion and politics—that of racism.

To clarify this subject of who’s a Jew—or rather what is a Jew, or who are the Jews—the question to ask is in what category or group can or should one place the Jews as a collectivity? Are the Jews a nation, a race, a culture, a religion, a people, a family?

Taking these various categories one by one it is easy to show that the Jews constitute neither a nation, nor a culture, nor a race, nor merely a religion. You can say that they constitute a people—but then the term “people” itself is so lacking in concreteness that it is almost meaningless—unless of course it is equated with “nation,” in which case it would be as inapplicable to the Jews as a nation is.

However—and here we come to the subject of racism—to state that the Jews constitute a family, the family of Abraham—or if you like the sons of Israel (*bnei Yisrael*), who is none other than Jacob, son of Abraham—to say this is not to make a racial statement, since members of a family can marry those of another. As to racism, as you know, Israel now has an openly racialist group, a small political party called Kach (which means Thus, or Only Thus). The fact that this fringe group has managed to be in the Knesset, even if only by one seat, has given food for thought to the parties of the Establishment, left and right. The result was a proposed

anti-racism law, which almost all political parties are agreed ought to be passed. This is a law against racist incitement or pronouncements taken to contain such incitement.

Now the great irony about this law is that the religious bloc of parties opposes it—and it opposes it on grounds from which it can easily be inferred that Judaism and the *halakhah* itself are racialist in character. It is interesting to note here that Kach's leaders call Israel's Declaration of Independence "schizophrenic," in that on the one hand it calls the state Jewish and grants rights to Jews only, and on the other hand it speaks about full equality for its citizens, irrespective of race, religion or sex. This of course is totally unfounded. It's enough to say here that a member of any race whatsoever can become a Jew through conversion.

July 1, 1986

For a talk at a workshop on University Teaching of Jewish History: Sephardic and Oriental Jewries—The Jews in Moslem Countries, to be held later this month, I prepared these notes.

Two basic assumptions are at the root of this talk:

- It is both wrong and misleading, as well as historically untenable, to appraise the behavior, attitudes, norms, and manners of one historical era or one particular culture by those prevailing at another era or culture.
- When we come to judge the behavior of a certain regime, a culture, or a society in certain fields of human relations, we have to ask ourselves: What were other societies, other cultures and regimes doing at that particular period of history about these particular fields of human relations?

I say this by way of introduction because I know how difficult it has become today to deal with the subject at hand. My friend Mark Cohen the other day spoke of a myth and a counter-myth—the myth of an idyllic state of harmony and peaceful coexistence between Jew and Arab throughout the ages, arbitrarily ended by the emergence of the Zionist idea and enterprise, and the counter-myth depicting the life of Jews under Arabic Islam as an unrelieved tale of woe, repression, humiliation and murder.

Obviously the perpetrators of both myth and counter-myth are guilty of violating one or the other of the two basic methodological tenets I've

just mentioned. In my various writings on the subject I furnish examples of these violations. But the classic example is something that I witnessed personally while attending a course on the Ottoman Empire in one of our universities. The lecturer, a fairly young *sabra*, was speaking about the Ottomans' treatment of the Jews and how bad it was generally—and as proof positive of the prevailing discrimination, he gave the fact that Jews were not conscripted. The fact, of course, is that the Jews of the Ottoman Empire considered it a privilege not to be conscripted. However, for a native-born Israeli observing the consequences of Arab citizens not being recruited, the reaction was understandable.

But the confusion goes deeper—thanks mainly to a misleading use of terms. Examples abound: Modern, self-confessed Arab nationalists who don't give a damn about Islam are blamed, retroactively so to speak, for things which their Moslem predecessors had done fourteen, thirteen or two centuries ago. *And vice versa*. The shocking conditions in which some Jewish communities in Moslem-Arab countries lived are blamed on "anti-Semitism," without stopping for a moment to consider the conditions in which Moslems and other religious and ethnic groups lived during the same period of time—which, in most cases, were manifestly worse than those in which the Jews lived. Intolerance towards the Jews is likewise depicted as anti-Semitism, omitting to mention that the same measure of intolerance—and sometimes even a worse one—was practiced against fellow-Moslems, of different sects or persuasions.

And, of course—and what may be a worse omission—the position of the Jews in Arab-Moslem lands is reviewed and appraised with no reference to the position of their coreligionists in the Christian West during the same period of time.

October 14, 1986

Fifty-eight per cent of Israel's Jewish citizens, we are told, believe it is "impossible to trust most Arabs," and 47 per cent want Arabs to be encouraged to leave the country. Sixty per cent favor greater supervision of Arabs, and 22 per cent think that "getting rid of the Arabs" is "the only solution."

And so on. But statistics are not everything, and polls do not always reflect reality. Sociologist Sammi Smooha of the University of Haifa, who conducted the poll, has himself admitted that the importance of the trends it reflects should still not be exaggerated "because Israelis do not legitimize racism, but publicly condemn it." He is convinced that it is not racism but what he calls "the growing political intolerance" that is

the central threat to coexistence and democracy in Israel. "Inability to tolerate minority opinion and the tendency to see them as subversive are growing," he says, and the boundaries between legitimate political dissent and active subversion are becoming vague in the public eye. Thus, 57 per cent of the Jews polled favor denying the vote to "Zionist Jews" who advocate a PLO state, while no less than 70 per cent think "non-Zionists" should have their Israeli citizenship taken away whether they are Jewish or Arab.

Smooha nevertheless discerns traces of racism in some Israeli attitudes to the Arabs, and asserts that negative images of the Arab as are to be found in the Hebrew media and in works of literature are both widespread and deep-rooted. This latter point is also taken up in a detailed study on "The Image of the Arab in Hebrew and Translated Literature as Taught in the Israeli High School." The study, initiated by the English-language monthly *New Outlook*, was funded by the Ford Foundation and the research team was headed jointly by Sasson Somekh and Shaul Mishal, both of Tel Aviv University. The findings summarized at the end of the study are by no means sensational. At one point, for example, we are told that teachers of literature were almost unanimous in saying that works related to "the Arab topic" always generate involvement on the part of their students, indicating that this involvement is partially motivated by negative attitudes towards the Arab.

Ethnocentrism is also reflected in the reaction of some teachers, mostly from religious high schools, whose responses were quoted as being on the following lines: "We ought first to learn more about ourselves, and only after doing so we can deal with other people's problems"; or "An abyss separates us from those Israeli authors who write about the Arab dilemma."

October 24, 1986

A. B. Yehoshua, author of *The Lover* and other works of fiction available in English translations, deals with the Arab problem in many of his works. However, he has difficulty with at least one Arab fellow-writer, Anton Shammas. Shammas writes in Hebrew, both verse and prose; he finished a Jewish high school in Haifa and studied briefly in the Hebrew University; and he lives in Jerusalem and works for Israel television, as well as contributing columns and articles to the Hebrew press. The debate, conducted in the pages of a new monthly, *Politica*, touches on a subject that many thinking Israelis would describe as one of the utmost significance—namely the place of non-Jews in Israel and, ultimately,

the kind of society or state Israel is. The dialogue had its origins in an article published in the local Jerusalem weekly on the eve of the Jewish New Year and in which Shammas spoke of what he called the glaring contradiction between what the Declaration of Independence describes as “the state of the Jews,” and the current outcry against Rabbi Kahane of Kach and his openly racist doctrines; he also thought there was a contradiction between the Law of Return and another phrase in the Declaration, in which it is stated that Israel shall offer its citizens full equality “irrespective of their religion, race or sex.”

