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Zionism: The limits of it as moral discourse

Gover, Yerach, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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Zionism: The limits of It as Moral Discourse

By

Yerach Gover

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York**

1992

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Yerach Gover

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in
satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

ZIONISM: THE LIMITS OF IT AS A MORAL DISCOURSE

by

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This study attempts to establish a critical base at the intersection of literature and sociology for exploring some limitations of Zionist ideology in regard to its capacity to support moral and cognitive reform. The analysis of Israeli Hebrew fictional texts reveals the following: (1) There is a pervasive distinction that qualifies depictions of Arabs and Jews, between moral and juridical citizenship, and an identification of the former with a moral subjectivity denied "the Arab," and the latter with objects of judgment. (2) This distinction expresses a certain "structure of feeling," in which the Jewish conscience articulates morality from the perspective of a subjectivity beyond history and validated as such by the Holocaust. (3) The distinction, the identification, and the structure of feeling determine an irreducible dependence of Jewish identity (therefore of moral subjectivity) on relations of exclusion and inclusion, hence on the need constantly to reiterate the negative identity of an other. (4) This "other" is embodied in the figure of "the Arab," and humanized by a distinction between "good Arabs" and "the Arab." (5) The identity-driven articulation of that figure constitutes a barrier beyond which consciousness cannot penetrate, thereby eliminating at each last moment the possibility for Jewish recognition

of Arab subjectivity necessary for the completion of any morally substantial auto-critique of the role of Zionist nationalism in "Arab-Israeli relations." (6)

The general problematic constituted by these tropes accounts for the ways in which Israeli literary criticism organizes itself in the function of a policing of culture. This is itself a genre, therefore a strategic formation. As such, it aims to diminish the force of the moral paradoxes of Israeli culture. What is threatening about those paradoxes derives from the same pressure for explication and utopian politics that makes Israeli culture intensively ideological to its "imagined community."

Israeli Hebrew literature provides the quintessential object for a critique of Israeli political discourse precisely because of its highly spiritualized yet embodied referents, an historical people and a living utopia beyond which lies an unanalyzable but concrete, hence dangerous, otherness of being. Through the literary heightening of the symbolic and allegorical aspects of this myth, Israeli Jewish culture presents itself as an historical force that can be taken as an object of critique.

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para Raquel

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INTRODUCTION

Sociology of Culture

The relationship of Israeli Hebrew literature to Israeli culture provides sociology with a strong variant in its general theory of culture. On the one hand, it is not compatible with the traditional distinction between high and popular cultures. The circulation of literary texts in Israel is so widespread, and the texts and their authors so much a part of public life, that what in another society would be "high" and elite is in Israel popular and public. On the other hand, it seems to challenge two largely unexamined assumptions in the sociology of culture: (1) that what appear to be cultural forms constitute in fact the key elements of culture, and (2) that culture operates in society as what Talcott Parsons called a "latency."¹

In regard to the first, what makes Israeli Hebrew literature cultural is not simply that it is literary, but that the instances of it are features of a greater public discourse of accountability. This is true, however, only in regard to a particular sense of "features," namely that literary texts are, as Clifford Geertz might say, 'thickly' implicated in that discourse and cannot be extricated from it, even for the most elementary understanding of their form and content. Indeed, Israeli literature lacks the degree of autonomy — of text, genre, significance, and position — that is attributed to what is usually called "literature." One of the most important

¹Talcott Parsons, "A Revised Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification," chap. in Essays in Sociological Theory, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Comp., 1954): 386-439.

consequences of this for my investigation is that a "close" critical reading of Israeli texts is essentially intertextual and interdiscursive, and only secondarily textual.

In regard to the second point, Israeli Jewish culture manifests an assertiveness, an unwillingness to take for granted anything that has to do with the relationships between the individual and society, and between society and history. This deprives it of the capacity to provide a basis for consensual spontaneity, what Durkheim called "mechanical solidarity," though it nevertheless accounts for a degree and quality of uniformity that resembles such a type. This aggressive tendency to become explicit in all respects gives Israeli culture something of the force of a threatened return of the repressed: more — ambivalence, anxiety, desire — edges onto and disturbs the surface than in most other cultures.

One important consequence is that it should be possible to find present a singular moral tension in all Israeli cultural forms, particularly in the most widely read novels. In what follows, I will illustrate the pervasiveness of this tension and the ways in which it gives shape to moral and political reflection in contemporary Israeli literary fiction.

My investigation suggests that this tension has to do with what might be called the politico-ethnological history of the Jews, and with the need incessantly to make manifest for each individual, in each voice, in regard to every assertion, an identification with a certain version of Jewish history. It expresses itself, as one might expect, through representations and through the discursive operations of their signs (within the relatively fluid cultural circulation of representations); and, for reasons I hope to make clear, it allows for no positive point of rest. This accounts, in part, for why Israeli culture has always been so distinctively ideological. This

must be understood, again in part, to be motivated by a need to reduce the tension intrinsic to identification on so expansive a scale. Such a reduction involves the management of representations in detail. As a result, the normal operation of Israeli culture can be seen to be aimed at reducing the relatively uncontrollable latency typical of culture in other societies and at other times. That is, its normal operation entails a positioning of culture against itself.

There are certainly historical causes of this regression of the latent in the service of the manifest, but it needs to be noted and investigated as such if one is to understand contemporary Israeli culture. Given this hypothesis, I expected to find in the texts that I chose for analysis an irreducible unease or ambivalence about any representation having to do with Jewish history and identity and all that is currently associated with them. Further, I expected to find compromises testifying to this unease in each text insofar as it aims to revitalize criticism within the body politic that is In Israel also a body cultural. The key elements in this post-modern cultural formation — culture against itself — are Zionism and representations of otherness.

Zionism, the significance of Holocaust, and the poetics of Arab-Jewish relations are important elements indicating a way of thinking: but they only indicate it. The ways in which these elements make themselves textually known imply deeper, more generalizable, cultural operations having to do with the relation of self to other, the relation of state to society, and the relation of subjectivity (including society) to history.

In what follows, I will attempt to explicate these operations against the background of contemporary Israeli history and the geopolitics of Arab-Jewish relations, as well as inter-Jewish ethnic relations. I will focus especially on the ways in which dissident literary fiction in Israel both challenges Zionist moral and

political themes and, despite itself, ends by reiterating the episteme upon which those themes are based.

Ideology

While it is difficult to define "ideology" satisfactorily for all purposes, it can be roughly and very generally defined for the purposes at hand. In this regard, for a notion of "culture" as generative and reflexive, "ideology" refers to a particular failure of culture within culture itself. That is, it can be thought of as a configuration of themes and references, within the relatively mobile discursive context we call "culture," that momentarily fixes those themes and referents in ways which are incompatible with the normal generativity of that context, and reconstitutes them as something like universal predicates qualifying all instances of discourse.

More specifically, for my project "ideology" refers to (1) a repetitive discourse that (2) expresses a particular interest (3) unself-critically, and (4) expresses it in such a way that it mediates other discourses, particularly those whose concerns are primarily moral or political. As a practical matter, such a discourse aims to refamiliarize its audiences with what they have already received as incorrigible knowledge, and to do so monologically, in a way that places it beyond the challenges of different points of view and different, dialogical, means of knowing and claims to know. The most obvious examples are class-based ideologies in which a particular interest is expressed as a structure or inclusive narrative — as if no further work needs to be done in order to establish and clarify the latter.

The success of any ideology, the extent to which it colonizes other discourses, depends in large part on its capacity to constitute and synthesize formations of meaning and feeling, in Habermas's terms integrated elements of legitimation and motivation.² Because of the role played by Zionism in contemporary Israeli culture, it is necessary to consider the ideological aspect of Zionism. In this regard, I intend to show how Zionism constitutes just such a synthesis, how it conforms to the model of ideology as a counter-generative repetitive thematically discursive unit, how it serves as a basis for predication within the discourses that it informs, and in what way it can be seen as pervasive to or unavoidable within Israeli culture. My method will involve analyzing literary fictional texts in such a way that these features of Zionism are pronounced. In this way, it will be possible to highlight the interactions of these features with other epistemic elements present within each text.

Culture, Ideology, and Material Life

If a *prima facie* case can be made for the ideological and cultural force of Zionism, it is reasonable to assume that the study of Zionism is crucial to the study of contemporary Israeli political and moral discourse. However, as indicated above, the relations among ideology, culture, and sociality are different in Israel than in other national societies. If, as I will argue, Jewish Israeli society is grounded in its culture, and if that culture is mediated by Zionist ideology, then political decisions, attitudes toward other groups, patterns of authority and obligation, and the limits of political and moral dialogue must be examined as they

²Jurgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

take form relatively independently of the rational instrumental base of the Israeli national political economy.³

There are, certainly, other societies in which culture has equal or even dominant weight over material factors. However, culture is significant for understanding Israeli society as a whole in ways that differ from societies in which the assertion of difference in identity conform to a normative principle of differentiation.

The hypothesis that culture in Israel has an explanatory weight not derived from or reducible to material factors is not inconsistent with a more comprehensive theory that sees material base as the most general condition of culture, sociality, and consciousness. Nor does it imply that Israeli society can not be studied profitably from the perspective of its political economy. Rather, I am arguing that the Israeli case is a variant of the base-superstructure relation in one direction, in contrast with the United States as a variant in a different direction. If one wishes to understand the cultural determinants of political life in the United States, one must first study the dominance of institutions by the corporate economy. If one wishes to understand the cultural determinants of political life in Israel, one must first study the relatively autonomous operation of culture.

In the case of the United States, whatever doubts one might have had earlier, and whatever small aspect of the official polity is still reserved as "contested terrain," it seems fair to say that the state generally operates as an "executive committee" for the corporate class. In the case of Israel, the state attempts, apart

³ Baruch Kimmerling, Zionism and Economy (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Comp., 1983). In his study Kimmerling attempts to demonstrate the presence of an a priori Zionist ideological force in economy planning and that this pattern is continued from pre-state Zionist economy to economy-structuring in Israel.

from its strictly administrative operations, to ensure its own position as primary referent of all public discourse and the focus of historical consciousness. In this sense, for the Israeli state, relative to other national societies, presence is more important than practice, its status as metaphor more important than its capacity to operate. In the United States, accumulation takes precedent over legitimization and motivation; in Israel, the situation is reversed.

It follows that the analysis of Israeli politics, unlike politics in the United States, must examine certain attributes of political and moral discourse implicit in all Israeli institutions. Among the most important of these are (1) the figurative categories by which populations are defined and then seen as essentially in opposition and that opposition taken as part of a universal historical drama, (2) the moralization of politics according to this drama, and (3) the totalization of conscience in all political and moral discourse according to this moralization.

Politics and Morality

We usually think of political discourse as distinct from moral discourse and only loosely related to it. For example, in the United states, political discourse has little to do with the more general morality children are taught in school. In Israel, on the other hand, political and moral discourse are never distinct. People learn to think politically and morally simultaneously, in regard to referents, images, and conceptions that are deeply and persistently moralized. This is illustrated in a study of the pedagogy of prejudice by an Israeli social psychologist.

In 1963, Dr. George R. Tamarin, then Professor of social psychology at the Tel Aviv University, studied "The influence of Ethnic and Religious Prejudice on

Moral Judgment." Tamarin investigated the effects of chauvinism on moral judgment in regard to (a) the presence of prejudices in the ideology of youth, and (b) the effect of uncritical teaching of the Bible on the tendency to form prejudices particularly associated with the notion of the "chosen people," the superiority of monotheistic religion, and the study of biblical heroes.

Tamarin selected, as he says, "the most extreme forms of prejudice: the extermination of the out-group." Students were asked to comment on two texts. The first was taken from the Book of Joshua (6: 20-21; 10: 28-32), and described Joshua's genocide of the Canaanites in his conquest of the land. The second text was a 'Chinese version' with General Lin as the leader of the out-group. While Joshua's genocide is not the only instance of genocide recounted in the Bible, Tamarin selected this particular example "because of the position the Book of Joshua has in the educational system, both as national history and as one of the cornerstones of a modern national mythology that includes such concepts as 'the generation of the desert'." Tamarin concluded that the approval of Joshua's genocide and relative disapproval of General Lin's shows

the influence of chauvinism and nationalist-religious prejudices on moral judgment. The answers indicate the existence of a highly prejudicial attitude among a considerable number of the respondents.... The uncritical teaching of the Bible — to students too young — even if not taught explicitly as a sacred text, but as national history or in a quasi-neutral atmosphere concerning the real or mythological character of its content, no doubt profoundly affects the genesis of prejudices..., even among non-religious students, in accentuating the negative-hostile characters of strangers... The overestimation of statehood as a supreme value and the idea that assimilation is the greatest evil, and the influences of militaristic values in ideological education, are further sources of discriminatory tendencies.⁴

Tamarin certainly claims too much for the relationship of pedagogy to

⁴George R. Tamarin, The Israeli Dilemma: Essays on a Warfare State (Rotterdam: Rotterdam University Press, 1973): 183.

attitude and belief, and draws too complete a conclusion from the fact that students distinguished invidiously between Joshua and Lin. They may well have seen the different genocides in terms of entirely different contexts, thus conflating their evaluation with other historically significant considerations. It may be less the use of a double standard that is important here than an extreme ethnocentrism that excludes applying moral standards to other groups, or does so with extreme qualifications. In addition, it seems less likely that biblical teaching inculcates prejudice than that the teaching is a symptom of a more general socialization experience that moralizes politics and politicizes morality along the ethnocentric, statist, and militaristic lines described by Tamarin. In any case, a full account of this hegemonic socialization requires a discussion of its mediation. One important way in which it is mediated is through Israeli Hebrew literary texts, though they too must be seen as moments of a far more overwhelming hegemonistic process.

Ideology and Culture

As ideology, Zionism is singularly self-conscious and therefore more dependent than other ideologies on what we might call literary values. There is a curiously intellectual quality to Zionism, and a tendency to emphasize the mode of expression as much as what is expressed. These qualities make Zionism more complex and theoretical than is normally the case with ideologies. Israeli culture reinforces that complexity by its own tendency to leave nothing inexplicit and unspoken. Thus, if the defining characteristic of culture in regard to other institutions is said normally to be its "latency," Israeli Jewish culture tends always to manifest itself as the consciousness of its people. Because a culture of reflexively manifest values requires that all institutional action be morally accountable, Israeli culture lacks what Parsons believed was the inherently

conservative disposition of culture. Instead it shows a degree of volatility and tendencies toward ambivalence that lead less to the comforts of consensus than to a self-conscious and only superficially satisfying utopianism.

Zionist discourse is riven with a distinctive figurative language, particularly evident in literary texts, that corresponds to the need to represent contemporary Israel as a totality and as a living utopia — 'actually existing Zion.' The demand for so abstract and constant a referent creates an extraordinarily complex ideological formation, one that supports the exclusivist attitudes of which Tamarin wrote, in particular attitudes that preempt recognizing what is at any moment defined as Other and, therefore, that can only leave the issue of self-identity itself morally unsettled. This lack of settled identity is what makes Israeli politics incorrigibly a politics of identity.

Once the moral and the political are combined as a single discourse — forcibly rather than allowed to grow together — the new association registers an inherent ambivalence otherwise uncommon in morality and politics taken separately and prior to that combination. Political discourse taken by itself looks outward. It does not produce ambivalence of self-doubt in the self-consciousness of its subjects so much as a sense of uncertainty and doubt about the world. This mix of confident subjectivity and a sense of the world as unreliable and problematic motivates an instrumentalist rather than a self-reflective and dialogical outlook.

Similarly, moral discourse taken alone is self-reflective, but only in the abstract: the reduced self of isolated moralism is impractical, unable to learn and teach. Therefore, its mode of self-reflection cannot be critically reflexive in the sense of being impelled by desire to make its own terms immediately problematic in

their use. If it were to be self-critical in this sense, moral discourse would have already implicated politics, and the two hypothetically distinct discourses would be, in effect, one. In that case, ambiguity and ambivalence would be part of politics, motivating political discourse toward questions pertaining to identity and significance at least as much as efficiency and instrumental effectiveness.

This unavoidable synthesis of morality and politics provides, therefore, a heightened self-awareness of the productive aspects of discourse and a totalizing type of collectivist attitude toward reference. This is progressive only if the inclusive referent is a universal humanity rather than a segment of a population. It is regressive and reactionary if the posit of a living utopia is particularized and sectarian. The language of Israeli Hebrew literature has to do work of a higher order than is normally required of other linguistic cultures where literature appears distinct from the subjective conditions of writing, reading, and discoursing — that is, from society. Israeli Hebrew writing can never be seen simply as a matter of technique, distorted as it then would be by the distance thereby established between itself and its community. Nor can it be seen simply as expressive and artifactual, as a symptom that successfully conceals its conditions.

However, it does not follow that Israeli literature is somehow more honest to itself. It is only that it cannot avoid its own dishonesty, which derives from its elision of the sociology of the living utopia to which Israeli writing constantly refers. Nor should the inability to avoid this pathos of the self be thought of as an "Eastern" trait. It may well be specific to any historically mechanical unification of people in which the collective forms of subjectivity and the socially practical orders of moral obligation derive their validity from the same source, an identity asserted beyond space, time, and experience, as the Zionist episteme. The study of Israeli

Hebrew literature provides the quintessential object for the critique of Israeli political discourse precisely because of these highly spiritualized yet embodied referents, an historical people and a living utopia beyond which is an unanalyzable otherness of being. It is through the literary heightening of the symbolic and allegorical aspects of this myth that Israeli Jewish culture presents itself as an historical force and can be presented as object for the critique of ideology.

One may still ask whether or not literature, in the form of published books, written by authors who are said to be more or less canonical, is too narrow an empirical domain for an analysis that aims to connect ideology to culture and that to politics. And, of course, even if the argument were granted, how would it be possible to sample this literature or to read it in general through the analysis of a few works? And if this is possible, how can an analysis of selected texts demonstrate, without simply being tendentious, the specific overlay of morality and politics, the limitations of criticism, and the pervasiveness of Zionist ideology that my argument and working hypothesis led me to expect?

I attempt to show in the chapters that follow that the perspective in which Israeli Hebrew literature and culture are taken together, and in the context of what is deceptively called "Arab-Jewish relations," provide plausible accounts of certain key limitations of Israeli moral and political discourse, specifically those having to do with the irreducible themes of inclusion and exclusion so far as they bear on self-criticism.

Briefly, my method is one of what might be called "close" reading, and it identifies points at which extra-textual materials are unavoidable if the material of the text is to be understood. By "close reading" I mean reading in detail, for the internal relationship between the rhetorical and the substantive, and for the ways in

which narrative elements achieve what Hayden White might call an affect of plausibility. Interpretive inferences are subject to the tests of consistency and coherence, by which I mean that they are initially posed as hypotheses and tested against the narrative in all other respects. By the identification of "points" of intertextuality, I mean the identification of specifically symbolic and allegorical moments that are essential for the plausibility of the presumptions, intimations, and analogies. To a large extent this involves paying close attention to juxtapositions of figures of abstraction and concreteness, lapses in the temporal sequencing of events or in the intentionality with which events appear to be grasped, and the ways in which a given text challenges its own boundaries (e.g., by problematic titling, by ambiguities in designation of authorship, by the method(s) used to refer to extra-narrative historical or sociological contexts, or in the means by which a text carries its reader from passage to passage). It also involves addressing the critical context itself, since no novel can, from the perspective of its being read, be said to speak with a single voice.

Israeli Hebrew literature, ostensibly Israel's "high culture," presents its representations and narratives in such a way that the morality of writing itself is always on the surface — in the poetics of representing representation and in the constant absorption and reabsorption of narratives in metanarratives. The "subtexts" of Israeli Hebrew fiction are "sub" in name only. In fact, they operate as supertexts, metatexts, there before what is read and not merely brought surreptitiously into the text as something extra.

In this sense, one must acknowledge that the "meaning" of any Israeli novel, if "meaning" is the issue, is always outside of itself, the novel being a vehicle for that "meaning" rather than a distinct and permanent presence geared to

defending itself against all extra-textual ascriptions. While this dependency might be attributed to any novel, the characteristics of Israeli culture described above imply that the way in which "meaning" lies outside of the Israeli Hebrew text is different from what could be said about the instances of other national literatures. It is "outside" in the sense of being a feature or moment of a greater center of meaning, not merely in the sense of reflecting an unstated idea. The heaviness of the symbolic in Israeli fictional writing testifies to this, as does the constant return to allegory as part of the way in which its narratives achieve their plausibility and therefore a sense of community among readers.

In order better to understand the relationship between Israeli society and Zionist ideology, it is necessary to show how the literary textualization of Zionism glosses over polarities of hegemonic and counterhegemonic formations in Israel. One question I will address is how texts can both refer to something significant and exclude it at the same time. In other words, in what way does the reference to Israeli Jewish identity exclude the Other on which that particular identity is predicated? I will also consider the ways in which certain dilemmas peculiar to the exclusionist consciousness appear in literary fiction as limitations of moral self-reflection.

An example of the latter may be seen in the potentially subversive interactive themes of virtue and strength. David Ben Gurion expresses them with a certain forcefulness: "... reliance on ourselves means two things: on our strength and on our being in the right. Just one of these two will not sustain us." ⁵ Yet, it seems clear that the need to exercise strength and its actual exercise are not the same thing.

⁵ David Ben Gurion, "Where There is no Vision the People Perish: Interview with David Ben Gurion," interview by Ehud Ben Ezer, ed. *Unease in Zion*, with a Foreword by Robert Alter (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press & Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Comp., 1974): 75.

While the former may be consistent with virtue, the latter can only be if it is possible to justify the surplus of destruction, and the elision of the difference between the innocent and the involved, that is unavoidable whenever force is used to protect virtue. Even in the case of self-defense, force may be understandable but it is not and could not be virtuous. For that, one would need the aristocratic principle of "honor," and that can only replace virtue, not include it.

In the context of an exclusionist ideology, the need to be strong and the need to be right are already contaminated because there is no definite point at which one needs to deliberate about whether or not and when force is necessary; contradictory because the use of force to implement a categorical exclusion is inconsistent with its regulation by the universalistic requirements of virtue. How is this dilemma reflected in Israeli literature?

Of course, how could it be otherwise? On the contrary! Why didn't I think of it right from the beginning? Our Hirbet Hizah. Questions of housing and problems of absorption! And hurrah! We'll house and absorb, and how: we'll open a co-op store, we'll build a school, maybe a synagogue too. There'll be political parties here. They'll debate plenty of issues. They'll plough fields and sow and harvest and do great things. Long live Hebrew Hizah! Who would guess there ever was a Hirbet Hizah before, that we have evicted and, thus, inherited. We came, we shot, we burnt, we bombed, we pushed and shoved and expelled....⁶

"Hirbet Hizah," the name of a fictional Palestinian village as well as the title of Yizhar's short story, tells about a detachment of Israeli soldiers sent to evacuate the Palestinian inhabitants. Yizhar is protesting not only against the brutal use of force, but its use to evacuate the Palestinians from their homes, their communities,

⁶S. Yizhar, "Hirbet Hizah" in Arbaah Sippurim (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishers, 1977): 34-88. Publications in Hebrew are indicated by asterisks (all translations from the Hebrew are mine).

and their land. It is an atypically intense critical text. However, the protagonist's reflections are not subject to the play of voices, to a process in which criticism can discover its own history and obligations. The story is told as an inner monologue of a soldier who participates in the evacuation despite his reservations, who in effect "follows orders." This separation of theory and practice, considerations of virtue and considerations of strength, deprive the monologue of what it needs if it is to represent a virtuous and therefore self-critical recognition of the humanity of the Other.

If the narrator were to be provided that recognition, if he were to have recognized not only the violation of the principle in the exercise of force but the significance of that violation for his own sense of self as well as for the victims, he would have found himself unable to continue in the exercise of force and unable to sustain the sense of self that permitted complicity in it in the first place. That is, if the monologue were to be the reflection of a subject, one whose recognition of the Other permitted a recognition of the self as Other, it could not have remained an interior meditation. By remaining so, the monologue speaks only of the particular others beyond the morally constitutive interpretation of selfhood and otherness.

In this way Yizhar's story illustrates the sentimentality and hollowness of hermetic reflection, of exaggerated and one-sided self-consciousness, once force and virtue are associated and given glib articulation as such. Once they are, subjectivity can only become utopian, apart from practice and indifferent to the history of practice. Yizhar's protagonist thinks, finally, only for those who do not dare speak, which is to say those who cannot speak and therefore cannot constitute themselves dialogically.

Similarly, consider the related themes of unity and creativity — community

and fecundity or generativity. Through the "ingathering and assembling of exiles," diversity — through which a people discovers its own need to progress and discovers the dependency of progress on the inclusion of yet greater diversity — is qualified by the putative national unity that gives them the abstract and impractical identity exiles need to enjoy, to exult in, the "ingathering and assembling." This abstractive joy of community cannot sustain generativity; but generativity, diversity, can guarantee neither joy nor community, both of which exiles might desire more than anything else. The two can only be sustained as absolutes without the burdens of self-reflection. Above all, they can only be sustained at the cost of historical memory.

Jacob Kellner, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has published an enlightening study of this cost of imposing the contradictory ethos of the exile onto the nation of what must, despite itself, aspire to be a diversely composed people. Kellner analyzes two attitudes toward the administration of the Jewish refugees entering Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first considers the physical and social "redemption" of the land as the fundamental point of reference, with the individual as a means of achieving that goal. The second considers the "rescue" of the individual as primary and the "redemption" of the land as a means of accomplishing that rescue on a societal scale.

According to Kellner the first attitude prevailed from the beginning (the 1880's) until the present. As a practical matter, it entailed systematic control, an orientation of education to increasing productivity, and the allotment of resources

primarily to those who can sustain themselves.⁷ This choice, according to Kellner, led to the development of "an ideology which turns the collective into a sacred ideal and allows conscious indifference toward the individual person," and an ominous tendency on the part of settlers to "obey their leaders without question." Emblematic of this ideology is the ancient injunction that "Any man who is afraid and has lost heart shall return home, or his comrades will be as discouraged as he is" (Deuteronomy 2: 8). Kellner writes that this slogan was used at the time of the Second Aliyah by Yosef Witkin and A. D. Gordon, two early Labor Zionist leaders, to promote "Halutzim"(pioneers), and that Martin Buber had, in 1916, also agreed with it. But it is clear that the demand for unity can only support at best a demand for the expenditure of energy, the concrete labor appropriate to extreme scarcity and subsistence rather than to a mode of productivity consistent with the creative and socially progressive use of resources. While conditions may control the degree to which the demand for unity outweighs the desire for generativity and progress, Kellner is arguing that the ideological realization of conditions went far beyond these principles.

Thus, Kellner cites M. Usishkin, an early Russian Zionist leader, who proposed, in 1905,

to establish all-Jewish workers associations of young single men, healthy and strong in body and spirit. Each member of the association has to immigrate to Palestine for three years and to fulfill his army duty for the People of Israel, not by the sword or by the gun, but by the spade and the plough. These thousands of young men will have to come to the Hebrew colonies and to offer their services — as if they were laborers — for the exact same salary as the Arab laborer, to live in the most arduous conditions, as those provided to the army in its barracks" (Kellner, 1982, 32).

⁷Jacob Kellner, The First Aliyah. Myths and Reality, ed. and comp. Aharon Fein (Jerusalem, The Hebrew University School of Social Work, 1982): 16.

Kellner concludes that "the daring attempt to organize the transfer of the Yemenite Jews to Palestine at the time of the 'Second Aliyah' ⁸ is a perfect example of the tendency to use the forced dependency of individuals on their absorbing institutions, and to make of them tools...." He points out that this plan was conceived when the mass Jewish emigration from Palestine would have jeopardized the survival of the Zionist community there (Kellner, 1982, 28, 39).

In 1984, the Israeli historian and journalist, Tom Segev, published a book entitled "1949, The First Israelis." About one fourth of this book deals directly with the issue of the Jews' immigration and their absorption in Israel during its first three years as a state. Segev is regarded by some as one of Israel's 'revisionist' historians. In fact, with the opening of some of Israel's historical archives to the public, documents not available before could be examined, providing in some instances a different perspective on Israeli history. Segev argues, for example, that in promoting mass immigration to Israel, Zionist leaders, many of whom also served in the government, were motivated by their statist idealism as much as by the plight of the refugees. This is indicated by the ways in which they provided for the refugees' needs.

Segev provides ample evidence of the harsh, and critically dangerous conditions of transportation suffered by the refugees from Europe. For them, and

⁸"Aliyah' means immigration: it is a major idea of Zionism and the primary means for its realization. It implies personal participation in the rebuilding of the Jewish homeland and the elevation of the individual to a higher plane of self-fulfillment as a member of the nascent nation" (Encyclopedia Judaica, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 2: 633). Indeed, the term is not value free. Literally it means 'ascendence', 'going up', 'approach'. In the same vein the Zionist term for emigration from Israel is '*yerida*', meaning, 'descend' or going down'. The Hebrew "value free" term for 'immigration' and 'emigration', is '*hagirah*'.

for those coming from Arab countries in the Middle-East and from North Africa, their new life resembled that of life in a concentration camp. Segev quotes an Absorption Department official telling the Zionist Executive Board that: "It is no exaggeration to say that the conditions were better in the refugee camps in Germany, after the war (p. 97)." Segev argues that while there were undeniable difficulties in administering the influx, the methods used to control the immigrants did not derive from conditions of general scarcity, or a lack of financial resources. Rather they reflected a design justified ideologically and guided by the purposes of the state. Thus, Ben Gurion argued that

"the main thing is the absorption of immigrants.... This embodies all the historical needs of the state.... We might have captured the West Bank, the Golan, the entire Galilee, but those conquests would not have reinforced our security as much as immigration. Doubling and tripling the number of immigrants gives us more and more strength.... That is the most important thing above all else" (ibid, 117-118).

The attitude of the "First Israelis" toward the newcomers was complex and self-contradictory, charged with emotions and infused with prejudices, reflecting their self-images as Jews and Israelis. The key lay in their evaluation of the Diaspora. Segev writes that "most tended to regard themselves as Israelis first and Jews second," often speaking of the "elimination of the Diaspora." In this, Segev notes, "they discarded ancient Jewish cultures," and did so "without compunction, for they believed that they were making the only relevant history; the state of Israel meant more to them than the preservation of Jewish culture outside of Israel."⁹

⁹Israel argued that Palestinian Arabs were encouraged by their own political leadership to leave the country so as not to be in the way of the Arab armies in their surge forward against Israel. There is now ample available bibliography that refute this

The number of Jewish refugees who went immediately from Europe to Israel after the Second World War was relatively small. Thus, it became urgent for Israel and the World Zionist Organization to encourage Jews to emigrate from their home countries, sometimes creating panic and at times near catastrophe. In the early 1950s and 1960s, East Europe, North Africa, and the Middle-East were the most likely origins for immigration. The "emptying" of Jews from Arab countries was considered by the Israeli government to be an exchange of populations for the Palestinians expelled or otherwise displaced during the 1948-1949 war.¹⁰ This also justified expanding the war against the Palestinians into neighboring countries, a policy which eventually dragged all other Arab nations into the conflict.

In many instances, emissaries of the Zionist Organization and Mossad functionaries operated illegally in these countries, often intimidating Jews in the effort to get them to emigrate. Before the establishment of the Israeli state the World Zionist Organization had no specific interest in Jewish life in the Middle East and North Africa. Once the country was established, there was no limit to that interest.

argument. For a thorough discussion of this issue, see: Walid Khalidi, "Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine," Journal of Palestine Studies 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1988): 4-37. Also: Benny Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949 (Cambridge University Press, 1987). Michael Palumbo, The Palestinian Catastrophe: The 1948 Expulsion of a People From Their Homeland (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1987).

¹⁰Abbas Shiplak, The Lure of Zion The Case of the Iraqi Jews (London: Al Saqui, 1986). Simha Flapan, The Birth of Israel Myths and Realities (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987). Wilbur Crane Eveland, The Ropes of Sand America's Failure in the Middle East (New York: Norton, 1980). Uri Avneri, My Friend, The Enemy (Westport, CT: (Lawrence Hill & Comp. Publishers, 1986). Also: Avneri, "Haqlam Haze 20 April 1966. "The Black Panthers 9 November 1972.

Segev claims that, through bribery and other covert arrangements with governments of those countries, the actions of Zionist and Mossad agents contributed to increased hostility toward Jews, creating in some cases situations in which Jews had to flee in haste only to arrive in Israel bewildered and impoverished. The explanation Segev offers for these policies are first, the belief of the Zionists that the only legitimate place for Jews is Israel, and second, the belief that there would be no opportunity later to emigrate. The fact that the more affluent Jews chose to migrate not to Israel, but to France and other countries in Europe, and to the United States (Segev, 1985, 117-118), gave the immigration a class as well as an ethnic character, which no doubt contributed to the direction taken by its administration.

The mass of immigrants therefore arrived in Israel perplexed and immediately dependent upon the bureaucracies of the political parties. They often became clientele of and constituencies for these parties, in the hope of at least solace for the abuse they regularly experienced as they searched for jobs, housing, health insurance, education and other social services.

In contrast to the reality, the poet Nathan Alterman wrote about the immigrants whose arrival raised the Jewish population of Israel to about one million,

It's good to be a million
 You look at them and your eyes grow moist
 Tears twinkle. And why?
 For we've said it, brother — Statistics
 Is not always something dry...." ¹¹

¹¹•Nathan Alterman, "The First Million" The Seventh Column (Tel Aviv: Davar Publishers, 1954): 49. Segev, 1985, 98.

Analogous to biblical prophecy in ancient times, Zionism reinforced itself by dire predictions in the form of what Neil Smelser called "generalized beliefs" ¹² about the future of world Jewry and the prospect of yet another Holocaust. "New catastrophes, no less dreadful, may yet happen," said Ben Gurion. And the writer S. Shalom warned: "This is an age of annihilation, of utter peril. We are facing the question whether we will or will not exist as a people" (Segev, 1985, 125).

Dan Laor, an Israeli literary critic writing in 1988, saw a trend in the fact that "not only 'veteran' writers such as Nathan Alterman and Haim Hazaz responded to the historical challenge of immigration and the ingathering of the exiles... but this matter was legitimized by the younger 'native' group of Israeli writers of the 1950's as well." Moshe Shamir (1946), demanded of those younger writers that they "go down to the people", and help "shape the real life of the country, express the values of Zionism, and build the Land." ¹³

In 1954, Hanoah Bartov published a critically acclaimed novel focusing on immigration, entitled Each Had Six Wings. In 1958 it was adapted for the stage by the Habima, Israel's National Theater, and in 1987 it appeared in a new edition. The story takes place in an abandoned Palestinian neighborhood at the southern outskirts of Jerusalem, immediately after the 1948-1949 War, an area that was in the process of being resettled by Jewish newcomers. For Bartov, it provided a paradigm for presenting the total life of the "New Immigration." The protagonists were rendered to represent complete social entities — the "Seventy

¹² Neil Smelser, The Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: The Free Press, 1962): 79-130.

¹³ Dan Laor, "The Mass Immigration as Content and Subject in Hebrew Literature" Haaretz, literary sec. 20 April 1988.

Jewish Diaspora"; social classes, fathers against sons, newcomers against veterans. Bartov attempted to create situations that could illustrate and provide an image of the new immigration in all its complexity. These included daily life, linguistic diversity, social differentiation, and the experience of strangeness, the experience of alienation between veterans and newcomers, and confrontations with Israeli authorities.

The biographies of the various characters that appear in the course of the narrative were intended to represent the broad diversity of Jewish "destinies." But

the representational spread of the mass immigration with all its aspects and components was guided in this work — as in those of Alterman, Hazaz, and other writers — by ideology. Although Hanoah Bartov is well aware of the reality of the 1950's, with all its problematic angles, he attempts to interpret it as a constructive social process, leading in an almost linear progression toward the assimilation of the newcomers into the "melting pot" of Israeli society, and to an almost instant achievement of the "Ingathering of Exiles" (Laor, 1988).

In contrast to the nationalist and Zionist pathos that characterized the approach to the "new immigration" by Alterman, Hazaz, Bartov, M. Shamir, and others who have written in a similar vein, one must mention a different tendency, represented by such writers as Ephraim Kishon, Aaron Appelfeld, Shimon Ballas, Sammi Michael, and most recently Albert Swissa. They represent an alternative vision of the immigration, and I discuss some of their work in Part Two of this book. The first indications of change appeared in the 1950s, in Kishon's satiric short stories and humoresques, and a radical revisionist project was in place by the 1960's. Interest in it has increased since, and now it occupies a significant though still controversial position in Israeli letters.

To some extent, this revision reflects more general changes in Israeli

culture during the 1960's. The most important single determining factor is the mass immigration of the 1950's and the 1960s. While the movements of populations in the 1950s provided "literary material" for writers already in Israel, from the 1960's on it became "material" for the newcomers themselves, specifically for those writers who had come to Israel at a young age. The latter writers, wrote in an altogether different mood from that of their forebears, and with a different message. They wrote of poverty, hatred, and the sense of estrangement experienced by those thought of as "Orientals". They avoided the eschatological "lexicon" of the 1950's, and, on the whole, they rejected the temptation to interpret their own migration to Israel as a matter of an historical destiny for which suffering and struggle could only be of secondary interest. On the other hand, even this degree of difference may reveal itself to be superficial when we examine the texts in detail. Much of these alterations in historical understanding can only be evaluated against the greater background of cultural development that also accounts for the significance of the debate itself.

Part One

CHAPTER 1

ISRAELI HEBREW LITERATURE AND ZIONIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Following the European "Jewish Enlightenment" (mid 18th century), modern Hebrew literature positioned itself as a vehicle of cultural, social, and political criticism. Simon Halkin summarized this trend in terms of its aim:

Convinced that it preached the salvation of the group, it lashed out against what it considered social ills of the Jew's own making — against the obscurantism of Jewish orthodoxy, against the supineness of the Jewish masses under the "oppressions" to which they were subjected by the ghetto oligarchy, against the inertness of the community in the face of constant economic insecurity and cultural stagnation.¹

But this aim was, according to Halkin, predicated on yet a greater project. He argues that, based on the prevailing bourgeois ideologies and literary genres of the epoch, and following the granting of political emancipation to Jews in major Central and Western European countries, the writers of the Enlightenment assigned themselves the task of revising Jewish history to establish an immediate link between their image of a humanist-rational "Renaissance" Jew, which they

¹Simon Halkin, Modern Hebrew Literature (New York: Schocken, 1970), 115.

thought was demanded by their epoch, and the Israelite pastoral shepherd-king of the biblical narrative specifically depicted in the books of Judges and Kings. This provided the framework within which the millenaral aspect of Zionism took root.

Following the fall of 'Israel Northern Kingdom' in the late 8th century BC), and the destruction of the 'First Temple' in Jerusalem early in the 6th century B.C., the Jewish diaspora that already existed in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as other countries in the region, was greatly enlarged. At the same time, other peoples were settled in the country by the Kings of Assyria. In 538 B.C., a charter granted by Cyrus, King of Persia, permitted the restoration of Judea as a relatively autonomous protectorate. Consequently, Judea, like a few other small states, was able to remain relatively autonomous, first under Hellenist and then under Roman rule, until about the middle of the second century A.D.

During this time, the diaspora grew much larger than the Jewish population of Judea itself, and developed networks of social and cultural institutions with internal legislative and representative bodies in the various countries of its sojourn. However, since for most of this epoch neither Judea nor its Diaspora developed an independent base for the exercise of political power, the learned word of the "Sacred Texts" served as the only authority in the conduct of life, and in community affairs. If any historic connection between these ancient communities and Jewish communities living today may at all be assumed, it can only be attributed to the material force of what otherwise seems merely idea or notion, namely the "sacred texts" themselves.²

For such traditions to develop, a broad and widespread system of popular

²Salo W. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, vols. 1 & 2, "Ancient Times" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952).

education must have been in place since very early times, and education, from the elementary to the extremely esoteric had to have been institutionally secure beyond even the question of content. One should not underestimate, however, the mediating force of non-Jewish thought in the development of Jewish culture. Initially, Aristotelian, Hellenist, and Neo-Platonist thought were important, replaced later by the early Greek-Christian schools. Following the emergence of Islam and the rise of Muslim-Arab culture in the mid 7th century, thinkers such as Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon, Isaac ha'Israeli, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Rabbi Ba'Hayai Ibn Pekuda, Rabbi Yehuda Ha'Levi, Abraham Ibn Daud, Rabbi Musa Ibn Mimon (Maimonides), Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, and Rabbi Hasdai Karshkash, all of whom lived in Muslim countries, brought to bear on Jewish thought the works of the great Medieval Muslim philosophers, including Ibn-Sina, Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Al Khawarizmi, and Ibn Rushd.³

Until the middle of the 18th century, all Jewish texts founded their legitimacy in the religious codex. At that point, a process of secularization began within the European Jewish community, evidence of which is manifest in the departure of younger scholars from tradition in favor of "external" studies. Since the political and material conditions for such a change had been emerging in Europe for at least a century under the auspices of the newly assertive bourgeois class, these revisionists were able to achieve high intellectual stature in various countries even outside of Jewish settings (For example in Germany, Moses Mendelssohn).⁴

³Julius Guttman, Jewish Philosophy (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1963). Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs. 10th ed. (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1970).

The emergence of a secular, bourgeois, nation-state following the Napoleonic wars and the ensuing popular struggles for national liberation in Europe, led many, "reformed", modern Jewish intellectuals to endorse the prevailing nationalistic sentiments of their time. Rabbis, the first to articulate such aspirations, used the lexical and metaphorical field of theology to give "providential" legitimacy to worldly, political, human action. A millenarian, messianic movement emerged as the herald of this new liberatory spirit.⁵

Those who succeeded the revisionist Rabbis were, in most instances, their sons; but they included others as well who were willing and able to leave their traditional homes and orthodox schooling at a relatively young age. Most attended secular institutions of higher education as unaccredited students, and their scholarship was, to some extent at least, amateurish and intuitive relative to that which they criticized. They were more versed in the writings of Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Dostoevski, and Tolstoy, than Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. They became 'modernists', 'rationalists', 'liberals', and 'socialists' as a reflection of their existential position in a new global social constellation; and they did so by means of belles-lettres, rather than through systematic and scientific study.⁶

This was not in itself a disadvantage. Close to the surface lay the Bible; the Messianic idea, the "millenarian promise" embodied in the Hasidic temperament,

⁴ Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Haskalah," (Enlightenment) by Yehuda Slutsky.

⁵ Arthur Hertzberg, The Zionist Idea (New York: Atheneum, 1977). Shlomo Avineri, The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual History of the Jewish State (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

⁶ David Horowitz, My Yesterday: An Autobiography (Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1970): 18 (and *passim*).

provided tremendous spiritual as well as emotional energy. Not having access to mainstream institutions for maintaining an immanently Jewish social order, Jews of the time spilt great quantities of ink, rather than blood, in fighting their internal wars. This may help to explain why modern Hebrew literature assumed so prominent a role in Jewish life at the expense of theology, thereby appropriating for itself an almost unchallenged authority over secular discourse for the past one hundred years. Many of the earliest of these literary works can be seen as pre-Zionist texts, articulating specific Zionist-like themes that easily translated into the Zionist "master narrative." The specific modalities of this articulation is evident in novels and constitutes in the novel form itself the ideologically representational constitutive divisions that were to develop within and in relation to Israeli national society.⁷

When the Zionist movement came into being, the corpus of modern Hebrew literature was well established as a center of cultural authority for a relatively coherent frame of reference that provided Zionism with the means to disseminate its message and a context in which the legitimacy and the motivational force of that message was already prepared. The notion of a return to the "Promised Land" merely made explicit what was already a "structure of feeling," and its transformation from an historical promise to a moral obligation, from matter of sensibility to a matter of republican virtue, gave it a distinctly modernist politicality. This is indicated by the participation of eminent writers in the Zionist

⁷ Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious (Ithaca & New York: 1981). Also: "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." Social Text 15 (Fall 1986): 65-88.

Executive, in prominent Zionist social and cultural institutions, and as delegates in Zionist world congresses following the early lead of such figures as Herzl, Ahad Haam, N. Sokolov, E. Ben Yehuda and H. N. Bialik. The overlap of literature and politics, and the special cultural significance of the former, led in many instances to writers playing a more important role in the formation of constituencies and policy than politicians themselves.⁸

Throughout their history, Hebrew books were viewed by Jews with great respect and admiration. The Hebrew word for 'writer' derives from the act of copying the Bible (counting the letters of the text). Hebrew publishing was not seen as ordinary commercial activity, but was looked upon almost as a calling, especially during earlier times when the only purpose for writing books was to interpret and be instructed by the Scriptures. Thus, modern Hebrew literature found itself operating institutionally at the most generalizing level of the super-structure. This is why Gershon Shaked concludes that this history of textual presence is most eloquently represented by Zionist "renaissance literature."⁹

When we turn to Hebrew literature in Palestine, and later in Israel, it is necessary to distinguish between two separate periods, first from the early 1900's to the late 1950's, and since then to the present. The event that marks the division is the mass immigration of the late forties and fifties which in ten years tripled Israel's Jewish population. The sudden numerical swell dramatically changed

⁸Pinchas Genussar, "The Dialogue between the Labor Movement and the Renaissance Writers" *Ilon* 77 106-107 (November-December 1988): 26-33; and nos. 108-109 (January-February 1989): 32-35. This essay is part of the author's Ph. D. thesis in Literature.

⁹Gershon Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction*, vol. 1, *In Exile* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameukhad and Keter, 1977): 17-68.

Israel's social fabric. Before the establishment of the state, the Zionist community in Palestine was, in many respects more or less homogeneous. The majority of its members came from Europe, primarily from eastern Europe. Many had experienced some education and training in Zionist camps and communes; and though most lacked formal higher education, they were avid readers of European classic literature and, secondarily, Jewish and non-Jewish history. Some became versed in philosophy and social science, and, probably most important for the quality of their participation in Zionist active life, modern Hebrew literature. Many of the German Jews who migrated to Palestine in the early 1930's and during the years immediately preceding the Second World War, were professionals and academicians. These comprised the first Zionist intellectual elite in Palestine.¹⁰

By then, Hebrew literature in Palestine had positioned itself at the apex of cultural life (classical music and art were just emerging as a national cultural medium). However, the legacy of such writers as A. Mapu, M. J. Berdichevski, J. H. Brenner, and A. N. Gnesin, and later H. N. Bialik, S. Tchernihovski, Sh. Y. Agnon, and H. Hazaz, in the final analysis, limited the boundaries of Hebrew literature to a distinct national setting, linking politics and literature in ways supported by the Zionist leadership itself (Genusar, 1988).

Aside from the few modest private publishers, institutions such as the Zionist Organization, the Federation of Trade Unions, and most political parties had their own publishing houses. Almost every party had its daily newspaper and weekly literary supplements featuring original prose, poetry, and literary

¹⁰Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, From a Community To A State: The Jews of Palestine as a Political Community During the British Mandate (Tel Aviv: Am Oved University Library, 1977).

criticism oriented toward Zionist life in Palestine. From this point of view the times were revolutionary, and literature was held to that standard.¹¹ The eventual structure of this deeply literary political culture provided no clear distinction between the "high" and the "popular," and, increasingly, left little room for the implicit or the latent.

The migrations of the 1950s initially represented a break in the continuity of this structure. The majority of the newcomers could not speak, read, or write Hebrew; and, for many years, literature, Hebrew or non-Hebrew was the least of their existential priorities. But this was momentary. While so decisive a demographic was bound to threaten the hegemony of the established literary culture, it may paradoxically, have given it a yet more definite institutional position in Israeli society than before.

Today, Israel's cultural elite is still relatively broadly based. Much of its political vision is still articulated, or rather, represented literarily — in prose, poetry, or drama. Israeli writers are still deeply involved in current political events, and their books evaluated in terms of politically-charged standards. Politicians seek the approval of literary figures, and publics are swayed by their statements. Hebrew literature in Israel is still read as an authoritative interpretation of real life, still with the expectation that it remain loyal to the Zionist vision.

¹¹Nurith Gertz, ed. Literature and Ideology in Palestine in the 1930s, 3 vols. (Tel Aviv: Everymans's University, 1988).

The study of literary texts

I am interested in studying how literary texts pose the less obvious moral dilemmas of Israel's culture, in particular those that have to do with relations of self to society, and of society to history. Thus, I am especially concerned with dilemmas arising from how subjects are thought to be related to law, those which bear on the subjective aspect of Israeli civil society. While interpersonal relations ignore their own moral problems on individual actors, I am interested in that level of moral thought that constitutes rather than merely manifests the normative order, such as it may be. Thus, the civil subject precedes the interpersonally responsive subject, in Israeli culture as in many others, though in Israeli culture the division between civil and juridical subjects is particularly fraught with alterity, and hence laden with opportunities for a deeply guarded bad faith.¹² Thus, the issue of historical "value," difference, is immediately presented within Israeli moral/political discourse and unavoidable from the standpoint of all parties to that discourse. Relations of civil subject to civil subject are relations that individuals manifest in general, as representatives. Therefore, they carry the weight of an exclusion as well as inclusion. The other is in a sense, the object of the civil subject, and the latter expresses the subjectivity beyond that which an individual can claim for her or his own. It follows that the overriding relation presents itself as one of Subject to Subject changes when one term refers to an other beyond moral society. When this other is nevertheless acknowledged as a subject, the relation is that of the moral citizen of the living utopia to the merely juridical citizen of the state. The former

¹²I will refer to 'civil self' as 'subject' in the dual sense of membership and agency or obligation.

appears as an authentic subject while the latter is, as it were, a merely practical subject who is always an instance of a category, never an authentic representative. The authentic, moral citizen's relation to the living utopia is not available to the juridical subject as such, for whom society is a practical but never a moral community.

These relations, and the dilemmas they constitute, appear in virtually every canonical literary work, as the textualized presence of a greater cultural reality and of a greater discourse on the universal significance of the Israeli and Jewish experience. A preliminary test of this hypothesis lies in the comprehensiveness with which these relational presences operate within specific texts. My analysis focuses on the key relations of the Jewish person as moral citizen to the non-Jewish person as juridical citizen. This requires accounting specifically for ways in which "the Arab" is represented in Israeli Hebrew literature. It requires as well, exploring the field in which these representations constitute the quintessential non-Jewish person of Israeli Hebrew literature, and how these two ostensibly equal subjectivities are stratified from the point of view of the Jewish civil subject. The latter is the major finding of my research.

At the same time, I argue that through the "imaginaire" of the living utopia, which for historical reasons has become a dominant and substantive field of reference throughout Israeli Hebrew literature, the texts dramatize and recreate the relationship of Israeli society to itself, to "its" history. They thereby encompass the less than utopian obligations of people as citizens to the living society of which they are part — that is, they inscribe a practicable 'general will' on an embodied

lesser world of counter-wills, ostensibly affirming a community of Law and a unity of theory and practice. This argument draws upon historical research suggesting that Israeli society presents itself, by virtue of its elevation of Law to the status of a moral and practical imperative, as a "republican" virtue.

But, for one reason if for no other, Israeli republicanism fails to guarantee itself. It spatializes and temporalizes its posit of a "general will" by the qualification of lineage and therefore, in the modern reference of lineage to a type of person, hence a population, "race." Thus, it is difficult for an Israeli Jew to understand other Jews who are not Zionists, and the difference can only be represented negatively, as one of identity versus a lack of identity. In this sense, the non-Zionist is, for Zionism, neither lapsed, nor absent, nor missing. He or she is not to be mourned but is erased from memory; and, in the moment of that erasure, is reconstituted as a moral Other, therefore an enemy of morality itself. That is, the rejection of the non-Zionist by the Zionist, in the name of both the republican form and the living utopia that is its Israeli content, is conceived fundamentally as a matter of moral revelation, a charismatic moment rather than a result of a deliberated resolution of a difference of opinion or principle.¹³ This anti-dialogism, this monologue that challenges the possibility of sociality in its very assertiveness, establishes an ethical foundation for what otherwise would appear to be merely intolerance or absolutism. It is the point at which Israeli Jewish culture draws a boundary aimed at delineating and protecting the possibility of a Jewish discourse, a Jewish moral universe, and an ethos of conviviality necessary for the experience of equilibrium and a balance of expectation and obligation.

