ISRAEL
AND ITS MEDITERRANEAN IDENTITY

DAVID OHANA

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Preface

Between the western coast of the Mediterranean Sea, where I was born, and its eastern bay, by which I now live, stood ideology, historical circumstance, and the destiny of the Jewish people. My whole store of associations about the Mediterranean Sea, it sometimes seems to me, is drawn from the collective memory I learned to use during the few years I spent in my birthplace, Oujda, Morocco. Before that, I have my personal memory to guide me back through a narrow channel of unforgotten anecdotes and images: a cream-colored ice-cream cart, of a sort I have never seen again, gives me its flavor, my taste of the Madeleine; a city park, near a neoclassical post office building, where I would sit with Tata Titin, my grandmother's sister, the two of them immigrants from nearby Algeria; the Muslim milkman, a lunatic, who every morning as he left the milk bottles by the door of our house at Casablanca 14, would mutter to himself "dada, dada," a deliberate or habitual modification of "Dehdeh," my nickname. I remember the Moroccan king's return from his exile in Madagascar. Oujda dressed itself in holiday pomp, and the masses, among them a large portion of the Jewish population, gathered in the streets to celebrate their king's homecoming, returned by the colonialist courtesy of the French authorities, and to declare by this their unanimity in the cause of Moroccan independence. Perched on my father's shoulders, I saluted "Yihyeh al Malik! Long live the king!"

Oujda's pluralistic atmosphere fit in with its Mediterranean geography: Algeria was its neighbor on the eastern border, and to the north were the coastal cities of Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish colony. Our nearness to the French and Spanish communities lent a cosmopolitan air to the city and especially to the Jewish community. For the Jews, many of whom had come, like my mother, from Algeria, French was the *lingua franca*. My father worked as a waiter at his brother's café, a place of bohemian happening that inspired many of my future dreams. With Jewish merchants, Muslim natives and Algerian neighbors, Spanish tourists and American soldiers (from the Second World War) populating the tables, my father, Maxim, meanders between them with nonchalance and an incorrigible smile. So it lives perpetually in my memory, a multinational and multicultural microcosm, free of change and innocent of the causes that bring change about.

Then comes 1948. The State of Israel is declared, and three weeks later blood riots break out in Oujda and nearby Jirada. Muslim fundamentalists, encouraged by the silence and powerlessness of the French authorities, assault, loot, and kill Jews in the two cities. The thugs break into our house as well, a wing of four connected houses sharing a yard. But all this was four years before my birth. In my infancy I was nursed by Zalo, our neighbor from across the way, being that my mother was ill. The four Jewish families made up one large family. Back then the rioters killed Zalo's father-in-law, who also lived in the complex, and raided our house. My brother was at home alone and hid under the bed; his resourcefulness saved his life. At the end of the day the body count came to 44 Jews. Thus in my childhood became apparent to me the two sides of Mediterraneanism: multicultured openness on the one hand and tribal nationalism on the other. When we emigrated to Israel, I having completed my fourth year, we were welcomed there by this same Janus-face of the Mediterranean Sea, which we had known before and continued to characterize the place we left on her eastern side.

The ship *Kabu Daurnus* led us away to different shores, to a new land, the fresh nation-state of the Jews. Now nationhood, religion, and culture—life's new landscape—kept out of view the sunlight and soil that had bred us there in our native Morocco from our new homeland, which had been built up by European expatriates. Zionist socialization, but also my sobering up, maturing mind-set, made me an Israeli patriot who loves his land and fights her wars but who is yet concerned about her well-being and the way in which she pursues her continued existence. In these days of worry about my homeland's future, I reflect a lot about the Mediterranean option, which has been sought as a remedial for our gory wound, Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. On top of the many other rational reasons that suggest the Mediterranean option to our consideration—there has always been a shared, supranational tradition between the nations now conflicted; there are now political and economic bridges between Israel and its neighbors as well as many others in the region; there has been a broadening of the social group from bilateral contention to regional partnership; there is a strong common denominator between the various Israeli communities, a common identity—I feel in the most immediate way that my own identity can be very well summed up as Mediterranean. This I feel is equally true of many others in Israel, who seem in terms of personality, rationale, and mental structure, both in the private and the collective spheres, typically Mediterranean.

Israel and Its Mediterranean Identity attempts to depict the lights and shades of this identity. It is too easy to slip into an oblivious nostalgia, forgetting to rigorously examine the geocultural questions, or to be swept up in a romanticizing fervor, swiping away the complex reality in favor

of an imagined, desirable one. No doubt, as a person I do fall into these pleasant traps once in a while. Nonetheless, as a historian I see Mediterraneanism in a philosophical way and not as an ideology. Whereas ideologies have their ready solutions for every situation, philosophy asks questions and discovers problems. At the same time, my discourse does not begin a priori but comes upon Israel's Mediterranean identity from its particular vantage point and from there embarks on its analysis. The Mediterranean's thematic contexts of history and identity strike me as axiomatic, and my discussion takes place within their framework. This is not an abstract picture drawn on a blank slate. The Mediterranean option stands before us as a model, a proposal, a challenge—now let us begin to discuss it.

My inspiration for the Mediterranean option was sparked by Albert Camus and Jaqueline Kahanoff. I find myself easily acclimating to the landscapes of Camus's youth, the poverty from which he emerged, which wasn't signified by embarrassment but by a joy of life, and I identify naturally with his immigration to a new country, which was yet old, where he was an outsider among the bourgeois intellectual elite, the offices of its thought and literature. It is no wonder to me that he revealed a lifelong empathy with the Jewish destiny and a concern for the survival of Israel. It is no wonder that he has been adopted in Israel as the most popular foreign writer. Kahanoff supplies me with the model she proposed to Israel in her early years, where she challenged the western hegemony by means of a dialogue between east and west, putting forward her example of feminism before its time had come and pointing out the cultural wealth of Israel's various immigrant communities in a time of nationalist and provincial isolationism. Camus and Kahanoff, writers who saw their assumed societies from within and without, document their unique viewpoints without resentments or disaffection, and they are both Mediterranean humanists who passed away before their time.

My youth in Israel was spent in a small town, Kiryat Gat, which was populated largely by immigrants from North Africa and survivors of the Nazi persecution in Europe. I saw a spectacular human laboratory of Eastern and Western elements, immigrants from Christian and Muslim countries who tried, and in most cases succeeded, to build a shared future. Every weekend we would travel the distance of several minutes to swim in the Mediterranean Sea. Our nearness to the waters of the Mediterranean expressed for us our version of normalness, a wistful longing for the big world that was, then in the 1960s, light years away. Then I came to the mountain. Jerusalem's people, mountain people, embody the toughness and dignity of a besieged town. At last (or currently, at any rate) I have found my place in Sede Boker, a small village in the desert. Here, far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, one finds the quiet and content

of mind to adjust to a clean environment, untouched by history's remains and unaffected by the fever of the times. So I have lived all my life up until now near the Mediterranean, in the mountains and in the desert, seeing the various faces of my country and discerning the different colors of Israeli identity. This book doesn't wish to do away with Israel's other dimensions but will try to call attention to the possibilities for development open to Israel's Mediterranean identity.

Part I

Identity

1

A Bridge over Troubled Water

Israel and *Mare Nostrum*

Israel is a Mediterranean society in the making. The shift it underwent from being a society that had to fight for its existence to one engaged with some of its neighbors in political, economic, and cultural dialogue has raised questions about Israel's collective identity and the character of its emerging culture. The old choice between the "Middle Eastern" or the "global village" options would today be more arbitrary than ever. Having to choose—either to blend into the area or to become another island in the globalized world—strikes one now as an absurdly severe restriction of Israel's rich cultural possibilities. The Mediterranean option, on the other hand, is a cultural possibility in which Israel is neither isolated in its region nor cut off from the West. The challenge is to take the emerging Mediterranean identity of Israeli culture and society as a point of departure (Ohana, 1999: 81–100; Del Sarto, 2003: 27–58; Nocke, 2009).

There, the Mediterranean track attempts to subvert the minefield of conflict and establish in its place new paths of intercourse. This agenda seeks to free the Mediterranean discourse—political, religious, economic, sociocultural—from its present-day confrontational attachments and to discover beyond them an older and vaster framework, one in which Israelis and their Arab neighbors cannot be fatalistically alone with each other but must work together in their larger, more widely inclusive context. In other words, it is an attempt to create a dialogue that has a different perspective. In the Arab-Muslim Middle East many view the Israelis as crusaders but in the Mediterranean Basin as a whole the Israelis and the Arabs are both part of a larger reference group with respect to history, geography, and culture. This is one way to lower the tone of the conflict in the Middle East—a way that the Israelis can say to their neighbors, "We are not overnight visitors in

the East Mediterranean. You and we belong to something that is larger and older than both of us."

Perhaps the "Middle East" and the "global village" represent the two polarities of the cultural possibilities of Israeli society. The concept "Middle East" is too local, isolated, politicized, steeped in wars; the concept of "the global village" is too distant, foreign to the Levant, suggesting maybe an escape from the here and now. The Mediterranean option is a third possibility, which embraces the two others. The Mediterranean is not Oriental but represents a dialogue between East and West, between the classical world and the worlds of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The cultural identities of the Israelis need to be rethought (Adler et al., 2006). Through the exploration of Mediterranean culture, and the place of Israel in it, the Israelis also hope to be able to gain an insight into the various elements that make up their own culture. Thus a consideration of the difference between "Mediterraneanism" and "Orientalism" shows that the difference is not merely semantic. Mediterraneanism is a dialogue between East and West and not an ideology of Orientalism. The Mediterranean option is not a call for ethnic isolation or a return to roots, but for an Israeli ethos that would constitute a common cultural platform for the discussion of tensions and separate identities. It is too ancient, important, and central to be one more reason for ethnic denial or for the nursing of sectorial interests, folkloristic tendencies, or sentimental longings.

The Mediterranean is not the Levant (Norwich, 2006). It is the Levant as well as other things. The Mediterranean includes both the Levant and the West, and out of this synthesis it was able to create the European space and western culture. The Mediterranean did not give rise to a hegemonic, all-inclusive culture with a single, homogeneous character. It created a variety of historical models of cultural meetings and exchanges of intellectual goods, such as the Italian Renaissance or Christian-Muslim-Jewish Andalusia.

The Mediterranean Sea links together three continents, three religions, and thousands of years of civilization and has thus been a channel of mutual influences and cultural exchanges. These processes have formed the destiny of large Jewish communities. The historian Joshua Prawer drew attention to an interesting fact: "It should be pointed out that, without any causal relationship, the period of the closure of the Mediterranean was—in relationships, in the exchange of ideas and in trade—the period of the greatness of Judaism" (Prawer, 1990: 9). According to the historian Shlomo Dov Goitein, the Jews lived along the coasts of the Mediterranean and were an open, mobile people that were not closed up in their own world but, in the countries where they lived, inherited the culture of Greece and Rome and adapted it to Islamic culture. In his monumental five-volume work *A Mediterranean Society*, Goitein described a Jewish society of the Middle

Ages that lived within the framework of Mediterranean geography and culture (Goitein, 1967–88).

Goitein, as the first Hebrew University lecturer in Islamic studies, focused in his pioneering work on early Arab literature and society and only later in his life began to concern himself with the medieval Jewish communities. His original project was to investigate the trade with the Indian Ocean, but his academic starting point was the investigation of the Cairo *genizah*: "In the summer of 1958 I abandoned India and turned towards the Mediterranean" (Lassner, 2005: 23). In the documents of the *genizah* he examined, there was no special term for the Mediterranean Sea, and the Arabs generally called it "the Sea of the Romans," "The Sea," or "The Salt Sea." Unlike Henri Pirenne, who saw a division in the Mediterranean, Goitein revealed an extensive Mediterranean trade between Christians and Muslims from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. In his opinion, the division in the Mediterranean took place with the spread of the tribes from Central Asia and the Caucasus to the Islamic countries. After the Mamelukes and the crusades, the Europeans regarded the Mediterranean as a hostile area. Goitein's geographical sociology, which deciphered the documents of the *genizah*, portrayed the Jews of the Middle Ages as a Mediterranean people who developed its sources, disseminated its wisdom, and was prominent in trade and the liberal professions in the countries of the Basin. His research depicted a Jewish society that was premodern in all respects: day-to-day life, commerce, law, and way of thinking. It was an exemplary model for the study by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (2001), which added to the net-like Braudelian structure of the macro, alternative micronetworks of areas and subareas, in the same way as Goitein. The precise reconstruction of the area of the Mediterranean between Tunisia and Egypt was revealed as a total history, a history of the mentality of the medieval Jews, and a historical sociology of the worldwide, countrywide, and communal organization of the Jews, with a description of synagogues and prayers, the system of education, the legal system, the development of the nuclear family, and the women's world. The status of the Jews was perceived as a central axis in the Middle Ages between the Mashrek and the Mahgreb (the eastern and western areas of North Africa). Goitein himself became aware of Fernand Braudel's book only at the end of his research: "I immediately regretted I had not done so earlier" (Kremer, 1990: 9).

Braudel was preceded by a year by Nahum Slouschz (1871–1966), a writer and a philologist of the Oriental languages, in his study *The Book of the Sea: The Conquest of the Seas—An Aspect of the History of Civilization*, published in 1948. It is impossible not to notice the similar disposition, the Mediterranean compass, and the creative imagination common to Slouschz and

Braudel. Slouschz wrote, "The life-force in the land of life overcomes everything: the farmer who has nothing in Southern Italy, the penniless fisherman in the Isles of Greece, the ploughman in Provence and the peasant living on vegetables in the Balearic Islands have never changed their social form. They have remained steeped in light, full of charm and devoted to an ancient joie de vivre" (Slouschz, 1948: 28).

With the same expansiveness, Braudel poeticized: "In this book, ships sail, the waves repeat their melody, the vines descend from the Cinque Terre to the Genoa Riviera. In this book, olives are harvested in Provence and Greece, the fishermen draw their nets from the silent lagoon of Venice or the canals of Djerba, and the carpenters still build ships similar to those of yesterday [. . .]. And at the sight of all this, we are outside time" (Braudel, 1985: 1).

In Slouschz's work, the connection of the "new Jew" to the Mediterranean is very important, and as David Remez (1886–1951), an Israeli political leader and a writer, says in his introduction to *The Book of the Sea*, "Our world was planted on the shores of the Mediterranean, the great sun of world culture." According to Slouschz, the attractiveness of the Mediterranean still derives from the biblical sources: "Zebulun will live long on the shore," "Asher with his havens," "Dan will live on ships." This way of thinking draws inspiration from the past: "The actions of our forefathers were a sign for their descendants when the first ones wished from the beginning to restore the seas of our land to their original splendor as international conduits fusing the expanses of the east with the farthest regions of the west" (Slouschz, 1948: viii). According to Slouschz, the young Hebrew *Yishuv* (the Jewish-Zionist community in Palestine prior to the state of Israel) had the same task as the ancient Israelite society, and one therefore had to "renew the youth of our land as one of the strengths of the sea, commanding its ways and linking together countries and islands against the background of trade and the kinship of peoples." One had to vanquish hearts before one conquered the seas, and hence a Mediterranean consciousness and education through a sea approach to Israel were essential to the crystallization of the Hebrew consciousness, as opposed to the conditions of exile: "The sea, a substance of much water in itself, as against the evil waters of exile that distance those who are near" (Ibid.). As a result of this ideology of the Jewish people as a Mediterranean one, Slouschz developed a historiography and a historical philosophy that emphasized his knowledge of the past of the Jewish people on the sea and stressed the way of life and activities of the Jewish communities in the Mediterranean Basin. He characterized the Mediterranean Jew as follows: "A Mediterranean person of this kind is first of all a social person, one link in a great chain of similar people, who does not represent life outside the community in which he was born and in which he was

raised" (Ibid., 27). Unlike the people of the north "who walk in darkness," the "heroes of the bright horizon of the Mediterranean," like Samson and David, Alexander and Socrates, and Hannibal and Napoleon, were first and foremost natives of their cities, part of their environment, and felt comfortable in nature or in the public space.

David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the Israeli state, already at the ninth Zionist Congress in 1935 called for the Mediterranean character of the state in the making to be developed (Aronson, 1994; Herman, 1962; Karmon, Shmueli, and Horowitz, 1983; Newman, 1970). Ben-Gurion persisted in his Mediterranean orientation and even adopted the Canaanite narrative concerning the Hebrews as pioneers of Mediterraneanness, preceding the Greeks and Romans: "The fathers of seafaring, prime instrument of economic progress and the spread of culture for three millennia now, were Semitic tribes, speaking Canaanitish Hebrew and dwelling of old on the shores of Palestine—in Tyre and in Sidon and their off-shoots. Canaanite became a synonym for merchant and the word kina a synonym for wares" (Ben-Gurion, 1954: 299). Ben-Gurion outlined a maritime historiography of the people of Israel, quoted the Book of Ezekiel on the wealth and maritime power of Tyre, and described the commercial relationships of the tribes of Zebulun and Asher with the people of Tyre. He said that the inhabitants of Israel and Judah did not learn seafaring from the people of Sidon because those living on the shore, the Canaanites to the north and the Philistines to the south, blocked their path. Throughout the period of the First Temple there was no Jewish harbor on the shores of the Mediterranean. There were no sailors in Judah and Israel until Solomon needed his friend Hiram, the king of Tyre, and afterward there were a few maritime ventures in the time of Jehoshephat, who built ships at Etzion Gaber. Only in the days of the Hasmoneans did the Judeans succeed in reaching the shore and conquering Jaffa, the first Judean port and the only one on the Mediterranean in the late Second Temple period. The nautical history of the land of Israel brought Ben-Gurion to the conclusion that in ancient times, in the Middle Ages, and in our own time, most of the wars in world history were decided by the maritime powers.

The Jewish people were not a nautical people in the periods of the First Temple and the Second Temple. The land of Israel was situated on two seas, the Mediterranean to the west and the Red Sea to the south, but it never had the use of the two seas. Only with the founding of the State of Israel, said Ben-Gurion, was the biblical promise—"I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea even unto the Sea of the Philistines" (Exodus 23:31)—fulfilled for the first time. The State of Israel is the only one of the Mediterranean countries to have an outlet on both the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean without needing the Suez Canal (this was said, of course, before the opening of the

canal to Israeli shipping): "This settlement on the shores of both seas is the thing that is unique to the third return to Zion." On the return from Babylon, the Jews returned from the east and on land, but in the present return to Zion, the *aliyah* is from the west, via the sea. This connection with the sea has a political, military, and economic importance. Without the sea, Israel would be a "city under siege"; without sea power, strong land and air forces would not be effective. The sea is a convenient and cheap means of transport that moves foodstuffs and raw materials. The understanding and foresight of Ben-Gurion were indeed far-reaching: "The sea contains unlimited possibilities of settlement, and this is not a paradox. The sea is not a desert of water, as many people think." Ben-Gurion combined a maritime philosophy with a Promethean vision:

> The sea covers the part of the surface, it has no frontiers, it is free. It is not divided among the State and the peoples that are on land, there are no partitions between the oceans, no barriers or confining bounds. A people with a territorial base and port may sail the world over and sound every sea, it may put a girdle about the globe and seek out every folic and speech. Land severs the nations, the sea unites them and brings them close, it advances the unity of mankind, opening new horizons and spaces invisible to us that stand on shore.
>
> Our forefathers, who had never sailed its length as their kinfolk of Sidon did, called the Mediterranean the Great Sea, but it is just a land-girt lake with a narrow exit to the Atlantic Ocean. On the broad bosom of ocean man sees the elemental immensity of nature, for the mightiest man-made vessel imaginable is no more than a minute speck of sand in an illimitable expanse of water. He also learns his own greatness and the tremendous strength that is in him to control natural forces and rule the vast deep. The man who bridges gigantic oceans in a frail craft of his own making is proof that quality transcends quantity, that the human spirit is superior to nature's measureless wealth of matter in the raw. (Ben-Gurion, 1954: 311–12)

Ben-Gurion once again mobilized science not in order to understand the laws of the universe but in order to control nature and to harness it in the service of humanity. Not only did he not consider the Mediterranean a "lake" whose importance had to be diminished or did not need to be recognized at all, but he said that "just as we have come here to make the desert bloom, so we have come here to conquer the expanses of the sea." He concluded,

> The Mediterranean is the bridge between Eretz-Israel and Europe, and we must have a strong part in this. The Mediterranean does not have to be the frontier of our land but its continuation and extension, and our link with the

> great Jewish centers of the Diaspora and the cultural centers in Europe and America. We are returning to the east, but bringing to this country the light of western culture, and with all our efforts to be absorbed in our country in the east and have friendly relations with our neighbors in the east, we shall preserve our connection with the centers of culture in the west. (Ben-Gurion, 1972: 402)

The "Canaanite group" was a cultural movement founded in 1939 by the poet Yonatan Ratosh (1908–81) that called for separation between the Hebrews (Canaanites) who lived in Palestine and the Jews in the Diaspora. The Canaanites, more than any other ideological faction, had the idea that in their past the Hebrews were Mediterranean in their character and activities. Already in 1915, Itamar Ben-Avi (1888–1943), an Israeli journalist and Zionist activist, in his article "Our Future Is Also on the Sea," described the "glorious maritime past" of the Hebrews and claimed that only "if the Jews will again be people of the sea, only if many of our new tribes again become Canaanite Zebuluns, will there be a complete resolution of our hopes" (Ben-Avi, 1930: 68). The Canaanites were also influenced by Jeremiah Halperin (1901–62), the adjutant of of Zeev Jabotinsky (1880-1940), leader of the Zionist Revisionist movement, in the defense of Jerusalem, responsible for the nautical section of Betar, captain of the ship *Sarah Aaronsohn* and the formulator of a Hebrew nautical ideology as against the socialist ideology that sanctified the soil (Amir, 2000). He regretted the fact that, among all the Mediterranean peoples, all of whom were sailors and owners of ships, Israel was absent. This was not because the Hebrew fleet was of a lower standard in the history of early ships than that of the other Mediterranean peoples, but because exilic Judaism (with some exceptions) did not provide the possibility of participating in the nautical profession, which was considered an aristocratic profession in the countries bordering the sea (Halperin, 1970). Halperin referred to the book of Raphael Patai (1910–96, a Jewish ethnographer and anthropologist), *The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times* (Patai, 1938), in which it was claimed that the development of ships and seamanship is a criterion of cultural development, and it declared, "the Hebrew people wrote one of the most glorious pages in the history of the seamanship of the Mediterranean peoples." Moreover, the Jews, who had fourth place among the coastal peoples before the Second World War and were known for their talent in trade, their initiative, and their capacity for international organization, would know how to exploit this geographical advantage once again to take their proper place. The idea of the resurrection of Hebrew seamanship is connected here with the Mediterranean character of the Hebrew state.

Halperin based his findings on the research of "the young scholar in Paris who called himself 'El Raid.'" One can learn about this pen name of the researcher of the ancient East, Adia G. Horon (1907–72), the intellectual father of the Canaanite movement, from an article by Zeev Jabotinsky. The article "Israel and Carthage," based on a series of articles that Horon published in *Rassviet*, the revisionist Russian-language journal, in Paris under the pseudonym El Raid (in Arabic, "the observer"). Jabotinsky claimed that the Phoenicians were kith and kin of the Hebrew people and extended their culture as far as Carthage. Hannibal was one of the great Hebrew heroes, and the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean Basin was Hebrew. Jabotinsky also saw Carthage as a kind of inscription on a potsherd: that is, one piece of evidence among many of the Semitic origin of the Mediterranean idea. At the Betar Congress in Danzig in 1931, Jabotinsky gave his blessing to Adia Horon, who founded the "Alliance of Youth of the Sea—*Zur Rodei Gal*" (the Association of the Rulers of the Waves, known as *Rodei Gal*), a movement to prepare the youth of Betar for a life of seamanship. A nucleus of the movement was founded in Tunis next to the ruins of Carthage, a sailing ship was acquired, a nautical periodical *Le Cran* was published, and there was even a fantastic plan to overrun the islands of the Straits of Tiran as a first stage for the conquest of the whole of Palestine (Halperin, 1965). The Canaanite source of the Hebrew attraction to the Mediterranean Sea is to be found in the writings of Adia Horon, and it continues until today in the writings of the poet Aharon Amir (1923–2008), one of the Canaanite leaders. Amir stated in his article "The Sea, the Last Sea," which appeared in 1996 for the inauguration of the "Forum for Mediterranean Cultures," that the Mediterranean ("the Philistine Sea," "the Last Sea") is an organic part of the infrastructure of the Hebrew culture and its worldview (Amir, 1996). The bearers and revivers of the Hebrew cultural heritage should not in his opinion feel as guests in the ancient sea but should be full partners and equal citizens in the Mediterranean Basin. In one place, Amir points out three potential dangers in the Mediterranean option: an idealization and sentimentalization of the Mediterranean, which is "one of the seas most steeped in blood in the history of mankind"; a dependency on the history, true in itself, of the Jewish Diaspora in the Mediterranean Basin; and a community-based ideology of the type of the "oriental heritage," which can interfere with a comprehensive national view of Israel as a Mediterranean nation.

The poet Erez Biton, editor of *Apirion—Mediterranean Journal* and founder of the International Mediterranean Centre in Israel, also sees an affinity between the Canaanite group and the Mediterranean ideology: "The Canaanite teaching of Jonathan Ratosh also sought, in the final analysis, to give an eastern dimension to Israeli existence, and it too

received a death-blow with the founding of the state, precisely because of that oriental basis. Therefore, strangely enough, we, the oriental Jews, can find a common denominator with the Canaanite teachings in the common attempt to give a special content to our reality here" (Biton, 1983: 4). Adaptation to a comprehensive Mediterranean entity would in his opinion give the Israelis an authentic force of existence and "would rescue us from the comparison with the crusaders, who were here for only a short time." A semantic distinction or distinction of meaning between "Mediterranean" and "Middle Eastern" or "Oriental" is made in various contexts, and Biton chooses to make a tactical use of the first formula: "It seems to me that the difference between 'Mediterraneanism' and 'orientalism' is only a semantic difference, and especially in the case of my use of the formula Mediterraneanism, because this formula can be easily accepted in the very polarised society in which we live" (Ibid.).

The poet Natan Yonatan (1923–2004) makes the same choice for the same reasons: "Why do I sometimes prefer to use the concept 'Mediterranean culture', or similar concepts? I cannot support this with any argument or any scientific justification, but I want to bring it about that the people who will listen to me or who will think about the things I say about culture will try to think about culture in concrete, realistic terms[. . .]. In my opinion, to say 'Mediterranean culture' is a good way of speaking about our culture, our literature" (Yonatan, 1983).

The cultural critic Gabriel Moked stresses another aspect: "In my opinion, we must distinguish between the Mediterranean cultural world and the Middle Eastern cultural world [. . .]. The Middle Eastern Muslim culture is to a great degree very fanatical and far from any true symbiosis with the West. As against this, the Mediterranean culture is basically pluralistic, impregnated with the various influences of 'Mare Nostrum.' It is partly European and partly Levantine [. . .] Mediterraneanness means among other things openness and refinement, cultural variety and possibilities of dialogue between different religions, and cultures that are not homogeneous" (Moked, 1985: 6).

The Israeli-Palestinian poet Mohammed Ghanayem points out the dialectical aspect of the Mediterranean option: "One must speak about a cultural synthesis that cannot turn into a cultural invasion, even if the result is a cultural operation that brings together worlds that are different and even opposite to each other. In this respect, Israel can provide a good example of a broad spread of civilizations if it relates on an equal basis to the cultures of the minorities within it, Arabs and Jews, Ashkenasis and Sephardis, all of whom can make up a new Israeli cultural identity that can save the region from an expected cultural desolation" (Ghanayem, 1985: 6).