Some two months later, in the course of an interview in *Politica*, Yehoshua deplored the fact that while his comrades of the Left and the peace camp rightly condemn the continued occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and Israel’s policies in the territories, they do not vocally reject calls for the de-Zionization of the State of Israel—such as those coming from Anton Shammas, whom he addresses thus:

The Law of Return is the moral basis of Zionism; in the State of Israel, which is a state that belongs to a people still mostly dispersed, there has to be a law of return . . . And I say to Anton Shammas and to his Arab and Jewish friends: You never wanted the State of Israel; it is a state that has been forced on you. If you—Shammas—want to preserve your full identity, if you want to live in a state with an independent Palestinian identity, with an autochthonous Palestinian culture, then get going, take your earthly belongings and leave.

May 16, 1987

Back in Jerusalem from seven weeks abroad. Things seem so “distant.” Truth is while abroad I felt I was light years away from Israel—so much so that every time I wanted to say Jerusalem, I said Baghdad . . .

I had a long chat with Khalid Kishtainy in London, at SOAS [School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London)] Common Room. It was my first meeting with him and he gave me a copy of his book on the prostitute in progressive literature and I arranged for him to get a copy of my book on the Jews of Iraq, which he said he would review in a local Arabic weekly. Zelfa Hourani of *Quartet* is sending me a copy of his forthcoming book, *Arab Political Humour*.

Cecil Hourani got my phone number from his daughter Zelfa and called urgently to say he must see me—he knew so much about me and had read my writings and heard about me from Irene Gendzier. He was off to Paris the next day and we had to meet in a pub for lunch just

opposite *Quartet's* offices on Goodge St. Interesting man. I finagled a copy of my book and gave it to him. I also had copies delivered to Albert Hourani, and the two London University professors Sami Zubeida and Sami Daniel, who both hail from Iraq . . .

Mr. Irajd Bagherzade of I. B. Tauris publishers is quite a guy. Not a shade of an accent—well, just a shade—which, for an Iranian is quite an achievement. Very efficient and businesslike, and Cecil says his brother is the man's reader of Mideast works . . . Zelfa is very helpful and said she would help with an alternate publisher should *Quartet* decline the ms.

December 30, 1987

. . . Khalid Kishtainy was here! He had been invited to an international colloquium in Amman on non-violence (about which he had published a book) and when finished he said what the hell, why not cross the border—with his British passport, the only one he has now. So he came, and gave two or three talks at the office here of some group advocating non-violence (while in the same breath declaring their full allegiance to the PLO). Shenkar interviewed him for *New Outlook*.

January 10, 1988

. . . A friend who works for the Ben Zvi Institute tells me that during a meeting he and others from the Institute had recently with Knesset Speaker Shlomo Hillel—and apropos of the translation of his masterpiece into English, French and Albanian, he remarked that these translations would constitute some sort of counterbalance and corrective to the Ideas disseminated by the likes of “Rejwan, Sasson Somekh and Sammi Smooha.”

This is the good news. The bad news is that our dear President Herzog, in the course of an address he gave at Heikhal Hatarbut at a colorful celebration of the 35th anniversary of—what else!—Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, said something to the effect that Raphael's book *The Road from Babylon* and Rejwan's book *The Jews of Iraq* add to our bla bla bla. I wasn't there—I wouldn't be seen dead in such festivities. (Nor was I invited . . .) The interesting thing here is that Herzog apparently forgot what he had been told about Rejwan being an anti-Zionist. And speaking of that fascinating subject, George Mosse, whom I quote in a recent review, said upon reading it: “Ah well, this is a piece of Zionist propaganda. I know people at the *Post* and I will ask them next time

to assign such books to someone who knows about the subject." The irony of it is that a review of mine of his own recent work, *German Jews Beyond Judaism*, is in the works. . . .

Chances are, I am going to be in the States later this year: September–December in Binghamton, January–February '88 in Houston, and in between here and there. I have decided to accept an offer from Don Peretz of an appointment as visiting scholar for one semester (office and use of the library) and I intend to sit down there and finish rewriting and reorganizing my papers—and also my thoughts. I have some six months of leave due me from the radio, plus I am sick and tired of what's going on here generally. So why not take this busman's holiday!

I and Kishtainy are doing great . . . He finally sent me a copy of his Arabic book, *Takwin al-Sahyuniyya* (he saved me time and embarrassment by incidentally supplying an English rendering of the title. How he translated *takwin*? "Genesis!" For some crazy reason I never would have thought of that word, and I have the impression he took it from the Arabic translation—*Sifr al-Takwin*. The reason I so needed his book was this sudden request I got to write a longish review of recent Arabic books on Israel (for a book, perhaps an annual, called *Books on Israel*, edited by Ian Lustick), and just yesterday I finished the essay, some 9,000 words of it. I have also sent Elie a long review-article on Israeli-Zionist historiography apropos of a three volume compilation alleged to be a history of the Jews in Islamic lands.

January 16, 1988

I left Houston on December 22 in the morning to land at Kennedy airport at 16:00 the same day (with a stop at Memphis). However, what with a delay here and a mechanical mishap there, we finally got to JFK at 18:50, when my Sabena plane was practically taking off. For all kinds of crazy reasons, Sabena wouldn't endorse my taking an El Al flight, or any other flight for that matter. So I said okay let's spend the night and take the Sabena flight the next evening. They said okay but tomorrow is Wednesday and we have no flight from Brussels to Tel Aviv on Thursday—or Friday or Saturday! So we either take you to Brussels and you spend the time there until Sunday noon or take you on the Saturday evening flight. Obviously I chose the latter alternative—and after spending the night in a lousy hotel called Viscount at the airport, I moved Wednesday morning to spend the remaining three days and nights with millionaire friends of mine (not Cohen) at 500 East 83rd St.

January 23, 1988

After nearly two weeks of recovering from that jet lag—the worst I've ever experienced—I have been doing some work for the radio but NOTHING else except reading the papers and the collected works of Nathaniel [Nathanael] West. I have the usual pile of reviews in the *Post* waiting to be printed—as well as the no less usual pile of books yet to be reviewed. We purchased a new car, small-medium, which we are getting in a few days. Amir is back from London with his girl friend, after an absence of exactly eight months and there is the getting-used to his large presence to do. And I am inexplicably depressed! I guess it's because in the final analysis I managed to do so little in Binghamton and nothing—so far—about my jinxed MSSs. Houston was a good break and Mexico City and Acapulco (two nights each) even more relaxing. However, after more than three weeks of excitement and familiarizing I am now waking up to the tremendous mess that surrounds us here in this part of the world. Still, I am trying now to get myself into some sort of routine.