¹³Irving Goffman, Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

As with all such boundaries, this one measures its own futility. The cost of those ethnic virtues and resources is ultimately the possibility of boundedness, hence, the vitality and centering associated with the boundary-dependent notion of a living utopia. Its very secularity, as a device aimed at security, betrays that visionary notion by making of membership itself an obligation and the object of a test, something that cannot be lived with the pleasure of practical day to day sociality. This self-alienation that is built into the effort to cure alienation provides a core problematic for the liberal branch of Zionist morality which wishes to escape the exclusivist strictures of Zionism and recover the universalism by which alone the living utopia can find its moral justification. But the best it can do, as I will try and show, is to defer the crisis of identity in which the Other by which the community defines itself is revealed as the community itself. Thus, the utopian community must ultimately sacrifice itself as a practical reality, or form of life, to its own dreams and fantasies. Tragically, it can hardly avoid first sacrificing those "external" others against which it had hoped to define itself as an ethically complete totality.¹⁴

¹⁴On September 13, 1985, Anton Shammas, an Israeli Palestinian author, poet, and journalist, published an article in *Kol Haiv* (p. 17), entitled: "A New Year for the Jews." There, he says, "In the absence of a Constitution, [Israel's] Proclamation of Independence, although still considered in good repute as a liberal document... is, in my view, the AIDS of 'a Jewish State in the Land of Israel to be known as the State of Israel' [quoted from the Proclamation]. A mono-national Jewish state contains its own seeds of calamity: the collapse of the state's immune system, i.e., its democracy...." "A mono-racial, mono-national state as established by the Law of Return is, in my view, is the racist aspect of the Proclamation of Independence... on the surface it, it promised 'complete social and political equality' for all; yet, it turns out... that the only democracy in the Middle

The utopian aspect of Israeli Jewish culture, in regard to which Zionism asserts a power — to define, to know, to declare — that ultimately depends on the unattainable pleasures of exclusivist community, provides a special ideological articulation of history. Class (internal) and race (external) are finally constituted as a synthetic abstraction that operates to delineate the fundamentally distinct relations of juridical citizenship and moral being. Zionism was, at the outset, in certain respects a class ideology as well as one imbued with a moralism of race.¹⁵ The synthesis of the political and the moral incorporates class and race in an essentialist configuration of otherwise ambiguous terms of exclusion. This configuration relies on the attribution of trait-like dispositions and assures the validity of trait-signs and identity-names. When it is taken in its orientation to the non-Jew, it bears the aspect of "racialism," an intellectual propensity to see others in terms of rigidly stratified principles of difference and disposition. It rationalizes social divisions in a way that disqualifies, as a moral imperative, the mixing of groups.

East is dying." "...what is to be done? Establish the State of Israel... (a united Israeli nation in which some are of a Palestinian Arab ethnic origin)." This article was rebutted fiercely both by the right and the left and it provoked a harsh debate that still continues, mostly within literary circles. A. B. Yehoshua, Israel's pre-eminent Hebrew writer, who considers himself a member of the Israeli 'left,' became Shammas' main interlocutor. In his first response, Yehoshua announced: "I am saying to Anton Shammas: if you want your full identity, if you want to live in a state that has a Palestinian character, with a genuine Palestinian culture, arise, take your belongings, and extract yourself one hundred yards eastward, into the Palestinian state that would dwell alongside Israel." See, "A. B. Yehoshua, 'The Guilt of the Left' Interview by Yaron London. *Politica* no. 4 (November-December 1985): 8-13.

¹⁵Theodor Herzl, *Collected Writings*. Translated by A. Barash, R. Benjamin, and A. Yaari. Vol. 5 *The Jewish State* (Tel Aviv: Mitzpeh, 1939): 9-96.

For example, the difficulty of acknowledging "the" Arab as a possible partner in a "general will" may be understood as an expression of the absolute distinction between moral citizenship (a matter of identification) and juridical citizenship (a matter of enforced obligation) in the context of the historical conflict on which the validity of the absoluteness of the distinction depends. This complex formation frames moral decision in such a way that it is only possible spontaneously to think ethically if the thought is supported by a self-reflection that is also a moment of the utopian reflection of society on itself. It effectively transforms every moral decision from an instance of a specialized rationality to a total reflection on self and society, to rationality as such.

The three tropes, identity, utopia, and boundary, make it difficult if not impossible to avoid a hyper-moralization of politics in which what is of politics but external to morality, i.e., the Arab, is subject in principle to exclusion on the basis of race. But the racialism, on which the rationality of the exclusion depends appears as nothing else than an obligation to history, to the true, and to the good. This is why it is not correct to call Zionism "racist." Zionism does not operate, as racism does, at the surface of social division, but at a cognitive point beneath it. The result, racist exclusion, only manifests a deeper epistemic force, and therefore can only be confronted critically by an action that engages the ideological formation as a whole.

Israel is not unique in this structure of rationalization for policies of exclusion. South Africa can be described in somewhat similar terms, as generating a white racist culture inconsistent with expansion — e.g., by negotiation — of the body politic in the direction of a greater moral inclusion of

its putative 'other'.¹⁶ I want to show how the critical intention of certain Israeli Hebrew novels is undermined by the imperatives of its informing ideology, in specific regard to depictions of "the Arab," and through that of the Jewish self.

Briefly, the Arab can not be conceived of as an authentic moral being. He or she exists only in the formlessness of a non-subject assimilated to the generally negative category of the other-than-us and its concomitant moralistic evaluation — unable to be us. This has its abstract political aspect in the attempt to assert a moral universe as a condition for claiming a territorial realization of Jewish history. In this way, the questions surrounding conquest are resolved by asserting a polity that can stand for the moral universe itself, therefore one based on the identification of exclusion with moral rectitude.

The exclusionary attitude of Zionism toward "the Arab" is understandable in these terms; and it may be that one can extend this understanding to account for yet different but equally morally-charged exclusions — e.g., Christian, Moslem, non-European ethnic Jews (Sephardic, and Arab Jews) — and the tendency to place, at least in the margin, the "Diaspora" Jew and the Israeli Jewish emigrant. In all of this, exclusion and marginalization are accompanied by an extraordinarily self-conscious but unselfcritically idealist historiography in which the living utopia of Zionism's Israel is at the center of an epic and epochal narrative, the course of which is strictly allegorical, and whose persuasive force lies in its accumulation of a seemingly endless stream of confirming anecdotes and cases.

The national history that appears in Israeli Hebrew literature and the

¹⁶Michael E. Brown, "The Viability of Racism: South Africa and the United States." The Philosophical Forum 18 (Winter-Spring 1986-87): 254-269.

historiography of the Holocaust are both relevant to understanding the significance of Israeli Hebrew literature to and within its cultural context. Yet, neither defines that context to the extent to which it is understood in terms of its informing ideology. The Holocaust and national histories are, in the discourses that now prevail, products of rather than sources of evidence for Zionism.

The Israeli Hebrew novel walks a very different line between fiction and reality from that drawn in American literature. Its audience requires something more than narrative plausibility, the subjective possibility that events within the narrative could have happened as represented whether they did or not, what Riffaterre calls "fictional truth."¹⁷ What it requires above all is historically objective plausibility, namely, that such events probably happened and that events of the given type certainly must have happened.

In the canonical Israeli literary text, the use of historical materials is intended to be informative as well as moralizing, and to inform about history as a whole, as is appropriate for a people that claims to make its own history and therefore "history" as such. This use of history has properties in common with the traditional epic. But its attempt to define a universal praxis, to display an obligation to history, defines it as a distinct genre. One sees this clearly by comparing the Israeli novel to familiar and ahistorical genre traditions of popular American literature. Unlike the North American writer, the Israeli Jewish writer cannot plausibly construct a plot around isolated ironist heroes who move, barely noticed, within settings of unlimited extent — e.g., "the far west," "bourgeois

¹⁷Michael Riffaterre, Fictional Truth (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

society." He or she cannot simply dwell, on a character's predicament without an historical account of it, as a general condition, nor on such conspicuous challenges as those which lead protagonists to utterly individualistic modes of action, nor on those journeys that pit the subjectivity of the hero against the limits of place and time in the sort of universally indifferent allegory of personal growth and development typical of modern romance novels in the west. The Israeli writer must always position the present as a whole in the consuming context of a total history, and reconstitute the individuals of the present as agents but never as principals or sources of principle.

This allegorical mode of constituting a semblance of praxis, with its sense of movement from the past toward just this very moment of ethnic society, this living utopia, provides the foundation, of the historically "explanatory affect" that invariably accompanies every other pleasure of Israeli Hebrew literary fiction.¹⁸ The Israeli Hebrew author resolves the putative historical order to a narrative order in which moral priorities are instated in reference to a cumulative series of oppressions and resistances superintended by the telos of the living utopia, the Zionist's Israel. This integration of telos and experience has the look of a dialectic. But it operates only as an incomplete version, producing what Hegel called mystical enthusiasm rather than enlightenment. Thus, it has the effect of making present experience both tolerable in its pain and exhilarating in its prospect. The most recent Jewish oppression becomes yet another demonstration of that telos of total history which transcends the suffering of mere others and any history that

¹⁸Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973): 7-29.

such others might, on their own behalf, create.¹⁹

Today, the Holocaust has become the Israeli Jewish writer's standard of suffering. Therefore, it is also the legitimate standard moment in which resistance makes itself visibly heroic and heroism appears as visibly historic. By definition, no other people can justify resistance and struggle since no other can claim an equal grievance, an authentic beginning that makes this struggle necessary and universally significant. Thus the writer is free to explore the terms under which Arabs and Jews actually communicate in Israel, but never terms of a possible negotiation based on mutual recognition. The latter presupposes rights, a sense of violation, and justifications external to the Jewish experienced as defined, precisely what Zionism can not admit for any other people.

It is, in that light, possible to understand why the Zionist conception of Jewish history is systematically lacking in the compassion so evident in other Jewish traditions of self-knowledge. Thus we have the paradox of the narrative of the Holocaust effacing all other instances of modern genocide — e.g., Palestinian Arabs, Africans, Latin Americans, American Indians — as in the long narrative of Jewish history with its endless and intolerantly sectarian sadness. This is why no amount of suffering can be permitted a definition that would expand the "genocidal universe" of which only the Holocaust is permitted to be the definitive instance. This is why no struggle can be justified as part of a universal struggle but that of the Jews for Israel. To be sure, this is a narrative that, in other contexts, would preserve the universal idea of the voice of humanity, a morality virtually infinite in compassion. But the possibility of articulating this

¹⁹Tzvetan Todorov, The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1987).

theme is altogether subverted in the context of Zionism.

To see this, one needs to look at the history presented in Israeli Hebrew literature in terms of how it contributes to and substantiates the project of Zionism. What does this history present such that the Israeli Jewish Hebrew reader must choose between recognizing "the Arab" as absolutely non-identical to the Jew or finding a Jewish aspect only in those Arabs who are not culturally or politically endowed. Either "the Arab" is morally empty or he/she is like "the Jew." In either case, "the Arab" can only be good or bad, never a morally practical being. In the first case, the good Arab is totally predictable or dead; the bad Arab is arrogant, intrusive, ungrateful, insistent, alive. In the second case, the good Arab is tormented, guilt ridden, self-doubting, eager for Jewish recognition, or self-destructive. The bad Arab either betrays his or her people (e.g., by becoming a Jew) or lives ambiguously but without guilt or self-reflection.²⁰

²⁰For a sample of such portrayals of "the Arab" see, S. Yizhar, "The Prisoner" in Arbaah Sipurim (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishers, 1959, 13th ed. 1977). English translation in: Modern Hebrew Literature. Edited, with introductions and notes, by Robert Alter. Translated by V. C. Rycus. (New York: Behrman House, Inc. Publishers, 1975). A. B. Yehoshua, "Facing the Forests" in "Facing the Forests, Short Stories (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1978). English trans. in: Modern Hebrew Literature trans. Miriam Arad (1975). "The Lover (Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing House LTD., 1979). Translated by Philip Simpson (New York: A. Dutton Obelisk Paperback, 1985). "Mr. Mani (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990). Translated by Hillel Halkin (New York: Doubleday, 1992). Amos Oz, "Nomads and Viper" in "Where the Jackals Howl 6th pr. (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1982). Where the Jackals Howl and Other Stories. Translated by Nicholas de Lang & Philip Simpson (New York: A Helen & Kurt Wolff Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981). "My Michael (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1968, 1983). Translated by Nicholas de Lang in collaboration with the author (New York: Bantam Books, 1976). David Grossman, "The Smile of the Lamb

What cannot occur is the recognition of another in whose gaze the Jew finds him or herself suddenly objectified as a Jew, made an essence, in the face of the now existentially vital, subjective and self-reflective Arab. In that turning of tables, "the Arab" would not be merely deserving of respect, but would suddenly be the measure of what should be respected. Instead of the objectified Arab, there would be the objectified Jew. Instead of a Jewish morality to which the Arab must but can never conform, there would be an Arab morality or moralities in the light of which it would be the Jew who would lack the right to claim, without question, moral substance and the corresponding capacity to hold a morally significant identity. Suddenly the Jewish reader would feel that only the Arab can judge, can grant recognition to that reader as a moral subject.²¹ This "dizzying" reversal of fortune is nowhere found in the canonical Hebrew literature of Israel. Its lack constitutes the most important critical limitation of that literature and stands as a fundamental paradox of Israeli Jewish culture. It defines the inability of that culture simultaneously to assimilate the principle of universalism

(Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishers, 1983, 7th pr. 1987). Translated by Betsy Rosenberg (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991). *Yellow Wind (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1987). Translated by Haim Watzman (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988). Sammy Michael, *Hasui Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1977, 9th pr. 1986). In English: Refuge, trans. by Edward Grossman, 1st. ed. (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1988). *Trumpet in the Wadi (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1987). Shimon Ballas, *A Locked Room (Tel Aviv: Zmora, Beitan, Modan Publishers, 1980). Shulamit Lapid, *As A Broken Vessel (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1984). Ruth Almog, *Death in the Rain (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1982).

²¹This is the logic one would apply to any case of the moralistic denial of an other's essential humanity and the sudden recognition of that humanity in a moment of justifiable hypercriticism.

on which its claim of the moral priority of the Jewish experience rests with the exceptionalist theme by which that priority is and must be experienced.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROBLEMATIC OF A "GOOD ARAB"

The moral limitations of Zionist ideology are poignantly displayed in Yoram Kaniuk's novel, Confessions of a Good Arab. Kaniuk's protagonist is "part" Arab and "part" Jew. In this ambiguity he encapsulates the moral and political chaos of a geopolitical reality and lives the contradiction of that fact as a course of self-loss and self-discovery. The novel presents a political fact — the confrontation of Jew and Arab — as an allegory of authenticity. In this regard it is a meditation upon and engagement with the moral dimension of politics aimed at instituting a disposition toward universal compassion within the putatively authentic self of "post-diasporic" Israeli Jewish society. However, the ambiguity of self which afflicts the novel's protagonist ultimately substantiates an image of a utopia that can only be enjoyed in a morally gratifying way by the unambiguously Jewish Israeli reader. The ambiguity that initiates an essentially moral quest is denied by the very success of the quest, leaving the good conscience produced in the text unable to remember how it came to know itself as good. In Confessions of A Good Arab, only the Israeli Jewish reader can experience the coming to fruition of a moral self compatible with the view of history. But, as will become clear, even that remains in doubt. Its systematic conflation of morality and politics reveals in the development of Kaniuk's narrative the most radical limitations of his project.

One attribute that gives Confessions of a Good Arab its place at or near the center of Israeli culture is the size and visibility of its audience. Its author is a canonical writer, which means that his work informs the work of other writers; it participates as object and as point of view in significant literary, political, and social discourses; and it has become part of critical reflection on Israeli national literary traditions. Confessions of a Good Arab presents the actual polity of the opposition of Arab and Jew in an idealized relation between moral and juridical selves that can only favor the former over the latter.

The story traces an allegory in which the protagonist's failure of identity is overcome through his exploration of a division — of Arab and Jew — within his experience of himself, by his acknowledgment of an absolute otherness in regard to which the self must measure its authenticity. This absolute is then distinguished from the merely relative otherness with which one ("we") must and can live in a condition of mutual understanding against the absolute other.

This resolution begs two questions: (1) on whose terms, and with whose sense of problem is the problematic self authorized to discover and convey the truth of its history? (2) How can it know that history as its own and as true?

The tendency to resolve the ambiguity of the self is mediated within and enforced by a political reality that defies compassion and a social reality that defies compassion, and by a social unity that appears as virtually neutral, as prior to politics.

Kaniuk narrates a dilemma of self recognition that virtually exhausts the spirit. His novel, like its protagonist, ultimately falls victim to its own circumstances. It memorializes valor — 'honesty' — at the cost of the memory of

the dilemma at the light of which valor was possible in the first place. Whatever success the protagonist has in confronting what, in his dual identity, he represents to Jewish Israelis is betrayed by his failure to recognize what compels someone like him to confront identity as a problem in the first place.

Thus, a self divided against itself becomes allegorically complete, as if returning to an original wholeness the initial departure from which is then only an error or accidental. This is in one respect analogous to the Zionist illusion of a final Israel. But, perhaps more importantly, this recovery of origins at the expense of history is the only way in which selfhood can be achieved within the Jewish culture of contemporary Israel. This is why the allegory is poignant and not merely a sham.

How then does it operate? The allegory is the undertext, or the telos, of a series of narratives. The relationship between this undertext and the narratives is revealed in many ways throughout the book. But it is presented immediately as a problem by two otherwise curious devices: its title which combines the pathos of confusion with the savage irony of racial slur, and the adoption of an Arab-like pseudonym, Sherara, by the Jewish author.

The book is, then, even before it is read as a novel, allegorical. It manifests in its two most object-like traits, title and authorship, an underlying contradiction between the culturally idealist conditions of recognizing the other and the relatively practical conditions of self- recognition. In this way, the object-book sets the stage for the novel-text to address a key issue for the Israeli liberal conscience in regard to the 'Arab-Jewish question:' how can one be both Zionist and moral in the

existential, self-reflective sense of the term?

Despite the author's desire to confront and overcome the essentialisms of self and other in the midst of their deployment within the essentialist politics of contemporary Israel, the novel fails internally to fulfill its project. It lacks what it most requires, namely an acknowledgment of this particular constitution of self and other. Yet it is clear that Kaniuk has made a serious attempt to explicate a point of view that, at least arguably, can be recognized, not merely acknowledged, as the other's. To the extent to which the other of the novel resembles the other that is "the Arab," the self-sufficient Arab, Kaniuk can be said to have succeeded. However, it is not possible to demonstrate such a resemblance; nor could even such a demonstration guarantee that the "real" Arab could be described beyond the semblance, therefore neutrally, and then be held up as a whole, without the limitations of perspective, as a test of the fictional image of the "recognizable" other. Therefore, one must still ask how the Arab is constructed by the novel as one that a Jew can claim to recognize as a subject, and what is involved even in so limited a recognition.

Clearly, the recognition of another as subject requires, at least momentarily, experiencing the self as object. But the problem of recognition itself emerges in a context that precludes tolerance for such a turning of the tables: self, other, and mutuality appear in the way they do only for subjectivity that can know no alternative to itself. This, at least, is what I hope to show — that the possibility of a subjectively valid recognition is caught in the same predicament as the failure or inability to recognize; and, therefore, that this novel could have succeeded only by turning against the Zionist subjectivity which it had hoped to reform and, by

reforming, conserve.

For the tables to have been turned, the Jew in Kaniuk's self-divided protagonist, would have to constitute an experience of self as an instance of otherness. It would have to found, at least momentarily, the terror of lapsed subjectivity, a helplessness of the self in the face of total definition from without. Only then, in the midst of its own hostile objectification, could a self find the possibility of self-criticism. In that case, it would re-emerge as a full subjectivity on the side of its former other, the Arab, and therefore against the Zionist ideological emphasis of difference and exclusion. What Kaniuk intended as a reform of the self could only have succeeded, in a reform greater than mere self-affirmation, if it could have become radical vis-a-vis its own presuppositions. It would have come to know as itself what it had once taken for its enemy. Therefore, it would have recognized the other in regard to a history of its own to deny that other's subjectivity. This would also be a history of a defense against self-recognition, therefore of the reasons for and contradictions of such a defense. Thus, as a matter of principle, defense against a possible reversal of fortune reveals the inherent instability of a self made definite as an identity only by its rejection of an other.

As I hope to show, Confessions of a Good Arab, nevertheless challenges Zionism from within by insisting on questioning the principle by which only Jewish Israeli Subjectivity is included in the moral universe claimed as the basis for Israeli society. It suggests that exclusionism is inconsistent with the universalism claimed by Zionism in the light of the Holocaust as justification for the inherent morality of the Jewish experience, and requires an untoward suppression of any

attempt to expand the moral universe to include those defined as other. This suggestion, implicit in the novel, that Zionism has not lived up to its own meta-ethics allows us to read Confessions of A Good Arab, as posing as poignantly as possible the question of whether or not Judaism can survive Zionism. The problem is that the poignancy of this implicit critique is only an instant in a system of thought determined to protect itself from any and all moral challenges. Thus, the novel's critique is only momentarily unsettling; in the aftermath of reading it, the reader finds herself in the same position she was in before the dilemma was posed. The novel's bad faith lies in its cancellation of the very self-critique that it introduces as the object of its project. But it is a bad faith within the project itself, not that of the author alone. Reform within any exclusionist formation can only end by setting conditions of inclusion that reaffirm exclusion.

* * *

The Hebrew edition of Yoram Kaniuk's novel Confessions of a Good Arab, was published in 1984, under the pseudonym, Yosef Sherara. This curious *nom de plume* is composed of Hebrew and Arabic elements in an altogether awkward amalgam. It is a pseudonym; but, because of its elements and their combination it is an impossible name. The novel's Hebrew title is Aravi Tov, meaning, "a good Arab." The Hebrew title of the book ends with a comma, the full phrase provocatively incomplete: "A Good Arab,".¹ The comma

¹Yosef Sherara, A Good Arab. (Tel Aviv: Kineret Publishers, 1984). The English translation of the book: Confessions of a Good Arab A Novel by Yoram Kaniuk, trans. by Dalia Bilu (London: Peter Halban Publishers LTD, 1987). Because of significant discrepancies between the Hebrew and the English versions and as part of my argument itself, I had to attempt my own translation wherever I found it necessary. Translations of all other Hebrew materials are mine.

provocatively signifies the Hebrew colloquialism, "A good Arab is a dead Arab."

According to the narrator, A Good Arab is a confessional narrative in the first person: "The words I am sending to the reader are supposed to be a confession, probably a partial autobiography..." (Heb.: 5.; Eng.: 2).² Its principle, what motivates the book (text plus title, plus "author"), is the desire to create suspicion on the part of the reader — suspicion about identity in general. This is done first by coupling the uncertainty of authorship (of the book) with the ambiguity of the narrator's identity (in the text). Suspicion is also created through a constant ironical subversion of action. For example:

"If they finally catch up with me and somebody decides, in spite of everything, to settle accounts with me, I'll laugh. I've come to the end of my tears, and of my fears too. If I weren't the victim of the executioner who was my own self, I would have written an amusing farce" (Heb.: 6.; Eng.: 2).

The accumulation of such instances of ironical alienation reverses the usual moral order of agenda and content. The imagination of the act is more important than the act and, as a result, what might have been a morality or a politics is finally established as an untrustworthy consciousness; but it is threatening. Our capacity to identify with so picaresque a character lies in the fact that his critique of "us" is one in which he does not believe. It is one that can be entertained without having to be thought through or lived. We will see finally, that the truly, recognizably, "good Arab" is the Arab as such, and not one in particular. Therefore the "good Arab" is only a possibility never actualized. The Arab is good only when he or she is no one

²This will be the format of all references to the Hebrew and English texts of A Good Arab.

in particular, is beyond situations, lacks politics, is without vitality or even life. With neither agenda nor the capacity to respond to situations, with neither memory (connected speech, discourse) nor practice (connected activities), the essential Arab becomes the truly dead, objectified, Arab of the occupation. As a practical matter, the good Arab can only be for another; therefore he or she can only exist institutionally, as an abstraction of law and its sanctions. In this case, the reform offered by Kaniuk can only be something between pity and compassion, an abstract acceptance and a momentary indulgence in sentiment for a victim of an unacknowledgeable perpetrator.

The novel recounts the life of an Arab Jew, Yosef, who was born in Paris in 1950.³ His father was a Palestinian Arab born in 1904, in the town of Acre. His Jewish mother was born in Berlin, in 1930. The plot opens in the Kassit Cafe in Tel Aviv, apparently in late Autumn of 1971, and moves back to the First World War, when Franz Rosenzweig (born in 1895) met Azouri Sherara on the Haifa seashore at the foot of Mt. Carmel. Sherara, a Christian Palestinian Arab, was then 13 years old. An immediate bond of love is established which they would not admit to each other, and which would eventually come to muddle their lives. Azouri marries Franz's daughter, Hava, and they have a son, Yosef, who is the novel's protagonist.

Yosef graduated from art school in 1971. He had just ended an intimate relationship with Dina which had continued from their early adolescence. Dina, a young and renowned Jewish poet living in Tel Aviv, was the daughter of Holocaust

³The author does not provide dates and is meticulously chaotic regarding his characters' age, biography, or history. Therefore, all birth dates, and 'the time' of other 'historical' events are extrapolated from the text.

survivors. Yosef occasionally sleeps with Laila, an Arab woman who lives in Haifa. His friends are for the most part derelicts, or "bums," who hang out in the disreputable Cafe Kassit. Frustrated by his rejection for military service, because his father was an Arab, Yosef goes to work for the Mossad. His rejection by the army confronts him with a problem he never knew he had, the lack of a clear identity. Instead of being an Israeli of mixed parentage, he is suddenly and dizzyingly reconstituted as an Arab claiming to be a Jew. For a Jew there can be no separation of self from citizenship; from the standpoint of the Jew, the Israeli Arab self is by definition separate from Israeli society; though subject to the law, he cannot be moral, only obedient. Therefore he owns none of the moral entitlements of society's history.

Yosef is a Jewish Arab who becomes both Jew and Arab and therefore can not be a Jew. Indeed, Yosef discovers himself as a purely negative identity, the non-Jew. This is his problem: an ambiguity of essence comes to infect his subjective life, determine the prospects of his freedom, and define him for the Israeli Jewish reader not so much as a character but as a utopian field of moral dialogue. The novel's ethical project is to create the opportunity for compassion of Jews for Arabs by guiding the reader toward an identification with the duality of Yosef's self. In this identification the Israeli Jewish reader can ostensibly experience an "Arab" anxiety as if it were her own, and "Arab" needs, desires, and even suffering.

Yosef still loves Dina, but persuades her to marry Rammy, whom Yosef considers his Jewish "double". After that, Yosef resigns from the Mossad and

leaves Israel to work for the Palestinian "Organizations" in a civil war-torn Beirut, though we are never told what, if anything, he does. Yosef's work for the Mossad involved telepathy. Thus, he had no physical contact with "enemy agents", nor apparently any access to "secrets." His work for the Mossad involved "forecasting", and recording his "forecasts" on tape.

For the Palestinian "Organizations," he does some translations. He is as uncomfortable working for the "Organizations" as he had been working for the Mossad. For whatever reason, he comes to believe that he has been "burnt," first by the Mossad and later by the Palestinians, that he must flee from both the Israelis and the Palestinians. The true reason for so impossible a flight is never altogether clear to the reader. It is one of many unsolved mysteries in A Good Arab.

Yosef finally arrives in the city of his birth, Paris, where he finds a safe place to hide. From there, in Autumn, 1982, he sends his manuscript, presumably written while he was on the move, to a publisher in Tel Aviv. This manuscript is entitled A Good Arab.

Yosef's name, his lineage, his liaisons, his adventures, and his manuscript — are filled with mystery, and laden with a sense of failure. Falling between categories, without clear location, Yosef is a slippery character, a special kind of monster — demographically one of "us" yet not of any community. He is inside and outside at the same time. His always modest ironical critique of the relationship between Arab and Jew is unthreatening, but the definiteness of his marginality makes him, as a fictional character, a dangerous concept. The reader can identify with him only in the abstract; all that is concrete in this intimacy of Arab and Jew is, as we shall see, suppressed.

Yosef embodies a self-alienation with which the reader is encouraged concretely to identify and upon which to reflect, as at a distance. In this way, the reader can experience a fall and then salvation through a final ironically claiming resolution of difference. However, as we will see, this salvation is, under the circumstances, an event external to the novel: only the reader can live it; and therefore, it can only be lived after reading. Yosef himself is fallen, condemned, at the moment of his conception — by his parents, by the author, and at the moment of the first knowledge the reader has of him. We will discover also that he provides an opportunity for redemption, therefore grace, for the Israeli Jewish reader that is not available to the Arab. The novel inserts "the Arab" into Yosef's subjectivity only to deny "Arabness" as a form of life beyond its category.

The date of the novel's publication is crucial for understanding the uproar it caused in Israeli literary circles, in the media, and among the public at large. During the Spring of 1984, Israel was still in control of the greater part of Southern Lebanon, including the cities of Tyre and Sidon. Its invasion of Lebanon, in June of 1982, had led to a momentary collapse of consensus about the Palestinian issue. The invasion was termed Israel's first "war of choice," a characterization in sharp contrast with previous wars that were regarded as "wars of no alternative."

It should be noted that the Peace Now movement was established soon after the right wing Likud coalition took office in 1977, displacing for the first time Labor and the other left of center partners. But it was also the opportunity the 'left' had to argue that the stagnation of the "peace process" could no longer be thought of solely as due to "Palestinian intransigence," and instead must be seen as the work of the "extremists" of "right wing Zionism," including some of the same

religious parties that had once been Labor's own partners.⁴

From the pace of Kaniuk's literary production, one must assume that he wrote A Good Arab during 1983. By then, there was considerable opposition in Israel against the invasion of Lebanon, and many Zionist ideological tenets had as a result lost at least a modicum of legitimacy among Jewish Israelis. Nevertheless, the fundamental principles of Zionism still held sway across the political spectrum, or what is otherwise termed "the Zionist consensus" from which only the Communists and the Israeli Arabs were and remain excluded.

It is in this context that Yoram Kaniuk disguises himself, presenting his novel as if its author were Arab.⁵ Given the circumstances, such a decision to use a pseudonym might have been reasonable for at least two reasons: the desire of the author to protect his reputation in anticipation of controversy, and/or his desire to protect the novel from the possibility that readers would doubt that a Jew could write from an Arab's point of view. On the other hand, Kaniuk might be understood as having intended the pseudonym to qualify the text, to be part of its project. I will try and show that the use of "Yosef Sherara" as the author's name is a vital aspect of the text itself, as mediating the process of reading and as qualifying content.

Even before its author's actual name was revealed, A Good Arab had

⁴ See, for example: *Amos Oz, Poh va-sham be-Eretz-Yisrae'el bi-setav 1982 (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Ofakim Am Oved, 1983). In English: In the Land of Israel (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, inc. 1983). Also, The Slopes of Lebanon Essays and Articles (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1987). [Recently published in English by Vintage International]].

⁵Yoram Kaniuk, "I am Yosef Sherara." Maariv Sofshavua (weekly supplement magazine) 6 August 1984, 27.

become a media event. It was not, however, universally acclaimed. For example, Heda Boshes, a Haaretz cultural affairs commentator, stated that

The great curiosity regarding the true identity of the mysterious author cannot yet turn this novel into a meaningful document, nor assign it literary value. The current comparisons with Emile Az'ar and B. Traven belong, at best, in the gossip columns...

She added that

Literary criticism welcomed the novel with one of its most enthusiastic outbursts, and considered it an original "discovery". Perhaps it is the law of 'guilt' that operates here: it is much more comfortable to challenge literature than reality....⁶

Whatever the agenda of its critics, the novel was often taken to task for what appeared to some to be its peculiar and overwhelming display of "style." But the exaggeration of the distinction between "style" and "content" implicit in this criticism may have been itself a way to neutralize the danger the book posed for Zionism's attempt to manage Israeli Jewish culture in the interest of its interpretation of Jewish history. This danger was recognized by some critics. For example, after condemning what she saw as mere tricks and idiosyncrasies, Michal Sela attributed the initial reception of A Good Arab to the fact that

it brings up again a problem that is at the center of the political and social debate here, in the country — although at times only implicitly. It is the story of an Israeli of 'mixed marriage' (what an irony. A people of Holocaust survivors is pondering all sorts of mixed marriages!).... This novel has, however, an additional aspect: an ironic criticism of Israeli society's ways of thinking, pardon — Jewish society — in Israel, regarding the entire set of relationships with Arabs.⁷

⁶Heda Boshes, "Incest As A Problem," review of A Good Arab by Yoram Kaniuk. In Haaretz, 25 May 1984, 12.

Yet this account separates the "problem" from the experience of which it is part. Perhaps this tendency of so many critics to neutralize the novel's moral impact led Amnon Navot to claim that A Good Arab conveys meanings not easily reduced to propositions and argument:

from any point of view A Good Arab is an exceptional work: not only in various poetic aspects, but also, and mainly, in terms of its materia [content]: meaningful engagement with "border line" materia which are outside of the routine and customary consensus of contemporary Hebrew fiction, and outside of the real and imaginary area of the familiar 'topical canon'.⁸ The degree of success and failure, though, in this case is secondary when compared with the breakthrough of an Israeli canonical writer into textures and materials that were never in the consciousness and conceptual vocabulary of contemporary Hebrew fiction. We have here a singular and impressive challenge with the problematic of a threshold sensitivity issue.⁹

Navot concluded that A Good Arab is notable for its "excellent artistic and literary quality," and its exposure of "an existential friction in Israeli society felt in the dimmest layers of reality involving two peoples" in a single nation. At the same time, he criticized the author for not having controlled the ambivalent and

⁷ Michal Sela, "I Am An Israeli Too." review of A Good Arab by Yoram Kaniuk. In Yediot Aharonot, 1 June 1984.

⁸ As Navot says in his essay, he was among those critics who, a short while before Kaniuk's public announcement, identified the writer by the novel's style and language. This process, then, began to bear on Kaniuk, finally forcing him publicly to admit his deception. See Amnon Navot, "Shedding Light On The Consciousness Of The Other," review of A Good Arab by Yoram Kaniuk. In Maariv, 29 June 1984, 43. (Also, Sela, 1984).

⁹ Navot, 1984, 43.

sensationalist aspects of his novel, for making "a priori automatic assumptions" ¹⁰ in what Navot calls "the external layer" ¹¹ of the novel, and for failing finally to shed light on "the consciousness of the Other." The This lies, in Navot's view, in Kaniuk's failure to have provided alternative consciousnesses or perspectives. But this view of the novel as monologue is at the expense of seeing it as a radically ironical, self-critical, text. For Navot, Kaniuk's choice of point of view, that of a "first person confession," provided "a great deal of credibility." But the "attachment to a single consciousness narrowed down its perspective and reduced the scope of its prism."

Thus, Navot concludes that, though the novel touches on "controversial and traumatic aspects of our existence," it ultimately fails to make "us" sufficiently self-conscious. But this is a failure of Israeli literature itself, not merely of Kaniuk. Admitting this, Navot ends with a question: "What is the element that is lacking in Hebrew literature in order for it to make a conscious and wide breakthrough toward new and all inclusive textures?"

While it may seem that Navot leaves the question unresolved, in fact, his analysis suggests that he has an answer. Apparently drawing on Bakhtin's distinction between monologic and dialogic discourse, a single voice and the intrinsically self-critical mixture of voices that constitutes a moral/political

¹⁰Navot mentions, Rammy's (Yosef's Jewish "double") need, as it were, to be serving in a paratroopers' unit as an example for such "an a priori" assumption by Kaniuk; or Dina's being a cadet in women officers' training.

¹¹I assume that Navot is using the term "external layer" in contrast with his designation of "materia," which he perceives as substantive content ; meaning these materials that are not sensational.

subjectivity, Navot compares A Good Arab, to Faulkner's Light in August.

When Faulkner was seeking to make a general statement regarding the tragic dilemma of 'black' and 'white' by means of "black on white" (Joe Christmas is a hybrid), he did not cling to one consciousness, nor even to one dominant consciousness but as the case might be, to many consciousnesses which in their accumulation formed the internal tragedy that evolves out of negro and white existence in a violent and shattering milieu.

On the other hand, Navot argues that

the private tragedy in A Good Arab, is not illustrated by, and not connected to other consciousnesses. Those could have provided a broad and many-faceted framework in which the private predicament of the novel's protagonist could acquire a proper frame (Navot, 1984).

But a multiplicity of consciousnesses can as easily merely add perspectives or force them into convenient synthesis as lead to a discovery of their internal connections. The appearance of objectivity in Faulkner lies, for Navot, in a kind of journalistic summing of differences, one voice, then another. Such a process could leave the reader, the final agent of such a summation, untouched by any particular voice or, if so, touched in a way that creates an impersonal distance from all experience. What gives Kaniuk's novel its force is its irony, not its "objectivity" or inclusiveness as such. If it fails, A Good Arab, will have had a higher aim than objectivity, namely to negate distance so that the reader him or herself may hear and speak with a different voice. In this, Kaniuk succeeded. The novel's failure lies in the way in which the novel enforces a prior hierarchy of voices, which I want to show is a failure of the national literature and its culture.

All literature operates in a context. This is certainly the case with literature in Israel. What in my view is powerful if not unique in Israel is the way in which

its literature manifests an interpenetration of morality, politics, identity, and history. This provides an unusual connection of what otherwise would be seen merely as a minority phenomenon, "high culture," to the interest of the community in its own solidarity. This is why debate within and about Israeli literature so easily revolves around the question of a policing of boundaries.

I wish to show how this policing becomes part of the literature itself. For this, Kaniuk's novel serves as a case and my investigation is exploratory. Despite the profound unease caused by A Good Arab, among its Jewish Israeli readers, its images, representations, and narratives display the constraints of an unusually dominant ideology, Zionism, that defeat the novel's moral purpose. It is these internal constraints that I believe lie behind the general inability of Israeli Jewish culture to acknowledge the Arab in an authentic self-critical act of recognition and self-recognition.

The inability to escape so exclusionist an ideology as Zionism resembles the predicament of writers in all of what are called "colonial settlers' states," for example in Algeria before its independence.¹² I will examine Zionism as an instance of this, and explore some characteristic ways in which Israeli writers find themselves, and readers find their texts, submerged in its cultural field.

It is necessary, first, to put this study and its hypothesis in the context of another way of looking at literature, in terms of technique and idea. From this point of view, the failure of a novel is, in one way or another, the author's failure. This

¹²Edward Said, "Narrative, Geography and Interpretation." New Left Review 180, (March 1990): 81-97. For the concept 'Colonial-settler State' as it pertains to Israel, see: Maxime Rodinson, Israel A Colonial-Settler State? (New York: Monad Press, distributed by Pathfinder Press, 1973).

emphasis on the relationship among author, form, and content, yields different results from my emphasis on text, context, and reading. The first attempts to isolate literature and then purge it of ideology and politics. My approach looks at a literary text through the prism of politics. In the Israeli case, context cannot be and is not avoided. However, I see context as playing a constitutive role in literary or cultural production rather than operating as conditions of meaning. It seems to me that the latter can not show how a given text is an instance of history.

If we take this denial of history to be symptomatically intentional, we can ask what this intention is and how it is reflected in critical commentary. Without arguing the point further, the emphasis on author, form, and content evades the connection of meaning to experience, therefore the relevance of culture to society. The dilemma of Israeli criticism is that it cannot acknowledge the problem "Arabness" poses for Zionism without undermining Zionism; therefore it tends to evade the problem even where it is found, in order to police the boundaries of the Jewish state and Zionist exclusivist consciousness.

But a Jewish people is conceivable, like any other, only on cultural grounds, as an intentional collectivity whose history can not be separated from the play of differences that determine its "voices" and the limitations of those consciousnesses that speak in the form of voice. To admit this is to admit context and ideology to analysis and interpretation.

On the other hand, there are several criticisms of Kaniuk from which I wish to distinguish my own, criticisms that seem to ignore the tropes by which literary texts like Kaniuk's imbue themselves with morality and politics, and beg the question of how Israeli Hebrew literary texts attempt to challenge, and whether they

can succeed in challenging, the constraining power of Zionist ideology.

Some critics have argued that A Good Arab, only appears, because of the pseudonym, to be a novel written from the point of view of "the Arab," that Kaniuk has disguised his own ethnicity in order to avoid the obvious rejoinder that a novel by a Jew cannot in principle represent an Arab point of view. In some sense this is probably true. But this criticism is relevant here not so much because of its conclusion as for how it analyzes the text in order to prove its point. It tends to point to instances of what the critic takes to be sloppy language and stereotypes, technical failures considered as unintentional and therefore as evidence that the author's pseudonym was contrived to convince his audience of something he could not otherwise do.¹³ However, what appear to be sloppiness and stereotyping are better understood as strategies of the text. This is valid only if the book is taken in context so that its ironies can appear and so that it is possible to appreciate what is critical about it. The apparent arbitrariness of syntax, the curious spacing of words on pages, the abruptness with which sentences begin and end, as if wrenched from their own context and later allowed to proceed according to a different logic from that with which they began, are not themselves symptomatic weaknesses. They are, as I will try and show, deliberate reflections within language on the foibles of language and the subtle controls it exercises on consciousness (Heb.: 123).¹⁴

¹³Boshes, Sela (see above). Anton Shammas, "What About The Comma," review of A Good Arab, by Yoram Kaniuk. In Kol Hair, 5 May 1984. P. Alef, "On The Road to Despair," review of A Good Arab, by Yoram Kaniuk. In Zo-Haderkh, 22 August 1984. Lea Dovev, "A Good Arab, Unreasonable," review of A Good Arab, by Yoram Kaniuk. In Kol Haifa, 24 August 1984.

¹⁴As in the Hebrew edition on p. 87; missing from the English version.

If this interpretation is correct, the syntax, spelling, and the rest are part of Kaniuk's attempt to build into his novel a Jewish self-criticism rather than merely expressions of prejudice. They can be seen within this greater irony to be part of the same irony on which Yosef reflects — that he lives in a society which demands constant affirmations of ethnic identity but which cannot abide the simultaneous claims of both of his ethnic identities. This is Kaniuk's critique of the moral limitations and paradoxes of Zionism's emphasis on the exclusivity of Jewish identity.

This is substantiated further by a poetics of dispersion that so swiftly outpaces the prospects of unity and reconciliation that it makes of such prospects at a least a joke and at most an embarrassment. Short, abrupt, detached, staccato-like sentences, oxymoronisms, and presentations of the characters of certain lines as if the lines were "crossing each other" in a non-linear pattern. For example, we read on page 9 of the Hebrew version (my emphasis),

She stood up again, dialed and shouted hahahaha, banged the phone, and returned to drink more champagne. *Rammy* was wearing a brown pullover which in the crossing light in the rain seemed violet, his hair looked as if it were burnt. The phone woke up *Hetzkel* who while sleeping said: we have stomach and grist soup lowered his head and waited for *Marcel*, his waiter, to answer the phone. *Nissan* said to *me*, everyone knows everyone else. Perhaps because I said that *he* looked familiar to me. *An old chase player* was sitting there which *Franz* and *I* used to meet at night and *who* would always ask about *Kathe*, and *Franz* used to say to *him*, there is no *Kathe*, *Kathe* kaput, and *the man* *who* *Franz* said was once a genius in mathematics used to cry for *her*. And then *Franz* used to look at *me*, how we were all crossing each other, *I* being the son of *that who* desired *Kathe* most and *Franz* felt the emptiness and *he* would embrace *me* with a totally defeated but arrogant look (Heb.: 7).¹⁵

¹⁵Missing from the English translation.

In the contradiction between the display of signs and their use, we see irony poised against itself, constituting a trope of self-reflection in which the ironical subject becomes itself the object of an irony. If this were all that the novel did, its value for the critique of moral and political discourse could not be denied. In A Good Arab, the Jewish self does indeed confront the other within the self; and this is indeed a confrontation that subverts language every bit as it disturbs moral complacency.

But, as I shall try to show, the real other, which is "the Arab," is finally suppressed. The suppression leaves an abstract morality of ungrounded self-doubt where one might have expected a far more catastrophic moment of recognition of self and other. But this criticism nevertheless sees Kaniuk as having carried the moral predicament of the biblical Israeli Jew to its very limits, beyond which the history of Israel and the history of "the Jewish people" must be thought apart from their traditional allegory, reinforced by Zionism, of self-realization, therefore apart from the mix of secular and theocratic elements that constitute the militarized statism of present day Israeli politics and Israeli Law.

Upon announcing his identity as the author of A Good Arab, in his weekly newspaper column, Yoram Kaniuk responded in an "open letter" to some of his critics' concerns. There he justified his writing and reflected critically upon it: "I have tried the method of camouflage: writing Arabic names as a Jew who had discovered his Arabness following graduation from Hebrew school; but it didn't work, and it aroused suspicion." ¹⁶

¹⁶Kaniuk, "I am Yosef Sherara." Arabic names in A Good Arab are misspelled in Hebrew, or are not possible as names. Yosef's father's first name

Regarding his choice of a name for the author-protagonist, Kaniuk said, somewhat curiously:

I erred badly in one thing. I called the author Yosef Sherara. I should have called him Yosef Galili. By giving the author a half Jewish and a half Arab name I sinned to myself and to Yosef. I had brought curiosity to its limit.... If I had signed the book with a Hebrew name I probably would have succeeded in remaining unknown for a long time.¹⁷

Is this all there was so far as Kaniuk is concerned? A matter of provoking a mystery about the identity of an author? Or is he saying that a name made up of incompatible parts must be seen as doing something semiotically powerful in its context, and that the misspellings inherent in misidentification or ambivalent identification are, after all, about identification? If so, his comments reinforce what I am suggesting is evident in any case in the text, situating it firmly within the context of the overriding moral predicament constituted politically as one aspect of the substance of Israeli Jewish culture.

Of course, Kaniuk's late apology can not be taken unequivocally as evidence of an underlying intention of the text itself, as an instruction to the reader. But that does not mean that it should have no bearing on our attempt to read the novel, or to read our own reading, or to read in regard to a context. Kaniuk's apology creates yet another textualization of the book in which he now emerges both as author and character, a duality with no clear lines of demarcation. We still

"Azouri", for example, is not a first name in Arabic; his last name, "Sherara", from the Arabic root Sha'ar, a spark, should be spelled Sharara, or a more proper form would be Sha'ara. For criticism of this aspect of the novel, see: Shammas, Sela, and Alef (above).

¹⁷Kaniuk, "I Am Yosef Sherara."

do not know the author's 'name.'¹⁸ By his letter, Kaniuk redoubles the text's effort to resist disclosing its own limitations and, of course, those of its culture.

One crucial question presented by the new text, novel plus apology, is what can be meant by declaring that someone who learns Arabic late will misspell, and by the peculiarities of writing that could only have escaped editing intentionally and that therefore must be recognized as part of writing and inscription? Clearly, inscription as well as conception have become objects of textualization. Kaniuk's statement about defects in learning must be read as ironical, since an apology for misspelling based on late learning is obviously an excuse for something else, especially in an area as sensitive to casualness and indifference as the representation of the other. Because it is transparent, it fails as an excuse, one might say ludicrously. Therefore, the failure must be read in quotation marks, as an ironical and self-critical notation about excusing and excuses, therefore about something inexpressible or incapable of being represented. The apology therefore provides a new and remarkable aspect of the book, its way of excusing bad faith such that it discloses the ease with which we fall into bad faith.

Rather than dispel the confusion of his critics, Kaniuk adds to it until there can be no further doubt that confusion is the deepest part of this remarkable text of self-doubt, self-defeat, and sacrifice. What appears as a lack of the author's skill is, in the text, a way of rendering a morally significant interior division of the self. The student from Hebrew school is said to have learned to disattend to the signs (names) of what Erving Goffman called "personal" identity, yet to use types of names adequately for them to serve as markers of "social" identity (Goffman,

¹⁸See the novel's Introduction (p. 1), first paragraph both in the Hebrew and the English versions.

1963). That is, this student sees a radical opposition of persons (named) and relationships (in part constituted by social types indicated by types of names). The Arab, either purely concrete or purely abstract, would appear in this program as an agent without principal or reason, and as an individual without context. Kaniuk's apology must be seen, then, as adding nothing to our interpretation of the novel, though our interpretation of the text must be responsive to its insertion in the book. The misspellings are then, not mistakes or indifference, but a show of indifference, and not merely to persons and names but to the language itself. In this way all that could be Arabic in the identity of "Arab" is systematically "spoiled".

Kaniuk is therefore holding bad faith up to the 'good face' of an Israeli consciousness that can find no room in its "goodness" for recognizing the subjectivity of its other, and therefore for discovering its own moral significance beyond the most immediate self-affirmation. Ultimately, as Kaniuk knows but cannot quite demonstrate, this other-denying Jewish self collapses, its morality exposed as pretence, its good will little more than the desire of the self further to congratulate itself for its tolerance, forbearance, and idealism.

But what makes Kaniuk's novel brilliant is its capacity to extend this moral dilemma, to draw it out agonizingly and in detail until the reader is on the verge of discovering it in him or herself — as a choice between a radical break with the racialism of Zionist morality, or a compliant acknowledgement of the dilemma in a text seen merely as literature. Kaniuk's failure is to have given the reader an easy way out within a text that initially promised no way out at all. Ultimately, Kaniuk's reader feels welcome in a world whose dilemmas determine but do not raise

questions about the moral high ground. By acknowledging Arab-Jewish relations as posing a dilemma of identity, the reader is restored to a utopian unity at the expense of both the other and the self. How does Kaniuk restore the reader's sense of self-righteousness, having demolished it at the outset? How does the ideological context of this self-critical Israeli Hebrew novel come to re-assert its dominion over the self-criticism it attempts to institute? We will see that the answer lies in a certain trick that his context plays on Kaniuk at the moment he begins to write.

To establish the basis of a liberal moral critique of Jewish-Arab affairs, it is necessary to begin with a politics of identity from which escape is impossible. The self-limiting framework of self and history is fixed from the outset. The desire of Israeli Jewish liberalism to go beyond Zionism is defeated by the inability of the liberal to admit the division signified by Arab and Jew within his or her own self. But this inability is enforced through a poetics of identity that is also a rhetoric of exclusion.

CHAPTER 3

DUAL IDENTITY: "TO BE MY OWN ENEMY"

Before the narrative begins, in the introduction Yosef presents himself as a symptom of a disease that encompasses the self. Since such a disorder can only be indicated, the best he can hope for is that others might learn about this condition.

I am speaking of a tax of grief because it is hard for me to experience regret since I was denied the possibility of being born someone else. Between two righteousnesses, in the midst of a tragedy from which I do not see a way out, I am not an accidental, insignificant victim; in my room I live alone, and my mirror is not scored by objective principles....

Nevertheless, Yosef puts himself beyond this condition, this betweenness, by reflecting on an aspiration that seems to be part of a different history, the history of literature and its eternal standards of value:

... Once, when I had read "An American Tragedy" by Dreiser I thought that perhaps one day I would be able to write An Israeli Tragedy; but on second thought, I'll leave it to someone else, more capable than myself.

In this elevated reflection on talent, Yosef's "second thought," already governed by a first autobiographical reflection on reading and writing, dissects his feeling of loneliness, drawing the reader analytically into a narrative paradoxically freed of tragedy, and into a perspective with which literature ultimately can not compete:

What came out is the flower of the wound. I'm not Dreiser, I look at the world from a perspective of a hostile person, screwed up, and wasted; that is why I am able to deride myself with such indifferent satisfaction....¹

Yosef's condition is now a limitation of writing, and a virtue. Rather than take the stance of a "metaphysical rebel," rather than confront his Israeli Hebrew readers with a flagrant and unavoidable Arabness, he writes in Hebrew. For those readers this invokes both an untoward intimacy, and prepares a foundation for pity, and through that the basis of a limited recognition of the Arab.

Because of my emotional handicap I am capable of writing this book only in Hebrew, my anger is bilingual; when I translate myself into myself I have to shoot the mirror rather than it shooting me (Heb.: 5-6; Eng.: 1-2).²

This appeal is insidious, far more devastating than a direct confrontation; for the abjectness Yosef expresses is a con. It insinuates a culture of stereotypes, including possibilities of pity and disgust, that define and confirm a corresponding and anti-tragic sense of righteousness. Thus, at the outset, Yosef displays his

¹ Paragraph missing from the English translation.

² A debate erupted in the aftermath of Anton Shammas' publication of his novel "Arabesques," in 1986. Anton Shammas is a Palestinian Arab citizen of Israel. His novel is a first person autobiographical narrative of a Palestinian Arab written originally in Hebrew. Shammas argued that he is a Palestinian Arab, member of the Israeli nation, writing in its national language — Hebrew. This follows his position that Israel should be "a democratic state of its citizens, rather than a Jewish state of the Jewish people." Anton Shammas, "Arabesques" (Am Oved Publishers & Michaelmark Books LTD, 1986). In English: Arabesques, trans. by Vivian Eden (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). For the debate, see Sammy Michael, "Arabesques haZionut ["The Arabesques of Zionism"] (Comments on the debate between A. B. Yehoshua and Anton Shammas)," Moznaim vol. 60, nos. 1-2 (July-August 1986): 10-17. Anton Shammas, "Milkhamti beTahanot Anshei haRuakh" ["My War Against the Intellectuals' Windmills"] Moznaim vol. 70, no. 3 (September 1986): 26-27. Yael Lotan, "Lismoakh veLo leHitaabel" ["Be happy Rather than Mourn"] Moznaim (same issue): 28-30.

duality as something outside of the reader's subjectivity. In other words, it can be recognized, but only clinically. The only empathy the reader can achieve is that of professional, a diagnostician. More is possible only when Yosef meditates on the Jewishness of his experience.