It is an interesting fact that many of the Israeli poets, writers, and artists wrote and produced in Israel as if they had never heard the sound of waves lapping the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, as if the people of the mountains and desert had overcome the people of the sea and the shore. But a few poets nevertheless stand out, and first among them Saul Tchernikovsky (1875–1943), who wrote about the wanderings of the Hebrew poet and his longing to reach the Mediterranean: "I wandered from sea to sea all the days of my life / and it was my desire to reach the southern sea / and my way was fenced around with mountains" (Ohana, 2000: 141). Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896–1981) cursed the fate that decreed that he should be born in Christian Europe and in 1929 chose the Mediterranean, his poetic mentor, the landscape of his chosen motherland: "And I learn the teaching of the rhythm of the water: / I have chosen you among the teachers, O Mediterranean, as my teacher of poetry! / The salt of your waters is the salt of my blood and my tears. / Forgive, for I was wrongly not born on your shores" (Greenberg, 1979: 101). The poet Harold Schimmel came from beyond the sea, beyond the Atlantic Ocean, and in a short poem he listed his Mediterranean heroes: "Abra(ha)m / Or-phe-us / Jesus / A-ppo-lon-ius." (Schimmel, 1933: 36). Ayin (Omer) Hillel (1926–90), one of the leaders of the new Hebrew poetry before the founding of the state and after it, sang a hymn of praise, "The Voice of Many Waters," to a pagan melody in the manner of Tchernikovsky and Schneur: "I stand and wonder at the sea / and my body stirs like the expanse of the sea / the sea, the idolatrous sea / mighty as rebellion / like a mass of men exultant in strife and battle, / and its roar is hot and blue and overwhelming / as a nightmare is overwhelming. / The mighty sea abundant in power." The most Mediterranean Israeli poet is undoubtedly Israel Pinkas, who describes his wanderings on the seashore, and concludes in his poem "Mediterranean Song," "In our ancient sea / there is nothing new / Only the wind changes." (Pinkas, 1999: 7). Pinkas experiences the Mediterranean in Braudelian stretches of "extended time," ignoring the ravages of time and the tragedies of history. The Florentine merchant who wanted to sell red-tinted glass in the year 1401 still does the same today. This freezing of time gives a sense of stability. The Tel-Aviv poets Natan Zach, Moshe Dor, and Moshe Ben Shaul also have their private moments facing the Mediterranean (Dor, 1965; Ben Shaul, 1966; Zach, 1974), and only Meir Wieseltier in his poem "Depths of a Bottle" (1976) declares that the heavy weight of ideology and history in the Mediterranean area is like a compress defiling the blood of the individual (Wieseltier, 1976).

Wieseltier was nevertheless sympathetic to the first Hebrew city, situated on the seashore. The sociologist Maoz Azaryahu, in his book *Tel Aviv, Mythography of a City* (2005), entitled the Mediterranean chapter "The

Most Beautiful Place in Tel-Aviv: the Seashore." However, Meir Dizengoff, the first mayor, reacted as follows to reservations about his plan to create an industrial area on the shore of the city: "Jews have no interest in sea-bathing. Industry is more important" (Azaryahu, 2005: 273). Contrary to this, the novelist and poet Shalom Asch (1880–1957) expressed enthusiasm for the seashore: "Every Jew, and I among them, ask two things of God: a place in paradise in the next world and a place on the seashore in Tel-Aviv in this one" (Ibid., 278). The opposite attitudes of Dizengoff and Asch represent the whole spectrum of ideas about the relationship of the city and its institutions to their Mediterranean location. The sentiments expressed by Asch correspond to the geography of collective redemption in which the Tel-Aviv shore represented the new liberated Jewish existence. It was precisely because the shore was free of elements of national renewal and building the land that it revealed in the most extraordinary way the normality of the life lived by the Jews, which, in the final analysis, was the purpose of the Zionist vision. Dizengoff's remark anticipated (and perhaps was a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy of) the repeated criticism, formulated by the critic Hedda Boshes, for example, that "the streets of Tel-Aviv run away from the sea as if they were frightened of it and of the dangers that lurk there" (Boshes, 24.11.1978). Azaryahu quoted from a story in a children's book published on the eighteenth anniversary of the foundation of Tel-Aviv. In the story it was asked, "Why was the first Hebrew city built with its back to the sea?" The reason given was that the founders and builders of the city were frightened of the monsters living in the sea. In fact, the architects of the city failed to pay enough attention to the sea. The main roads run parallel to the sea and do not give onto it; the big hotels obstruct the sea view. Because of the lack of a planning tradition, the planners of the city "ignored the sea, [and that fact] showed that the position of the city on the shores of the Mediterranean had a far-reaching influence on the character of Tel-Aviv" (Azaryahu, 2005: 305). Despite the criticism, however, the sea played a decisive role in the mental and cultural geography of Tel-Aviv, and an expression of this is the reference to the sea and the seaboard in the iconography of the city. The Zionist outlook that saw Tel-Aviv as a haven for the Jews is reflected in the symbol of the city, in the center of which stands a lighthouse. The promenade and the shore as boundaries separating while also joining the city and the sea personify the sea and the city as complementary opposites (Feige, 2008).

A Window to the Mediterranean

Only recently did Israeli literature open a window on the Mediterranean. A. B. Yehoshua is rightly considered the Mediterranean Israeli author par excellence. His novels often dramatize, explicitly or symbolically, the struggle between Israel's Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities. As a Sephardic Jew and fifth-generation Jerusalemite, his novels represent Israel as a vital Mediterranean society, not a medium for transplanted foreign cultures. He says "The Mediterranean—the Mediterranean identity, composed of Greece, Italy, Egypt, Turkey. This is our identity, and I think this identity will compose the two elements of East and West together" (Honing, 2003). He declares himself a "Yam Tichoni," the Hebrew word for Mediterranean: "If I see a Greek Tragedy I feel at home, not like in Hamburg [. . .]. I don't want to present myself as being between East and West—I am 'Yam Tichoni' [Mediterranean] and my books are 'Yam Tichnoni'im.' 'Mr. Mani' is a Mediterranean book and the 'Journey to the end of the Millenium' is Mediterranean" (Nocke, 2009: 85).

Amos Oz, however, who initially did not wish to go Mediterranean, found his own way there, which is characteristically interesting. The young Oz, who was of the school of thought of Micha Josef Berdyczewski (1865–1921), believed that vital creative powers were the main thing, and not the local form, which was seen as sentimental and provincial. Later, Oz depicted the Israeli society in formation as one with characteristic Mediterranean qualities: warm of heart and temperament, hedonistic, life-loving, and emotional. Israel will continue to develop as a Mediterranean society, he concluded, for better or worse, if its conflict with its neighbors is resolved. He saw the Israeli seaside town Ashdod as the national Mediterranean profile coming into being before his eyes. He looked at Ashdod with resignation, with the sadness of a householder whose dream has evaporated like the dreams of those socialist world reformers, the fathers of the kibbutz (Oz, 1986–1987; Oz, 1990). Here he surprisingly broke forth as follows in 1998, in his book *The Same Sea*, not as a romantic beginning or as a fanfare, but describing a sea, olives, and cheese. This poetic novel takes place by the Mediterranean—not in Jerusalem and not in Hulda but in Bat-Yam and Tel-Aviv (and also in Tibet). It is not surprising that critics compared *The Same Sea* to the poet Natan Alterman's *Summer Festival*, which also took place in a Mediterranean city, Jaffa. Among his contemporary Israeli characters, bereft of dreams and living an everyday existence, there are figures who reflect the sea and there is even a "Mediterranean philosophy." And as if all this were not enough, Oz's Mediterranean "repentance" is expressed in a play in the form of a poem-chapter, "Exile and Kingdom," that suggests a closeness, admirable if late, to Albert Camus, the lyrical prosaist of

the Mediterranean (Oz, 2001). In his interview with Alexandra Nocke, Oz elaborates on his Mediterranean attitude:

> By Mediterranean I mean: passionate, hearty, noisy, materialistic, talkative, argumentative, very middle class. And I realize that this country resembles more and more not so much the Arab world, but Athens, Piraeus, Naples, the South of France. Possibly like North Africa, which I don't know. [. . .] Greece was closer than Germany. I realize that this is rapidly becoming a Mediterranean country. [. . .] I actually discovered yes: I do like it. [. . .] We Israelis belong not in an Ingmar Bergman film but in a Fellini movie, and I like it this way.
>
> I am not an ideologist. I don't think that the Mediterranean option is a model, a goal or a purpose. I think it is a reality for most Israelis—not for all of them. [. . .] not because it makes it easier to build bridges with the middle eastern environment. I don't know where the Middle East is going, maybe it is becoming more and more fundamentalist, which in my vocabulary means less and less Mediterranean. [. . .]. I like it because I like it, because it suits me, my temper, my way of life and my essentially secular, pluralistic and tolerant perspective.
>
> What I regard as the Mediterranean way of life has a lot to do with the open society, is the cradle of the open society. (Nocke, 2.4.2003).

"With its back to the sea"—that is how the art critic Gideon Ofrat describes the relationship of Israeli art to the sea in general and the Mediterranean in particular. Joseph Zaritsky (1891–1985), the formative modernist painter who is the target of post-Zionist catapults, "stood with his back to the sea and painted the distant hills of Ramat-Gan [. . .] and behind him, right below him, was the sea. To go there, yes. To paint it, no!" (Ofrat, 2004: 37). It was the same with the painter from Jerusalem Arieh Aroch (1908–1974), or Zvi Meirovitch (1911–1974), the painter from Haifa, who looked more at the plants of the Carmel Range than at the sea at the foot of the mountains. It is true there was Nahum Guttman (1898–1980), but in general the sea was absent from Israeli painting, and a visitor who happened to stop over in Israel would find it hard to believe he is in a country bordering the Mediterranean. There are dark and mysterious surrealist depictions but not the sea light and not maritime landscapes. The contemporary painters do with Israeli painting what the big hotels in Tel-Aviv have done: they block out the sea. Why do they ignore it? "From our very roots, it may be that the Jewish genes, which never liked the sea, recoiled from it [. . .] also, the generation of the founding-fathers of Israeli culture was a generation that had lived in little Jewish shtetls far from the sea-shore [. . .] a ghetto-experience too closed in for the Jewish artist coming to the country to adapt to the open sea" (Ibid.). One is bound to admit,

Ofrat began his analysis of the historian of the Israeli literature Hanan Hever, that Zionist self-realization required land but not sea! However, if the Israeli painters today do not paint the sea, they also ignore the valleys, the mountains, the streets, and the buildings. The door of the studio is locked against the outside world: "Israeli art remains relatively cut off, but it is perhaps the beginning of a long process of Mediterranean coloration" (Ibid., 47).

Unlike the Israeli writers, poets, and painters who hesitated on the shore uncertain of their identity, the musicians were the first to leap into the Mediterranean. Perhaps the reason is to be found in the sensitive, direct medium, the ear open to the sound of a ceaseless melody. In her article "Israel and the Emergence of the Mediterranean Identity: Expressions of Locality in Music and Literature" (2006), the cultural researcher Alexandra Nocke suggested that the new Mediterranean identity could be a solution to the identity crisis of the Israelis, who had exhausted all the old ideological models that no longer corresponded to the needs, problems, and requirements of Israeli society (Nocke, 2006). Mediterraneanness, as a nonexclusive point of view, is in fact a real and attractive possibility for many elements in the population. The Mediterranean discourse, which was random and fragmentary until the end of the 1980s, gained impetus in the 1990s and found an echo in cultural practices and in daily life. Because of the geographical proximity of Israel to countries like Greece and Turkey, music was instrumental in bringing together the musical affinities of different ethnic communities, creating a Levantine-global combination, to use the expression of the musician Kobi Oz, who saw Mediterranean music as a synthesis of Tunisia and MTV—that is, of the local and universal. Thus Mediterranean music was a highly effective agent of cultural cohesion. Until the 1980s, the idea did not correspond to the situation; from the 1990s onward, theory and practice have gone together. The fall of the Soviet bloc and the end of the confrontation between East and West, the shift of Europe toward the Mediterranean Basin, and the rise of multiculturalism encouraged regional connections and fostered a multicultural dialogue in Israel. The academic discourse and that in the media gained added validity with the fusion of the ethos with the different affected groups (Malkin, 1997).

For many years, the Mediterranean identity was a neglected option in Israel. The Jewish Israelis had a suspicious and hostile attitude toward the sea (there was no sea in the towns of Eastern Europe or Iraq), perhaps because it was associated with wandering or because the Israelis had an ethos of conquering the land. The historian Irad Malkin has an interesting explanation for this. His theory is that whereas the Israelites came out of the desert and settled in the land as in the biblical myth of the exodus from

Egypt, in modern times the Jews came to the country via the Mediterranean and settled mainly along the coasts. This change had a demographic significance and political and ideological consequences. Until the 1940s, the existence of the Jews along the coast did not result in territorial ambitions of annexing parts of the biblical heartland. After the conquest of the West Bank in the Six-Day War there was a strengthening of the consciousness of settling the hills and the inner parts of the country on the part of those on the political right, but the normative "coastal existence" remained as it was and became even stronger. Malkin expects the Mediterranean idea to be important in the future, perhaps without any need to resurrect the past and reinvent it, through the sheer force of reality, through social and cultural circumstances. Israel, after all, is much closer in its way of life to Greece, Italy, and Spain than to countries like Holland, Germany, or Poland. Open-air cafés; a bustling nightlife; articles of food like baguettes, croissants, and Tunisian sandwiches; many "taverna" programmes on the Israeli television channels; economic and touristic links with the Mediterranean countries; and the acceptance in literary circles of Mediterranean images—all these are the first signs of a Mediterranean culture. In the opinion of many, the Mediterranean option is not a call for ethnic isolation or a return to roots but a striving for a common cultural platform that would smooth out separate tensions and identities. The Mediterranean ethos is too ancient, important, and central to be yet another reason for ethnic seclusion or for advancing sectional interests, folkloric tendencies, or sentimental yearnings. Malkin concludes:

> Ever since it was founded, the State of Israel has been faced with the question: should it be European or oriental? Should one create here a "Vienna on the banks of the Yarkon" or should one create a new "Levant", or even choose "Canaanism" and partnership in a "Semitic space"? Today more than ever, there is a need to encourage a cultural process and to clarify Israel's place in the Mediterranean context.
>
> Precisely because it has no strong national ideology, the Mediterranean offers Israel a richly-textured cultural orientation, drawing on the extensive Mediterranean and other connections of the people of Israel in the past together with the challenging Mediterranean and international reality of our own day. Moreover, the Mediterranean provides Israel, which is a multicultural society grappling with the ideological consequences of the melting pot, a multicultural model nourished by cross-fertilisation. The Mediterranean is not only a geographical or historical area but also a metaphorical entity with frontiers and a variety of cultures and identities, which came into being through an incessant discourse among them. All these have helped to preserve its unique character. The perpetual interaction between them has created a culture that is basically multicultural. (Malkin, 2005: 12)

According to the critic Yoram Bronowsky (1948–2001), a reinterpretation of Israel's place in the area is required:

> I am convinced, like many others, that the dream to which Israeli society should be directed, to which it can direct itself, is the most ancient of humanity's dreams—the Mediterranean dream. A sort of Mediterranean Scroll of Independence with Mediterranean inflections rings all the time in my ears: "On the shores of the Mediterranean, the Jewish people arises, etc." I think of the connections and ancient contexts—Phoenicia, Crete, Greece, all maritime countries—and those that came after them. And I dream of Israel as one of the centres of neo-Mediterraneanism, just as it was a centre and one of the sources of the ancient Mediterraneanism. (Bronowsky, 16.11.1987)

There has been a notable tendency on the part of many Israelis to develop a strategic policy of supporting a regional culture that permits a dialogue between the peoples of different countries and between the different peoples in the Mediterranean Basin, especially at its eastern end. Many people in Israeli society have begun to call for a strengthening of the peace process in the Middle East following the Oslo Accords through an expansion of the cultural links between the states of the Mediterranean Basin and through a removal of the barriers between peoples. The Mediterranean option is put forward not only as a cultural proposition but as strategic geopolitical aspiration in its own right. Have the intensification of the Israeli occupation and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism made Mediterraneanism redundant?

An early proponent of the Mediterranean Basin as the proper sphere for Israel to relate to was Abba Eban (1915–2002), the first Israeli minister of foreign affairs. Already in 1952 he discerned two distinct advantages in the Mediterranean option: the chance of breaking Israel's political and cultural isolation (for in the Muslim and Arab Middle East, Israel was the exception) and the exploitation of the commercial and cultural connections that Israel had with most of the countries of the Mediterranean Basin:

> If the State of Israel seeks to find its own way within the area as a whole, if it wants to find itself a world that would be more fitting for the expression of its political relationships and cultural affinities, I think the concept "Mediterranean" would be the most suitable: Israel, not as a Middle Eastern country but as a Mediterranean country. The Mediterranean is the only channel of intercourse between Israel and the rest of the world. All Israel's trade and connections pass through that sea. If this is true as a geographical fact, it is all the more true from a historical and cultural point of view. (Eban, 1952: 7)

The first sign of a partnership between Europe and the Mediterranean countries could be seen in the Barcelona Conference that was held

on November 27, 1995, and that was attended, apart from the 15 countries of the European Union, by 12 countries of the Mediterranean Basin, including Israel. There was a considerable acceleration of the process from 1989 onward, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, for at that time the European Union began to direct its efforts southward toward the countries of the Maghreb and the Mediterranean in accordance with models whose success had already been proved in Eastern Europe. Toward the end of 1994 an explicit policy began to be formed of encouraging links between Europe and the Mediterranean countries. The "Barcelona process" had three main objectives: a political and security partnership that would create an area of peace, democracy, and human rights; an economic partnership that would create an area of free trade; and a cultural and social partnership that would develop a civil society and encourage relations between the countries of the European Union and the Mediterranean partners and between the countries of the Union themselves. The main obstacle to a partnership between Europe and the Mediterranean countries was the conflict in the Middle East. The peace process in the Middle East in the 1990s permitted the implementation of the first steps of a new Mediterranean policy, including the invitation of Israel to regional forums, a large majority of whose participants were from Arab countries. Although the El-Aqsa intifada and the Second Lebanese War slowed down many of these developments, Israel, like the European Union, still has a strong interest in promoting political and economic stability in the area and stopping fundamentalism (Lerman, 2007). Many people think the Mediterranean option would contribute to this.

The Mediterranean Moment

Even after a generation of fruitful discourse devoted to discussion of the Israeli Mediterranean identity, it is hard to rid oneself of the persistent hegemonic relationship implicit in the title of the article "Jewish Mediterranean Culture, Semantics and Metaphors," in *New Jewish Time: Jewish Culture in a Secular Age—An Encyclopaedia View* (Shavit, 2008). The hegemonic culture creates the "other" in relation to which or in contrast to which it defines itself, and at the same time it implies that in the "other" there is something lacking or missing. A good example of this historiographical deficiency is the Mediterranean option.

Some Israeli historians have claimed that a Mediterranean culture is a fabricated idea, an invention, that was not created by the peoples of the Mediterranean but by others, tourists and travelers, who at the end of the eighteenth century first visualized the Mediterranean world as a single geographical and cultural entity with its own distinctive character. Prominent

among these is the historian Yaakov Shavit, editor of the collection *A Mediterranean Anthology* (2004), which appeared in the Mediterranean series of the project of the Centre for Mediterranean Culture in Tel-Aviv University. Shavit sees the Mediterranean region from the outside, so adopting the ideological perspective of the northern Europeans who in the time of the Enlightenment gave descriptions of the Orient and Southern Europe. Although the collection mainly consists of direct quotations from authors, historians, and anthropologists of European culture, this, he claims, does not demonstrate any "Europocentricity" on his part but the "historical fact," as he puts it, that "Mediterraneanness" is not a spacial identity of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean Basin. In his opinion, it was the Europeans, especially the "northerners," who created the idea of the Mediterranean as a natural environment and a human environment and conceived of the Mediterranean region as a world in itself: "The development of Mediterraneanness is a chapter in the intellectual-cultural history of Europe in the dialogue it created with the Mediterranean world" (Shavit, 2004: 31). Only in the twentieth century, he maintains, did some inhabitants of the Mediterranean Basin adopt the idea that they lived in a special area that was the cradle of human culture. According to this Europocentric point of view, it was only when the modern Greeks and Italians were exposed to the discoveries of the North Europeans that they first became aware of their classical heritage! The Mediterranean idea, the essence of which was is the recognition that the riches of world culture originated in the area around the Mediterranean Basin, was withheld from the local inhabitants, and they needed the North European "other" to define for them their spacial identity, their special contribution, and their universal culture.

If this is the case, the Mediterraneanness of the local inhabitants is inauthentic, an imaginary identity proposed, dictated, planted, and disseminated by "others." What is demonstrated in Shavit's critique is a "theoretical colonialism" similar to the "cultural colonialism" of presumed white superiority in Africa, the "pedagogical colonialism" of the British in Asia, and the "religious colonialism" of the Christians in Africa and South America. Today, the Muslim immigrants in Europe practice a "reverse colonialism," saying, "Yesterday you came to us and tried to condition and direct our identity; today we come to you and seek to prescribe your identity." The Mediterranean idea set in motion a dialectical process of far-reaching significance in welding a geocultural area into a single entity that included both "East" and "West." But when Shavit attempted to examine the validity of the Mediterranean idea as applied to Israel, he took his Europocentric approach and adapted it to the Israelis. In his opinion, the Israelis who favor the Mediterranean option have adopted an external approach like the North Europeans: "Those who long to be rooted in the natural

Mediterranean landscape look at it with the eyes of visitors from outside" (Shavit, 9.4.1996). He sees the Mediterranean idea as "a harmless entertainment which can be presented as another ingredient in the sought-after recipe for 'identity', if not its very essence." There is a total rejection here of Jacqueline Kahanoff's idea of culture (Ohana, 2006), and in the words of the Tel-Aviv historian, "In this entertainment, even 'Levantinism' is rescued from its stigma of shallow superficiality and puts on a garment of fruitful cultural openness" (Ibid.). The idea of a Mediterranean identity, he claims, is unsustainable in itself: it is either an attempt to be "Oriental" in Mediterranean fancy dress or a sophisticated way of remaining in "Europe." In the year 2007, Shavit once again ridiculed the Mediterranean idea and wrote, "Mediterraneanness is bluff, but harmless bluff that does not hurt anyone" (Shavit, 26.9.2007).

Unlike Shavit, the historical geographer Meron Benvenisti thinks that the Mediterranean option for Israel was invented not to disengage from Western culture, the one the Israelis favor, but as a Levantine replacement that would enable them to avoid a real encounter with Islamic culture and the Arab neighbors. The connection with the sea is a roundabout route to a land connection: it is easier to stretch one's hands across the sea than to turn toward the continent, where there are Palestinians. "My Mediterranean father educated neo-Canaanites sons" (Benvenisti, 9.4.1996) writes Benvenisti, who on his own admission supports a coexistence between the two sons of the land and has always hoped that their sense of belonging to a common homeland would prove stronger than their enmity as hostile neighbors. The title of Shavit's article, "An Entertaining but Illusory Idea," and of Benvenisti's article, "Escapism That Ends with a Sip of Arak," shows how critical and skeptical the two of them are about the Mediterranean option for Israel. The two articles were published in a special supplement to the newspaper *Ma'ariv* that bore the title "Pergola and Rosemary, or We and Mediterraneanness" and appeared in 1996 with the founding of the Mediterranean Forum in the Van Leer Institute. The journalist Haim Hanegbi, the editor of the supplement, expressed his cynicism about the founders of the forum, saying that they wanted to

> make life on the shores of the Mediterranean into a thriving and agreeable culture. No more isolation but openness; no longer a reservation but a wide-open space, a release from the ghetto. For a moment it has seemed that our geography, an abiding natural condition since the foundation of the world, has become before our eyes a cause for rejoicing. Israel is no longer a widower among the peoples of the sea, for they are about to embrace one another in order to renew their days as of old and restore to this Basin, the oldest sea on the planet, the glory of its youth. (Hanegbi, 1996)

The poet Salman Masalha also joined in the criticism of the "flight" from the Middle East: "Israeli society, which specialises in inventing detours, starting with the bypass roads in the occupied Palestinian territories and ending with the parliamentary bloc at the Knesset, is trying to lay another bypass road in the form of a Mediterranean culture, a road that bypasses the new Middle East. The Jewish-Israeli tribe is ready to bypass the heart and go as far as Morocco, Tunisia and Algiers in order to run away from the real struggle, not only with the place, here and now, but also with the local inhabitants" (Masalha, 1996).

And as if these body blows to Mediterraneanism were not enough, Hanan Hever comes along and adds to the assertion that the Mediterranean idea is a North European invention the claim that the Mediterranean is a projection of Western Zionism. For him, the hegemonic Zionist culture is also an Europocentric narrative in the form of a journey from West to East, from exile to redemption, from one territory to another, with an obliteration of the sea, a cleansing and purifying contraction of the middle distance. The sea has no value itself but is only a means of transition to Zion, the hoped-for land, the true utopia. The sea is the land's "other," the "other" that has to be crossed and left behind (Hever, 2000). It is not surprising that the Zionist-Israeli tale "With His Own Hands: Alik's Story," written by the writer Moshe Shamir in memory of his fallen brother Alik, begins with the classic sentence "Alik came out of the sea." The ultimate Sabra is not a native of the history-laden Israeli territory but the product of a new experience, free from all traces of the past. The emergence from the sea is an act that cleanses the birth of the Sabra. There is an ideologization of the sea as an experience bereft of ideology. The sea is the opposite of the heavy-laden Zionist content of the land. The sea is nothing, an obliterated area between the negativity of exile and the positivity of Israeliness, between "there" and "here," between Europe and the Levant. The Mediterranean Sea has no status of its own, no affirmative presence: only in the sea can something come out of nothing. The birth of Alik the Sabra is an *ex nihilo* myth that is doomed to extinction: from the water he has emerged and to dust he shall return. His end is known in advance, in the same way as that of Shamir's other hero, Uri, in the play *He Walked in the Fields*, whose actual body and whose metaphysical image were blown to pieces.

The repression and obliteration of the sea and the placing of the land in opposition to the sea was in Hever's opinion a form of imagery that represented an exclusive metanarrative—that is, there is no land except Zion, and everything around it is repressed and obliterated. The sea is a national covering metaphor that conceals the Zionist territorial violence and the Palestinian and oriental "other" by representing "others" as citizens and human beings from north or west of the Mediterranean Basin (Hever, 2007: 24). The

sea crossing of Zionist immigration signifies a change of identity (rite of passage), an ideological pilgrimage, and a utopian venture by means of a ship. Zion in place of the "other" requires a reductive leap: one must leap over the sea. As against the Zionist utopia there is the heterotypical narrative of the Oriental Jews in Israel, whose immigration, in Hever's words, embodied the "accepted, symbolic, normative crossing of the sea" (Ibid.). At the same time, Hever contradicted himself and claimed that all the Oriental Jews crossed a contiguous body of territory represented by the territorial contiguity of the Middle East. He made even the immigration of the North African Jews that took place across the Mediterranean fit this one-dimensional ideological interpretation. The trouble with comprehensive historiographical theses is that they are ideological metanarratives that subordinate all the facts to a single explanation.

Can They See the Sea?

The architect and theoretician Sharon Rotbard continued the line of thought of Benvenisti, and to a certain degree of Shavit and Hever, seeing the Mediterranean option as an ideological proposition in which the Mediterranean Sea "is the ultimate place of escape, escapism personified [. . .]. More than it is a fantasy, it is an ideology that I might call 'Mediterraneanism'" (Rotbard, 2005). On the one hand, it represents the invention of a Mediterranean entity that fuses together many identities, a variety of types and periods into an ideal generality, and on the other hand it represents an obliviousness to the tensions that exist in the Basin. This obliviousness takes the form of a flight from the bloodbath in the Middle East to the cradle of Mediterranean culture, from "the horrors that have made the Mediterranean what it is" to its depiction as "a sort of decorative cover of a cookery-book." The Mediterranean, here, is a selective recollection involving both a short period—seasonal memories of the annual vacation, the sensuality of summer—and a long period, universal and archaeological: "What is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict next to the eternity of the Mediterranean? [. . .] and in this respect, in this project of Mediterraneanism, in creating an approved area of agreement, a kind of public domain of memory, culture and history, there are undoubtedly some positive elements" (Rotbard, 7.6.2005). Rotbard suggests, however, that we should treat this ideology, whose expressions can be banal and kitchy, with suspicion. In his opinion, it is "a sort of cultural religion of openness and love of life and people" whose architectural equivalents are logos like "Club Met," "Pueblo Español," "Givat Andromeda," and "Hotel Lutraki" in Greece.

There has never been a critical discussion of the political and moral significance of the Mediterraneanization of Israeli culture. The aim of such a discussion, says Rotbard, would be to expose the colonialist nature of projects like the restoration of the Arab Israeli village Ein Hod; the restoration and renovation of the Old City of Jaffa; and the creation of the Irgun Museum, Beit Gidi, in Jaffa. The desire to belong gives birth to "a culture that is basically not only alien to its environment but to a large degree hostile to it" (Ibid.). Domination of the East was achieved through a typical process of colonization like the physical expropriation of a place: the dispossession of the local inhabitants drew them into the Western socio-economic context. For instance, Jews were the owners of the properties of the Arabs of Jaffa who still lived in their houses; Israeli architects were the preservers of the Jaffa style of building. The most outstanding example of this geographical and historical dissonance is "Beit Gidi at Menashiya, a museum in the shape of a glass box of the school of the architect Mies Van Der Rohe, one of the leaders of the Bauhaus, built over the remains of an old Jaffa stone house." Beit Gidi "is an example of an aesthetics and rhetoric of ruin and destruction, an example of how to commemorate death and obliteration." "Mediterraneanism" is mobilized in the service of the Zionist ideology: "The whole natural cycle of obliteration, destruction, extermination and making the desert bloom is simply the necessary background for the real allegory of Mediterraneanism, which is to be found with us in *Altneuland/Tel-Aviv*" (Rotbard, 2005).