December 16, 1988

Got this call from London—a man introducing himself as Adam Kubba asking where he could find my book *Passage from Baghdad*, which on being asked where he heard about it, says it's on the back blurb of *The Jews of Iraq* which he had just read. The reason he called, he says finally, is that he's looking for a clue to his mother's relatives here in Israel. The mother, it transpires, comes from a Jewish family named Rabi'. Hibiba Kubba, he said, was born in Baghdad in 1918, worked as a midwife at Al-Majidiyya Hospital, met his father Abdullah Kubba in 1945, married him four years later “with the full knowledge of her entire family.”

February 12, 1989

I feel vaguely proud of the fact that, with help from certain veterans of the community, I finally located a fairly close relative of Dr. Adam Kubba, whose mother Habiba turned out to be an aunt of an acquaintance, Abraham Kahila, now deputy mayor of Jerusalem. After some hesitation—lest the man should feel embarrassed about the relationship—I finally decided to let him know and was impressed by the almost matter-of-fact nature of his reaction. The link having been established, I left it for the Kahilas to get on with the good work of finding Dr. Kubba's other long lost relatives.

I give here excerpts from a long letter Kubba wrote a little before I made my discovery. It was a reply to a letter I sent him, telling him,

among other things, that according to Jewish law, he was a Jew and, according to the Law of Return, he can come and settle in Israel.

I am fully aware of my Jewishness, and it is an honor to be a Jew, just as it is an honor to be a Shi'a Muslim. I was brought up at a Roman Catholic school, just to make the whole thing balanced and confused. I have reasonable knowledge of both the Jewish and Islamic traditions, but don't believe in either of them!

. . . As far as becoming an Israeli, the Middle East is far too hot for me! I left my country for good because it is bedeviled by wars, racism and religious conflict, and I cannot see myself going back to a warring nation. However, I hope and believe that I will find my relatives one day and visit them. I wish Israel success and her people peace and conciliation.

**REVIEW***Israel and Ishmael*

In the self-image of a people, the view it has of its own origins and early history plays an important role. While in most cases popular pre-histories—or ethno-prehistories, if you will—are either entirely mythical or studded with myths, the personages figuring in them nevertheless contain clues to the personality traits that the people in question considers either ideal or abhorrent. A study from this point of view of the prehistoric traditions of the great culture carriers of antiquity—the Egyptians, Sumerians, Greeks and Romans—would no doubt yield fascinating results. As for the Jews and Arabs, the following preliminary observations can be made.

Thus Raphael Patai, in the opening chapter of *The Seed of Abraham: Jews and Arabs in Contact and Conflict* (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons). Relations between Jews and Arabs, Judaism and Islam, have for decades been Patai’s main area of scholarly interest, as evidenced by his books *Golden River to Golden Road*, *The Jewish Mind*, *The Arab Mind*, *On Culture Contacts and its Working in Modern Palestine*, and others.

In writing *The Seed of Abraham*, Patai tells his readers he has two aims. Firstly, he writes, “I felt that there were a number of chapters in the overall great story of Arab-Jewish symbiosis that had been tackled by none of my predecessors and that needed telling.” Secondly, “I wanted to connect the historical relations between the two peoples with the present situation in which, for the first time since the days of Muhammad, there is, in the midst of the many large and small Arab countries, a Jewish state with a sizable Arab minority in its population.”

One could add another, no less valid reason for embarking on yet another account of the history of Arabic-Jewish relations. This is that each

generation has not only the right but the obligation to restate and reinterpret its collective history for itself, and in the light of its own specific needs and concerns. Indeed, if any subject has been in need of restatement and reinterpretation, for the present generation of Jews and Arabs, it is the history of their peoples' relations in the past, and specifically the period in which the two cultures and the two religious faiths achieved a true cultural, linguistic and even religious symbiosis.

Patai's recapitulation and reconstruction of this symbiosis is impeccable. His first two chapters, especially, which deal respectively with how Jews and Arabs view their prehistory and on Abraham in Jewish and Arab-Moslem tradition, contain a wealth of new material presented in the author's usually lucid style.

However, in the context of recent developments in relations between Jews and Arabs, and certain conclusions that are to be drawn from the past of these relations, a few reservations come to mind. In the chapter, “Arabs under Jewish Rule: A Historical Anomaly,” for instance, the case of Turkey's annexation of the Syrian province of Alexandretta in 1939 is cited as showing that the Arabs' acceptance of this annexation contrasts sharply with their vehement refusal to accept Israel's presence in Palestine.

The reason for this, Patai maintains, is the Moslem's traditional image of the humble *dhimmi*. The Arabs, we are told, simply cannot reconcile themselves to the fact that despised *dhimmis* should be lording it over them. This, of course, ignores the basic differences between the two “annexations.” The Alexandretta affair was no more than a large-scale border dispute between two sovereign states, whereas the Arabs perceived the Zionist influx into Palestine as a full-scale invasion and an alien intrusion.

In organizing a colloquium on the subject “Jews among Arabs: Contacts and Boundaries,” the two organizers, Mark Cohen and Abraham Udvovitch, were fully aware of “the controversial tone in which the subject of ‘Jews and Arabs’ has been discussed in recent years,” as they write in a brief preface to the book *Jews Among Arabs* (Princeton, Darwin Press). “Against the backdrop of the Arab-Israeli conflict,” they explain, “the Jewish-Arab relationship of the past has come under new and intense scrutiny, with historical questions often masking political predilections.”

Cohen and Udvovitch, in organizing the colloquium, were “not interested in entering the controversy as to whether Jews and Arabs in the past lived in harmony, as some claim”—or whether, as some others contend, “Islam despised and relentlessly persecuted the Jews throughout the ages.” Nor—and here we come close to the core of the argument—were they inclined to impose on Jewish communities of the modern and

contemporary Arab world what they called “the traditional model.” They agree with the views expressed in this regard by one of their contributors, Lucette Valensi (“Religious Orthodoxy or Local Tradition: Marriage Celebration in Southern Tunisia”).

According to Valensi, the predominant theme in current scholarship about the Jews of Arab lands is “the-road-to-freedom motif,” which emulates the theme of “out of the ghetto” and “emancipation” long prevalent with regard to the modern history of the Jews in Western Europe. The editors criticize this approach on the ground that “it posits a trajectory leading from Arab oppression to liberation under the wings of Western colonial powers and European Jewish agents charged with the Westernization and regeneration of the Arab Jews.”

Rather than follow this mechanical—and perforce misleading—approach, then, the organizers of the colloquium set themselves a modest but more plausible goal, namely “to explore the experience of the Jewish communities of North Africa and Iraq in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as one example of interaction between a religio-ethnic group and the dominant surrounding Arab-Muslim society.”

To move beyond the customary perspective of minority-majority relationships, too, they sought to examine “the practical and symbolic exchanges between communities; the shared traditions and cultural forms of these communities; and their boundaries, which served both as a system of communication and contact and as a means of separation and identity.” In short, they sought “to explore the ‘Arabness of Arab Jews’—what it was and how it worked—and also to probe its transformation and its continuity in recent times and in new countries.”