On the other hand, the Jewish reader can take the point of view of an Arab only in the context of the confluence of Arab and Jewish identities in a single character, and that is a point of view framed entirely by the Jewish conception of the perspective of an other. Kaniuk believes that the limitations of Zionism, its exclusionism, can only be breached by compassion. He hopes to inculcate compassion through the literary device of dual identity, on the assumption that the unavoidability of Arabness, by itself, is sufficient to establish it.

The dilemma that Yosef presents to a liberal Israeli Jew is how to be compassionate to one who seems to deserve at best only pity. The duality of Yosef's identity is, ultimately, what the novel provides as the only context for compassion, therefore the only opportunity for a Jewish entry to a Jewish-Arab dialogue.

Indeed, in his open letter, Kaniuk reveals something of this intention:

...I was so close to Yosef that I did not know who was I and who was he.... Because of my close identification with Yosef, the son of an Arab father and a Jewish mother, I went to Acre to look for Yosef's [my] father's house....³ I felt for Yosef, that the Jewish-Palestinian tragedy was slicing through his flesh...⁴ It was difficult to be Kaniuk while I was writing

³While the actual meaning is "the house of the father of Yosef," (a grammatic form frequent in the Bible), here, as I suggest, it implies a double meaning, namely, "my father's house" (Yosef's).

⁴Kaniuk (here obviously as the writer), defines the "tragedy" as "Jewish-Palestinian" rather than Israeli-Palestinian, or Zionist-Palestinian, thus utilizing a

about what it was like being a Jew of Jews.⁵

Yosef himself finds just the sort of language needed to complete the conversion of the Jewish reader of difference to a Jewish reader of unity:

No, I couldn't go into all kinds of explanation. I simply wanted to belong, to insert myself in the seam between the lonelineses, between the strangenesses, to find a hiding place in their tired ritual. I couldn't tell them about Franz or Azouri or Gertrude. I was frightened. I didn't want to confront their amazement. My old urge to be a sort of Rammy awoke. He was my idol long before I met him. His look divulged intelligence, friendship, pain, and power"(Heb.: 12; Eng.: 9).

The Arab finds his role model in the Jew, Rammy. It is the search for virtue that is compelling in this passage. The Arab longs to be a Jew, a moral being, and it is through this longing that the Jewish reader finds it possible to identify with the Arab. This is Kaniuk's predicament: if the Arab is to achieve a subjectivity capable of engaging the reader's capacity for identification, he must assert the moral vitality of Arabness. But he can only assert such vitality in the form of a desire to be not an Arab but a Jew. Moreover, if the Jewish reader is to be capable of compassion, he or she must recognize the Arab as morally vital in his own right, and acknowledge that vitality as a point of view from which the Jew must be judged. But, since the categories, Jew and Arab, are defined at the outset as exclusive, the Arab can only be morally vital from the perspective of the Jew, that is if he is Jewish. Given that exclusiveness, any other vitality could only be that of an enemy, for whom compassion would be impossible.

Zionist trope whereby the entire Jewish people becomes a (monolithic) partner to the conflict, and the Palestinian people an enemy of the Jewish people as such.

⁵Kaniuk, "I Am Yosef Sherara."

The failure of the novel, if it is a failure, lies not in its withdrawal from its own design, but in its initial premise. To begin with an absolute difference in order to teach compassion makes it impossible to teach the necessity of compassion. It is the Zionist presumption of absolute difference that leads to the Jewish part of Yosef's character being the only active moral agent possible.

There is another feature of the above passage that speaks to this paradox. Yosef says that he wants "to insert myself in the seam... to find a hiding place in their tired rituals." However, nothing reinvigorates a "tired ritual" more than such an insertion, if only because a "seam" is an area of tension, where contradictory impulses meet at the point of greatest strain. To aspire to insert himself in the seam is for Yosef already to have confronted that tension, already to have become the creature of an opposition. To insert himself at that precarious point of crisis is both to highlight it and to constitute yet another opposition — between an agent who inserts himself and a place of insertion that remains in equilibrium only on condition that it remain uninhabited.

Yosef cannot hide and he cannot run. His attempt to hide in the seam is his only possible strategy, but it cannot succeed any more than Kaniuk's choice of an Arab *nom de plume* can elude the antagonistic difference that he wishes, as a writer in the interest of compassion, at least momentarily to neutralize. Indeed, the effort to hide exposes even more the desire that motivates the attempt to hide. And it is, above all, desire beyond even the notion of fulfillment that is dramatized in A Good Arab.

This is the point of entry for the reader who is open to compassion. The moral persuasiveness of the novel depends on whether or not it supports the

identification of the reader with a desire to avoid — but not overcome — difference. I will argue that the novel fails to do the former because it fails to address the foundation of the difference in the first place; and that foundation is the confluence of an idea — Zionism — and a practice — conquest and exclusion. Thus, the unity achieved by avoiding difference is predicated on a military utopia that can not allow for genuine, self-critical compassion.

Kaniuk's method of giving moral subjectivity to his protagonist by ascribing to him two separate identities, only one of which is capable of such subjectivity, poses the moral question and then withdraws it. The Arab part is certainly available to the Jew who identifies with Yosef. But it is the part of Yosef's identity that is the Jewish part's problem. The Jew in Yosef is only occasionally a problem for the Arab, and never a moral problem.

In his 'confessions', Yosef is not satisfied with expressing his predicament. He perceives himself destined from birth to embody the Israeli-Palestinian 'condition'. This is something he cannot overcome. It is his contradictory, and therefore unstable, essence. He is in other words, more than experience: an instance of history but not of the making of history. In order to avoid the stereotype Jews have of the half of him that is Arab, he has to be the entire Israeli-Zionist ethos, with its opposition of Jew and Arab. When he defines his Arab aspect, he defines it as a Jew would. But this is difficult, since he must be able at the same time to claim the most important attributes required by that ethos of its subjects: i) a "credible" Israeli Jew must be a descendant of Holocaust survivors; ii) he or she must reflect the history of Zionist pioneering and heroism, particularly its emotional terror; iii) she or he must have served willingly and as a matter of

principle in the Israeli military.

It is no wonder that Yosef narrates these traits as if they are for him contradictory:

What remains is therefore my own irrational theory; I was there as potential. A good Arab is a dead Arab for Nissan and his friends. I had to be born so as not to grant Bunim and Nissan such liberty, but to understand them with the part of me that was supposed to be expropriated from the ordinary stereotyping, and to appear under the pronoun as "a descendant of Holocaust survivors,"

Here, following the comma in the last sentence, Yosef adds his version of the 'rational — "Franz was not a Holocaust survivor. He ran before it. But... the Judaism they forced on him with the yellow patch, made of him a refugee" (Heb.: 30; Eng.: 37-38).⁶

In these passages, Yosef draws a distinction that, for him, is necessary if he is at all to be eligible as a moral subject. Nissan and Bunim "and their friends" are Israeli Jewish nationalists. Yosef represents them as 'maximalists'. Bunim is an

⁶It will be impossible for me to provide a systematic review of the discrepancies in syntax, grammar, and punctuation, between the Hebrew version and the formal English translation of this book. However, this instance could serve as a proper reflection of the problem: "What remains is therefore my own irrational theory, I was there, in potential. I had to be born in order to spoil the stereotypes that made things so simple for Bunim and Nissan, and also to understand them with the part of me that comes under the stereotype of 'holocaust survivor'. Not that Franz was actually a holocaust survivor, he got out before it happened, but his humiliation when they expelled him from the hospital, the Judaism they forced on him in the shape of the yellow star, were enough to make him into a refugee." Among other things, it should be noted here that the term 'yellow patch' in Hebrew, in Israel, signifies humiliation. As such it works as a trope for the Zionist notion that European Jews in their powerlessness, meekly, had to wear a national symbol as a sign of their own humiliation. If later on (non-Zionist) Jewish historians termed it a 'yellow star', they, I believe, wanted to signify a defiance of this intended humiliation, but that is not in Kaniuk's text.

officer in the Mossad directly in charge of Yosef, and Nissan is an informer for the Mossad who "informed" on Yosef to Bunim. Thus, when Yosef says that "a good Arab is a dead Arab" is true for them, he implies a distinction between "them" and Israeli liberals, whom Yosef believes do not "expect" an Arab to be dead before he or she can be "good." What Yosef seems to mean is that, from the point of view of an Israeli Jewish liberal, if an Arab is good, he or she could at least be tolerated if not beloved.

It is clear to Yosef that "Israel was the necessary answer to the Holocaust, even if another people had to pay the price. "All around him" he says, "there were the parents of friends who came from there," and their stories of suffering affected him much more strongly than his friends who "wanted to be normal Israelis." The latter, he says, did not want "to think of *aktions*, of the dismantled skeletons sent by Eichmann to the Institute of Racial Research." He read all he could lay his hands on; he established a total identification with them; he received their suffering as his own, more than he could Azouri's. Parents of friends "were talking about the cruelty of Arabs in the '48 war, about slaughtering and tortures, about Jews' heads stuck up on poles."

Clearly, Yosef is trying to square the circle, and although his two identities may seem equally distorted, the distortions are not quite symmetrical. It is the half Arab in him that has to be neutralized or eradicated. As the "Exile" Jew did in the past, Yosef wants to appear more Jewish than the 'pure', undivided, Jew.

Azouri tried from time to time to tell his side of the story, but it seemed that he was not sure of himself anymore. He spoke of 'the expulsion.' He spoke of Jews 'assisting' in

the expulsion of Arabs, of 'Present Absentees,'⁷ of the disgrace of Deir Yassin,⁸ and of house arrests, beatings and tortures.

But Yosef "couldn't feel complete identification" with him:

I understood that he was speaking of pain, but the real pain which was avoided from Hava my mother on Franz's side, the pain and humiliation of a people that found itself in a world of locked doors, where everyone shuts their eyes and allows others to die in a slaughterhouse (Heb.: 123; Eng.: 176).

There is an analogous asymmetry in the language of the narrative. While the suffering and torture of Jews either under the Nazis, or in the "'48 War," are relayed by means of plastic, descriptive, concrete images, the suffering and torture of Palestinian-Arabs caused by Zionists or by Israeli Jews is presented in abstractly

⁷Israel's Knesset Protocols, Absentee Property Law, 1950. This law assigned the status of Abandoned Property to all movable and immovable property of Palestinian Arabs who had fled to the neighboring countries during the war and later extended its jurisdiction to include the property of Palestinians who were declared "present absentee" although they did not leave the country. These were people who were not "physically" present at home on May 15, 1948, the day the State of Israel was proclaimed. Land, houses, property, and all means of livelihood were put into a custodianship of the Custodian of Absentee Property, and were later confiscated by the state. This property was then leased, granted, or sold for a symbolic price to Jewish newcomers, farmers, town dwellers and kibbutzim. On that see: Sabri Jiryis, The Arabs in Israel (New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1976): 75-134. Ian Lustick, Arabs in the Jewish State Israel's Control of a National Minority (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980): 31, 59, 61.

⁸On April 9, 1948 a unit of the Irgun and Lehi para-military organizations attacked and captured the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin at the southern outskirts of Jerusalem, and slaughtered some 250 men women and children whose mutilated bodies were stuffed down into wells. The first Israeli account was published by Uri Milstein in the daily Ha'aretz 30 August 1968. See also, Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, O' Jerusalem, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972): 272-282. M. Begin, The Revolt, (New York: Dell Publishing Comp. 1977): 224-227. And, Jiryis, 1976 , 137-140.

neutralizing and general terms. Every Israeli Jewish school child, from the age of six, learns the history of the Holocaust. Thus, as a reader of Israeli Hebrew literature, every Jewish Israeli would be moved by the use of the German term *aktionen*. At the same time, he or she would remain indifferent to the use of such terms as "Present Absentee," or even "Deir Yassin." These are not mentioned in the Israeli Jewish school curriculum. Moreover, Israeli atrocities committed against Arabs are immunized against all moral judgment by the standard of the Holocaust.

Kaniuk writes that it was not the pain of which Azouri spoke, as Yosef says, but rather "the real pain..." of his mother Hava. In the final analysis, it is not pain compared with pain, but rather, "pain" with "real pain." Thus, Yosef recounts his feelings about Anne Frank: "I loved Anne Frank, I fell in love with her, I wanted to dream about her at night." And he writes of Azouri's reference to "pain that became abstract." What is meant by the fact that his grandfather, Franz, "was trying to balance" the experience of his own pain? Did Franz, too, tell stories of the suffering of the Jews? Did he say that it was not "all that bad?"

Franz was a second generation assimilated Jew who had converted to Zionism through the persuasion of a Palestinian Arab named Azouri. Franz had never quite fit the Zionist mold in Palestine despite his efforts to seek his "roots" there by collecting, on private archeological excursions, pieces of broken glass and terracotta. If that is the balancing of the concrete and the abstract of which Franz was capable, it is one more example of Kaniuk's irony. It is an asymmetry that mirrors that of Yosef's identity. In both cases balance is an illusion and a hopeless reflection of intractable dualities. Giora (one of Yosef's best Jewish friends) spoke with him "about the Macabbees, about the Palmach, about ha'

Shomer. I was proud of them. I was trapped by the myth," he says.⁹ Azouri knew that he was losing his son, Yosef, to an identity he could not share. But "it was part of the risk he took" in encouraging Yosef to assert himself in one way or the other, though he may have actually believed that, "in the end," Yosef would come back to him, and that Yosef "didn't have an alternative but to be burnt and then to choose for himself."

In fact, Yosef never chose for himself. He had to end up a "Jewish" refugee, an overdetermined result of an overdetermined cause. The identity he chose was already implicit in his duality. The only choice, given that, was the Jewish part. "The great and fearful justice was still on my side," says Yosef — meaning on his Jewish side. Thus, he reacted to Nachie's (Giora's father) participation in demonstrations against Arab dispossession, and, to Azouri's house arrest and beating, with the tragic but lame reflection of the absurdist:

but I said to myself, nobody is putting him in a gas truck; nobody has humiliated him completely; nobody closed any doors to him, the world was full with Arabs, full of Arab states; he had family relatives there; he was a son of the great Arab nation, one hundred million; he had somewhere to go. Nachie didn't. I identified with him, "the poor man's lamb." I didn't think of the absurdity of my situation...." (Heb.:122-123; Eng.: 175-176).

These are words most Israeli Jews would use. Again and again the "gas

⁹ 'Palmach', Hebrew abbr. for Storm Troops; name of Jewish para-military units established in 1941 in Palestine, nominally, to assist the British army in the defense against the approaching German assault which never materialized. In 1944, these units went underground and formed a commando force against the British and the Palestinian Arabs. These units distinguished themselves in the 1948-49 war and became legendary. 'ha'- Shomer', The Watchman (1909-1920), the first Jewish para-military organization in Palestine, served to protect life and property in the Jewish colonies, and was supported by the Zionist World Organization. The majority of its members, although not being of the same political party, were ardent nationalists and in many instances exerted violence.

truck" and the "complete humiliation" become the standards used to deny that Palestinian resistance could be justified as resistance to oppression. Thus, for Yosef to avail himself of this kind of self-negating rationalization is, as he says, an "absurdity." But like any absurdity, this too is unavoidable. It is, as he says, "My situation."

Within a single year, between when Yosef was ten and eleven years old, both his mother and grandmother died of extreme hysteria. His family, during the months prior to his mother's death, moved back and forth between Tel Aviv and Acre. Yosef was taken out of one school and put into another. It was, he says, a year "misty" in his memory. For a while, he went to a Christian school in Haifa. Apparently, during the same year, he attended the fifth grade of primary school in Tel Aviv where he wrote an essay about "drying the wilderness."¹⁰

I wrote about how we came to a desolate country. There were swamps all over. We were sick with malaria. We wanted to civilize the only country we ever had and of which we were robbed, the homeland no people attended to since we were exiled from it. I wrote about the wicked Arabs who came at night to burn the haystacks, about Mordechi Halperin,¹¹ about Bilu.¹² About the pioneers. I wrote a very florid essay, but the teacher wouldn't let me read it in class.¹³

When Yosef "read it to Azouri, he burst out laughing" that "I wanted to avenge

¹⁰This is a pun on "drying of the swamps", which is to this day a distinguished Zionist metonym. (Missing from the English translation).

¹¹A slightly changed name of an early Zionist fantast and eccentric (could be intended as another pun).

¹²Acronym for an incipient Zionist movement (early 1880's) ; initiated the first groups of Zionist immigrants to Palestine.

¹³This, of course, is Kaniuk's ironical reflection on Zionist indoctrination of little children in elementary school.

myself on the wicked Arabs. I said be-tu tu tu tu ha-Aravim yamutu.¹⁴ He said, Yahudi fil surmaya, which means Jews under my sole."

This exchange is said to "straighten the balance" — children on both sides cursing each other's nationality as if each curse carries the same sting. But in the same sentence, Yosef again finds balancing absurd, but only in its denial of the priority of Jewish suffering:

...as the Arabs used to say when the Turks revoked the foreign consulates' protection of Jews and let their blood in the First World War. Listen, I know this story in the fissures of my blood; I know it, and I'm sick of it.

The last sentence seems to be directed to the reader, not to Yosef's father; and it is clarified in the following passage from Yosef's "confessions:"

For two thousand years a country stood empty. There were Arabs but they did not have a Palestine. The Jews could have come but they didn't. The tragedy began the moment the Jews remembered too late, and the Arabs suddenly realized they were a separate nation. One nationalism fed the other. Justice belongs to God alone (Heb.: 123; Eng.: 176).

In what sense did the Jews remember "too late," and the Arabs "suddenly realize"? These too are only apparently symmetrical predicaments. But it is an appearance that shapes Yosef's sense of the Zionist-Palestinian "tragedy," one that denies historical significance to the Arab/Palestinian experience. Yosef's endorsement of this perspective is liberal and it is Jewish. In its self-deception, in its denial of what Yosef cannot help but be for others, it too is absurd.

¹⁴ Hebrew: "on the fifteenth (of the month) all Arabs will be dead." Azouri's response is in Arabic.

It is interesting that so many of Kaniuk's Jewish readers accepted Yosef's rationale for the suffering of the Palestinians. But the cost of doing so was a loss of the significance of Yosef's dual identity, and of Kaniuk's intention; for the context of that duality, Yosef's statement is absurd and must be read as an irony if the dual identity is not prematurely to dissolve into one. But Kaniuk could not in any case have succeeded in completing this particular irony. The literal reading of Yosef's rationale for Palestinian suffering is the only one possible given the way Kaniuk presents Yosef's identity: divided, hierarchical, exclusionist. Because of this, it is only too easy to read Yosef's sense of the "tragedy" in the context of Zionism's own declarations about the relation of Jew to Arab. Whatever Kaniuk intended, his novel reproduces the irrepressibility of the uncompassionate division it hoped to use in order to inculcate compassion. It is, finally, too much an instance of the trope it had hoped to challenge — the commensurability of sufferings.

Yet, Yosef's statement remains, for analysis if not for reading, absurd as a reflection on the duality that constitutes A Good Arab, what Kaniuk does not permit his Jewish readers. He allows only for the inclusive and elevated voice of analysis. Who can recognize, speak, the absurdity of a Jewish definition of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict as tragedy? If analysis has its own voice, it can only be outside of the Arab in regard to which the object of analysis — difference — has its concreteness as a lived reality and situation. If so, then it is altogether abstract, a mystical realization of a truth incapable, as a matter of practice, of communication.

If, on the other hand, it is Kaniuk himself that speaks of absurdity, one must ask who comprise his community? What capacity to appreciate absurdity allows Kaniuk to write and expect his writing to get a hearing? If the community

that can hear the voice is not the community of Zionists, to whom does he speak of absurdity? Either Kaniuk, if the voice of absurdity is indeed his, had no need to speak for the absurdist or he is doing little else than teaching those whose sensibility is irrelevant to the difference that is only absurdly portrayed as tragic. In other words, it is at this point that we see Kaniuk's novel lose itself to the context in which it can only be literature, and reconstitute itself as a voice of moral reason within the limitations of the particular culture.

The failure to begin with the basis of difference, the military unity within which the Arab is relative to the Jew an inessential subjectivity, marks Kaniuk's novel with its own tragic inability to avoid reproducing what it hoped to make no longer possible. What is left? Yosef's duality becomes intractable according to its own internal hierarchy; and, as we will see, it becomes the foundation for a new emancipation — not freedom from antagonism but rather from the obligation to recognize the Arab. The difference of Arab and Jew becomes the basis once again for Jewish self-recognition, not at all for compassion.

* * *

In 1963, when Yosef turned thirteen, he demanded that his grandfather, Franz, give him a bar-mitzva.

Friends and a few relatives came to the bar-mitzva. Azouri also came and stood at the side. I was called to read the portion of the Torah, and, in hindsight it was superfluous but necessary. The Rabbi taught me the Law and the concluding chapter from the Prophets. He didn't know a thing about me besides my name. The Office of the Interior had not yet compiled these black lists.¹⁵ The Rabbi didn't know that my father was an Arab, and even if he knew he could not refuse. From the point of view of Halacha, I was Jewish (Heb.: 122; Eng.: 174-175).¹⁶

¹⁵The lists of mixed marriages and children thereof, or "suspected" non-Halachic conversions to Judaism.

¹⁶Halacha, Jewish traditional law.

But only from a "point of view." Even his Bar-Mitzva dramatizes the asymmetry of Yosef's dual identity. Again, Kaniuk has been able to create the sense of a predicament, but only as a point of view. Kaniuk cannot expose the real, implacable, asymmetry that accounts for Yosef's sense that his "situation" is absurd because A Good Arab is predicated on it, and therefore on the premise that only a Jew can express and manifest moral agency.

Yet, Kaniuk pushes that premise to its limit. Yosef lives vividly and with an incredible ruthlessness of self-reflection through and against absurdity. He considers his father, Azouri, "responsible" for his being half Arab. Indeed, he rarely uses 'father,' but almost always speaks of 'Azouri', which is not an Arabic but a Hebrew name. Yosef blames Azouri for attempting to kill his mother in a battle during the '48 war, and for her death, later, in a car accident. His father seems to serve as a metaphor for Yosef's own absurd and unreliable life: Azouri is a mechanism rather than a character, there to move Yosef. Yosef rarely engages him as a subject.

And yet it happens once at a very critical moment, the death of Kathe, his grandmother. The family gathers under an old fig tree; in keeping with her wish, they scatter her ashes in Acre, at a spot chosen by Azouri. At the end of this emotional experience, Yosef's mother, Hava, "entered Azouri's arms and said" to him: "even if everything is already over, you're all I have; the only question is for how long." In retrospect, Yosef reflects on this moment: "I said to her,"

Mother, and what about me, and suddenly she looked at me with Kathe's eyes, trying to understand. She blinked her eyes, and I saw that she couldn't remember who I was. And

Azouri took me by the hand and said, look, have you ever seen a sunset like this anywhere else? ha? And he tried to smile, and Franz scattered more leaves to protect his beloved (Heb.: 115-116; Eng.: 164-165).

Here is what makes Yosef's sense of absurdity poignant — the fact that he cares for each part of what as a whole he finds absurd. It is this caring that makes his sense of absurdity compelling and not merely glib or analytical. This is the source of a desire that could have engaged the reader's capacity for identification, and therefore compassion, if that had not already been made impossible. Whatever possibility of identification exists, it is not connected with the duality of Yosef's identity, therefore with the telos of the text. Indeed, the latter has now become more an element of plot than a stage onto which Kaniuk can draw his reader and then teach him or her compassion.

Yosef feels that his mother never loved him. Perhaps, from his point view, she too is to blame that he was born half Arab; and perhaps in his hidden, unspoken, fears she has betrayed her own nation by having married an Arab. All these suspicions are implied in many different ways throughout the narrative. Yosef's grandmother was always alienated from him. She could not even identify him by name. He has an Arab aunt, "Aunt Khuri," whose relationship to him is mysterious. The only person who loves him, who recognizes him, who is close to him, and is concerned for him is his grandfather, Franz. But Franz was never a real Zionist. In a hidden corner of his being, he remained a Jew. He was an internationalist, and at times appeared even to be a ridiculous cosmopolitan. Yet, Yosef never uses the word 'Grandpa' or speaks of Franz as 'grandfather'. Perhaps he suspects that Franz's affection toward him was never quite honest, that it

stemmed from his greater love for his youthful lover, Azouri.

Yosef is sure of very little, but most sure of what he does not like. He cares; and because of that he reflects credibly on the absurdity of caring. Similarly, Kaniuk, the author with a different sort of dual identity, cares for Yosef and his divided self. But, as Yosef cannot redeem an identity adequate to being a self recognizing moral agent, so Kaniuk cannot redeem the Arab past of what he has created as the basis for compassion, except as a redemption that cannot bear the freedom and weightiness of moral agency. Yosef's life is based on missing the real point of his predicament. Kaniuk's authorial voice is based on missing the point of Yosef's missing the point.

* * *

The question is, then, who can identify with a character such as Yosef? And if identification is possible, with what does one identify? And if that identification can be said to occur, who could be its agent and what could be gained? We have seen that the reader does get caught up in Yosef's predicament, but that only the Jewish part of his identity can be the object of identification. Since the problem of identification was initially set by Kaniuk's desire to teach a recognition of the Arab, identification with the Jewish part can only leave the reader in a moral state of mind prior to any identification with Yosef as he is.

In this sense, for all its striving to mediate and make use of the difference of Arab and Jew, the novel is irrelevant to its project. But if the novel had succeeded in turning the tables, in imposing an Arab subjectivity on what was an exclusively Jewish province of moral agency, who would this enlightenment benefit? I have argued that this could only be analysis itself, therefore a "subjectivity" for which the problem of identification can only be of idle or professional concern, not at all a

critical matter of some urgency. In this case the novel can only be said to have produced a theoretical rather than a practical community of readers. Even if it could produce the latter, it would be a community for whom writing of such things, of the need for compassion, would in the face of the reality have been absurd.

There is a related problem having to do with the logic of dual identity. The personal foundation of Yosef's moral agency is Jewish. But what allows for the possibility of that agency is its antithesis, the Arab. Jewish compassion, like compassion in general, needs a greater object than that of any momentary expression. Thus, it requires that particular non-Jew for its object. But since compassion can only have its object in the form of its opposite, in this case the Jew, it can only hold to its own possibility by negating the Arab. In other words, Yosef can not choose one identity without affirming its negation of the other in terms of which that choice could only have been made. If he were to identify himself as Arab, there could be nothing about him with which to empathize. If on the other hand, he were to identify himself as a Jew, even if he could get away with it, there would be nothing about him that would need compassion. If he were to sustain his dual identity, it could still only be as one or the other in an alternation that neither Jew nor Arab could know. In other words, what Yosef truly is cannot be represented by anything that has to do with morality. Therefore, when Yosef speaks of his sickness, it is as one which resides in language itself, and because of that, within historical conditions which include the politics of moral thought and the inevitably "fictional truth" that comprise such thought.

Yosef's "emotional sickness" is not merely something suffered by an individual character. It is a literary reflection of the greater dilemma faced by the

Israeli Jew. The Jew can only act morally toward the Arab in the context of a recognition of the Arab as a moral being. This is impossible where the difference between Arab and Jew is, from the outset, represented as absolute. In that case, all that is possible is an acknowledgment of the Arab as a fact in contrast to a subject. For this logic, the morality of the Jew implies the amoral objectivity of the Arab. A Good Arab. exemplifies this even within its liberalist Zionist project; and by doing so it shows how Zionism operates culturally, predicating the full range of its morality on an absolute, hence militarized, difference. It is this predication that reappears, even at the end of Kaniuk's liberalist critique of Zionism, as an affirmation of the stratified order of that difference: the Jew as moral subject, the Arab as merely juridical subject. The Jew as the foundation of the Law, the Arab as the Law's object. The moment at which the Arab is acknowledged as the source of problems is the moment at which the Jew rediscovers his or her capacity to recognize, to confer identity, and to feel for the other, without having to subject one's self to that other's judgment.

As I argue in the previous chapter, contrary to Navot, Yoram Kaniuk had in fact found a way momentarily of transcending the absoluteness of the difference posed by the Arab to Zionism, and through that to the Jew. To the extent to which Yosef's duality succeeds in engulfing the Israeli Jewish reader, it succeeds in challenging Zionism's version of that difference. Where the narrative of that duality fails is at the point at which it needs the Arab's subjectivity as much as it needs the Jew's. By leaving the Arab as the object of Jewish moral subjectivity, it restores the reader to his or her originally presumed condition as the exclusive subject of moral reference and moral judgment. Each reader is able to be compassionate to

some extent; but no reader can experience community with an object of moral judgment, much less his or her subjection to the judgment of that object as before another, alternative, subjectivity.

Yosef endlessly resists the implications of his duality but fails to relieve himself or the reader of the force of those implications. Unlike his Jewish friends, Yosef is rejected by the Army. His credentials as a Jew were secure; yet, in his introduction to this episode he reiterates what one has to assume is his view of what are the most important characteristics of the Jewish self. There, he reminds us that in his mind he was the son of a Holocaust survivor.¹⁷ He explains that he was healthy and physically fit, that his average grade in school was ninety, that he majored in science and knew Hebrew, Arabic and French, that he could read and speak English, and that his German was passable. Yosef had read "the protocols of the Eichmann trials in the original." This was "when the desire to be Jewish was so strong" that he had invented a past for himself in which "Azouri was effaced": he had called him "Uncle Azouri." Because Acre was a 'mixed city,' Yosef avoided going there. In other words, so far as he was concerned, in all respects he was fit, as a Jew, to serve his obligatory time in the Israeli army; yet, "the call-up papers came, but none came for him."

With the help of Franz, and through the connections Giora's father, Nachie, had with some people in the army, an appointment was arranged for Yosef to

¹⁷ This means that here Yosef is assigning his mother, the daughter of a Jewish emigrant from Germany who left in 1936, the status of a 'descendant of Holocaust survivor', thus granting himself the status of a second generation descendant of a Holocaust survivor; and so every Jewish newborn of European descent after WWII could be regarded "descendant of Holocaust survivors;" which, from a Zionist point of view, is as important for its moral significance as is for traditional Jews being descendents of those who attended the Giving of the Tora at Mount Sinai.

appeal his rejection to a committee composed of three officers in charge of recruitment. In an excruciatingly humiliating interview, Yosef adamantly sticks to his argument that he "was a Jew and therefore he had to be drafted." One of the officers replies: "are you trying to tell me that you know better than me what you have to do? Maybe the army knows better?" Yosef looked at them and said:

I was born in the country, ¹⁸ I was born to a Jewish mother, my grandfather is a Holocaust survivor (here I added a title to Franz which he wouldn't exactly have dreamt of); by law I have to be drafted and you have to draft me.

The officer sitting on the right said, "as if he was squashing a mosquito and at the same time contemplating some profound philosophical theory,"

your father is an Arab called Azouri! He has been detained four times as a member of an anti-Zionist party. He worked for years on a research project that had caused great damage to the state. These are facts. Your father has relatives in Jordan, on the West Bank, in Lebanon....

Yosef admits these liabilities but argues that he has "another side," his mother's: "I am Yosef Rosenzweig, an Israeli, studying in an Israeli high school, ¹⁹ living here. Who gave you the right to deprive me of my duty." He continues:

The officer shouted, 'the privilege!' and I repeated, 'the duty', it's my duty. I could have been made into soup for the Germans if Azouri hadn't saved my grandfather.... I want to serve. I have no problems with my conscience.... If I want to serve that's because it is my duty.

The argument goes back and forth until the officer says

there are some Arabs (he almost said 'good Arabs' but he caught himself in time) serving in the IDF, but they are *Arabs* who serve in the IDF. You're not exactly that sort of an

¹⁸This is incorrect, Yosef was born in Paris, France.

¹⁹By this he means a Jewish high school.

Arab.... What exactly do you want?...

Yosef told him that if they called him, and if he had any fear, he could appeal; but who gave them the right to appeal for him?

One of the officers said, what gives me the right is that I'm a Jew fighting here for his homeland. That is a right. And me? I asked. He said with a little sneer in his voice, You? You? What are you, exactly?

Yosef realized that his struggle was already lost, and "under this officer's contemptuous eyes" he began "to gnash [his] teeth of an *Arabush*, of *Arab work*, of that of a good Arab is a dead Arab...." ²⁰ The other officer said, "don't you understand that you're not wanted, Yosef? It's nothing personal, this is a matter of significance! Why do you struggle to push in where you're not wanted?"

Yosef screamed, "don't you talk to me like that. My mother was as Jewish as you are. I am a Jew. I wanted to be one. I learned to be one. What do you mean 'you're not wanted'." And then the officer said "in words that hardly touched each other, what did your mother have to marry an Arab for?"

* * *

Yosef's desire is not so much to serve in the Israeli army as an Israeli citizen, Arab or Jew, but to be recognized as a Jew, and only as such to have the right to serve in the Israeli army. This is not a confrontation of a citizen with the state over civil rights, but rather one between an individual's desire to define himself as a moral subject and the absolute authority of the military to define all

²⁰ All demeaning colloquial terms used for Arabs in Israel.

individuals based on prior definitions. Yet, Yosef's desire to dissolve the duality of his identity into an authentic subjectivity is itself an expression of the legitimacy of his having been denied as a Jew. Yosef's own self justification is used against his claim to be a moral subject.

... The... officer yelled; I came here from 'there.' Boy, I had it stuffed into me. I walked between corpses and took shit out of dead men's backsides. They used to beat me. You won't teach me what reason is and what is the word. I do not want Arabs in my army. I am in charge of drafting soldiers and you won't fight anyone. You'll put your tail between your legs like all Arabs do and you'll curse; maybe you'll take a pot shot at me in the dark. I know your kind....

Once again, the Holocaust is the standard of morality and provides the only legitimate basis of recognition among moral subjects. The only thing left for Yosef to remember and learn is that he is only human to the extent to which he is not eligible for recognition as a subject. This is clear when he is told that his friends are

getting their call-up papers now. In less than a year they'll be soldiers. It would be better if you do not ask them too many questions; do not try to find out where they serve and what they're doing.... Try to learn how to be one of those who do not hear and do not see, okay?

That more even is at stake than recognition is made explicit to Yosef when the officer continues:

if the situation were reversed and your Arabs had won, you wouldn't have dared talking like that. You'd be hanging from a tree, with your feet up and your balls being picked, slowly. A friendly advice, he added. Do not ask questions. If you have any friends who fancy the idea of marrying Arab women, or the other way around, tell them that every lechery has its price. And then he yelled, who is next? (Heb.: 126-129; Eng.: 181-185).

For the officer, for what he symbolizes, Yosef is neither subject nor capable of

moral impulse. His otherness is complete and incorrigible.

To the best of my knowledge this is as close as any literary text has come to depicting the prevailing racism toward Arabs In Israel. It is, in the visceralness with which the soldier condemns Yosef, also close to acknowledging the subjectivity of the Arab. But because the acknowledgment is rhetorical rather than a matter of content, it leaves intact the Jewish Israeli perspective. It represents that other subjectivity as only possible, and as defined by anguish. For it, the Arab is acknowledged to the reader beyond the text as an object of pity. Yosef's duality permits the reader a moment of identificatory reflection, that in the next moment, gives way, in the pleasure of pity, to self-righteousness. It is, however, admittedly a pleasure tempered by the fire of a certain revelation that suggests, but only that, an Arab subject beyond this object of pity. Yosef's duality is not merely Jewishness contaminated by Arabness. It is Jewishness that has in it at least some of the pain, if not the knowledge, of the other. That it remains the pain of an other is a limitation of the novel as it is of the Jewish Israeli consciousness to which Kaniuk wishes to appeal. The externality of the difference between Arab and Jew remains in its fictional depiction as two sides of the same personality. The conflict is not one within a single soul, but between souls as separate in Yosef as they are in the militarized unity posited by Zionism's utopian vision of the Jewish experience.

As a result of his rejection by the military, Yosef prepares "to avenge himself on the Jews," though his method is, on the surface, paradoxical. First, on the level of social action, he goes to work "for Bunim", i.e. for the Israeli Mossad, becoming a 'shtinker' (Yiddish for 'stinker'), "spying on his own people." In this he flaunts the traits for which the military had rejected him. He becomes their Arab with a vengeance. On the personal level, in a liaison with a

lover, he does "what every Arab boy dreams of, to fuck a Jewish soldier, to fuck her uniform."

When I began to fuck her uniform she burst out laughing. But the laughter ended abruptly. I could see how and from what depths, depths I knew in my own soul, as if against her own will, she was forced to fight for something Jews had prayed for in their cellars; and suddenly she had to defend that bloody uniform, make it into more than it really was, and at the same time she hated herself that she fought for the uniform and was considerate to me. What's a uniform, she said afterwards; but at that moment, the uniform was a sort of symbol for the two thousand years with which they washed our brains in school... the two thousand years which were always used against me, against Azouri's son, not Hava's son on Franz's side, my grandfather. She didn't say that I was desecrating it, but after the short-lived laughter she started to fight back, to save her uniform from disgrace, perhaps to protect her father. She said: You just want to hurt me even when there is no need for it. I said all I was doing was fucking a uniform and what the hell is a uniform anyway, every army had uniforms and heroes, the Germans had uniforms and valor too. She said, but you had more in mind, I knew that that was what she would say. From the day she joined the army all I could think about was the day she would come home on leave and I would find, here in the room I had known for four years, a Jewish soldier, who would one day search my pockets in buses, enter the homes of Azouri's cousins in Sakhnin to hold the baby while they searched the house, the comrade-in-arms of people who would put the cousin in administrative detention or torture him with all the ingenuity at their command in order to justify those 'two thousand years'.

I said to her, for all your so-called liberation and left wing views, all you really want is to have a strong army, and she said yes, that's right, and I said, my nation is at war with my state and vice versa, and what am I? And she said you're my lover, but I am part of something, I belong to its genetic code, and I asked, to whom? Whom do you belong to besides me? And she wanted to answer but she knew that every word would be false so she didn't say.

... [A]nd even I wanted to respect that uniform because it was my mother's, Hava's, uniform too, and when I hurt her it was hurting myself where it hurts most I always envied Azouri for being a full Arab, free of the accursed blood of the Jews who in the name of their absolute justice forced me to be my own enemy.

... Afterwards she said... you probably enjoyed fucking my uniform more than fucking me.... [T]he light fell on my half-closed eyes and I couldn't resist saying, yes, your uniform was sexier! She said, that's what every Arab boy dreams of, fucking a Jewish soldier, fucking her uniform... I closed my eyes furiously, for a moment I wanted to hit her but then I had a thought, as if I actually went a few moments backwards and I knew that she was right... (Heb.: 96-98; Eng.:137-139).

This Passage provides another instance of Kaniuk at his most relentless. However, Israeli literary critics tended to trivialize such devastating revelations as too "controversial," "exceptional," "sensational," "traumatic," "opportunist," and "gimmicky." The point was to avoid by all means the politics implicit in Kaniuk's savage iconoclasm. In Iton 77, a well known liberal literary magazine in which one would have expected at least an acknowledgment of what Kaniuk was attempting in such passages, Neli Milo states that

In regard to such an intricate web [the novel] and in a forum for artistic discourse [her magazine], it would be a waste of time to deal with political implications, to deal with national identities or with self-identity rather than with the artistic work.

Milo concludes that Kaniuk's content limits appreciation of the art of his novel:

[The author's] engagement with traumatic materials which also have social and political implications hinders us from joining Yosef's conclusion that "perhaps this was all just one great joke." I prefer to join Yosef's opening words: "I wanted to weep, a story came out," to which I would add 'and almost a poem'. ²¹

Amnon Navot, who referred to such trying passages as "external layers", seems to have been similarly preoccupied primarily with damage control:

Exceptional cases like this call for a thorough examination. The 'materia' of an Arab having intercourse with a female cadet, confessing to himself... that he is actually having sex with the uniform's cloth and what this cloth represents, is equivocal. It echoes distress and estrangement, and even hostility toward the 'automatic symbols' of our existence in this

²¹Neli Milo, "Almost A Poem," review of A Good Arab. By Yoram Kaniuk. In Iton 77, no. 77 (September 1984), 51.

country. But in vignettes of this kind the author has failed by showing insufficient sensitivity to the possibly ambivalent and sensational aspects of the *materia*.²²

These comments provide evidence of how many important Israeli critics deny *A Good Arab* political significance by reducing its art to work that could only be foreign to society, by suggesting that the text fails to achieve moral profundity because of its selection of "materia," and that the failure lies exclusively with the author. It is as if these critics hoped further to control the tension included by Yosef's duality by constituting the author as identically — poet and vulgar politician. divided. This doubling of division effectively eliminates the perspective from which division itself can be criticized. These critics write Kaniuk as a dual identity of Artist (Jew) and Politician (Arab). This, in effect, adopts the same trope which Zionist ideology imposes as the site and limit of even a modicum of compassion. But where the novelist's failure was one dictated by culture, the critics' reflect only their own bad faith, a refusal to take the opportunity for moral reflection that Kaniuk provides even in the midst of his failure. This reveals one function criticism serves for Zionism, policing the reception of texts in regard to the need to make culture at all times explicit and therefore its instances fully accountable.

Yosef's humiliation occurs not only in the military recruiting station, where the Israeli Jewish liberal might sympathize with the Arab who has been denied his civil rights, but even in the most intimate situations. Yet, even in these, Kaniuk cannot help but undermine his own project by having Yosef constantly resort to self-pity, and, at the end of every moment of strength having him retreat to self-

²² Navot, 1984

bashing. For example, rather than relish his power in the act of "fucking" Dina's uniform, Yosef immediately falls back into the stereotypical role of one who needs sympathy, one who needs to be treated with virtue but has no virtues to offer others. He reconsiders his relationship with Dina, as predicated weakly on his own personal need rather than strongly on a mutual attraction in which he and his lover share subjectivity and therefore the capacity to engage one another in conflict and the exchange of power. Thus, he muses,

When I had been with her, perhaps because I was rejected, perhaps because of things that went much deeper which only Bunim knew how to set before me in simple and cruel formulas...

Whatever power he attributes to himself is not that of a subject, but only that of one who hopes to receive power from another. This analogy between Yosef's self-reflection and the officers' reaction to him at the recruitment office is clarified by the following passage:

from the moment she put on that fucking uniform she was ten times more powerful than Azouri, and I thought that perhaps just because of it Azouri inherited Franz and she inherited Azouri, and that's why he will become stronger than her, and through him I too become stronger just because I do not have that uniform...

Of course, this also reflects the intricate confusion of a dual identity derived from an absolute difference predicated on power. In the final analysis, the source of power is the Israeli Jew, male or female, concrete or abstract. And because of that, the love scene with Dina turns into a nightmare, as it must since, as the Israeli officer in the recruiting station reminds Yosef, "every lechery has a price." Thus,

when I was with her, I really enjoyed myself more than usual. It was a moment of happiness to fuck not only Dina, whom I loved so much, but a Jewish soldier: a fantasy of toughness, a woman with an Uzi glued to her body, who could walk into my house whenever she felt like it and arrest me , [or] expel my father.

* * *

The expulsion of the Arab — as metaphor, or in reality — is the ultimate manifestation within Zionist consciousness of the relation of Jew to Arab. Here, it expresses Yosef's failure to achieve moral identity — he can not merely have it. Indeed, Yosef's failure is predicated on his having too much identity, too much about him that demands explication. As such, he can only be a resource for another's identity. What does expulsion mean for Yosef, as a practical matter: only, he tells us, distance and defeat.

And if Azouri's cousins in Jordan or in the West Bank have uniforms and they shoot and throw shells, then from all of this and from her, I become stronger; but of course I am also totally defeated; I have no way to retreat; I had to fuck my mother's uniform to kill my father.

I told her, ha! you'll be standing on the border with my sperm and guard for me your state!

It is tempting to see this version of expulsion, which is also an estrangement from self, as exemplifying "identification with the aggressor;" except that in this case the failure of gratification remains on the surface of rather than beneath Yosef's consciousness. He considers this, or is forced to consider it, throughout the novel. For example, when we turn to the 1948 war, both Yosef, the half Arab, and his father Azouri, who is a "complete" Arab, find it morally justified for the Jews to have conquered "their" towns and villages, to have removed "them" from their land, to have expelled "them" from their country, to have turned "them" into

refugees, to have taken over their homes and settled Jewish refugees in these same homes not "two days later".... "First they drove out the Arabs to the sea shore. Two days later they brought in Jews from Haifa, who had just arrived by boats, and gave them the houses." Similarly:

... Although I did not fight in the war I was full of its pain. We returned to Acre.... Jews were living in my uncle's house and in the houses of my cousins who were in refugee camps in Lebanon. The Jews uprooted the lemon trees to fuel their stoves during the terrible winter of 1949. I understood what my brothers did not understand, where they had come from, their distress. I knew that this was no reason to exile me, to insult me, to turn me out of my home; but there were no more laws as before.... (Heb.: 63, 64; Eng.: 87-88, 90).

This acceptance, this pre-critical stoicism, appears in the narrative to be coupled with one type of goodness Arabs might be said to have — unqualified sympathy with the fate of the European Jews during and after the Holocaust. However, Kaniuk acknowledges what his characters evade: that Zionism had already begun, at least six decades before, to dispossess Palestinians. In other words, Azouri has sympathy for a history, in this case another's, at the expense of History. Kaniuk must be taken to have intended to raise this issue of the cost to self-recognition of being a good Arab. The denial of the historicity of one's own history, implicit in the elevation of a particular history to the status of a basic referent, is perhaps typical of true victims. Kaniuk can therefore be read as acknowledging the Arab's victimization by the Jew but only within the framework, of acknowledging but not recognizing the other, that is constructed within the novel as a rejection of politics in principle. The Arab's admission of Jewish suffering and Jewish right is both an instance of self-denial (in the narrative) and a textual device for confronting the reader with the Arab experience through its denial. Where the

admission of politics as a matter of practice finally comes, it is in effect merely the exception that proves the rule. Kaniuk builds political exceptionalism into the fabric of the novel, as internal to the reading of it. The rejection, and evasion, of politics is part of the poetics of the text, as what one might call its strategy. What makes the rejection an evasion is the way in which Kaniuk surrounds every political moment with confusion suspicion, and irony.

Thus, the uncertainty at any given moment as to whether the speaker is a particular character or the narrator himself; whether what is written was spoken in the past, is said in the present, or occurs in the future; whether something has been told to the narrator or is the narrator's recollection; all these ambiguities and more are rhetorically integral to the narrative's as "fictional truth." Yosef says: "my earlier is not your earlier; I live in linear time; time is like space; there's no past or future; but I knew that I wasn't explaining properly" (Heb.: 9, 11; Eng.: 5, 9).

To assert and then take back; this too is part of the "tropics" of Yosef's discourse, what casts the novel as a discourse such that reading it becomes a practice caught in conditions rather than an act of consumption, or even of criticism.

Indeed, this intricacy duplicates the narrator's, Yosef's, psyche. Thus we cannot blame Kaniuk for undermining the defenses of the reader who follows the course of this surplus-ridden text of deprivation. The excesses of the text and the excesses of Yosef are mutually reinforcing. The duplication is the means by which Kaniuk leads the reader to Yosef's predicament, and to enter it even if for only a moment. The reader has no need to suspend disbelief to enter deliberately Yosef's consciousness. The entering is done on behalf of and to the reader. Thus, Yosef says that Azouri "... had already begun to understand the destroyers; and he

said that in a war for life and death, in which each side is persuaded of its own justice, destruction is inevitable..." Here Yosef speaks for the subjectivity of a reader who stands above duality as witness, but is not subject to it. This abstract and ultimately abject appreciation of one's "destroyers" is all that the Israeli Jewish reader can see as the moral courage of an Arab — to admit the legitimacy the point of view of one's destroyer. The best the Arab can be is a relativist; since relativism is denied to all moral subjects by virtue of the Holocaust, whatever the Arab "best" is, it is not again, on the order of moral or political subjectivity. It is the goodness of the good inmate, the good patient, the good victim.

Azouri's statement that "in a war for life and death, in which each side is persuaded of its own justice, destruction is inevitable," finds its limited truth in the context of a liberal Zionism. There, one can recognize the other only after denying the other's right to recognize one. The solution is a parity of suffering, but not a parity of wrongs. This makes no distinction between victim and destroyer. Thus, it preserves morality at the expense of experience. The liberal Zionist admits Arab suffering, therefore allows an Arab to dwell on it; but it cannot admit the wrong involved. Therefore, the Arab must dwell on his own suffering vicariously — through the Jew's suffering and as if his/her own is someone else's. Thus, Azouri's wisdom, affirming the parity of suffering without a parity of wrongs, is a truth at the expense of an Arab history that could survive and even include Jewish history.

Yet a type of Arab historical thinking is permissible, if only it does not include the Jews or contain any possible reference to Jews: "We" [the Palestinians], says Azouri Sherara, "should have persuaded our leaders to accept the U. N.

resolution and establish two states; we did not do that..." (Heb.: 63-64; Eng.: 88-89). Here is the sort of regretful historical reflection required of the good Arab — regret not for what he, Azouri, may have lost, but regret for having attempted to oppose that loss. In this subtle reversal, in which an Arab reflection on history withdraws somewhat from any obligation to the Israeli Jew, it is the Jews who were the victims of the Arabs, the Arabs the victims of themselves. Now, it is as if the claim of that Jewish minority over the whole territory was founded in a right greater than any rights of its majority non-Jewish inhabitants, who now appear to have suffered without being able to claim that their suffering was a wrong done to them.

Azouri's regret is at the same time a totalization of himself, and through that the Arab in his son; and through that the Arab as such. The space-time of Azouri's catastrophic reflection is Palestine, in 1948. It provides the chronotope of a moral universe, therefore a total frame of reference for the reader. This is also clear in other respects from the rhetorical constitution of the passage quoted above. Yosef is the narrator, but the actual speaker is Azouri. He begins with the pronoun "we," purporting to represent Palestinian consciousness as such and a putative body politic: "we should have persuaded our leaders." He proceeds, "bleeding refugees wanted a state of their own, and it had to come at my expense because my people grasped neither the moment nor the intensity of the insult incurred by the refugees from Europe..."

It is the relativism of the last phrase that allows reading to proceed through this Arab reflection on suffering. Arab suffering is relative; that of Jews absolute. Azouri's expression of compassion for the Jews is a necessary condition of his

being recognized morally, though not as a moral subject. Despite this limitation, the passage comes close to a greater moment of critical truth. The expression "my expense," conjoined with "my people," and governed by "we," yields a voice that is both personal — of this Arab — and general — of the Arab. This voice, at once concrete and generalized, brings Arab experience close to being recognized by the reader. But the Arab in general, denied politics, cannot speak with or for moral authority; and without that, the concrete Arab has voice but not authority. Thus, Azouri's acknowledgment of the Jews is without any autonomous authority that could stand equal to or even occasionally above the moral authority asserted by the Jew in the name of the Holocaust. This is why Yosef can only follow Azouri by speaking always of his own failure of moral authority. In no sense will an Arab voice of moral reflection ever judge the Jew.

At the same time the singular possessive 'my' separates Azouri from his people and from their leaders. An Arab can speak against the Arabs as no Jew can speak against Jews. Azouri's salvation as a good Arab lies in his willingness to speak against politics, against the legitimacy of Arabs deciding their own fate, against the possibility of an Arab right at all commensurate with the right of the Jews victimized in Europe and throughout history. The latter can be shared with no one, but above all not with the Arab other who occupies a space Zionism wishes to purify. Azouri stands, in this passage, for the Arab outside of history, therefore for a moral reflection that is moral only in its acceptance of the existing fact, the conquest of Palestine by the Jews. Thus, when Azouri laments the treatment to which the Arabs were subject, even when he gives vent to Arab suffering, the implications of this are muted in his acknowledgment of a Jewish right beyond any

law that could conceivably be shared by Jew and Arab.

* * *

When an Israeli Arab says, in a text written for an Israeli Jewish audience by an Israeli Jewish author, that he did not fight in the (1948) war, as Azouri does at the opening of the quoted passage, he is cleansing himself — but only in the eyes of Jews. At the same time he is estranging himself from his own history, allowing the Jewish reader to hear him only as an individual and in so doing not to hear the greater voice of those who had both suffered and fought, that historical voice of what the conquest of Israel has constituted as "the Arabs."

But Azouri is for Kaniuk more than an Arab. His voice is doubly authentic. It is the voice of one who accepts the mastery of Jew over Arab and therefore wills himself to be abject in order to be good. But it is also the voice of knowledge. In this duality, Azouri's truth is both moral and historical, though only in its endorsement of Zionist history. He is in a sense the final and most complete witness of the Jewish experience and the special right derived from it — both as an outsider who admits that right over any he might himself declare, and as an expert who can certify the validity of the Jewish claim to history. Azouri is after all an important Arab historian with, as the narrator tells us, five doctorates (Heb.: 61; Eng.: 85); ²³ and he is an acknowledged expert on the Arab Jewish conflict (Heb.:12; Eng.: 10).