This view of "Mediterraneanism" was shared by Sami Abu Shehadeh, an inhabitant of Jaffa who conducts subversive tours of his city in reaction to the celebration of the "white city," Tel-Aviv. "Tel-Aviv did not grow out of just anywhere;" he said, "it sprang out of Jaffa. It rebelled against its maker, and cast out and obliterated Jaffa, and it still tries to do so today" (Zandberg, 2004). Thus, for example, in the famous photograph of the lottery for building plots in "little Tel-Aviv" in 1909, two political narratives are represented: the "Zionist" camera documents people set against deserted sands on the seashore, whereas the Palestinian perspective insists on what is missing, stressing the fact that the camera's lens did not capture—and did not intend to capture—nearby Jaffa and the surrounding Palestinian villages with their orchards and vineyards. The architect Zvi Elhyani, in his article "Seafront Holdings," documented the history of Menashiya, the area between Tel-Aviv and Jaffa, from the time it was a Muslim village in the nineteenth century to its conquest by the Irgun in the War of Independence, its period of neglect when it became a Jewish slum, and the plans for immovable property connected with it from the 1960s onward. The article is accompanied by an appendix of photographs from 1967: "*Yizkor* [Memorial Prayer] for Manshiya" (Elhayani, 2004).

In a similar way to Rotbard and Abu Shehadeh, the journalist Esther Zandberg called Beit Gidi "a Palestinian ruin transformed into a monument to those who destroyed it" (Zandberg, 2004). In her article "Dreams of an Island," she examined the catalogue of the Israeli exhibition "Back to the Sea" held in 2004 in the architectural Biennale in Venice, which dealt with the Tel-Aviv Jaffa coastline. In the Zionist vision, the boundaries of the Mediterranean coastal strip were not seen as final boundaries but were subject to continual negotiation, natural conditions, and political circumstances. Architects and engineers, planners, and politicians put forward schemes for a "spacial engineering" of the Mediterranean vision and in their feverish minds constructed a fantasy "of the rosy future of Tel-Aviv and the State of Israel that cannot be realised on the existing soil." Ever since the founding of the "white city" on the sands, a casino, an Olympic village, luxury hotels, buildings, and towers were planned and imagined. The audacious dream of all of them was to build artificial islands opposite the shores of the city, "the fantasy of building on land liberated from the shackles of a complex history, and to depict an Israeli soil which no people lays claim to and that represents a new horizon, efficient, planned and better." Indeed, this may have represented "the hope of getting away from the existing reality and of creating an alternative, utopian reality" (Ibid.). The debate on the Mediterranean option is a continuation of the debate that took place in the culture of the Hebrew renaissance on the East as an object of longing or as a place that threatened the Western mentality of the Zionist thinkers.

The "new Hebrew" faced two directions: he looked to the East but he also had his back to it. Zionism was characterized from its earliest days by its ambivalent attitude to the East. The positive attitude to the East was first expressed by figures such as Moses Lieb Lilienblum, Mordechai Zeev Feierberg, Itamar Ben-Avi, Nahum Sokolov, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, and David Ben-Gurion. Lilienblum saw the European Jews as aliens: "We are alien to our own race. We are Semites among the Aryans, sons of Shem among the sons of Japhet, a Palestinian tribe from Asia in European lands." Feierberg declared to the Jews in his famous essay *Whither?*, "And you, my brethren, as you now go eastwards, you must always remember that you are orientals by birth." Itamar Ben-Avi declared "We are Asiatics," Sokolov wanted to create "a great Palestinian culture" (Rubinstein, 2000: 71–103), and Ben-Gurion said in 1925 that "the meaning of Zionism is that we are once again becoming an Oriental people" (Ben Ami, 1998: 331).

The negative attitude was expressed in an *a priori* rejection of the eastern option. Herzl declared in *The Jewish State*, "For Europe we can be part of the defensive wall against Asia; we can be outposts of culture against barbarism" (Herzl, 1997). The historian Joseph Klausner saw his culture as

a superior one, as he said in his article "Fear": "All our hope that we shall one day possess the land of our ancestors is not based on the sword, nor on the fist, but on the collective advantage we have over the Arabs and Turks."

Is this attitude of some of the thinkers of Zionism in its early stages an outstanding example of the Orientalist thesis put forward by Edward Said? Were certain varieties of Zionist perception of the East an example of a paternalistic relationship of the West to the East or, more precisely, to the area of the Eastern Mediterranean? Here we have something much more complex than the out-and-out European Orientalism because the East was seen not only as the site of the ancient history of the Jewish people but also as the supreme object of the people's return to itself according to its vision. But to the same degree that the East was seen as the cure for the national distress of the Jewish people and the insignia of its national identity, it represented the "other," was external to the Zionist Jew, and was perceived as "there," whether as a strange or even alien entity or as an object of insatiable longings. The growing attraction of the East for the nineteenth-century European romantics may be ascribed to a longing for ancient and authentic roots and to a common feeling among the intelligentsia that the West was in decline. It was this attraction that impelled Jews of Zionist inclination to see the East not only as the cradle of their national identity or as a place of refuge but also as a source of values, strength, and moral renewal for their people.

Zionism was born in Europe, and paradoxically the main choices of identity and cultural options for Israeli society—socialism, nationalism, secularism, messianism, Canaanism, "crusaderism"—originated not in the Holy Land but in Europe. Mediterraneanism as a cultural idea is also a theoretical option for Israeli identity. The Mediterranean idea has been effectively promoted in a number of Mediterranean countries as a program of collective ethos, suggesting directions of action, formulations of policy, and cultural activities. The Mediterranean option is a possible bridge between Israel and its Arab neighbors, between Israel and Europe and among Israelis themselves.

A Place in the Mediterranean Sun

From many different sides, people began to envisage the goal of developing and disseminating a cultural policy and regional strategy for the Mediterranean Basin, in order to produce the cultural content for understanding between the various peoples and states of the entire Basin and of its eastern end in particular. Many voices in Israeli society began to seek to strengthen the Middle East peace process by creating cultural understanding among

the states of the Mediterranean Basin and destroying barriers between peoples. Thus the Mediterranean option is not only a creative and innovative proposal but also an aspect of regional cultural dialogue in its own right.

But why should we have a discussion about dialogue, pluralism, and tolerance between peoples in general, or between Israelis and Arabs in particular, here, of all places, in the Mediterranean context? The annals of the Mediterranean Basin recount an ongoing conflict for political hegemony, cultural control, and economic imperialism. The tensions go back to the struggles between north and south in the Mediterranean—the Persian War, the Peloponnesian War, the Macedonian Wars, and the Punic Wars—which were succeeded by the struggle between East and West, between Hellenists and Romans, at whose end the Romans managed to create the first political and cultural union embracing the entire coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The Muslim conquest shattered this unity. From the eighth to the eighteenth centuries the Sea was split in two, its northern (Christian) shore against its southern (Muslim) shore. Historical watersheds such as the Crusades, the Ottoman conquest in the East, and the Spanish Reconquista in the West; the campaigns of Napoleon; modern colonial settlement; and the World Wars in the twentieth century—all were tense encounters pitting nations, cultures, and religions against one another.

The Mediterranean dialogue can play a key cultural and political role. This dialogue has two facets: exposing and examining the common heritage of the peoples of the region and creating new channels of communication based on their reciprocal influences and interactions.

The Mediterranean is not just a market or a free-trade area, nor merely a museum, but rather it is a place for creation. We cannot speak about the Mediterranean without remembering its past, its myths. When it comes to dealing with this sea, which is the cradle of civilizations, a question emerges: how do we establish a renewed cultural dialogue? Can we achieve this without knowing ourselves and recognizing ourselves? This implies a rereading of our recent and distant past so as to engineer the present and the future. The Mediterranean, although not representing a homogeneous cultural unity, has historically been a space with an intense mixture of cultures.

Each nation practices selective memory and highlights its contribution to the process of civilization, frequently ignoring the contribution of others. Evoking the reciprocal debt should contribute to modifying this view of oneself and the "other." The Mediterranean is rich in cultural crossbreeding.[22] On each of its shores, whether it is on the north or the south or the east, by preserving one's own heritage, one is also preserving that of the "other."

The Mediterranean Basin has served as the crucible of cultures. The Renaissance probably constitutes for the whole of the history of the planet, the last earthly paradise known and loved: the Medici, Leonardo da Vinci, the discovery of America, the Empire of Charles V, the dawn of science. But the Renaissance was transformed into one of the most belligerent, divided, conflictive, and ideologically dramatic periods of the history of humanity. Italy itself was a hotbed of sectarianism and internal struggles, Michelangelo had to flee from Florence to Rome, the Reformation opened a secular abyss in the heart of Catholicism, Charles V's empire was torn apart in a rosary of battles all over the place, and the specifically Mediterranean division between Islam and Christianity was consummated. Nor were the Jews themselves less indebted to the Mediterranean environment for their own accomplishments in philosophy and culture—take for instance Maimonides's syntheses of Jewish teaching with Greco-Arab philosophy, or the poetic achievements of Hebrew poets of the Golden Era like Judah Halevi, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, and Shmuel Hanagid.

Mediterranean civilization is not restricted to a beach with topless bathing beauties. What we call Mediterranean civilization—at the same time as we have doubts about it—has a formidable background of 2,800 years of existence. It is in Greece where two ideal concepts were struck: that of man as the center of all things, of the universe, and that of the ideal of democracy; in Rome, law was established as the foundation of the individual and the state. Both ideals, with their derivatives such as human rights or the welfare state, today embody the maximum aspiration of all the peoples of the world. So it is a case of the triumph of a clearly Mediterranean idea.

The Mediterranean is also the center of the new leisure culture. In this, and in the welfare society, the arts and the works of the imaginative have a place of greater importance than they have ever had before. And here it is not only a matter of the art of Classical Greece or the Renaissance, ancient Egypt or the Romanesque. At the height of the twentieth century much of the most spectacular and popular painting has been created by Mediterranean artists or artists who found their style on taking up residence on the shores of the ancient sea: Picasso, Miro, Dali, De Chirico, Van Gogh, Matisse. The various shores of the Mediterranean contain enormous differences in standards of living, demographic growth rates, access to technologies and audiovisual media, and the outlook of its young people. The southern frontier of the European Union constitutes an almost unitary space, but the southern Mediterranean is splitting up into nations that are not only separated but often in a state of irreconcilable confrontation. And if in the north there are arms control mechanisms and processes of nuclear and conventional disarmament, in the south and the east there are none and the situation is just the opposite.

The Mediterranean Basin is a cradle of the arts but also a wellspring of cultural enmity, border conflicts, and regional jealousy; a crossroads of information and bodies of knowledge open to the world but also an arena of religious wars; a meeting place of cultural canons but also the home of dreams of cultural exclusivity and domination. In short, the Mediterranean Basin has been marked by interesting paradoxes: monotheism versus polytheism, religious fundamentalism versus Hellenism and symbiosis, cultural particularism versus the challenge of geocultural unity, colonialism versus nationalism, democracy versus fascism.

Why do we have to mention the dark side, the "shadow"—to use Albert Memmi's term—that lies over the Mediterranean Sea? (Memmi, 15.8.1988: 85–87). Because it is necessary to try to avoid a tendency to sentimentalism and kitsch and because an effective debate about tolerance and pluralism can be significant only where they do not exist.

It must be possible to mold a new regional culture in which the stress would be on awareness of the role and importance of the "other" as part of the interregional fabric. The Mediterranean Basin is a mosaic of interlocking influences; it has been the most important region of cultural, artistic, and religious cross-fertilization in the world. The consequences of these influences and collaborations are manifest in all its subregions and countries. The Mediterranean as a whole comprises centers of multifaceted contact, trade routes, and markets, in which commercial and cultural dialogue have flourished for thousands of years. In our own days, however, this vital dialogue does not find an appropriate expression. Israel, in spite—or because—of the conflict with it is charged, may provide a laboratory for the meeting of East and West, and may serve the region as an example of coexistence among disparate cultures, diverse traditions, and different communities.

2

Multiculturalism or Dialogue?

A specter is haunting Israel. All the powers of today's Israel have come together in a holy alliance against the last Israelis: settler and post-Zionist, new Mizrahi and neo-Canaanite (from both the left and the right), the old-style ultra-Orthodox, the nouveaux riches, the advocates of sectorialization, the sanctifiers of graves, and the procurers of foreign workers. The country is dividing itself into enclaves as though its living flesh is being cut into. Each one has its own symbolic language, defines its own territory, takes its pound of flesh, and—after that—the deluge. It is as though the Israelis had returned to the state of nature in which, but for the fear of the ruling power, each man would devour his neighbor alive. In the absence of a common ethos—such as Mediterraneanism might perhaps provide—the Israelis have privatized themselves.

Despite their differences of ideological outlook, political persuasion, religion, or ethnic affiliation, there was a common lexicon among the "last Israelis," a terminology on which there could be fierce confrontations, productive tensions, and lively controversies. From the beginnings of Zionism and the moment of rebirth, there were underground currents in Israeli life and the national consciousness. The liberal Revisionists, the national religious, the "Kingdom of Israel" and the "sun of the nations," the development towns and the kibbutzim, pioneers of the hills and the valleys, the blue shirts and the knitted skullcaps—all of them preached their own Israelism and looked in different directions. But they all drew from a common source, and to paraphrase the words of the national poet Haim Nachman Bialik, "Opposites joined at the root."

Underlying the Jewish narrative and the Israeli narrative, there was one question that served as a common tool for positioning the separate identities: where did the Israelis come from, and where are they going? Amid all the polarizations in the Israeli scene, there was a "dialogic center" around this question, an agreed language of symbols, a common memory, a parallelism of texts in a well-stocked bookcase. The dialogue between the past

and the present and between ideological adversaries was itself the lexicon of Israelism. The "last Israelis" spoke to each other, and even if they insulted one another—quite often, it must be said—they understood the words and secrets of the other. The radical religious philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz made a special journey to Kibbutz Merhavia to contend with Meir Yaari, the leader of the left-wing party Mapam. The extreme Revisionist Abba Ahimeir, when dying, wished to have one last debate with Berl Katznelson, the ideological guide of the Labor Movement, who came from the same town, Bobruisk. In the cultural wars and the great ideological debates there were hidden cultural codes: Beitar (the Joseph Trumpeldor Alliance) and Gdud Ha-avoda (the Labor Core) were both named after Joseph Trumpeldor, the charismatic hero whose personality in the 1920s embodied the two principles dominant at that period—settlement and security. The condemnation inherent in the epithet "Canaanites" that the poet Abraham Shlonsky attached to the "Young Hebrews" was understood by all (the Land of Israel was Canaan before the Israelites took it). Israel Eldad, the radical intellectual, on the right, and Yehoshaphat Harkabi, the general and Orientalist, on the left, went as far back as the Bar-Kochba revolt to express their disapproval in the present. The central layer of Israelism was a cultural baggage, a common corpus, and every camp and generation added its layer to it.

The "last Israelis" did not "come out of the sea." They came out of the Zionist ideology that grew out of the Haskalah, which itself resulted from the contact with general history. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Haskalah was the first modern ideology in the history of the Jews. The significance of Jewish history in modern times lay in the new consciousness the Jews had acquired and their desire to create their own history. At the same time, modernity was linked to continuity, to retaining an attachment to the point of departure. A historical change is necessarily bound up with knowledge of the past. In this dialectical process, every new ideology turns to the past to receive its justification, and conversely, every picture of the past is a self-image and a reflection of present desires. That is how an intergenerational dialogue comes about: the needs of the present bring about a rewriting of the past, and this "correspondence" with the past molds the present (Ohana and Wistrich, 2005).

The thinkers of the Haskalah, the founding fathers of the State and the sons who brought it to pass, never ceased to ask themselves how they should relate to their cultural heritage, their special historical role, and their spiritual tradition. These questions gave rise to great controversies, fierce disputes, and vigorous debates. The most interesting and impressive answer was given by the Zionist movement: a modern solution that sought to turn the Jewish people, who for a long time had been in a degenerate and moribund condition, into a modern entity that reformed its way of life and

brought about a national-cultural renewal by modern means. The challenge offered was to reconnect with the old-new homeland while retaining universal values. It was an impressive challenge from every point of view: a true resurrection of flesh and blood combined with the spiritual revival of an ancient culture. This idea, which began to take shape in the Haskalah, was embodied in the Zionist ideology, motivated pioneering settlement, and as a source of strength and inspiration sustained the "last Israelis."

The aims of the "last Israelis" were to reconnect with the civilization of ancient times, to return to the place of origin, to revitalize their intellectual faculties, and to exercise their total sovereignty as Israelis, men and Jews. This was more than simply a material solution to the wretched Jewish condition; a historical dialectic was at work to change the national spirit. Many people stopped speaking their language, left their parents' home, and turned their backs on the landscape of their land of birth to create Israelism in hope of spiritual renewal. It was an active and creative dialogue between the people's past and the formation of a society.

There is increasingly a feeling that this potential was not realized, that the "correspondence" with the cultural heritage of the nation has ceased, that the debate belongs in a museum, that the dialogue is embalmed in some ancient parchment. Great enterprises—national ones as well—come about through tensions between generations, through meetings of cultures. What we are dealing with is not Israeli creativity, its intensiveness, and its impressive scope. What is questioned is the *idea* of Israelism, or, in other words, where do the Israelis stand with regard to their basic declaration of intent? It can of course be claimed, and it is even legitimate, that the starting point and the foundations were false, that a tragic encounter lay ahead with another people that had made their home and lived their life in the abandoned motherland, and this historical fact invalidates the youthful dreams that were dreamed up in Europe. It can be said that our anomalous life gave rise to illusory expectations, and the narrow horizons produced fantasies that were clearly impracticable; and that if the Israelis wish to attain normality they should stop trying to be a vanguard in the service of others or a permanent criterion of universal morality. This is all very well, but one fact is indisputable: we have avoided a reexamination of our declared intent.

The "last Israelis," however, did grapple with the original declaration of intent. There were some who adhered to it like Berl Katznelson; there were some who were critical of a divergence from it like Yeshayahu Leibowitz; there were some who totally rejected it like Yonatan Ratosh, the founder of the Young Hebrews; there were some who reflected on its relationship to the national cultural heritage like the Orthodox cultural critic Baruch Kurzweil. There were some who compared it to manifestations elsewhere

like the historian Jacob L. Talmon; there were some who wanted to break away or open a new page, but no one was indifferent; there was no alienation and no avoidance of the issue. Today, the Israelis are not interested in this declaration of intent. It is too academic; it belongs to other currents of thought. A few people still relate to it in closed seminars, but it is regarded as passé and has no place in the center of the public discourse. The matter no longer burdens the souls of the Israelis.

From the time of the Jewish national revival in the modern era, there was a debate within the broader context of the national ethos about what it is that brings isolated Jewish individuals together to form a people; how Jewish life has been helped or harmed by modern history; the dynamic correlation between the rights of the collective and the time factor; and what connects the Israelis, what connected them in the past, and what can connect them in the future. There were only three years between the two central events the Jewish people passed through in the twentieth century: the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel. This is evidence of an extraordinary vitality in the history of the nations. From the beginning of Zionist settlement to the time of the Holocaust and the founding of the State and afterward, there was a lively debate with a variety of points of view. There were differences of opinion, but nearly all of those involved, in the words of Amos Oz, had "Zionism as a surname." The feeling today is that the vitality of this debate has been lost, that the Israelis have reached an impasse.

The "last Israelis" represented a dual negation: "no" to the identification of Israelism with the State, or the rejection of the tyranny of one viewpoint or the monologue of the "society of the righteous." And "no" to the total dissolution of Israelism, its fragmentation into fortified and alienated ghettos and the loss of the attachment that binds different elements together. The "last Israelis" were not a metaphor for an uncritical embrace of the Palmach, the Sabra, and the kibbutz. Here it is not a matter of nostalgia but of an oppressive feeling of ignorance, emptiness, and alienation from the intellectual sources of a society voluntarily divesting itself of its assets. Something deep, something basic has happened to the Israelis.

The fact that the Jewish people, who were once "the people of the Book," turned out in Israel as a fragmented, mass-consumption society, free to the wind of any popular media, is the surprising thing, and we are required to try to understand it. In Greek mythology the myths constantly altered, new stories about the gods were added, some of the gods changed their roles, and each generation added to the mythological corpus. In classical Greece, mythology and philosophy, the *polis* and democracy, Delphi and Mount Olympus were created, and in Greece today the kiosks sell statuettes to tourists (Leibowitz, 1992). Normalization, however, need not necessarily

mean arteriosclerosis, the end of controversy, or an acceptance of oblivion. The meaning of normalization is not casting off the burden but living with it day to day, without sanctifying the place or glorifying sacrifice but also without shame and without apologies. Normalization is an awareness of the starting point, an alertness to the dynamics of cultural development, and a critical consciousness of both.

The "last Israelis" stood before a number of threats: the closing Israeli mind, Israelism's fragmentation into fringes, the return to a certain kind of Canaanism—an alienation from historical continuity, and crusaderism—an alienation from the geocultural space.

The attenuation of the Israeli spirit has been due first and foremost to the postmodernist intellectual climate that seeks to annul the distinction at the heart of all cultures: the distinction between the actual and the ideal. It is commonly said that we live in a postideological era, but the truth is that our age has been witness to the victory of one ideology: that of the free-market society. The philosophy of the "global village" is revealed as a cover for the ideology of the "American village," which imposes its special values, its heroes, and its order. An Israeli society of this kind, which is distinguished by its imitation and assimilation of the model of its big brother and consequently creates a local virtual reality, loses its "added value," the secret of its vitality.

The postmodernist intellectual climate has various currents, but they all share the contemporary abomination of modernity's challenge to give birth to a man who is independent in his world, a challenge that requires the construction of a metanarrative and the subordination of different narratives to a single model of consciousness and action. Zionism, which came into being at the end of the nineteenth century, had an affinity with two movements: modernity and the Enlightenment. Modernity is the will and capacity of people in the modern age to mold their fate with their own hands. In itself, this chronological manifestation did not imply any values. Some took this path in a spirit of freedom and some in a spirit of servitude, but the value system of the Enlightenment involved a universalization of concepts—reason—and a universalization of values—morality. The same reason and the same morality applied to every member of the human race. Zionism, as a modern national movement, sought to create both independent human beings who were not enslaved to their fate and enlightened people who cultivated an ethos of Jewish solidarity, lofty cultural values, and an exemplary form of society. The difference between modernity and the Enlightenment was the difference between the actual and the ideal. It was the dissonance between exilic Judaism, the historical reality, and Zionism, the political and social ideal; between the Old Yishuv (pre-Zionist Jewish settlement) and the new Israelism; and, in our time, between the

amulets, blessings, and acceptance of fate and an independent, modern, and enlightened approach to the re-creation of the collective identity.

Collective identity is not the sum of a society's secondary identities but the connecting point of a society, the special quality that creates its self-awareness and the factor that distinguishes it from other societies. This state of consciousness is not the result of a chance combination of events, a national mood, or the invention of an elite, but a sort of accumulation of memory and a renewed historical pact.

In the absence of a social contract and solidarity, the Israeli is liable to be a wolf to the Israeli. The kibbutzim privatize in their distress; they feel the pain of parting from a failed utopia on a different, egalitarian model. They experience the humiliating return home of a son who was banished and returns from his banishment bereft of his dreams. The settlers in the occupied territories fortify and expand their villas, lay roads bypassing their neighbors, and armor their vehicles. They have no time or strength of mind to deal with the sicknesses of Israeli society—the unemployment, the poverty—as settlement comes first. They prepare themselves for a rainy day by enclosure in fortified ghettos in a Mediterranean Yugoslavia in which the peninsula of a Jewish continent runs into the peninsula of a Palestinian continent, one island touches another, one enclave abuts another. The nouveaux riches in this fragmented land recruit private police, private schools, and workers from Thailand. The Haredim (ultra-Orthodox) lock their doors and close their shutters against the winds of modernity, the abomination of secularism, and the hatefulness of dialogue, liable to ruin their souls and their way of life. Many immigrants from the former Soviet Union are like arrivals in a strange land, alien to its holidays, anxieties, and memories. Filled with nostalgia, they watch the television stations of Mother Russia; read their own newspapers, of which there are even more than those written in Hebrew; and fear the wall rising up between themselves and their children. *Mizrahim* (Oriental Jews) of the kind found in the Shas party seek to restore the glory of former times by a heder-type education, segregation as in the *mellah* (Arab ghetto), and the politics of the court of a skullcap-wearing guru. Secular Oriental Jews who wrote their theses in American universities turn the "Afro-American narrative" into an ideology of local abuse. The Orientalism of the Shas kind and of the "Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow" is the starting point of everything: tell me your philosophy of history and I'll tell you the ideology you have chosen, and the opposite. The many thousands of foreign workers who build the houses and wash the elderly are the maintenance people of Israel. This is not a passing phenomenon: it would seem that it is already impossible to set back the clock. A large number of them will continue building the country. Will they shut themselves up in ghettos of poverty, filth, and crime?

And as for the Palestinian Israelis, will they prefer the existing situation of a national minority with increasing demands for national and cultural autonomy to emigration to the neighboring state of their people? Despite the promise of equality in the Israeli Proclamation of Independence, it is clear that the Palestinian Israelis cannot attain full national equality when the Israelis define their national entity as a Jewish democratic state.

Shall the Land of the Deer turn into a land of the vulture? The last barricade to be overthrown before the final dissolution is the negative definition of Israelism. Rival brothers in a besieged city join ranks for a short time in the shadow of disaster, under the fear of assassination or in the proximity of death. Only when the Gulf War broke out and the Israelis found themselves in gas masks did they suddenly discover the fellow citizens: ultra-Orthodox people, college professors, kibbutzniks, and Israeli-Arabs, whom they are forced to meet in difficult times when facing a common enemy. When the red lines—the rules of the game of a decent society—disappear, the social fabric unravels and people revert to the state of nature. Israel has the highest income gap among the Western nations. In this state of nature, the political assassins Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir have increasing legitimacy among many Israelis who excuse them on the grounds of their opposition to the Oslo Accords.

The disappearance of a comprehensive conception of Israelism comes at a heavy price. The universal problems of the citizens as a whole become sectorial problems of different segments of Israeli society. The horrors of the Holocaust are the affair of the survivors, unemployment is the affair of the unemployed, poverty concerns only the poor, the Katyusha rockets concern only the people in the Galilee, and the Scud missiles only the people of the south. A social matter like the right of the long-established inhabitants of the neighborhoods of development-towns to ownership of their apartments rented by public bodies is now a sectorial problem. And, most serious of all, the intermittent peace process is solely a problem of the left. It would be desirable if the struggle to remove the grave of Baruch Goldstein (perpetrator of the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre), which commemorates the memory of the murderer of a large number of people, could become the struggle of all Israelis for the soul of the State of Israel.

A lecturer bearing a haversack—a wandering thinker—who went from town to town giving his lecture "Are We Still Israelis?" found it hard to finish speaking in these Israeli enclaves if he did not seek to flatter his audience but adopted a critical attitude, pointing out the discrepancy between the "ideal" they aimed for and the "actual" in which they lived. He could expect a peck of troubles. In Kibbutz Afikim, the kibbutzniks were infuriated when they heard a quotation from Yaakov Hazan, the leader of the leftist party Mapam—"We wanted to rear atheists and we got ignoramuses"—applied to them. In the

settlement of Ofra in the occupied territories, the audience was angry to hear the following story from a visitor. At the height of the great strike in the economy in November 1997, the minister of finance came to the settlement of Atzmona in the Gaza Strip to receive encouragement in his endeavor to end the strike. "They are not striking here!" declared the rabbi of the settlement to the journalists, and with local patriotic pride he directed them to the hothouses with their Thailandi workers. Here is the whole story in a nutshell: yeshiva students, stolen water, Thailandi workers, and a few dollars' profit. In Ashdod, the teachers in a local high school were angry at a lecturer who was critical of the failure to condemn the moral pornography spoken in a school play by a young female pupil who was from the third generation of immigrants from Morocco: "The Nazis took out the hearts of the Ashkenazis, and that is why they treated my parents heartlessly." Parts of the play were shown on television. How had these unfortunate children come to store up such hatred, such anger? Where is the demarcation line in understanding the anger of the other, the other's sense of insult, or the victim's hatred?

Every Israeli has his own scars. Everyone has his heritage. These define the general identity, but this special quality remains an overburdening excess and a marginal derivative. Things have been stood on their head: the Israelis have regressed from a State to a Yishuv, from sovereignty to the various exiles, from ownership to tribalism, from a vision of the future to the stigmas of the past, from citizens guided by universal motives to subjects who cling to their private inheritance. The present fragmentation of the Israeli identity into components alienated from each other, whose self-identity is defined by their difference and their difference from the identity of the other, is partly a consequence of and rebellion against the ideology of the melting pot that sought to create a new society and a new man. Are these militant declarations of the present time a transitional phase, or will they prove to be the permanent hallmark of an Israelism of a different, postmodernist variety—a completely new phase with an unstable coalition of identities? Have we gone from a consortium of dreams to a state of consciousness in which the collective spiritual equilibrium and social balance have been upset?