These of course are, in themselves, laudable and useful guidelines. However, not all the contributors to this volume can be said to have followed them closely enough—and in any case the limited scope of the project, confined as it is to North Africa and Iraq, precludes the possibility of utilizing the editors’ thesis and their wishes to the full.

Lucette Valensi’s careful exploration of the way in which religious orthodoxy and local tradition interacted in the matter of marriage ceremonies in Tunisia is practically the only paper which fully vindicates the editors’ approach, as this passage from her concluding remarks would indicate: “This is a case of cultural symbiosis between two populations,” she writes,

such that it is impossible to trace when local customs were invented and by whom. Instead, we are dealing with a collective anonymous construct,

a tradition that everybody accepts, enacts and transmits. What is considered as authentically Jewish or Muslim is not orthodoxy in the religious sense, but orthodoxy vis-à-vis local norms. In this respect, while it is true that Muslims and Jews did not exchange women, their marriage patterns illustrate the continual mingling of their cultural practices.

In the case of Iraq, where Jews lived uninterruptedly for over 2,500 years, two papers are offered here, neither of them conceived or written in the same vein as Valensi’s. The first, contributed by Professor Sasson Somekh, is entitled “Lost Voices: Jewish Authors in Modern Arabic Literature” and devoted in the main to Iraqi Jewish authors, with a substantial section on Egypt. The “lost voices” of the title refer to the efforts made by some of these authors to assert their Iraqi identity and their “Jewish Arabness.”

These efforts, Somekh demonstrates, “were bound to encounter some insurmountable obstacles.” Citing the case of Anwar Sha’ul, he calls his autobiographical work, *My Life in Iraq*, “a sad book, in spite of the basically sanguine outlook of its author.” Of Sha’ul’s poetry and prose—also written after his departure from Iraq—Somekh remarks that, while they “still entertain that noble but elusive vision of Jewish-Muslim and Jewish-Arab symbiosis,” they too were to come to naught. Sha’ul’s “labour of love,” Somekh concludes, “as well as that of his fellow Jewish Arab authors in Iraq and in other countries, was unrequited. Their voices were lost.”

The genesis of the mass exodus of Iraq’s Jews in the early 1950s is surveyed and carefully analyzed in Professor Elie Kedourie’s paper, “The Break Between Muslims and Jews in Iraq,” the longest in the volume. Kedourie, who like Somekh was born and partly educated in Iraq, traces the origins of the factors that led to that exodus back to the changes brought about by the Ottoman reforms (*tanzimat*) of pre-World War I years, and he follows them through the British occupation, the Mandate, the national government, and the impact of the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel.

Of the remaining three papers gathered together in *Jews Among Arabs*, one is by Norman Stillman, “Contacts and Boundaries in the Domain of Language: The Case of Sefriwi Judeo-Arabic,” in which the author takes the case of a modern Jewish variety of Arabic, “as an example of the complexity of cultural conjunction and disjunction.” The example he chooses is the Judeo-Arabic of Sefrou, in Morocco.

To place this variety of Arabic within its proper historical and cultural context, Stillman discusses the notion of Jewish languages in general: sur-

veys the development of the phenomenon of Judeo-Arabic; fits Sefriwi Judeo-Arabic into the scheme; and describes some of the features of this particular language.

Stillman's conclusions do not differ basically from those reached by Valensi though their respective fields of research are widely different. "Jews," he writes, "were very much part of the Moroccan culture in which they lived, to be sure, but they also differentiated themselves—in a variety of ways, not least among these in the domain of language where the boundaries were continually delineated amidst the contacts."

*JERUSALEM POST*, 1988

### WHO IS A JEW?

After reading and listening to millions of words pronounced over the previous thirty-five years or so on the question of who a Jew is, in 1985 I decided to contribute my share. The article I wrote was destined to be—and in a way, I wanted it to be—rather provocative. I myself am not religious, so my position was unexpected: I unconditionally took the side of the orthodox. I sent the piece first to the *Jewish Spectator*, whose editor Mrs. Weiss-Rosmarin, though "religious," was either Conservative or Reform. Then I sent it to Joel Carmichael, editor of *Midstream*, who accepted it with reservations but made no changes. He also took the precaution of sending the proofs to two American rabbis, both Conservative, for comments.

The article finally appeared in the August–September 1985 issue of the magazine under the title "Who's a Jew: Two Famous Non-Questions Answered." I give it here with the two rabbis' comments and my response.

At the end of a noisy and highly recriminatory debate on January 17 the Knesset decided, 62 to 51, to reject a proposed amendment to the Law of Return stipulating that conversion to Judaism be performed "according to Halakhah." The amendment, which was supported by all the religious parties and 32 out of the Likud's 38 M.K.'s, was presented by Abner Shaki of the National Religious Party, who said its aim was to prevent "paper conversions, fictitious conversions, conversions that distort the time-honored concept of *giyur* [the Hebrew term used for conversion to Judaism]." Shaki further argued that the objective of the proposed amendment was to ensure the unity and integrity of the Jewish people, which he said could be achieved if there were only one entrance gate to Judaism.

There was nothing either new or original in this line of argument, which the religious parties have been using ever since their repeated attempts started to add the qualifying “according to Halakhah” to the definition of a convert entitled to immigrate to Israel in accordance with the Law of Return. Nor was there anything new in the arguments advanced by opponents of the amendment—with the possible exception of one passage in the government’s reply, which was delivered by Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Pointing out that the government was not a religious authority, and that it cannot discuss a problem that is “more in the realm of Torah than in the realm of government,” Peres went on to assert that the Law of Return was a Zionist law, not a religious one, and that as such it has no implications with respect to matters of personal status nor did it weaken the authority of the rabbinical courts.

The gist of Peres’s argument was, of course, only a rehash of the argument advanced by the Supreme Court back in the Fifties in the famous case of Oswald Rufeisen, better known as Brother Daniel, who pleaded to the court that though a convert to Catholicism he was Halakhically still a Jew and entitled to Israeli citizenship according to the Law of Return.

After a good deal of deliberation and not a little embarrassment, the court decided to deny Brother Daniel’s plea—but it did so on the grounds of the understanding of Jewishness embodied in the Law of Return, which was a *secular* law, admitting, however, that according to Jewish *religious* law (Halakhah) Rufeisen was still a Jew. Peres’s argument, which in reality amounted to saying that the Law of Return was a secular rather than a Jewish law, was taken up with alacrity by Shulamit Aloni of the Citizen’s Rights List, who argued that the Law of Return, which was a Zionist law “aimed at furthering the ingathering of the exiles,” must not only remain as it is today but ought to be amended to include a definition of a Jew as “anyone who declares in good faith that he is Jewish and has tied his fate to that of the Jewish people, and who has one Jewish parent.”