If a man who experienced "the humiliation [and] the plunder," who was among those "who stood on the Acre beach for two days and two nights," who "never fired a shot, who was pushed by Israeli soldiers into the water and forced

²³This 'generosity' in the number of Azouri's doctorates is in itself an Orientalist expression.

to stand in the surf as if he should swim to some Arab limbo in the sea," (Heb. p. 66; Eng. p. 92) if such an Arab can feel and think and say all that he does about the possibility of all that, Azouri is beyond question a "good Arab." If, in addition, he can speak from a position of expertise and as a recognized authority, he is someone even beyond Jew and Arab, whose assertion of the rights of the one sufferer over the other must be true. In this, Azouri is the reader's own surrogate within the text. It is not Yosef who is intended by Kaniuk to enlighten. His duality is only a condition of enlightenment. It is Azouri, his reflections and his credentials, who speaks with a light of finality. He reflects on duality from above it, and from the only position from which such compassion could be taken as moral — the Zionist vision.

Finally, if Azouri could bear witness to the terrible winter of 1949, to the destruction of the homes and families of his people, watch them being marched through their own abandoned orange groves and forced to leave behind their flocks, cattle, and beasts of burden, see them forced to flee into exile through pastures and valleys of lands they had sown, and if even then he could justify that devastation by another people's history and require that it be accepted as justified, then he is not only good. He is truthful. For the moment, he speaks of Arab life, even if only for, if not from, the point of view of the Jew.

The grandeur of what Azouri represents as an Arab, the stoicism so essential to the truth he represents, requires, for his completion as a good Arab, the additional element of life. This newly-recognizable Arab for Jewish history must be formed in life as well as in speech. There must be moments, typically more private affections, in which the vitality and beauty of the Arab is made manifest.

Thus, Azouri tells Yosef,

I didn't want the obligation I had to guard Acre, the town which is my heaven and my historical land. After you have already taken the beautiful houses and the orchards, Kafur's garden and his seashore and the lands of Galilee, I didn't want what I'm doing here in Acre to be directed against Franz and Kathe (Heb.: 64; Eng.: 90).

- Azouri addresses his son in this passage as if he, Azouri, were the Arab compromised by Jewishness. He speaks as if he had somehow benefitted from his own father's misfortune and that of the entire Palestinian people. This moment of hostility by a son toward his father, this momentary intimacy of what had just been presented on a grander scale, gives leeway to what is taken for a specifically Arab complaint; but again it is one that abjures politics and expects true reconciliation (between parent and child), if only a reconciliation in anger; thus Azouri can remain an Arab in detail even as he sets himself above that history. He tells Yosef that

... I wanted to protect Acre for my grandchildren. I couldn't have known that if I ever had a grandson it would be a dead fetus aborted by a Jewish girl called Dina, from the boiling sperm, ejaculated and red, of a Jewish son who is the fruit of my loins (Heb. p. 64-65; Eng. p. 90-91).

* * *

The premise of Yosef's dual identity is that the Jewish reader is already mired in an unavoidable dilemma predicated on an essentially militarized difference. This is where Kaniuk begins; but it is also where he ends. The tables are never turned, nor could they be even if with a minimal moral vitalization of the other (the Arab) in so dedicated a culture. The Arab does finally emerge, but only as an object of the reader's pity and in order to demonstrate the righteousness of that reader's sense of Jewish-Arab relations. This righteousness is what was already there in Zionist liberalism. What Kaniuk has added is a willingness to listen to an Arab.

Even though it is one who speaks fundamentally for the Jew, this is a critical gain.

The novel conveys the greater culture of which it is part; but, surprisingly, it reinstates what its author intended to challenge, the otherness of the Arab. Not only culture, but ideology is finally salvaged; but there is a cost, and this is what is most interesting about A Good Arab. In Yosef's dual identity, the unavoidable conversation with the self, the Jewish reader is forced to encounter Arabness as at least a moral possibility. But the standard of the Holocaust, and the Zionist rejection of the Diaspora, remain contexts of meaning for this possibility. The resulting depiction of Arabness denies moral subjectivity to the Arab in a way that leaves intact the division on which Zionism rests, between moral and juridical self.

A Good Arab intends to embody the possibility of a greater moral universe. On the other hand, it addresses readers for whom this moral universe is already complete and exclusive. And so the dilemma posed by the other for a self that wishes the other to remain external, cannot be overcome; it can only be restated endlessly. My reading of A Good Arab attempts to respect the desire in the text to overcome this dilemma under conditions that make its resolution, or its transcendence, impossible.

CHAPTER 4

THE PALESTINIAN 'EXTREMIST'

A good Arab, is not merely an invention of its author. Nor is it a self-contained text operating solely as a vehicle for "fictional truth." Like all literary works, it is, first of all a complex product of operations mediated in all respects by Israeli culture, and its intercultural aspects, as a "moment" of that culture. That is, it embodies practices that define the intersection of interests, identities, and social organization, according to an historical project itself defined by an absolute and morally constitutive opposition drawn along racist lines. The most definite anti-figure of this project is "the Arab," against which all of Jewish experience is delineated as a synchronicity, and given status within a universal historical narrative as the enactment a fundamental truth registered as an allegory of identity and the Law.

It is in this context that the significance of the goodness of "the good Arab" must be understood and its paradoxes explained. This is, of course, a familiar problem. Every racist project situates the individual instances of what it categorizes in a dimension-like space that yields a variety of exemplary and interchangeable figures or types.¹ In this way, the culture provides a sufficient

¹In late 18th century England, one finds the same moral conceptual base for 'savage', 'woman', 'child', 'primitive', 'the people', 'the mob', 'the poor'. Each invokes the irrational other to what Adam Smith called "commercial society," and to the calming rationalism of the Augustans.

range of moral, aesthetic, and political response to ensure that the hegemony of any particular categorization operates across society and is made subtle, varied, and capable of regulating argument among people of good faith. This, in turn, confirms an essential decency within the racist culture, cohesiveness and mutual recognition and respect among the denigrators, and the constant illusion that there are ways out of the social problems that accompany racism by identifying a sub-category of acceptable others whose exceptional qualities both justify compassion and justify the rule that ultimately prohibits it.

How, then, or in what sense, can there be a "good Arab" for Israeli Jewish culture? Jewish children regularly encounter Arabs as janitors or gardeners, construction workers, garbage collectors, the street sweepers, cleaning women, gas-station attendants, and others who perform such apparently artless tasks of service and maintenance. The unthreatening and politically empty presence of such Arabs, given the larger significance of "the Arab" in Israeli society, has to be rationalized within the racist discourse.

The rationalization of this extraordinary Arab, defined vocationally, and in relations of subservience to Jewish consumers, is a practical moment of self-Jewish-Israeli reflection. It is usually made explicit by a sensitive parent, who gently explains that "not all Arabs are the same," that "there are Arabs and there are 'Arabs'," as the officer at the recruiting station told Yosef. "This," says the parent pointing to an Arab at work, "as you can see, is a good Arab."

Thus, a distinction is not only implied, it is made self-evident: "this" individual is different from most of them; i.e., she/he is not typical of their kind, not what we mean by "Arab." And what "we mean" turns out in political terms to be at the extreme of the category, 'extremist' or a terrorist. In cultural terms, it is

"them." The result is that there is no "typical" Arab that is a subject, and no exceptional — "good" — Arab who is an agent. The latter is exceptional, good, precisely by virtue of being defined functionally. The former is obsessed and lacks the capacity for moral reflection; which is to say that the "typical" Arab is a monster. The exceptional, good, Arab is a functionary. He or she can perform duties virtuously, but cannot address the question "why?" or reflect on matters of substantive value.² The Arab as such, the true Arab, the monster, is human without capacity for moral reflection. Therefore one has an obligation to respect the incipient soul of such a creature; but one must never confuse that soul with that of a moral subject. The Arab cannot constitute a subject position from which another can be judged. In the Arab, then, Zionism creates its perfect foil — one who can be judged without fear that the tables will be turned or that the judge will be held accountable. The Arab is one in relation to whom "we" can never be object.

The distinction between the inconsequential "good Arab" and the dangerous "real Arab", is reproduced incessantly in Israeli Hebrew literature. It is manifest there from the early days of the Zionist colonial settlement in Palestine. One finds it later in explicitly denigrative forms and with a greater degree of sophistication. The same polarized construct of "good" particular and monstrous universal appears already in its most vulgar simplicity in Hebrew children's literature of the 1930s.³

²For another example of this "type," see, the boy protagonist, Naim, in: Yeoshua's, novel The Lover, 1979).

³Adir Cohen, An Ugly Face in the Mirror: National Stereotypes in Hebrew Children's Literature (Tel Aviv: Reshafim Books, 1985). Fauzi El-Asmar, Through the Hebrew Looking-Glass Arab Stereotypes in Children's Literature (Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1986).

In A Good Arab, the quintessential "real" or "typical" Arab is represented by the character, abu-al-Misk Kafur Sherara. It should be noticed that the "bad" features of this character are so exaggerated that one could suspect it of being a parody of a stereotype, therefore Kaniuk's attempt to ridicule just such a characterization. On the other hand, all the Arab characters in this novel, including Yosef and Azouri, appear in ways that make it difficult to determine the boundary between irony (self-criticism) and abuse (the denigration of the other).

We are introduced to abu-al-Misk Kafur Sherara via Franz Rosenzweig, Yosef's grandfather, who, as a young German officer, was sent to assist the Turkish army in the construction of a second fortification line on Mt. Carmel. He was sickened by what he saw, and by the people of that backward country. He then found himself in "an enchanting garden of a kind he never saw before in his life."

It was enormous, stretching from the middle reaches of the mountain to the sea below. Following a detailed description of the garden's marvels, which all "comprised "a wonderful arabesque," we are told that "the gardener who had planned it came from the Haifa German Colony." Such a creator of so perfect an arabesque — something so Arab-like — would not have been, for the Germans, an Arab. Thus, we have a vision in which the arabesque is the product of the European imagination, its perfection that of the essentially "oriental." In this fantasy there are no lives to enjoy the garden as part of its appropriation.

Looking through the entrance gate, beyond the growth of foliage and creepers, Franz saw an enormous house embellished with arches and vaults. He

entered and met "Abu Misk Kafur Sherara." ⁴

Kafur was sitting in the inner courtyard with Franz's Turkish friend who said, here is Rosenzweig Franz [last name comes first in the original], and Kafur nodded his head. He was holding a sword which he claimed had once belonged to Salah Addin, and was wearing a silk suit. And at a short distance, adorned ladies were sitting smelling of perfume and drinking blood from tall goblets. They looked at him through the... dusky dimness of the light, and afterwards they laid romantic traps for him from which he was forever escaping (Heb.: 26; Eng.: 32).

This account comes close to imitating classical European Orientalist literature of the kind discussed by Edward W. Said in his book, Orientalism. ⁵ It also has, however, at least one Israeli peculiarity worthy of notice, the ridiculing of Salah-al-Din. This is traditional in Israeli Hebrew discourse on the Arab, and it is in many ways especially revealing of its racialism.

It is difficult to determine exactly when reference to Salah-al-Din became prevalent in Israeli Hebrew literature. It is reasonable to set the date at soon after the October 1956 invasion of Egypt by Britain, France and Israel, aimed at reversing the nationalization of the Suez Canal, defeating Egypt once more in a colonial war, and humiliating Gamal Abd-al-nasser. The joining of forces with Britain and France culminated four years of aggressive anti-Egyptian foreign policy by the Israeli government. After the war, hostility was focused on Gamal Abd-al-Nasser, who had, in 1956, assumed the office of the Egyptian Presidency.

In A Previous Chapter (1985), Nissim Calderon, an Israeli literary critic,

⁴The name is not spelled correctly, should be: abu-al-Misk Kafur Sharara; also the name (in Hebrew) of Salah-al-Din is misspelled.

⁵Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1979). See specifically discussion of Dante, d'Herbelot, Flaubert, Lamartine, and Lane.

is concerned with Israeli Hebrew poetry and politics during the 1950s and 1960s. The second part of the book is entitled: "Moshe Dayan, 1956." In it, Calderon quotes a section from the diaries of Moshe Sharet, at that time Israel's Foreign Affairs Minister, and writes the following preamble to the quotation:

Moshe Sharet was forced to resign from the post of Prime Minister in consequence of his objection to the policies that led to the Sinai War. Israel attacked on 29 October 1956. About a month earlier, Moshe Sharet went on a diplomatic tour of Asia. He did not know of the decision to go to war, either because it was concealed from him or because he was ignored. On 2 December, while in Cambodia, he received Israeli newspapers, and he writes in his [--] diary:⁶

Sharet's discussion, as quoted by Calderon, opens as follows —

As usual, when a great event takes place, Nathan's mind thrust into it like a dagger. He produced a ... column which was the most arduous and piercing political essay of all those which appeared or could have appeared in our press on this topic [the Sinai march]....⁷

Calderon presents Sharet's critique of the poet, Alterman, in which Sharet argues that Alterman had written politically in a way that was inconsistent with the government's promise never to engage in a preventive war. What disturbed Sharet

⁶Nissim Calderon, A Previous Chapter On Nathan Sach In The Early Sixties (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Siman Kriah, 1985): 75-76 and passim.

⁷'Davar', Israel's Trade Unions Federation (Histadrut), daily newspaper; at the time the *de facto* mouthpiece of the ruling party Mapai. 'The Seventh Column', a political weekly feature by the poet Nathan Alterman in the 'Davar' weekend edition. Alterman's admiration of Ben Gurion and Moshe Dayan and their policies and politics, and their praise in his poetry became explicit already in the early 1950s. A number of Israeli literary critics have dealt with this issue. See, 'Dan Miron, If There Is No Jerusalem... Essays on Hebrew Writing in Cultural-Political Context (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1987): 56-67.

so much was not Alterman's view, but that he had used his authority as a nationally prominent poet to 'take sides' in a political dispute. This intertwining of art and politics is characteristic of Israeli critical writing.

There are many similar instances where literature is the site of a political debate. I chose this one as exemplary because of the involvement of a politician and because of the particular quality of representations employed by the parties. Here is heroic writing in reference to an heroic episode, an epic treatment of the depiction of a military event that is itself both military-like and one that aspires to unlimited magnitude of moral persuasiveness. This epic historical consciousness dwells simultaneously in past, present, and future; and it is by no means peculiar to Zionism though it is characteristic of it.

After the establishment of the state of Israel, the Palestinians and nationalist Arabs elsewhere made an analogy in their literary and in political discourses between the "Zionist State" and the Crusaders' Kingdom in Palestine (the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem). There were in this analogy complex intimations, on the one hand, that the Jewish state was parasitically established by European invaders of a different religion hostile in principle to the native cultures, and, on the other hand, that hope lay exclusively in the Moslem reconquest of the land. These intimations were embodied in the historical figure of Salah-al-Din, who led the battle against the Crusaders and restored Jerusalem to Islam.⁸ It is in this regard

⁸The Foreign Minister of the United Arab Republic (UAR), Kamal-ud-Din Hussian, on one occasion published a statement that was read to pupils at all educational institutions of the UAR. It concluded with the assurance that the "day of Hittin" was near (referring to the battle of Hittin, near Tiberias, where Salah al-Din had defeated the Crusader Army on July 4, 1187). Al-Ahram, May 15, 1958. Quoted by Aharon Cohen, Israel and the Arab World (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976): 324-325.

that Israeli Hebrew literature began to treat Salah-al-Din as an anti-hero and to ridicule the Arab accounts of his heroism.

After the Egyptian Officers' Revolution of 1952, many Third World countries began to regard Egypt as a leading force in the struggle against colonialism. At the same time, Israel's participation in the invasion seemed to make even clearer than before its annexationist intentions and collaboration with Imperialism. Anti-Zionist, anti-Israel sentiment among Palestinians and Arabs grew more intense and intransigent as a new pan-Arab nationalism began to solidify around the figure of Gamal abd-al-Nasser. The accumulation of imagery and symbolism in regard to the invasion gave it a universal significance for all parties. Liberal Zionists in Israel, who opposed in some measure the invasion and the politics that led to it, began nevertheless to employ the Crusader image in their own accounts of Israel's history and mission.

Again, it is difficult to determine whether the analogy originated in political discourse strictly defined and was later incorporated into literature, or vice versa. In any case the image of the crusader carried the weight of apprehension about Arab-Israeli relations. This, in turn, reinforced the belief that only aggression toward the Palestinians and the neighboring Arab states could prevent Israel, and therefore Jews, from falling victim to the same fate that befell the Crusaders' state.⁹ In Israeli literature, poetry, and literary criticism there are numerous

⁹Uri Avneri, Israel Without Zionists A plea for Peace in the Middle East (New York: The Macmillan Comp. London, Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1968). Israel Without Zionism paperback ed. 1971): 79-89. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, The Israeli Connection Who Israel Arms and Why (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987): 4, 22, 182, 248. *Sylvia Schein, "Joshua Prawer In Memoriam." (Haifa University, Israel). In her lecture Ms. Schein is saying that "As a historian, Joshua Prawer holds an outstanding place among historians of the Crusades and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem."... "The impact of his lectures at the Hebrew University... from the 1950s

instances of this sentiment; and it is in this context that all contemporary major political Arab figures are represented as analogous to Salah-al-Din, as potential agents of Pan-Arabism and vengeance against Israel.¹⁰

In a comment on Amos Oz' novelette, "Late Love", Gershon Shaked says that

... From the speaker's words ... we learn that the source of national aggression is anxiety, as we also learn that the source of anti-Semitism is society's need to have scapegoats for its frustrations. Distress causes frustration and frustration needs a victim. In sacrificing, the sacrificer hastens his own end, since he is "wasting" as it were his best energy and vigor on destruction, so that there is no vitality left in him. This ambiguous process could be used to describe anti-Semitism but it could also serve as a basis for describing the forces that are

onward is best reflected by the fact that in contemporary Hebrew literature, history students are frequently depicted as working on some aspect of the Crusades." Ms. Schein's lecture was published in English by The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization of the University of Washington. MESA Bulletin 25, (1991). I owe my gratitude to Dr. B. Beit-Hallahmi for advising me on Ms. Schein's lecture.

¹⁰In late summer of 1990, when the Iraq-Kuwait crisis loomed large, Salah al-Din's image was invoked in Israel once more. This time, in analogy with the President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. On this, see: "Yossi Sarid, 'Let Them Look For Me' Haaretz, 17 August 1990. "Yaron London, 'So Long, Hussein, Nusselbbeh, and You Other 'Authentic Leaders' Yediot Ahronoth, 14 August 1990. Chaim Shur (Editor-in-Chief), "Gulf Crisis: PLO on the Wrong Track" New Outlook (August 1990): 5. Daniel Ben Simon, in a special section "Notes from the Israeli Peace Movement" Tikkun (November-December 1990): 70-78. Yerach Gover, "Gulf Crisis, Palestinians and the Israeli Peace Camp" Social Text 27, (1990): 167-171. In literature, see: "Dalia Ravikowitz, 'Karnei Hittin' in The Third Book: Poems, 4th ed. (Tel Aviv: Levin-Epstien — Modan, n. d.): 29. Yehoshua, "Facing The Forests", 1968) "Amos Oz, in Ad Mavet Sigurim, 5th repr. (Tel Aviv: Sifiyat Poalim Publishers, 1971). Unto Death Crusade, trans. Nicholas de Lange, (New York and London: A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanowich, 1973). "Gershon Shaked, A New Wave in Hebrew Literature Essays on Recent Hebrew Literature (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim Publishers, 1971): 136-140, 200-203. "Nurith Gertz, Amos Oz A Monograph (Tel Aviv: Sifiyat Poalim, 1980): 147-158. Generation Shift in Literary History: Hebrew Narrative Fiction in the Sixties (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameukhad Publishers, 1983).

active in our own day's crusaders soul. And, perhaps, it also implies Israel's survivalist philosophy of history.¹¹

Right-wing nationalist writers, using to the same analogy, took an inverted perspective, praising the Crusaders' valor, their relatively advanced technology, and their efficient methods of using power for political ends. They emphasized the need to learn from the Crusaders' defeat so that it would not be repeated by modern Israel.¹² But what is of greatest interest is the liberal self-critical Zionist use of the analogy. Its equivocality and the ambiguity of its articulations create the sort of intertextuality that makes any text intrinsically cultural and therefore knowable only through a critical hermeneutics of difference. These "symptomatic lapses" in the presentation of the analogy allow us to observe variations of the tendency according to the Israeli national mood following each national crisis.

'A good Arab' like Yosef would not, then, miss an opportunity to employ this analogy; and indeed, in one of the arguments he has with his father, Azouri, he says that "they [the Jews] are conquerors, like the crusaders, foreigners, hypocrites, self-righteous; they'll be finished off like the crusaders too; and Azouri said, no, I think you're mistaken Yosef. You'll stay here but we'll stay here too..." (Heb.: 67; Eng.: 95). Here is how Yosef, half Jew and half Arab, presents the question of Arab-Jewish relations to his father, who is 'an Arab', and how for Yosef the historically epic analogy is projected and then used prophetically. Azouri

¹¹Gershon Shaked, Wave After Wave In Hebrew Narrative (Fiction) (Jerusalem: Keter Publishers, 1985): 183. For the English translation of the novelette "Late Love" see. Amos Oz, Unto Death, 1973.

¹²Yitzhak Shalev, The Gabriel Tirosh Affair a novel, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1964).

appears as the Arab of the liberal Zionist's fervent hope: 'No, both you and we are going to stay here.' In this context, a key heroic figure of universal proportion is used both to represent Arab aspirations and the growing identification of Israelis with the crusaders. It is not surprising that Salah-al-Din becomes then, for Israeli Jewish writers, a figure of ridicule, and as such part of the reversal of the crusaders' history now undertaken as a project by Israeli Jewish society as a whole.

Thus, the image of a degenerate Kafur holding what he claims to be Salah-al-Din's sword is an implicit insult (p. 115 above). Yet, by itself, the episode of the garden tells us little if anything about the overall intention of the novel. The text as a whole, with the intertextual universe its passages invoke, attempts to appeal to the Israeli Jewish Hebrew reader's moral sensibilities beyond his or her parochial identification as a Jew. Therefore, this episode must be seen as a literary turn, in which the presence of an 'extremist' Arab operates as a source of moral nuance for the Jewish reader. Extremism stands for a political disposition the total absence of which defines the goodness of good Arabs and the presence of which in any measure allows the Jewish reader to feel free of constraints concerning prejudice and stereotyping. This way of giving a negative boundary to the "good Arab" allows the Jew to experience a moral revulsion against prejudice, though it is still framed by the very prejudice that it rejects. In this way Kaniuk's novel discovers for its readers an object suitable for a pity that can stand for compassion, and a capacity to think about that object in terms that do not disturb the sense of moral righteousness.

As we have seen, the goodness of the good Arab who deserves compassion, indeed to whom it is in some measure owed, lies in the absence of a

political disposition and in the presence of a demonstrable character, that of the juridical citizen who does his or her job, never looks for or feels anything beyond that job, and who aspires only to be what he or she already is for another. This perfectly non-subjective Arab is for liberal Zionism, the proper object of a compassion that can only manifest itself as pity.

But, it is evident from Yosef's meditations that the Arab part of his subjectivity reflects on the politics of division, laments more than merely material conditions, and in other ways shows itself to be a less comfortable Arab for Jewish readers than the other Arabs to whom Yosef usually refers in his confessional autobiography. A Good Arab distinguishes between the Arab one individual might or might not be and Arabs 'out there.' The latter are potential objects of compassion. The former is only one term, ultimately the losing one, of a struggle for the right to be moral, to judge, to give or withhold compassion, to be the authentic subject in the opposition between Arab and Jew.

In A Good Arab, the Jewish reader earns the right to do what he or she is already destined to be able to do — to judge and therefore to decide whether or not to be compassionate. Jewish history again provides the context of meaning in which the reality of the Arab is reduced to that of a presence without practice, a type of humanity that lacks the right to claim subjectivity and the extra-juridical rights and identities by which the right becomes another's duty. The Jewish self is thereby reconciled with a morality that had been momentarily disturbed by the Arab-Israeli conflict. It confirms itself by the small virtue of acknowledging that something is owed the "good Arab" (other than the "dead Arab"), as if the Arab-Israeli struggle could be reduced to an exchange, if only the good Arabs remain

good, the "bad Arabs" — Arab subjectivity, politics, memory — are vanquished, and Israeli Jews are able to find a place in their hearts for those Arabs who are truly and ahistorically good.

Kafur's character plays a key role in the novel's distinction between proper and improper objects of compassion. But, the distinction also develops around a yet more general characterization of the non-goodness of the bad Arab. Not only is the good Arab non-political, abject, and a creature of law, but he or she does not claim an identity of any historical significance. That is, he or she is also a creature of a fixed culture. Thus, the total Arab, against which Arab goodness is identified, the bad Arab, is one whose identity is clear and irrepressible, like his or her politics. Nothing of the objective and "deserving" in the bad Arab; nothing of subjectivity in the good Arab. This point is illustrated by Kaniuk's treatment of the Palestinian Arabs' religion and claims of religious identity. The novel at no point allows for an effective and principled religious identity among Palestinian Arabs.

Historically, Moslems have constituted between eighty and eighty five percent of the entire Arab population of Palestine. The Christian population has rarely ever reached thirteen percent. In the wake of the 1948 war and the consequent flight of Arab inhabitants, the percentage of Christians among the Israeli Arab population rose to its peak in 1955, about twenty-two percent, and then began to decline. Today it is approximately twelve percent.¹³

Yet, of the Arab characters presented in this novel, not one is identified as Moslem. On the contrary, all are Christians. On the one hand, it is as if the

¹³Correspondingly: A Survey of Palestine, Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. Reprinted in full with Permission from Her Majesty's Stationary Office by the Institute of Palestine Studies, (Washington, DC: 1991), 1: 141. Jiryis, 1976. Appendix-Tables, Table no. 4: 291. Israel Statistical Abstract 1990.

absence of the Islamic were a necessary condition for representing goodness in the Arab; on the other, the fixed culture which is a source of beauty and the beauty that redeems the Arab must be, as it were, defanged. The "Arabesque" must be beyond the practices of Islam. The "Arabesque combines surface traits with a separateness from history.

...[i]n the darkening light of the late afternoon the gray eyes of Kafur's brother's son shone like rare precious stones. In the face and eyes of Azouri, hundreds of years of ancient chivalry and glory married the beauty of the northern lakes with the burning desert. The seam between the European indifference which [Crusader] knights brought with them nine hundred years before, and the yellow desert afflicted blazing heat, were captured in the man..." [Azouri] (Heb.: 28; Eng.: 35).

Paradoxically, the Christian Arab — the racial rather than the ethnic Arab — lacks the potential to be Arab in the sense of what can be identified as the good Arab and placed alongside the bad. The Arab of moral discourse can not be the Arab of culture. Whatever evidence of subjectivity is revealed in this Arab cannot by definition be historically significant, that is, threatening.

It is ironic that the liberalizing project of Kaniuk's novel is weakened if the good Arab is also real, alive, self-involved. Kaniuk preserves the allure to the non-Arab of the "Arabesque" without situating it in a context by which the alluring traits might be motivated, might be Arabic. "European indifference" makes of Arab passion nothing more than an appearance that is also an accident, a mere presence. Kaniuk could hardly have written otherwise since he was, presumably, writing in anticipation of his own readers' prejudices and stereotypes. And what better way to dispel these than by using them. The Arab is "blazing heat" and passion. When

tempered, it is a beauty that "we" can appreciate; when it is not, it is the threat of a flood, of intemperate, unpredictable, unlawful impulses.¹⁴

The other contrast that must be noticed is between the magnificence of Kafur's mansion and garden (decisively European and Christian, yet of an orientalist splendor), and the degraded state of the people occupying it. The contrast serves more than a strictly narrative purpose. Again, it brings beauty and history together, this time in a less demanding identification of value and product. Yet in both cases, the Christianized element of valor, beauty, glory, appears as the side of Jews, as the source of Jewish virtue, a trope at odds with traditional Jewish historical consciousness. This part of the Zionist 'revaluation of values'¹⁵ rejects the image of the passive and lachrymose Jew, but at the cost of identifying with the non-Jew: just as morality is not possible for the Arab in relation to the Jew, so it appears that virtue is not possible for the Jew in relation to "the West."¹⁶

The need for absolute moral justification, the need therefore to hold history, as it were, in one's grasp as if it were all one's own, is what most distinguishes Zionism from other ideologies. This is its way of immunizing the acts of Jews from the standards of those who have always condemned them. This is one way in which Zionism transcends its original secular purpose — the Jew as the agent of Right in history, history being the struggle of that Right to survive. It is also part of Zionist self-identification. The self is always a self in operation, and

¹⁴I found a very similar disposition toward the Christian Arab (Anton Shammas), portrayed as a 'good Arab' who finds himself in a "minority group" among Moslem Arabs in Israel, and as such being shown sympathy — "as a Jew." See: *Michael, "The Arabesques of Zionism" 1986).

¹⁵M. Y. Berdichevsky, "Revaluation of Values" [After Nietzsche] Writings: Essays, (Tel Aviv: Dvir Comp. LTD, 1952. Maariv ed., 1960): 27-54.

¹⁶For a critical comment regarding the 'lachrymose Jew' as it is perceived by Zionists, see: Baron, 1952, 1: 297.

the Zionist self's operation is defined exclusively by its good, always categorical and therefore absolute.

However understandable, this reveals yet another paradox. This universalization of the Jew depends on a position external to the Jew, from which identity can be achieved. But the categorical nature of the opposition between what the self is (for another) and what it does (for itself against an other), can only end in a double negation: the self that asserts itself against an absolute other can only know itself in that negation and as negation; that which is other to the self inevitably becomes the source of the self's inevitable opposition to itself, that is, the source of a need for what the self negates.

Thus, while the poet H. N. Bialik ¹⁷ laments the Jews massacred by Cossacks in the Ukraine, young Zionists in Palestine adapted Cossack lyrics and sang them with the same devotion their parents had once used to pray for mercy. ¹⁸ In a very short period of time, young Zionists internalized Russian culture. In their metamorphosis from "Zid" to "Hebrew," ¹⁹ they were able to dissociate the 'signifier' from its 'signified' by translating the lyrics from Russian

¹⁷H. N. Bialik (1873-1936), formally considered the greatest Hebrew poet of modern times, essayist, story-writer, translator and editor who exercised a profound influence on modern Jewish culture. Born in the Ukraine. In response to the Kishinev pogroms he wrote the poem "On the Slaughter," (1903), and later he wrote "In the City of Slaughter" (1904). See Writings, 22 repr. (Tel Aviv: Dvir Comp. LTD, 1962). He participated in Zionist Congresses (1907, 1913, 1921, and 1931) and the Congress for Hebrew Language and Culture (1913). Settled in Palestine 1924.

¹⁸Elef Zemer ve-Od Zemer The Israeli Sing-Along, ed. Rafi Pesakhson and Telma Eligon, 4 vols. (Tel Aviv: Kineret Publishers, 1981).

¹⁹Zeev (Vladimir) Zabolotinsky, "Dr. Herzl", in First Zionist Writings (Jerusalem: Ari Jabotinsky Publishing, 1948 or 1949): 97-100.

into Hebrew and, especially, from one cultural setting to another.

But there is another aspect of this complex sentiment of Zionist admiration for the Christian and revulsion toward the Moslem. Zionism is a fundamentally Western ideology. It is imbued with European secularism, modernist nationalism, and a utopian reason that combines representation and logic in an aestheticized, therefore immediately communal, synthesis of self and society. It gained its ascendancy among Jews at a time when European Colonialism and Orientalism had become hegemonic.

Colonialism and orientalism are not necessarily 'Christian.' But in the European context they were primarily, and ideologically, directed against Moslems in a Christian way that evoked invidious images of ungoverned sensuality, pride, undisciplined passion, and narcissism. From such a point of view, the Moslem appears as the exact opposite of modern secularism, nationalism, and civic communitarian virtue. He or she appears therefore without respect for boundaries, indifferent to the disciplines of exchange and compromise, and without a reasoning sense of the importance of universalism. As contradictory as it may seem, Zionism becomes not only a political tool in this offensive, but, because of the Jews' position in the Old and New Testaments, a biblical symbol of its non-sectarian, e.g., Christian, correctness and necessity. At this point Zionism and Christianity find their mutual affection in excluding the other. The excluded oriental constitutes Christian virtue in the context of imperialism, and the Protestant ethic in the context of imposing "order" on what otherwise would be license. One part of that oriental, the Jew, reappears to justify that very exclusion.

Thus, Zionism, at its most philosophical, endorses the terms by which the Jew was originally condemned. The incorporation of this in Hebrew literature is

virtually unavoidable in a moral universe that situates the Jew categorically between the Arab and the Holocaust. But it enforces for liberals an imagination inconsistent with their project of liberalizing Zionism through compassion. It is, in other words, their own acceptance of Zionist history that traps liberals, including Kaniuk, into reproducing within their critique the conditions under which Zionism has always reiterated its most fundamental reaction — against the Arab other.

There is a practical aspect to all of this. There is no identifiable point within the history of the Palestinian national movement of absolute conflict between Christians and Moslems, although, throughout the period of British rule in Palestine, British authorities and Zionist functionaries made great efforts to "discover" such 'natural' points of opposition.²⁰ This method of dividing and exploiting the differences among ethnic or religious groups of Palestinian nationalists is still pursued by Israeli authorities in the occupied territories and in Israel itself.²¹

Thus, when we are told in A Good Arab, that Kafur's "dream of returning to the House of the Ummayyad did not appear to contradict the crosses stuck on the fence and the cross suspended between the folds of fat hanging from his neck," (Heb.: 27; Emg.:33-34) we are meant to understand that Kafur is a

²⁰Yehoshua Porat, The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement 1918-1929 (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1976), 169-195. Vol. 2: From Riots To Rebellion. The Palestinian-Arab National Movement 1929-1939, chap. 3: 69-104. Muhammad Y. Muslih, The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988): 158 (and *passim*).

²¹Ian Lustick, Arabs in the Jewish State Israel's Control of a National Minority (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980): 82-149. *Sammy Smooha, "Arabs and Jews in Israel: Minority-Majority Relations" Megamot 22, (September 1976): 397-423.

political opportunist and a man of double standards. We will presently realize that opportunism and hypocrisy are Kafur's main character traits: "Kafur already then was looking for a new friend in his future war for greater Syria and he therefore supported Turkey, winked to the Germans, and supported them. They, on their part, handsomely rewarded him." And just before the final defeat of Turkey:

... Abu Misk ibn Kafur courted the land speculators and made deals with them. (...) Kafur saw the houses going up on the ruins of his garden and he ground his teeth and hid his gold in secret places. Now he was already dreaming of Palestine instead of Greater Syria (Heb.: 26; Eng.: 32-33).

This notion of natural differences, exploitable differences, among Arabs is illustrated more generally by a notorious popular conviction, intensified in this case by homophobia, that had prevailed since the early years of the Jewish colonial community in Palestine and later among Jews in Israel, that Turkish (and Arab) men, had homosexual proclivities. "Franz could see the Turkish officers in their filthy underpants going in and out of their rooms in the huge corridor as he was captivated by the beauty of the place." Yosef associates his own predicament with the homosexuality implicit in Franz's and Azouri's relationship. When Yosef speaks of their relationship he tells us that

their love was bodiless; they missed the opportunity for what might have been a simple but different story. They waited for Kathe [Yosef's grandmother] to arrive. Thus I missed the chance to be the first boy to be born to a twenty two-year-old man [his grandfather] and a thirteen-year-old lad [his father] (Heb.: 32; Eng.: 40).

This extension of difference clarifies the meaning of the scene in which "adorned ladies were sitting at a short distance smelling of perfume and drinking blood from

tall goblets." These ladies "looked at [Franz] through the dusky dimness and afterwards they laid romantic traps for him from which he was forever escaping" (Heb.: 31; Eng.: 38). Yet, when Azouri and Franz went back to the house for dinner, "the women were already giving Franz looks of loathing and contempt." There wasn't a woman there who "didn't lust after the boy" [Azouri], "and Kafur would laugh in his chair and say, he is mine, not yours; he belongs to... royalty, not to women. They swallowed the insults in silence" (Heb. p. 29; Eng. p. 36).

This Satyricon-like atmosphere was suffused with sensuality and indulgence: "horses came galloping by, and Franz drank cold grapefruit juice and ate roast chicken served by a giant Sudanese eunuch who wore a white kaftan, who looked like an extra in a German opera." Kafur, in the meantime, who "never got up from his chair...., "was the fattest man [Franz] had ever seen in his life."

Once a thoroughly decadent environment is established on the basis of a fear that joins the racial with the erotic, it becomes possible to clarify what can be the "good" of an Arab, and what is the nongood. For this, Kaniuk introduces us to the "historical" background of the ludicrous figure represented by Kafur, the historical shadow which gives Kafur his ideological and cultural significance in the novel.

Kafur was named after a tenth century Ethiopian, a diseased slave, who was the ruler of the country. He lived in Acre, and searched for the caliphs of Abbas and Ummaya among the rocks of a countryside that was less desolate then. He made the earth quake for six months intermittently in order to terrorize his friends;²² and to punish the rebellious Egyptians, he stopped the waters of the Nile, refusing to let them overflow their banks for a whole year, and bringing famine to the land of the Nile (Heb.: 27; Eng.: 33-34).

²²In the English translation: "to defeat his enemies".

Out of thirteen hundred years of Islamic history Kaniuk conjures up a figure whose greatest achievement must be ignored, namely, that he was the first black slave to rise from oppression to wield absolute power. For Kaniuk, what gives the ancient Kafur his connection to the novel's Kafur is power. This is the shadow of the latter Kafur's decadence and unreliability — not struggle but manifestation of result, not history, the conditions of possibility, but an affinity across time based on ruthlessness. To see how this works ideologically in A Good Arab, it is necessary to recover the history hidden beneath the appearance invoked by Kaniuk's conceptualization of the old Kafur.

The Abyssinian eunuch, abu-al-Misk Kafur (musk camphor), was purchased from an oil merchant, by Muhammad ibn-Tuhj al-Ikhshid [who founded] a Turkish dynasty... in al-Fustat, Egypt.... Kafur became sole ruler from 966 to 968. He successfully defended Egypt and Syria against the rising power of another petty dynasty in the north, the Hamdanid.... The case of this black slave, rising from the humblest of origins to a position of absolute power, was the first but not the last in Islamic history....²³

In our narrative, Azouri says that "Uncle Kafur was a miserable dreamer who lost everything because no dream can ever bring about a reality which will equal it." Still, we need to remember that Kafur is portrayed by Kaniuk as a caricature embodying the most prejudicial features of what "is," for Zionist thought, a Palestinian "Effendi,"²⁴ nationalist, and most important of all, national leader. Yosef accepts Azouri's description in the following passage, which we must assume is his record of Azouri's own words:

Kafur fed people because he wanted to see them fawn. He liked giving so that he could see the shame of a nursed desire played in front of him. He was a shrewd and intelligent person who

²³Hitti, 1973, 456.

²⁴In Arabic, in translation: Master, Land owner, Sir.

trusted no one. He was so sly and so suspicious that he didn't even trust himself.... (Heb.: 26-32; Eng.: 32-41).

Of course, the historical Kafur was not diseased, unless being a eunuch is itself considered a disease. But then Nehemiah, who headed the Jewish return from the Babylonian Exile (BC 515), was a eunuch too. The historical Kafur did not live in Acre. "Searching for the caliphs of Abbas and Ummaya among the rocks of the countryside" can only serve to satirize Islamic fantasies and dreams of an old and lost grandeur, as if the only possible Arab legacy could be found in debris. All of this supports yet another distinction — between the reasonable Arab who accepts exile, and the unreasonable Arab who claims to own what could never have been owned but for the Jewish cultivation of the land.

But this mix of caricature, stereotypes, orientalism, and categorical differences, eventually pulls the negativity of this putative Other into the very identity that had hoped to find a content beyond the merely negative. This is evident in Kaniuk's cultivation of the concept of the "extremist."

The next occasion on which we encounter Kafur occurs some twenty years later, and it serves a rather different narrative purpose, that of installing hope in the expedient Arab character. Thanks to Azouri's urging, Yosef's forebears, Franz, Kathe, and Hava, have "made Aliyah" (immigrated to Palestine). The year is 1936. They have just settled in Tel Aviv, "the first all Jewish city."²⁵ Franz travels to Acre in his search for Azouri despite the ongoing Palestinian armed rebellion against the British. He fails to find him but

the sight he saw was perhaps the biggest surprise in a lifetime of surprises. In a somewhat dim alley, in the sunlight that penetrated long eyelets made by the roofs, which looked like

²⁵Encyclopedia Judaica, 15: 916.

the crenellations of an ancient castle, stood a group of little boys in brown uniforms with a man wearing a brown suit and black boots, a swastika on his armband, putting them through military drilling exercises. They held sticks instead of guns. The strange man was Abu Misk Kafur. Franz recognized him from a distance.... (Heb.: 51; Eng.: 69).

When I read this passage, I could not avoid my own memory of a dramatic childhood experience.

I was about twelve years old when, with some elementary schoolmates, I joined BETAR (the Hebrew acronym for the Revisionist Youth Movement, or in Hebrew, Brit Trumpeldor). The year must have been 1943. All I remember of our group meetings are the military drills. We were children from poor homes. Our clothing was simple, and some of us did not wear shoes. It may have been summer, since some of us went barefoot. We could not afford to have uniforms, but our 'Commander', Yehuda Weis, had one. Yehuda was a tall, handsome young man, with gray eyes and blond hair. His family had come from Germany, probably the same year as the Rosenzweigs' of Kaniuk's narrative. He wore a brown suit, a black tie, a black service cap, black boots, and a black armband, and we held sticks instead of guns. The room we used was locked and dark. It was the "Underground," empty but for the Leader's portrait hanging low on the wall, at about eye level. Our most frequent routine involved the Commander raising his hand in salute, and in his funny German accent, shouting 'Tel Hai', and we, some twenty children, shouting back 'Tel Hai, Tel hai, Tel Hai !' ²⁶

Here is Yosef's further reconstruction of his father's memories - - -

... [Kafur's] enormous stomach did not have its chair now. There was no Sudanese to stand above him and serve him cold drinks. There was no cross to adorn his halation. ²⁷ He raised his arm in a salute and twenty barefoot children shouted 'Heil Hitler!' in a funny accent. Franz stood mesmerized, deliriously looking as if he was watching a silent movie that was

²⁶The Hebrew name of the sight in Upper Galilee where Joseph Trumpeldor (1880-1920), is buried. Since then a kibbutz has been established near the Lebanese border. Trumpeldor died in battle with Palestinian villagers who resisted the French and Zionist settlers. The Zionist myth makes Trumpeldor a symbol of pioneering and the armed defense in Palestine. It is said, that Trumpeldor's last words before dying were, "Never mind, it is good to die for our country." See "Shulamith Laskov, Yosef Trumpeldor A Biography (Haifa: Shikmona Publishing Company LTD, 1972): 243.

²⁷This sentence is missing from the English translation.

utterly ludicrous. He didn't want Abu Misk to see him. The children shouted 'Heil', 'Heil.' Azouri was nowhere to be seen. The alley thundered with their shouts. Abu Misk looked at the children despairingly. They were his last army, his last hope for reviving the Caliphate Kingdom. The swastika was hand painted, not at all precise, not properly sewn on; the uniform was a cheap imitation; the boots were torn. He felt sorry for the little Fuehrer; then he slipped into a side alley.... (Heb.: 51; Eng.: 66-70).

I remember, further, that

later in the summer my friends persuaded me to join them in a memorial ceremony for the leader, Zeev Zaboinsky. The memorial was to take place in Metsudat Zeev, in Tel Aviv (the Zeev Fortress, which was and still is to this day the name of the Betar, now Likud, Party headquarters). My parents did not know that I had joined Betar, and, of course, I did not dare to tell them of my plans for that night. I had to snatch a few coins from my mother's purse, and to sneak out unnoticed. This was a very long and dreary night for me. In a walled courtyard people stood in formation for hours. There were speeches in lowered voices, and hushed singing. There was no light aside from a few small kerosene lamps. As the hours went by, my panic grew worse and worse. I knew that by the end of the night I would have met my judge.

As I carefully opened the door to our house an hour or so after midnight, my father and mother were sitting there, waiting for me. My father said, Where have you been? I said, At Bracha Gelis' doing homework. This was a poor lie. My father then went to the Gelises' who lived just across the street from us. Within three minutes he returned, looking as if he was about to burst like a volcano. He said, "Mr Gelis told me you were with Bracha at the Zaboinsky memorial in Tel Aviv... " I will not speak of the verdict and punishment that followed, except to say that that night was not my only childhood experience with the Zionist Brown Shirts.

The anecdote speaks, beyond its personal significance, to the paradox in Israeli Jewish life discussed earlier: the internalization of one's enemy as an assertion of identity. Yosef was, in the above passages, merely a witness, the voice of another's memory. No such distinction is possible for me.

Presenting Kafur as a "little Fuehrer" in a fascist uniform suggests that this tie of hope to fascism was the most significant feature of the "1936 events... [which] the Arabs call the 'Great Revolt'." It symbolically links the Palestinian

national movement to Nazism and the Holocaust, thereby reaffirming the boundary between the good Arab individual and the real Arab population. The resemblance to my own, Jewish, experience is lost in this identification. All hopes are equal, but some are more equal than others. The Nazi must remain exterior to the Jew, beyond Jewish potential, there always to be judged by one who can never legitimately be judged.

Kaniuk explicates the image further in his delineation of the personality and invocation of the political experience of al-Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husayni, who had a central role in the political contest for control over Palestine. Al-Husayni was appointed by the British in 1921 as Mufti of Jerusalem. He served in that position until 1937. As the leader of the Moslem community, not only as Mufti of its premier city but also as President of the Supreme Moslem Council, Husayni was spokesman for the Palestinians to their British rulers. In this capacity, he was able to articulate Arab grievances against the Zionist movement, and galvanize support in the Moslem world for the Palestinian cause.

From his appointment by the British... until 1936, he had pursued a dual policy of cooperating with the British while uniting the Palestinians against Zionism. To his mind, it was the Zionists who were the real threat to Palestinian national goals. The British were too strong to evict, but could perhaps be induced... to alter their pro-Zionist policy.²⁸

Charles D. Smith writes about the context of al-Husayni's activity.

Aware of Zionist tactics and totally opposed to the initial [Peel Commission 1937] partition plan, Arab leaders despaired of retaining control of Palestine. The ensuing tension led to the second and much more violent stage of the Arab Revolt, from September 1937 to January

²⁸Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Nationalist Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988): 87-88.

1939.

For the first time, Smith says,

...British officials became targets, and the acting district commissioner for Galilee was murdered.... The violence continued, even though the Higher Arab Committee had disbanded after al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni's flight to Lebanon and then to Iraq, barely escaping British efforts to capture him because he opposed partition." ²⁹

What interests Kaniuk most, and every other Zionist, is Husayni's political activity in exile, especially his maneuvering in Iraq during the pro-German coup attempt of 1940-41, his residence in Germany from 1941 to 1945, his propagandizing on behalf of the Axis, his attempts to organize Arab and Moslem forces against the British, and his efforts to stop Germany from deporting Jews to Palestine.

Mattar notes that the Allies did not find enough evidence to warrant trying the Mufti as a war criminal. He concludes that the personality of one leader, no matter how prominent, could not have been decisive to the outcome of the Palestinian struggle:

The overriding factors that frustrated Palestinian nationalism have less to do with the policies and actions of a single leader than with the balance of forces.... The Palestinians were... never a match for the British army, nor, after 1939, for the Zionist forces." ³⁰

The significance of this history relates directly to the way 'Arabs' are

²⁹Charles D. Smith, Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988): 100

³⁰Mattar, 124

represented in Kaniuk's novel: in particular in regard to contacts with the German National Socialist government. There were, of course, similar contacts with Nazis by the leadership of the World Zionist Organization, the leadership of the Zionist Organization in Germany, and by the Jewish Agency of the World Zionist Organization in Palestine. The World Zionist Organization, by these affiliates, held negotiations with the German government intermittently between the years 1933 and 1941, and again, in Hungary, in 1944. From the Zionist point of view, these negotiations were one source of hope under circumstances that seemed to require even the most desperate of strategies. No such indulgence is permitted the Arabs, nor could it be given the Zionist appropriation of the Holocaust.

But there is also a more invidious interpretation — that those contacts, between Jews and Nazis, looked beyond the immediate urgency of the Jewish people to a different and more protracted conflict with a different enemy. Whatever the truth and whatever critics of Zionism think of those negotiations, and the process of immigrant selection they were intended to secure, is not here at issue. What is significant is that the negotiations played a role in Yosef's autobiography.

Azouri, a Palestinian liberal nationalist, is responsible for Kathe's and Franz's conversion to Zionism. In 1936, he urged them to leave Germany and go to Palestine, since "you are Jews and your life here is coming to an end." The narrative however, does not allude to the internal politics of Zionism that made such an option possible for them and not possible for others. The negotiations between the Zionist Organization and the German government allowed for individual Jews and families — e.g., of Franz Rosenzweig (in the novel) and the Weis's (the family of my own trainer in the Betar youth movement) — to migrate to Palestine, given the availability in Palestine of means of support (as stipulated in the "transfer

agreements"). The fundamental principle of these negotiations was, for the Zionists, the selection of the "suitable" candidates for transfer."³¹ This provides some of the background against which Kaniuk paints his portrait of extremism and distinguishes between the momentariness of Jewish extremism and the symptomatic extremism of the Arab.

In January 1941, the LEHI (Freedom Fighters for Israel [Stern group]) Zionist underground organization sent Naphtali Lubinczic to Vichy-controlled Beirut to meet two German government representatives. One was a Military Intelligence agent, the other from the Foreign Office. He handed them a memorandum, proposing collaboration. They sent the memorandum to the German embassy in Ankara, where it was found after the war. The document was entitled

³¹Luci Dawidowicz, The War Against the Jews 1933-1945, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985). On the Haavara (Transfer) Agreements, concluded August 1933, see pp. 82-85. On the June 21, 1933 Zionist memorandum to the National Socialist government, proposing that the "new German state" recognize "the Zionist movement as the most suitable Jewish group in the new Germany with which to deal, that Jewish status in Germany thenceforth be regulated on the basis of group status rather than individual rights...." The Zionist movement "held out bait — in the event the Germans cooperated ... to call off the anti-German boycott. The Zionists continued to pursue the idea of group rights for the Jews... from the start conceding individual rights and the achievements of the Emancipation" see pp. 183-185. On the Eighteenth Zionist Congress resolution to exclude anti-Zionists as applicants for British certificates for immigration to Palestine, and the Zionist criterion for 'suitable' applicants, see pp. 189-190. On the Kastner-Eichmann negotiations in Hungary: (the rescue of 1684 Jews in exchange for 450,000 who went to their death); and the 1953-54 Kastner trial in Israel, see Lenni Brenner, Zionism in the Age of the Dictators (Westport, CT Croom Helm London & Canberra, Lawrence Hill, 1983): 252-264. See also Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem a Report on the Banality of Evil (New York: Penguin Books 1976). And Dina Porat, An Entangled Leadership The Yishuv & the Holocaust, 1942-1945 (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1986); and her, The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust 1939-1945 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

"Fundamental Features of the Proposal of the National Military Organization In Palestine (Irgun Zvai Leumi) Concerning the Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe and the Participation of the NMO in the War on the side of Germany." Lubinczic told the Nazis that "if the Germans thought a Zionist state would be politically inexpedient, the LEHI would agree to the 'Madagascar plan', i.e. the deportation of European Jewry to the island of Madagascar, under German domination."³² The German government showed no further interest in this proposal. Nevertheless, in July 1941, Nathan Yellin-Mor, second in command of the LEHI organization, sought to reach the Nazis again in neutral Turkey. He was arrested *en rout* in Syria by the British in December of the same year (Heb.: 62; Eng.: 87).³³

This provides a perspective for understanding Kaniuk's depiction of a German Jew confronting Kafur, a Palestinian Arab nationalist, as a degenerate in 1917, and, in 1936, as a "little Fuehrer." In this light, his light-hearted ironies about Zionist political cynicism can be taken to represent what is possible by way of criticism and what is necessary by way of the balance required of criticism in the literature of liberal Zionism. They illustrate at least the limits within which Kaniuk hopes to shift the sentiments of his readers. But they rely, within those limits, on the difference between a figure of unqualified and symptomatic extremism and on extremism implicit in certain situations as, at most, a behavioral problem, not one of character and category.

The last time we hear of Kafur, he is not even mentioned by name: but the

³²Lenni Brenner, The Iron Wall (London: Zed Books, 1984): 194-198. For a detailed bibliography see *ibid*, p. 212.

³³Yellin-Mor, Nathan. Encyclopedia Judaica, 16: 738.

attentive reader will recognize him by association. The time is Spring, 1948, the "event" the next major Zionist-Palestinian military confrontation. We are told that, "only [Azouri's] dying uncle, rolling in the remnants of his last hope, set forth to do battle on Mishmar-haEmek at the age of sixty seven, and came back broken, and died of a broken heart" (Heb.: 62; Eng.: 87).