In what perspective should one perceive the "last Israelis"? There is the perspective of the assimilated, of the Marxists, and of the nationalists; and that of the Canaanites, of the Haredim, and of those who "came out of the sea"; and there are others. If the Israelis of today are pessimistic about the present and skeptical about the future, the "last Israelis" were characterized by an optimistic belief that their life could be molded by their consciousness. The ethos of modernity was their guiding light. The "last Israelis" found themselves between the legacy of the Haskalah and the Zionist enterprise. They lived before the great ideologies disintegrated. To be more

exact, they were the ideological children of their Haskalah progenitors and worked before the advent of the postmodernist relativity of values on the one hand and the fundamentalist sanctification of the place and the text on the other.

To draw a rough parallel with another sphere, one could say that in a metaphorical, not a biological, sense there is a genetic code and a mutation in the sequence of generations. In the present stage of Israelism, it is the mutations that count, and their weight is decisive in relation to the genetic code. The mutations are overwhelming and the code has disappeared. The mutations may have been successful, and perhaps this was the only way to survive, but it is important to realize that it was with the genetic code that the Israelis arrived in this country. It had a value and was not arbitrary or accidental. Who said that Greek mythology was better than *Zorba the Greek*? But it *was* a mythology—a great spiritual treasure—and it came to an end. Analogously, one could say that the Israelis absorbed their genetic code together with their mothers' milk. It was a heritage that was assertive and quarrelsome, hurtful and vulnerable, and potentially disastrous, but people shared it and it kept changing shape. It had taste, color, and distinctiveness and made possible a living dialogue that included protest and revolt. Eldad and Leibowitz agreed to speak together, but they still retained their anger with each other; Ratosh repudiated the genetic code, but he was not indifferent toward it. People transgressed the genetic code and gave their lives for it. It was an intercommunity phenomenon that stretched from Poland to Algeria and an intergenerational enterprise from the Haskalah to the "last Israelis." And now the Israelis have reached a situation of complete obliteration of this heritage, which was swallowed as quickly as fast food. The knowledge of it was unthinkingly lost.

This is how things turned out, and one has to go forward from here. There is no room for regrets or nostalgia and no need for congratulation. There is no point in turning the clock back, and in any case, it cannot be done. The challenge is to stop for a moment and say, "Let's think about it." This was an important and many-sided phenomenon, smoldering and flaring up, and it came to an end and no longer exists. The Israelis lack this "spiritual deposit," but one cannot duplicate genes or set up a "Jurassic Park" of the Israelis. What is left after the funeral oration is to draw up an account.

The linguistically and politically correct thing today is multiculturalism, the meaning of which is a war on universality. The present separatism and segregation are the opposite of taking a direction or being a vanguard that seeks to convince the whole camp of the rightness of its path. In the "last Israelis" dialogues with their rivals there was an attempt to influence the public at large, but today people have renounced the idea of speaking to the whole community, a renunciation due to despair of the present and

ignorance of the past. So what one has is the isolated monologues of those who segregate themselves in their fiefdoms and monasteries and speak the language of their particular sect. Within the framework of this attenuation and fragmentation of the Israeli spirit one hears of two alternative concepts that have to be considered. But is a common linguistic bridge and terminological connection still possible between the people of Gush Emunim and the post-Zionists, for example? Are the readers of *Theory and Criticism*, the unofficial organ of the post-Zionists, and the readers of *Nekuda*, the organ of the settlers in the occupied territories, able or willing to understand each other's ideas?

Here is a passage from Haim Guri's *Notes from the Tavern*:

> His hand etched a weary movement of resignation, as if to say: here we are all sitting together, belonging to the same people, and there is a gulf between us! He ordered another beer for both of us, and said: "Do you remember John Steinbeck's story 'The Moon is Down'? There was a film of it. It took place in Norway during the Second World War. A German officer interrogated a Norwegian mayor whom he had arrested. Do you remember?" "Yes, I remember," I answered. "Finally," Avivi continued, "the German said to the Norwegian: 'The time has come for us to part company.' The mayor replied, 'I know.' The interrogator said, 'I will go to life, and you to death.' The captive answered, 'I know, but only God knows which of the two of us goes to a better place'." "This, as far as I remember, was the dialogue between the two," said Avivi, staring at me with his blue eyes. "That was the end of Socrates' *Apology* in Plato's works," I said, searching among my memories of my far-off days as a student. "Exactly," said Avivi.
>
> After that, he lit a cigarette and was silent for a long time, and then he turned to me and cried out softly: "Two sworn intellectual enemies speak to each other over a chasm of hatred about passages from the works of Plato. They carry on a Socratic dialogue. One perhaps studied in Heidelberg and the other in Oslo—Western culture—and here is a man sitting two meters away from you, your brother; yes, we're all brothers, we're all Jews! He doesn't know much about you and you don't know much about him. Once it was different." (Guri, 1991: 140)

Is the Israeli vernacular so split up that it has lost the capacity to arbitrate, in the most basic sense of the term, that the words have lost their connecting function? Concepts and linguistic coinages that everyone once accepted are now placed in inverted commas and taken out of their historical context: for example, "the conquest of labor," "*avodah ivrit*" (Jewish labor), "the ingathering of the exiles," *haganah* (defense), "making the desert bloom." Words with a religious significance have been made political: *Messianism, sanctification, redemption*. One person compares the children

of the settlers in Hebron to the *Hitlerjugend* and another calls the tunnels of the Western Wall "the foundation of our existence." Instead of the "war of liberation" they say "the war of 1948"; instead of *aliyah*, immigration; instead of settlement, colonialist enterprise. On the one hand, there is the "national home," on the other hand, the "global village"; on the one hand there are "hereditary rights" and on the other hand there is "occupation." It is no longer a single language but a collection of separate items.

Why does post-Zionism make even critical people feel uneasy? The answer lies in a confusion between philosophy and ideology. Philosophy asks questions, raises doubts, encourages investigations, and puts forward critical theories, while ideology provides answers. Post-Zionism has changed from being a critical theory to being an ideology whose concepts dictate both its basic assumptions and its conclusions. As in Marxism where the model was the metanarrative, in post-Zionism the ideology is the methodology. The starting point and conceptual system—colonialism, emigration, exploitation, expulsion—condition discussion and research, oversimplify the complex reality, and disregard the historical context (Michman, 1997: 11–26).

Hebron as an Example

Hebron is depicted in the Gush Emunim ideology as combining the ideal of theocracy and the myth of settlement. Hebron and the nearby Kiryat Arba are the place of residence of several of the political leaders of Gush Emunim, several of the rabbis of Judea and Samaria, and the spokesmen of the radical right and the initiators of settlement in Samaria. Kiryat Arba is also the hotbed of extremism that served as the base of the Jewish underground and is the largest settlement of Gush Emunim, the center of Kahanism and the most religious settlement in the country. At the entrance to the settlement there is a placard, a sort of self-definition: "Kiryat Arba, Zionist political settlement. The more it is oppressed, the more it will multiply and spread forth." The mentality of the settlers of Hebron and Kiryat Arba is a combination of a feeling of siege and victimization, ideological solidarity, politico-religious fundamentalism, and a sense of being the torchbearers of memory (Feige, 2009: 144–170).

Herein lies the paradox. The old Jewish settlement in Hebron was in fact anti-Zionist, and its inhabitants refused to defend themselves or to accept assistance with security. Some Arab inhabitants rescued Jews. The disturbances of 1929 were not perceived in the collective consciousness as an Israeli event but as an exilic experience; the old Hebron yeshiva that after the slaughter moved to Jerusalem did not return to its previous locality. The narrative of 1929 is fixed in the consciousness of the settlers like

the narrative of the Holocaust. In their view, in both events, the Jews went "like sheep to the slaughter," their enemies are the devil incarnate, and one can neither forgive nor compromise with his representatives. In the room in memory of the victims of 1929 in Beit Hadassah in Hebron, among the photographs of shattered gravestones, there is one grave on which a swastika is inscribed, linking up the great Holocaust in Europe with the lesser holocaust in Hebron. The grave has become a permanent historical feature, faith has become an icon, and memory has become political. In the eyes of Gush Emunim, the site of Hebron is the true memory of the Israelis and their mythical goal and the true representation of the essence of Israelism.

The Machpelah cave is an example of the mythologizing of a symbol that turned on its maker. As soon as the symbol ceased to serve as a means of arbitration, it became a source of legitimacy, a mobilizing myth for the end itself. The Machpelah cave is the heart of the cult of memory and the sacred focus of the Gush Emunim ideology. According to Rabbi Yisrael Rosen, "the secret of the city's holiness is connected to the Machpelah cave" and depends on the ancestral tombs: "The cave is the point of connection between heaven and earth" (Rosen, 1963: 11). The cave is the fundamentalist climax of Gush Emunim, for, according to them, Zionism derives its justification from the ancient text that bestows sanctity on the land and the right of eternal possession. The sacred cave is the ultimate source; it connects the Jewish people to its land and its past. The struggle over the Cave of the Patriarchs is the struggle over the rights of their Israeli descendants.

The matter of the Jewish cemetery is a new fetish liable to turn on its maker. The inhabitants of Kiryat Arba saw the Hebron Jewish cemetery as an opportunity to get in touch with the mystical memory. Despite the refusal of the army, a mother, Sarah Nahshon, hid the dead body of her son Abraham in a grave in the Jewish cemetery that she dug with her own hands. She said, "If the Holy One, blessed be He, took from me an infant who was born in Hebron and was circumcised in Hebron, this son will open up the cemetery for us." And indeed, on the gravestone it is written, "Born in Kiryat Arba on the 25th of Adar 1975, he entered into the covenant of our father Abraham, may he rest in peace, at the Machpelah cave and was named after him. He returned his soul to his Maker on the 22nd of Tammuz 1975. He acquired with his body the right of burial in the Old Cemetery in Hebron through the devotion of his mother and of all the holy congregation that revived the Jewish settlement for the first time since our return to the inheritance of our fathers." Here is the whole story of Hebron. The modern myth of Sarah Nahshon and the burial of her son Abraham is linked to the ancient myth of Abraham, who bought a burial site for his wife Sarah, and in the words of the poet Sarah Frenkel, who lives in Hebron, "The infant connects the old and the new, the burial-ground that

existed until most of the tombstones had disappeared, and the Hebron of today in which Jewish life is being renewed and to which the heirs of the slaughtered are returning." A mythologization of the past parallel to that of the present, from the settlement of our father Abraham to the settlement of today, from the burial of Sarah to the burial of the child Abraham Nahshon, from the Messianism of the House of David to the political Messianism of the State of Israel, and from the disturbances of 1929 to the murder of settlers. Whatever was, will be; the mythological pattern is a precedent that returns again and again. The settlers claim that the creation of a new secular Israeli identity is clearly impossible for it is umbilically connected with the imperatives of history and the sanctity of the place.

The neo-Canaanite significance of the Gush Emunim ideology is this: the place is the source, and it is of greater value than the people who live there. The sacred place is the reality that must dictate political action. It is an ahistorical metaphor, a mythological element that overlays history and activates human beings. It is not the settlers who create the myths but the myths that think through the settlers. They are not modern, enlightened people creating their own destiny, but in the words of Eliakim Ha'etzni, a settler ideologue, "Hebron is part of our genetic code. When our genetic needle pointed to Hebron, we received an electric shock" (Ha'etzni, 1984: 10). As with the Greek *moira*, one accepts one's fate as predestination. It is not surprising, if this is the case, that the settlers see the evacuation of Hebron as threatening the end of Zionism. For if that happens, they fear that the actual place will overpower the metaphysical place, history will prevail over myth, and people will rise up and destroy the golem they created with their own hands. On the other hand, many people in Israel hope that their children's fate will not be determined in the city of the Fathers.

Israel Itemizes

The fragmentation of identity is a fragmentation of memory and a fragmentation of language. A society is not a collection of monads without any connection or obligation or attachment to their fellows. If a society's center of gravity and point of anchorage disappears, if memory fades and the language is fragmented and the sources of one's culture are obliterated, then the initial question—"Where have we come from?"—disappears, and with it the final question—"Where are we going?" From the moment a society loses its bearings, it is fated to wander to and fro between an "other" who is an "other" of an "other." In such a state of nature, would Israel be a secular democracy? A Jewish theocracy? An item in the global village? For if, in the words of one of the post-Zionist spokesmen, there must be a "democratization of Israel

which can also be called a post-Zionization: that is to say, a process of diversification of the collective identity and a lowering of the barriers of membership" (Ram, 3.3.1995), who will guarantee that the sectorialized Baruch Goldstein will not achieve the same degree of legitimacy as the sectorialized Yitzhak Rabin—one text next to another, one narrative next to another, as it were?

In the absence of a positive definition of Israelism, an accepted moral code, social solidarity, intellectual roots, and a collective identity, people return to the fragmented state of nature. Why, one may ask, is this fragmentation negative? The answer is that this state of nature or fragmentation is not neutral; the strong become stronger and the weak weaker. Without general criteria, people are no longer perceived as equal in wisdom or humanity but as numbers, quantitative units. This new criterion—power, or numbers or quantities—has at least three characteristics that poison Israeli society. In becoming a society of manpower, the social-democratic achievements of Israel are annulled and many workers are left without rights. In relying on ratings, the factor of quantity is invalidated. Surveys of public opinion have tended to change from being statistical examinations of tendencies to an assertion of the public will. In becoming a much-divided social entity, half the people are left without legitimacy in making general political decisions: the left with regard to peace and the right with regard to war. What is therefore needed is a new Israeli ethos, one that is not based on a negative definition, on solidarity only in wartime or during terrorist attacks, or on the collective memory of religious persecution, exile, and the Holocaust. Can a society that is multicultural, postideological, torn apart, lacking national consensus, divided on basic questions, and captive to a coalition of minorities, have a positive collective identity?

A Time of Dialogue

Here is a proposal for discussion of a new Israeli ethos, which has five basic components: a democratic consciousness, education for peace, a Jewish "added value," a Mediterranean bias, and social solidarity. Israel is not the Weimar Republic: the Israelis defend democracy. Israel is not Sparta: the Israelis educate for peace. Israel is not Greece: the Israelis guard their essential assets. Israel is not Singapore: the Israelis have an opening on the Mediterranean. Israel is not the United States: the Israelis seek social solidarity.

Democratic consciousness. The Israeli democracy has been shown to be stable in the short time it has existed, despite the many wars and the murder of Yitzhak Rabin. But it still lacks a long-standing political tradition, and it is not immune from structural crises because of the political

cleavage in Israel. The slogan of the French Revolution was Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. What the Israeli democracy lacks is a sense of fraternity, a Jewish and Arab civil community that internalizes in a positive manner, energetically and consciously, the democratic rules of the game.

Education for peace. Israel, like Sparta, does not have to educate its citizens to be forever on a war footing, in a state of perpetual conflict with its neighbors. Among many Israelis, the prevalent feeling is that expressed by Moshe Dayan in his famous lament at the funeral of the soldier Roi Rotenberg: "the sword shall devour forever." A healthy society raises its children and youth on the values of peace, conciliation, and compromise between nations.

Jewish added value. Whether in a "Jewish State" or "a State of all its citizens," the Israelis have to preserve Jewish cultural continuity through a knowledge of Jewish, Israeli, and universal literature. The Israelis have to be connected with their intellectual sources and their Jewish cultural productions and disseminate them with an openness to their various interpretations. There must be one State in the world—where the Jews are not a national minority—that will preserve that added value that is Jewish.

A Mediterranean bias. Israel is situated in the eastern Mediterranean. In the historical and cultural space of the Mediterranean Basin, Eastern culture and Western culture, universalism and democracy were created, and it is the meeting point of three continents, three religions, and ancient and modern civilizations. The Israelis have to develop a spacial identity with a bias toward both the culture of their neighbors and the culture of the West. An intensification of the discourse with the Mediterranean space would be conducive to compromise, conciliation, and dialogue.

Social solidarity. A small society that is a kind of extended family cannot permit the existence of great social and economic gaps among its members. Israel must not aspire to be another capitalist enclave in the American village. *Social justice* is not a rude term. On the contrary, it is a central value that makes the members of that society into enlightened people.

This is a proposal for the agenda of a public discourse, not another ethos put forward by an elite. The era of giants and of mobilizing myths disseminated from above has ended. There now begins a conversation between the new Israelis, within and between the social groups—a direct conversation. It is the time of dialogue.

Part II

Region

3

Mediterranean Humanism

Albert Camus, Albert Memmi, Tahar Ben-Jelloun, Jorge Semprún, Najib Mahfouz, Edmond Jabès, and S. Yishar—these are the names of a few of the figures who exemplify the idea of "Mediterranean humanism." These writers are at one and the same time exemplars and moral and intellectual seismographs of the Mediterranean humanist current. Coming from various countries, having different political viewpoints, and working mainly in the creative realm, they are also distinguished as social critics—to use the term employed by Michael Walzer (Walzer, 1987)—within the Mediterranean geocultural space. What they have in common is their opposition to every kind of violence, integral nationalism, dictatorship, and ideological radicalism; their antiracism stemming from their tolerant attitude to the "other" and their acceptance of the foreign and the different; their multicultural outlook that foreshadows the postmodernist discourse; and their affirmation of dialogue as a form of human activity. Although they have never claimed to constitute an intellectual or aesthetic school of thought, I hope to show in this chapter that these shared qualities make them representative of a common idea—the Mediterranean humanist idea.

These Mediterranean humanist writers internalized the warm, unmediated contact of dialogue between peoples and cultures. They did not dream of a "new man" but considered the problems of actual men in Mediterranean societies. Camus, Memmi, Ben-Jelloun, Semprún, and Jabès (Mahfouz being the exception)—each one in his intellectual biography represented a kind of migration that was not tragic but served as a kind of bridge within his own personality. This position gave these writers a creative viewpoint, a critical perspective, and moral criteria—a "sense of measure" as Camus called it—with which to oppose the illusions of many Europeans concerning the birth of a "new man" within a radical ideology and an all-justifying violence (Ohana, 1996: 87–104).

The Promethean urge of the European Enlightenment sought to create a new humanity, to give birth to a Western man who would be his own

master and enthrone omniscient reason whereby he could rule over nature and mold the world as he pleased. This Promethean urge inspired the political ideologies of the nineteenth century and prepared the way for the regimes that arose in their wake in the twentieth. The modern aspiration to a different humanity was part of the political culture of radical intellectuals in Europe, from the "new man" as the supreme project of the Enlightenment (Jean-Jacques Rousseau) to the Nietzschean *Übermensch* or the pretension of artists and various circles in the age of technology of creating a "man-machine." The representatives of the Mediterranean humanist idea rebelled against this radical European intellectual tradition.

The Inspiration

Albert Camus's (1913–60) description of the diminished position of modern man forestalled Michel Foucault's analysis. According to him, the European Enlightenment, a liberating concept, ensnared modern man in a prison of his own making so that man was both a victim and an executioner (Isaac, 1992). From the Renaissance and the humanism of the early modern period to the nationalisms and political ideologies of the nineteenth century and the dictatorial regimes of the twentieth, the unfettered will affirmed the creation of political churches complete with priests, dogmas, rites of passage, and the hope of redemption. All these different churches—such as the nation-state, the dictatorship of the proletariat and modern technology—reflected the same phenomenon: man overpowering himself. The awareness of this self-enslavement appeared only with post-Kantian thought: modern man with his liberated consciousness discovered that he was enslaved to a reality that he himself had created.

Camus believed that the human experience of the twentieth century was to be found in the fluctuations of modernism from the desire for freedom to the will to power, from Promethean humanism to Prometheus unbound. Modernity, which placed at its center hubris and self-deification, was a self-destructive action. Modern man put himself, from the time of humanism onward, at the center of creation, as the lord of creation and the creator himself. From the time when he murdered his god and the king, his representative on earth, man shook off his metaphorical chains. Like Nietzsche, Camus saw the condition of modernity as one of homelessness and alienation: men who have rejected God are liable to seek, in a dangerous and paradoxical manner, the certainty that only God can provide. Prometheus's betrayal was the act of crowning himself Caesar; in this he changed from being man's friend to becoming the enemy of mankind (Camus, 1965: 839–44).

Camus was a writer, journalist, and intellectual who wrote and spoke out of the eye of the storm. He was the kind of intellectual whose biography is the supreme test of the authenticity of his work. In his life he realized in practice what he advocated in his thought and writings, as in his systematic and consistent opposition to totalitarian ideologies and violence in both his articles and his political activities (Todd and Camus, 1996). Apart from being a writer and thinker, essayist and playwright, stage manager and actor, Camus was also the lyrical prosaist of the Mediterranean. On the February 8, 1937, in the "Maison de la Culture" in Algiers, Camus gave a lecture on "La Nouvelle Culture Méditerranéenne" (The New Mediterranean Culture) in which he formulated his humanistic vision for the first time. Camus sought to stress the humanism in the intellectual climate of the Mediterranean Basin against the pessimism that was also part of the Mediterranean tradition, although he also drew attention to the conflicts and nationalism in that region. Which of the two dreams, he asked—the pessimistic or the humanistic—would take on flesh and sinews? "But the criterion is no longer Christian; it is no longer papal Rome or the Holy Roman Empire. The criterion is man [. . .]. We reject the principle of a Mediterranean nationalism" (Camus, 1945: 1321–22).

For the young Camus, Mediterraneanism was opposition to a Europe that placed its confidence in history rather than in nature. The continent of ideologies and abstractions alienated itself from the here and now. But he, for his part, saw much significance in stone and in sand dunes and the sunlight. Our realm, he thought, is this world, and there is no meaning beyond existence. There is only existence, and that alone is significant. The essence is denied; the essence is that which is. Mediterraneanism embodies the challenge of concretizing experience, of fostering that which is—the desire for a closer contact between man and his world (Ohana, 1998: 21–29). Unlike Kafka, Kierkegaard, and Sartre, Camus instinctively felt that although the world can appear alien and hostile, we have to live in it since it is our only home.

In the summer of 1938, Camus and some friends published the first issue of the journal *Rivages*. Its subtitle described it as a *Revue de Culture Méditerranéenne* (Review of Mediterranean Culture). Young French and Algerians, writers from Morocco and Tunisia, authors, artists, and cultural critics sought through the magazine to provide a glimpse of the Mediterranean spirit, and together they drew up a cultural manifesto that Camus formulated: "At a time when a taste for doctrines seeks to separate us from the world, it is not a bad thing if a few young men in a young country proclaim their attachment to the few perishable and essential possessions which give meaning to our lives: the sea, the sun and women in the light" (Camus, 1945: 1329–31).

In his essay "L'Exile d'Helène" (Helen's Exile) (1948), the young Camus argued that Europe had abandoned the Greek heritage of beauty (Camus, 1945: 851–57). He claimed that we have banished beauty. Greek thought, he said, never went to extremes: it did not reject either the sacred or the rational. It took everything into account and balanced light and darkness. As against this, Europe sought the absolute. It envisaged only one thing: the future reign of reason.

The mature Camus wrote about the young Camus in *Le premier homme* (The First Man). Was Camus hinting in this novella that the myth of the Mediterranean—that it was a sphere of pluralism and dialogue—was fissured when Europe's frigid ideas such as nationalism infiltrated and polluted its southern shores? Even his father, who lived on the shores of the Mediterranean, had to return to the soil of Europe, fight its wars, and die there on the altar of nationalism in 1914. Was Algeria, the arena of the "dirty war," a burst bubble of the Mediterranean myth? (Charbit 1998: 157–84).

The son, Albert Camus himself, was once again conscripted on behalf of history and took time off from nature. He was among those who fought against Nazism in the French underground. In the fourth letter in his *Lettres à un ami allemand* (Letters to a German Friend), Camus relates that although he and his German friend were both of the opinion that "this world has no final significance," each of them drew different conclusions from this premise (Camus, 1945: 1468–91). The German believed in the only good he knew: love of his country. "To tell you the truth," said Camus, "I, who believed I thought the same as you did, cannot find any argument with which to answer you except for an intense love of justice." But this "justice," identified with Arab nationalism among those who demanded independence for Algeria, was to be found on the side of the Algerian War of Independence against his mother. Camus did not succeed in freeing himself from nationalism, the accursed fruit of Europe.

Camus fought against both the brown and red forms of totalitarianism. In his works and also as a member of the staff of the newspaper *Combat*, he exposed the face of totalitarianism at a time when many French intellectuals and writers collaborated with the Nazi conquerors or carried on their lives as usual under the Vichy regime. But the test of the consistency of his struggle against totalitarian violence was his war against its leftist face, Stalinism. Camus was the first French intellectual to oppose both Nazism and Stalinism, and the one who did so most consistently (Lottman, 1979).

In the years before 1944, the young Camus made the "leap" that he condemned in the cases of others like Kierkegaard, Shestov, and Jaspers, who moved from a nihilistic position to one of commitment. He leaped from the absurd to a moral imperative, starting from the position that there was no correlation between the disharmony of the world and the harmony of

morality. He now had to formulate a value system, a Promethean philosophy. Camus consistently claimed that the absurd was merely a stage in his development, a Nietzschean phase, a stage that he had to pass through. In 1944 he wrote, "Not everything can be summed up by rejection and absurdity. But we have to pass through rejection and absurdity first because we found them on our path and because our generation has to confront them." In his criticism of Sartre's *Le Mur* (The Wall) in 1939, he said, "Describing the absurdity in life is not an end in itself but only a beginning." The challenge was to lay the foundations of a Promethean humanity at a time when the forces of morality and truth were weakened (Duff and Marshall, 1982: 116–36).

Camus's Promethean humanism was expressed in his war against the religious and political churches that appealed to eternity and in his desire to return from nature to history, from the world to man, from pantheistic passivity to collective responsibility, from aesthetics to ethics, and from nihilism to humanism. In the four letters to a German friend written at the turning point of the Second World War, between July 1943 and July 1944, one finds the self-confidence of someone about to win, and ideas of the justice and inevitable victory of humanism. This was also a turning point in the development of Camus's thought from the Nietzschean philosophy reflected in his works at the beginning of his career to an unequivocally humanistic position (Judt, 1998). The key to his leap from the man of the "absurd" to the rebellious man is to be found in his *Letters to a German Friend*, the seed of his future concept of an "ethics of limits" and a summary of his Promethean humanism.

While the young Camus was preoccupied with the human fate in a world without meaning or values, after 1945 the writer was concerned with the practical results of actions on behalf of humanity and not with the nihilistic consequences of the absurd. The common factor in the two phases of Camus's thought was this: he never accepted any principle that was not based on a human criterion. He always fought against values external to man, rejected values deriving from a comprehensive system, and denied philosophies of history or self-evident eternal truths. He always remained true to a philosophy of balance in which he found protection against the world of abstraction. Camus called this philosophical outlook "Mediterraneanism." In all his life and work he was a humanist whose values were inspired by conditions of repression and injustice, and they were formed as a protest against them (Camus, 1945: 1314–31).

The idolization of man characteristic of the European Enlightenment reached its climax, in Camus's opinion, in the writings of Hegel and Marx. The Hegelian-Marxist tradition combined historicism with an uncritical belief in abstract reason. While their predecessors, from Hobbes to Kant, had an unhistorical approach to man, Hegel and Marx had a progressive

view of humanity, which perfected itself in the course of time. Hegel thought that all human actions were subject to explanation, to rationalization in terms of progress. But Camus claimed that there was no final state of human nature, that man was an uncompleted creation, that he was not a finished product but an experiment (Camus, 1945: 1609–1716). The experiment was that of bestowing significance: "I am sure that something in this world has a significance, and that is man, because he is the only creature that seeks to have a significance" (Camus, 1945: fourth letter).

Prometheus's betrayal lay in his perversion of the ideas of the Enlightenment, in his tragic idolization of modern man. Camus saw the thought of absolute ideologies as a form of human self-annihilation, negating the past for the sake of an uncertain future. In an intellectual milieu that obsessively sought revolutionary absolutes, Camus developed an ethic of limits, a political morality of rebellion.

Albert Memmi

In 1955 Camus wrote a preface to the second edition of *La statue de sel* (The Pillar of Salt), a work by the Tunisian-French Jewish writer Albert Memmi. Camus made a good diagnosis of the problem of identity in the life and work of Memmi, describing him as "a French writer from Tunisia who is neither French nor Tunisian. He is hardly Jewish since, in a sense, he did not want to be [. . .]. However, Vichy France delivered him up to the Germans, and Free France, when he wanted to fight for her, asked him to change his Jewish-sounding name" (Camus, 1966: 11–12). Could Camus have been speaking about himself? His father was French, his mother Spanish, his wife Jewish, and he himself a French citizen in Algeria and later an Algerian-French writer in France. Camus wrote the following about Memmi and perhaps also about himself: "All of us, French and natives of North Africa, remain what we are, struggling with the contradictions which today steep our cities in blood, and which we will not overcome by running away but by living them out to the end" (Ibid.).