Peres and Aloni, of course, were perfectly right in arguing that the Law of Return was a secular (Zionist) law while the question as to who is a Jew and how conversions to Judaism ought to be performed was more in the realm of Halakhah than in the realm of government. What they both omitted to mention was that in Israel there is no separation of synagogue and state, and that as long as this situation prevails the definition of a Jew and the way in which a non-Jew can be converted to Judaism must remain in the realm of Halakhah and cannot be decided by what is admittedly a secular legislation. Opponents to the amendments proposed by the Orthodox parties to the Law of Return cannot eat their cake and have it at the same

time. As long as the rabbinical courts are allowed to decide on matters of personal status, and as long as these courts have to do this according to Jewish religious law, the government and its secular laws cannot impose on them what is essentially a secular definition of a Jew or of a convert to Judaism.

In the light of this, indeed, the question as to who a Jew is, and its twin, who is a convert to Judaism, are two non-questions that have somehow been allowed to exercise the minds of otherwise sensible men and women for far too long. As everyone knows by now, a Jew is a person born to a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism. Implicit in this definition, of course, is the conclusive answer to our second question: a convert to Judaism—exactly like a convert to any other religion—is one who has been lawfully received into the new faith. Since, however, every human group or association, every ideology, religion, party, or club has its own set of rules for admitting members into its rank, it stands to reason that a person seeking admittance must conform to the rules of the group, ideology, or religion to which he or she wants to be admitted.

If, however, the answers to these two questions are so simple as to render them non-questions, why has so much fuss been made about them? Why have so many coalition governments in Israel fallen, so much energy been expended, such a great deal of Menachem Begin's and Shimon Peres's time wasted trying to answer them? The answer to this question is to be sought neither in a correct definition of the word "Jew" nor in the methods used to convert non-Jews to Judaism. The question to ask, briefly, is why suddenly there is such a great need to ask these questions in the first place. In other words, why do people, no matter in what numbers, want to convert to Judaism, and what are the circumstances leading to and necessitating these conversions?

Interestingly enough, the rabbis were quite alert to such potential difficulties and queries when they laid down the rules for conversion. Two points are worth elaborating in this connection.

The Talmud relates how a non-Jew who seeks full conversion to Judaism is discouraged. He is told: "What do you see in Judaism? Be aware that Judaism imposes many restrictions that do not apply to the righteous non-Jew. Now you are not liable to observe them; the moment you convert, you will be (so) liable. And aren't you aware that Jews today suffer persecution and discrimination, and the moment you embrace Judaism you subject yourself to the ignominious lot of the Jews?" (*Yebamot* 47a)

Anticipating another kind of difficulty, Maimonides—a liberal enough sage and rabbi especially where *gerim* and converts are concerned—lays

it down in the *Mishne Torah* that a non-Jew applying for conversion to Judaism is automatically disqualified if his or her motives for conversion should be found to fall within any of the following three categories: material gain, a desire for position and influence, and fear. It is only after making sure that the candidate has none of these three motives that he or she is confronted with the “warning” quoted above—and it is only after he or she has become aware of the said pitfalls that the various rites required are performed to bring the person in question “into the Covenant of our Father Abraham” (*Hilkhot Issurai Biah*, 13–14).

Clearly, a non-Jew who fulfills these conditions, accepts the burdens and disadvantages cited as implicit in being a Jew, and goes through the process of instruction and the related rites of circumcision and ritual immersion can safely be said to have sought conversion out of conviction rather than for personal convenience of one kind or other.

It goes without saying, therefore, that a non-Jew cannot and should not be converted to some sort of dissenting, revisionist, or in some other way diluted version of Judaism—Conservative, Reform, secular, national, or atheistic (if such a term has any validity).

To be sure, the Law of Return as it stands today and as it will remain even should the Orthodox bloc manage to get enough votes in the Knesset for its proposed amendment, grants all Jews the right of return no matter what the state of their religious belief is and irrespective of whether they are Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform Jews. At first glance, therefore, the argument currently advanced by Conservative and Reform rabbis in the United States, namely that they ought to be allowed to make Halakhic conversions on their own terms seems reasonable.

The argument, however, does not withstand closer scrutiny. The point here—indeed the crux of the matter and the reason I believe Orthodox objections are valid and logical—is that being a Conservative, Reform, secular, atheistic, or even “pagan” Jew are privileges open only to a person who was either born to a Jewish mother or became a Jew after having been converted according to Halakhah as defined and codified in the Jewish sources. The situation is reminiscent of a story by the American Jewish writer Abraham Cahan. The story concerns an Italian barber in New York who falls in love with a Jewish girl on Broome Street. The barber wants to marry the girl but her mother will not hear of it. Finally, the mother says that they can be married if the barber converts to Judaism. She makes him learn Hebrew and pray every morning with a yarmulke on his head. The couple live with the mother-in-law and the barber doesn’t get breakfast until he prays. But that isn’t all. The bride has a brother named Joe, and

Joe doesn't pray before getting breakfast. After a while, the barber asks his mother-in-law, "Why doesn't Joe have to pray before breakfast?" The matron's answer is as prompt as it is simple: "He is a Jew," she retorts. "I know he's a Jew. *You've* got to prove it."

What the New York mother was saying is remarkably relevant to this discussion. A Jew remains a Jew even if he sins—or becomes an atheist, or even if he converts to another religion. But the demand now being made that ultimately non-Halakhic conversion should be accepted by the Orthodox—or, worse still, that one can be converted to anything but Judaism as it has been known and defined through the ages—is unjustified both on religious and on logical grounds. It is like applying for membership in a faith, a party, or a club, while declaring one's basic disagreement with its teachings, program, rules, and even its conditions for membership.

For these reasons and others we cannot go into here, it is clear that in this day and age only very few non-Jews would seek genuine, *bona fide* conversion to Judaism—and my understanding is that they will always be welcomed by the Orthodox. Equally clearly, these persons will perforce choose to be Orthodox or perhaps ultra-Orthodox Jews and would feel at home only in these circles.

Yet the root of the current controversy in Israel on this subject is that most, if not all, of those non-Jews who have sought and managed to convert to the Jewish faith in recent years have done so not out of conviction but for personal convenience of some kind. In other words, according to the strict rules set by the rabbis for conversion they should have been precluded *a priori* from joining the Jewish ranks.

Now in the Diaspora these problems do not arise. A Gentile girl, say, who wants to marry a Jewish boy can either ignore the matter altogether or seek and easily receive conversion by a Reform or Conservative rabbi. In the case of a Jewish girl choosing to marry a Gentile, the difficulty does not have to be faced even should the couple want to raise their children as Jews or want them to be eligible for Israeli citizenship according to the Law of Return, since Halakhically these children are born Jews regardless of the father's religious allegiances.

Such difficulties do arise, however, when a mixed-marriage couple decide to come to Israel as immigrants and demand to be registered with their children as Jews and to be treated as such by the rabbinical courts. There are also other cases. A friend of mine opposes Halakhic conversions because she does not want a Gentile volunteer, working and well-settled in a kibbutz, to be penalized simply because he isn't a Jew, and that there-

fore such a person should be allowed to become a Jew the easiest possible way—so that he or she can qualify for the privilege bestowed on Jewish newcomers by the Law of Return.