This, then, is the story of "Uncle Kafur." It is also a history of the Palestinian national movement prior to the calamity of the 1948-49 war, told as a parable (Yosef's dual identity) and a genealogy of Arabness. The history of Azouri's family, as well as the others from whose fate Yosef seems so terribly detached, shows the decisive role of genealogy in Kaniuk's identification of the limits of Arab goodness. What we now know is that these limits refer us to several increasingly inflexible traits: unreasonableness, obsessiveness, extremism, self-indulgence, unfettered sensuality, and politics.

CHAPTER 5

THE 1948 WAR: IRONY AND SELF-RIGHTOUSNESS

"After all", says Yosef, "Azouri was born into a history that saw the 1948 war as a British-Jewish bloodbath, and when [-while-] my mother Hava was wounded in a wearying attempt to save Jerusalem from the Arab Legion,¹ Azouri's brothers were talking about the theft of the land from its owners" (Heb.:45; Eng.:61).

In these few lines a whole history is constructed. Yet, there are two

¹ The Arab Legion was the army of the State of Transjordan, and was then under British Command. Until 14 May 1948, units of the Legion were stationed in Palestine as part of the deployment of British military forces. After that date the Legion stayed in Palestine under an agreement with the later-to-be Israeli government. This agreement was reached through long negotiations between the Zionist leadership in Palestine, King Abdullah of Transjordan, and the British Government acting as mediator. In the process, Golda (Meyerson) Meir met with King Abdullah on 17 November 1948, in Naharyim (the Palestine hydraulic electrical station on the Jordan River).

Abdullah secured Jewish agreement for annexing to Transjordan that part of Palestine that was to be allotted to the Arabs by the UN. Mrs. Meir ... had returned home with what amounted to a non-aggression pact with one of the leading Arab states. The ruler of that state and master of the Arab Legion had promised that he would never attack the Jews or join with other Arabs in frustrating the establishment of a Jewish State.

See, Avi Shlaim, Collusion Across the Jordan King Abdullah the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 110-121, and Appendices 1, and 2, pp. 625-627. This agreement was never violated by the Arab Legion, except where it contested Israeli aggression against an area controlled, by the Legion in accordance with this agreement.

questions that remain: (1) What is the referent, in the context of the narrative, of the phrase "British-Jewish bloodbath?" (2) What is intended by the juxtaposition that of Yosef's Jewish mother risking her life "to save Jerusalem" and his Arab uncles "talking about the theft of the land from its owners?"

The debate about the fairness with which the British authorities governed Palestine between December 1947 and 15 May 1948 is by now beyond resolution. Some Zionist historians argue that the British favored the Arabs. Other historians argue that they favored the Jews. For Yosef, the debate is beside the point since, for him, the Palestinians are simply "not there."

Regardless of their position on this question, most historians, both Jews and Arabs, agree that the British government kept its political commitment in general to the Zionist colonizing enterprise in Palestine. On the other hand, though its Military Command at all levels never diverged from any of the principle directives set by the Government, the army was somewhat less sympathetic to the Zionists. The limited armed conflict between the British forces and what were then called the "Dissident Organizations" (the 'right wing' IZL and LEHI), or the Hagana during the years 1945-1947, ended after the UN resolution of November 29, 1947, partitioning Palestine, when the British government announced its resolve to withdraw by 14 May, 1948.

Thus, Yosef's reference to a "British-Jewish bloodbath," revises the history of the war. Instead of one primarily between and affecting Arabs and Jews, it is characterized as a crisis jointly faced by the Jews and the British. Thus, an ambiguous mix of Arab and Jew, Yosef, defines Arab history without any

implication of Arab experience. It is as if Yosef sees history itself as the mirror image of his own contradictory identity. In both the history and the identity, the Arab is inessential, provides no perspective, is there only to witness others less ambiguous than himself. The revision also mirrors the militarized relations of Arab and Jew that now define and constrict so much of Israeli society. The war was "a British-Jewish bloodbath" because the Arabs constituted a mere condition of rather than were parties to the only relation for whom dialogue and negotiation were conceivable.

The second question is more complex. Hava was wounded while driving in an armed convoy in, as Yosef put it, a "wearying attempt" to break through a blockade of the main road to Jerusalem by Palestinian-Arab militia (Heb.: 59-60; Eng.: 82-84). These militia were headed by Abd al-Qadir Husayni, who had been appointed by his uncle, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, Mufti of Jerusalem, to command the Arab military forces in Palestine.² The Mufti was the Palestinians' greatest adversary against Abdullah, then King of Transjordan, who had rejected the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Abdullah had coveted Palestine and had hoped to annex it, or at least those parts of it left after the establishment of the Jewish state.³

On the whole, the Zionist military strategy was offensive. It was designed to secure the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine. This included controlling the main road to Jerusalem, the city itself, and its vicinity. Its purpose was, as far as possible, to gain a larger territory than that allotted to the Jewish state

²Mattar, 1988, 127.

³Ibid, 112-113.

by the UN. Thus, 'saving' Jerusalem meant taking it.⁴

Hava's "wearying attempt" contrasts with Yosef's uncles' complaint about the theft of the land from its owners. The first, the labor of saving, evokes the idea of a right to what one has earned. The second refers only to the violation of a juridical right over property, earned or not. The opposition of perspectives in Yosef's recollection, thirty-five years after the event, is again, unequal. Hava's right is predicated on her suffering as a subject, therefore a right predicated on an expenditure. The Arabs' right is merely one in law, and therefore merely conventional. In this juxtaposition, only the Jew can truly be deserving. Because of the higher nature of Hava's claim, every Jew is represented by Hava's labor. By contrast, a juridical claim identifies only a category of persons, and subjects others to the limitations of the right that inheres in the category. A category is not a group; nor does it designate a subjectivity and therefore an enduring sense of right. Therefore, in this logical exhaustion of possible rights, there can be none left for the Palestinians but what they share abstractly, categorically, with all Arabs; and any instance of ownership will do, without regard to whatever relationship might have established it. Thus, no suffering or labor is associated necessarily with such a claim: only, if at all, accidentally. Therefore, the claim is amorally juridical. It induces no obligation on society as such, no sense of expenditure and depletion, no reference to what is deserved beyond what is merely granted. Therefore, it can in no sense be part of a legitimate politics, that is one recognizably founded in righteousness.

This distinction between higher rights and conventional rights completes a

⁴Khalidi, 1988.

circle that begins and ends with the inconceivability of a Palestinian experience equivalent to that of a Jew. What is erased in this remarkable passage, in which the labor of conquest takes priority over the property of victims, is not Palestinians, but the possibility of Palestinian subjectivity. Nor is the erasure political in the sense of a withdrawal, removal, or a taking away: it is rather an affirmation of Jewish subjectivity, since the latter now appears as purely positive, not oriented against an other, but oriented to and for a universalistic historical project, the salvation of a Jerusalem that stands for a people rather than concerned merely with land which is an object, there for anyone. By referring to Hava's "wearying attempt," Yosef fills the Jew with rights and history beyond temporal law, rights that can only be opposed by those who oppose humanity itself, in this case the Arab Legion.

On the other hand, the moral inferiority of property rights does not discredit Yosef's uncles. It merely leaves them with a calculable loss. In this way, the sense of a legitimate antagonism is sustained, but the legitimate direction of its moral resolution is implicit in how it is depicted at the outset. The uncles only meditate on specific rights derived from a specific state. Hava suffers for the sake of a people, and for a history the moral dimension of which is visible only through that people's experience. This is given added rhetorical force in Yosef's dramatic reference to 1948.

Yosef opens this part of his confession with the following:

In Acre where my mother and father were later to meet, a great kingdom once came to an end with a magnificent flourish. In 1948 a few Jewish shells put an end to the Turkish reign of hundreds of years, when the Israel Defense Forces conquered with a single three-inch-mortar

what Napoleon had failed to conquer. (Heb. p. 46.; Eng. p. 61).⁵

It is significant that the English translation changes or key expressions, possibly to aid the English reader in negotiating the Palestinian-Israeli historical maze. On the other hand, it alter the tone of the novel, diminishing the sense of irony in the original: "In Acre where my mother and father were later to meet, a great kingdom once [my emphasis] came to an end with a magnificent flourish." The added term 'once' moves the action to a distant and symbolic plain; and, in relation to the "once," "where my mother and father were later to meet" casts the battle itself as fantastic, and the meeting epic, heroic, anticipated. The Hebrew construction of this passage alludes more directly to the medieval Crusaders' Acre of the twelve century, and operates satirically to convey a sense of pretension punctured. The pretension of celebrating Salah al-Din's victory over a so-called "great kingdom." This demeaning of Arab history, the gloating, is lost in the English translation.

This is confirmed by the next sentence of the English version: "In 1948 [my emphasis] a few Jewish shells put an end...." There is still the sense of great accomplishment, but not that of puncturing pretension. The insertion of the words "In 1948" specifies a moment, as if the statement is intended to inform rather than to characterize. It renders the sentence innocent, without the cutting edge of the original and without what might appear to the English reader as untoward gloating. Finally, the translation omits the word 'Arab', which appears in the Hebrew in the hyphenated expression, 'Arab-Turkish'. The primary effect is to neutralize for the

⁵The quotation is in the English.

English reader the original reference to the Arab as an object of scorn. For the Hebrew reader, the "Arab-Turkish reign" was, like Napoleon's, pretentious rather than truly mighty.

The translation was doubtless intended to reduce the tone of racialism and the arrogance that might have been somewhat offensive to English readers, especially in the light of the facts. Indeed, Acre was not conquered by the Israeli army with only a few shells from a single three-inch-mortar. In a book dedicated by the IDF to the Carmeli Brigade, the description of the battle takes eleven pages. According to the UN resolution partitioning Palestine, Acre was to become part of the Arab-Palestine state.

Since there were no Jews living in Acre in 1948, its 15,000 Arab citizens felt secure, at least during the first months of the conflict. However, following the fall of Arab Tiberias, Arab Haifa, and other Arab towns in the Lower Galilee district of the country, a siege was gradually laid around Acre. A flood of refugees came into the city, in numbers estimated at approximately 35,000.⁶ The siege was completed by the destruction of bridges on the roads leading north to Syria and Lebanon. Only then did the shelling by three-inch and six-inch-mortars commence, and it was systematic and devastating.⁷ During the siege a typhus epidemic broke. Intelligence sources reported that the situation was near despair and that Acre would not be able to defend itself against a Zionist attack. The

⁶Tzadok Eshel, The Carmeli Brigade in the War for Sovereignty (Tel Aviv: Maarakhhot, Ministry of Defense Publishing, 1973): 174-184.

⁷The Israeli six-inch-mortar, the 'Davidka', was known for its inaccuracy, and thus as an indiscriminate weapon that wrought havoc among civilians and had a tremendous terrorizing effect.

Operation Order to the attacking forces, *inter alia*, said:

The city of Acre is under siege for the fourth day. A reinforcement of fifty fighters arrived yesterday in Acre. According to earlier information they had 100 fighters of which some have already run away. Their fire power includes 2 heavy machine-guns, 4-5 medium machine-guns, and about 70 rifles. Our forces: 3 NCO (mechanized) companies... + 2 Regular companies... + 1 Supporting Arms platoon. Mission: to attack the city with the intention of killing its men, setting property on fire, and bringing the city to surrender.

The general attack lasted 24 hours (16-17 May 1948).⁸ Had the story been told by its Arab residents, no doubt many Havas would have been mentioned for their exemplary heroism. Above all, it would have been impossible to ridicule the defense of Acre by identifying the defending forces with pretensions and characterizing the Zionist attack as a puncturing of it. Yosef's account gives voice to a certain exaltation, a reflection on an achievement of historical stature by a people who had been reviled by others as they now revile those they conquer. The sentiment is understandable, but then so would have been a similar sentiment on the part of the Palestinians if the situation were reversed. What is important is that Yosef speaks here for his Jewish against his Arab self, just as he spoke against his rejection by the Israeli military on the ground that he was, after all, a Jew and therefore should be permitted to be moral, to choose whether or not to do his duty.

Kaniuk's novel transcends the private and the incidental in its special use of psychology, its reference to the historical dimension of politics, and its invocation of culture. Its ambition is to present a saga of two conflicting nationalities. But it constantly reiterates the ethnocentrism of its original assumptions and the

⁸Eshel, 1973.

dependency of those assumptions on conquest, dispossession, and contradictory identity. It protects the Zionist myth from any criticism of its underlying invidious distinction by a poetics of dispersion, of chaos, and of utopia. The myth appears everywhere, casting its sense of the heroic and the historic on one event after another, regardless of type, whether fact or fiction, or whether great or otherwise insignificant.

This is particularly evident in the novel's references to what it admits as Arab politics. Because these references bear on Yosef's relationship with his father, and therefore with the Arab portion of his own identity, it requires some discussion. In this account, Yosef's sense of his father is intertwined with ambivalence toward the "Party" as emblematic of politics.

Azouri did not fight and was busy with Party affairs. He spoke of Jewish Arab brotherhood, but believed in no more than what he saw with his own eyes. Young women from the Jewish sector mingled with those tough men who formed the nucleus of the Party. There were dreams and there were meetings, and when the 1948 war broke out and Azouri was in Acre.... (Heb.: 62.; Eng.: 86-87).

Yosef never refers to the "Party" by name. Yet, from the allusions he makes to it, one can safely assume that what he has in mind is the Palestinian Communist Party which together with Jewish communists, eventually established the Israeli Communist Party (MAKI). My discussion of the "Party" relies on this assumption.

Given the ideological context in which "communism" was then perceived, to write of "the Party" without naming it was to invest the referent with the quality of something sinister, monolithic, and secretive. It was to incorporate politics into a field of dark forces in which people "mingle" without any greater purpose than

can be imagined from the gang-like conjoining of "young women" and "tough men,"⁹ The image is, to be sure, softened by the reference to "dreams and meetings." But we are left with an impression of "party affairs" and 'busy-ness' as a reflection of idealism without hope and therefore tinged with a danger reinforced by reference to a "nucleus" of "young women" and "tough men."

By definition, any internationalist party in Palestine concerned with a bi-national political program and determined to include Palestinian Arabs as well as Jews is anathema for Zionism. The central principle of Zionism was the exclusion of Arabs from Israel (and even more generally, though in a different way, the exclusion of all non-Jews). Therefore, it is not surprising that many Zionist politicians, academicians, writers and artists, hold extremely hostile attitudes toward Jewish members of the Communist Party, especially women (whether married or not). In this respect, the Zionist reflection on Jews sharing politics with Arabs is analogous to the Orthodox proscription of intermarriage.

For Palestinian Arab members of the Communist Party, however, the situation was and remains somewhat different. While hated by the landed aristocracy and other bourgeois, religious-orthodox, and right-wing nationalist groups, the party has played a significant political and cultural role for working

⁹The Israeli historian G. Z. Israeli, makes the following curious comment about intentions, in his own text: "It should be noticed that the leaders of the PCP generously dispensed promises among Arabs regarding travel and studies in Russia. Communist propaganda among Arabs was based not necessarily on class-conscious persuasion and personal ideals. The inducements for Arabs were different (spending time abroad for free, and the opportunity to meet with Jewish young women freely within the party, etc.) [my emphasis]". *G. Z. Israeli, MPS - PKP - MAKI The History of the Communist Party in Israel, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1953): 79 [my emphasis].

people, including the peasants.

Throughout most of the British rule in Palestine, the party was not allowed to function legally and therefore was forced underground. Party members were brutally persecuted; its leaders and cadres were frequently held in prison for long years or exiled from the country.¹⁰ Of its Jewish members thousands were sent back to their "countries of origin." The Palestinian-Arab branch of the greater Communist Party had objected to the war of 1948.¹¹ It was the only Arab political force that survived the war, and was the first to reorganize itself afterward (within MAKI) in opposition to Israeli control and the Military Government by which that control was implemented.¹²

However, the subtext of Yosef's reference to the Party is not politics. The latter is merely a presence within his discourse. The subtext has to do with the relationship between Azouri and Yosef's dual identity. There are key passages that bear on the relationships among paternity, identity, and ambiguous or otherwise uncertain classification.¹³ As with every part of the narrative, Yosef's confessions pursue the Arab part of his identity in an effort to dispossess it as a cause of anything but the error others have made about him based on his duality. However, Azouri is both father and Arab.

Thus, his depiction and its role in Yosef's "confession" is complex. Part of

¹⁰Hans Lebrecht, "Hapalestinaiim Avar ve'Hoveh (Israel: Mifalim Universitaiim Publishers LTD., 1987). (A translation of: Die Palastinenser Geschichte und Gegenwart. Frankfurt: Verlag Marxistische Blatter, 1982.)

¹¹Aharon Cohen, Israel and the Arab World (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976): 185, 353.

¹²Israeli, 1953, 201.

¹³Marie-helene Huet, "Monstrous Imagination: Progeny as Art in French Classicism" Critical Inquiry 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 718-737.

this complexity lies in Yosef's sense of Azouri as never quite what he seems to be. Thus, Yosef says of Azouri that he "spoke of Jewish-Arab friendship but believed in no more than what he saw with his own eyes." In a related context he remembers that Azouri "was active in the Party out of a need to belong, to harness himself to something bigger than he was; but I know that Azouri was as much a Marxist as I was a Turkish monarchist."

There is some power in Azouri's cynicism, but it is too isolating to be felt as truly authoritative. Yosef feels that Azouri lacks the political perspective he claims, and that he may lack political conviction as well. While this confers on Azouri the minimal condition for being a good Arab — a lack of politics — it leaves him with less definition than he needs to be fully and unequivocally paternal. Yosef writes about Azouri's stay in France where he taught in the Sorbonne for six months (1946): "They say he had a woman there who was married to another man. She used to come and see him. Did he love her? I never asked him and he never told me" (Heb.: 61.; Eng.: 84-85).

This de facto inaccessibility is matched by Azouri's apparent indifference to those who may have loved him — especially women. "To the women he met in the Party he was hard and casual. They went in and out of his [bed]room without complaints. Azouri was the blue-eyed boy of the town...;" ¹⁴ and, "A Jewish woman from Haifa who was in love with him used to come [to Acre] and stay with him but he did not go to bed with her. He told me that she had once been his brother's girlfriend" (Heb.:63; Eng.: 88). Azouri had principles, but Yosef could

¹⁴The English translation is using the term 'bedroom' (see, Heb.: 76; Eng.: 107).

find in him no definite center.

As for politics, Yosef writes of Azouri that "there were dreams and there were meetings." That it is paternity that is the issue is clear in Yosef's account of the lineage of Azouri's questionable authenticity as a moral subject:

his [Azouri's] father went to Kfar Yassif and joined the Qawuqji fighters for a while and he may have fired a few shots here and there, perhaps he took part in some battle, but for whatever reason this family was not eager to fight. Like many others they shouted, denounced the Jews, but they didn't shoot.¹⁵

Azouri, despite his "dreams," did not even "curse; and he didn't join the the grumbling chorus. He refused to hold a gun in his hand." Azouri's father's own refusal to fight may have been due to a lack of enthusiasm, or it may have reflected some cowardice on his part. But Azouri's refusal is more complex, and Yosef cannot quite get the point of it.

At least his refusal seemed to be part of a constant and less expedient disposition than that which Yosef attributes to his grandfather. Yosef knows this only through others, but through Azouri's reputation in general and not simply evaluations of his conduct, by specific others: "Azouri's friends in town always looked at him with admiration, they saw him destined for greater things than war."

We have already learned that very little is greater than war. Yet the reader expects to hear what it is about Azouri that motivates his friends' admiration of him. Azouri's status in the community as a man of 44 years of age, an intellectual with

¹⁵In 1948 Azouri's father must have been at least 65 years old when we consider that his brother (Azouri's uncle), the famous abu-al-Misk Kafur Sherara, died in the same year at the age of 67, and that Azouri (who is not the oldest son) is himself 44 years old in 1948.

five doctorates, a historian of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, a leader of "the Party," complicates Yosef's understanding of his refusal to fight. Together, Azour's reputation and inaccessibility create for Yosef a mysterious figure that inspires in him even more than respect. In the midst of war, "Azouri sat at home; told his father, when the war is over let me know who won. He wasn't even interested in the radio his father had bought." Here, perhaps, is the special authority of one who can afford to be indifferent and to be so for reasons impossible for a son to understand.

What we are left with is a distinction between Azouri the father and Azouri the Arab. This is a duality that Yosef finds in his father analogous to the one which he cannot evade in himself. Yosef sees the positive aspect, the father, surface over and even against the negative aspect, the Arab, just as the community saw Azouri as more than Arab. This "positive" aspect constitutes an estrangement. Yosef recognizes the special power of his father, but only to forget it:

A man who stood on the Acre beach for two nights and two days and never fired a shot, and Israeli soldiers pushed him into the water, and made him stand at the water's line, and wanted him to go back to some Arab past in the sea; he'll never forget it, he said, but he added, 'you know what? I've already forgotten. What I have not forgotten is my mother. In 1948 she was fifty years old. A beautiful woman, but old' (Heb. p. 66; Eng. p. 99).

Yosef forgets what his father will "never forget," and remembers what his father's indifference to women otherwise makes forgettable. Yosef's dual identity requires two pasts — one that refers to the father who subsumes him, the other that recollects the mother who could have given him meaning and conviction. Paternity completes itself for Yosef as the mystery of the father's desire and the emergence of

the son's.

On the other hand, Kaniuk adds an unexpected confusion, thereby reinstating doubt and ambivalence in Yosef's attempt to reconstitute a useful genealogy of his identity: Azouri's mother cannot have been 50 in 1948, since she would then only have been six years older than her son.¹⁶

- In 1948, Azouri was 44 years old. His brother was four years older than he. How can their mother have been 50 years old? What is at issue in the narrative is not her age, but the resemblance this comparison of age difference creates with her son. What is important, then, is what Azouri makes of her, and what Yosef is then able to infer about Azouri in relation to himself. Azouri remembers his own mother's abandonment of his father. The purpose of this memory is to duplicate throughout Yosef's lineage the abandonment and the characteristic of forbearance. It is through the mystery of what lies behind forbearance that Yosef discovers the power that his father, any father, can have over his son. Azouri speaks through Yosef, the son authorizing the voice of the father and through that authorizing the father's own account of the forbearance of his father before him.

My father went to Kfar Yassif.... His wife sat at home: a traditional Arab home, said Azouri. I was sort of an inexplicable clown. What was my father? He studied once in some school, a minor clerk in the British mandate. My mother was beautiful and she burned with hatred.... I went to Haifa.... When I returned, my mother was no longer there. Do you understand how a son feels? And I'm an Arab, Yosef, an Arab son of an Arab, who hears that his mother ran off to Tunisia with an officer from the Qawuqji army.... Pleasure came my mother's way again, from one who came from Iraq. I'm not sure where he came from, but I found an empty house. My mother didn't know how to write. My father came back and found that his wife had become a refugee in Tunisia, gone off with a mustachioed officer.... I cried for him, but he didn't cry. He was a strong man unlike his brother, Kafur, a realistic man, close to the land, not a big talker. He sat quietly. His pride was hurt and he didn't say a word.

¹⁶Azouri was born in 1904 (see Heb.: 28; 32, 39).

Azouri, who usually forebears, weeps for his father, perceiving strength rather than indifference in his refusal to speak. In this, he shows himself to be moved by his father as Yosef is by him.

Beauty and passion, a gendered Arab reality, the feelings of Arab sons, betrayal and pleasure, mystery and intimation, pain and forbearance; these are some antinomies of the genesis of Yosef's duality. But in the end, in the juxtaposition of passion and forbearance, Azouri's memory reconstitutes the priority of one identity — that of the father — over the other — that of the Arab. The juxtaposition reveals, Yosef says, "strength." Kaniuk needs to qualify that strength since it is still the strength of an Arab. He needs to do this so that Yosef's reflection on the relationship between identity and lineage will remain consistent. But it must also, for the sake of Kaniuk's project, reinvest Arabness in the strong father:

Later he remarried. He brought his wife from one of the villages. [At that time he was working as an interpreter in the military government. In the meantime my brothers had scattered, the house was almost empty. I had apartments in Acre and in Haifa and I had to stand in a queue... to get a travel permit. My father was in charge. Sometimes he was ashamed to look me in the eyes.] I wasn't angry with him, his wife was nagging him, she began to despise him.

The brackets represent a type of disruption Kaniuk typically inserts in the text. It suspends momentum and pluralizes the narrative at key points. In this case, the device reconstitutes Azouri's father's Arab pride and shame, and gives Azouri the chance to forebear: "I wasn't angry with him...." With pride and shame comes

yet a new Arabesque, the Arab woman who now stands for the Arab traits by which Arab paternity distinguishes itself as other than a manifestation of strength:

She wanted him to take a knife and go and avenge himself on the woman who had betrayed him. It maddened her that he wasn't angrier, that he didn't kill her or himself, that he helped me obtain travel permits. She became more and more trapped in the hatred boiling inside her.

This passion, bordering on obsession and madness, is not just that of any woman, but of an Arab — indeed Arabesque — woman. "In bed she gave my father a cold body. She never smiled. She cooked and withdrew into herself. One day she killed herself in the room."

Kathe and Hava had similar problems. They also could not relate sexually to their husbands. The only difference, we can assume, is that they did not 'cook'; at least we are not told they did. They, like Azouri's father's second wife and Franz's sister, kill themselves, in each case but one out of frustration at having chosen the wrong man. Franz's sister committed suicide after Germany's defeat in WWI. Frustration based on strength belongs to men, and especially fathers. Anger based on weakness, belongs to women, stereotypically Arab women. None of the men kill themselves.

We were sitting in the kitchen. First she screamed, Go and stick a knife. But my father never stuck knives in anyone, a wasted Arab, torn from what he had grown up on without arriving anywhere else. I too Yosef. He and I, mutations from which you were saved. You inherited anger from my parents' parents: not from me, not from my father.

Here, I think, the monologue takes a fateful turn. Azouri confesses to mutations from which a son must be saved. But these mutations are the results of betrayal by women. Nevertheless, the confessional tone contributes an element of

'good faith' to the relationship between Azouri and Yosef. Azouri's father is "a wasted Arab," like Hamlet might be said to have been a wasted prince. This qualifies paternity in just the way Yosef needs, as confirming in his own authorial voice the obligation of Arabness to give way to the Jewish subjectivity on which any authority depends. Azouri too is a man who tried all his life to be his best and ended up vanquished. He says, "I too Yosef;" and he shows that waste is not necessary when he compares the suicide of his own father's second wife's to that of Hava: "like Hava, she was a brave fighter in a lost battle." The losses of Arabs as well as Jews appear against the standard of Jewish heroism.

Yet, there remains a further ambiguity. Kaniuk's ironies always end with final authority vested in the Jewish conscience. But they leave that conscience at least somewhat uneasy: righteous, but uncomfortable with what the righteousness of such a self may do to others. Kaniuk's liberalism succeeds no more than any instance of Zionist liberalism; but Kaniuk at least makes room for an Arab reality, though it is one that requires forbearance which is a strength the vitality of which lies in forgetfulness. Perhaps Kaniuk is saying that Zionism can only thrive at the expense of memory. If so, then the Zionist self, the sense of being an Israeli Jewish subject, can only survive on the ground of an invented past, a fantasy that disguises the Arab as dreams disguise unconscious guilt and fear. In this case, we are beginning to see Zionism as the resistance of a subjectivity to itself, a version of what Azouri refers to as "waste." This is clarified in Yosef's depictions of Arab resistance, especially by Palestinians.

CHAPTER 6

"THE ORGANIZATIONS"

The umbrella coalition of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), represents a broad spectrum of cultural, civil and military organizations, institutions and political parties. In A Good Arab, however, the term "Organizations" operates as a figure of speech. For Yosef, it names and homogenizes the politics of Arab resistance, thereby establishing the basis for a 'covering discourse' on all politics beyond the stipulated boundaries of Arab goodness. It constitutes an image of diffuseness and extremism, of dispositions beyond norms and negotiation, of terrorism. Its force lies in its always insinuating more than it says, qualifying any sense of proposition in which it is part and invoking for the Hebrew reader a sense of urgency and efficacy beyond law. This term, consolidates the Zionist "theory" of Arab of Arab politics, and provides A Good Arab with a referent that marks the boundary of Arab goodness.

"The Organizations" are identical things, galvanized by irrepressibly uncivil dispositions, and arranged like a guerrilla band rather than a polity or a disciplined military force. Even Azouri's moderateness can never allay Yosef's suspicions that he is not really so. On the other hand, "the Organizations" share those Arab traits that make even the political Arab somewhat ludicrous. Arab politics is dangerous, to be sure. But, like the old Empire, there is more posture than

substance.

Yosef's image of "the Organizations" is articulated in two ways which, at certain points, converge. One I would call 'mundane', or 'profane'. Here the Palestinian Organizations are described behavioristically, by lists of activities and operations. Description is simple, direct, and laconic. Palestinians, the subjects of these activities and operations, are on the order of functionaries. For them, identity is totally realized in the act. Thus, whatever their appearance, they show no rational conviction. But when, always unexpectedly, the organizations are represented historically, identity is no longer set within the act but within an allegory. Then, Yosef's narrative becomes intricate, in its ambiguous, and filled with pathos.

They killed children on a kibbutz... Sometimes when I look deep into my own heart, trying to imagine this tragic conflict..., an unbridgeable gap. Thus the ground was left for the extremists and for war..., which will last very long, for generations. It does not lend itself to an interim solution; in this game someone has to win. But the victory is also a sign of defeat, for the victor will bear all the scars and he won't have peace, neither he nor his enemies (Heb.: 102; Eng.: 145-146).

The upshot of this prose is that readers are brought without warning and as a matter of insinuation, into the Zionist problematic.

These two levels on which Yosef articulates "the organizations" yields a sense of Arab politics as an appearance of Arab interest and a reality of Jewish entitlement. There are acts and there are deeds, rituals and purposes. For Yosef, Arab acts and Arab purposes have no necessary connection. Therefore, for the Jew, the acts require a reaction appropriate to the danger of extremism. For the Arab, the mere fact that he or she acts is tragic, since without the immanence of

purpose an act can only be antagonistic to the actor, hence the ludicrousness of Arab Action.

Yosef frequently compares "the Organizations" with Jewish 'extremists': not, however, with Jewish political parties and organizations, but with individuals. These are usually presented unnamed or as strictly in role, as, for example Bunim, Yosef's supervisor in the Mossad.¹ Bunim has a habit, of using biblical terms in his everyday speech. He is fond of poetry² and has something of a sense of humor.³ He had been a Hagana naval captain in the Jewish underground refugee fleet on route from Europe to Palestine, and was Commander of the port of Haifa when the Rosenzweig family arrived in 1936.⁴ As a captain, he had served on the boat that brought over Dina's (Yosef's lover) parents.⁵ Bunim has the almost mythical dimensions of a Zionist hero. Against his 'extremism', which is noble, the Palestinians are, both monstrous and ridiculous: monstrous because the indifference to humanity, exemplified by their opposition to Jewish hegemony, and ridiculous because of pretentiousness revealed in every act by its lack of purpose — purposefulness without purpose. We must remember that the 'ridiculous' in A Good Arab is frequently evoked in ways that cast doubt on the legitimacy of ridiculing a particular individual.

¹The Mossad becomes, as it were, an analogous extremist agency to that of "the Organizations." This is one way the narrative draws a symmetry between these two 'entities'. But, in fact, they are not at all symmetrical, since the term "the Organizations," stands as a trope for all that "we know" is Palestinian as such, while the Mossad is a definite entity which the Israeli liberal Jewish Hebrew reader might be willing to concede as being of a dubious character, as an aberration.

²Heb. 18; Eng. 20.

³Heb. 58-59; Eng. 81.

⁴Heb. 22; Eng. 26.

⁵Heb. 18; Eng. 20.

But all politics has, for Kaniuk and Yosef, its own field of righteousness and doubt, focused by dreams and the past, and by a consuming goal that broaches neither exception nor compromise. This is especially true for Arabs in general and Jewish extremists.

Azouri played it safe, but it seemed as if he was really free of his uncle's curse, the dream of the restoration of the Umayyads, overcoming the slanders of the past, even if he did have a somewhat romantic attitude towards the Organizations. They killed children on a kibbutz, but Azouri didn't sound too convincing when he condemned their actions. Perhaps in the depths of his heart he admired their single-mindedness, a single-mindedness which he lacked (Heb.:102; Eng.: 145-146).

Azouri failed unequivocally to condemn murder. Yosef can only speculate on why the equivocality. But the reasons for his conclusion, that purposefulness is enough and "single-mindedness" admirable — is vague.

Purposefulness cures several ills: it heals estrangement, but it also makes one vigilant and prepares one to flee as much as to attack. From what Yosef says it seems that Azouri's strength lies in his forbearance. But then, the ambiguity expressed in the latter leaves Yosef to interpret it pretty much on his own. He is free to be tempted by politics, though if he is to be strong, and therefore a self, he must forebear.

... Sometimes when I look deep into my own heart, trying to imagine this tragic conflict, which so many patriots on both sides had made their own and patented, I think that the gap between Arab moderates, and Azouri really is a moderate, and Jewish moderates is greater than that between extremists.... Franz's fire was Europe, and Hava jumped out of the fire and landed on Azouri providing his brothers, my uncles, with an identity, an identity they did not have before but which was crystallized in struggle. It is new and invincible; and thus the

ground was prepares for the extremists and for war. I know it in my guts, it will last very long, for generations. It does not lend itself to an interim solution; in this game someone has to win. But the victory is also a sign of defeat — for the victor will bear scars and he will have no peace, neither he nor his enemies (ibid).

Here, Yosef sees politics as a sham, at least in contrast with what the Jews faced in Europe. After further meditations along these lines,⁶ Yosef remembers that Bunim once told him that:

... if I were an Arab, not an Arab like you but a proud Arab, I'd join the Fatah. I smiled my obsequious smile for him, my 'Arab' smile, and went on describing what was happening in Arafat's camps, what I saw there, what was going to happen. And he was examining the papers in front of him in earnest and with scorn for me saying, there isn't an Arab you can't buy. Only name your price; and then he stared into space thinking, how many Jews can't you buy? Was uprightness ever a Jewish trait? And then he felt so very lonely in his desperate struggle to justify the injustices he was causing. But he is a whole person, though he had erased the humanity with which he was brought up in order to oppress Azouri, so that he would be sure that he was right even when he wasn't right, because on the other side he was facing those who were professionally righteous, each a kind of Bunim. The world is full of Bunims and I'm dying here, lonely, longing, thinking... (Heb.:103-104; Eng.: 147-148).

Yosef sees Bunim as a Jew who can imagine being an Arab, who defines the Arab as an enemy who can be admired — in contrast with the stereotyped Arab that Yosef can produce at any given moment in his reflexively "obsequious smile." in this reflexivity Yosef enacts the role of abject other to the utter indifference of his interrogator in this pitiless version of master and slave. Bunim's indifference to and contempt for Yosef yields for the latter an appreciation of the former, and through that to compassion for Bunim in a world of enemies. But the self Yosef

⁶Yosef thinks of Heine, "...the German Jew who loved and hated his Jewishness and his Germanness, who lived in Paris and revenged himself on himself, writing lines of love and accusation against himself..."

discovers within himself, one that can think thoughts "of love and accusation against himself," is an unhappy, inconsolable self, a morally desirous self surrounded by the "professionally righteous" and unable to find its own center. Here we see abjectness as a surface, a disguise for a more profound sense of absence or void. This relationship between disguise and the absence it conceals provides Bunim with the Arab he expects, preserves Yosef's sense of himself as not that expectable Arab, and completes for the reader the image of one who must conceal himself because of injustice, but who conceals only the inner void which is a reality without the capacity for politics. The Arab subject (who is also a Jew) will emerge, as he must if Kaniuk's project is to be even partially fulfilled. But it will still be the Arab who cannot turn the tables because he was never really seated in the first place. This is an Arab who finally must be grateful for all liberal attempt to recognize him and his kind, even Bunim's demeaning sentimental recognition of an idealized Arab nobility, even Kaniuk's self-protective recognition of Arabness in A Good Arab.

Much later, the novel returns to "the Organizations." The following passage identifies Yosef's objects, the Organizations, the "Minorities," with the object Yosef himself had been in Bunim's eyes.

Today the whole thing seems to me like a joke. In panic I fled from the Organizations, but the chase through the streets of Copenhagen in a Volkswagen bus was indeed ludicrous. Two youngsters, whom the Voice of Israel would doubtless have described as "minorities" were hot on my tracks but I slipped away. They didn't have a chance, they asked people the way. I was insulted by the ease with which I escaped (Heb.: 110; Eng.: 157).⁷

⁷This issue can not be raised in the English translation, notice: " ... with two young men whom the Israeli papers, would doubtless have described as 'minority group members'..."

Here there is the appearance of incompetence, a subjectivity of form without content. No one is there to speak for a truth beyond this weak appearance. But Yosef speaks with an almost affectionate irony, absent in Bunim's characterization of him. It must be noted that 'Minorities' is a derogatory term used by Israeli authorities and the Israeli media when referring to Israeli Arab citizens, either as individuals or in groups. It elides the fact that the only non-Jewish minorities in Israel are Arabs, and equates them despite their differences (whether Moslem, Christian, or Druse). Normally the term is not used to refer to Palestinians living in the occupied territories or outside of Israel. Yosef uses it ironically to comment on the false objectivity of the Voice of Israel, and, in the context of "youngsters," to both humanize the category and, with "hot on my tracks," to reinforce a sense of ludicrousness, as if Arab terrorism is an obvious joke.

But for Kaniuk, who speaks behind Yosef's voice as its limitation, "Minorities" does additional work. It blurs the line between two categories, namely Palestinians who are a minority in Israel and normally have nothing to do with "terrorists," and Palestinians who live in the occupied territories and are the people of their land, therefore "terrorists" by definition. It also implicates all that is, in Israel, associated with "the Organizations." As for the paragraph as a whole, it pairs "the Organizations" with youthful incompetence, depicting them as not much of a threat. Yosef's sense of insult completes the parody. But what game does Yosef think he is playing in this episode? We will see that it has something to do with danger.

Kaniuk distinguishes the truly dangerous from the apparently dangerous Arab, though again, at the cost of a refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of Arab politics, of the possibility of self-initiated action. This is why it is necessary for Yosef to insinuate the analogy between the "Organizations" and the Nazis, as in the following otherwise essentially plot-driven Passage:

... I arrived in Rome and from there flew to Zurich where I met Nabil who said to me, we heard of what you were doing. Come work for us. You could write something. I told him, I haven't done anything, and he said, look, you worked for the Mossad and it's an open secret. Now it's your turn to pay.... Nabil suggested that I go with him to Beirut and I agreed.... The *Luftwaffe* plane was already cruising over Cyprus when Nabil, who had had too much whisky, told me a few things, from which I understood that Bunim had decided to keep me guessing to the end.... [italics mine] (Heb.: 138-139; Eng.: 196-197). ⁸

Parenthetically, it is worth noting that this passage protects its author, Yosef, from being identified with terrorism and terrorists. The trip is part of his adventure, and the fact that it is his "turn to pay" introduces precisely the element of exchange necessary to neutralize the possibility that Yosef is, after all, another Arab. The sense of "exchange" is maintained in Yosef's way of discussing those Arabs left behind in Israel after his "escape." This is evident in the symmetry he finds in Arab-Jewish relations, as well as in the reasons he assigns for the acts of others such as the writer, Kassem:

Kassem had a sense of drama which he knew how to exploit for all the wrong ends. His plays were Palestinian manifestos about miserable workers dominated by Zionist imperialism. The

⁸In the English translation the airline is not mentioned by name. The term 'Luftwaffe' designates the German Air Force, and for an Israeli Jewish reader it might connote the German war machine in WWII, reflecting a traditional collaboration of the Palestinian national leadership with the Nazis.

plays he wrote in his head were those of a wasted Arab Chekhov writing nonsense. The poems he used to publish in Hebrew translation were sad. They were woven with hypnotic lyrical strength but his plays were cheap entertainment for yawning commissars (ibid).⁹

Kassem's writing is wasted, expedient, sad, tiresome, any thing but political. Kassem is redeemed by his "sense of drama" against the insignificance of his political art. He is resituated in the regime of instrumentalism — writing for a goal. Thus his work poses no danger except to himself. There is only the betrayal of himself as an artist; and "art" stands for a realism outside of history, therefore a realism in which the Arab can be subjective, but not a true subject.

Throughout the novel, Kaniuk's attempt to find the Arab worthy of compassion appears desperate. He must find ways of diminishing all Arab agency but that which belongs to individuals alone, or that which, like art, is conventionally institutional. We see this in his comments on Kassem and Darwish, whose politics are described as symptomatic, and whose symptoms are made to appear symmetrical with those of Jewish writers.

⁹Samikh el-Kassem and Mahmoud Darwish, two of the most distinguished Arab writers in Israel are presented in this novel by their real names. These writers are known for their radical Palestinian nationalist stand. Much of their literary and poetic work is printed in Arabic, and their poetry and literature is highly regarded among Arabic readers. Some of their literary work is translated and published in Hebrew in literary magazines, and in daily newspaper literary supplements. On different occasions in this narrative, Yosef repeats his criticisms of their work which, in one way or another, are analogous to those of their Zionist critics. He faults them not so much on literary and aesthetic grounds but on their political militancy as such, or, "thus," their hatred of Israel. Mahmoud Darwish left Israel in 1973 following political harassment by Israeli authorities. He joined the PLO and assumed a leadership position in its Cultural Department.

The tragedy for Jews and Arabs in Palestine is that their sense of justice does not let them translate their non-ideological screwing into real art, [Kassem] once said to me. All Arab and Jewish protest, all this literature and poetry and art, drop dead before entering their frames [of reference]. The wise Jews do not produce art in Israel. They're good for their Diaspora but not for here and now; and we learned from them! (Ibid)¹⁰

- The discontinuity between politics and art and the invidious continuity of politics and "the Organizations" are visible in the text, as part of its discourse, as a basis for identifying that portion of Arab life that must be recognized democratically, as symmetrical with the Jewish experience. The question is "who can produce art?" Certainly not those who live the tragedy of being forced to be ideological. Kassem is both militantly Arab and Jew-like in his obsessive meditation on justice. But he favors politics over art. His character in the novel is saved from the consequence of politics for the Jew's sense of the Arab by his wry lament and his sense of art as both life and futile — "not for here and now."

The category of extremism serves as the negative against which the goodness of the Arab can have its proper range. But as we have seen, even an extreme can be neutralized. It would have to be if the goodness of the Arab is to include the artist, and Kaniuk could hardly be expected to advocate compassion for the Arab if the Arab artist were excluded. Kaniuk's category of Art is, then, broad enough to embrace Kassem and himself — both last authentic voices against a world of Arabs, Jews, and readers.

But this is still the Jewish artist determining the boundaries of compassion and granting exemptions from the invidious meaning of Arab politics in this Zionist

¹⁰This part of the paragraph is missing from the English translation.

economy of moral judgment. This is what allows us to follow Yosef, after he arrives in Beirut, in his otherwise oppressively moralizing discourse — e.g., on the failure of heroes to live up to their promises, therefore on the irrelevance of politics especially for Arabs.

I arrived in Beirut exactly two years ago. Since then so many things have happened there. I went with Nabil to a small hotel that stank of whisky and hashish. The rooms were full with women who served as mistresses of officers in the Organizations, who brought up the children who swarmed the corridors. These were the Organizations whose heroes Laila wants to believe are saints.... The man who aimed his Kalachnikov at me shouted, What do you want here? I told him to go to hell. Freedom fighters do not sit on top of perfume, dripping baskets full of gold, buying concubines by weight (Heb.: 141; Eng.: 201).¹¹

Yosef's desire for heroism is sufficiently elevated to raise it beyond the advocacy of "terrorism" or "extremism." What is left out is always the terrorism committed by the Israeli state. But this could be "terrorism" only if an Arab point of view were to prevail. If compassion were to be possible, and if it were to be predicated on recognition, then none of the parties could be political, though they might defend themselves as individuals. But surely only the Jews' defense is, as we have seen, legitimate. The agency, the subjectivity, that remains after politics is nullified, and then made finally Jewish.

How does Yosef produce this result? Sufficient evidence is inserted into the narrative to make possible a chronological reconstruction of the events such that we can see just where Yosef draws the line. We may reliably assume that the 'time' of the statement quoted above is in 1982. Thus, when Yosef says that "since then so many things have happened there," he is referring to Beirut since 1980. 1982 is the

¹¹ Among other differences in the translation, the three last lines in this paragraph are missing in the English translation.

year Israel invaded Lebanon. In his Introduction, Yosef says that he "had finished writing [this partially confessional autobiography] a year ago,"¹² and then had to rewrite the manuscript before he could send it to the publishers. This would mean that the manuscript was complete by 1983. If this was the case, Yosef would have had ample time to grasp the devastating impact of Israel's invasion on the Palestinian community in Lebanon. Being an intelligent and informed person, and having worked for the Mossad as an expert telepath (forecasting events), Yosef can be held to have known that Israel had invaded Lebanon once before, in 1978. He would have known of Israel's political and military involvement in Lebanon for many years before that, if not because his profession, than by generally available information. He would have had to know how vital the role of "the Organizations" was to the life of the Palestinian community in Beirut, and for the Palestinian Diaspora all over the the Middle-East — especially in 1980 when a protracted civil war was ravaging the country. The absence of commentary on all of this makes of Yosef's disavowal of politics, and his constant neutralization of them in his narrative, a trope, that organizes the figurative aspects of the text rather than a position he could have defended on rational grounds. From that point of view, his elision of that history reinforces the inability of Zionist liberalism to tolerate any degree of Arab agency or active subjectivity but that of a disguised absence and abjectness.

Throughout A Good Arab, Palestinian brutality alternates with Arab culture and melancholy — structures of feeling that allow the reader to see at least a modicum of virtue in good Arabs. Thus, Yosef tells of his visit with the family of

¹²Heb. p. 5. This detail is missing from the English translation.

his uncle (Azouri's older brother) in Beirut. His uncle, a Maronite Christian, "was waiting for the Israelis to come and rescue him." ¹³ Both he and his wife were teaching at the American University. After dinner they took Yosef to their bedroom, ostensibly to see his cousin Annette. It is a shocking scene.

It was an enormous room. Above the bed there was a closed window and underneath the window a small crucifix. The other walls were bare but for a huge photograph hanging opposite the bed with its shiny yellow counterpane. My uncle switched on the neon light which almost blinded me, and I looked at the photograph. In five boxes which had been photographed next to each other, the dismembered parts of a young girl dressed in a fine khaki suit could clearly be seen. Her face was slashed, her eyes had been gouged-out and lay in a separate box which held her face. My uncle said, meet your cousin, this is how we found her. They slaughtered her, tortured her before they killed her, but they gouged-out her eyes after she was dead. My aunt said, I took these photographs....

This is melancholy to be sure. But it exemplifies a calculation — "I took the photographs" — that could only have been predicated on a rage permissible only if politics has been neutralized, as in "waiting for the Israelis...", and only in the context of a cultured expression of melancholy and a denial of Arab identity: then Yosef's aunt and uncle took him to another room and his other cousin played the *Moonlight Sonata* on the piano. Later, they had a midnight supper, during which Yosef's aunt said,

... we'll screw those Palestinians. We'll gouge their eyes out of each one of them individually.... I asked my uncle, and you? aren't you a Palestinian? He said, me? I left Acre forty years ago. I'm a Lebanese Christian. When I left there was no Palestine. The Jews, in their stupidity created a people and a homeland for the Azouris.... (Heb.: 142-143; Eng.: 202-

¹³Typically Yosef does not tell us that his uncle is a Maronite Christian, only that "he had lived as" one.

203).

This representation of the just rage is reinforced by Yosef's depiction of Palestinian life in exile in the persons of two other Palestinians in Beirut, a doctor and a poet. There is nothing indicated of the vital Palestinian intellectual and cultural milieu that existed in Beirut. Instead, there are attitudes and airs, expressions of a pseudo-culture of melancholy:

... Nabil came to the hotel and took me to headquarters. On the way we paid a visit to the Palestinian library. I met a physician from Acre with an aristocratic air who knew Azouri. We had coffee. He didn't say much, and he looked at me. His longings were weary and sad. He looked at me and tried to see the al-Jazzar mosque through me. He spoke melancholically about the bay and Haifa... (Heb.: 144; Eng. 204).

The 'Palestinian library', if it existed by that name, was probably part of the Institute For Palestine Studies in Beirut. The Institute kept the Palestine Archives until it was plundered by the Israeli army when it captured Beirut in 1982. It had been a center of Palestinian learning and research. By 1980, it was part of an elaborate network of political, cultural, and social institutions, in fact, part of a national infrastructure the PLO had begun to establish for the Palestinian community in Lebanon and elsewhere after September 1970. Thus, meeting a physician in the "Palestinian library" who "knew Azouri" (Azouri must have been 76 years old in 1980), a physician who did not say much and looked at Yosef with weariness and sadness and "who spoke melancholically about the bay and Haifa," was for Yosef evidence of a general condition of passivity, depression, and torpor. This is reiterated in Yosef's brief but memorable encounter with the poet:

I was taken to a poet whom we had all admired in Haifa. He sat sad and depressed, opposite me. At eleven o'clock in the morning he was already drinking straight from the whisky bottle.... We spoke for hours. I had met him very briefly years ago in Haifa, when I was still in high school and attended, in the German colony, a meeting of Jewish and Arab writers at the Party club with Azouri.

This sense of opposition between the admirable poet and the permanent exile, between a soul of profundity and its sad state of decline, speaks more of Yosef's own sense of isolation and division than about a general fact of Palestinian life. The poet "said nothing about his flight and about what had happened to him since he left" Palestine. Why is Yosef disappointed not to have the details of a "flight" that had taken place thirty-two years ago? Perhaps he had hoped that the poet's account of his own separation and isolation might have provided a kind of redemption for him as well. In the following passage, it is not clear that Yosef is able to distinguish himself from the poet, to distinguish his own internal self-loathing from that which he attributes to the other:

Perhaps he had compassion for me. Perhaps his hatred was too fierce for words. He was different from most people I met in Beirut. He knew I was an enemy, not because I had worked for the Mossad but because for him I was a Jew, and a Jew was a wound, was pain; and he perceived my own pain the way a person perceives his own shadow. Here though, he too was a Jew. Perhaps he was frightened by meeting me, which was kind of like looking in a mirror...

What Yosef sees in this Palestinian Arab refugee is the Judaization of his own refugee condition, the Judaization of 'taking shelter' (*dons Refugier*). He finds this metaphor essential to resolve his own dilemma of self-division and antagonism. But this again serves the reader more than it could possibly serve the

subjectivity of the Arab part of Yosef. Through the Judaizing of the concept of 'refugee', that is through the analogy of the image of the quintessentially Jewish refugee, it becomes possible for the liberal Israeli Jewish reader to have compassion for a Palestinian. But then, the Palestinian is only a surrogate, an accidental rather than an essential refugee; and such a compromised compassion can ultimately be no more superficial, ultimately compassion for one's own self: "... a few minutes later we switched to Hebrew, as if the language had a reality beyond this room... which he knew how to hate in the words he was writing but for which he never ceased lusting."

As for Kaniuk, the universal refugee is the Jew, so the universal language for 'refugee' is Hebrew. Thus, the Arab who deserves compassion can have no language of his or her own to express what it is to be a Palestinian in the context of the conquest of Palestine. Compassion is only for the Arab if the Arab does not speak. Parenthetically, the tendentiousness of this conversion of Hebrew to the universal language of the 'refugee' is further indicated by the fact that the majority of Jews throughout the past 2.000 years did not speak Hebrew; nor were most of them refugees. The four main languages spoken by Jews during this long period were Aramaic, Arabic, Ladino, and Yiddish. The point of identifying Hebrew as the only language that speaks authentically of exile, is not merely to appropriate a status (refugee) to a language that expresses it as its nature. It is to assert one voice in order to deny all others. "We exchanged enigmatic sentences," says Yosef. "Perhaps he was trying to warn me, if he could. He would disguise himself in my image and would pay the price once more but he had burnt more than one bridge

and I understood his fear, his pain...." (Heb.:144; Eng.: 204). It is to recenter Israeli Jewish subjectivity and radically decenter any other subjectivity that might authorize a claim of moral right, a right to recognition.

Yosef and the poet share a Jewish aspect, but they cannot speak that aspect in any language but the one in which Yosef's other aspect and the fact that the poet is only analogously a Jew are either denied or condemned. Indeed, even if the poet could have recounted the events of his "flight," it could not have been in the terms of the migration forced by the Israeli conquest. And Yosef's desire to hear those events recounted is a desire only for a ritual reiteration of what he must have known happened to the poet after his flight. These complexities, of language and voice, of biography and condition, of refugee and victim, of the Arab who is more than an Arab because a Jew in spirit, blur what would otherwise have to be recognized as a radical opposition.