Sartre, in his introduction to Memmi's *Portrait de colonisateur* (Portrait of a Coloniser), reflected on the dual identity of the author of the book. Was he ruler or ruled? The Muslim children saw him as a collaborator with the French rulers, but he was not accepted by the French rulers either. With regard to his identity, he was between the devil and the deep blue sea. At the same time, said Sartre, Memmi was an authentic, trustworthy spokesman for his situation, since "only the southerner is competent to speak of slavery, because he knows the negro; the people of the north, abstract puritans, know only man, who is an entity" (Sartre, Preface 1957).

The Mediterranean humanist writers refuse to reduce man to a single unidimensional model, and if he objects, they "compel him to be free," to use Jean-Jacques Rousseau's remarkable expression. Sartre, like Camus, points to the immanent contradictions in Memmi. Memmi, in Sartre's opinion, understands the contradiction of the human situation: "Because he has felt it first of all as his own contradiction. He explains very well in his book that these rendings of the soul, pure interiorisations of social conflicts, do not dispose one to action. But someone who suffers from them, if he has self-awareness, if he is conscious of his complicities, temptations and exilic condition, is able to enlighten others in speaking of himself" (Ibid.).

At the time of the Nazi conquest, when the Jews of Tunisia were saved at the last minute from being sent to the death camps, Memmi together with other Jews was taken to a labor camp. In the chapter "The Camp" in *La statue de sel* (1953), he described his stay in the camp and his escape from it. At the end of the war, he took a degree in philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. His marriage to a non-Jewish woman served as the basis for his book *Agar* (1955). The transition from the culture of the Maghreb to Western culture and his marriage to a Catholic were experiences that formed his works and caused him all his life to be concerned with problems of identity (Ohana, 2002). Memmi continued to write about the problematic dual identities of immigrants, Jews, and other uprooted persons (Yetiv, 1972: 145–201). *Le Scorpion* (The Scorpion) (1969) is an allegory of his own dual identity; *Le Désert* (The Desert) (1977) describes a medieval prince who loses his kingdom and tries to return to it; *Le Pharaon* (The Pharaoh) (1988) is a novel about a character who resembles that of the hero of *Le statue de sel*, a writer, an immigrant to France from Tunisia who looks back on his former homeland with nostalgia.

Memmi's essay *Le Racisme* (Racism) (1982) marks the turning point in his work between the two approaches he developed: "domination" and "dependence." In his early essays—*Portrait du colonisé* and *Portrait de colonisateur* (Portrait of the Colonized and Portrait of a Colonizer) (1956), *Portrait d'un juif* (Portrait of a Jew) (1962), *Libération d'un juif* (Liberation of a Jew) (1966), and *L'Homme dominé* (The Dominated Man) (1968)—Memmi constructed a theory in which men were classified as either dominating or dominated. Wielders of power enslave others, whether they are conquered, black, Jews, women, or servants. This sociological concept preceded by two decades the postmodernist discourse on the "other." At the beginning of the 1980s, Memmi reached a turning point. A personal experience—a long stay in a hospital—caused him to abandon his previous emphasis on the subject of dominators and dominated, and he began to be concerned with the subject of human dependence. The pair of concepts *domination-sujéstion* (domination–state of subjugation) was set aside in

exchange for the pair *dépendance-pourvoyance* (dependence-provision). According to this view, dependence is not necessarily a negative phenomenon: in order to provide for our needs we are dependent on someone else. Dependence plays a central role in our lives, and unlike domination it provides for both the giver and the receiver. In his preface to *La Dépendance* (Dependence) (1979), Fernand Braudel wrote, "Dependence is not limited to the individual; it penetrates the density of the present time. It questions the whole of society, and finally the existence of all men.

Finally, am I under a spell or am I party to the simple fact of having accepted such a direct form of interrogation? *La Dépendance* renews music and the reading of human sciences as if it gave us other ears, other eyes, another intelligence" (Braudel, 1979).

Albert Memmi relates to the Mediterranean sun—hinting, of course, at the metaphor associated with Albert Camus—but in an unexpected manner (Memmi, 1998: 86–87). He warns against the shadow that it casts. The emigration, uprooting, colonialism, and wars so characteristic of that geopolitical space also sow seeds of racial trouble. Memmi thinks that the struggle against racism goes together with the struggle against oppression: rejecting racism means opting for a certain concept of humanity. Mankind can only unite on the basis of an equality between all peoples and between all the people within it: this is usually called "universalism." Universalism, according to Memmi, is "true mutuality," a rejection of particular criteria and the acceptance of a single principle: man as man. The abstract European Enlightenment sought to create a "new man" in its rationalistic image—something out of nothing. Its tool was ideology. But Mediterranean humanism is concerned with the real man and not with the abstract man, with experience and not with ideology, with the struggle against racism and not with hegemony.

Heteropovie, the central concept in *Le Racisme*, means oppressing the stranger because of some difference; racism is a specific kind of *heteropovie* (Memmi, 1982; Ohana 1998: 29–38). Racism, according to Memmi, is ascribing a value to real or apparent differences, to the advantage of the person who does so and to the disadvantage of his victim. This is done with the aim of justifying some kind of aggression or privileges. Racists are people who attach supreme importance to certain biological characteristics. However, if it is true that, as Memmi says, "as soon as a racist is asked, he immediately denies being one and is shocked (What, him a racist? Never!)," how does one explain the recrudescence of racist individuals and movements springing up recently like mushrooms after rain? (D'souza, 1995).

Tahar Ben-Jelloun

To this question, the French-Moroccan writer Tahar Ben-Jelloun, author of the book *Le Racisme comme je l'ai expliqué à ma fille* (Racism as I Explained It to My Daughter) (1998), answered, "Those who frighten me are not the nuisances who go to and fro in public places. Those who frighten me are not the drunks, the homeless, the sick. Those who frighten me are those who meet in spacious offices, drink coffee and discuss the most effective ways of exterminating another people. This happened in Germany: this is happening in Serbia and Uganda, and it can also happen in other places. We have to be on our guard against these people, for racism leads us to them. Racism is not coca-cola, it is not a form of diet" (Haaretz, 21.1.1999). In the book, Ben-Jelloun has a heart-to-heart talk with his daughter about aspects of the phenomenon that preoccupy him: genetical and sociological differences, foreignness and the sense of superiority, slavery, ghettoes, extermination, fascism, genocide, insults, ostracism, and rejection. The success of the book was due in his opinion to the fact that "the tremendous thirst for the simple answers found in this tiny book of reflections reflects parents' great fear about what is going to happen to their children."

The phenomenon of the rapid spread of racism is explained in the book against the background of the waves of immigration that have taken place in recent years from the Mediterranean Basin to Europe: in the east, the immigration of Turks to Germany and Austria; in the west, that of Spanish and Portuguese to Western Europe; and in the south, that of North Africans to France. In relating to this phenomenon, Ben-Jelloun, on the basis of his personal feelings of anger, arrives at a general explanation:

> There is no point in being angry at the racist himself, who is generally only expressing his own distress. I must judge the milieu—in my case, France. The Minister of the Interior here has raised the idea of arresting all the illegal immigrants and sending them to detention camps. We are not far from discussing transfer. One should remember that illegal immigrants, and especially the Arab immigrants, are the great cause of the extreme right and similar racist movements. This is not the way to treat this delicate subject. This is not the first time that France has not known how to relate to the Arabs. France has completely messed up the immigration from the countries of the Maghreb. It should be pointed out that it has not failed with other immigrants—those who came from Spain or Portugal or Italy. But with the Arabs there has been a colossal failure here because of a lack of thought, ignorance, a total lack of inspiration. It starts with an extraordinary lack of knowledge concerning the existing reality and continues

> with the strange French tendency not to take their history seriously. They say that mistakes were made in their absorption but that now a new page has been turned. Excuse me, but what about those who live on the previous page? (Haaretz, Ibid.)

Le Racisme comme je l'ai expliqué à ma fille is a simple, unmediated dialogue between a father and his daughter—a wise, instructive pedagogical work. Born in Fez, Morocco, in 1944, Ben-Jelloun immigrated to France at the age of 27 and since then has written novels, short stories, poems, and essays in French. He became famous with the publication of his book *L'Enfant de sable* (The Child of Sand), which was about a girl who was forced to be a boy, a story of dual identity, perhaps a metaphor for the complex identity—not only sexual—of the people of the Maghreb and perhaps of the author himself. In *La Nuit sacrée* (The Sacred Night), which won the Prix Goncourt in 1987, Ben-Jelloun returned to this model with the woman Zahara, who confesses, "I was a little girl whose identity was confused and uncertain. I was a little girl whose sex was hidden, for that was the wish of my father who thought he was inferior, humiliated because he did not have a son" (Ben-Jelloun, 1987). Ben-Jelloun is not only a writer but also an intellectual involved in bringing light into the darkness: in his former home, Morocco, by opposing old, entrenched ideas; in his new home, France, by fighting a growing racism.

The dialectics of racism work in two directions. On the one hand, as Ben-Jelloun says, "It is a fact that racism can conquer a state via the ballot-box—that is to say, through a supremely humanistic method." But on the other hand, antiracism sometimes becomes a new and sophisticated form of racism. The "slave rebellion" of the Third World "exposed" the West, revealing it as representing all the diseases of the human race. Franz Fanon, a doctor and intellectual who made his studies in France, sought in his book *Les Damnés de la terre* (The Damned of the Earth), which appeared at the end of the colonialist period and the Algerian War, to strip the mask from racist colonialism, and he developed a strategy of counterviolence and a philosophy of blind, unrelenting hatred (Fanon, 1961). The person who makes use of this kind of hatred in our time is Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the American Black Muslim group, the Nation of Islam. The Million Man March he organized in Washington was a call for racial separatism and the climax of a campaign of indictment of the "white race."

The events of the Holocaust and the dangers of racism in the second half of the twentieth century have given rise to skeptical and relativistic cultural modes of thought. Multiculturalism is today the paradigm of liberal antiracism. For the adherents of multiculturalism, Afro-Americans,

women, and homosexuals are the collective victims of a bigotry and intolerance based on race, gender, and homophobia. These groups therefore call for a struggle against racism, sexism, and sexual bigotry.

Jorge Semprún

Since Plato's parable of the cave, in which no light was visible but only shadows—says Jorge Semprún, a Spanish author, dramatist, and intellectual living in France—the quality of lucidity has been bound up with vision and perspective, or in other words with light. It is not surprising if Prometheus, who stole light from the gods and thus rejected a reality of transcendental values beyond man, has become a metaphor for an enlightened outlook. Semprún, who sees the human eye as a primary tool for investigating the world of knowledge, quotes Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "Men are dazzled by the evidence of facts as bats are dazzled by the light of day" (Semprún, 1989).

Semprún compares this Aristotelian metaphor to a Talmudic legend: a cockerel and a bat were waiting for the light of day. The cockerel said to the bat, "I am waiting for the light because for me light is something familiar, but why do you desire the light?" Semprún, who associates understanding with light, quotes Emmanuel Levinas's commentary on this passage: "The lark welcomes the sun, and anyone can do that. But to discern the dawn in the darkness of night, to catch the light before it is truly visible—is this not the very meaning of understanding?" (Levinas, 1968).

Semprún sees the Jewish intellectuals as those who illumine the path of enlightenment in the night that has engulfed Europe: "It would seem as if, between one gas-war and the next, the European Jewish intellectuals have been given the task of preserving lucidity and saving the critical attribute of reason [. . .] a lucidity which was now finally freed from illusions, a lucidity which had been wounded by the rays of a sun which dazzled with illusions of an absolute truth whose time had passed." Was Semprún alluding, in the words of René Char's poem, "Lucidity is the wound nearest the sun," to another Mediterranean writer, Algerian in origin, who described a certain Meursault arbitrarily murdering an Arab on the coast of Algiers because of the dazzling rays of the sun and refusing to cooperate with the judge who tries to find a meaning in this arbitrariness? If so, the metaphor of the sun is two-sided: it represents the absurdity of the arbitrary and the enlightenment of lucidity. Semprún chose the latter option.

Semprún's intellectual and political biography reveals a humanistic pattern (Semprún, 1993). He fought in the French Resistance and was a survivor of Buchenwald who, from that time onward, documented the horror

that took place in Europe but also preached its unification. He opposed the fascism that had seized control of his country, Spain; defended dissidents, freedom fighters, and citizens everywhere; protested in his scripts against the Slansky trials in Prague and the colonels' regime in Greece; and warned against the intellectual justification of terror wherever it appeared, from the Russian Nitchaev to the Leninists in France (Semprún, 1994). In the cemetery at Portbou overlooking the Mediterranean, a hundred years after the birth of Walter Benjamin and fifty years after the end of the Second World War that cut short his life, Semprún, now Spanish Minister of Culture, lay the cornerstone of Dani Karavan's sculpture in honor of the Jewish philosopher trapped in the Pyrenees (Karavan, 1997).

Indeed, anyone, like the lark, can welcome the sun; and anyone can look backward at human history like Hegel, who compares the philosophy of history to the owl of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology, which appears only with the onset of night, at the end of the historical process. However, Semprún is neither a lark nor an owl but represents the enlightened intellectual "who discerns the dawn in the darkness of night, who catches the light before it is truly visible."

Semprún recalled the line from René Char's poem for a second time in *Laudatio*, an encomium delivered in 1991 in honor of György Konrád, a Hungarian-Jewish writer and freedom fighter in communist Hungary. Semprún described certain anonymous people—writers, sociologists, film producers—who knocked at the door of his home in Paris: "the expression of these anonymous people . . . can be seen as a flash of the lucidity described so wonderfully in René Char's metaphor. Lucidity wounded by the missionary sun of violence" (Semprún, 1991).

Semprún, inspired in his speech by Konrád's article, "Violence Is Premature Haste," said the following: "The writer has only one duty: not to provide ideological services in any way or to anyone whatsoever. We should only be concerned with the formulation of the truth that is within us." Politics is not the main thing for Semprún; it is not a point of departure and certainly not a destination. It is subordinate, in his words, "to our rules of the game, to our moral initiative, and, in that sense, to the anti-political." These "rules of the game" that derived from a profound humanism are what caused Semprún in 1942 to join the Spanish communist party, whose main purpose was to oppose fascism; they were also responsible for his criticism of the party and finally for his leaving it in 1964. Semprún declared that an intellectual cannot take refuge in a tub like Diogenes; he cannot shut himself up in an ivory tower or, as he put it, in an "ivory-plated prison."

Najib Mahfouz

Najib Mahfouz (1911–2006) is not the kind of writer to take refuge in a tub. Widely accepted as the major writer of twentieth-century Egypt, and a Nobel Prize winner, he already in 1959 aroused the ire of the Egyptian authorities when he published the first chapters of his book, *The Children of Gabalawi* in *Al-Ahram*; it raised a storm among the Egyptian fundamentalists, who finally succeeded in preventing its appearance in Egypt (Mahfouz, 1959). The book is a secular version of the Book of Genesis set in the alleyways of Cairo. This existentialist allegory, essentially a variation on the theme of "the death of God," made the blood of the religious leaders boil. In the opinion of Sasson Somekh, the interpreter of Mahfouz, this is a sad allegorical parable of the bitter situation of human society when the few determine the fate of the many (Somekh, 1973). In such a situation, every dream is liable to evaporate, and every revolution, however justified, will turn to dust and sooner or later adopt the ways of the former rulers. It may be that Mahfouz, a liberal to the depths of his soul, wished to warn the leaders of the new regime, especially Nasser, against dictatorship, signs of which had appeared on the horizon. Mahfouz as a storyteller, explains Haim Gordon, "can get away with portraying the cruelty of government officials, with presenting the fanatic stupidity of members of the religious establishment, with describing the callousness of bureaucrats, with depicting the brutality of leaders of the regime. Thus, Mahfouz guards his integrity" (Gordon, 1990: 21–41).

Mahfouz's integrity is reflected not only in his books but also in his involvement in public affairs. In addition to his criticism of Nasser's authoritarian regime, Mahfouz attacked Anwar Sadat's economic policy in the 1970s, the "open door" policy that, as Menahem Milson pointed out, gave rise to *nouveau riches* and widened the economic gap between those close to the establishment and the urban population as a whole (Milson, 1998: 129–58). He also took a stand in the affair of Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses*, and scornfully rejected the death sentence pronounced on the author by Khomeini (Gordon, Ibid.).

With his trilogy *A House in Cairo* (1956–57), Mahfouz took his place as the leading writer in Egypt. At first he wrote of Pharaonic Egypt in an attempt to embrace the totality of history, but in the 1940s and 1950s he turned his attention to writing about the new and poor Cairo, the city where he was born. An allegory about the prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muhammed was situated in modern Cairo. The historical novel made way for social realism. The trilogy described the development of the new Egypt and its lively metropolis between the two World Wars. The book focused on the history of a single family in the course of several generations; the story of

the petty merchant Ahmed and his family; and the growth and development of modern Egypt from the first king, Fuad, to the revolution of Sa'id Zaglul, the Egyptian national leader. What is special about Mahfouz is his description of the banality of daily existence that posed the question of why the Egyptians chose to submit to their fate, and his attempt to answer it through a candid depiction of the broad context of moral, religious, and ethnic factors and the socioeconomic conditions peculiar to Egypt.

Mahfouz raised another storm with the appearance of his book, *Najib Mahfouz: Pages From His Memoirs and New Light on His Life and Works* (1998). In this work, the phases in the life of this 88-year-old nonconformist are presented to the reader together with an exposition of his general outlook and his opinion on the various regimes in Egypt. His relationship to Nasser was complex, combining sympathy with his social reforms with contempt for his dictatorship and his imperialistic foreign policies. As a writer he suffered from censorship. Mohammed Hassanein Heikhal, the editor of *Al-Ahram* in the time of Nasser, rejected Mahfouz's articles describing the torture inflicted on the opponents of the regime. Mahfouz relates,

> One of the stories I wrote at that period [the beginning of the 1960s] was a short story called "Fear" (1965), set in a social environment dominated by hoodlums. An officer arrived who succeeded in suppressing the hoodlums; he then took off his uniform and put on civilian clothes and sat down with the hoodlums in a café and shared their lives, and he ended by getting the girl they all wanted. It was not difficult for the readers to understand that the story represented a criticism of the dictatorial methods of the Nasserian revolution. The hoodlums symbolized the political forces and parties which struggled for power before the revolution, and the officer who overcame them and got the girl was Abdul El-Nasser himself [. . .]. After the story was published in *Al-Ahram*, I heard that it struck the directors of the newspaper with terror, and it also put me in a dreadful state of fear. As I walked in the street, officers would block my path and ask me what the story meant, and who the real character was who was hinted at by the officer. (Haaretz, 5.8.1998)

Thirty-two years before this declaration by Mahfouz, the critic Mattityahu Peled described "Fear" as an allegorical comment on the relationship between the regime and the people in Egypt (Peled, 1966: 310–18; Peled, 1983).

Edmond Jabès

The Jewish writer Edmond Jabès (1912–92) was also born in Egypt into a family distinguished for its connections with Egyptian Jewry and with other Jewish communities in the Mediterranean Basin (Landau, 1969; Shamir,

1977; Kramer, 1989). As traditional Jews and Egyptian subjects possessing Italian citizenship, who aspired to French culture, the members of the Jabès family had a cosmopolitan Mediterranean outlook. France, a missionary of its culture in the Mediterranean Basin as well as in other places, set up schools in Egypt via the *Alliance*. The Jewish community in Egypt at its peak numbered about eighty thousand souls, and these included Alain-Yehoshua Feinbert, the adviser to Zaglul, the founder of modern Egypt. The Jewish youth were enlisted into the activities of the Egyptian revolutionary movement. Intellectuals, journalists, theater people, and more than seventy Jewish writers made the Egyptian Jewish community one of the liveliest in the Mediterranean Basin. But in the 1930s the winds of fascism also began to blow on the banks of the Nile (Jabès, 1981: 45). The Second World War, Egyptian independence, and the Suez crisis put an end to a community that had flourished for about a thousand years.

Jabès began by working in the Cairo stock exchange; he was active in the Jewish community and was prominent in political activities. Anti-Semitism had not really penetrated Egypt, but the fascist "greenshirts" tried to draw young Egyptians into their ranks. The Egyptian opposition to the British presence facilitated the expansion of German trade and the spread of Nazi propaganda in Egypt. As a result, the Jewish community in Egypt began to organize itself: Edmond's uncle Umberto Jabès and Leon Castro founded the "League Against German Anti-Semitism" in Cairo in 1933, and in 1934 Edmond Jabès founded the "Young People's League Against Anti-Semitism" in Cairo. Jabès first came across Jewish refugees from Germany when a ship docked at Suez in 1936: "A woman who had been tortured by the Nazis pointed to her shoulder still scarred with cigarette-burns" (Jaron, 1955: 11). In 1940, Jabès was imprisoned for a few weeks. In October 1941, as a member of the antifascist group "Italiens libres," he signed an open letter to the citizens of Greece protesting against Mussolini's occupation of the country and expressing solidarity with the conquered Greeks.

Mussolini's African policies and the racial laws he directed against the Jews caused Jabès to set up the Antifascist Association and to participate in the activities of the Italian consul Umberto Celasso, one of the leaders of the international antifascist movement. In 1942, when Rommel's forces drew close to the Egyptian frontier, the British suggested to certain political figures that they should leave Egypt (Colombe, 1951; Hassoun, 1981; Wild, 1985: 126–73). Jabès made his way to Jerusalem and remained there for nine months. In November 1944 he displayed courage in founding in Cairo the "Groupement des Amitiés françaises" (The French Friendship Group) with the Jewish communist activist Henri Curiel. Steven Jaron correctly described Jabès's humanism in those dark

days: "The subdued, tasteful political activism of Les Amitiés françaises suited Jabès's humanistic and universalistic temperament" (Jaron, 1997).

Jabès wrote ten books of poems and contributed to the journal *La part du sable* edited by Georges Henein. Among his books are *Illusions sentimentales* (Sentimental Illusions) (1930), *Le livre des Questions* (The Book of Questions) (1963), *Le livre de Yukel* (The Book of Yukel) (1963), *Retour au livre* (Return to the Book) (1965), and *Le livre des ressemblances* (The Book of Resemblances) (1976) (Jaron, Ibid.; Jabès, 1991). Jabès followed an individual path that led him into anticonformism. He felt stifled by a class-conscious, pedigree-obsessed, wealthy, snobbish, and provincial society. He thought constantly of death and began to take his distance from his circle and to isolate himself in the desert with his poetry. Jabès forged connections with French intellectuals and writers staying in Egypt, of whom the most outstanding were Jean Grenier—Camus's teacher in Algeria—Max Jacob, André Gide, and René Char (Jacob, 1946).

In 1957 he emigrated to France, where he felt isolated both because of the difficulties of existence and problems of acclimatization and because of anti-Semitic manifestations. One evening, when he was returning home in the Odéon quarter, the lamps of a car lit up inscriptions on a wall: "Death to the Jews!" and "Jews go home!" The inscriptions were clearly old ones, but what hurt him was that nobody had thought of removing them. Jabès was a writer of the exile. His texts show alienation: they are the work of a stranger, first as an author writing in the French language in Egypt and then as a Jewish writer in Paris (Stamelman, 1993: 118–34). In Jabès's life and works, three forms of alienation can be identified: his self-alienation in his early years, his banishment from Egypt for political reasons, and his ambivalence toward classical Jewish sources and rabbinic orthodoxy both in Egypt and in France.

In his thinking and writing in France, the spiritual heritage of the Jewish community from which he had been exiled had a prominent place; it was a religious burden, reflected in his sense of "Judaism after the Life of God," as he described it, and in his special approach to books. According to him, the writing of any book created a "wound" that is healed with reading, which is an act of interpretation (Mandelson, 1987). The Jewish consciousness in all generations is a nonchronological succession of wounds and healings. The Holocaust exposed a "wound," and healing is possible through the connection between the "people" and the "book." At the end of the war, Jabès became aware of the scale of the Holocaust, and from then onward it was ever-present in his work (Mole, 1994: 293–306). *Le Livre des Questions* was a testimony to the shock and a universalistic attempt to extend the dimensions of the Jewish trauma. In this way, Jabès, like Paul Celan,

contributed to the penetration of Holocaust consciousness into modern poetry (Mendelson, 1988: 69–83).

Jabès's interpretations internalize cabbalistic concepts, and his writings are mainly allegorical and symbolic. He employs an array of symbols in the representation of political reality. A certain relativity and lack of finality are preserved in the text in order that the reader should continue the work of decipherment and reproduction. Thus reading becomes active, an activity that bears a resemblance to writing: a kind of rewriting. The text has the character of a mosaic, like the "shattered tables of the law"—a fragmentation that demands a polyphonic reading. We have here a philosophy of continual dialogue between the author and his readers. Jabès's form of poetic prose links modernists like Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce, and Kafka to postmodernist writers like Emmanuel Levinas, Julia Cristba, and Jacques Derrida. The dialogal-interpretive approach of Jabès represents a bridge between modernism and postmodernism and forms an active connection between the texts, the interpretations, the author, and his readers in different times and places (Cahen, 1991; Gould, 1985; Motte, 1990).

In his Francophone writings of the second half of the twentieth century, Jabès embodied the figure of the stranger par excellence, but his alienness was a creative bridge between Mediterranean cultures. He himself wrote in *Le livre du dialogue* (The Book of Dialogue) (1984), "My mother-tongue is a foreign language. Thanks to that, I stand with both feet in my alienation."

These Mediterranean humanist writers internalized the warm, unmediated contact of dialogue between peoples and cultures. They did not dream of a "new man" but considered the problems of actual men in Mediterranean societies. Camus, Memmi, Ben-Jelloun, Semprún, and Jabès (Mahfouz being the exception)—each one in his intellectual biography represented a kind of migration that was not tragic but served as a kind of bridge within his own personality. This position gave them a creative viewpoint, a critical perspective, and moral criteria—a "sense of measure" as Camus called it—with which to oppose the illusions of many Europeans concerning the birth of a "new man" within a radical ideology and an all-justifying violence (Ohana, 1996: 87–104).

S. Yizhar and Albert Camus

S. Yizhar's (1916–2006) lecture on Albert Camus, published in *Albert Camus: parcours Méditerranéens* (1998), dealt with a short novella by this Franco-Algerian author. The story of Janine in "La Femme adultère" (The Adulterous Woman) is a simple tale of the loneliness of one woman in the universe (Yizhar, 1998: 3–10). She was the passive wife of Marcel, a cloth merchant,

who behaved like Meursault in *The Stranger*, in a joyless life that was totally predictable. He abandoned the study of law, he disliked physical exertion, and no children were born to the couple: "The years had passed in the semi-darkness behind the half-closed shutters" (Camus, 1957: 156). Everything now seemed far away: the summer, beaches, excursions—"the mere sight of the sky were things of the past." Apart from making money, nothing really interested him. Janine was infected by her husband's passivity. Although she did not really want to accept his invitation to join him when he traveled on business to Southern Algeria, she agreed in the end, "because it would have taken too much energy to refuse." However, her fears were justified: the desert was monotonous, the vegetation dried up; there were heat, flies, primitive accommodation. They traveled in a jerky, dusty bus loaded with silent Arabs wrapped in cloaks; a fly annoyed the passengers. The couple put up in a desert inn: "When the manager had closed the door, Janine felt the cold coming from the bare, whitewashed walls." After dinner at the hotel they went out "into the dusty, cold street." The meal and the wine "bothered her somewhat." Between her husband's visits to various stores on business, she waited. Her distress worsened and she wanted to return home. "Why did I come?" she asked herself. The space element in the story echoed her loneliness. She did not have the strength "to tear herself away from the void opening before her." From a balcony, she viewed the horizon: "Over yonder, still farther south, at that point where sky and earth met in a pure line—over yonder it suddenly seemed there was awaiting her something of which, though it had always been lacking, she had never been aware until now."

She had been shut up in the city with her husband under the yoke of days and years of habitual boredom. Her depressing thoughts did not lead to any conclusion. As usual, "Docile now, she turned away from the parapet and followed him." In bed, she felt slightly feverish, which suggested that an illness was coming on. She asked to sleep alone, far from the noisy crowd that was spending the night in the cafés with music. She finally dropped off, but the question still gnawed at her: why did she come here? She woke up after a short time, and her husband of over twenty years was sleeping next to her. Physical relations in the dark were the only contact they had, "every night, when he didn't want to be alone, or to age or die." Her anxiety and loneliness increased at night: "But who can always sleep alone? . . . who goes to bed every night in the same bed as death." Janine was frightened she would die before she gained her freedom. She got up from her bed and left the hotel for the desert and the night.

Gardens of stars hung down from the black sky over the palm trees and houses. She ran along the short avenue, now empty, that led to the fort. The cold, no longer having to struggle against the sun, had invaded the night; the icy air burned her lungs. But she ran, half blind, in the darkness. At the

top of the avenue, however, lights soon saw vast burnooses surmounting fragile bicycle wheels. The burnooses flapped against her, then three red lights sprang out of the black behind her and disappeared at once. She continued running toward the fort. Halfway up the stairs, the air burned her lungs with such cutting effect that she wanted to stop. A final burst of energy hurled her despite herself onto the terrace, against the parapet, which was now pressing her belly. She was panting and everything was hazy before her eyes. Her running had not warmed her, and she was still trembling all over. But the cold air she was gulping down soon flowed evenly inside her, and a spark of warmth began to glow amid her shivers. Her eyes opened at last on the expanse of night.