This attitude, remarkably similar as it is to that expounded by Shulamit Aloni, is of course tantamount to saying that Judaism and its laws as we have known them for close on two millennia, as well as Jewish rituals and practices, should be revised and adapted to the provisions of the Law of Return—a secular law promulgated to serve strictly secular ends. This of course cannot be accepted either by the Orthodox or by those of us who respect and accept a religion's definition of itself and the rules it sets for admitting strangers. I myself find it difficult to believe that no Israeli political party, opinion leader, or public figure of standing—not even among those engaged in the fight for civil and human rights—has ever seen fit to decry this state of affairs, which in the final analysis amounts to anti-religious coercion.

It is not often that I find myself in agreement with the religious leadership in Israel, but I am afraid that in this particular case the spokesmen for Orthodoxy are right in calling for a revision of the Law of Return in order for conversion to Judaism to be acceptable only if it is performed in accordance with the Halakhah. After all, Orthodox Jews—like anyone else—ought not to be forced to accept what is religiously unacceptable.

#### **RESPONSES AND A REJOINDER**

##### ***Who's a Rabbi?***

To the Editor of *Midstream*:

As an Israeli journalist, Nissim Rejwan ("Who's a Jew: Two Famous Non-Questions answered," August–September, 1985) can perhaps be excused if he knows nothing about Conservative Judaism or Halakhic conversions. He should, however, refrain from writing about them.

No one can "easily receive" conversion by a Conservative rabbi. Every candidate for *giyur* in the Conservative movement must satisfy all Halakhic requirements for conversion, including circumcision (or *hatafat dam brit*, the symbolic drop of blood), immersion, study, and *kabbalat ol mitsvot* (assumption of the obligation to observe Jewish law). In my community, which I believe is typical, a conversion requires several months of preparation before a non-Jew can even be considered a candidate. The actual process of conversion generally takes from one

to four years and includes a commitment to observe Kashrut [kosher], Shabbat, and to continue one's studies. Our requirements for conversion are actually more stringent than those listed on the very page of Gemorrah from which Rejwan selectively quoted. After being informed of the persecutions to which a non-Jew would subject himself by converting, if the potential convert is not deterred, the Gemorrah states, "he is accepted immediately, and is taught some of the minor and some of the major commandments" (*Yevamot* 47a).

Rejwan's characterization of Conservative Judaism as a "dissenting, revisionist, or in some other way diluted version of Judaism" is spurious nonsense. Conservative Judaism claims to be the heir of biblical religion and of rabbinic Judaism. Rejwan may not agree with that claim but as a "journalist" he is beholden to take note of it, and to recognize that the Conservative movement's claim to legitimacy is based on it. It is not surprising that Rejwan gives no examples of Conservative Judaism's "dissent" or "dilution." There aren't any.

While Rejwan's insistence on sharing his ignorance of the practices and requirements relevant to *giyur* is to be condemned, as an Israeli, his ignorance of the issues commonly understood to be the motivation of the Orthodox political parties he applauds is shocking. The proposed amendment to the Law of Return has nothing to do with conversion, with Halakhah, or even with Zionism. It has to do with power, money, and politics. It is part of an item perched high on the Orthodox agenda—the delegitimation and undermining of all other streams within Judaism. Having lost in the marketplace of ideas, the Orthodox have unabashedly retreated to the arena of power. Nissim Rejwan has made himself their accomplice.

(Rabbi) Samuel Fraint, Highland Park, IL

To the Editor of *Midstream*:

I have just read the article "Who's a Jew" by Nissim Rejwan, a journalist whose writings I always read with respect and admiration. However, in this piece, he has made some serious errors. Before writing about Conservative Judaism, he really should find out what it teaches. I will not speak of Reform or other interpretations of the Jewish religion but confine my remarks to the group to which I belong. Rejwan may not realize that Conservative Judaism does maintain the binding character of Halakhah; it recognizes it as evolving through the ages rather than remaining frozen at one particular period. Therefore, the statement that

it is “a diluted version of Judaism” is entirely erroneous; indeed, as we see Jewish history and law, Conservative Judaism is indeed the heir of all those in the past who reckoned with the totality of life in making the Halakhah a *living* standard.

Moreover, Rejwan should not overlook the fact that those seeking an amendment in the Law of Return are actually seeking to disenfranchise all the non-Orthodox. I convert people by teaching them, taking them to the mikveh [ritual immersion] with bona fide witnesses, and making certain (to the degree that I can) that they are truly committed to our people and its Torah. Moreover, the vast majority of those I convert do so out of conviction and commitment, usually without marriage in mind. I challenge anyone to find better Jews than these Jews-by-choice. And I will join my fellow Jews in fighting those who assert that these converts are not true Jews because they were taught and guided by a Conservative rabbi!

Why does Rejwan assume that “it is clear that in this day and age only very few non-Jews would seek genuine, *bona fide* conversion to Judaism”? My long experience in the rabbinate testifies to the contrary! The same is true of many of my colleagues. Can Rejwan and others not realize that Judaism is so remarkable that others want it to be theirs and the people who bear it to be their people? Can one have so little appreciation of our religious civilization that one supposes that only those born into the Jewish people must suffer with it? I am delighted that there are sensitive, spiritual men and women who acquire such a deep understanding of our tradition that they resolve to make it their own! And I am certain that, when I help them and convert them, they are the same as born Jews, whatever certain groups to the right of me may say.

In the Diaspora as in Israel, no one group has a monopoly on teaching or living the “true” religion. If Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai existed today, I doubt if they would be able to agree that both represent the will of the living God. As long as some Orthodox groups refuse to grant legitimacy to those who interpret the Jewish religion (and to those who teach Halakhah as they understand it) the Knesset dare not allow this amendment (or others which would deny validity to the non-Orthodox) to pass. [Note: Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai were antagonistic schools of Jewish interpretation in the first century.]

(Rabbi) Simcha Kling, Louisville, KY

Nissim Rejwan replies:

Since Rabbi Samuel Fraint is indulgent enough to excuse an Israeli journalist's general ignorance of things Jewish I shall allow myself the added privilege of posing two questions at the risk of being exposed as an even greater ignoramus:

1. If, as Fraint states, conversion to Judaism by a Conservative rabbi is invariably performed according to Halakhah and in keeping with each and every one of its requirements, why then stand so vehemently against the proposed amendment, which merely adds the words "according to Halakhah" to the word "converted"? Why not first accept the amendment and *then* proceed to prove that *giyur* by Conservative rabbis is entirely Halakhic and *kasher lemehadrin* [scrupulously kosher], as so copiously described by Fraint?
2. Fraint is right—so right I couldn't agree with him more—in saying that the proposed amendment to the Law of Return "has nothing to do with conversion, with Halakhah, or even with Zionism," and that in reality "it has to do with power, money, and politics." The question, however, is why should Conservative—and Reform—Jews allow themselves to be part of this unseemly, at times obscene, jockeying for "power, money, and politics"? Granted that the Orthodox "having lost in the marketplace of ideas" have now "retreated to the arena of power," why should their opponents help them by themselves perpetrating so plainly objectionable a practice as that of the mixing and confusing of ideas and power, Halakhah and treasury funds, religious observance and government posts, Synagogue and State?