For Kaniuk, compassion is possible only if opposition is neutralized, or at least the sense of opposition, since the opposition of Arab and Jew is the unyielding context within the novel and its allegory of compassion. Yet, Kaniuk's writing leaves in these depictions a certain surplus of meaning. The poet speaks of fighting "against those who took Haifa from his parents;" but his enemies remain nameless, and his momentary vocalization of his active subjectivity points not at a just identification of enemies but at the loneliness and torment of a self. The poet remains a poet; and Yosef is left with a trace of nothing more than an existential struggle that need not threaten anyone and, indeed, could not. This denial of voice provides one context for Yosef's neutralization of Arab politics in his references to "the Organizations." It is necessary for Kaniuk to establish this denial since "the

Organizations" is otherwise what most threatens to reassert the voice of Palestinians and to the subjective Arab, to blur the line between the Arab and the good Arab, and thereby to undo the possibility of Jewish compassion for the Arab.

Thus, Yosef meets some of the heads of "the Organizations." One is a high ranking commander who tries to milk Yosef for information. Yosef finds the situation somewhat ridiculous. His interrogator is, compared to Bunim, "amateurish." Yosef reflects that Rammy could have made mincemeat of him "with one hand tied behind his back." Yet Rammy and his friends were sophisticated enough to realize "that they were playing a part in a cruel farce," something the commander could never realize. Rammy and his comrades would see, through an appreciation of Yosef's sense of them, an irony that the official Jew would likely miss. This ability to see irony shows the potential of the Arab extremist to be worthy of compassion even in the context of politics. For one can be compassionate to another if that other can laugh at himself, especially if that other can also acknowledge his or her own capacity to reflect ironically, to laugh at oneself, about what one otherwise seems to do with inordinate seriousness. And what makes irony work is memory — the capacity to juxtapose things that are otherwise different so that each becomes ludicrous.

That night Nabil took Yosef to a luxurious night club for a drink "where young concubines were doing the striptease, and the fighters rushed at them with desperate battle cries and bayonets on their guns." Nabil wanted Yosef to see, "probably," that "it was Azouri's dead uncle's plot ¹⁴ to bestow upon [Yosef]

¹⁴Abu Misk ibn Kafur Sherara.

glorious abominations in their wild wretchedness" (Heb.: 145; Eng.: 205). Yosef does not immerse himself in the "abominations"; they are the result of Nabil's ploy and Yosef's "dead uncle's plot." But Yosef's innocence is not enough to redeem him as an Arab who is not an Arab. He has to experience even greater abominable pleasures against his will before his redemption can be complete.

But, in fact, nothing is or can be sufficient for his redemption. Yosef can only realize, over and over again, the experience of absence — the other's and his own. And absence has its positive moment of representation in Yosef's nostalgia, his fantasy of being somewhere else. This occurs even in the context of otherwise insignificant moments of intimacy. For example:

Late at night I sat in a room that was rented for me. A woman that Nabil had sent to my room sat waiting in an armchair. She drank whisky and for some reason decided to speak English with me. I didn't know who she was. She said, life sad here. My friend dead, was officer, dynamite finish. I belong Organizations, what you? ... I was drunk and I lay next to her. She tried to undress me. Someone had paid her. I didn't want an actual woman. I wanted to hear the rattle in her throat, to smell the stink of an ideological whore. I didn't specifically want the actual penetration into her. This I saved for my fantasy. I told her to stop fumbling with me. I shut my eyes. I wanted to remember something that was hanging just at the edge of my memory. Suddenly it came to me, Dina.... (Heb.: 144-145.; Eng.: 204-206).

Yosef has already had his fuck. This virtually voiceless woman, paid for and drunk, is there only for Yosef to be somewhere else. If we could read the novel in its chronological order, we would remember that Yosef had conjured Dina up in his consciousness once before in a similarly charged situation when Yosef and his friend Giora were fourteen years old. "They were dreaming about girls.

They looked at pictures of naked women." One day they went to a party, with "boys and girls." One girl, Nina, was the kind he liked. "She had big tits spilling out of her dress." She came to Yosef and asked if he wanted to dance, and he said "no, I want to fuck"

Panting and heaving we struggled and then I entered her, and she let me go all the way in, and suddenly I realized that it wasn't going to work. But it was too late; I was already inside her. I shut my eyes. I put Dina in the pupils of my eyes, and she came and sat in them as if she had been there all the time without my knowing it. I thought that perhaps I was in love with Dina but I didn't want to think about her, and suddenly, when I was already in the seventh heaven of delight, I wanted to run away. She wasn't Dina. I convinced myself that she was Dina and I felt good. I whispered sweet words in her ear and all the time I directed my words to Dina (Heb.: 123-124; Eng.: 176-178).

The difference is that Nina was not voiceless but powerful. She dreamed with him, made demands on him, was the kind of girl he liked. Here Yosef speaks to Dina through Nina. With the whore, he had only to think of Dina. Perhaps his childhood innocence brought Nina and Dina together for a moment, and his adult encounter fulfills a separation of his authentic experience with Dina from all other experiences of sex. If so, then this can be seen as a development of the faculty of distantiation. It is as an adult that Yosef can enjoy the pleasure of nostalgia, the separation from life.

Yosef's intimate relationship with Dina had ended some ten years earlier than his adventures with Nabil. Thus, the fact that Dina's image fills Yosef's mind any time he is with a "strange woman" gives a curious spaciousness to his adult relations with women in general. Once Dina "enters" Yosef's stream-of-

consciousness, we and he are taken back to a different time and to a fantasy to which all women can be associated. We are then told an anecdote — e.g., of Yosef's visit to an Israeli army camp where Dina was in training some twelve years earlier. The anecdotes seem to float loose in Yosef's stream of consciousness, a population of events without any concrete context but his momentary unease with one woman and his momentary nostalgia for another. Driven from one place in his imagination to another, so rapidly that he cannot afford to admit what is real to consciousness, Yosef becomes at each moment a victim of persecution, though he is his own persecutor.

Because his self-persecution is as nameless as historical persecution is absolute, the duality — reality and image — is magnified to the point of contradiction. Among Palestinians he is Jewish and among Jews he is an Arab. For one, the other is real; for the other it is the first that is real but unattainable. Wherever he is, he is no place at all. For Yosef, to be is to not be. There is no escape. Yosef is at all times and in all places the epitome of the persecuted.

This is an irony that he discovers and rediscovers in himself, as he discovers and rediscovers it in others. But, in himself the ironical juxtaposition of opposites is not ludicrous. That is why he is driven by the real to nostalgia, and from that to the disorganized streams of association his imagination conjures up to enable him to function despite his uneasiness. As the epitome of the persecuted, he lives a life of denial, and of hope, a life of futility.

This opposition of the real and the imagined is the axis not only of this text but of much of Israeli Hebrew literature wherever the 'good Arab', or in more general terms 'the other', figures as central to the plot and where he/she constitutes

a moral 'dilemma' for the Jew. The main feature of this 'character', so far as it is *sympathique*, is that of the permanent exile, or refugee. A 'refugee as such' is, then, one who lacks a national identity, not merely one who has left home. Lacking such an identity is tantamount to lacking selfhood, which is taken for the Arab to be a personal anomaly rather than a shared condition. Thus, Jews who refuse to accept their Jewish national identity, once it is offered them by Zionism, are anomalous in the same way. But the referent of this metaphor of refugee is not merely identity. It is nation; and Yosef's duality, like all such instances of failed analogy, stands for and is emblematic of the desire for nation and a morality of that desire as if nation were a need and a legitimate good.

What Kaniuk drives to the surface, I believe, is the anomaly of being both Jew and nationalist. That is, despite himself, Kaniuk exposes Zionism as an anomaly for the Jew.¹⁵ In contrast to the illusion of Zionism, that exile leads

¹⁵For an argument to the contrary, consider the following by Yehoshua: that "a Jew can best lead a normal, coherent and challenging life in Israel, and the Diaspora is essentially a neurotic solution to the identity conflict between the Jews as a people (like any other) and as the Chosen People (like no other)." (See, A. B. Yehoshua, "In Bezchut haNormaliut Hamesh Sikhot al Tzionut (Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing House Ltd., 1980). In English, Between Right and Right Five Essays on Zionism, trans. Arnold Schwartz (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981). Yehoshua began to develop this theme in his first novel "The Lover (the boy Naim comes specifically to mind as the exemplary "good Arab"). In his most recent novel, Mr. Mani he brought it to perfection. One of his protagonists (circa 1848) is captivated by an *idea fixe* that the Arabs of Palestine "are really Jews who have not yet awakened to their true identity, which it was his task to bring about through instruction and if necessary, chastisement." The narrative covers a period of centuries. By not mentioning the term 'Palestine', but using instead the Zionist designation for the country, "Eretz Israel," and by assigning Arabs to mute and 'extra' roles, and by portraying an ancient setting for the period preceding Zionism, Yehoshua appropriates the country as having been Jewish for a period long before the establishment of modern Israel in 1948. For a

to its opposite, community, Kaniuk seems to say that exile has its own finality. Thus, for him the refugee is last not first, after or in the midst of, but not before community.

In other words, the community of exile is not the same sort of thing as the fixed community of an unbroken history. The latter is, in any case, always a dream since there are no unbroken histories. Thus Zionism's illusion is not exceptional. It is only anomalous since the new or even renewed Jew of the Holocaust is nothing if not an emblem of broken history.

Zionism's illusion of 'return' is then a denial of the very Jew for whom it promotes that illusion of an unbroken history. The Jew seen as refugee, is the last true Jew.¹⁶ It is this paradox with which Kaniuk wishes his readers to be confronted. But because it is an irony that can only be appreciated from the standpoint of a community of ironists, it leaves intact a vestige of the illusion of unbroken history. Only the Jewish reader can know this irony; therefore, the reader must be above it, immune from it. But, as we have seen, to be above one's own contradiction is to be prior to self-criticism, including the self-criticism of Zionism which motivates Kaniuk. This is why the novel's self-critical demonstration of paradox — the identification of the exile with a community, with

review of the novel Mr. Mani, see Ted Solotaroff, "Strange Jews" The Nation Books and Art Section (15 June 1992): 826. My quotes are taken from this review.

¹⁶See Yoram Kaniuk, The Last Jew, (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad & Sifriyat Poalim, 1981). In this novel the (Israeli Jewish) reader is confronted with a dilemma whether or not the Israeli is the 'last Jew.' Supposing that non-Zionist Jews are not able to maintain, or will be forced, sooner or later, to abandon their Jewish identity, then Zionism is the last station, the end of Jewish history — since, how much 'Jewish' is there, if there is no Jewish identity left outside of Zionism?

an unbroken history — falls before its own radical insight.

Since this illusion of community can only be maintained negatively, against an other, the notion of "Jew" on which Zionism is predicated vanishes, becomes inessential. The other becomes, is, the essential term of Zionist consciousness. Startlingly, the Arab replaces the Jew as the source of Jewish definition and identity. The Jew is, in other words, not the non-Jew. But, of course, the positive content of this is, finally, the assertion of Jewishness as such; and such an assertion is, as a practical matter, an assertion against the Arab. It is, in a way too fundamental to last, a declaration of war: thus, as we have seen, the image of the warrior as a permanent agency on all sides.

Kaniuk's 'last Jew,' the exile, the final conscience, has one yet after it. That is the self-critical Jew whose consciousness Kaniuk can only invoke, as the reason for writing, but cannot make vital as the warrant for his novel's finally ambivalent critique of Zionism. For if self-criticism, which is praxis, rather than exile were to be the object of A Good Arab, the novel would have ended with the other, the Arab, having achieved a subjectivity for which the Jew would now be merely an object, itself liable to judgment. This would certainly have allowed Kaniuk's critique to have transcended Zionism and its only internal moral option to war, compassion. That this did not happen shows that the limit of Zionism's capacity for self-criticism is its inability to tolerate any moral judgment of "the Jew." Even a momentary subjection to the judgment of the other is unacceptable.

In Kaniuk's treatment of Arab politics, "the Organizations," stands for a denial of politics, a freeing of the "good" Arab from what is inconsistent with Arab goodness. However, freeing the Arab from politics, like capital's historic freeing

of labor, merely produces an illusion of equality: on the one hand the Jew whose politics is part of subjectivity, on the other the Arab who, lacking politics, has only the subjectivity of the exile — without hope of community and therefore without the possibility of a legitimate utopian unity.

Kaniuk leaves his reader with two concrete universals: active and passive subjectivities. These exhaust the moral universal of liberal Zionism, and demonstrate that for all its liberalism it remains caught in the paradoxes of Zionism's moral dependence on the fact of conquest. But this is not a morality that the Zionist subject can use to defend Zionism; and this may be what confuses Kaniuk. The Zionist is still a subject vulnerable to critique, though not one that can be stated or written. If it were to become explicit, then the Arab and not the Jew would be seen as victim, and therefore, according to the moral logic of Zionism, as the moral subject. That it never becomes explicit leaves a problem: the Arab as moral subject is, for the Zionist, a formal possibility, and therefore a threat, in principle, to Zionist righteousness. As a result, even liberal Zionist writers must contain that possibility by restricting the type of Arab who can manifest it. The good Arab can be the object but not the subject of morality. He or she can be valued but cannot value. To sustain this defensive maneuver, Zionism in all its cultural variations, including the novel, must constantly police the boundary between the good Arab and the Arab, no matter how much of its own irony it has to swallow.

The following recollection, in the midst of Yosef's meditation on his adventure with Nabil, highlights Yosef's dual identity against the political background of opposition in a way that suppresses the latter. His innocence as

exile, his being a liminal person whose lack of place, and therefore spontaneous need, qualifies him as a good Arab and presents that goodness ironically, gives the Jewish reader yet another opportunity to discover the possibility of compassion. Yosef is "the kind who waits for a red light." He is a lesser subject than one who crosses the road any way, but he is a fit subject for the weakened theme of injustice.¹⁷

Dina [The switch in the stream-of-consciousness we interrupted above occurs in the same line of the text] in her uniform standing at the southern gate of the camp. This was Land Day and I did not remember it was Land Day. I drove down to visit her in Azouri's Volvo. On the way

¹⁷ If it were not for the English translation I would not insist on quoting the Hebrew version but rather offer a general description of the episode. But, in my view we have here a case that goes beyond the limitations imposed on translation in general. It seems to me an attempt to insert a specific interpretation to the original text. Therefore I suggest that my reader examine this version first:

Dina in her uniform standing at the gate of the army camp. It was Independence Day and a lot of demonstrations had been organized throughout the country against the expropriation of Arab land. I drove down to visit Dina in Azour's Volvo. On the way I was stopped and searched. They shoved me, they hit me, they abused me and mocked me. I told them I was going to visit my girlfriend and they said, and what about the land then, bloody little Arab, what about the raped Arab land, the holy Arab land? I said, the only good Arab is a dead Arab, and they said, you said it, not us, and one of them, Druse in the Border Police whose poet brother I had met in my Haifa days, pushed the handle of his gun into my stomach and I said to him, what are you doing with them? And he looked at his Jewish officer standing a few yards away and said, they like to see us putting on a performance for them, and I wanted to cry but I didn't cry. They kept me there for an hour, tormenting me and slapping me around, they had nothing against me personally but I was the only Arab who turned up at their roadblock and they had to make the best of me. Afterwards they let me go, with the warning not to show my face at any of the demonstrations. Before I drove off a man in civies came up to me and said, what are you looking so sulky for? It's war, isn't it? And I said, yes, it's war, and you're a big hero. He pointed at me and said to his friend, you see this monkey here? This is the kind of monkey who waits for a red light to cross the road. You'll never make human beings of them.

I was stopped and searched. I was shoved, and hit, and mocked. I told them I was going to visit a girlfriend and they said, the plundered land day, ah *Arabush*? The holy Arab land, ah? I said to them, a good Arab is a dead Arab and they said you said it. A Border Police officer, a Druse whose poet brother I knew in my Haifa days insulted me. I asked him what are you doing with them? And he replied, they like this show! I wanted to cry but I didn't cry. They tormented me for a long time. They had nothing against me but I was the only Arab that had turned up at their roadblock. Later on they let me go. They only warned me not to show my face at any demonstration. A man in civies came up to me and said, shake hands, what are you looking so sulky for? It's a war, isn't it? I said yes, and you are very right. Pointing at me he said, this one is surely the kind who waits for a red light to cross the road, you'll never make human beings of them (Heb.: 145-146; Eng.: 205-206).

We must assume that Dina joined the Israeli army when she was 18 years old, as is the case for all Israeli women who do not object to service on religious grounds. We also must assume that she had already been through training. The year has to have been 1970. But Land Day, an Arab celebration of Resistance, took place in Israel for the first time on March 30, 1976. It is obvious that "linear time" is of no importance here. Yosef wants to remind the Israeli Jewish Hebrew reader of a brutal attack on Arab Israeli citizens by the Israeli army and the Israeli Border Police.¹⁸ At the same time, however, Yosef chooses not to mention the national significance of the event for Israeli Arabs. He "forgot" it was Land Day. Here is one more instance of harassment by his own kind: Arab-Druse police

¹⁸As a result of government plans to expropriate tracts of Arab land in the Galilee the Communist Party formed in late 1975 the National Committee for the Defense of Arab Lands. Its success, however, was much greater than that of any other attempts to mobilize Israeli Arabs on a mass basis. The committee declared March 30, Land Day, and called upon Arabs to participate in a general strike on that day in protest against the slated expropriation. On the day of the strike curfews were placed on three villages in central Galilee, some of whose lands were to be expropriated. As a result of confrontations between villagers and army units sent to enforce the curfews, six Arabs were killed, many wounded, and hundreds arrested. See Ian Lustick, *op. cit.* p. 246, and p. 333 for information sources.

officers. But it is one that summarizes his status as exile, and the possibility of his being good, and that yields the possibility of injustice: all to provide a point of reference for compassion.

Shifting "the event" to Israel's Independence Day, as the English translation does, eliminates the political context of Yosef's "visit" and to some extent spoils the intricate and complex personality that Yosef represents in his reflection on duality. In the English translation there is war first, persecution only afterward, and in that light. If an Arab were to have demonstrated on Israel's Independence day, so far as the Israeli Jewish Hebrew reader is concerned, his beating and the torture and humiliation would at least be understandable; but in this context, it is merely unjust. The English translation thereby softens the critique implicit in the original.

Since Yosef is 'still' in bed with the woman in Beirut, let us go back and hear from him how the episode that we interrupted finally ended:

In the end I let her rape me as I once raped an Australian etching teacher. The orgasm of the cat-like purring monster lying next to me was a bewitching act of automatic sophistication. She knew when she should groan. She probably did it in accordance with the instructions of the Organizations, as if how to kill Jews and how to groan during an orgasm came from the same instruction manual.

Here again is the allusion to extremism, to the detriment of "the Organizations" to be sure, but this was still war. Yosef's suspicion of his sexual partner's motivation reflects the paranoia suitable for an exile, since the condition of exile not only provides no foundation for trust but tends to merge all others in a single scrutinizing

subjectivity. But it is also the sensibility of a good Arab who knows war and the superficiality of politics.

But in concluding his recollections of his visit to Beirut, Yosef adds a nuance. Yosef says that "they," meaning "the Organizations," were "indifferent to pain, they were looking for revenge... their zealousness..." like "Jewish fanaticism." Arab politics equated with Jewish fanaticism; Jewish fanaticism detached momentarily from Jewish politics; therefore all Arab politics is like some Jewish politics, extreme and irrational; and the "some" of the latter is the measure of the former's "all."

Those at the top (of the "Organizations") began to show signs of impatience toward Yosef, since the information he gave them was good for nothing. They 'tried' to beat him, to threaten, and even sexually to abuse him. He finally phoned his uncle and told him that he had to get out. His uncle hid him with a young officer who, as Yosef tells us, "didn't ask questions either. He gave me cigarettes and a very young girl, almost a child. She served me Turkish coffee, the best I've ever tasted. That night they put me on a boat to Cyprus...." (Heb.: 146-147.; Eng.: 207-209).

* * *

Conclusion of the First Part

This reading of A Good Arab has allowed us to see more than we could have from a mere survey of Hebrew Israeli literary fiction. The relation of Jew to

Arab constitutes, for Kaniuk, an allegory of authenticity. In this regard the novel meditates upon and confronts the moral dimension of a political fact. It aims to reinstate compassion within the authentic self of "post-diasporic" Israeli Jewish society. The identity of its protagonist is utopian in the way in which its duality is presented — as two parts, separable and, in principle, equal.

But its ironies inevitably intrude. However, only the Israeli Jewish reader can experience those ironies with any sense of moral gratification. Yoram Kaniuk is aware of the destructiveness of the Zionist myth. And while, like other Israeli Jewish Hebrew writers, he strives to retain a Zionist resolution, the attitude and the overwhelming presence of the Jewish consciousness conveyed by his novel denies any such possibility. Other Israeli Jewish Hebrew writers have striven in their own criticisms to 'purify' even further the Zionist utopia, believing that only beyond "Evil and the Kelippah"¹⁹ can this Utopia be found.

A Good Arab also represents the total Zionist saga, personalized and embodied in the life experience of an extraordinary individual, ostensibly divided in two — an Arab and a Jew, a Palestinian liberal nationalist and a Jewish Israeli liberal Zionist. Thus, the narrative of A Good Arab offers in compressed form not only an abundance of 'actual' historical 'events', the movement of a whole century, but an interpretation of the significance of these events as they are presumably seen from the two oppositional poles of Jew and Arab.

Yet, we see how this extremely self-critical Israeli Hebrew novel fails. Kaniuk has given the reader no way to avoid compassion within the text, but no

¹⁹'Kelippah,' Hebrew word for 'peelings'. The term signifies a doctrine in Lurianic Kabbalism.

way to practice it. He has at the same time welcomed his reader to a gratifying high ground outside of the text and apart from the experience of reading it — therefore to a position outside of experience. This inadvertent and unself-conscious intertextuality shows clearly that a moral Zionism cannot remain Zionist. Kaniuk ultimately offers his readers the opportunity for a self-righteousness in regard to the text that he had demolished thoroughly within the text.

This is the novel's "bad faith." Its context in the world, the militarization of the relation of Jew to Arab, comes finally to re-assert its dominion over self-criticism by means of the very device Kaniuk adopts to avoid that very predicament. To establish the basis for a liberal moral critique of Jewish-Arab affairs, he had to begin with a politics and a poetics of identity from which escape is impossible. The politics of identity was necessary if he was to conduct his appeal to consciousness. But this is a self-limiting framework, fixed from the outset. It is the fundamental and self-defeating dilemma of an Israeli Jewish liberalism that wishes desperately to go beyond its own limitations but cannot even envision, much less conceptualize, its own dilemmas. I have tried to show how a poetics of identity creates and reinforces unresolvable dualities at the center of Zionist moral thought.

In my analysis of A Good Arab, this appears revealed within the complexity of a single text. I propose that it stands for the code of the entire genre of critical writing that takes the Zionist utopia as its problem.

In Chapter 1 (p. 40, above) I said that the exclusionary attitude of Zionism toward "the Arab" is understandable in the terms I specified, and that it may be that one can extend this understanding to account for yet different, but equally morally-charged, exclusions. To this effect Part Two presents an analysis of two novels

written by Israeli Arab Jews: Sammi Michael, who immigrated to Israel from Iraq, and Albert Swissa, who came from Morocco.

Both Michael and Swissa come from an "ethnic group" that constitutes for Zionism an 'internal Other'. Yet, their literary work is done by that of a moral 'Subject,' while their protagonists represent Israel's Jewish underclass and its ethnicity. But both the writers and their narrators speak their own experience. The complexity of their writing represents an important angle of that perspective in which Israeli Hebrew literature and culture are taken together. Their text provide specific accounts of aspects of Israeli society having to do with the social relations of internal-Jewish difference, constituted by Zionism and by the politics of inclusion, exclusion and marginalization, that are the most general consequence of those relations.

Part Two

CHAPTER 7

"ALL ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ARE MORE"

Sammy Michael was born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1926. In his youth he joined the Iraqi Communist Party underground. Because of his political involvement he was forced in 1948 to leave the country for Iran, where he continued his politically dissident activity. One year later, he immigrated to Israel.

Michael holds graduate degrees in Psychology and Arabic Literature from Haifa University. His first novel, All Men Are Equal — But Some Are More, was published in 1974. In 1975 he published the prize winning Palm Trees In the Storm which, like his later book, Shacks and Dreams, was written for young people. Refuge, which appeared in 1977, represented Israeli Jewish-Arab relationships in the context of the 1973 war. It employed a narrative of intermarriage. The theme of interpersonal division along moral and political lines runs through Michael's work. For example, in A Handful of Fog (1979), depicts the dissolution of a Jewish family in Baghdad, in the mid-1940s. This family was divided by the opposing moral convictions of two sons. One was a member of the Communist Party underground; the other was active in the Zionist underground. The novel articulates this difference as poles of a moral dilemma transformed by

events into a family crisis.

Sammy Michael teaches Arabic Literature at Haifa University and serves on the editorial board of various Hebrew and Arabic literary publications. His most recent novel, Trumpet in the Wadi, was published in 1987. It is, like most of his earlier work, concerned with relations between Arabs and Jews in the context of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. In order to explore his handling of this theme, I will discuss how Michael's first novel, All Men Are Equal — But Some Are more,¹ addresses that aspect of difference that bears on the paradoxical relationship between a sense of place and a sense of belonging.

* * *

The cover of the 1976 paperback edition of of the novel contains the following statement:

In [this] bubbling novel Sammi Michael redeems the 'Second Israel' from a conspiracy of silence and opens a window onto the painful reality of the silent majority. This novel tells the life story of a mass immigration. Each of its protagonists represents an archetype of all those thousands who arrived in Israel 'from the East rather than the West.'²

¹Sammy Michael, Shavim veShavim Yoter (Tel Aviv: Boostan Mod Enterprises LTD, Boostan Publishing House, 1974). A more accurate translation of the Hebrew title should be: "All Are Equal — And Some Are More." (All translations from this novel are mine).

²As a matter of fact most immigrants of that period came from North Africa, and thus, from a geographic region that lay to the west of Israel. However, Arab Jews and Jews of the Balkan countries of a Sephardic (Spanish) descent are termed 'Sepharadim' (Spaniards), or 'Mizrahim' (Easterners). Thus, the terms 'East' and 'West' are not defined geographically but, rather, politically. In explicitly derogatory instances in which they refer to various non-Ashkenazi groups and individuals, the term 'blacks' (or in Yiddish 'shvartzes') is used. In this narrative the term 'black[s]', is used by speakers to address each other, and thus in a mood of self-irony, therefore, in a way implicitly critical of hegemonic Ashkenazi vernacular. For a theoretical analysis of this aspect of Israel's cultural dichotomy see Ella Shohat, "Sepharadim in

This only hints at what is shocking in Michael's novel. Although it was by no means the first literary expression of the voice of the Jewish subaltern class in Israel,³ its challenge to Zionist ideology in regard to one of its most revered myths — the notion of "The ingathering of Exiles" was perceived as very daring.

The narrative covers a five-day experience in the life of its protagonist. It begins at 9: 00 am, on June 2, 1967, and ends at 6: 00 pm, on June 6, 1967. David, the narrator, is a military reserve soldier. He speaks while riding with a crew of five in an armored carrier. The commander and radio operator are 'Ashkenazi'. The carrier's driver and David are 'Sepharadi'. The fifth member of the crew is a Yemenite, a distinct ethnic group of the so called Sepharadim. They are traveling from a location in central Israel to the southern border.

On June 5, at three o'clock, six hours after crossing the Egyptian border into the Sinai Desert, their carrier is struck by a shell and destroyed. The driver is killed and the other four are seriously wounded. David, who is in slightly better condition than his comrades, removes them from the burning carrier which is about to explode. Despite the severity of his own wounds, he manages eventually to signal for help. Rescuers arrive the next morning, and he and his friends are saved.

During these five days David recollects the course of his life in a series of time frames. He remembers his family's experiences in Israel when they arrived

Israel: Zionism From the Point of View of its Jewish Victims." Social Text 19/20 (Fall 1988): 1-33. See also Shohat's: Israeli Cinema East/West and the Politics of Representation (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

³See, Shimon Ballas' novel, HaMaabara ("The Transition Camp"); (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1964).

from Baghdad in 1950. He then shifts to the present where, during a military ceremony a few weeks after the war (1967), he is awarded a Medal for Heroism. These recollections juxtapose the personal struggle of David and his comrades to survive the war with the more sociologically determined difficulties his family had in surviving the consequences of their immigration. The two experiences are treated as analogous and as symbolizing the paradoxes internal to the image of Israel as a melting pot, as an assembling of diverse Jewish ethnicities into the newly established republican state. The paradoxes express a contradiction between the intense patriotism associated with the "settlement" of Israel and the absence of the sort of planning or infrastructure necessary to sustain the element of community presupposed by the unifying myth of the melting pot.

In this regard, one can compare All Men Are Equal with Hanoch Bartov's Each Had Six Wings. Both writers present the Israeli army as engaged in 'settling' the new immigrants and in helping the younger generation among the newcomers to overcome alienation, a sense of isolation, and frustration. Bartov's novel represents the army by the figure of a remarkable woman soldier who serves as a school teacher for the newcomers' children, and who, because of her military status, has more authority in the community than would normally be expected of a young teacher. In Michael's novel this same role is assigned first to David's older brother Shaul and later to David himself. Both novels gloss over the incompetence of the state bureaucracy and its priority of politics over human needs. Both novels beg the question of the conformism imposed by the Israeli army on Jewish youth. Both accept the ideological premise of this imposition, that the military serves society as a whole, and does so in a way that is both humane and responsive to community

needs, especially those pertaining to the problem of assimilation of Jewish newcomers. As a result, both rely on an unexamined, unexaminable, utopian vision.

In All Men Are Equal David remembers a gathering of immigrants at an unemployment agency, and their mute frustration where the "good" jobs were assigned to the 'Ashkenazim'. The only overt signs of anger are shown by a gang of thugs led by one Abu Halawa.⁴ Abu Halawa's gang "works" for whomever is willing to pay the highest price. In addition he operates as the chief pimp in the immigrants' camp. Bartov's novel says relatively little about that underside of "community." Thus, when a group of activists organize a demonstration in front of a municipal office, they are counseled by their benevolent soldier-teacher, who eventually intervenes successfully on their behalf.

Michael depicts a much more arduous and conflictual process in regard to the "Ingathering of the Exiles" and their assimilation to the civil "melting pot" of Israeli society. His novel is in this sense more 'realist' than Bartov's. It refuses to minimize the tremendous human sacrifice involved in any process of unification. Both novelists bring their protagonists to a point within sight of Israel's 'living utopia'. Michael's characterization of the social dislocation, inequality, and suffering that underlie unification is, at the same time, a demystification. In fact, Michael portrays a rapid transformation of well-to-do Iraqi Jews into a community of failed and hopeless souls. Its members began their journey by airplane stripped of their property and belongings yet dressed in their finest clothing. They have

⁴It is interesting, though, that this character is the only one among Michael's men- protagonists in this novel, with an Arabic name, and as such, it is a slightly derogatory nickname. For more on that, see chapter 8.

traded the prosperity of a nation for the promise of a society. They anticipate a joyful "return" to the ancient land of the Jews. What befalls them, however, is depicted in a striking and ironical account of the "reversal of fortune." This experience is presented as one that cannot be endured. Yet his narrator embraces it as a reflection of the sacrifice necessary for the achievement of unity.

The fact that sacrifice is only remembered, is merely part of David's recollection, removes its sting. Those who are its victims do not actually tell their own tale. Their fate is one material of David's self-consciousness. His memory, his subjecting of the experience to that sort of memory, subordinates it to a greater story of collective achievement. In the retrospect of David's life, which stands for the life of Israel itself, sacrifice may be accompanied by pain, but it is an abstract pain, a general pain without concrete victims. In the totalizing finality of unity, nothing and no one is truly lost. David remembers the immigrants being taken from the airport by trucks to an old British military camp that had been turned into an 'absorption center'. It is called "The Gate of Ascendancy." Scores of young and old, men and women, children and infants are placed in barracks "to live" together through endless days and nights, without privacy, without proper facilities, without dignity. Where all bodily fluids mix, where sweating, farting, and love making have no more than a blanket to hide their intimacy, and where all other human peculiarities are remorselessly exposed, people can only fall into despair. It is as if they are forgotten by those in whom they had initially invested so much hope. Finally, at the nadir of their decline, and with the same degree of arbitrariness with which they had been originally assigned, they are abruptly taken on a cargo train to

their "transit camp," a tent colony in Kheiriya,⁵ there to sit for years and rot.

David recollects all of this immediately as part of a greater history. Nothing that happens to them seems to have reason; nothing can or needs to be rationalized or explained. Only David's greater history makes intelligible the first generation of newcomers' loss to misery and despair. David's father, a robust man in his fifties, had been a rich merchant in Baghdad, well known and respected in his community. Here, he is enfeebled, gradually losing his sight as well as his other faculties. Now, he is wholly dependent upon his family where only yesterday he was its source of strength. Shortly after arriving at Kheiriya, he dies in a tent fire with his wife and their youngest daughter, their's is a sacrifice of a unity of which they could dream. In this sense, the being of community is demonstrated by the deaths of those without it: as Foucault tells us, the living body of premodern knowledge was known only through the clinically analyzable corpse, with its parts now separable and therefore capable of distinct inspection according to form and function.⁶

However, the novel overcomes one tendency, to become an allegory of the hopeful encounter of unreasoned faith with an unreasoning and incorrigible world, that is of the absurdity of fortune. It emerges with another tendency intact, namely the attempt to recover a utopian denial of precisely the anti-utopian history it had disclosed. It does so by judiciously deploying rhetorical devices that transform

⁵The Arabic name of the place is not questioned in the narrative although Arabic speaking Jews come to live there less than a year after the Palestinian village that had been there was demolished.

⁶Michel Foucault, The birth of the Clinic An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books A division of Random House, 1975). See specifically Chapter 8, "Open Up a Few Corpses": 124-146.

experience into context rather than into either history or object of irony. The following episode serves as an example.

While having my tea I was teasing him:

"Actually, what difference is a black lawyer like you going to make?"

"Work." He didn't even bother to raise his eyes from the book.

"Surely, even in lawyers' offices there're special jobs for blacks!"

"Sit down and study!"

"I'm talking seriously Shaul."

His hand was smoothing the book as if it was the curve of a woman's hips.

"I didn't choose Law accidentally," he said simply; "for the law there are no ethnic differences; in court we're all equal. I believe it, and I'm sure that through law I'll be able to achieve equal rights, not only for myself but for all of us."

"The old-timers in this country are able to bend the law — at their will."

"Take that trash out of your head" (111, emphasis in the original).

This is a dialogue between two brothers, David (the narrator), and his older brother, Shaul, who is studying Law. Later, David protests against what he considers Shaul's idealism, or *naivete*. However, it turns out at the end, that Shaul's personal success is the result of opportunism. His, and David's acceptance as equal citizens of Israel is predicated not on the law but on their bravery in war, not on history but on power.

The restoration of utopia predicated on a military concept of unity finally, and paradoxically, confirms hope. It occurs in a story of heroism so conventional that it erases precisely the predicament that it had initially, at the preheroic part of the novel, made trenchant and motivating. This emerges as the narrator's autobiography, an account of a life intended to subsume and to some extent neutralize the horror which constituted its origin as life. Thus, it is by a trick of individuation and the elevation of voice above event, what autobiographical writing

does so well, that the reader is drawn ironically back into the utopian vision. In this way realism is transformed into its opposite. The reader ends by appreciating rather than sharing. He or she is left with an ironist's view of suffering, but one that is devoid of self-irony. What emerges then, is the coupling of a voice beyond suffering with a suffering beyond voice. It is to this emergence that we now turn.

* * *

David was twelve years old when his family arrived in Israel. He is thirty when he recollects these events. He had matriculated as an "external" student and had, at eighteen, in spite of his mother-in-law's objections, married an extraordinarily beautiful Ashkenazi woman from Poland. The couple divorced soon after having a child because, he says, of his mother-in-law's jealous protectiveness toward her daughter and her contempt for what she considered the 'inferior' Sepharadim. This synthesis of ethnic difference through intermarriage (unity) fails. But the child, the surplus of an impossible union, is neither "Iraqi" nor "Polish." He is an Israeli in the sense of being something new and complete, something that expresses the failed union, but expresses it as an impossibility rather than a failure. The child does not merely experience conflict; he is conflict. That is the center of his being and therefore the condition of whatever he does and whatever he can make of himself.⁷

⁷ This is re-emphasized later (through an Ashkenazi conspiracy of sorts). David's (now ex-) wife's mother (Tzipora), had first sabotaged David's application for a better and higher job that was already offered him in a large bank. Knowing personally the director of the Personnel Department who interviewed David, she then takes care to 'arrange' for her daughter (Margalit), a part time job at the same bank. After David's and Margalit's divorce, Tzipora 'arranges' her daughter's marriage with that same director, a certain Mr. Zidowitz, who happens to be a widower. He is of the age of Margalit's mother, and once marrying Margalit, he becomes David's son's step-

During his 17 years in Israel, David served in two wars, completed his studies, received his diploma as an accountant, and spent a number of years as a government clerk and as a foreman. He comes across as someone special, who matured through experience and personal sacrifice that would have destroyed another less steadfast than he. To rise from the gutter, he had to make hard choices. yet, at the end, it is only by his determination and, most of all, his courage in war that he becomes a true citizen of an historic struggle. This moral career is not itself an object of reflection within the novel. It appears instead merely as events in an evolution the plausibility of which lie in the steadiness of its movement through a telos the reader already takes for granted as a source of value. The narrative describes an allegory of achievement that appears to be history, based on a denial of the virtual allegory of hope and futility that might otherwise have instituted a critically historical consciousness of that appearance

But this substitution of one allegory (the myth) for another (the opportunity) could not by itself have completed the task of erasing despair and what despair constitutes as an attitude and a way of being. It needs as well the telos of a utopian practice, an end to which everything can be oriented, capable of displacing both hope and therefore making irrelevant the sense of futility that must haunt every particular act in the light of so elevated an end. The result is a melancholy disguised

father. There is another aspect to this complexity: Daivid's last name is Asher (a biblical name). While being a popular last name among Arab Jews, it also fits well with the "Israelization" of names (see more on that in chapter 8). The name Zidowitz, on the other hand, is an Ashkenazi name, it has a Yiddish sound to it, and the first three letters of the name constitute the word 'Zid', which is an offensive anti-semitic appellation. Whether or not this juxtaposition of names was a conscious act on the part of the author is, I think, irrelevant.

by rituals of order and by celebrations of utopia as if utopia had actually come to pass. The figure of this order and this utopia is the army, which is in this novel, more than an institution or a setting. The Israeli army is ultimately the protagonist of a far greater drama than David's; and it is this drama, this delusionary history, of which David's relatively meager story is ultimately no more than a fleeting signifier.

The army is presented in both novels as society's capacity to mold individual character and its resource for forging a national unity. This confluence of substance and practice, value and production, makes the military society's only adequate representation. In this context, civilian life, even one magnified by horror, is of little significance save as a backdrop against which the army demonstrates its significance, or as a source of illustration of weakness that need to be overcome for the sake of history. And overcoming these is, finally, all the civilian life that needs to be recognized. It is, in effect, civil society, civil society against itself. The ideal of unity is therefore exposed as the reality of military life. The telos that informs society is reduced to a military truth divorced from human need and the self-critical entanglements of intersubjectivity, including despair, a sense of futility, and doubt. This truth is embodied in David. But David is manifest in his function and the vision that informs it and typifies his conduct as what sociologists used to call performance of a role. In Michael's novel, David is a personal abstraction. He becomes the figure by which utopia completes itself without the vision of it being disturbed by memories of what had made utopianism possible. David, the determined visionary, the vehicle of telos, now in those terms erases, the otherwise narratable lives of his parents. They, in turn, become only his occasion, reduced to a mnemonic device itself part of the military economy of

David's own sense of self-determination, of being beyond contingency, his birth merely an uncaused cause. Their desire for peace can have no recognition in the formidable military universe of reconciliation. They become a fact in David's biography. Their motives, desires, and attitudes are no longer active in what can be conceived of as David's life beyond that biography. His new and abstract military existence erases the old fragile personalities of those, including the self he might have been, who expect reasons and respect. It therefore deconstitutes the very idea of humanness in the light of which only can his narrative make sense outside of its national military context. Thus, the army constitutes not only a unique solution to an abiding and radical problem posed by memory, it has the aura of something as mystical as the living utopia itself. Indeed, in All Men Are Equal, it becomes that utopia and therefore comes to stand for all that needs to be envisioned.

Shaul, David's older brother, arrived in Israel one year ahead of his family. He says that he came "accidentally, just out of curiosity,"⁸ and was "guided by agents who risked their lives" in the Zionist underground. After joining the Israeli army, Shaul was promoted to the rank of corporal. When the family disembarked upon arrival from Baghdad, the father was unhappy, because Shaul, his oldest son was not there on the tarmac to greet them. Reuben, a family acquaintance, apologized for Shaul, saying that he might have been delayed by his military duties. This suggests at the outset the direction of the novel, toward a "life" that will ultimately erase Life, toward a supercession of the civil by the military in the 'living utopia' of Israel, toward a denial of history.

⁸Meaning, without prior Zionist indoctrination, as he later says to Reuben in one of their conversations.

Shaul turns out to be the wise man, the experienced man of will power who had already learned the ways of discipline and detachment. In one of his first conversations with Shaul his father complains of having been sprayed on arrival, with DDT, as if he had been an animal. Shaul replies: "My father, I know... listen. Around this small country we're encircled by enemies. None of them acknowledges our victory. If an epidemic were to break out among us, we'd all be lost." Thus, it is not the need for immunization that Shaul has justified, but the need to sacrifice all criticism and all claims to military considerations. In other words, Shaul advises, there is no past, only the future.

Shaul takes over his father's responsibility as head of the family, a responsibility that increases as his father's condition deteriorates. A few months after his family's arrival, Shaul is promoted to the rank of sergeant. In spite of his condition and state of mind, the father is moved almost to tears by his son's promotion. But even this joy cannot diminish a greater bitterness. He appeals to a history the utopian future cannot abide:

"We'd thought, we'll come — like coming back home. Jews among Jews. One people. But it isn't so. Someone is dividing everyone else into two peoples. You remember — in Iraq we had troubles, but we were not inferior to them! Here, thank God, Jews are not persecuted. But already before we came — our status was fixed for us as another class. A second rate class.

After a moment of bewilderment, Shaul responds:

... And so, father: when I was persecuted there I had none to complain to. I did not dare hit back. Here, I knock loudly on every door that's shut in my face. It ain't easy. From the many doors on which I knock, my hands hurt — and no one opens. But at least I'm allowed to knock forcefully, and with noise. At the end, father, at the end someone will open (25-26, emphasis in the original).

Shaul's response takes for granted a unity prior to struggle. Thus, while one may knock in Israel, no one should knock too hard lest he disturb the Jewish peace which allows each Jew in principle to be heard. This justification for denying politics and history is, of course self-deceptive. Shaul wishes to live under the conditions he knew in Iraq, only with the tables turned. This identification with the aggressor is the secret of his vision.

What is most important is that, at this early stage of the novel, Shaul's argument suggests a major Zionist theme. If only Jews convert to Zionism, if only they 'return' to the "Land of Israel" early enough in their lives, they can save themselves from inevitable persecution and humiliation and find themselves as citizens of their own country. This cold blooded, uncompassionate nostrum is Shaul's way, and finally the reader's, of simplifying history and denying experience. Shaul's response summarizes the novel's own solution to the Diaspora.

At the same time, Shaul is a figure of confidence and strength, in contrast with David's tentativeness and lack of clear direction. The need for effort on David's part is a constitutive feature of him. He is mired in the possibility of failure and futility. For him to become definite, he must become different. Thus, it is essential to the novel that David become a hero. Heroism will guarantee his transformation and, in that guarantee erase his own memory as the perspective of heroism erases history itself. But since a novel is not merely a resolution but the history of resolution — that is, an object of reading and not merely a moment or a thing — Michael's book nevertheless preserves what its narrative attempts to

overcome. It recovers an experience of pain and loss that the narrative tries to but cannot displace. And this is its *de facto* challenge to Zionism. Writing often leaves written what the mind needs resolved. It is to Michael's credit that the novel ends without burying its own development as a text in sentiment and explicit self-denial. But the only reader who can have the benefit is one willing to remember as well as merely continue reading.

Shaul does not live in the ragged tent shared by his father, mother, brothers, and sisters. Like the Israeli pioneers, he has built his own hut. In fact, it is his comrades, appearing one evening with lumber and a willingness to work, who assist him in the construction. Thus, his is a false self-sufficiency. He is, in a different way, as depended on others as his family is on him. The hypocrisy compromises the *noblesse oblige* with which he treats his father, and heightens the ambiguity of such acts as providing extra food for his family. In the case of the extra food, his father questions the legality of the gift, in effect questioning Shaul's authority and honor. Shaul hesitates for a moment and again provides a glib answer to a far more serious question:

Look, here we all say vuz-vuz — and it is a derogatory term, even with hatred.⁹ But I'm stuck in a military barrack with forty of them. Of the whole lot, ten were born here. They are polished at 4 pm, take the bus and leave for the comforts of the city or its environs. But the others aren't in a hurry. They are vuz-vuz too, but they roll into their beds in the big barrack, smoke, keep looking at the ceiling.... They have nowhere to go. Their families were slaughtered. Before you arrived in the country, I was like them. But I had, after all, the hope of meeting once more with my family. They're lying there, dreaming dead people's dreams. When they heard that you came — they got together to help, even the cook. I don't know

⁹This term is directed at Ashkenazi Jews in Israel. It takes its sound from a frequent Yiddish speaking tone of the word - 'Vwoos', ('What?').

if you'd understand, father... when they push something into my bag. Before I come here, they set aside slices of bread for their dead dreams.... No... this food was not stolen; it is kosher.

Father ceased eating, and, pondering, he moved his plate and lit a cigarette. Are these the boys who brought the lumber for your hut?

Yes. (39-40, emphasis in the original).

- Charity, even a son's toward a father, depends on the relative security of the donor. Food but no lumber; the moment of consumption but not the possibility of life. These qualifications of the good deed are, like charity, intended to instruct. It is because of the surplus of military procurement that Shaul can be both generous and moralistic. He can enjoy the pleasure of life for which giving can be calculated and therefore gratitude deserved. Unlike the reader, Shaul is in this novel. Thus, he is immune from rereading, protected from memories the reader can hardly avoid. For the reader, and perhaps for the father whose life is what is written, though not what is told, Shaul, and possibly Israel, is weakened by self-deception, by forgetting.

His generosity is partly a sham. But it is reasonable in the light of the novel's own project — to achieve a measure of reconciliation without, nevertheless, denying that it is neither inevitable nor without countervailing temptations. Yet, this tension between the textual aim to reconcile and the writing of difference that makes reconciliation a possible aim, is what gives this novel its counter-hegemonic bite. Through writing, Shaul becomes an episode in David's life, just as the textualizing narrative casts his father's life as an episode in a greater history. Reconciliation is always at the expense of those who need or want it.

Shaul refuses to get involved in communal affairs or to confront thugs who continually harass the community; nor is he "ripe," as he says, for leadership since

he had learned in the army "never to act before you're ready." In any case, he says that he wants to complete his studies before doing anything else. However, after he completes them, he leaves the tent colony to establish a lucrative private practice as an attorney, like a proper utopian, never looking back. Shaul represents the only attitude that can support the utopian vision; but the fact that Michael presents him with a measure of bad faith reminds his readers of faith, good and bad, and of hope, futile or not. Michael thereby retains the sense of a critique of Zionism — by showing what utopia cannot reconcile. But, he preserves in Shaul's weakness, the need to do away with criticism. This allows him to retain a grasp of the vision of unity despite having to acknowledge its predication on a history that contradicts unity.

Shaul appears as strangely apart, even alien. His detachment, like the indifference of an aristocrat, objectifies others. It is one source of his power. But he also has a knack for gaining position, and this becomes a resource for David, whose own story increasingly becomes that of Shaul. Upon completion of his studies, Shaul eventually gains a national reputation as an attorney. He establishes himself in the upper echelons of power. When David uses his brother's name in applying for a job, it makes an impression. Wounded in the 1956 war, Shaul limps slightly on one leg, a Byronic defect that adds to his charisma. He is not married, but has had a long relationship with a family acquaintance, Naima, who is married but with whom he has had two children. This relationship can be seen as another key to Shaul's character and its significance to David.

We learn about Naima and Shaul's intimacy when David senses some conspiratorial intent in their gestures toward each other. Shaul's hut is adjacent to

the part of the family's tent that is occupied by David. One night David, hearing strange noises cuts a hole in the material separating him from Shaul's room, and witnesses Shaul and Naima making love. David explains this violation of privacy by some more general fears he had for his brother's health. In fact he allows himself to be deceived by Shaul.

- We are led to believe that Reuben, Naima's husband, cannot have children, and that Naima is sexually unsatisfied by him. Following several erotic scenes that David has witnessed through his peep hole, he hears Naima reveal her pregnancy by Shaul. He understands this as evidence of Shaul's virility, and of his generosity in satisfying another's, Naima's, need. But the episode carries another weight as well. It teaches David one aspect of the difference between strength and weakness, an aspect that bears on the image of Israel, the utopian vision, that informs the novel. Reuben is considered by Shaul to be "another weakling of ours." He had been elected to the Knesset, something Shaul considers "unbefitting" 'Iraqis' or even 'Sepharadim.' As he sees it, Reuben is one of those Sepharadim who make their way into the political machine by being 'smooth'. Smoothness, expediency, and pretence, are not the sorts of virtue that contribute to unity. They are attributes of a selfish temperament. They speak for agendas that are hidden and divisive. Shaul's own detached air also conceals, but for David this is a triumph of form, strength over content, agenda, as is David's tale of a self that is also Israel. But "agenda," hidden or not, can also stand for politics, and it is this that must not be permitted to disturb Sammy Michael's allegory.

In the 1950s, conditions in the immigrants' transition camps were uneven and politically tumultuous.¹⁰ While demonstrations and protest ended at times in

violent confrontations with the police, there were nevertheless reforms and occasional allocations by the government of resources for the improving social conditions. But what is more important from the point of view of the immigrants themselves is that in these struggles they established new forms of political organization. For example, the Black Panthers movement emerged from these struggles in 1970. It claimed to represent the second generation of political activists in the immigrant community. However, official statements and much of the press characterized the protests as "riots," and all immigrant politics as having been instigated by "thugs" or by anti-Zionist "elements" such as the Israeli Communist Party. At times, officials hinted that such activities could only help "the Arabs."¹¹

Michael avoids all of this in his overwhelmingly positive depiction of the immigrant communities. The impression is, once again, one of the "good Sepharadi" for whom an Ashkenazi reader might have compassion not only for the injustice that had been done but for the heroism with which the "good Sepharadi" faces such conditions without asking anything exceptional of 'society'. But this elision of politics is part of a yet greater, though ambivalent, purification of the utopian vision of righteousness as well as unity.

It so happened that on the eve of the 1967 war, David lost his job and then, as a reservist, was called into the army. His loss of morale in civil life will be compensated for in his life as a soldier. His experience in the army is radically

¹⁰Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lisak, Trouble in Utopia The Overburdened Polity in Israel (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1990). Specifically Chapter three, p. 119. Also: Swirski, 1989).

¹¹Horowitz and Lisak, 1990.

separated from civil life and its temptations. His utter failure as a civilian marks a total transformation of identity. In a sense, he outgrows the civilian world, is in effect relieved of it: like a bar-mitzva which brings the boy into the world of authority and praxis, his entrance into the army is both an end and a beginning. But it is a beginning for Israel's utopia as much as it is for David's identity as moral citizen.

The novel ends when the family, including David's ex-wife Margalit, and their eight year old son Shai attends the ceremony in which he receives his military award for heroism. In the midst of the festivities in which they are declared to be "a family of two heroes," in the virtual voice of the author himself attempting finally to clarify the connection between the novel as idea and the written text that belongs only to the reader, David says

"... I received a document which establishes and testifies that I am an Israeli citizen. For the first time I behave as a citizen whose skin color does not constitute an impediment for him, as if it were a physical defect. However, I had to go through a baptism of fire in war, and to hand over my beloved wife to another man to earn this station....

Do I forgive?

Days will tell.¹²

Memory, then, has not been altogether erased. The sense of a predicament re-emerges, that of enactments through time, and therefore the possibility of a futility thought to have been dispelled. With this comes an implicit acknowledgment that utopia is still only a project, though the real means for its attainment remains hidden. Room is yet left for compassion and for criticism, but

¹²The concluding paragraph of the novel.

much is concealed.