Camus's pantheism in this story was not exceptional in his writings. At the beginning of his career, he identified with Sisyphus, who accepted the decrees of fate, and sang a hymn to nature on the Grecian model. Through Sisyphus, the proletarian of the gods, and Meursault, the proletarian of the modern era, he made a surprising declaration: it was paradoxical, but the absurdity of the world was an invitation to happiness. The height of happiness was revealed in the pantheistic experience, in the feeling of man's fusion with the universe. Despite their fate (one was doomed to roll a stone to the top of a mountain for all eternity and the other was sentenced to death), or perhaps precisely because of it, they felt a reconciliation with the world. At the end of *The Stranger*, when Meursault threw out the priest who had forced him to confess, he finally found the peace that he had longed for and described his pantheistic feelings: "Once he'd gone, I felt calm again. But all this excitement had exhausted me and I dropped heavily on to my sleeping plank. I must have had a longish sleep, for, when I woke, the stars were shining down on my face. Sounds of the countryside came faintly in, and the cool night air, veined with smells of earth and salt, fanned my cheeks. The marvelous peace of the sleepbound summer night flooded through me like a tide" (Camus, 1957).

Likewise, Sisyphus confessed at the end of the essay: "Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus, 1942). The absurdity was that these antiheroes found their happiness precisely in their punishment. But the later Camus (it would be ironical to say the mature Camus, as he was only 47 when the tragic accident cut short his life) chose Prometheus, who represented a revolt against the gods, a rebellion against fate. The young author who in the 1940s fought against the human plague of the flesh-and-blood Nazis had in the Second World War to formulate a human philosophy and a human ethics (Ohana, 2000). Not everything depended on the starry sky and dazzling sun; they were liable to be arbitrary. The later Camus recoiled at

a romantic pantheism and the deification of fate and the cosmos. He abandoned an all-embracing pantheism for a rebellious existentialism.

Now we pass to Yizhar. Yizhar's interpretation of Camus's text reveals a reading that is between a Spinoza-type pantheism and a Kierkegaard-type religious existentialism. The universe participated in Janine's loneliness and despair, and as soon as she opened up to the universe, the infinite space opened up as well, as in a revelation "and this happens here, not with human beings but with the stars of heaven, and not with the stars as a symbol or metaphor, but in actual fact [. . .]. The feeling of a total awakening was an actual fact and not a substitute or illusion." (Yizhar, 1998). This existential correlation between man and the universe—not between one human being and another—is accompanied by a surge of genuine religious feeling that reinforces the relationship between man and the universe. Pantheism triumphs: it is "a total fusion with the infinite that is also a redemptive revelation." Man connects with the infinite:

> And thus it appears that there is no solution to man's isolation, and he can find no redemption, if he is looking for redemption, except in those rare moments of revelation on the edge of the book of the desert beyond human habitation; only on the edge of the empty desert, not among humans and not with humans but only under the motions of the heavens, only there, on rare occasions, does a wonderful, surprising but hoped-for thing happen, and they open up completely to the little man who is so despairing and lonely, and who also opens up to them completely. All the starry heavens as if by magic come to her and penetrate within her. The infinite comes to her and unites with her in a real and total unity. (Ibid.)

Those used to the prosaic style of the secular Israelis who fought the War of Independence (1948) must surely be surprised. Yizhar is able to write that people have always said that "the heavens speak to the lonely man." And he comes out with another surprising statement: "It is a kind of revelation that is seemingly impossible, to such a degree that God himself comes and appears in his starry heavens simply in order to come and speak with this suffering and despairing man out of compassion, and suddenly all the distant heavenly décor becomes the outer décor of a real living presence" (Ibid.). This knowledge is the realization of the truth that the heavens above are within oneself, an inner experience. It is a rare existential moment of union of the two elements, the universe and man. Pantheistically, it is revealed that God is not transcendental to the world but is present in the creation and permeates all, for there is no "cosmos" and no "I": each is immersed in the other, a totality of being without which there is nothing. Yizhar supported his ideas with authoritative sources like the

Bible, *War and Peace*, and *The Critique of Practical Reason*. He quoted Genesis 15:5: "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now towards heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them." As against human despair, "there are suddenly the star-filled skies."

When in 1997 Yizhar gave his lecture "Star-filled Sky" from the rostrum of the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem, the historian Yehoshua Arieli was present in the audience. Arieli was a prisoner of the Nazis for four years, and the circumstances of his capture were closely connected with his sense of responsibility, which a year before the outbreak of the Second World War made him join the Jewish units of the British Pioneer Corps. He was sent to Egypt and afterward to Greece as an officer in the British force. At the beginning of 1941, Greece declared war on Germany, and that very same day Germany succeeded in defeating the Greeks. The traumatic experience of the capitulation was the beginning of a long period of imprisonment that tested the capacity of Arieli and his friends to preserve their values and human dignity. The period of imprisonment included time spent in prison camps in Austria and Upper Silesia, in the first Stalag in Germany and in Chelmno in Poland. It was a time of hunger, threats, humiliation, and insecurity.

Arieli once related a religious experience he had during his period of imprisonment:

> As a prisoner living in fearful expectation, I was close to despair and suicide. My heart and my head were paralysed. What made me survive was the Bible, which I read day and night. Most of the time I was indifferent and uncommunicative. In Corinth, which was fantastically beautiful, I was looking one night in June at the deep blue sky strewn with millions of stars, and one could see the Milky Way in all its splendour. And suddenly I heard an inner voice recite the psalm "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?", and I immediately once again became fully alive. It was a mystical experience. And thus, although I am not religious, I am in some way a believer. (Arieli, 2002: 17)

Analogously to the religious state of mind in which Arieli in a time of despair read verses of the Bible, Yizhar couples "the moment of terrible despair" with "the moment of revelation of the eternal foundations" (Yizhar, 1998: 9). In his religious conception, he describes in his own language "one lost man below, and the One God in the heavens above," and contemplates "the light of the stars," "the sight of the starry sky" and "the solitary man and the cosmos of stars." He supports this with a quotation from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* in which Prince Andrei was alone and could not see anything, and in the words of the great Russian writer, "Above him

there was nothing but the sky, not clear, yet immeasurably lofty, with grey clouds slowly drifting across them [. . .]. How is it that I did not see this sky before? How happy I am to have discovered it at last! Yes, all is vanity, all is delusion, except those infinite heavens. There is nothing but that. And even that does not exist; there is nothing but stillness, peace. Thank God." (Tolstoy, 2010: 302). So Yizhar, a reader who identifies with Tolstoy, says, "[I]t is now clear that nothing is important, neither achievements, nor the war, nor prosperity, but precisely the opposite: silence, tranquillity, inactivity. And suddenly God is here as well, and one should be thankful. It is not the God of Abraham that speaks to him [. . .] but the God of tranquillity and silence, of the absence of all movement, the absence of all human effort [. . .]. Here, the Absolute is revealed, and it is nothing but the slow movement of clouds across the sky." The prince now knows that "there is more in the world above than all that exists in the world below [. . .] sheer tranquillity and silence. And these are what gives taste to man's life" (Yizhar, 1998: 9).

Man's deeds, achievements, and love relationships are of no avail in the time of testing, says Yizhar, the human skeptic but religious believer:

> In the terrible moment of despair, and only in this moment of revelation of the eternal foundations [. . .] the discovery of the most simple and ancient elements such as the sun or the heavens or the stars or the clouds, is the secret of reality to be found, and only their silence and their silent movements are able to declare the thing that is most correct, most true, least false, the thing that man has always sought after. And in these difficult moments of loneliness and despair and fear of death, suddenly, if the man is fortunate, suddenly there is revealed to him the greatest, truest thing that was always next to him, which he never noticed, and which indeed is that which is true, which never changes, and which like God is ever-present and unseen. (Ibid.)

It was all very well for Yizhar to turn to the Book of Genesis and *War and Peace* for his purposes, but how strange it is that he should also be inspired by Kant, one of the greatest of rationalist philosophers, for a religious encomium. Yizhar was intrigued by *The Critique of Practical Reason*, in which Kant wrote, "[T]wo things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence" (Kant, 2005). From all these giant figures—the writer of the Bible, the great Russian author, and the highly regarded philosopher—Yizhar gained religious nourishment and rose to the greatest heights, up to the heavens, disregarding the biblical injunction that "the heavens, the heavens, are the Lord's," and "the earth he gave to the children of men" (or, in the Christian version, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's"). From

these high altitudes, Yizhar returned to Camus's heroine Janine, one lonely woman in the cosmos, who "sensed the night calling out to her to come [. . .] into the midst of this cosmic dance in which all silent things and all glittering things and all finalities are joined in immeasurable splendour and majesty" (Yizhar, 1998: 10).

A rereading of Yizhar's writings shows that the reader should not be entirely surprised to discover that this poetical author who trembled at the sight of "Star-filled Sky" had always been there. One can find many similar outpourings of feeling in his descriptions of the starry sky, for example, in *The Days of Ziklag* (Yizhar, 1989: 590) Thirty years after *The Days of Ziklag*, one of the high points of the new Hebrew literature, the writer, at the moment of concluding his impressive personal and literary biography, elucidated a story by Camus and in the process composed a personal prayer, special in style and content, within the prosaic Israeli context. In one of the rare poetic moments in our republic of letters, he stood up and sang a hymn of praise before the beauty and majesty of the universe, a "cosmos of stars." Here it is interesting to compare the pantheistic plenitude of the "star-filled sky" with the mystical sentiments expressed by Vladimir Mayakovsky in his poem "My Starless Agony," lines that Yizhar chose for the opening of his great work, *The Days of Ziklag* (Ibid., 572).

A Man and His Fate

Yizhar in "The Prisoner" (1949) and Camus in *L'Hôte* (The Guest) (1954) depicted men in opposition to their fate, each of them in a state of war or laboring under some cruel law like the characters in ancient legends subject to the arbitrariness of the Olympian gods. This time, would the fate of the person in question—the "other" personified by an Arab in both stories—be decided for better or worse by beings of flesh and blood?

"The Prisoner" is one of the best known of Yizhar's stories published at the end of the War of Independence (1948–49). The stories were concerned with the ethics of the individual faced with the violence of war. A platoon of soldiers during a lull in the fighting, with time on its hands, was eager for action of any kind. It so happened that on its way it came upon an Arab shepherd: "one man, isolated, to be hunted alive. And the hunters were already off" (Yizhar, 1966). He was interrogated and asked many questions, and gave whatever answers he did. "A happy circle around the blindfolded prisoner," mistreated the simple Arab shepherd. The interrogation continued but yielded poor results: "Because if you want the truth, beat him! If he lies, beat him! If he tells the truth (don't you believe it!) beat him so he won't lie later on! Beat him in case there is more to come" (Ibid., 165). The

soldier-interrogators' frustration increased, and the idea came up of killing him or perhaps putting him to torture. The sentry, who was not named, feared that "something terrible was about to take place [. . .] take the stinking beggar, they should tell him, and get rid of him!" Finally, it was decided to transfer him to a prison camp, a task that was given to the sentry. The sentry hesitated as he held a man's fate in his hands, "as though you were a little god sitting in a jeep [. . .]. This time is an affair between you and your conscience." On the other hand, he reasoned that, being only an emissary, he was under orders; he was not responsible for the hard-heartedness of the others. This was war; "what would happen if we all started to set prisoners free?" (Ibid., 106). And so on and so forth. The sentry knew that he himself would not do such a thing, "You're a noble fellow, you'll meditate, enthuse, regret, reconsider" (Ibid., 172). He wavered inwardly and outwardly: "This time you have the choice, and it's at your disposal. It's a big day. It's a day of rebellion." However, his helplessness and indecision won the day. The end of the story was enveloped in sadness, a sadness that "is in the heart of a waiting woman, the 'who-knows' of fate" (Ibid., 174). The sun went down; the fate of the prisoner was unknown.

So much for Yizhar's "The Prisoner," and now for Camus's "The Guest." The story of "The Guest" takes place in Algeria, which was under French colonial rule. A gendarme by the name of Balducci came to the school in an out-of-the-way village of the teacher Daru, accompanied by a manacled Arab who had murdered his cousin. The gendarme was unable to complete his task and asked the teacher to accompany the prisoner to the nearby provincial town. The teacher refused, as it was not in his line of work, but the gendarme insisted, "The orders exist and they concern you too" (Camus, 1957: 240). Everyone, he said, was mobilized in wartime, including the teacher. Daru was left with no choice, but he still hoped that the Arab prisoner would somehow release him from having to turn him in and so resolve his dilemma. The prisoner slept in Daru's home, and Daru gave him food and drink and treated him decently. Daru did not lock his door that night, but the captive refused to escape. Daru questioned him about the reason for his murder of his cousin; the prisoner answered laconically, like Meursault in "The Stranger": "He ran away. I ran after him" (Ibid., 248). Nobody could solve Daru's mysterious conundrum. So it was determined and so it would be: destiny had chosen him to decide the prisoner's fate. The teacher and prisoner got up in the morning and went on their way as though to the sacrifice of Isaac. Daru "slipped a hunting-jacket over his sweater" (Ibid., 253), knowing what was expected of him, but which he was still unable to make up his mind to do. The snow melted on the way; they kept going without stopping. Daru now made a decision: he showed the Arab the path to freedom via some nearby vagrants and supplied him with food and money, but the Arab chose not to escape but to give himself in.

The soldier in "The Prisoner" and the teacher in "The Guest" were both victims of the arbitrariness of others. A moral decision was imposed on them concerning the fate of some weak "other," a captive or prisoner, which was made their responsibility. The soldier was part of a military platoon, a rigid hierarchical framework; the teacher was his own master. Both of them were in a war situation and a situation of colonialism; each of them confronted his own "Arab." In "The Prisoner" his name was Hassan Ahmed; in "The Guest" he was nameless. The soldiers in "The Prisoner" were captives of a grotesque self-image that made them act the part of tough soldiers mistreating a passive man, who for his part made the soldiers look ridiculous by asking for one cigarette after another. As in the Hegelian paradigm of the master and the slave, the captor and the captive were both prisoners of their self-image. Yizhar's antihero, the sentry, was undecided about an essential point: was he in a position to decide at all? He was a marionette, a cipher in a war game. Yet, nevertheless, this "bleeding heart" ruminated as follows:

> We'll stop the jeep right here in the gully. We'll let him out, free his eyes, face him towards the hills, point straight ahead, and we'll say: Go home, man, it's straight that way. Watch out for that ridge! There are Jews there. See that they don't get you again. Now he takes to his heels and runs home. He returns home. It's that easy. Just think: the dreadful, oppressive waiting; the fate of a woman (an Arab woman!) and their children; the will-he-or-won't-he-come-back?; that what-will-become-of-me-now?—all would end well, one could breathe freely again, and the verdict will be return to a life. Come, young man, let's go and free him. (Camus, 1966: 159)

In a similar fashion, the teacher Daru shows the Arab his escape route:

> "Now look," the schoolmaster said as he pointed in the direction of the east, "there's the way to Tinguit. You have a two-hour walk. At Tinguit you'll find the administration and the police. They are expecting you." The Arab looked toward the east, still holding the package and the money against his chest. Daru took his elbow and turned him rather roughly toward the south. At the foot of the height on which they stood could be seen a faint oasis. "That's the trail across the plateau. In a day's walk from here you'll find pasturelands and the first nomads. They'll take you in and shelter you according to their law." The Arab had now turned toward Daru and a sort of panic was visible in his expression. "Listen," he said. Daru shook his head: "No, be quiet. Now I'm leaving you." (Camus, 1957: 257)

In both cases, making a choice is the heart of the matter, and this is shown in a clever and unexpected way: it is fate that chooses its moral "victims" and teaches them not to evade responsibility. Decisions cannot be avoided.

Yizhar places a choice before the sentry (a nameless soldier, anyone). Daru-Camus places a choice before the teacher (his profession is not accidental) and before the Arab (a nameless person, anyone). And what happens? Daru recoils from and rejects the task imposed by fate and in a certain, somewhat pretentious way, the sentry also recoils, but these are different recoilings, opposite in kind. Daru's recoiling from the fate that chose him to take the Arab to his death was a heroic moral action, that of giving a man another opportunity, but the recoiling of the sentry who had been chosen by chance, and who was able to bestow life, to release the Arab shepherd who had been captured for no reason, was an immoral act of cowardly conformism. And this is the paradox: it was precisely the nonguilty captive who was taken to be punished, in some kind of deterministic sequence of capture, imprisonment, interrogation, isolation, and punishment. He was punished simply for being there, while the Arab who was guilty of murdering his cousin was set free. The sentry and the teacher—the masters—could decide on what they did; the captive and the prisoner were subject to an arbitrary fate.

The Arab who murdered his cousin did something personal, a matter of chance. The thing requires rationalization and knowledge of circumstances, or else absurdity triumphs and the arbitrary wins, but that is precisely the point. Absurdity exists in any case, and it serves no purpose. It is the cruel imposition of the gods. Nevertheless, the reader requires a solution to the paradox in the personal story and needs to understand it within a broader framework of significance. Thus this once-only event becomes the fulcrum of a whole logical construction. The personal event is connected to the war, the personal act is given a national-political context, and this connection, according to Camus, is an arbitrary one. There is a precedent in "The Stranger": Meursault's three accidental shots at the Arab on the seashore require an explanation. It is an unjustified action without any purpose, although the attorney, the judge, and the hangman pile up unrelated evidence and succeed in finding a meaning in it. But the explanation is beyond good and evil, rationality and mysticism, truth and falsehood, the moral and unmoral.

At the end of "The Guest," the reader still has some hope, but the hope is vain: the Arab is tied to his fate. Daru shows him the possibility of escape, the place from which he can gain his freedom. The Arab, however, makes a different choice: the place where he will find his punishment. A man and his fate: he has to be punished as decreed by the gods.

S. Yizhar and the Mediterranean humanist writers wrote their best in places where they felt the most engaged and involved. They wrote about uprooting, emigration, racism, multiculturalism, and dialogue. The Mediterranean for them evoked the Greek concept of *nostos*: the wanderer and returner, the Odyssean hero forever longing for his Ithaca. They had the

tendency to create a character, a philosophical persona, who could express their desires and longings. That is to say, they had a kind of humanism imbued with a poetic power identified with the Mediterranean. The readers of the Mediterranean humanist writers have found them sensitive barometers of their geopolitical space who, while sounding an alarm, rebelling and protesting through their characters, their actions, their confessions, and the story of their emigration, at the same time embodied the tragic humanism of the Mediterranean in themselves.

4

Levantinism as a Cultural Theory

Levantinism as geocultural synthesis took place in the eastern Mediterranean during the twentieth century when the colonial presence of the French and the English brought about a dialectical fusion of cultures, rich combinations of language, and unique literary encounters. The roots of Levantine culture date from the late Middle Ages, but already at the start of the modern era the Levant began to be a defined geographical area where the European West was involved commercially, militarily, and culturally with certain Mediterranean countries such as Egypt and Lebanon. The colonialist encounter was preceded by the Orientalist ideas of the Western elites about an imaginary East. In the late 1950s, the Egyptian-born Jewish intellectual Jacqueline Kahanoff (1917–79) challenged the Israeli cultural elite with a radical theory of cultural identity equally appealing to all Israeli communities: Levantinism. She formulated her theory in a series of articles titled "The Levantine Generation" published in the journal *Keshet* in 1959. There Kahanoff described the historical connotations of the concept "Levantinism," its cultural ramifications, and the yet-unrealized options it provided (Kahanoff, 1978; 2005).

Some of the recent interpreters of Kahanoff wishing to explain the concept "Levant" in her writings stress the Oriental aspect of her thinking to the point of making it the sole basis of her theory. In so doing, these scholars disregard her main idea, which is the importance of a dialogue between the Levant and the West, or the encounter between the Mediterranean and Europe. Unlike the "new school" that sees Kahanoff as a thinker who proposes an Eastern orientation to the riven Israeli society, a critical reading of the essays she wrote from the end of the 1950s in newspapers and journals in Israel and elsewhere (some of which have been collected in two volumes) reveals a systematic theory of a universal nature that is not necessarily concerned with a particular social sector or ethnic group. Kahanoff's theory of

identity was rooted first and foremost in the Mediterranean space in which Israel is situated, a space that serves as a bridge between East and West. In this, she joined major Israeli intellectuals who formulated cultural options of spacial identity presented to Israeli society in the 1950s: a modern Western identity; the Canaanite option of Hebrew nativism; the option of the "Semitic space"; and a few other options. Kahanoff's Mediterranean proposal was before her time, and today it seems the most reasonable option for serving as a minimal common denominator for the growing social tensions and increasing sectorialization in Israel. Multiculturalism is not the solution in Israel today; it is the problem. In the period of state hegemony that characterized Israel until the beginning of the 1970s, greater cultural pluralism and social openness were needed, but since then many troubled waters have flowed beneath the bridges until the point has been reached that between the Ashkenazis and Sephardis, the religious and the secular, the hawkish and the dovish, there is no common foundation on which to work out the points of agreement and the possibility of dialogue.

In a collection of articles in English she prepared for publication, Kahanoff described her guiding principles. (She died in 1979, having published the only collection of her articles that appeared in her lifetime: *Me-mizrah shemesh* [Sun from the East] the previous year). On rereading them, one finds it extraordinary to see how much her analysis, which proposed a "mosaic of the Levant" made up of different local narratives and not an all-embracing ideology, anticipated the contemporary Mediterranean theses of Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell in their book, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (2000). What they tried to do was "to post-modernize Braudel": that is, to change "the Braudelian meta-narrative Mediterranean" into "local and varied narratives." Horden and Purcell wrote, "During the twentieth century, the Mediterranean region itself has also to a considerable extent been disintegrated, and to the network of its microecologies radically recognized, by the involvement of its coastal nations in the credit economies, political alliances, technologies and communications networks of the North and West or the Far East" (Horden and Purcell, 2000: 3). They went on to note: "The distinctiveness of Mediterranean history results from the paradoxical coexistence of a milieu of relatively easy seaborne communications with a quite unusually fragmented topography of microregions in the sea's coastlands and islands" (Ibid., 5).

In the same way, Kahanoff proposed examining the "stubborn local subcultures and the multi-layered identities of the Levant's people. It is not exclusively western or eastern, Christian, Jewish or Moslem." In all her articles, stories, and interviews Kahanoff stressed the variety, the many-sidedness and continuity of the Levant:

> Because of its diversity, the Levant has been compared to a mosaic—bits of stone of different colors assembled into a flat picture. To me it is more like a prism whose various facets are joined by the sharp edge of differences, but each of which, according to its position in a time-space reflects or refracts light. Indeed, the concept of a continuum is contained in the word *Levant* as in the word *mizrah*, and perhaps the time has come for the Levant to reevaluate itself by its own lights, rather than see itself through Europe's sights, as something quaintly exotic, tired, sick and almost lifeless. (Kahanoff, "From East the Sun," 1968: Preface)

Kahanoff did not view modernity as purely a Western phenomenon, as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and other Western thinkers saw it, but as varied cultural possibilities for people in the modern era to create their own independent way of life. Here she anticipated E. S. Eisenstadt's concept of "multiple modernities." In the year 2000 he wrote, "In different periods of their development, [they gave] rise to multiple institutional and ideological patterns. Significantly, these patterns did not constitute simple continuations in the modern era of the traditions of their respective societies. Such patterns were distinctively modern, thought greatly influenced by specific cultural premises, traditions and historical experiences. [. . .] The idea of multiplied modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world [. . .] is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (Eisenstadt, 2000).

This anticipation of the multicultural outlook and early recognition of many-sidedness did not come to Kahanoff from a fashionable postmodernist climate of opinion or a *zeitgeist* emanating from the academic world. Her cultural baggage was derived from a retrospective autobiographical perspective that began with Egyptian colonialist society in the early twentieth century. In her childhood and youth in Cairo in the 1920s she felt that pluralism and universality are not contradictory, but the opposite: they are two sides of the same coin: "During my childhood, I thought it fairly normal that people could understand one another and look alike, in spite of the fact that they spoke different languages and were known by different names—they were Greeks, Moslems, Syrians, Jews, Christians, Arabs, Italians, Tunisians and Armenians."

This "generation of Levantines," as she called them, imbibed the influence of many waves of immigration from southern Europe, especially Italy and Greece, and from the Mashrek and Iraq, together with British rule and French culture in a Muslim country torn between traditionalism and modernity, between a dynastic monarchy and a modern centralized regime, between nationalism and the desire for a regional federation. Modernity was therefore not identified, as it is by many scholars, with the

European Enlightenment and the industrial and French revolutions. It was the attempt of many societies, including some outside the Western world, to find lifestyles and means of adaptation whereby people of different cultures could form themselves and make their own way between the conservatism of the past and present-day modernity. In this connection, Tiziana Carlino claims that the Levant is a form of adoption of modernity, a way of fusing several modernities, a combination of different metanarratives (Carlino, 2006). The cultural heterogeneousness of the Levant reflects, more than anything else, its cosmopolitan character, or in the words of Aharon Amir, Kahanoff's translator in Hebrew, describing the Levant, "Cosmopolitanism of the Mediterranean. A colorful hybrid made of Jews, Italians, Greeks and Copts" (Amir, 5.4.1996). Levantinism as Kahanoff's home landscape became the basis of a systematic, well-formulated and deeply inspiring world outlook.

And what in fact is the Levant? There are as many interpretations of the concept as there are interpreters, but here I will look at the Kahanoff scholars who connect the idea with her. Carlino says that the Levant, as a geographical area, is identified with part of the Mediterranean. In modern times, Levantines have been Europeanizing people engaged in commerce with the northern Mediterranean, cosmopolitans of the colonial world who spoke many languages. Kahanoff, in Carlino's opinion, saw the Levant as a geographical space with actual cultural and not merely symbolic characteristics (Carlino, 2006). As a result of her experience of emigration to France and the United States, and influenced by Western intellectuals like Albert Camus and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Kahanoff formulated the idea of a Levantine culture as a hybrid identity that could serve as an alternative to the contradiction-ridden reality of Israel. Levantinism was proposed as a possible form of rapprochement between controversial issues like religiosity, rationality, progress, and Middle Eastern culture. The modernistic Levant proposed by Kahanoff in opposition to the Western cultural hegemony that prevailed in Israel until the 1970s comprised definite elements of modernity: an aspiration to universality, a commitment to progress, a vision of the future, and the hope of equality. In her Egyptian colonialist education she absorbed modernistic principles from Marxist ideology, feminist teachings, the revolutionary tradition, and the history of national movements.

The Levantine figure parallel to Kahanoff, said Carlino, is the Italian woman writer Fausta Cialente, who lived in colonialist Egypt and published the novel *Ballata Levantina* (Carlino, Ibid.). The protagonist of the novel, Daniela, was an orphan raised by her grandmother Francesca, an Italian mistress who had a child—Daniela's mother—by a wealthy Jew from Alexandria. Daniela, a typical Levantine, is very reminiscent of Kahanoff: she

commands several languages, leads a cosmopolitan existence, has had a European education in an Islamic country, and has independent characteristics and a feminist consciousness. Her doubts whether Egypt is truly her country show a sense of alienation from the land in which she lives. The ending of the novel is mysterious: Daniela disappears close to the Nile. Her disappearance signifies the end of the colonialist era. She may have drowned, and thus her memory was obliterated like that of other Levantine authors. An obsessive concern with identity—cultural, national, feminist—is common to Kahanoff and Cialente, and both of them chose a literary medium to express their hybrid self-awareness.

Gill Z. Hochberg declared in her article "Permanent Immigration: Jacqueline Kahanoff, Ronit Matalon and the Impetus of Levantinism" that Kahanoff's aim in her series of articles was to replace the colonial connotations of the term *Levant* with a radical new cultural and sociopolitical meaning. For her, Levantinism was not only, in Hochberg's words, "the experience of hidden self and loss of language but also the way out of this state of loss" (Hochberg, 2002: 222). Kahanoff, in this interpretation, found colonialist oppression in Israeli-Jewish society: the "internal colonialism" of the Ashkenazi (European Jew) toward the Mizrahi (Jew from Arab countries), "'a complex illness' based on racism and phobia" (Ibid., 223). Kahanoff wished to cure this colonialist sickness by reclaiming "Levantinism," transforming this concept, which had previously signified a lack of authenticity and cultural stability, into a positive cultural force with therapeutic power.