Presumptuous as it is of me to say so, I don't think I am as ignorant as Fraint obviously thinks I am of "the motivation of the Orthodox political parties"—and it is to be greatly regretted that he is so swept by his own emotion that he takes my stand to imply "applause" for these parties. My attitude to the Orthodox, like my attitude to the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist streams within Judaism, is the same; it is one of empathy, respect, live-and-let-live, and—above all—*family*. But I certainly am against any of them becoming dependent or influenced—or themselves influencing—a modern sovereign state which is universally regarded and accepted as a secular rather than Halakhic state. In a memorable turn of phrase Professor Yeshayahu Leibovitz—an Orthodox Jew if ever there was one—once described the religious political parties in Israel as "the kept woman" of the Zionist establishment. I can believe that, in their own interest and in defense of their good names, Conserva-

tive, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jews should not allow themselves, let alone seek, to be part of that particular masquerade. Instead, they should join in the call to draw a clear line between Synagogue and State in Israel, thus helping religious Jews of all streams to preserve their self-respect and independence and at the same time helping Israel to normalize.

This brings me to Rabbi Simcha Kling's letter. He is of course right in saying that those seeking amendment to the Law of Return are in fact seeking "to disenfranchise all the non-Orthodox"; but this is precisely why the Orthodox parties, together with all questions pertaining to the Halakhah including that of *giyur*, should not be made to influence or in other ways affect state laws and state institutions. (Needless to say, religious Israelis can form their own political parties and Israeli citizens can vote for them; but then they will be sharing power in a secular state until they become a majority, if ever.) Conservative Judaism may well be what Kling claims it to be, i.e., "the heir of all those in the past who reckoned with the totality of life in making the Halakhah a *living* standard." Unfortunately, however, this is neither here nor there—and as far as the question of *giyur* is concerned the argument cannot be expected to persuade an Orthodox Jew to sanction his child's marriage to someone, say, whose mother had been converted to Judaism by a Conservative or Reform rabbi—and in my opinion he would be right in not being so persuaded. My main point, in fact the only one and the thrust of my whole article, is that Israel as a polity and as a society ought not to be asked to be involved in these matters. Let the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist rabbis perform *giyur* according to their own respective lights; but the Law of Return as it stands now—as well as Israel's entire canon of laws pertaining to personal matters and status—is bound to result in violations of the simple human rights of the Orthodox, as I try to show in my original article at considerable length.

Finally, if I were Rabbi Kling—or Rabbi Fraint—I would not in a hundred years beg the Orthodox groups "to grant legitimacy" to my own or to any other stream within Judaism. The solution obviously does not lie there. The crucial issue is whether these groups should be allowed to have the *power* to grant such legitimacy. As long as the current confusion continues as between religion and state they will go on having and exercising that power—and they will never grant any other Jewish group legitimacy.

## EPILOGUE

### FROM GEMARA TO SHULHAN ‘ARUKH

My 1985 article for *Midstream*, “Who Is a Jew: Two Non-Questions Answered,” together with lengthy objections by two U.S. rabbis and my reply to them (all reprinted in Chapter 11), was not the complete debate. The article appeared in the August–September issue, but the discussion began months before with Joel Carmichael, the editor. My reply to Carmichael’s remarks follows.

March 25, 1985

To Joel Carmichael

. . . Frankly, Joel, I’m beginning to suspect that you are letting your personal inclinations get the better of the editorial instinct in you. It’s as though the debate were between us two, and accordingly I will try to settle that first—in the hope that that will obviate the need for further revision and addition.

You state, correctly, that Reform and Conservative Jews do not consider their stand on the subject of conversion non-*halakhic*, only that “they have a different view of *halakha*.”

Now, the *halakha*, Jewish law, has been set and codified authoritatively on at least three major occasions—in the *Gemara*, in Maimonides’s *Mishne Torah* and in the *Shulhan Arukh*. Neither Maimonides nor Joseph Karo deviated from the version of the *halakha* embodied in the *Gemara*, and their codes have been accepted and acted upon by all Jews. Not only have the Reform and Conservatives not produced any such codes, but even if they were to do so, they will have to have a consensus of some latter-day Sanhedrin, a virtual impossibility. To be sure, there will always be Jews or groups of Jews who will proclaim a revised version of the *halakha* and even adopt their own version and act upon it. However, this will remain their own concern—and they will be free to

do so as long as they don't become too ambitious and claim the right to actually admitting non-Jews into the Jewish fold.

The other point you raise I shall state in your own words: Reform and Conservative Jews, you say, “are . . . and have been, no doubt, brought up for several generations as Reform and Conservatives, and are still Jews NOT, after all, by biology, but by continuous *halakhic* repetition on their own terms, and are still accepted for the Law of Return by Orthodox Jews; why then should not their conversions, too, be accepted as *halakhically* valid?”

Before answering this question, let me point out, first, that no matter how you or I view the Jewishness of the Reform and the Conservatives, Rabbinic Judaism considers them to be “still Jews” *only* by “biology”—and it is on this ground and on it alone that they are considered by Orthodox Jews eligible for the Law of Return as well as for any and all descriptions of Jewish rites and venues. Orthodox Jews consider “still Jews” those Jews who are unbelievers or atheists or even converts to other religions. So what else is new?

As to why “their” conversions should not be accepted as *halakhically* valid, the answer is simple enough: Because while they are accepted as Jews by virtue of having been born to Jewish mothers or themselves *halakhically* converted, Ref. and Con. Jews cannot force on the community people whom that community—or even a fraction thereof—had set its own rules for considering as outsiders unless they undertake certain rites and accept certain obligations promulgated and unanimously accepted long ago. What is more, I believe that in this particular case neither seniority (“generations of Reform and Conservative Jews . . .”) nor numbers (millions of Ref. and Con. Jews in America . . .) should count, since here we are dealing with a matter of principle not of expediency or of convenience.

The problem, you see, is that once you have allowed such considerations to play a decisive role there would be no end to the absurdity to which you can get. Why only Reform and Conservative Jews should be allowed to convert non-Jews to Judaism? What about the Reconstructionists? And while we are about it, what about the Bundists and the Zionists? All these groups profess Judaism of one sort or other—exactly like Reform and Conservative Jews. They may not *speak* of *halakha*, but they all imply that they are Jews first and foremost, and that “Judaism” should be interpreted and acted upon in the respective ways they have chosen to interpret it and to act upon it. Are we, then, to allow them to

admit non-Jews not merely to their own ranks but to the Jewish fold as a whole?

#### SACRED COWS NO MORE

In a volume in which certain questions are asked so persistently, and answers are furnished that, to many, may seem neither satisfactory nor convincing, it is probably fitting that an epilogue be devoted to the two questions that have plainly preoccupied the author's thoughts and writings for so long and that, to many, still seem to have no satisfactory answers. I refer to the questions of who a Jew is and of "immigrant absorption," also known as "mixing the exiles" and the melting-pot theory.