Israel's wars are represented as monuments in Israeli Hebrew literature and lessons in the life stories of its protagonists. The latter are either going to war, reflecting on war, returning from war, or lost in battle. In any case, there is a greater memory than survival or death. But, strangely enough, there are no true military conquests in these representations, and no other people occupy them besides "us;" no other interests or reasons are involved. In war, the soldier is away, not in one place or another. He or she engages specific enemies in a battle of life and death in which the ultimate protagonist is utopia, something greater than the person or the state. While the Arab armies appear screaming "etbakh! etbakh! etbakh!"¹³ Israeli soldiers are depicted as racing forward, deeds taking precedent over words. While Israeli armies leave the battlefield with their enemies lying dead at their feet and with their heroes well-remembered, they do not gloat. Israeli Jewish soldiers reflect only their duty.

Their sleep is broken like that of reluctant fighters tired of war. Israel's soldiers do not return triumphant. They come home with sighs of relief. There they count those who have fallen. They lick their wounds and try to suppress the sights of terror from their consciousness (194).

Indeed, one finds a duality in all of Israeli literature analogous to the structure of Michael's book, the opposition it constitutes between idea and writing, like the anti-historical opposition between utopia and experience. On the one hand, there is self-righteousness, self-pity, and self-doubt about one's acts and deeds during war. On the other, there is no questioning of the reasons for war, no

¹³In Arabic: Slaughter! Slaughter! Slaughter! See Michael's opening page in this novel.

attempt to examine the reasons given for conquest, though those reasons could only have been beyond question if Israel were a total subject deciding its fate in a moment of decision without a hint of internal difference.

Regardless of its compromises, and perhaps because of the confusion generated by them, All Men Are Equal provides a challenge to Zionism not at all typical of the genre. Nevertheless, it remains tied to the sort of utopianism which Zionism increasingly identifies with its military project. The Israeli Hebrew reader is, because of the peculiarities of Israeli culture, a self-typifying reader. That is, Israelis read as tendentiously utopian as their writers write. As a result, one can discern the terms by which a novel is received by the consensus-affirming attributes that are evident in it, part of its surface and therefore taken for granted in the course of reading. In All Men Are Equal, it is the hero and the army that ascend; and that ascendance allows what is unavoidably critical about the novel to be submerged — but only in the typical context that can be attributed to reception. The movement of reception, reading, cannot fully evade what the narrative demands be evaded. It is in this sense, that of an irreducible interaction of text and reading that the novel provides precisely the challenge that conservative Zionists fear. But in its cultural presence, as a book, a totality driven by a telos, the novel's effect is otherwise. It remains, at the same time, critically ambiguous and uncritically certain.

The subtlety of its valences releases the reader from the persistence of memory all too easily, especially in the context of so compelling a narrative and its allegory of spiritual striving. But this subtlety finally leaves unquestionable the military presence that is the only embodiment of the Zionist's utopian project. Michael's writing challenges Zionism in principle, but his narrative has left its most

general principles intact. All Men Are Equal is not truly counter-hegemonic. Though it leads the readers back to the singular moral authority of the Jew, it nevertheless leaves that Jew, as reader, in the midst of contradictions, at the very edge of what Zionism tries to contain.

CHAPTER 8

... ON THE MORNING OF THE AQEDAH

Albert Swissa was born in Casablanca, Morocco, in 1959. His family immigrated to Israel in 1962, and was settled in a newcomers' neighborhood in Jerusalem called Yir Ganim C'. His elementary and high school education was (Ashkenazi) Orthodox and Hasidic. He graduated from a "Hesder Yeshiva."¹ But at age 23, Swissa abandoned his Orthodoxy and went to Paris where he studied pantomime with Etienne Decaroux and eventually joined a traveling theater group. Swissa has lived in Paris for eight years and is currently studying movement-theater. Aqud² is his first novel.

* * *

Aqud is comprised of three parts, each of which can stand by itself. The

¹'Hesder', is the Hebrew word for 'arrangement'; the Hebrew term 'Yeshivat-Hesder', stands for a political arrangement with Orthodox parties of Israeli coalition governments, by which Orthodox students who are not conscientiously objectors, may complete their higher education in the Yeshiva and join the service upon graduation.

²Albert Swissa, Aqud. ["Bounded"] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishers, The New Library Sifrei Siman Kriah, 1991). The title refers to the binding of Isaac by Abraham, in Hebrew - *Aqedah*. All translations from this novel and all other related Hebrew materials are mine. I express my gratitude to Mr J'il Amuyal for assisting me with the Archival Institute of the Israeli Hebrew Writers Guild in Jerusalem. At my request he had sent me eight items of criticism and reviews of the novel Aqud. Mr. Amuyal is teaching literature at the Science and Art High School in Jerusalem.

first part, entitled "Aqud," is the shortest and can be read as a short story. The second part, titled "Blessed Orphanhood," is a novelette, while the third part, "A False Effort of A Fading Remembrance," occupies the bulk of the book. The three together make one narrative set in a community of Jewish immigrants from North Africa. Initially placed in transition camps in Jerusalem, they were moved during the early 1970s from asbestos huts to a newly built neighborhood. By all accounts, this resembled an urban penitentiary, or area of containment. It was laid out in three distinct zones called Yir Ganim A', B', and C'.³ The constraints of this setting provide a first principle of unity for the novel. A second is provided by the three main protagonists, Yohai, Beber, and Ayiush.⁴ These are children not yet thirteen years old. They provide the voice and perspective of the victims and heroes of "Aliyah." Growing up in those newly built slum neighborhoods, they are witnesses to the sacrifice of their community to an ideal and, at the same time, are exemplary figures of its survival. The sacrifice and the struggle, the third principle of unity, are configured as a condition of being bound and waiting (*Aqud*).⁵ The protagonists' destiny is to forge a zone of conflict, hence freedom, in the prison into which they had been thrown without preparation and for reasons they could not understand. The children strive to liberate themselves, though the constraints under which they do so confer a certain irony on their actions. Their

³Since the background for this novel is historic and autobiographical, and the name of this neighborhood is real, it might be considered as an intended irony: in translation the name would be Garden Town, Parkville, Kew Gardens, etc.

⁴The three child protagonists of the novel: Yohai (a Hebrew name combining two words, and etymologically implying "God is alive," common among Sepharadi and Arab Jews), Beber (a Maghrab, Berber, nickname for Albert or Abraham), Ayiush (an Arabic name also etymologically related to 'life' — in Hebrew, Haiim).

⁵Relating to the *Aqedah*, the binding of Isaac by Abraham for sacrifice.

only available weapon for their struggle is defiance — defiance of authority and through that the development of a sense, often vague and inchoate, of the oppressiveness of authority.⁶

While Sammy Michael's All Men Are Equal was perceived as a daring attempt to "redeem the Second Israel from an acceptance of a conspiracy of silence," Aqud was seen by its critics as, sensationalistic, culturally irrelevant, and without significant context. I will try and show that Aqud is about resistance, and therefore incorporates a context rather than merely reference to it. Many of Swissa's critics ignored the element of resistance, focusing instead on what they took to be matter of style. Thus, they argue that his writing is pretentious, imitative, and even coquettish, and that Aqud's narrator is "artificial and hollow," the narration itself enveloped in an "Amazonian flowery rhetoric." But if this "style" is in fact itself a matter of substance, then these criticisms are misleading and beside the point. I will argue that the speech of the narrator displays in its own rhetorical movement the struggle of the children to find in their lives, to discover what distinguishes them as human beings even under inhuman circumstances. Their candor, their refusal to use the standard codes in which conflict, oppression, and resistance are suppressed, leads them to invent their own language of resistance, including gestures that spoil the conventions by which memory is regularly neutralized.

One distinguished critic, Ariel Hirschfeld, was offended by all the shitting

⁶James Scott, Weapons of the Weak Everyday Forms of peasant Resistance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). Franz Fanon, The wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press Inc., Black Cat Edition, 1968).

and peeing, as if victims should act only with the decorum and sensibility of the culture to which they are being sacrificed.⁷ Hirschfeld finds such expressions particularly offensive when they come from members of the Moroccan Jewish community: "Of all the ethnic groups" [in Israel],

the most ethnic is the Moroccan. This group intensified its own seclusion from other ethnic groups in the 1960s and turned itself into a spearhead of polarization. The thirst for literary expression which draws its energy from this character, the discussion of which never lacks racial ingredients and energies, is immense.

Once having appealed to racist grounds for his discussion of style, and after minimizing the work of Erez Biton, a Moroccan Israeli poet, in order to illustrate his point, Hirschfeld goes on to say that

[The Moroccan ethnic group] has not yet established an artistic presence for the large and meaningful space it occupies in Israel. An artistic expression of this specific spirit relative to the energies it emits all around it in other aspects of human and political activity, has not yet appeared.

His point is that Aqud is not yet the "artistic expression" which Hirschfeld deems appropriate to the Moroccan "ethnicity." Instead, Hirschfeld claims that it "positions itself in the midst of" the thirst for expression as an index of "the focal

⁷The two most distinguished critical reviews are Ariel Hirschfeld's essay "A Word About sales." Haaretz, Culture and Literature section, 1 March 1991, 8 (B). Hirschfeld is a writer, literary critic, editor, and Professor of literature. He is one of the younger Israeli critics who have established themselves as new authorities. The second is Menachem Peri, who has a similar professional background, although of a somewhat older generation. For recent and relevant discussions of power in the Israeli literary 'establishment,' see Avi Katzman, "He Is The Establishment" an Interview with and about Gershon Shaked, 7 Days, Haaretz Weekly Supplement, 27 December, 1991, 21-23.

issue of this group — seclusion and repulsion," as if difference were not mediated and the perception of difference not itself an object for critical scrutiny.

Hirschfeld goes on to accuse the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency of the World Zionist Organization of having been responsible for the "termites nests of exposed concrete; the malignant growths of the social perceptions at the heart of Ben-Gurionist methods of immigrant absorption," which are "suppressive architectural embodiments of statist magnitudes." Swissa

is at the center of the issue, and he intends a great cry. He directs his vision at the focal points of violence, not at the Jewish Agency or the Ashkenazis but at parenthood and sex relations. He identifies properly the real style and disposition of the ethnic base that he is about to shape and he does not turn away his eyes from the hard sight: humans on the brink of being animal...

What begins as a humanist critique of Swissa — for ignoring the causes of misery — ends by endorsing a racist characterization of the victims, Hirschfeld endorses the basis of discrimination for a good purpose, thereby undermining that purpose by the limitations presupposed by discrimination. Policy, he says, is the source of evil, and the evil itself is manifest in the abjectness of the victims, their need for others, Zionism, to save them. He fails to acknowledge the thickly textured racist culture of Zionism, and therefore sees its victims instead as victims of bad or thoughtless decisions. But it is precisely Swissa's refusal to treat the victims as abject, as "animals," that gives his novel its power to disturb even the Zionist liberal and to expose the racism that lies at the heart of modern Israeli Zionism, and with it liberalist self-righteousness and complacency.

Even Menachem Peri, *Aqud*'s editor, in his lengthy endorsement on the book jacket, succumbs to such misapprehensions. On the surface, Peri's praise is without qualification; and Hirschfeld directs his wrath at Peri as ferociously as he does at the novel itself,⁸ ostensibly for pretending detachment from what he wishes to sell. Peri is editor of the literary series in which *Aqud* is listed. His three-hundred word endorsement (signed, M.P.) is as long as a book review, and its intent is understandably to promote the book and the series. Other critics also have attacked Peri for the same reason, accusing him of trying to promote new writers who "do not yet 'deserve' it."⁹ The real casualty of the debate is Albert Swissa and his novel. As in many such instances the author became a *cause celebre*.¹⁰ What is important here is not whether Peri was or was not trying to promote "his" author, but the content of his endorsement. Like Hirschfeld, Peri ignores what is profound about *Aqud*, and for the same reason. He writes, "in spite of its materials, *Aqud* is not a socio-ethnic novel."¹¹ Instead, he continues, it is about psychopathology. "Ayiush, in his refusal to accept the loss of his childhood, runs away from his 'bar-mitzva' to an amoral world, goes out of his

⁸Hirschfeld's title of his essay is "A Word About Sales." About one third of it concerns Menachem Peri.

⁹Yehudit Orian, "Albert Swiss, Go On — But Be Aware," review of *Aqud* by Albert Swissa, in *Yediot Akharonot*, Literary Sec. 11 January 1991, 22, 24. Batia Gur, "Aqud by Albert Swissa," review of *Aqud* by Albert Swissa, *Haaretz*, Books of the Week Review, 25 January 1991, 8 (B).

¹⁰Within the first month of its publication (January 1991), the novel *Aqud* had gone through two printings. In November 1991, it had a third printing. According to Hirschfeld (op. cit.), it sold a few tens of thousands of copies, in Israel's marketing magnitudes a substantial success.

¹¹I mentioned the use of this term earlier by Amnon Navot (see Chapter 2, above). The term 'materia', in this context, would mean — 'content'.

mind, and probably commits suicide." Nor is it only Ayiush who is disturbed.

Peri refers to

the father, who having been exposed in his weakness to his son, is also his son's object of love; the boys' difficulty in separating from their feminine identity; the father's guilt feelings for his atrophic fatherhood, his relinquishing of authority to his son; the romantic preservation of a lost childhood that turns into a concealed scroll torn by memory into pieces; an abject enjoyment of self-humiliation, among fathers too.... A childhood from which one refuses to separate is also a world despairing in its cruelty. It is part of a spiral repetition of human life. The new reality where fathers cannot find their place is, in fact, a repetition of what happened to them 'there...'; and the fathers' emigration from one world to another is also a metaphor for the "emigration" of adolescents.

Neither his editor, Peri, nor Hirschfeld have been able to acknowledge the deeply critical aspect of Aqud, the latter because of an overemphasis on style, and the former because of a tendency to neutralize the novel's cultural force. What is lost to the critic is the reason of the author: the characters are simply of no account. What is lost to the editor is the reason of the characters: context is merely incidental.

As I will try to show, Albert Swissa has broken new ground for Israeli literature by attempting to transcend the otherwise intransigent ideological limitations of Israeli moral discourse. If this is correct, Peri and Hirschfeld abandoned their cultural responsibility in favor of attempting to contain Aqud's counterhegemonic impulse. It is, then no wonder that, for them, the issue of value hangs solely on Swissa's language. Thus, Peri's endorsement of Aqud applauds the ruthless sensitivity of its prose:

Aqud is shocking in its whirlpool of a baroque-like language, in its powerful and often cruel depiction of reality, and in the overflowing of new materials never before seen in Hebrew literature. Swissa opens windows onto broad scenes; he composes a great symphony. His use

of language is wonderfully free, its picturesqueness marvelous. At the same time he shows a profound sensitivity to the multi-generational layers of the Hebrew language, which he displays fluidly at his will.

Hirschfeld, on the other hand, finds in that same prose a profound failure:

Albert Swissa presents the bitter, bony, biting, and violent world of the Moroccan ethnic community through an artificial and hollow narrator who wraps himself in Amazonian flowery rhetoric..., ugly waterfalls of "beautiful" words and Hazaz's style of syntax.¹² Swissa's narrator takes upon himself, uncritically and with bad taste, the panoply of styles of Hebrew fiction writers: S. Yizhar, Shamir, Oz, Kahana-Carmon and A. B. Yehoshua. And he clutters his novel with them in an enormous effort to find favor.

But it is voice and not words that defines Aqud as a novel of struggle. Throughout the entire novel the narrator speaks in the third person, never as a character. Thus the narrator is not a child, though he speaks in sympathy with the children. Sometimes these children express themselves directly from a perspective possible only from the narrator's retrospection. This device in no way undermines, trivializes, or otherwise reduces the force of what the protagonists reveal about their universe. The voice is that of the children, though self-consciousness of voice is the narrator's.

Perhaps the greatest surprise posed by Aqud to the Israeli Hebrew reader is its secularization of a religious language ordinarily used for traditional purposes in order to declare a unity not possible for Swissa's characters. Yet, Swissa does not desecrate religion. He is not contemptuous, nor even for a moment condescending. On the contrary, the integral reverence of Swissa's protagonists for religion is

¹²A writer of an older generation mentioned above in the Introduction to this study.

never in question. What is remarkable about his use of language, so shockingly realistic to Peri and so indefensibly mannered to Hirschfeld, is that the children apply revered cultural references to their own gutter reality in ways that are self-emancipating. They take responsibility for their language. It is spoken in their voice. In this way, The speech is liberating, part of a struggle for self-definition and self-determination so far as that is possible.

Admittedly, such a use of so traditional a language can only annoy the proponents of 'high culture'. But for these children it is a language of praxis, therefore one laced with humor and irony. From this point of view one can only feel empathy for and even rejoice in their ingenuity. Even for their parents, for whom religion is self-preserving as a form of personal and communal memory, religious language is always somewhat reactionary. In the old country, their own religiosity had been liberal and at least somewhat liberating under the circumstances. This is personified in the narrative first and foremost by the women, the wives and mothers whose daily routines are seen to express a freedom only degrees removed from that of the children. The sensuousness of their movements and their discourses are an everpresent background to the more experimental lives of the children. This is a freedom that is unthinkable in the traditional Ashkenazi home, or for that matter in any 'dignified' Western home. Yehudit Orian makes just this point:

One of the most boisterous chapters is that which depicts the very direct femininity of the Moroccan mother: a warm and broad bosom, the noise and bustle of a multiparous woman, the engine and mover of the house whose motherhood is natural and realized with no exertions regarding her destiny.... Ayiush's mother, together with her women friends, compose a kind of naughty mothers' harem associated with physical and erotic experiences. The North African

family is represented as the ideal place to grow up without wounds.¹³

The liberalism of these families' religiosity is illustrated in Aqud more concretely by an episode in which a father, Mr. Sultan, looks at his twelve year old son, Beber, whom he loves and of whom he is very proud. He is reminded of

life salon parties in the company of handsome old men in Casablanca and Agadir, with their well-nurtured silver shining moustaches, their glorious white hair, their flourishing and perfumed coiffure; not the superfluous old men here (51)."

In her commentary on Aqud, the critic Ariana Melamed notes the metamorphosis these men went through by the move from Agadir to Yir Ganim. She describes the contrast,

those superfluous old men covered from head to foot with their black *jalabiyas*,¹⁴ like... silent monks decaying in the synagogues located in bomb shelters, and who are an embarrassment for the intermediate generation of these children's parents.¹⁵

Swissa's own life provides a measure of support for the possibility of liberalism in the midst of religiosity. Commenting on his interview with Swissa, Yigal Sarna writes that the author's father, a dentist, is strictly Orthodox and never read his son's book. Yet his mother reads "the lustful Henry Miller," and it was she who

¹³Orian's own review, however, is ambivalent and even self-contradictory. She asks, for example: "if [the novel] is so bad how come it is so good." But her answer is confusing. She also believes "that there is no protest in Swissa's writing," which may be why she finds it confusing.

¹⁴Long wool robes with a hood.

¹⁵Ariana Melamed, "Wild, Surprising and Overflowing" review of Aqud by Albert Swissa, in Hadashot Weekly Supplement Literary Criticism Sec. 4 January 1991, 45.

sent her son's first short story to a publisher. Swissa says that such a couple as his parents, a strictly orthodox man and a liberated woman, is possible only in Morocco: "how greatly my father loves this woman, who is so different from him, and how tolerant he is despite being otherwise so closed." ¹⁶

The children of Aqud engage their reality not only through a secularization of traditional language, but by a transformation of culture itself. For example, they occasionally summon mythological figures from the Bible and personify them in order to share with them their own tribulations. The result of this humanization of the sacred is a demystification of tradition in favor of affirming life as it must in any case be lived.

Like Swissa, these children were raised in homes in which love was expressed physically and with sensuous affection, especially by their mothers. But their homes were overburdened by too many children in too little space, and by a degree of scarcity and disorder imposed from outside. In the camps and later in the settlement zones, the fathers' traditional authority had no base. The children had to maintain their own dignity with whatever resources they could provide on their own. Educated in schools not of their parents' choice, they gradually become aware that, for society, theirs were lives of degradation and violence, and they understood that this was neither their fault nor the fault of their parents. The uncollected garbage and junk scattered around the streets of their fragile community shows how little they count in the greater scheme of society, and their discourse conveys this knowledge.

¹⁶Yigal Sarna, "A Moroccan Novel" an interview with Albert Swissa 7 Days, Haaretz Weekly Supplement, 4 January 1991, 15-16.

The Mayor of the city, is always mentioned with irony. For example, in one episode he fails to show up for a scheduled inauguration of a street, which in any case did not occur. The indifference of officials and official institutions are sufficient to convince the children that their parents too do not count, any more than their own lives mean anything to their teachers and supervisors, the social workers, and other officials who represent the 'system'. The language these children use is then a product of an experience of dissociation from society, therefore an obligation to reflect what others may take for granted. Thus, when Yohai and his father, Mr. Pazuelo, walked together ¹⁷ through the borough, they saw it as something

the dreaming heart needed actually to touch each time anew in order to realize in its sorrow that this place was real and not merely built as a training site for air bombing exercises.

One needs to listen to the language of the children to see how it is synchronized with even their most profane acts, and as such constitutes an internal relation of thought and voice.

Yohai had to shit, and he liked so much shitting in empty lots. In empty lots no one could disturb him while he was shitting and telling himself stories, fondling almost involuntarily his member. The water in the puddle was terribly cold and it cooled his excitement to lower his pants (15).

¹⁷"Walking together," is a term taken from the biblical story of the "Binding." It is used in this narrative whenever a child and his father "walk together." The few lines I recite here are taken from a passionately poetic account of the father reproaching his son, while at the same time being actually consoled by him, all in the language and conceptual framework of the "Binding" myth. (See, 92-95).

Here shitting is poignantly subjective, a life-related act, a matter of praxis. It also evokes context and history in the midst of what is ordinarily neither to be seen nor heard. Hirschfeld is shocked:

The protagonists' emotional-sexual world in *Aqud* (it is hard to apply a word like love to this novel. The word *erotics* seems to have been borrowed too from another strange evolutionary stage) circles like a moth around an anus and from there it widens onto a whole ideational world — from the boys' and couples' buttock hills to the "Ass Mountain" and "Prick Mountain" of the mountains all around. His [Swissa's] anality drips everywhere.... The protagonist in the story touches himself only when he sits to shit in the fields around the neighborhood.

However, imagine these children's lives depicted without reference to bodily functions. They would then have appeared ethereal and with only abstract intentionality divorced from the physicality of their existence to which Swissa wishes to draw attention and, in doing so, present as a material base of their reflection on oppression and freedom.

I will discuss later and in greater detail the significance of terms like "Ass Mountain" and "Prick Mountain," and the choice of names in *Aqud*. The situation in which Yohai meditates while shitting is rendered poetically. We follow him on this harsh winter day, out of school because his father had granted him a day of grace before the execution of his punishment. The latter will require that he be taken to an unknown location for a yet unknown reason. He spends his morning hours that fateful day alone in the open spaces. When we listen to how he perceives nature, the way he paints it with his eyes, the way he participates in it, we almost envy him — paddling in the water with his little rubber boots, trying to make waves. he observes the sky,

the white enveloping furnace steam flying swiftly with in wind, which tarried once in a while and created gray-blue and deep blue swirls. Then the firmament split as a jet of shiny light sliced the world from one end to the other.

Yohai removes a sandwich from his pocket, about a third of a loaf of bread smeared with gravy. In his other hand he holds an unpeeled cucumber. He bites dreamily, once into the bread and then into the cucumber.

A thin rain began falling. Not far away a mosque minaret jutted up, exposed to the sky. Birds in formation circled toward it, dividing into two groups and coming to rest on cypress tops near by....

This is the context in which Yohai shits, as it where, so eloquently, what gives the latter its significance beyond what would be evident to the abstracting eye over-focused on the mere bit of behavior. Consider in this same regard, the intensity and love with which Yohai watches birds, and most of all the "*Nakhlieli*:"¹⁸

...that's exactly, that's what I need. *Nakhlielim* or a song about *Nakhlielim*; And how much he likes flowers and most of all *Rakafot*. [*cyclamen*], or a song about *Rakafot*, or to collect them. When would he come back to collect *Rakafot*? He will come back, he will; ¹⁹ what does it matter to collect, but the craziest thing is to be shitting next to *Rakafot*.

There is a temporal dimension to this reflection, a dimension whose horizon is a beginning and not merely an end. Yohai wishes for torrential rain to fall, to return home wet to his bones.

¹⁸*Motacila Alba*, a singing migrating bird, nests during the winter in the eastern Mediterranean countries.

¹⁹We should not forget, Yohai is about to be exiled.

His mother would slap his frozen cheeks, and then would sit him next to the kerosine heater, to warm up, and he would wonder into the blue flame that would steam his socks and wet shoes....

When he finally does return to his home,

his mother accepted him with a tormented and silenced face. She put her baby girl down, almost threw her on the bed, returned a puffed breast into her robe, and ran to him immediately. For him she was like a wild indifferent cat that already knew all the boys in the neighborhood, and carried her kittens in the streets by her teeth. "Pity, pity, you've no heart," she said, while roughly removing his wet clothes, almost plucking his head from his shoulders. 'He hadn't even breakfast for his sorrow. And working, he's working well [meaning 'hard'] from dawn 'till night. May the Evil Eye have no power over him. Why he, he would've given his eyes for his father, blessed be his memory. Never mind, never mind, to-mo-rrrow, ya bnini,²⁰ ev-ery- thing, eve-ry thing'll be all right."

This unqualified love, this affirmation, is of course nowhere else to be found. In school, Ayiush says, "we were taught a poem about *Lake Kinneret*.²¹ But we were also taught the *Shulhan Arukh*."²² Teachers "would use red ink to grade us." The teacher also intruded unfeelingly into the children's "most cherished secrets." Thus they were confronted at all times with the need to lie and at the same time, with the "tastelessness of lying." This was not for the obvious reasons, but because they, Ayiush says, hated having lies "forced" out of them, to

²⁰"My child," in North African Arabic.

²¹'Kinneret', is the Hebrew name used for the Lake of Galilee. The poem about "Kinneret" ('Ve'uly' ["Perhaps"]), by Rahel Blumstein (1890-1931), had been put to music and is widely sung in Israel as a popular patriotic song.

²²Shulhan Arukh. "the prepared table" names a code written by Joseph Caro. The book is a synopsis of previous works on Jewish traditional law by the same author, and "was ultimately accepted as the code of Jewish law par excellence." The book was first printed in Venice in 1565. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 14: 1475.

have no choice but to lie because "A cruel demand to tell the truth was assumed in advance, and taken for granted." Eventually Ayiush becomes fond of lying, "the way they were once fond of telling the lies that were called legends;" and he too came to "tell legends and tales to all those who had gloomy faces," as a kind of escape.

One of these 'escapes' was the neighborhood movie theater. To afford it, Ayiush had to barter his bus ticket or his lunch. Then, he would have to walk to school through unfriendly territory where he would have to confront hostile youth gangs, or vicious dogs. One morning, as so often was the case, Ayiush was late to school. He entered his class and walked to his seat as if no one would notice. When his teacher, Mr Lintzinski, got no response to his inquiry as to why Ayiush was late, he grabbed the child's finger and started squeezing it in front of the class. In his agony, Ayiush took flight by becoming a character from a Western movie starring Juliano Jema and Lee van Cliff. Bearing his pain nobly, as such a character might, he mumbled something the teacher could not hear. The latter intensified the pressure on the finger, and as the pain worsened Ayiush began to shout and make noises as if he were shooting, aiming with his free hand at the class and moving his body as if he were riding a horse. The pain finally became unbearable. Suddenly, Ayiush screamed: "you're a fuckin' blond and blue eyed girl, Yeh..." Angered, the teacher maintained the pressure on Ayiush's finger. "I'm rraapping her...!" "What's that!?" screamed the teacher. Ayiush responded, "rapping, rapping her, don't you understand...?" Suddenly the teacher released the throbbing finger. "Then Ayiush leaned his pain-racked body against the

teacher's desk and the class fell into a long gloomy silence (152-156)" ²³ Ayiush's capacity to visualize an alternative world at a moment's notice allows him, in this instance and at other times, to assert a self where no self would otherwise be permitted. It exemplifies one way in which myths are transformed into what James Scott calls "weapons of the weak." ²⁴

This perspective is quite at odds with that of Batia Gur who expands on Hirschfeld's thesis. She concludes that "these children's reality is characterized by expressions of violent and animal-like cruelty," and that they preoccupy themselves with "humiliating, filthy, sexual games lacking tenderness..." Yet, in contrast with Hirschfeld, Gur argues that *Swissa* represents the Ashkenazi world itself "as threatening" suggesting at least a modicum of rationality in the children's own apparent violence and cruelty. ²⁵

It is instructive at this point to consider the writer's own statements about the violence. In his interview with *Swissa*, Yigal Sarna raises questions about the 'gang wars' and the emphasis in the novel on the violence of the children and their parents. *Swissa* replies that he

... decided not to write directly about violence. This was my decision. And I kept [the narrative] clean of violence for a purpose, since writing about it is like writing about love only as fucking. I think that both violence and love always stem from a much wider reality of emotions and climate. This book is my own emotional memory, my cultural and moral memory of that place and time. It is like having someone being cruel to another, and suddenly having compassion for one being cruel. ²⁶

²³Kinneret is the Hebrew name used for the Lake of Galilee. The poem about "Kinneret" ('Veuly') [Perhaps] by Rahel Biluwestien (1890-1931), had been put to music and is widely sung in Israel as a popular patriotic song.

²⁴Scott, 1986.

²⁵Batia Gur, "Aqud by Albert *Swissa*."

²⁶Sarna, "A Moroccan Novel."

Sarna insists: "Did you purify the past? Do you build reality anew when you cleanse it of violence? Do you create — like a little god — another world?"

Swissa responds:

The violence you are talking about stems from an external perspective, that of a Western person. When I lived there under those rules, it looked different to me. An animal in the jungle does not think it lives in a cruel world. From my experience I knew that that world was governed by a very strong emotional and moral system, something we, as Westerners, ignore right now as we talk. There is here, in this country [Israel], a denial of the innermost things which inhabit the Eastern emotional and intellectual world.²⁷

This is why Ayiush's reaction to the teacher's violence is almost biblical in its passion. It reflects the heightened subjectivity of one who has been placed by violence beyond violence, who knows violence in its essence and as part of a moral universe that the teacher could scarcely grasp. Thus, his teacher would not be satisfied, no matter what Ayiush did. He persisted in demanding that Ayiush explain his lateness, as if it had been the result of a decision about concrete costs and benefits, and as if being late was to have been indifferent to norms and rules. "Ayiush took a heavy breath, the way children do because of their anger before they cry." Now, ready for revenge, he invented a hilarious story.

Well, ... so that's the way it was. On my way to school I saw a city gardener removing a strange lizard with yellow stains from a shrub fire. She was twisting with pain against the stick that he held on her belly... So, when I approached the fire..., he told me [imitating an old and painfully excited gardener], that he had saved this poor lizard from the fire but that she insisted like a mad thing on going back into the fire... 'Wait, wait, let me finish.' He suddenly turned impatiently [to the teacher] as if they were friends. Then, 'salamander,' I

²⁷ Ibid.

shouted to him, this is a salamander! And it is written that she lives in fire.... It is.. it is... It's like taking a fish out of the water! I told him. He began to retreat. 'You're torturing her.' He was somewhat confused but he let the animal go free, and that... And she turned on her feet, and sprang forth into the fire, sort of struggling in the coals 'till she actually got into the flames.... And there she sat in the coals, looking fearfully at me and then at the gardener. And we stood stunned over the fire... 'till we realized that we had been mad. We ran and brought more wood and shrubs so that she could live longer. That's it. This is it then. That's the reason that this is a very strange thing, and it doesn't happen to me every day. Th-i-s i-s w-h-y I w-a-s la-t-e!

Here Ayiush attempts to transcend his predicament by creating a universe beyond the need to make excuses, beyond the obligation to beg for forgiveness. What he cannot explain, why it was necessary to be late, he places beyond explanation, in the perspective of a tale in which lateness becomes irrelevant. In other words, here is Ayiush speaking the voice of the subaltern, beyond the knowledge of those who would rather put him in 'his place' within what they can know. Within the world of the children moral order, their subalternity, is manifest in the pleasure they take in each other, and in the self-conscious pleasure they take in their own discourses. They respond to each others' pains, and soothe each others' wounds, by spitting on dust and placing it like glue on those wounds or by using spices and Arrack, which they take "from their own homes, to stop the bleeding." Much of their wrestling too has to do with honor, but not the prideful honor of the truly self-alienated. Theirs is an honor that can, at least in principle, be shared and it also reflects the violence of the world around them in the community of resistance that it valorizes.

For example, the leader of their band is David ben-Shushan, a lad of "spiritual elation who took his inspiration from the Bible." David designated from

among the group military officers, judges, and consultants. Yohai, who always wore a headband around his shaven head and was known as a courageous fighter, was nominated to be second in command. One day, Muizo, another member, neglected his duty. The others unanimously voted, in a secret trial, that rather than "excommunicating" ²⁸ him, Muizo should be punished and made to renew his oath of loyalty. "Then David Ben-Shushan opened his mouth and said:"

Ya' know, when Abraham our father made his servant Eliezer swear to him, ya' know that he told him to hold his prick when he swore? Ben Shushan got excited and opened his eyes wide. 'Hakham[sage, teacher] Ya'kub, my uncle, told me — alright, he didn't tell me but he sort of pointed at the *Rashi commentary* ²⁹ where it is written — that he took it in his hand.' He pointed his finger to heaven and posed for the sake of impression, 'that's how Muizo will be punished and he is going to swear on my prick.'

Yohai's father punishes him for this event, sentencing him to exile in boarding school. The gang forced Muizo to drink Yohai's urine. When the outraged parents and older brothers assembled to find out who was responsible, Muizo pointed at Yohai; and none of the others, neither the children nor their parents who knew the truth, had the courage to challenge David. Yohai realized that he was to be the only one to take the blame despite the fact that everyone knew he had not acted alone. His understanding that he was the victim of David's cowardice, and the cowardice of the others, including his own father, reflects his knowledge of how separate are the world of the children from that of the adults. He was willing to accept cowardice from the one because of the need for self-protection. However, the cowardice of the adults is merely part of their nature,

²⁸In Hebrew 'herem', - boycott, excommunicate, destruction. The term is biblical.

²⁹*Rashi*, abbr.: Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac (1040-1105); leading commentator on the Bible, Rashi was born and lived in Troyes, France.

their way of repudiating community in favor of power. Yet, despite his acceptance of unfair condemnation by his chums, his refusal to repudiate the community they share now knows that he is alone.

When he and his father arrived at Bnei-Brak, his place of exile, he found it as strange as the sound of its name.³⁰ He entered the basement where the Orthodox boarding school was located, and suddenly knew that he faced far greater danger there than that he had in Yir Ganim. Yohai found the mutual flattery with which his father and the Moroccan *Hakham* who headed the institution greeted each other strange and frightening.

While they completed the admission formalities, they left Yohai unattended for a moment or two, during which he took flight. The horrors he went through in his escape, and the courage he showed, went beyond what could have been simply told. By the end of the day, exhausted and lost in what seemed to be a larger city, Yohai was approached by an old man who spoke a broken Hebrew with a central European Ashkenazi accent. Yohai was suspicious but lacked the energy to resist. The man treated him to a cake and a sweet selzer drink at a cheap coffee shop. Then, he took him onto his lap and played with him as if he were a baby, caressing his face and saying, "you're still smooth, little boy. I likes brown boys. In Poland there is no brown boys...." Suddenly Yohai vomited. The old man offered him another selzer, since "carbonated water helps to relieve gases from the stomach." He bought him a lollipop and took him by the hand to a cinema. It was dark and

³⁰A town in the vicinity of Tel Aviv, known for its ultra-Orthodox majority population with severely restricting rules of conduct. Certainly, mysterious and frightening experience for a child eleven years old from a slum neighborhood in Jerusalem.

quiet, with only a few people in the audience. On the screen, a man and a woman screamed at each other, yet when the man hit her she laughed and even seemed to enjoy it. With the lollipop in one hand, Yohai

felt in his other hand a soft thing, hairy and sticky; but he did not bother to check it out, since his eyes were closing onto a deep slumber, and he felt an endless long fall through a narrow entryway lit by a bright light that had no source.

Yohai's escape takes him momentarily into a dark world of images sweets, and assurances, but a world of few consolations and certainty none without a fair exchange. And it is this that makes the fact that he his caresses the old man's penis while drifting off to sleep other than merely a case of exploitation and abuse. A less ambiguous, less "deviant," rescuer would under the circumstances and given all that happened have been pathetic, the episode off-color and sentimental. As such, it would have betrayed what the novel had already established as basic to Yohai's world and as the conditions under which he could transcend it and in that transcendence find himself. For Swissa, for the struggle he attempts to explicate, the dispositions of any single character, including the old man, are less important than what those dispositions become, what meaning they have, in the situation. The use of Yohai by the old man is part of a rescue, and therefore is, for the boy a moment of consolation, though one laced, to be sure, with ambivalence.

This is not the only instance of so mixed a consolation in the text. There is another case, "the rape," as critics labelled it, of one boy by another. In the third part of *Aquid*, Beber Sultan, after an earlier sexual experience with his stepsister, Yvonne, which had been a tender and beautiful experience for both, seduced

Ayiush. Unlike Yvonne, Ayiush was unprepared and innocent, a gentle child bewildered by the feminine aspect within him. Beber undoubtedly takes advantage of Ayiush. But though this is not the beginning of a relationship, it is not merely a one time event. Thus, Ayiush's feelings are ambivalent. At times, he speaks of Beber as a 'criminal'; yet at other times he is offended by what he feels to be Beber's indifference, as if the two had truly shared an affection bordering on love. This ambivalence, like Yohai's above, reflects the inevitable ambiguities of consolation in a world like the children's, fraught with multiple meanings and incapable of providing unequivocal satisfaction.

What arouses compassion for these children, rather than sympathy or pity, is their capacity to remain critically reflective, and their interest in right and wrong. By its emphasis on the children's reason, the rationality of their struggle, Aqud reverses the normal order by imposing on the dominant moralism the authentic social morality of self-discovery.

When Batia Gur asserts that In Aqud, the "Ashkenazi world is represented as threatening and derided," she fails to acknowledge that by placing that world at issue, Aqud reveals one that had been suppressed. Yet even then, the dominant world, the world of domination, is given its due. The children respect the fathers even as they separate from them, and Swissa respects the fathers' world even as he writes against its grain. Thus, as Yohai sits next to his father on the bus to 'Bnei-Brak,'

His father never ceased to surprise him. His movements were so guarded, so modest and personal, that every gesture came as a precious rarity. A thousand times he offered him a peeled orange, and a thousand times he thrilled him. The boy licked his fingers and searched

for something to say to him. Haa, yes, he'd ask him about a biblical matter: for example, what did Isaac think on the morning of the *Aqedah*? But he didn't; his father was immersed in travel prayers, and when he finished he took out a miniature Psalm Book and began to read. The boy determined that his father was *Tsadik*, more than *Tsadik*.³¹

Similarly, on the same day, at morning prayers, the boy looks at his father, thinking that

there is none in the world who can grace him with the look his father gives him every so often, a compassionate look, quiet and attentive, a look that says, beware and watch your soul, that's all you have in the world, and that's much as well."

This respect is returned in similarly small but significant ways. Even in the midst of guilt at his having betrayed his son, Yohai's father reflects on his decision to punish to boy, saying "I am not asking any favors of this world. All I'm trying to do is to prevent misfortune." Indeed, the children's world appears throughout the novel to include the parents. The lines drawn are not simply generational, though they are partly that. This is clear in the first part of the novel. At a certain moment, Yohai thinks of what his father had been like when he was his age, and he says: "he used to walk behind a donkey as an apprentice. And at the end of every six months he would return to his own father, kiss his hand, and hand him the money bag." Then Yohai adds that his father "had no amazement in his youth, nor did he play in gangs...."

This history, so sober and so different from Yohai's experience, comes back to him during his exile. He

³¹Pious, in Hebrew, both (pro)noun and adjective.

was surprised to see his father's ancient suitcase, which he had used when working as a dentist. For many years it contained his tools, which lay like unturned stones in the cupboard containing the Passover utensils. For his mother, giving the suitcase to Yohai was a sign of... [her]... dream that [her husband] return one day to his old profession. She stuffed an old sweater [Yohai] inherited from his father into the suitcase. He stretched out his arm and caressed the suitcase as something marvelous. His mother noticed and said, '*eh oui, ce la vie*, what used to be mundane will now become holy.' And his father was carried away and said, '*Ma'alim bakodesh*,'³² and smiled to himself agreeably. Then he erased the smile from his face, but it still survived for a long time in his eyes.

The second part of the novel, entitled "Blessed Orphanhood," shows this same awareness of the interpenetration of the generations. The protagonist, Beber, is one of ten children. His mother, Yamna, complains of "the grinding weariness of having delivered ten children. Each delivery brought a 'prince' unto the world, or a 'princess'..., a king who is not obliged to share in the burden of upkeep, since one father supports ten children while they are not capable of supporting one father." In Morocco, Mr Sultan made his living selling old cars. Half car-thief and half dealer, an urbanite merchant who knew the pleasures and companionship of great cities such as Casablanca and Agadir, he liked to travel to the rural hinterland of the Draa Valley where his father's family had once lived.

Leticia, whom he loved, "was the first in the Draa Valley who dared to sharpen the rounded parts of a Moroccan-Jewish woman" by wearing women's clothing "with high shoulders, of the kind men wear in the great cities," and skirts which would "strangle her thighs so that she had to shorten her steps and bend her knees" while walking "on very high little red boat shoes that put holes in the dirt road." Leticia "disappeared from the world" ten days prior to her wedding with

³²An abridgement of the following: "One should enhance, not lessen, the importance of holy matters" (Talmud, Brachot, 28).

Mr. Sultan, eloping with his slave Salman, his "Moroccan Arab servant-partner in his smuggling business," "an ox of a man," the "enslaving slave." No one knew what finally happened to Leticia, but all suspected that Sultan murdered her out of his jealousy. There was also a suspicion that Leticia was the mother of the little girl, Yvonne, whom Sultan had saved from an earthquake in Agadir. Yamna, his wife, was Leticia's younger sister. It was Mr Sultan who was reminded, in the episode described on p. 226, above, while looking at his son, of the handsome old men in Casablanca and Agadir, in particular of

the metamorphosis these old men would effect around them from the moment they disembarked, slowly and authoritatively, from their carriages or their long limousines. They induced desires in young women's hearts, desires that were mixed with regret for being so young. They [the women] would urge their young husbands to hurry toward them with a customary flattering smile, to be first to shake and kiss their hands and to be blessed by their manliness. The presence of old men would validate the wine... and the abundance of food and drink on the tables. Their mature physicality inspired respect from all members of the family, while their wrinkled brows would hide with pretentious and well acted fatherliness an unconcerned condescension toward the women... With their eyes shining with alcohol, they would cruelly and impartially scatter their philosophical opinions, with profound contempt for the ungrateful world we live in; then they would find time to leave exaltedly and go to their private parties in the company of Jewish prostitutes.

In all of this, there are sons in fathers and fathers in sons: the rough and iconoclastic Mr. Sultan, the son of his fond regard, and a memory that carries the weight of judgment. Here, in other words, is the life affirmation and ambivalence that we have so far seen only in the children.

The third part of the novel introduces us to the Monsanegor family.³³

³³Hebreized from the Greek term 'synegoros': advocate, lawyer, champion of the right. The word entered the Hebrew language in the fourth century BC, in the wake

Ayiush is the protagonist. His father, Mr. Monsanegor, had been a textile merchant. He later became a book binder and is now a stone cutter. Ayiush has recurring and disturbing memories of his Arab Moslem nanny and his mother's woman servant, Sulica. The family has a room in the apartment that serves as a kind of a living room "for the days to come." For the time being it is a storage room, surrounded by brick wall built by his father and fronted by an iron door. There, Mr. Monsanegor had put all the furniture and expensive hardwares that still had some beauty. The furniture was kept under white sheets for his older sisters' dowry.

In the parents' bedroom, there are closets with doors and drawers all around the walls, stuffed with clothing: "black suits ready for night parties, fragrant perfumes and cosmetics, jewelry of silver and gold, and expensive textiles, preserved for the holiday that will occur when the Messiah comes." All this wealth had been brought from the old country. Much of it was already pawned, to cover "unexpected" expenses. A photograph that had been on the wall in Ayiush's room since he was a baby depicts the family at the time they arrived in their new country. They are shown

walking like astronauts in an old legend, with their legs raised high, careful not to step into the concrete crevices of the dusty dirt road.... They have white suitcases and elegant overcoats.... His brothers grin. They are sweating in their white wool suits. His sisters wear sleeveless summer dresses, exposing their full shaped arms.... If it were not for [Ayiush] being held in his mother's arms, it would have been almost impossible to distinguish her from her daughters, she had been so young and beautiful. [Ayiush's father is missing from the photo....]

of Alexander the Great conquest and the emergence of Hellenism. In Aqud we have a French form of the Hebrew noun/name 'sanegor', which, etymologically could mean 'my advocate' and in the narrative could have an ironic intention.

These details clearly indicate the social class, the style, and the humor of the family. Above all, the picture is one of what sociologists used to call a "primary group," a small community of intimates that could only exist as such in the context of a yet greater community. The photograph is in sharp contrast to Ayiush's life as an immigrant, but it yields a certain continuity of relations that runs from past to present constituting a basis for some of the complexity of his reflections on his own youth.

* * *

All three parts of the novel Aqud have a common motif: "The Binding" of persons, the adherence to restrictions that leave little room for movement and for the self. Yet, they also present both movement and selves, and a sense of connection that even circumstances so dire cannot erase. The motif draws upon the biblical story of the binding of Isaac by Abraham. In the novel it is repeatedly articulated by a question: "What did Isaac think on the morning of the *Aqedah*?"³⁴ This, says Menachem Peri, is a traditional question. As such it is "a 'well-used' theme of Hebrew literature." But he adds that

here there are no fathers who bind their sons on the altar of national self-realization. Nor is "Aqud," in spite of its materials, a social-ethnic novel. Its protagonists are 'displaced', between childhood and adulthood. The sacrificial altar is the "conspiracy" of the adult world, or the trauma of entering it."³⁵

However, for the community of immigrants portrayed in Aqud, fathers

³⁴Aqedah is the hebrew term for 'binding' (for sacrifice).

³⁵Menachem Peri, on the back cover of the book (Aqud).

sacrificing their sons for "national self-realization" is not possible, if only because those fathers are not actively included in the project of "national self-realization." But, in any case, the notion is conceptually foreign to them and in terms of their own faith it is a heresy. For this community, sacrifice, taken literally is possible only for God. Since Abraham's attempt to sacrifice Isaac, human sacrifice is not permissible, even metaphorically. A person may choose to die rather than to desecrate God's name, but this is a very different concept from that of sacrifice. This difference is suggested in Aqud when children choose suffering terrible blows over taking God's name "in vain."

On the other hand, in the novel, the entire community of Yir Ganim is bound for sacrifice. But they cannot know why and for whose sake. While the children are also bound, they are aware of it and hold their parents for collaborating, as it were, in the conspiracy of sacrifice, a judgment qualified by compassion for the powerlessness of their parents. The children are the object of the project of bondage and sacrifice, but they represent the possibility of freedom for a community that has already been sacrificed. What they offer in hope for the humanity of the parents when community has already been lost. And so, the children oppose authority not because they are nihilists but because they hate the nihilism of enforced passivity of the morality of obedience that enjoins.

When, in the third part of the novel, Ayiush's father is summoned to be reprimanded for his son's behavior in school, the teacher says that students "in this school are admitted by grace rather than by right." Ayiush interrupts: "do not threaten!" Before going to see the teacher, Ayiush tried to provide his father with the information he needed to face the situation without trepidation. But Ayiush

finally gave up: "there were more powerful people... who were interested more than anything in law and order, and his father was their prisoner."

Similarly Yohai's predicament in the first part also iterates the theme of the binding of Isaac. There, the profoundly moving experience of *Aqedah* is passionately narrated by the eleven year old Yohai.

In consequence of Yohai's long record of insubordination, he fears for himself when his father awakens him early in the morning ³⁶ one cold winter rainy day. Yet his father touches him tenderly on his shoulder. Despite the obligation he has to deal with Yohai's naughty behavior, Mr. Pazuelo is "saddened to see a child having to bear the burdens of grown-ups." Yohai recoils at his father's touch, but then, while he still lies under the smelly blanket with his five brothers on either side warming his feet, he watches his father prepare for the day in prayer and by ritual cleansing. The narrator tells us that the "little body had been grasped by a sense of foreboding" that had possessed him "since last night... when his father and mother spoke to each other in French." Yohai meditates on his predicament.

What did Isaac think on the morning of the *Aqedah*? He was reminded of when he stood next to his father at the rostrum, while he led the prayers in the synagogue on last New Year's day with his supporters on either side.

While chanting the prayer, "Era of Acceptance," his father had almost drowned in his own tears in fear of God. Yohai remembers crawling under his father's prayer shawl and clutching his knee.

³⁶ *Aqud* opens with the words "The boy rose early in the morning..." The biblical story opens: "Abraham rose early in the morning..." (See Genesis 22: 3).

The child was struck by panic. He felt as if he were about to fall. He clung harder to his father's knee, fearing he might lose him. Daddy's about to be slaughtered. They'll slaughter me too. Mother'll cry. Daddy's a criminal. He's not well! Daddy's afraid. Daddy's himself the slaughterer. He's a certified slaughterer. He's slaughtering chickens. He's confessing to a severe crime, very severe, sodomy. For God's sake, give him relief!

The congregation was awed and silent; and in reverence for their leader-in-prayer, one of his supporters invites the congregation to sing the "*Aqedah*." ³⁷

Following this scene, Yohai's thoughts wander on:

In school they didn't know what Isaac was thinking. Abraham was the whole story. But Isaac didn't know where they were going and he asked Abraham, his father, to tell him. And Abraham said that only God knew where a human goes when he is going. But when he was bound he certainly knew, because no one binds a human just like that. But the legends claimed that Isaac knew, and that in his righteousness he was happy to be God's sacrifice (9-10).

The binding of the child is also a bondage for the father. But only the child dares to reflect on the paradox. Only one who is deliberately bound by others has that right and can reflect on it with clarity. The father's perspective, though the father listens to God, is only that, a perspective.

Of course, Yohai's own reflections are not divorced from what is expected of him later in the same day. The presence of the others at his "trial," his peers, provides Yohai with a justification for his being punished despite being innocent. He identifies himself with Isaac, and if Isaac survived he probably would too. This is expressed by the narrator in the thought, "When would he come back to collect *Rakafor*? He will come back, he will..." None of his teachers had ever dared to

³⁷A liturgical poem based on the story.

present such a justification of punishment for the sake of the community, since the separation of Earth from Heaven must be absolute, analogous to the opposition of Power and 'subordination' in the secular world. Power justifies itself by reason and telos, subordination only by norm and obligation. Aqud is a poetic attempt to reconfigure and thereby overcome these oppositions, in particular the separation within the community and between it and its world of power. Only doubt, fantasy, and resistance are available for this metaphysical rebellion. In this sense, Aqud is a narrative of resistance, qualified though it must be by reference to circumstance and a sense of tragedy.

This is why Yohai elevates his father and himself to the imagistic level of Abraham and Isaac, why he feels free to speculate on his own fate, why he doubts all authority, why he allows himself to refuse and finally to flee. At the same time, he recognizes his father's predicament as analogous to his own. This is a distinctive feature of the novel, the powerlessness of fathers and sons in regard to each other and in the context of power directed from outside against both fathers and sons. But it is a feature that relies on the point of view of the child — the prospect of a critical position beyond the most obvious normative terms of reproach. Yet, even the fathers occasionally reflect on this, and wonder why they had ever come to this country, this "place." And although Mr. Pazuelo is inhibited in his expression by his awe of the Holy Land (not merely the secular State of Israel), he nevertheless makes his frustration clear, if only against the Ashkenazis from whom he had once expected so much.

For a moment Mr. Pazuelo was struck by joy at his own calamity. Deep in his heart he

rejoiced at their failure. But he was not at ease with such feelings. "Sheer loafers," he said angrily to himself; "education, aha! And they even call that special education!" He detested them, their beards, their side-locks, and their fringed garments which for years deceived him.

On the other hand, he still

admired them; they were the Exiles of Exile. They had survived. They do not educate.... They are what they are, and what they have always been. He felt some relief in his heart. From now on he will be free of those gatherings that aroused in him such revulsion for and hatred of Israel. Heaven forbid. Never did the school headmaster or the class teacher speak to him privately. There were always two. They would abruptly disrupt the conversation and consult each other in their strange language,

as if no one that counted was present.