Hochberg claimed that as Kahanoff found the geographical definition of the Levant constricting, she broadened it to include the temporal dimension. She challenged the geographical formulation and applied it to history as well. By bridging the glorious civilizations of the past and recent European colonialism, the Levant laid a basis for a cultural encounter between East and West. There are differences of opinion concerning the geographical borders of the modern Levant. It is identified with the countries of the eastern Mediterranean, but it can also include Iran, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya, and in different contexts Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and the Mashrek. As a temporal bridge between cultures of different eras, the Levant gave rise to cultural fusions that reflected "the necessity of living, not nostalgia" (Bhabha, 1994: 7). Hochberg sees Kahanoff's Levantinism as an area of literary production, cultural dialogue, and creative cooperation transcending national, linguistic, and geographical frontiers. Her Levant is a time-related cultural concept, a live political and cultural force, and is not conceived in nativistic-spacial terms. As further evidence, Hochberg cites Shlomo Elbaz and Mikaél Elial, the editors of the journal *Levant* (Elial and Elbaz, 1991), who saw a similarity between the Levantine option and the Andalusian school: that is to

say, it is a model of interpretation; a way of writing, reading, and thinking; an area of literary creativity giving rise to "surprising meetings" like that of Amos Oz and the Moroccan-French writer Tahar Ben-Jelloun, or Palestinian Israelis writing in Hebrew like Naim Araidi, Atalha Mansour, Muhammad Watad, Salman Massalha, and Anton Shammas (today one could add Sayed Kashua). Such manifestations not only represent a reality that crosses ethnic, religious, linguistic, and national lines, but they break down the barriers between East and West, the Middle East and Africa, Arabs and Jews. Thus a cultural conception of the Levant is offered as an alternative to the existing national, geographical, and ethnic options. Another intellectual who supports the idea of the Levant as a cultural space rather than a geographical one is Edward Said, who suggested the possibility of a productive interplay of "nationalism" and "exile," as "home is always more than a territorial location" (Said, 1983: 8). "Home" and "place" are broader concepts than as perceived by the nationalist outlook. In Jewish thought, the parallel concept to "home as territory" is that of "the text as home."

In his book *After Jews and Arabs—Remaking Levantine Culture*, Ammiel Alkalay opposes "the modern myth of the Jew as pariah and wanderer (that) has ironically translated into the postmodern myth of the Jew as 'other,' an other that collapses into the equation: writing = Jew = Book. [. . .] the Jew was native, not a stranger but an absolute inhabitant of time and space" (Alcalay, 1993: 1). Alcalay distinguishes between the European intellectuals and writers—and Kafka with his preoccupation with law is one example—who deal with the abstract and the Levantine writers with their "concrete and sensual attachment to the fact and memory of a native space" (Ibid., 215). Alcalay sees the Levantine Jew as the native Jew "at home," who lives in his natural Eastern environment and is able to share that space with the Muslims. Hochberg links Alcalay's spacial conception with those of Hannan Hever and myself. Hever asserts that "the spacial reality of the Mizrahi Jew, unlike that of the Ashkenazim [. . .] is local," and I am quoted as saying that the writing the Mediterranean Jew "is a natural son to his surroundings [. . .] and cultural origins" (Hochberg, 2002: 225). Hochberg sees the spacial approach of Alcalay, Hever, and myself as liable to degenerate into an ideology of national aggression.

Dolly Ben-Habib wrote, "Kahanoff's blindness to the situation of the Arab women laboring under the dual burden of military occupation and internal colonialism reveals the limits of the vision of the Israeli national collective" (Ben Habib, 1994). Deborah Anne Starr contributes to this critique by saying that the late success of Kahanoff's Levantinism is due to "a particularly relevant paradigm in its attempt to undermine persisting hegemonic, unitary national discourses" (Starr, 2000). These critiques seek

to appropriate Kahanoff for their political purposes by turning her into the mother of the Oriental Israelis.

A more balanced and sympathetic profile of Kahanoff is proposed by Alexandra Nocke in her book *The Place of the Mediterranean in Modern Israeli Identity*: "In her unique vision of Israel as an integral part of the Mediterranean or Levantine world, she promotes an open, pluralistic society in the Levant." The aura surrounding Kahanoff, explains Nocke, transfers a nostalgia toward a world of cultural coexistence into the harsh realities of the Israeli present. Kahanoff revaluated "Levantinism" by describing it as a model of a rich multiculturalism and a long cultural heritage. Nocke concludes, "The Levant is being rehabilitated and presented as an alternative, even conciliatory way to approach the different existing maps of the region" (Nocke, 2009).

Kahanoff deliberately constructed a myth of Levantinism to serve as a model of inspiration for Israel's emerging Mediterranean society. Toward the end of her life, when she gathered her articles together in order to publish them in English with a comprehensive critical perspective on her past writings, she expressed her belief that Levantinism was a "mythical dimension": "Time and again people have had to learn to live together in the same territorial and mythical space in order to survive. This is perhaps the great historical lesson of the Levant, as each entity has had to renounce part of its claim to an all-embracing universality—so often synonymous with imperialism, oppression and suppression. Pluralism here is the indispensable antidote to mutually exclusive territorial claims" (Kahanoff, 1968), "From East the Sun–Preface". 1968.

But for her Levantinism was not only a territorial "mythical space" but also a "mythical time" or, in her words, a "psycho-historical time" (Ibid.). The mythical reconstruction of a culture requires a departure from present, continuous time, and space (Kahanoff, 2005: 14). Every great cultural myth requires a starting point to which one looks at the present time to gain spiritual force or something to relate to. "Mythical time" is complete, harmonious time, while present time is partial, defective time. Modern Levantinism, according to Kahanoff, embraces not only the "mythical spaces" of different cultural narratives but also the "mythical times" of numerous cultures and religions. The calendars of the various religions, for example, express philosophies of history, hierarchies of values, and a view of the infidel, the "other," and in this way a fixed image of enemies and "others" is created.

What Kahanoff proposed with her modern perspective was the simultaneous adoption of the various points of time and space of the Levant made up of different viewpoints, relationships, and cultural dimensions. Thus the Levant is revealed as a rich mosaic, a mirror in which many angles are

reflected, a fertile and creative kaleidoscope that is not restricted to a one-dimensional ideology of East or West. Her constant stress on the eastern part of the Mediterranean as the Levant shows that she saw this area as the cultural space that made possible a living dialogue of East and West.

At the end of her introduction to her projected collection of essays in English, Kahanoff confessed that her articles reflected a certain ambivalence about a past that was not entirely free from the outlook of the period between the two World Wars or the dilemmas of an immigrant from an Oriental country who was none too enthusiastic about her process of absorption (Kahanoff, 1968). Her gaze, she wrote, was focused on the past rather than the future. The 1967 war, however, had brought Israel back to the Levant as a force that could change the old order. She hoped it would be a positive force, a modern and progressive one. The 1967 war changed Kahanoff's perspective on Israel and the Levant. After the founding generation that came from eastern and central Europe, a new generation had been born in the country. It looked at the Levant differently from its parents. The territories conquered in the war also produced an unmediated contact between Israelis and Palestinians. This was Kahanoff's view when she wrote her articles, which had an optimistic conciliatory flavor together with a modern outlook. Human beings had made history, and they could therefore make a different history. It was the generation before the *intifadas* and the massive enterprise of colonialist settlement. As a result, Kahanoff could hope that Israel had changed its approach to the Levant, that it was integrating into its surroundings and would not be too preoccupied with the Jewish aspect as it had been in the past. Perhaps she should have known already then that the narcissistic Jewish attitude of the first settlers that found its fulfillment in the conquest of the territories would not give birth to a modern Levantinism but would cause the conflict to increasingly degenerate into a fundamentalist national and cultural confrontation. Kahanoff did not delude herself that the pluralistic alternative she proposed would prevent future wars, but at the same time her gaze was directed toward the Braudelian *longue durée* (long term): "In the long run, it might help Israel integrate in the Levant."

The Levantine option is not only a cultural possibility but a concrete political proposal. In place of pan-Arabism on the one hand and Zionism on the European-Ashkenazi model on the other, Kahanoff proposed a political culture of the Levant, the essence of which was "live and let live." The reconstruction of the Levant—the product of the old encounter between Byzantium, Islam, and Judaism—could help to redefine the relationship of the Israelis to the political and cultural space in which they reside:

> We have all clung to old hostilities from our pasts—ethnic, theological and national—and made no attempt to reinterpret them in terms that would be mutually inclusive rather than exclusive. Reviving the notion of the Levant as

> a geographic entity, comprising many genuinely native peoples and cultures, may help us to create a consensus between Israel and other people in the region, which stems from the acceptance of diversity not as an inevitable evil but as a necessary good. Our own fears about assimilation and Levantinization have prevented us from stressing to best advantage the importance of a strong, independent Israel in the Levant, which can have a dynamic impact. The very fact that we are intensely particularistic as regards our own history, language and culture provides an assurance that what may be termed our "expansionism" and "imperialism" cannot be indefinite, but will be limited in time, as was the case with Byzantium and Islam. A Jewish Israel promises the best guarantee for the freedom of other people in the region who are just as particularistic and are no more prepared to be absorbed by us than we are to be absorbed by them. Even those now in the grips of revolutionary Pan-Arabism may yet discover that a pluralistic Levantine solution is a reasonable alternative to the anarchy created in the name of an all embracing, if largely illusory, Arab unity. (Ibid.)

Physical geography and the geography of the spirit are two different things, or at least there is not necessarily a correlation between them. And, to use Kahanoff's terminology, "mythical geography" and the geography of maps relate to different dimensions. Kahanoff claimed that the "mythical space" and the "mythical time" created a "mythical geography" of the Levant:

> To those of us who were born in the communities of the Orient, the names of places which were once familiar—Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Tunis, Algiers—are now the far away places in that mythical geography of hearts and minds, where distances do not correspond lo those on maps. And I wonder sometimes how the cousins, *shlish be'shlishi* ever got to places like New York, Montreal and Sao Paolo when for countless generations their families had been rooted in the ancient communities of the Orient. Even before the establishment of Israel precipitated a mass exodus, our grandparents or great grandparents suddenly packed up and left their ancestral homes. Cairo, Paris, London, then Jerusalem, and now New York, became crossing points of these caravans pursuing their peregrinations through space and time. (Kahanoff, 1962)

The Levant was characterized by exchanges of intellectual goods and mutual influences and affinities resulting from conquests, alliances, expulsions, discoveries, and wanderings on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Basin. According to Kahanoff, the culture of ancient Greece penetrated Egypt, Asia Minor, and Palestine. There was a meeting of Jews and Greeks in the Hellenistic culture of Alexandria, and that dialectical encounter formed the intellectual basis of Christianity and Western civilization. Greek, the language of civilization, was dominant in the Levant long after Greece became a province of the Roman empire, and the Greek

Byzantine empire became the center of the civilized world after Rome fell to the barbarians of the north. The Byzantine empire adopted Christianity, and Greek became the liturgical language of the Eastern churches. Kahanoff continued to trace the Levantine "mythical time" that existed in the Levantine "mythical space" up to the Alexandria of the time of her youth.

> Even as Byzantium fell to Islam, large Greek-speaking populations persisted within the Ottoman Empire and in Mediterranean cities, much the same as did the Jews in Eastern Europe. The Renaissance was directly connected with the exodus from Turkey of Greek and Jewish scholars who, taking old manuscripts with them, brought new cultural influences those of antiquity to bear on western culture. Thus, the Levant's culture, an ever-changing synthesis of many strains, flourished in several cities: Constantinople took over where Alexandria left off. Venice and Ravenna, Toledo and Cordoba during the late Middle Ages, embodied many aspects of the Levant culture on the fringes of the Christian world, somewhat as Alexandria, in modem times, briefly incarnated the western aspect of Levantine culture on the fringes of the Moslem world. That latter day Alexandria was a Levantine city rather than an Arab one, a city where Greek and Jew renewed their dialogue at the crossroad of streets called Nebi Daniel and Ptolemies. (Kahanoff, "From East the Sun," 1968: Preface)

Kahanoff saw herself as belonging to that generation of Levantines whose assignment but also whose privilege it was to spread European culture to the rest of the world. For her, and for other Levantine women, the truth lay beyond religion or Western civilization:

> Throughout our Mediterranean world, and the vast continents it bordered, other young people were imbibing this knowledge from their teachers, never suspecting that the dormant seeds would suddenly burst out from under the silt of centuries. The Arabs and the other colonized peoples were the crossbreeds of many cultures by accident, while we Levantines were inescapably so, by vocation and destiny. Perhaps our ways would part, but together, we belonged to the Levantine generation whose task and privilege it was to translate European thought and action and apply it to our own world. We needed to find the words that would shake the universe out of its torpor and give voice to our confused protests. (Kahanoff, "Childhood in Egypt," 1959)

Kahanoff called one of the articles published in *Me-mizrah shemesh* "Europe from Afar." The philosophy course in the French Lycée was *bon ton* among the members of the minorities in colonialist Cairo. It was fashionable to know the names of famous philosophers, but Kahanoff confessed, "We never read any of the works mentioned in our schoolbook. It was

one of the mysteries of Levantine culture: whoever read the books that made these people so famous?" (Kahanoff, 1959). She had the impression they were speaking of something they knew nothing about, and though they never admitted it, they disliked her for her knowledge. The writer who aroused the most resentment in her, and who perhaps represented Western rationalist thought, was Darwin. The following provocative passage was omitted by Aharon Amir when he translated Kahanoff's article: "If Darwin were right, then the Nazis were right. There was a master race, and when it had destroyed all mankind it could only destroy itself. The last man would die, triumphantly asserting his domination over the devastated earth." Amir continued his translation only from this point: "How could our professors, good socialists most of them, waste our time on Darwin? What was there I didn't understand." To Darwin, Kahanoff added Nietzsche: both of them led to the swastika. She predicted that not only the Jews would be crucified on this symbol but Christian Europe itself. She thought the Levantines should be selective in their use of the European heritage: they should take out the poison and emphasize "thou shalt not kill."

Secularism was an important principle of modern Levantinism for Kahanoff. The following sentence is taken from the original manuscript of "Europe From Afar": "We had a religious approach to the problems of our day, transposed to the secular world, for we despised the stale old beliefs." Amir took liberties and condensed this complex sentence as follows: "At the same time, I despised religion." Kahanoff's secularism did not mean atheism, and in all her writings she was respectful of the Jewish religion as of all other religions, and one also finds in her writings a basic belief in an omnipotent God.

Kahanoff treated the hope of national independence in Egypt and the attempt to liberate the country from British colonialism with great skepticism. She was critical of the Egyptian elite for its superficiality in wanting to obtain the modern luxuries without doing the hard work of building a new society: "We compared this to the situation in Palestine, a place where they were building a new society from the foundation, at the same time as in Egypt they were beginning at the top floor in the hope that the foundations could be built on it."

> Thus, even though we sympathize with the Moslem nationalists' aspirations, we did not believe them capable of solving the real problems of this society, and for this they could not forgive us. As Levantines, we instinctively searched for fruitful compromises, feeling as we did that the end of colonial occupation solved nothing fundamental unless western concepts were at work in this awakening world, transforming its very soul. We knew that Europe, although far away, was inseparably part of us, because it had so

> much to offer. These radically different attitudes toward Europe and towards our conception of the future made the parting of our ways inevitable. (Kahanoff, "Europe from Afar," 1959)

In the modern Levant that Kahanoff envisaged, feminism was a cornerstone. With a critical retrospective glance, she followed the stages of her awakening up to the crystallization of her egalitarian gender consciousness. She wrote candidly of the patriarchal structure that her mother attempted to bequeath to her. When she asked to be allowed to work independently, her mother answered, "You can't. People would think your father was ruined."

> Similar arguments went on in every home. Our families consented to let us learn first aid in a clinic, on condition that there were no contagious diseases. We were also to attend French law school in the afternoon, wedging it neatly between tennis and parties. We thought we had won a victory of sorts, but of course one doesn't learn two professions simultaneously, and we had neither the work discipline nor the need to earn a living, although we envied the girls who did. Why should one grind through the Code Napoleon, when so many pleasures were available to us, and in any case, in a few years foreign courts would cease to exist in Egypt and European-trained lawyers would find themselves out of work. (Ibid.)

In a later article, "Greetings to the Little Woman," Kahanoff suggested that the message of the movement for women's liberation was perhaps the idea that in the future women would no longer have to bear children and bring them up (Kahanoff, 1978: 283–85). Perhaps fertility itself would be unnecessary in the humanity of the future. Unusually for her, Kahanoff followed her conclusions *ad absurdum* in the hope of arriving at a radical analysis and of opening up possibilities that religion at that time did not provide. This may possibly have been an ironic essay critical of the women's liberation movement: "Almost without knowing it, the women's liberation movement prepares women spiritually and intellectually for the day in which their traditional role will not only be ineffective but will even be a stumbling-block to evolution and progress." The right to free abortion and the possibilities of lesbianism may anticipate the day when woman's biological functions will no longer be needed. It may be that women in their traditional roles of companions and mothers will in the future be completely unnecessary. Kahanoff had gone a long way until she could arrive at a radical thought like this. Her path to feminism began in the 1940s:

> The Second World War broke out, and from the distance of another continent I could see how much the Egypt I had known was changing. My younger sister went to university without the slightest objection from my

> parents. I proudly thought that I had paved the way for her. She, like many other girls, worked. It was considered smart, even patriotic, to work for the British and the Americans. With all those uniformed young men about, the girls thumbed their noses at the local boys and at their parents' counsels of moderation, secretly wishing the war would never end.
>
> When I returned to Egypt to visit my family in 1946, I came in the thoroughly enviable position of a young divorcee who had won a literary prize in the United States. "It can only happen in America," my left-wing and violently anti-American friends would say contemptuously (Kahanoff, "Europe from Afar," 1959).

Imagined Levantinism

In an interview she gave to the newspaper *Ma'ariv* in 1967, Kahanoff declared that the concept "Levantine" had been distorted beyond recognition in Israel. Her aim was to rescue this image from its negative connotation and make it the emblem of a rich civilization with historical sources:

> Why did we have an attitude at once so touchy and denigrating towards ourselves? I think we considered ourselves too inferior—or, as we say in Israel, too "Levantine"—to dare express ourselves in writing. Gide and Malaroux were our standard but it didn't occur to us that the point was not to emulate them, but to tell our own story, in our own words. That could be our only beginning. Once we had left Egypt, it broke our hearts to think that practically nobody had done this, that a whole community, one of the most complex and interesting, disappeared without leaving a trace. The one significant work about Egypt's Levantine world, the Alexandria Quartet, was written not by one of us, but by Durrell, an Irishman. But then, he had a language at his command, perhaps also a vitality, a naive self-confidence we lacked. He could describe our failure of nerve just because he didn't suffer from it. It was as if something in us had broken, long before we reached adulthood. (Kahanoff, 1973)

Kahanoff's essay's caption, "Ambivalent Levantine," a meaningful expression of her complex perspective, was unfortunately rendered by her Hebrew translator Aharon Amir as "Black on White." Here, in a short paragraph she phrases the essence of the Mediterranean worldview, whose starting point is in the dialogue between and the mutual enhancement of the East and the West: "A typical Levantine in that I appreciate what I inherited from my oriental origins and what is now mine of western culture, I find in this cross-fertilization, called disparagingly in Israel "Levantinization," an enrichment and not an impoverishment. It is from this vantage point that I wish to try to define the complex interrelated malady of both Israel's

Sepharadic (Jews of Oriental/Middle Eastern origin) and Ashkenazi (East European) communities (Kahanoff, "Ambivalent Levantine," 1959).

Kahanoff produces a sociohistoric genealogy of the Jewish diaspora, which went its separate ways, East and West. Part went into the Christian-Western world, part to the Levantine-Muslim; only in Israel did these two streams join one river. Each of the Jewish diasporas was influenced by the cultural and national character of their respective geographical surroundings. Thus the Eastern Jews came to Israel without technological proficiency, without professional expertise, and wanting Western culture's capitalist impetus. At the same time they were influenced by their traditional surroundings in many other spheres: social organization, the individual's relationship with the general public, their practices of worship, and their philosophy of meekly accepting god's judgment.

In 1959 Jacqueline Kahanoff began to publish a series of essays in the journal *Keshet* called "Generation of Levantines," which introduced a new cultural theory for the young state. They appeared under the editorship and by the translation into Hebrew of the poet and famous Canaanite thinker Aharon Amir. In one of those essays, "Ambivalent Levantine," Kahanoff reflects on the many sides of Levantine identity, mapping out an interesting account of colonizer-colonized relationships. She describes the colonizer's society as typically aggressive, technologically superior, and organized according to material rather than spiritual needs. Although the dominated natives see themselves as inferior at first, as they undergo an "imitative and acquisitive phase," "absorbing the ideas and techniques of the dominating culture," and understanding better "what constitutes the colonizer's power and hence its superiority, they grow more critical of the west, and more appreciative of the old society" (Kahanoff, "Ambivalent Levantine," 1959). In the case of the Middle East this process is particularly momentous because "the Levantinian is a potentially successful crossbreed of two more cultures, capable of applying what he acquired to the transformation and reconstruction of his own society, and able to compete with the westerner on his own terms. He then effects a swing back to his native origins, now highly idealized. The increasingly Levantinized Arab nationalist is such a crossbreed who idealizes Islamic or Pharaonic greatness. Similarly the Jew, regarded as a foreigner both in Europe and the Middle East, proclaims his ancient origins" (Ibid.). Of course this proclamation does not represent an actual reversion to any ancient civilization, Jewish, Arabic, or otherwise, but it does allow a fusion of influences and "dynamic powers, characteristic of the Middle Eastern people—among them the Jewish people—from antiquity to the present day."

In the Jewish part of the Arab world there was an unusually high degree of contact with the West, and an easy acquisition of wealth and status

"outside the old minority community framework." Thus when Levantine Jews came to assimilate into Israeli society, which had been founded by European Jews, they not only assumed no inferiority to the other group, participating as they were in the ideal of an indivisible Jewish homeland, but were openly critical whenever that ideal was not lived up to. Already in 1959 Kahanoff reported that "a new oriental communal identity is emerging, patterned neither on the Jewish past nor on the dominant group, which is beginning to develop an elite leadership able to compete with the latter."

But Zionism had from its foundation resisted the life and culture of those among whom its land of dreams had been situated. Although this self-containment was largely a symptom of an Ashkenazi displacement in Europe, Levantine Jews, whose Zionism had always been more spiritual than geographical, were subsumed into it. "The Zionists conceived of Judaism as a nationality," Kahanoff argues, "the Sephardic Jews as a religion based on Messianic hope." Sephardic Jewish writers had a long way to go before they could find the literary birthright they shared with other Arabic communities. They had bought in its place the Zionism of European Jews, whose vision was as far from the physical reality in the Mediterranean as it was from their spiritual, historic, and messianic version of Zionism.

When one has rejected the past and continues to resist the present, he has only dreams to live on. These must in time be tamed into reality or they will die. For the Levantine Jew, says Kahanoff, Israel "is neither part of Europe, nor of the Middle East, nor even really Jewish, since he has thrust aside all Jewish experience in 2,000 years of exile with a feeling of rebellion and shame. This leaves a sectarian nationalism as the only acceptable solution, which a young person, aspiring to a wider, more generous conception of himself in relation to a world, cannot countenance without an unpleasant feeling of being cut off from a fuller and possible development not only as an Israeli, but as a human being" (Ibid.).

She advocates the normalization of the Israeli as a lucky crossbreed, of mixed races and richly combined backgrounds, and urges to discard the "myth of the Israeli Jew as a defender of a superior European culture." Then, she says, Israel will be able to "develop an identity and personality of its own."

Finally, she sees hope in a deplorable situation:

> Bulldozers erase delicate contours to give rise to buildings which can be seen anywhere in the world and have no particular relevance as expression of this land and people except that they are "modern." The charming old parts of Jaffa rot away because we cannot accept their "alien" beauty. Despite this frenzied building activity, Tel Aviv does not look like a "little Paris," but like a dozen other Mediterranean cities, nonchalant, dirty, pleasure-seeking, with

> crowded sidewalk cafés and pretty women parading in the latest fashion—in a word Levantine, much of it mixed with the drive and energy of a diverse, active, intense people. (Ibid.)

Kahanoff's Levantine option was not proposed in a vacuum. The Levant, both as a geographical space in which Israel was situated and as a cultural entity, was disregarded by the Israeli elites who were reared in the West, in Europe or the United States. The first expression of this attitude—an expression that was virtually racist—appeared in a series of articles by the journalist Aryeh Gelblum in the newspaper *Haaretz* in 1949 on the subject of the great wave of immigration that took place at that time. In these articles, Gelblum displayed a patronizing attitude that viewed the Oriental immigrants as "Levantines" who represented the wretched, primitive culture of undeveloped countries, and as dangerous elements that could lower the cultural level of Israeli society to that of its enemies. If the Israelis were fated to live in the Levant, they should at least protect themselves from its inhabitants and the negative culture they represented.

In his article "Without Limits and Without Shame" published in the first year of the Israeli state's existence, Gelblum described an immigrant camp. The immigrants, gathered together in a hall, are described as "adults," "babies," "mothers," and "old people." There is a generalized description of "girls and boys in childhood, in youth, in adolescence" who are "crowded together here and who sleep in the same congestion [. . .] old men and women, they too are trying to sleep" (Gelblum, 17.4.1949). The description might be referring to cats: "They groan and spit and can't drop off, and they groan again from sheer old age or from bad health." Where does the generalized description of the immigrants—the children and the old people—end, and a specific description begin? At what point does Gelblum slip from general criteria to the description of a group with community or ethnic affiliations? The transition takes place when he describes "a group of Moroccans who take a bottle of arak from somewhere and begin to drink. Many of them are smoking, and the smoke fills the entire hall." The description of the smoke is not neutral but refers to particular people: "The smoke [. . .] mingles with the general stench and the smell of the sweating bodies." The journalistic focus is directed at one group among the immigrants: "In the hut where many of the immigrants from Africa are gathered, they still for a long time laugh and make a din, and as the only light-switch for three huts happens to be there, it depends on them when it will be dark."

Certain families and individuals are described in relation to their community but in a neutral way: "My neighbor, the Turkish woman," "the Turkish family on my right," "the director of the institution, a Rumanian

woman." Only when it comes to individuals from Morocco do we get a generalized comprehensive description: "the Moroccans," with nothing added. It is as if he were saying: the name is self-sufficient, it's the message. Here is a description of the Moroccans sleeping: "Meanwhile noises of loud snoring, wheezings and groanings rise upwards." Noises *and* wheezings *and* groanings! On the face of it, this malicious account is a minor anecdote revealing a lack of empathy and compassion for these refugees in a new country. Two days later, in an article entitled "Transports Come and Go," Gelblum described the mass immigration with ever-increasing fear: his fear of the masses who were being absorbed, and his feelings of dismay: "Today they announced that a hundred and fifty immigrants would come. Of course, two hundred and fifty turned up." The wave of immigration aroused ancient fears of sorcery in him: "And what if it becomes a precedent? If the thousands in Africa and other places will not even await their turn, and will simply come?" Once again, he stresses "the thousands from Africa" (not from North Africa, heaven forbid! It would be interesting to know if Gelblum would have described the South Africans as Africans) together with a general reference to the waves of immigration from "other places." A call for a selective immigration is delivered in a cynical, sarcastic tone: "Why not? Immigration is free!"

A week later, Gelblum finally revealed "The Truth about the Human Material"—the title of his article published on that date. He first explained his mission as a journalist: "The truth must be told, not only so that we should know what is in front of us, but because the existing idea in the Yishuv in this matter and the truth that exists in reality are two different things" (Gelblum, 21.4.1949). This being the case, Gelblum took it upon himself to inform us of "the truth that exists in reality." In order to do this, he divided the wave of immigration into three main blocs: "The first bloc, the Sephardi-Balkan, is the élite; the second bloc, the Ashkenazi-European, is of poor quality; and the third bloc, the Arab-African, is even dangerous!" And he immediately warned once again: "The immigration from Africa is increasing more and more!" In his article of April 22, "The Immigration from Yemen and the Problem of Africa," Gelblum reached his climax. His words were self-explanatory: "We are dealing with a people [the Moroccans] whose primitiveness is extreme, whose level of knowledge is one of almost absolute ignorance, and, even worse, they have little talent for understanding anything intellectual. Generally, they are on the level of the Arabs, Negroes and Berbers in the same regions. In any case, they are at an even lower level than what we knew with regard to the former Palestinian Arabs. Unlike the Yemenites, they do not have roots in Judaism either. On the other hand, they are entirely given up to the most primitive and wild instincts" (Gelblum, 22.4.1949).

Gelblum's articles were the starting point of the negative myth of the "Levant" in Israel. The central feature of this myth, its archetypal characteristic, is primitiveness, taken as an inherent, natural, immanent characteristic. In Gelblum's words, "The particular tragedy of this aliyah (immigration to Israel) is that, unlike that of the bad human material from Europe, there is no hope for their children either. Raising their general level from the depths of their condition as a community would be a matter of generations!" This is how a mythology, a prototype of the Orientals, came into existence. Gelblum's articles were the publicistic infrastructure for the growth of Israeli racism.