To start: "Who is a Jew?" Through the years—and these concluding remarks are written in the spring of 2005—I held the view that the one and only acceptable answer to this question is the one supplied by the halakha (Jewish Law), namely that a Jew is a person born to a Jewish mother or (halakhically) converted to Judaism. I am often asked by readers and friends if I still stand by that definition, and my answer is in the affirmative. I am quite aware of the fact that this stand might be unacceptable to the American Jewish reader—Conservative, Reform, or secular. Nevertheless, I believe I will go on holding this view as long as there is no prospect of an authoritative revision of the halakha.

Some fifty-five years after the Law of Return was put into force—with more than one amendment and a great deal of controversy—a number of serious problems seem finally to have emerged, problems that can reasonably be said to result from the authorities' failure to stick to one clear definition of "Jew" in that law.

The most difficult, and most felt, of these problems concerns what is known as "the grandchild clause," which makes anyone with a Jewish grandfather, and all of that person's family, eligible to be new immigrants to Israel, despite the fact that none of them are Jews.

These immigrants receive the same benefits as a Jewish immigrant, including a visa and double nationality. They also can opt either to go back home or to immigrate to the United States or Western Europe. Many of those who stay are the elderly, who continue to draw from social security and other benefits while their children, who now hold two passports, live and work abroad. The result has been that anything from 200,000 to 300,000 immigrants to Israel, mostly from the former Soviet republics, are not Jews—many, in fact, are observant Christians.

Things came to such a pass, indeed, that in 2005 a number of experts and government officials, cabinet ministers even, started thinking of trying to introduce significant changes in three related laws—the Law of Return, the Citizenship Law, and the Entry into Israel Law. The Law of Return, generally considered Israel's single most important act of legislation and the one that most defines Israel's character as a Jewish state, grants every Jew, the spouse of any Jew, and the offspring of Jews down to the third generation the right to immigrate to Israel. In mid-2005, when the powers that be were beginning to be aware of the situation and to think that certain laws were ripe for significant amendment, the most widely accepted proposal for amending the Law of Return was the annulment of the grandchild clause, so that the non-Jewish grandchild of a Jewish grandfather would not have the right to immigrate to Israel, or at least would not be able to do so without his parents or the Jewish grandfather.

It is interesting to note here that the grandchild clause was introduced into the law in 1970, twenty years after the law was passed. Two reasons were advanced for introducing this clause—namely, to counterbalance the halakhic definition of a Jew in the Law of Return (“a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has converted to Judaism and is not a member of another religion”), and to offer a response to the 1935 Nuremberg Laws. (Since the Nazis persecuted the grandchildren of Jews, Israel would grant them shelter, the argument went!)

This said, the prospects for annulling the grandchild clause—or for amending the Law of Return in any significant way—remain dim. In this connection Shahar Ilan, an investigative journalist who wrote a series of articles, “Who’s an Israeli?” in the Tel Aviv daily *Ha’aretz* (May 11, 13, 20; June 3, 7, 10, 2005), tells this highly instructive story. At the start of the term of the previous Knesset, when the now-ruling party, the Likud, was in the opposition, then-Knesset member Tzipi Livni put forward a proposal to amend the Law of Return. She did not get the support of the leader of the opposition at the time, Ariel Sharon. When Ms. Livni was appointed minister of immigrant absorption in Sharon’s present cabinet, Sharon remembered her idea and made it clear to her that as immigrant-absorption minister she had no authority to work for a change in the Law of Return. Livni was later appointed minister of justice and continued to call for an amendment of that law. Whether something concrete will come from this remains much in doubt at the time of this writing.

### “MIXING THE EXILES”

Defining “Jew” and “Jewishness” was not the only one of the author’s preoccupations that is dealt with on and off in this volume. Another was the subject of the absorption of immigrants from the countries of the Middle East and North Africa—a subject that I dealt with at some length in two books, *Israel’s Place in the Middle East: A Pluralist Perspective* (1998) and *Israel in Search of Identity: Reading the Formative Years* (1999). The absorption of immigrants—*mizzug galuyot* in Hebrew (“mixing the exiles”), also known as “the melting pot,” was, like the Law of Return, something of a sacred-cow concept, thought out, proposed, and put into feverish practice by the overwhelmingly Eastern European Zionist establishment.

As with the Law of Return, the melting-pot theory has been coming under attack and seems to be passing through a stage of serious revision, although mostly without much fuss in this case. Since I have dealt with this subject elsewhere, here I will quote another writer, who also happens to be a fellow immigrant from Iraq and who states the case with frankness and elegance. I am referring to Sami Michael, who is justly considered one of the three or four leading novelists now writing in Israel. In the 2005 Independence Day supplement (May 11, 2005) to *Ha’aretz*, in the article “Going Separate Ways,” Michael frankly, and with no words minced, pronounces Zionism’s melting-pot program dead and buried.

Looking around him on the eve of Israel’s fifty-seventh year of independence, Michael remarks that these days “we resemble separate islands in a raging stream: Jews-Arabs, secular-Haredi (ultra-orthodox) Ashkenazim-Mizrahim (Easterners), new immigrants–veteran Israelis, staggeringly rich–abjectly poor . . . and maybe there is nothing wrong with that,” he avers. This state of affairs, Michael adds, means “that the burning-hot melting pot that the founders of the country imposed at the time was, and remains, a figment of the imagination.”

The Jewish people were never monolithic, Michael explains, and never spoke in one voice and one language. “Its history is one of trenchant disagreements. From the dawn of its history, it was scattered in separate countries and among different cultures, and consequently its communities became so estranged from one another that the only language common to both was that of worship. That situation did not affect the solidarity between the isolated islands in the least.”

It was Israeli nationalism—which, Michael says, “is Western in its leanings and has nothing to do with the internal essence of the Jewish reli-

gion”—that declared the dispersion of Jewry to be abnormal and a threat to its very existence: “The state of Israel sprang from this fear and adopted the ambition of concentrating all the Jewish communities in one territory. The aspiration was to forge a ‘new Jew,’ deriving from the bad spirit of the time that blew in Eastern and Central Europe in the first part of the last century, and purported to create a ‘new man.’” The melting-pot model, Michael asserts, “was never the heart’s desire of the different groups who later streamed into the country from all corners of the world.” However, “to this day the original inventors of the melting pot model are waging a desperate battle to preserve and reconstruct the fragments from which the dream was built so artificially right from the outset.” This relentless effort “is both frustrating and embittering,” Michael continues. “The failure of the model means the loss of primogeniture for the veteran segment of the population, those who termed themselves the ‘generation of the giants.’ However, the Jewish people through the generations has never kowtowed to any giants. On the contrary, it made their lives miserable and challenged their desire to store and keep the people’s spiritual and material assets in their own safe.”

Michael concludes by asserting that he does not view the islands model as a national disaster, but as the opposite. “I believe that the nation is returning to the old model, which proved its efficiency for more than 2,000 years . . . Any attempt to tip the spontaneous development of culture into a narrow channel reflects shortsightedness and is doomed to failure. The vibrancy of life makes for constant surprises both at the individual levels and in the history of nations.”

Jerusalem, July 2005

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