Contrary to those who only see in the Moroccan Jewish culture "seclusionist and repulsive" tendencies and political ineptitude, it is interesting to consider the force of Mr. Pazuelo's critical meditation and especially that of his scepticism about the Zionist principle that Jews in Israel have "come out of Exile." Mr Pazuelo's perspective is a modernist one focused on secular dynamics in contrast with what is fixed by God and unmanageable by humankind. This is illustrated when he says that the Ashkenazis are "the Exiles of Exile," because "they are what they are, and what they have always been." In other words, they do not change, but for their location. Relative to them it is he, and his community who are in motion, alive, engaged; and it is the world and not God that is the source of life. He does not, however, permit himself to dwell on the implication that the Holy (of which he remains in owe), and its putative representatives (whom he doubts) are sources of death. He remembers the play of difference in his old country, where

the Arabs didn't hate us... and at times would show respect for us. They simply wanted our money, nothing else. We had commerce with them. We resembled them in our customs, in our food, in our songs, in our dress, in our marital relationships; and as for God — we were closer to them than to the Christians.³⁸ They used to call us "Yahudin" and we would call them "Muzlemin".

In the midst of his anger and sense of futility, Mr. Pazuelo sees this shared life of diverse communities in a context of power and conquest, far removed from traditional justifications of Zionism and its wars.

But here came the godless brothers of the strange Yiddish-speaking Jews who made war and conquered their cities. Now they are anxious to get rid of the Arabs. They find it impossible to tolerate their customs and their culture.... It is no wonder that they left their own culture behind them and in its stead took on the culture of wickedness and the sinfulness.

It is in this light that Mr. Pazuelo reflects ironically on the delusions of his own community: "And we, he thought, a bewildered multitude, sickening innocents, pitiless, stupid, and unreasoningly blind, we accept the myth of coming out of Exile,"³⁹ as if one could "actually" come out of exile and as if the identification of "exile" was unpolitical.

Ariel Hirschfeld suggests that the 'Binding' motif in *Aqud* has a more restricted meaning, namely

... the oppression of children by their fathers. In this novel there is the great *Aqedah*, with its principle manifest in the castration scene at the barber's. This scene transforms the violence depicted in the novel to Jewish metaphysical magnitudes. If Ayiush is to have his bar-mitzva, he must go through a hair cutting ceremony. This is only the external aspect. The content is the deep and burning insult he suffers at the hand of his father and the entire ethnic society, an insult that is ritualized. Ayiush's flight from this ceremony does not redeem him

³⁸Meaning, the French colonists.

³⁹*Aqud*: 13-14.

from his ethnicity. Without the obligatory religious ceremony he is abandoned like an animal, emptied of all context, a sign without signification.

That is, Ayiush must be either inside or outside, and which one depends on his response to the culturally decisive fact of generational difference. If Hirschfeld is correct, these generational relations of a difference resolved through ritual constitute a latent unity that fails only where the individual refuses to be the signifier of the difference. Hirschfeld thinks that Swissa goes too far, makes too much of too little, turns an individual's protest into an act of metaphysical significance. But this ritual defines manhood. It inscribes the law, as it were, on the individual, every individual who would and should be a manifestation of the law. The ritual is thus not specific to the Moroccan community, but is part of all Orthodox Jewish observance, both Sepharadi and Ashkenazi. Ayiush's refusal of the haircut and then the Bar-Mitzva is not merely the willful act, understandable by its cause though it may be, of an individual. It must be read in the context of the novel, which is a context of a struggle for a voice, a community of speakers, that Hirschfeld choose neither to acknowledge nor to recognize. Its form is individual rebellion; its context is the defiant speech of the group.

Ayiush's defiant gesture, like Yohai's, must be seen in the context of two struggles, one of a community to survive and the other for it to survive as a way of life and as an affirmation of the experiences of its people. The children are both emblem of and instrument in those struggles. But they are also the agents the yet more inclusive struggle of humanity that they represent in their subaltern existence as children. The latter is beyond the relative particularisms of generational conflict,

ethnicity, and violence. To emphasize only these is to neutralize what is political about Aqud, and therefore to read the novel apart from its people bearing on the Zionist claim that humanism derives only from the standpoint of the authentic, anti-diasporic Jew. Swissa attempts to demystify Israeli Jewish righteousness and to confront Zionism with its own contradictory attitude towards Jews themselves and the concomitant tendencies to identify an invidiously conceived otherness in the name of a false and imposed unity.

* * *

The community constituted by the children, beneath the surface of fake community, is articulated in Aqud in the form of a chronotype a place/time, that is not conceivable in terms of separation of a location and temporality by which the dominant society identifies acts and events and thereby reduce human agency to mere behavior. For that agency, place and time are separate dimensions, allowing for exchanges according to a logic of calculation. In contrast, place and time are not separated by the children. Thus, they do not participate in exchanges of freedom in time for order in place, or the reverse. Thus they do not have "free" or "leisure" time, as a fund, a portion of which can be appropriated to the greater purposes of society. They do not perform "roles" or implement "positions." Thus, violence is not, as Batia Gur seems to believe, behavior done when time is too free. Thus, the category of violence does not belong to them. They do what they do that another would violent is, for them, merely what they do in a setting for which the distinction between violence and whatever stands as its opposite has no meaning. What they do they do in regard to the place of time and the time of place. It is free because it is necessary. It is not rational because it is appropriate. Thus, their

conduct is about relations, not about standards. Going to a movie is not something individuals do by schedule, it is an activity infused with sociality.

This is expressed in many different ways in the narrative. In one instance we are told that "... they came and asked [Ayiush] 'what are you doing?' And he answered, when I do, I'm asked, 'what are you doing?' And when I'm not doing, I'm asked 'what are you doing?'" What appears to adults as "free time" is the only real time the children have. All time is the time of struggle, and all place is the place of self realization in struggle. They have no special "other time" reserved for them to be subjects, since such a subjectivity would have to be exempt from struggle, therefore meaning. Consequently, they do not have any "spare" time for "more important" things to do, or "for leisure." It follows that when they leave their neighborhood they are, as their parents warn, lost, but lost in a way that only the adults can mourn.

When Yohai takes a bus ride out of Yir Ganim with his father, we hear nothing about "place," or the succession of places, not even when the bus goes through "Jerusalem." Yohai falls asleep, and his father wakens him when they have to get off the bus. For him, they are "actually" nowhere. The time of the trip for Yohai is only a matter of then and now; and the series of places that appear to define the journey is a field of simultaneous presences, a situation in which differences are merely locations, points of demarcation that one can know but not experience. They are no more "places" in the lived sense than the names on a map.

When Ayiush searches for Gersha, who is "lost," there is no description of place separate from the movement of the search. In a sense all places appear to

Ayiush as defined by Gersha's absence; as substantially incomplete.⁴⁰ When Mr Sultan goes with his daughter to the "place" at which the Independence Day carnival had been scheduled, it is not possible to guess that they are in Jerusalem, and that no Independence Day carnival ever actually occurs that resembles what is evoked by that name. The two are merely passing through streets that have no significance beyond that of their passage. This 'outing' with the daughter who is the apple of his eye provides us with an unqualified opportunity to share Mr. Sultan's pleasure and, at the same time, his anger and frustration. Mr Sultan's pleasure derives from the outing. His anger reflects on its contradiction. For him, there is a here as much as now. "Here" is a "place" beyond places, and he momentarily despises what it represents. His anger obliterates the boundaries that ordinarily limit the instrumentality and identity of place. It is a deterritorializing impulse that reflects the unreliability of all named territory for the immigrant.

When Yehudit Orian says that she "could not reconstruct and arrange a vision of any concrete place..., any scene," in *Aquid*, she is reflecting not the novel's weakness but its strength. Of course, "Swissa's Yir Ganim could never be Amos Oz's Jerusalem or Yaakov Shabtai's Tel Aviv, or Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Macondo."⁴¹ After reading the novel for the first time, I also could not remember where the action occurred. I could not remember that the characters

⁴⁰Gersha is these children's only adult friend. He had created a garden fence of used junk. His yard is the only place in which birds and animals and flowers are protected. He is the only adult these children do not fear, and some of them even take advantage of him, and in their games they occasionally inflict pain on him, though Ayiush says that Gersha enjoys it. Gersha is their only protector, and in many respects provider. He is a human being for these children, despite his appearance to critics as a "madman," or as "grotesque."

⁴¹Yehudit Orian, "Albert Swissa, Go On..."

were in Jerusalem. If one did not know, first-hand, the city's streets, one might believe that the street "Costa Rica" was invented by the children. It took me a while to realize that this was in fact a real street, a "real place" only for adults who can situated themselves independently of time and predicament, who can know the locations of things as other than a setting for activity whose sociality takes precedence over its name. But in the novel, this street is not meant to be real in that topographical sense. Its reality as a place/time is not available to those who live by names, economies of time versus place that are marked by "doing" rather than being. At one point we are told about "the fruit groves that surround the world, a "world" that includes by name all the Jewish, Moslem, and Christian villages south of Jerusalem, but not Jerusalem.

The only object on the horizon "toward which birds are flying in formation," is "a mosque minaret that pulls itself toward the sky," an object suffused with movement. And the only beautiful place to observe is the sky, which is not a location at all. This is where the children direct their eyes for many hours each day — toward their kites in the sky — one of which they call the "sun wheel." This supercession of place is not an artifact of Swissa's prose. It has its own significance, and it belongs to the children.

Jerusalem, the Holy City, is thus radically secularized, deterritorialized. It is made absolutely mundane, in other words, stripped of Mythology. This is why Swissa, rather than speaking, as Amos Oz does, of the "blazing blue," speaks instead of the "deceiving sun in the pale blue" sky of Jerusalem. In this narrative, garbage and trash, junk and open sewage, are not just properties of Yir Ganim. These are what make of Jerusalem a situation for those children and for life. The

only other writer I know of who has written such an unorthodox configuration of the world named "Jerusalem" is the late poet Alexander Pen, in his poem "Jerusalem, The Holy Whore."⁴²

Names serve only as virtual signifiers for Swissa. In contrast, Sammy Michael's All Men Are Equal, relies on the capacity of names to evoke types. Apart from one character, Mr. Zidowitz, who is portrayed as an Ashkenazi opportunist, and another, Abu Halawa, who is portrayed as a thug, the male protagonists have Hebrew names. The significance is clear in the light of the fact that many if not most of the new immigrants from Iraq had Arabic names when they came to Israel.⁴³ The choice of Hebrew names is, then, an expression of a project. It is not merely a rhetorical strategy.

In Aqud, however, the names with the exceptions of Rammy, David Ben Shushan, and Yohai, form a mosaic of linguistic types: Immo and Emme, Ayiush's two older brothers; Leticia, Yvonne, Beber, Tully, Georgete, Muizo, Koko, Mr Sultan and his wife Yamna; Sitato the barber; *Hakham* Ya'kub abd-el-Hak, Ayiush's tutor for the bar-mitzva reading, and his wife, Ishtir; Mr Pazuelo; Mr Monsanegor; the family Shukrun; the family Shriki; Tonto Zaiish; Madam Arlette; Gersha; Mr Lintzinski, Ayiush's teacher in the Ashkenazi Orthodox school; the twins A'z'iz'i and Makhloof; the night watchman in the mental asylum, Zeituni; Z'oz'o; Rabbi Eliyahu Buhbutt, of the Kabbalist synagogue. There is also a Dr.

⁴²Alexander Pen, Along the Way Selected Poems (Tel Aviv: Mada Ve'chaim, 1956): 45-53.

⁴³See, Shimon Ballas' novel Hamaabara, 1964. The novel presents the same theme, the struggle of the Iraqi Jewish immigrant community in the early 1950's. In it, all characters are introduced by their Arabic names.

Goldstein, a Dentist; and if there is a Doctor in town he is Ashkenazi. However, when Ayiush's school principal called him by his Hebrew name, *Haiim*, "Ayiush shot back at him, keeping his cool, 'Ayiush!'" And when Katie, Ayiush's younger sister, heard him speak of Rabbi Nahman of Breslow, she asked him, "What is Breslow?" Ayiush replied, "It should be some Ashkenazi name... and they laughed." Besides their colorfulness these multilingual names are more typical to and respectful of the cultures they represent than those in Sammy Michael's novel.

The use of names is part of the way in which these novels depict Arab culture. For example, Chapter 7 of All Men Are Equal, Iraqi-Jewish immigrants display a marked lack of sensitivity to the fact that their tent colony was built on the ruins of an Arab village named Kheiriya.⁴⁴ This is part of depersonalization, desubjecting, of Arabs. In the light of this, the novel protagonist is able suddenly to see the person in a single Arab. This token discovery occurs on a winter night, as David is depressed, thinking about his divorce from his wife. He goes to the beach and enters the water "to cool" his anxiety. A wave throws him down. Another man who happened to be in the vicinity comes to help him. In the ensuing conversation which becomes personal, David realizes that the man is an Arab, "that an Arab, too, could become miserable because of a woman"⁴⁵ (emphasis in the original). This momentary recognition of an Arab as a subject is predicated on the particulars of the moment — David's peril and the personal nature of their conversation. Subjectivity is not, for Arabs, a priori.

In Aqud, however, the sentiment toward Arabs is different, and possibly

⁴⁴In Ballas' novel 'Hamaabara,' the Arabic name of the place, Saqiya, is mentioned.

⁴⁵Sammy Michael, All Men Are Equal: 244-245.

unique in Israeli Hebrew literature. Subjectivity is prior to individuality. On one occasion, Mr. Sultan refers casually to 'Arab-Jews' and 'Arab Moslems' in the Draa Valley of Morocco (43). In the "concrete colonies of Yir Ganim," the narrator tells us, children profoundly identify themselves with Arabs and the Arab presence in their "world." Yir Ganim is a slum, and the narrator looks at the contrasting "pleasantness of the nearby Arab villages," mentioning almost with envy the villages of Ein-Henyiah and Batir (97), their fruit groves, vineyards, brooks, and fountains. In another instance, on the eve of the Jewish Tabernacle holiday,

"even the Arab peddlers who had already sold their merchandise hurried to return to neighboring Biet Jalla and Bethehem before dark. They swung their sticks behind their donkeys, shouting while passing, 'Yid l'kher!' ⁴⁶ Trembling and thrilling the heart much more than all the blessings here" (206).

* * *

Yet, this sympathy is still not the crucial point of difference. In the first two parts of my study I was concerned with a literature operating within a context of a strictly defined nationalist moral discourse. In Aqud, however, the nationalist component of culture operates as an external imposition. Sympathy is qualified positively by identification. The Arabs and the Jews are what Alfred Schutz called "consociates," who "grow old together." ⁴⁷ They are not merely each others negation. What makes Aqud unique is its endeavor to free itself as a text not only from the nationalist restrictions on moral discourse, but from Jewish 'identity' as an

⁴⁶Arabic for, "Happy Holiday."

⁴⁷Alfred Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, trans. by George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert. (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

imposition on personal identity and intersubjectivity. In this regard, I consider Aqud an antinomian text. And while this may appear on the surface, to a secular, liberal reader, as an inversion of political priorities, in fact, Aqud represents an attempt to be honest. In the Zionist context, it is not Jewish Orthodoxy that is pulling Israeli nationalism toward an extreme, but secular nationalism that moves Orthodoxy toward rightism.

Thus, while A Good Arab presents an ambiguous identity within the context of a secular nationalism, in which dilemmas of political disloyalty inevitably arise, the moral dilemma presented in Aqud is one that can motivate a community, is that of the relationship between the affirmation of life through and acknowledgment of community and the affirmation of God through observance. A person's conscientious choice of another religion, even respect for it, is experienced by the Jewish-Orthodox community as shameful, as is the refusal of sacraments. Such a person is "Other" and is subject to excommunication (*herem*).

In Aqud, Ayiush is afflicted with this angst: he is beset by the memory of his Moslem-Arab Nanny in Morocco whom he suspects of being his mother. Simply, simplistically, this determines Ayiush's fate and provides the psychological trigger for his eccentricities. But rather than renouncing the possibly Arab-Moslem aspect of his identity in order to rejoin his possibly given Jewish identity, Ayiush comes to believe that he has been "deceitfully converted to Judaism" by his father. The first three years of his life with his Arab-Moslem nanny are, for Ayiush, an idyll, in his words, the 'pure kingdom', "which was probably lost too, and could never, God forbid, come back again." Thus, his life is "a false effort of a fading remembrance," which is the title of the novel's third

section. This personal dynamic has gone unrecognized in the critical commentary on *Aqud*, and with that failure is a failure to see how radical is Swissa's reflection on the relations of Arab and Jew, how thorough is his challenge to Zionist rationalism, and how moral his subjects become in a world in which they are free only in the context of bondage.

The critics are skeptical. Hirschfeld regards the narrator as "hollow." Peri dismisses the moral focus by applauding "the romantic preservation of a lost childhood that turns into a torn scroll in one's memory." Both ignore the forcefulness of Swissa's account of a dilemma that goes to the heart of Israeli moral discourse, how to be, at one and the same time, Jewish and free, where freedom has to be with being human rather than merely an identity. This issue turns in *Aqud* on the question of sin, punishment, repentance, and grace.

Ayiush's punishment for misbehavior in school consisted of confinement for an unspecified number of days in the family storage room. His father wanted to cure his son of the "illness" with which he was "infected." Nevertheless, he realized this "was not just a body that acquired bad habits because of neglect... There was something else working in his son from within, inciting him against his own father." Once the door shut behind him, Ayiush was left in the dark, unable to see. The storage room was filled with so much worm poison that his mother had to give him mint leaves in the hope of protecting him from the noxious fumes. In shock, he wondered how he had so easily consented to enter that room. He could not comprehend the lack of reaction by his mother brothers and sisters at seeing him so confined. He thought that they ought at least to have waved goodbye, like they would have if he were going to study at a distinguished *Yeshiva*, or were

going on an important mission, or if he was a "Gatherer" on the Sabbath,⁴⁸ whose punishment was necessary to provide a lesson for the community.

It is the latter possibility which preoccupies Ayiush, the fantastic idea of a sinner whose punishment makes of his sin a social good. Not only he but his father may be such a sinner for the sake of the community's need for self-affirmation. The father must educate and punish. The suffering he inflicts serves a higher good, no matter the ambiguity of its intention. Yet, Ayiush reflects critically on another aspect of his suffering, the personal aspect. As "time went on without movement," doubts began to disturb him. Someone came and sat beside him, someone who never bows, who refuses orders, who demands to know why he is confined. Why was he so submissive? What is his relationship with his father? Is he really so small and weak? Is his heart so soft? Does he so badly need his father's shelter? Does he love this unreal home? "That night when all was silent, Ayiush prayed to his God from the depths of depression and darkness, like Jonah from the belly of the fish." The episode severely dramatizes the tension between Ayiush's sense of self and the community in whose terms he ultimately knows and valorizes himself.

Often in the past, Ayiush found himself secretly wishing that "the wrath be over; let father be over, let everything be over..." When at night he stood for hours on the bridge between the housing blocks, watching soundless television through

⁴⁸'Getherer' (Numbers, 15: 32-36). During the time that the Israelites were in the wilderness, a man was found on the Sabbath gathering sticks. The people brought him to Moses and Aaron and he was kept in custody, because it had not been decided what should be done with him. The Lord told Moses that the man must be put to death, stoned by all the community. This was done outside the camp, as the Lord commanded.

neighbors' windows, he was often struck by the urge to throw himself into the depths. "Surely someone would scream then, someone would at least find something to talk about." Then he would go down to the bomb shelter and masturbate.

This precipice was one on which all the children stood — where the self of freedom and despair confronted the public social identity of false hope and moral compromise. This contradiction lends vitality to their lives. This essential ambivalence, so hostile to essentialism, testifies to the fact of oppression beyond any immediate experience of it. Ayiush thought of "the mother who had prostituted herself with such great love for the father who turned to her in lustfulness," the father who, as if by magic, suddenly returned when Ayiush was about to be thirteen. He thought about the house that had never really existed but was only imagined and without any meaning he could grasp: "the more it is full, the more ephemeral it becomes. Damn this house!"

In an ancient book of penitential prayers which he had received as a present from his father, Ayiush discovered that his father felt guilty of unfathomable sins and misdeeds — murder, robbery, treason, adultery. Ayiush studied these in detail and saw in them the false pride of the secret sinner in confession. Ayiush, whose ambivalence made him incapable of repentance, began to realize that he himself was not only destined to err and sin, but that he had inherited unbearable sinful propensities. His teachers told him that whoever does private acts, those he had done, that are not written in the *Shulkhan Arukh* commits sin. All these reflections are, for him, causes of shame though not occasions for repentance. They create a sense of his own evil beyond hope of redemption.

As if that Moslem child that he could have been. That little piece of road on which he had already walked toward the *madina*,⁴⁹ his soft palm mingling with the Arab servant's tattooed hand, implanted in him an ancient and unreasoning hatred of Israel, God forbid. Perhaps this is what his father means to suggest when he points a finger and says that "The one who blackens others blackens himself."

Thus, we are confronted with a son and a father who are irredeemable sinners, and in obscure ways partners to the same sin. Sinfulness, Ayiush says, was taught to him as well as being his disposition. Men have carried that burden of sin since Adam and Eve. But, for him, the ambivalence that constitutes authentic subjectivity in his situation makes sinfulness the only way he can preserve his connection to the ruined community of his people. Children without hope, like "gatherers" on the Sabbath, are the moral fixtures of such a community's feeble self-consciousness, available as resources for its confused memory of what it had been and how it came to be what it is.

On Yom Kippur, Ayiush sensed that the world was treating him strangely: "with his childish inability or unwillingness to speak and tell others what he should," he was made to feel that "he is the only and last survivor of humanity. In despair and futile wrath, he takes a stone and throws it at the universe." We are told that on that day,

the rumble of singing and prayer descended from all directions of the universe. Ayiush's heart held pity for his own awkward and compulsively large steps along the small desolate paths.... [On this very holy day he was walking] "toward, toward..., toward what he did not know..., [and yet he was walking] in shame filled with regret, toward that which had not yet reached him but would reach him despite himself....

⁴⁹Ayiush walks away with his nanny "from the *mlakh* to the *madina*" (from the Jewish ghetto to the cosmopolitan city).

This is the narrator speaking of Ayiush as he walks home from the synagogue in the midst of prayer. When he arrives home he is overwhelmed by the solemnity, stillness, and silence of the beautifully decorated household, prepared for celebration and a great feast at the end of the fast of the Holy day. Like Camus' Stranger, he breaks the fast ahead of time in violation of the law, curious to know what lies behind the notion that one must not eat more than "as little as an olive" on Yom Kippur. Ayiush

had a vague and inchoate desire to stand on the other side of the barricade, on the side from which one can see the stones thrown by your own people to kill you, by your acquaintances, relatives, and close friends, by the members of your family who are prohibited from mourning the dead sinner, the one who was stoned, the one for whom mourning obligations are not valid.

Here is an individual who, despite himself, attempts to measure God's rule by his own capacity to imagine its consequences. He wishes to know the rule as God knows it, to will it as if it could be his own, as if he might create the very law by which he [unlike god?] is bound. That this is a child's mediation is crucial, since only children are given the law without reason. Ayiush does not intend merely to be naughty, but only to demand that law be restored to the realm of freedom. We are told that Ayiush did not break the fast "in order to put himself apart from the" community, but on the contrary to join it; "just like that Gatherer, though two thousand years in his grave, he is not forgotten, nor is his sin." Ayiush's struggle is thus not against his people but for them, for their freedom and

for the identity that can only occur if obedience to the law is chosen, willed rather than imposed arbitrarily. But then he can only legitimately engage in this struggle to recover the lawfulness of the law if others are also in need of such a recovery.

As Ayiush exits the kitchen, he hears the sound of running water. By the volume of it and the different pitches it emits, he speculates that there are many people who have not gone to synagogue. Rather than being properly modest in their use of water on this day, they use enough to account for many great sins. Ayiush discovers that the community is not that which it pretended to have been. It, too, is engaged in a challenge to the arbitrary imposition of the law. His mood improves.

An androgynous midget, that Ayiush had imagined while confined in the storage room, reappears. Ayiush walks with the midget from the kitchen to his parents bedroom. There he takes off his clothes and enters the wardrobe. He digs frantically through the wardrobe, searching among hidden treasures and memorabilia. He finds an olive-wood box containing silver and gold jewelry, and a bunch of keys that he had never seen before. For a while he reflects "on the locked doors they had left behind." He realizes that the past of his parents is a mystery to him, and that they have preserved traces of a past to which he had been denied access. Sinfulness, memory, and alienation are brought together in this episode. Ayiush is Ayiush, but also someone else. Yet, who that someone is has been kept secret; and he imagines that this denial of access to memory is the greater sin of which he is victim; like memory itself this sin must, if anything, be shared by all. The refusal to share memory, the duplicitousness of this refusal, is the reflection of the community's need to recover its own commitment to the law through a reversal

commitment to one another, and therefore through respect for those subversions that allow the law to be chosen rather than merely received. But while this need can justify Ayiush's own conduct, he must face the likelihood that his heroic struggle will be rejected after all.

Ayiush searches through the wardrobe for something without any idea of what it might be. Suddenly, he finds,

in a black shiny purse, a number of family photographs of men and women he never saw before. Yet it seemed that there was something about them that he had known in the past. He examined their faces, their unbuttoned collars, their loosened neckties.... He was confused. They resembled each other. By their posture, all the women were pregnant, although one couldn't know by whom.... Here it is. Here is the longed-for photograph, another photograph....

Is it that memory cannot finally be kept from one who searches? It seems that Ayiush, after all, had a purpose in leaving the synagogue, and his choice of that very day may also have been for a reason. What other day of the year could be safer for an investigation into memory and the suppression than this day of atonement. He wanted to know who he was. A twelve year old boy, who in a few days would be thirteen, was eager to find out not only whether his life was worthwhile, but whether Bar-Mitzva is or even should be part of that life. This is a daring thought for so young a child. Yet, it seems a necessary one since he cannot be sure that he is Jewish and is, nevertheless, obligated by Jewish law. Moreover, he believes that he should not be forced to be Jewish. Whatever he is, it must be what he can will himself to be, what is true to his life.

Ayiush had once thought that the term "tender in years" was engraved on his forehead, as a sign of Cain, as if the fewness of his years declare him to be

tender and delicate, the years to come entailing a toughness until old age weakens him, and "finally causes him to crumble into the dust of the earth." that thought is evoked by the photograph he discovered, that "strictly forbidden object" he presumed to have been "left here temporarily." In it

A gloriously robust child of tender years is seated like a little man on the lap of an enormous woman. In his delicate, fattish hands he is holding a water-and-sky-like colored crystal fish. His blemish-free face is immersed in dream, free of wounds, immaculate. His soft eyebrows jut forward like little frontlets above full, almond-shaped eyes. He has a small and sensitive nose. His cheeks are doughnuts, his lips red and soft like a cotton-worm. The woman's tattooed hands are big and black, and she wears plenty of gold bracelets and rings. She embraces him around his belly, protectively and with warmth, reclining his body in a motion intended to turn his face toward the camera. Now Ayiush notices that the child's eyes are slightly recoiling from the camera, or from what is standing next to it. Although he is looking at the camera, his eyes are somewhat off center. His head is pulled upward and backward, toward the woman's face. But the woman's face is missing from the photograph. It is not actually missing. Someone had cut out the photograph's upper part...."

In a fit, Ayiush destroys the maimed yet tantalizing photograph. He feels an overpowering dizziness as if he had been hypnotized. But he also felt great happiness, "and a momentary exemption from... anxiety." While inconclusive, the photograph nevertheless seems to reveal the truth by its inclusion of the figure Ayiush identifies as his nanny, a truth for which he was willing to "squander his life." He ate wondering whether or not he should bless the food. But then he reminded himself that eating on Yom Kippur was a transgression, so that blessing the food would be "a good deed" actually done in sin. Nevertheless, in a presumptuous appropriation of the law, he did the blessing. Then someone within

him began to curse, and the midget said 'Amen'. Ayiush's desecration of the holy day, and his appropriation of its law to his will, to the will of humanity, has a greater project than religion or culture, namely to manifest the truth of community and of those who have need of community's truth. Thus comes into fruition the post-Sabbatian, antinomian conception of "*Mitzva ha'Baa ba'Aveira*,"⁵⁰ which is stated by the narrator in those exact words (194).

Suddenly, Ayiush runs back to the synagogue, and tries to enter it before the prayers end. He is terrified and yet excited. He enters the synagogue wet and dirty, his stained clothes revealing that he has eaten. Everyone is preparing to leave. They bless each other happily. His father is folding his prayer shawl. He too is happy, though somewhat confused: "less than thirteen years old one, does not need to fast," they say. But Ayiush says: "we'll see next year." They say, "he is alive! He is alive!" His mother massages his stiffened neck and says, "he is alive! He is alive! And she laughs from the depth of her heart."⁵¹ Ayiush thinks that "he is alive and nothing is dead in him; everything is as before...."

He must, then, begin again and again, this Sysiphusian figure who stands for the possible value of the continuing quest for meaning, and as representative of the permanence and insatiability of history. "He is alive" means only that he is still Ayiush, not the avatar of truth, not one who has come to a realization of self, not one who has served others.

This episode occurs, as I indicated, during the high holiday season. Now

⁵⁰"Holiness of Sin." On the doctrine and its development, see, Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1961): 287-324. Also his, "Studies And Texts Concerning The History of Sabbetianism and its Metamorphoses" (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1974): 9-76, and *passim*.

comes the day of the third and last holiday, the Feast of the Tabernacle. Following the awesome time between the New Year and the Day of Atonement, Tabernacle is a gay and spirited holiday. People are relieved after the ordeal of repentance and ready to celebrate light-heartedly. The narrative, too, takes a lighter turn, at least for a while. The main event of this feast is the construction of the tabernacle. It is depicted in two ways, one mythological and the other, "realistic." In both, Ayiush's father, Mr. Monsanegor, plays the leading role.

The mythological aspect is dominant in Ayiush's mind as he awaits his father's return from the city. Ayiush had seen him, after his early morning prayers, reach into the family's jewelry box. He would pawn some more of what was left of what had once been a treasure. He needed the money in order to provide his family with a booth, thereby to fulfill the Commandment of the Tabernacle. The booth is erected.

Between the beams of the wooden fence, a sign 'Danger - Construction Area!' hangs. There, Mr. Monsanegor finds his children standing as if in an aunts' line. He fastens his eyes on them with a clear, knowing look, as if he would be their mirror for the many generations that have gone and for the future generations to come. You were quaking in modest joy when your father came out of the inferno, and he answered you with reproachful and strident eyes, as if at such a time one should be silent and get work done.... The sound of hammers on nails' heads echo like the tide of a new era.... (212-213).

Despite all the wonder and excitement around the construction of the booth, some remain sceptical and in their bewilderment ask: "Is it that the Flood will come again to reign on earth that causes you to build an Ark for yourself?" Ayiush feels that his father is like a prophet whose spirit has departed, as if the feast has less to do with the law than with the people, the community.

Now [the booth] should be built with iron poles, and its walls with stone, since now the desert is in front of us and behind us, on our right and our left, up in the sky and on the earth. We do not need the signs required by wonderers; we do not need to wander in the desert. Let the desert wander instead.

This holiday was supposed to teach that the price of freedom was to have to leave behind the material pleasures of "ancient Egypt," that dwelling in the desert was only a means of redemption, that in forty years the generation of freed slaves would die and a "new generation," a "redeemed generation," would emerge.⁵¹ This Holy Day thus explains wandering. Ayiush sees it mythologically as

⁵¹ An exemplary Zionist rendition of this biblical myth is poetically rendered by H. N. Bialik in "The Last Dead of the Desert." In another poem, "The Dead of the Desert" (the Israelites who perished before reaching the "Promised Land"), Bialik's narrator declares: "The last generation of slavery and the first for redemption are we!" *Writings...*, 1962), respectively: 15-16, 94. For many years this line served as a popular Zionist slogan. Another relevant and interesting comment on the issue of 'center', 'periphery', and 'wandering', in Jewish history from a Zionist point of view, is expressed in an interview in which the writer Hanoah Bartov (see Introduction, above) says: "indeed, there were reciprocal influences and mutual rapport between dispersed Jewish centers.... But one cannot turn Eretz-Israel [i.e. Israel] into another wandering center. The center of renewal, creativity, and fertilization is here [in Israel] and not in America. Can you imagine, Professor Benjamin Harshav (Hroshovski) declaring that 'there exist now two exiles [Diaspora], the Israeli and the American.'" See, Yona Hadari-Ramg, "I Am a Share Holder in Eretz-Israel and I Am Concerned" an interview with Hanoah Bartov: *Itan 77* no. 106-107 (November-December 1988): 30-32. I can not help but utilize the Hebrew terms if only because they provide context and open the possibility of the subtext.

There are two points to be made here: first, it seems to me that Albert Swissa and Prof. Harshav concur in believing that one cannot realistically speak of Israel as the only "Jewish center," and of all other Jewish communities in the world as peripheral. But, the more important thing is, that Aqud, is a literary text grounded in Israeli politics and culture. Prof. Harshav is currently Dean of Hebraic Studies at Yale University. The reference by Hanoah Bartov is quoted from Harshav.

explaining rest predicated on wandering, therefore on purposefulness, therefore as revealing a cycle of futility underlying life. Thus, the Tabernacle celebration ends for him in complete disillusionment. Nothing has changed. Ayiush's father remains the same stiff disciplinarian and moralist. Unable even to drink in order to satisfy his thirst, he drinks instead for the "good" of it (*mitzva*) — the blessing of it. Ayiush

clutched the screens of the booth and felt fearful and utterly alone. He had challenged something that he could barely understand. And, already he guessed, with that innocent hope which only youth makes possible, that there is another source, that there is another future." ⁵²

* * *

Ayiush was shocked by his father's "blessing and curse" which he declared as the time approached for Ayiush to carry the burden of *mitzvot* (commandments). It said: "From now on your acts shall tilt the scales of your soul and the soul of the entire world in favor of or against you. From now on, if your acts should lead you to Gehenna I will not be there for you.!" ⁵³ Ayiush realized

⁵²The word 'source', *makor*, in Hebrew, rhymes with *makom*, 'place'. Gershon Shaked, a prominent Israeli literary critic, has published a book entitled 'No Other Place,' in Hebrew, Ein *Makom* Akher. Swissa's line is '*yesh makor akher*'. One can reasonably speculate that this is an ironic reference to Shaked's title. The difference between the two is that while Shaked is suggesting that there is no other place for a Jew besides Israel, Swissa is suggesting that there is. See *Gershon Shaked, *No Other Place On Literature and Society* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1983, enlarged second edition, 1989).

⁵³The Jewish Orthodox traditional blessing of a child by the father is profoundly significant. It derives directly from biblical sources. The biblical blessing is usually phrased in conditional terms, always implying a curse, in case the commands involved in the blessing are not fulfilled. Yet, there are many instances where a curse is explicit in the frasing of the blessing. In the context of this tradition, the blessing with the curse is very effective. It has the power of prophecy, and even of incantation.

then that he had no alternative. He determined to leave home the next day, the day of his bar-mitzva, at an hour even before his father arose to awaken the family. "Tonight," his little sister said, "he is taking revenge on his father for the loss of the kingdom, for the treachery of his confinement in the storage room, for the loss of the forelock which was his emblem, for his ugly birthright, and those walnuts.... " Upon leaving, Ayiush saw his sister sleeping. Her innocence was evident in her posture as she embraced her pillow with her small arms and legs. He knew "that things could have been different, and it stung his heart." However, he could not stay since there on the wall was "his bar-mitzva suit hanging, calling to him and frightening him at the same time." And although there was in the house a good warm smell of washing of food and sweets, he felt that something had gone completely wrong; then, secretly, he went out.

At dawn, on the third day of his wanderings Ayiush realizes that he wanted to return to school. He suddenly longed to devote himself to study. He imagined that he could become the school principal by the end of the next year; and he was prepared to suffer punishment in order to achieve his purpose. But while digging into the sores on his feet in order "to clear them of the devils they had inside them," he was unable to complete these thoughts. A hot ball stuck in his throat. He saw the morning spreading across the earth and smelled the sharp fragrance of pine trees. "Birds were leaping over one another and bending their heads toward each

For further discussion, see, for example: Yehezkel Kaufman, The Religion of Israel from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960). And, Max Weber, Ancient Judaism trans. and eds. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Comp. Inc., 1952).

other under low, cool strips of fog. And he let out a frighteningly joyful wailing, down toward Ein-Karem in the valley." The little man said: "now that you are wailing, you are free."

Ayiush is reminded of a huge *buffet* that sat in his room when he was a baby. On it stood a glorious crystal vase, a present from his mother to his father. In the family photograph hanging on the wall, they all looked like tourists. Into his mind enters the voice of his father saying "that's how they looked." Then his father disappears "somewhat wickedly," only to return, reflected "in the vase with his head bent sideways on his shoulder." Ayiush concludes that it could not have been his father "who took the photograph" (228). The little man of Ayiush's mind tries to revive his memory of his parents divorce and his father's subsequent attempt to repent for having committed adultery. Who is the greater "transgressor," Ayiush or his father? And thus, what right does the father have then to impose the law on Ayiush? And what right does he have to determine Ayiush's identity?

But these are questions prior to memory and subsequent to the futility that makes of Ayiush's life one of an 'eternal recurrence.' He stands for the contradiction between history and identity, destined both to remember and forget. His friends mourn him:

now he is like a fish in a big lake, said Z'oz'o sadly. Nonsense, said an angry Rammy, almost crying. He is like a crazed person, stuck... without purpose, as if trying to build his nest in the sky, as if he had special treasures there. He is a rejected object, simply higher than anyone else, simply more brilliant than the sun. He is not a cloud to guide us in day time, nor a fire to show us the way at night. He is ephemeral. He is an Epikouros." ⁵⁴

⁵⁴*Epikouros*(BC 342-271). The term, taken from the Greek philosopher's name who taught liberation from the fear of gods and the fear of death. In Hebrew and in a Jewish traditional context - 'heretic' or 'infidel'.

One can sense the boys' confusion. They wish to express what cannot be expressed about Ayiush and their sense of their loss of him. They take recourse in the traditional Hebrew word *Epikouros* to define what he means to them. Rather than "a sign without signification," as Hirschfeld claimed about *Aqud's* narrator, the narrative voice is a signifying voice without recourse to adequate signs. Rammy says that Ayiush was "*hefetz she'ein bo hefetz*," "a rejected object." As such he is an object of desire, but of a desire that rejects itself. Yohai says that Ayiush was like our "Tower of Babel, where God's spirit blows through in order to disperse us throughout the world, and to confuse our speech. Soon we will be confused. Soon we will not understand each other." But "we" understand ourselves now, and Ayiush was the spirit of "our" life in anticipation of something other than mere life and perhaps greater than the law.

Among the bands of abandoned children, an unnoticed little boy cried. "He stood agitated for a long while, at the entrance of the eternal street, Costa Rica, waiting for the Mayor to arrive...." He begged the other children to bind him to one of their carriages and to push it down the slope; but none would. Suddenly, he saw his father and mother approaching.

Without confusion, and without haste, with composed and measured steps, Ayiush approached one of the abandoned or forgotten carriages, took it with a steady hand, and stretched the wire to stabilize its slight movement toward the slope. Then he placed one leg onto the carriage floor. He held the other leg ready at the side. He sent one more quick look over his shoulder and saw his father growing in size. His mother extended a hand forward. Now he felt truly that he did not need breaks. Now he'll push off and will finally understand it all. It wouldn't be long before he understood perfectly. His leg extended like an uncoiling spring and he started rolling down the slope..... His father and mother watched their eighth bar-mitzva bridegroom, as he galloped in the wind toward the infinity of Costa Rica street.

Ayiush was gone, but his "little man" — the tiny female English doll his sister Katie gave him as a present, the one she used to call Madin Englander — remained behind. On his last night, Ayiush ran in panic from a watchman, but forgot his school bag. "In the dark interior of this old bag, reclining with his back against the book, 'Our Motherland' (another irony), the little man was left forsaken." Since the little man is now left alone and "has no one to talk to," he speaks to himself, chants an elegy to Ayiush, tender and sensitive. I quote only the last few lines.

— All of this, though, is a decisive testimony from other places, very far away, where people are surely longing for us without our knowing, since they were left by all those who came here, to our place. Therefore they are the source of our longing for those places, and those remote people we were once, or that we could have been but did not know, or that we do not know anymore....

In Yigal Sarna's interview with Swissa, the author speaks in the light of his memory of his own Moslem-Arab nanny. Swissa says:

And I am also an Arab child. In my imagination I can see myself living in a completely different world from that in which I live today. I am swept almost morbidly into the adventure of being an arab child. And from my visit to Morocco, I absorbed something that overcame even the force of my Jewish existence. I refuse to deny these emotions, especially because of the hatred that prevails today between Arabs and Jews.

Yet, Yigal Sarna concludes this interview with the following, vaguely dismissive, comment:

all Swissa aspires for in his greatest dreams is to have a small place in Paris and a small place in Tel Aviv. This is Swissa's "balanced happiness." When he speaks of East and West, Swissa seems to me like an acrobat, cautiously walking the tight-rope between a roof in Paris and a roof in Tel Aviv. Beneath his feet he sees the enormous residential buildings of Yir Ganim, and, close to him in the sky, a colorful kite.

Thus we have the Israeli mainstream skepticism of a Jewish cosmopolitan, who sees only an acrobat on a tight-rope, dangling between Tel Aviv and Paris, between the sky and the gutter, that is, who sees only the possibility of taking sides — but not the inevitability of moral tension, therefore of doubt in the midst of affirmation and of affirmation in the midst of doubt.

CONCLUSION

I have discussed some moral paradoxes inherent in Israeli Jewish culture, and analyzed them as expressing limitations of self-criticism and the capacity to recognize "the Other" inherent in "the imagined community" of Zionist nationalism.¹ The paradoxes arise in two fundamental projections: of the relationship between Jewish identity and Jewish history, and of the validation of sectarian morality by means of two tropes, the Holocaust and the secular global distribution of Jewish life called "the Diaspora."

The former organizes moral thought according to particular experiences. The latter establishes a utopian frame of reference for connecting life histories to an evolutionary movement of the Jewish people from dispersion to unity. Together, these projections constitute a "master narrative" linking texts, discourses, and moments of reflection in a dialectic of self and other.

The assumption that Israeli Hebrew literature has a unique and transformative significance in Israeli culture is argued sociologically, historically, and theoretically. The case is *prima facie*, and by no means conclusive. However, it seems to me sufficiently defended to constitute a framework for examining the ideological aspects of the texts I have selected for study.

The gist of the case is that Israeli culture must be seen to be more a matter of manifestation than of latency. If this is true, than it must be understood as

¹ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1991).

strategically organized around the problematics of explication and as subject in all its public genres to allegorical forms of representation which combine symbols of totalization in a rhetoric of politics and morality. This is, in effect, base to the Zionist superstructure. It is the field in which Zionist nationalism positions itself as a totalizing ideology, and the setting in which Israeli literature has its public presence as a source of cultural reflection on the intersection of identity, citizenship, and history. It is also the intersection in which writing and reading emerge as practices. In that regard, literature and writers play special roles in Israeli culture, influencing cognitive traditions, substantiating the continual affirmation/assertion of Hebrew as a "national," or nation-giving, language, reiterating the perspective of Jewish unity implicit in the political conditions of Israel's presence as a country among countries.

My analysis runs counter to two assumptions in the sociology of culture normally taken for granted: (1) that culture refers to two incompatible realms — art and the practices of every day life, and (2) that the latter, what ethnology would consider culture proper, operates in society as what Parsons called "a latent function," a latency of meanings, values, and norms that operates on both the manifest conduct of members and the manifest operations of societal institutions.

The first, though still prevalent in sociological research, has been thrown sufficiently into question by the "postmodernist" renewals of criticism that it is legitimate to begin with an alternative assumption consistent with recent currents of critical inquiry.² The second now appears inconsistent with most current

² R. Deutsche, "Boys Town" review of The Condition of Post Modernity, by David Harvey. In Environment Planning vol. 9, 1991): 5-30.

ethnographic research, which has demonstrated that culture is essentially political, that it is generative rather than fixed, and that it embodies, as "practices," conjunctures founded in differences more than "traditions."

What makes Israeli Hebrew literature "cultural" is not simply that it is literary, but that its instances are intertextual and intertwined with salient features of a greater Israeli public discourse. Thus, literary writing must be seen as lacking the degree of autonomy — of text, genre, significance, and position — ordinarily attributed to what is usually called "literature." Similarly, culture, manifest in public discourse and its operations, must be seen as remarkably self-reflective, transforming into manifestations all tendencies toward latency, that is toward taking things for granted. It follows that what remains latent is now conceivable only as suppressed or repressed practices, not merely as for an older structural functionalism, preconscious material suspended momentarily in a state of generalized availability.

Such a view of literature and culture requires a close critical reading of texts with an emphasis on intertextuality and discursivity, therefore on a poetics of context for which the autonomy and singularity of a given text are secondary in the sense of contrived as a matter of strategy. What is primary are the elisions of context and the work of constituting figures (characters, events, symbols) of those elisions.

Several conclusions were drawn from critical readings of three texts. These three were selected for their ethnological significance, in particular because of the publicity that attended their publication, their evident intention to cultivate a

David Harvey. In *Environment Planning* vol. 9, 1991): 5-30.

moral outlook on Arab-Jewish relations that could humanize the Jewish Israeli point of view, their attempt in this regard to provide for a self-critical recognition of Arab subjectivity, and the positions of their authors in Israeli life.

Among the most important conclusions yielded by this study are the following. (1) The attempt to establish a critical base for rethinking, and reimagining, relations between Arabs and Jews reveals an *a priori* distinction between moral and juridical citizenship, and an incorrigible identification of the former with authentic moral subjectivity and the latter with objects of judgment. This distinction operates at each point in the depiction of the Arabs and Jews, qualifying what can be thought of as Arab subjectivity in that context. (2) Reliance on this distinction expresses a certain "structure of feeling," in which the Jewish conscience articulates all terms of moral judgment from the perspective of an absolutely elevated subjectivity beyond history and validated as such by reference to the Holocaust. (3) The distinction, the identification, and the structure of feeling determine an irreducible dependence of Jewish identity (therefore of moral subjectivity) on relations of exclusion and inclusion, hence on the need constantly to reiterate the constitutive negative identity of an other. (4) This "other," constituted at all times as a matter of practice, is embodied in the figure of "the Arab," and humanized — so that morality is a type of knowledge as well as an attitude — by a distinction between "good Arabs" (individuals as juridical citizens or legal subjects) and "the Arab" (the category external to Law and negative to morality). (5) The identity-driven articulation of that figure constitutes a barrier beyond which consciousness cannot penetrate, thereby eliminating at each last moment the possibility for Jewish recognition of Arab subjectivity necessary for the completion of any morally substantial auto-

critique of the role of Zionist nationalism in "Arab-Israeli relations." (6) The general problematic constituted by these tropes accounts for the ways in which Israeli literary criticism organizes itself in the function of a policing of culture. This is itself a genre, therefore a strategic formation. As such, it aims to diminish the force of the moral paradoxes of Israeli culture. What is threatening about those paradoxes derives from the same pressure for explication that makes Israeli culture intensively ideological to its "imagined community." The need to sustain a utopian politics, a need expressed in literary criticism as an altogether militarized politics of unity, tends to undermine whatever moral self-reflection might otherwise accompany the pressure of paradox.

There are certainly historical determinants of the transformation of cultural latency into a culture of manifestation, and of the regression of practice (the construction of society) in favor of theory (the construction of an absolute other, hence an absolute identity). But both need to be noted and studied if one is to understand the intractability of contemporary Israeli culture in regard to the other — the Arab — against which it increasingly defines itself, though with an increasingly evident loss of control.

The texts I have chosen to analyze illustrate this irreducible unease, this irrepressible ambivalence, about Jewish history and identity and all that is associated with them, even as they attempt to introduce a more generous self-critical moment into the dialectic of Israeli culture.

What we see is a culture whose resistance to criticism is uniquely tied to a need for self-explication that makes criticism itself a constant subvocal presence.

Therefore, we see a culture always on the edge of self-criticism but never quite able to move beyond its own regressive tendencies. This contradiction of incessant utopian manifestation and unavoidably self-critical tendency marks Israeli culture as distinctively postmodernist. The key elements in the self-regulation of this formation — in which culture standing against itself must also stand against a definite subaltern other — as Zionism and a racist poetics which configures "the Arab" as homogeneous, disposed, and beyond any reason that could be shared.

Zionism and the poetics of identity and otherness, are decisive elements of the Israeli cultural "structure of feelings." But there are deeper, more generalized, operations that have to do with the relations of subjectivity to identity (mediated practically by territorialist projections), civic virtues to society (mediated ideologically by utopian idealism), and moral and political imperatives to history (mediated symbolically by religious sectarianism and the Holocaust).

I have attempted to clarify the context of these operations in Jewish history, both its record and its delusions, and in regard to the historical politics of relations between Arabs and Jews. I have focused especially on the ways in which dissident literary fiction both challenges the moral and political themes of Zionism and, despite itself, ends by reiterating the episteme which founds the reception of those themes.

Because of the role played by Zionism in contemporary Israeli culture, my investigation requires some consideration of its ideological aspect. In this regard, I tried to show how Zionism constitutes a synthesis of "structure of feeling" how it conforms to a model of ideology as a counter-generative, anti-critical, repetitive type of discourse, how it serves to organize the apparently extra-ideological

discourses of Israeli civil society, and in what ways it can be seen as a pervasive and currently irrepressible aspect of Israeli culture.

The language of Israeli Hebrew literature has to do work of a higher order than is normally required of fictional writing, reading and discoursing. Israeli literature is first of society and then organized canonically ostensibly in relation to society. Israeli Hebrew writing can never be understood merely in terms of stylistics, as a matter of technique, or as an implement to authorial intention, since each of these constitutes an altogether impractical distance between texts and the community of which they are part and beyond which they cannot be read as having been possibly written (without the need for constant reinterpetive translation). Nor can it be seen as merely expressive, as a symptom that momentarily conceals specific motivations. Israeli Hebrew writing bears the burden of many discourses and the responsibilities of a certain historiography.

I have argued, however, that it does not follow from its implication in community that Israeli Hebrew literature is somehow more honest to itself: only that it cannot avoid its own dishonesty. This may well be so for any historically, mechanically, enforced, unification of "a people" in which the collective forms of subjectivity and the socially practical orders of moral obligation seem to derive their validity beyond space, time, and politics of experience. But there are relatively few cases of a cultural formation such as Israel's — and I consider this a virtue as well as a trial — that must constantly, as a whole, defend its own dishonesty. For most societies, dishonesty lies on the surface of the texts, the genres, the moral specifications of cultural formations that appear more systematically subordinate to other "institutions" that is the case in Israel. There, the moral burden remains

especially heavy, and explicit self-consciousness remains perched on the edge of an abyss of the discovery that the self is indeed the other. These burdens give Israeli culture its special quality of ambivalence and its culturally critical operations their special determination to police the cultural practices.

The study of Israeli Hebrew literature provides the quintessential object for a critique of Israeli political discourse precisely because of its highly spiritualized yet embodied referents, an historical people and a living utopia beyond which lies an unanalyzable but concrete, hence dangerous, otherness of being. Through the literary heightening of the symbolic and allegorical aspects of this myth, Israeli Jewish culture presents itself as an historical force that can be taken as an object of critique, therefore as an object of an altogether different subjectivity (cf. Said, 1979).

In the second part of this study, I dealt with another aspect of Israeli culture. Both Michael and Swissa bear an ethnicity that represents for Zionism an other within. Thus, their authorial subjectivity constitutes a problem for which there are no obvious solutions. The fact that such a subjectivity cannot avoid being specially imputed in these cases demands a somewhat different contextualization from that appropriate to Kaniuk's A Good Arab. Above all, in them the coupling of exclusion and inclusion cannot be taken for granted; and, as it becomes overt and unambiguous in their texts, there is at least a semblance of counterhegemony within the culture of those texts' reception. Siwissa's Aqud, in particular, imposes an obligation to reflect on oppression that cannot easily be assimilated to the metaphysically qualified dissidence of other critical writers. For one, the obligation

is too general to remain within the omnivorous reach of Zionist interpretation; for another, the novel imputes a strength and subjectivity to its characters that stands firm against all instances of imposed or utopian unity. This is why so many critics of *Aqud*, chose to treat it from a strictly formalistic point of view rather than in terms of its content, the critical practices it discloses as part of everyday life.

Thus, my study concludes with a discussion of a text that operates enough beyond the limits of Zionist nationalism to evoke a certain critical dread, but enough within those limits to allow it to be reduced to a failure of writing. Despite itself, Kaniuk's *A Good Arab*, reflects the hegemony of Zionism within Israeli Jewish culture; Swissa's *Aqud* reflects the possibility of a counterhegemony whose cultural base can only remain ambiguous, which is a condition that is itself counterhegemonistic. In a sense, Swissa has produced an authentic extra-national, one is tempted to say post-national, novel. To that extent, it speaks within and of a history that subsumes rather than merely opposes that of the Jews, and it is that history that Israeli culture ultimately must recognize if it is to produce works that are genuinely self-critical in their moral reflection, if it is to permit the rediscovery of the self as other which is essential to recognizing the other and therefore to any nonsectarian morality.

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