What is the difference between "race" and "racism"? In nature there are various races, and they have ascertainable biological characteristics. The "yellow" race has slanting eyes and is small in stature; the "black" race has large nostrils and a dark skin. The American Indians are the "red" race, and there is of course a "white" race, and so on. These are objective distinctions that place the races next to each other. When races are placed one above the other, it results in an ideology of difference: a certain race is better or worthier than another race. Racism is an outlook in which human beings are seen in terms of their race. It represents a shift from a horizontal distinction to a vertical preference, from difference to superiority, from biology to ideology (Ohana, 2002: 29–38).

Israeli society is a society of immigrants, and within it there are various races and communities. The Zionist ideal was to fuse them into a vital "new race" through the revolutionary ideology of the melting pot, whose prototypes were the "new Hebrew" of the early twentieth century, the *halutz* (pioneer) of the 1920s and 1930s, and the "Sabra" of the 1940s and 1950s. It is interesting to note that the Revisionist leader Zeev Jabotinsky compared the Israelis in the making to an orchestra but forbade the national society to open its ranks to new instruments. The source of this idea was the German philosopher Herder and the nationalist intellectual climate in nineteenth-century Europe. The concept of a single race and a single orchestra can have only one meaning: the preservation of the unique form of the components of the nation or ethnic group. This principle gives rise to the claim of the advocates of racial purity that a culture ceases to be authentic if it is exposed to drafts.

The conflict between the Israelis and their Arab neighbors resulted in a problematic relationship between the Oriental Jew—who came from Arab societies, spoke their language, and was influenced by their culture—and the Arab, his enemy. In this situation of national hostility, the oriental Jew had to isolate himself within the Israeli public space, as it was difficult to say "I am an Arab." Almost half of Israeli society had a problem of identification with their land of origin, which had become their enemy. This

was a completely different orientation from that which prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century when pioneers and Jewish writers and artists romanticized the "wild East" and wished to resemble the Arabs, calling them "our cousins" and "flesh of our flesh."

This is only one thread in the complicated coil of contemporary Israeli society beset by tensions that tear into its flesh. The tension between the secular and the religious is not so different from the problem of racism as appears at first sight. The problem of extremism—for instance, the refusal of ultrareligious schools to accept Oriental female pupils—is also bound up with a topical question: what frightens the secular intellectuals so much? The main element in their obsession is the question of what their identity is as secular people. A partial answer to this is their tremendous fear of the *shehorim* (the "black ones"), in the Israeli sense of the ultrareligious, seizing control. Thread is interwoven with thread, and the Israeli coil becomes more and more complex, and Ashkenazi racism gives rise to Oriental antiracism that sometimes becomes a racism in itself. The Ashkenasis are depicted as the decadent, inauthentic, softish, alienated, frigid "other." This is how an Oriental pupil of a high school in Ashdod expressed herself on television: "The Nazis took out the hearts of the Ashkenazis, and that is why they behaved heartlessly to my parents" (Ohana, *The Last Israelis*, 1998). Here we see the emergence of an opposing racism produced by an ideology of stigma and a politics of cultural despair.

The outstanding, special, and especially contemporary characteristic of Israeli society is the fragmentation of the Israeli identity into secondary components. It is like a postmodernist supermarket in which each one is the "other" of some other "other," and there is no common symbolic language or normative rules. In this Hobbesian state of nature, parallel racist stereotypes are legitimate because the ethos of universality no longer exists in the fragmented Israeliness. The problem with ethnic or racial introversion is that people are driven to adopt a narrow outlook characterized by prejudice against the different, the stranger, the other.

Aryeh Gelblum represents one side, the negative, of the imagined Levant. On the other, positive side, the article of the writer and essayist Shulamith Hareven, "I Am a Levantine," published in the newspaper *Al-Hamishmar* in 1985, stands out. It was read out in its entirety by the author on the opening night of the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, which was devoted to Jacqueline Kahanoff and paved the way for the founding of the Forum for Mediterranean Cultures. And this is how Hareven began: "I am a Levantine. Born in Europe, I spent my time there, in an obscure impatience, as if it were all a mistake, a confinement, like a wretched marriage—till I first saw strong light on the rocky hedges of a mountain, a stooping summer olive tree, a well carved in stone—and I knew that was it. I had

arrived at something deep, palpable, ancient, the womb of the world, in which virtually everything has been and will be created. This was the right light, the right smell, the right touch" (Hareven, 1992).

Hareven admitted that she did not see all that was Middle Eastern as Levantine. The civil war in Lebanon, for example, reminded her of the actions of medieval European tribes: "One can be an excellent Levantine or one who does not do the profession proud." The Levantine can have the moral principles of an alley cat; he is seasoned, highly intelligent, and speaks many languages, as his part of the world has seen many conquerors, "for the Levant is the embodiment of synthesis and its essence. It is the opposite of all aggressive, crass single-mindedness. It is the color-blind pluralism that sees no racial, ethnic or religious differences. The Levant hardly goes anywhere: everyone comes to it, and the blazing sun smooths and molds everything" (Ibid.).

Hareven paints a portrait of a Levantine type lacking order or discipline, attractive and congenial, inconsistent and "not bound by any particular principle." He is a man who does not believe in hierarchies, in organizations, in "-isms." He represents a different kind of communication: "True Levantinism means the third eye and the sixth sense." Levantinism is a tragic sense of life, the knowledge that "how" is more important than "what" and that different nations live at different ages.

Levantinism, according to Hareven, amounts to the knowledge that every revolution and ideology exacts a human price. It is the awareness that in the cultural sphere, great art and serious literature have a deep theological dimension. It is therefore not by chance that all the great religions and heresies came into being in the Levant. Religion was born in the Levant; clericalism and giant hierarchies larger than life sprang up in Europe. None of the prophets, wrote Hareven, threatened sinners with a perpetual inferno of fire and brimstone: paranoid polarization and the Manichaean heresy produced European totalitarianism. It is not surprising that in the Levant—in Judaism, in Islam, and in early Christianity—there were no statues and no intermediaries. It was the Europeans who built towering cathedrals and constructed a vast system of idolatry. Humanism was created in the Levant, except that nobody called it by that name: "I am a Levantine because life in the claustrophobia of the present bores me, and I yawn in the thin air of European existentialism. I am a Levantine because houses festooned with multicolored laundry don't bother me, and I like human habitations that are manageably sized and don't try to intimidate me. I am not totally bound to the clock, and I like to talk to people different from me without being obsessed about "the bottom line" and without asking "what's the point?" (Ibid.).

Food for Hareven is an outlook on the world, for it is the real relationship between man and his environment. The languages of the Levant are closer to her than the European languages, "because when I go to Egypt I suddenly understand a great number of biblical and linguistic concepts that were closed to me before." Hareven ended by saying that because she was a Levantine, all fundamentalists would always want to destroy her.

Kahanoff wrote with the perspective of a visionary, foreseeing before her time the social and cultural complications Israeli society would run into if it didn't readjust its adolescent dreams to the maturing reality. The cultural critic Yoram Bronowsky described her phenomenon: "[W]ith a few light strokes, poetic hints, we have here been brought something no less monumental than an idea of culture, even a theory of culture" (Bronowsky, 17.2.1978). After her came Hareven, and after her many others, but while the young Israeli nation was still reeling from the recent events in Jewish history and barely accustomed to all the many aspects of life it would need to assimilate into a new language, when so many others couldn't see beyond the ideas that had brought them so far, Kahanoff sensed the need for new myths and theories. Even at that early hour, Kahanoff was able to imagine the dawn of a new model, universally applicable to the many ethnicities that would shape Israel's future. In the words of the Israeli novelist A. B. Yehoshua, "we felt closed off and besieged, until she announced openness, and wakened hope" (Baretzky, 15.3.1996).

Part III

Culture

5

A Man in the Sun

There are very few writers in general, and in the twentieth century in particular, who lived a life short and intense, full of works and action, filled with praise and tension, and ending in tragedy like that of Albert Camus. In Camus were all the ingredients that make a writer's life a literary legend. He was an immigrant writer who was both at home and a stranger in the landscape of two homelands, Algeria and France, that were waging a bloody war between them; who had won the world's praise already at the age of thirty with the publication of his first book, *The Stranger*, one of the most exemplary works of the century, but whose later years were characterized by a silence that changed to a rediscovery more than thirty years after his death, when his last book, *The First Man*, was published; who was the youngest writer after Rudyard Kipling to win the Nobel Prize for Literature; who was a writer and also a thinker, an essayist, a playwright, a director of plays, and an actor; and who was "a humanist in the sun," a Mediterranean source of inspiration for enlightenment, the most important intellectual in France to fight in the eye of the storm both the totalitarianism of the Right in the Second World War and the totalitarianism of the Left after it.

Perhaps now, when the Promethean century has come to an end, the time has come to appreciate his penetrating insight into some of its traits of character, his exposition of the nihilistic meaning, in the twentieth century, of the murder of the king and the death of God, his brave stand on behalf of the Jews in their darkest hour. It is impossible not to admire his call to preserve one's humanity precisely when all metaphysical boundaries have disappeared; his consistent struggle against abstract radicalism and all-justifying violence; the isolation that he sometimes experienced in the face of the pridefulness of the leftist bourgeois on the Left Bank of the Seine; and the simple, concise, and consequently human literary form that he gave to some of the existential problems of our lives: despair and happiness without faith, suicide and struggle without a purpose, liberty without honor and premature death.

What would Camus have thought of the fate of his country, for which he felt an "infinite longing," if he returned today on a visit to Algeria? Perhaps he would remember his father, Lucien Auguste, who in Camus's unfinished book, *Le premier homme* (*The First Man*), embodied "the first generation of French Algeria." His father had served in the French forces of conquest and participated in the conquest of the frontier town of Oujda on the Moroccan shore of the Mediterranean. I sat there in Oujda, at a table in a café, and thought to myself: would Camus still maintain his original view of French Algeria (the model he advocated was finally realized not in North but in South Africa), have persisted in his refusal to praise third-world nationalism, and still insist on the need for a multinational and multicultural society? As a man who was never a deserter from the sphere of public morality, he would not have been pleased with the fulfillment of his prophecy, and already in 1958 he said, "It's a pity we do not have any moral people who would react less joyfully to the disasters which have overtaken their country" (Camus, 1965: 891–901).

Here in Oujda, near the Mediterranean, my father, who had gone northward on his own as a youth from the Atlas Mountains in search of work, met my mother who had come from Algeria with her family across the nearby frontier. In the autumn of 1997 I sat for the first time in the town of my birth. For some days I had hesitated to go there because of a false rumor in the French press about Algerian Islamic fanatics who had slaughtered dozens of citizens in Oujda. In the café, in which my father had worked, the local people gathered around me, brushing against me affectionately, as an "Oujdi" who had come from overseas. In the air, there hovered the fundamentalist threat that wafted in from the Algerian border a few hundred meters away from the café like a knife aimed at the inhabitants. Two evils are now cutting into the living flesh of Algeria: Islamic fundamentalism on the one hand and military rule on the other. It is as though more than fifty years had not elapsed since that struggle, since Sartre spoke in favor of "free Algeria" and Camus was torn between his Algerian mother and the cause of justice.

"I was placed half way between poverty and the sun," declared Camus in his later introduction to *L'Envers et l'endroit* (Betwixt and Between) (1937), a collection of youthful essays that he published at the age of 22 (Camus, 1965: 47–50). Poverty prevented him from thinking that all was well under the sun, or in history for that matter, but the sun taught him that history was not everything. As he himself admitted some two decades later, "In these rough pages there is more real love than in all the pages I wrote afterwards." Every artist has within him a single and unique source that nourishes what he is and what he says throughout his entire life. When the source dries up, the creation is flawed. Camus's source was to be found in

that world of poverty and light. In his Mediterranean, the sea and the sun cost nothing. The obstacles he encountered were prejudices and manifestations of envy and stupidity, and for his immunity to these he was indebted to his family.

He sought to represent the workers as wealthy and the bourgeoisie as poor. Associating poverty with the life "without a sky and without hope" that he found in the suburbs of the cities, Camus came to the conclusion that one had to rescue their inhabitants from the dual shame of poverty and ugliness: "Although I was born poor, in a working-class area, I did not know what distress was until I encountered our alienated suburbs." His own poverty was not an out-and-out poverty of bleak and total wretchedness but a poverty always enveloped in light, sun, and sea. The penury he knew in his childhood and youth gave rise to "outbursts of rebellion," was a source of strength in his maturity, nurtured his social feelings, developed his natural sense of justice, and created invisible boundaries between him and his future intellectual colleagues.

Camus never left the landscape of his neighborhood. Already in high school he gave his philosophy teacher Jean Grenier, who first revealed Mediterranean culture to him, two essays: "The Hospital of the Poor Quarter" and "Voices of the Poor Quarter" (Catherine and Jean Camus, 1998: 61). His status in the neighborhood was ambivalent: according to his uncle, a man of means, and his mother-in-law, he always dressed in a dandified fashion, defiantly elegant, but despite this image, he did not dissociate himself from this poor neighborhood, for which he always felt affection and loyalty. He said that in his youth he moved "between the inside and the outside," between dandyishness and poverty, between the landscape and man. He felt solidarity with his poor friends as he did with nature (Ibid., 74.)

When Camus sprouted wings and left his neighborhood, he did not lose his empathy for the troubles of the local inhabitants because he had experienced them himself. He told his friend Blanche Balin that when walking in the casbah of Algiers, he discovered "subterranean, barbarian and liberated life all together." In Algiers there was something special; there was a Mediterranean cultural admixture despite the separation the colonialists tried to make between themselves and the local Arabs.

As an indirect reply to Sartre's assertion that Camus succeeded in forgetting the poverty from which he emerged, Camus wrote that a political solution on the lines of "Algeria for the Algerians" did not correspond to the needs of the local inhabitants(Ibid., 102). Catherine Camus, the novelist's daughter, when she was interviewed by the Israeli national daily *Haaretz* for the fiftieth anniversary of her father's death, had an at best lukewarm critique of Sartre. She said, "[T]hey did not see him as one of their own. The left has never liked those who started at the bottom and 'made it.' That

undermines them; they lose their constituency. Sartre and de Beauvoir's circle came from bourgeois families—some of them even wealthy; they were graduates of prestigious universities and adopted communist ideologies without being acquainted with the reality up close. When Sartre fondly referred to his young friend as a 'street hooligan,' he did so patronizingly, as though he were allowing himself to 'slum it'" (Levin, 7.1.2010).

In June 1938, Camus stayed for ten consecutive days in Kabylia. His series of articles on the people of Kabylia, Algerian Berbers, titled "Poverty in Kabylia" was an indication of things to come (Camus, 1965: 905–38). Each day he described the distress in the small villages, the undernourishment, the poor sanitation, and the difficulty the inhabitants had in preserving their human image. So Camus uttered a *cri de coeur*: Favor life over doctrine, whether Marxist or religious! As a Frenchman, he felt shame that he might have shared in the hypocrisy of the colonialists.

His poetic essay *Noces* (Nuptials) (1938), a hymn to the North African sun and sea, was the light-filled side of the Mediterranean, of which Kabylia was the shadow. The young Camus held it against colonialist France that it abandoned the people of Kabylia to their wretched fate as though it were a punishment for rebelling against the conqueror. They did not surrender easily: they are known to have rebelled already in the Roman period, in the years 1852, 1854, 1857, and 1871, and up to the time of the repressive actions of the French. The material distress was accompanied by spiritual degradation, obliteration of the human image, and the repression of freedom. Like the Greek poet Pindar, Camus, the poet of the French Algerians, felt he was not allowed "to feel the sweetness of the tranquillity of the night descending upon the mountains of Kabylia. Until equality prevails, this sweetness will be accompanied with a bitter taste."

Camus and his young friends planned to publish the journal *Rivages—Reveu de culture méditerranéenne* six times a year, but it only appeared twice. The intention was to obtain material from all the Mediterranean countries and to publish documents such as ancient Cretan texts. Mediterraneanness was in the air. In the declaration of intent, Camus wrote that there has to be a reason for the existence of a new journal. This one intended to define an existing culture:

> No one can fail to see that an impulse of youth and passion for man and his works has been born on our shores. Various, uncoordinated, vehement tendencies, expressed awkwardly and amidst injustice. They are expressed, however, in the most varied domains—theater, music, the plastic arts and literature—but with a common love for life, and with the same taste for disinterested intelligence. Not long ago, it would have been natural to be disinterested, but now those new on the scene must find a secret intoxication in that word [. . .].

> At a time when a taste for doctrine seeks to separate us from the world, it is by no means bad if young men, on a young soil, proclaim their attachment to those few perishable and essential things which give a meaning to our lives: sea, sun and women in the light. They are the assets of a living culture, the rest being a dead civilization which we repudiate. If it is true that true culture is inseparable from a certain barbarism, then nothing barbarian can be alien to us. The whole point is to agree about the word "barbarism," and that already constitutes a program.
>
> From Florence to Barcelona, from Marseilles to Algiers a whole teeming, brotherly people gives us the essential lessons of our lives. At the heart of this innumerable being there must be a more hidden being, as it is sufficient for everyone. It is this being nurtured on sea and sky before the Mediterranean steaming under the sun that we seek to resuscitate, or at least the multicolored forms of the passion for life that it brings to birth in each one of us. (Camus, 1965: 1329–31)

Rivages molded Camus's outlook, among other things, by drawing on various intellectual sources around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. On the editorial board of the journal were Camus, René-Jean Clot, Claude de Fréminville, Gabriel Audisio, Professor Jacques Ergon, and Jean Hitillier. The first issue included translations of Cervantes and Lorca's poetry. There was also a theatrical manifesto by Camus, who identified himself with the journal. The second issue contained the Italian poems of Eugenio Montale, Andalusian folk songs, an article by Emmanuel Robles, and five pages of Camus's "A Summer in Algeria," which was published in its entirety a year later. The third issue never came out because it included an homage to Lorca, who was an enemy of Franco's Spain. The material was destroyed by the Vichy regime in 1940.

In his "Letter to an Algerian Militant" (1955) Camus turned to Azziz Kessous, a socialist of the Algerian "Manifesto Party" (Camus, 1965: 961–66). Camus told his Arab friend that his pain at the decline of their common country was like a pain in the lungs. He was close to despair. To think that one could forget the Muslims' slaughter of the French at Philippeville meant losing one's humanity. At the same time, the idea that repression of the Arab people would be conducive to faith in France and admiration for it was also a kind of madness. The sense that the hostility was general and that in every family one side implacably opposed the other was intolerable and poisoned existence. For culturally, the two sides were similar, they had similar hopes—a fraternity of brothers, a common love of the same land. Camus was quite sure they were not enemies, that they could live happily in that country, the country that was theirs. He could not believe that the country could exist without his Arab friend, just as it was impossible that Kessous could cut himself off from Camus and those like him. Camus liked his friend's formulation: "We are fated

to be together." Unlike in Morocco and Tunisia, the French in Algeria (sardonically, Camus "thanks" his friend for not seeing all the French as "blood-thirsty wealthy people") had lived there for more than a hundred years (Camus, 1995: 127). One could not erase the "French fact" in Algeria, and to dream of their disappearance was childish. On the other hand, there was no reason whatsoever why nine million Arabs should be merely "counted as present," to use an Israeli expression. The hope that the silent and subjugated Arab mass would be wiped out forever was a ludicrous dream.

The French, Camus wrote to his Algerian friend, were too much tied to the Algerian soil, and their roots were too old and alive for them to be uprooted. That, of course, did not give them the right to uproot the culture and life of the Arabs. Camus reminded his friend that his struggle for social reforms for the Arabs of Kabylia had caused him to be exiled from his country. People had disregarded his warnings, continued to rely on power, which is not eternal and is contrary to the direction of history, and failed to implement the necessary reforms. There had to be reforms but not violence. This was an effort that needed to be made, but it should not involve the shedding of French or Arab blood. Camus was well aware that these ideas were an incursion into a war zone between the two sides. There is no point in preaching when the shooting is at its height, and it is no use saying that war solves nothing and that bloodshed merely increases the barbarity and suffering. A person who acts in this way can only expect a mocking reaction or more shooting, but one nevertheless has to speak up. The main thing is to preserve a dialogue even if it is limited, to create a lull even if it is temporary. Each side must ask its people to ease off. There are of course those, the fanatics, who, if there is no possibility of living together, prefer dying together, like a blood bond. Camus took upon himself to do his part among the French, and the Arabs had to understand that sowing terror among the French population strengthened the anti-Arab elements and put an end to all efforts at finding a compromise solution.

There were of course in both camps people whose answers were predetermined, who said that compromise was impossible: one had to continue the war until victory. Camus and his friend knew that this war would end without any winners: after it, as before it, they would again be together in the same country. Fate had put them together: crimes by one side would lead to crimes by the other, insanity bred insanity and inaction created sterility. If the Arab democrats did not succeed in calming the situation, the actions of the opposite camp were doomed to failure. Camus expressed solidarity with Kessous and wished him and his friends success. He wanted to believe that peace would shine forth upon their fields, their mountains, and their shores; that the Arabs and French would consent to a coexistence of liberty and justice; that a common effort would be made to forget the

bloodshed that divided them today; that the Arabs and the French who had lost themselves in their hatred and despair would find themselves together again in their homeland.

In 1958, three years after the letter to Kessous, when the Algerian violence was raging and at the height of the silence he had imposed on himself, Camus wrote a late introduction to his articles on Kabylia that had been published some twenty years earlier (Camus, 1965: 891–901). He answered his denigrators on the Left, who accused him of abandoning his country, that he had come out in defense of the Arab Algerians long before they had. These texts, as he himself acknowledged, expressed the opinions of a young man who was constantly disturbed by the distress in Algeria. Conscious of his responsibility for that country, he could not support a policy of conservatism and repression, but he could also not support an uprising that would cause the Arab people even greater distress and uproot the French people in Algeria. Such an uprooting would lead to a new imperialism that would threaten liberty in France and throughout the West. Do we not have here an early intuition of the Islamic fundamentalism of our time?

In the two following years Camus imposed silence on himself. He explained the reasons: "Because of my inability to associate myself with either of the extremist camps, and with the disappearance of the third camp which still made it possible to maintain one's composure, and because I am doubtful both of my certainties and my knowledge, and being convinced that the true reason for our madness lies with the leaders and the functioning of our intellectual and political society, I have decided no longer to participate in the endless controversies [. . .]. Personally, once again, I am only interested in actions which prevent bloodshed here and now" (Ibid.). Two more years after writing this or, more exactly, after two more years of his long silence, Camus met his death in a road accident.

In the manuscript of *Le Premier homme* (*The First Man*), which was found in his car after the accident, Camus writes about his mother, who was a cleaning woman, and his grandmother who lived with her. Unlike bourgeois writers who romanticized the past in the manner of Proust, Camus evokes poverty in his works but also developed as a result of it. At the age of 21, he discovered the *Théatre du travail* (Workers' Theater) in Algiers. In his journalistic work he demanded equal rights for the Berbers of Kabylia, self-administration, and the distribution of land. After these radical criticisms, which were not appreciated by the authorities, he soon found himself outside the borders of his country. Camus had no need of the admonitions of the salon-communists in faraway Paris; he had no salon to come back to.

Over fifty years ago, Camus already understood that decolonization is no miracle cure. Simone de Beauvoir's simplistic declaration that "the

humanist in him gave way to the *pied noir*" (the name given to the French settlers in Algeria) now seems less true than ever. Camus was contemptuous of the self-important French intellectuals, "liberators of the third world," who only yesterday submitted to the Nazis in Paris and turned their backs on the Jewish citizens who were sent to the concentration camps, and who immediately after the war disregarded the gulags because of the necessity for the communist revolution. Camus proved to the arbiters of the anticolonialist *bon ton* that he had been engaged in the struggle against colonialism long before they were.

In *The First Man*, the Algerian tragedy was treated not as a journalistic assignment or an occasion for literary brilliance or intellectual observation but was seen within the actual walls of Camus-Cormery's home through the pallor of his mother after the terrorist attack opposite her house. A violent explosion was heard just as Cormery was asking his mother for details about his father: in fact, the FLN (National Liberation Front) terror was a reaction to his father's family's settlement in that new world. The attack on the café, the running of the parachutists, and the anger and the fear were described in detail. Cormery, who went down into the street, stealthily slipped as an Arab into a nearby café for fear of reprisals. The description is simple and the observations are simple, and everything is so anti-intellectual. Behind all this there lies a love of humanity.

If, in the novel of the absurd, *L'Étranger* (The Stranger), Camus's first and most important book, the Mediterranean sun exemplifies the blindness of fate, the sole explanation for an arbitrary murder, his last, "posthumous" book, *The First Man*, is an invitation to happiness, the bright side of the sun. Camus returns to the lost Eden of childhood, visual joy or, as he puts it, "the kingdom of poverty."

The Myth of Prometheus

Camus's childhood and youth in Algiers, which were overshadowed by poverty and tuberculosis, are revealed in *The First Man*. The young Camus, the son of disadvantaged parents who lived in Belcourt, a working-class area of Algiers, received a scholarship to study for his BA, and the subject of his thesis was the connection between Hellenism and Christianity in the works of Plotinus and Saint Augustine. The illness he contracted and the necessity of earning his living prevented him from obtaining a higher teaching certificate. He turned to journalism, acting in the theater, and political and social activities.

In 1935, in the "Workers' Theater" in Algiers, he played the part of Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the first theatrical treatment of a nihilistic

subject, a meaningful choice for him. At the same time, he staged "Revolt in Asturia," a work of socialist realism based on the general strike in Spain in October 1934. In his youth he was a member of the communist party, and in the years 1937–1938 he joined the newspaper *Alger Républicain* and wrote a series of articles on the Berbers of Kabylia. This disproved the future accusation of the critics of his book *L'Homme révolté* (The Rebel) (1952) that Camus did not support the revolt against colonialism. In his debate in the pages of *France Observateur* with the communist journalist Pierre Hervé after the book appeared, Camus said he wanted to show him "a few hundred pages which proved that for twenty years, when Hervé and his friends neglected the struggle for tactical reasons, that was the only political struggle I waged" (Lottman, 1979: 546–60).

When he joined the Resistance in 1941, Camus declared that he did so "out of a conditioned reflex of humiliated honor." After setting up a rebel group in Oran in that year, he called on his friends in Algiers to learn the principles of the Oran organization and to extend it to Algiers and other places. According to Emmanuel Robles, the organization in Oran helped Jews and liberals, who were threatened by the Vichy regime, to move to Tunisia (Camus, 1965:1456–62; Todd, 2000: 219–20).

Camus fought against both the brown totalitarianism and the red one. In his works, and also as a member of the editorial board of the journal *Combat*, he laid bare the visage of totalitarianism at a time when many of the French intellectuals and authors collaborated with the Nazi invader or continued their lives as usual under the Vichy regime. But the true test of consistency in the struggle against totalitarian violence was opposition to its leftist manifestation—Stalinism. Camus was the first French intellectual, and the most consistent one, to fight both Nazism and Stalinism. This, of course, did not gain him any credit on the Left Bank of the Seine where Jean-Paul Sartre held sway in the 1950s. Camus's intellectual honesty was well known. An example of this was his complex attitude to the Algerian War, which he saw—to use Hegel's definition of tragedy—as a conflict between right and right: the universality of the right to self-determination versus the rights of his mother.

Camus's original intention was to publish what he called the three "absurds"—the philosophical novel *The Stranger*, the aesthetic essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (The Myth of Sisyphus) and the play *Caligula*—in one volume. He thought that in so doing he could encompass the whole question of the absurd. However, his friend the publisher Edmond Charlot told him that the project was impractical from a financial point of view. In 1942, when he was thirty years old, Camus had reached the peak of his creativity with the publication of *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In these two works, he succeeded in expressing a consolidated artistic and intellectual

position and established himself as the twentieth-century philosopher of the absurd. Through Sisyphus, the proletarian of the gods, and Meursault, the proletarian of the modern age, Camus made a surprising declaration: the absurdity of the world is paradoxically an invitation to happiness.

In Sisyphus and Meursault, the height of happiness is embodied in a pantheistic feeling, man's fusion with the cosmos. Despite their fate—one has to roll a stone up a mountain all his life and the other has to die—and perhaps precisely because of it, they feel at peace with the world. At the end of *The Stranger*, when Meursault throws out the priest who has forced him to confess, he finally attains the tranquility he had hoped for and describes his pantheistic sensation. Camus imagines Sisyphus as ultimately happy. Absurd though it may be, these antiheroes find their happiness in their punishment.

Sartre, Malraux, and Camus achieved their success by writing metaphysical novels before they chose to express themselves by other means. Malraux in *The Temptation of the West* (1926) and through the hero of *The Conquerors* rejected normal life in favor of the absurd. Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) did his best to express the absurdity of existence. Camus did not invent absurdity and did not introduce it to France but only concretized it in daily life and gave it a different form. He did not have to extend the attack on bourgeois morality and religion, for this was part of the mood of the period and was accepted by most thinkers. The works of Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* and *The Possessed*, Malraux's *Condition humaine*, and the writings of Hegel and Marx dominated the philosophical and political thinking of the intellectual Left in France. The common denominator was an agreement on the impotence of bourgeois society and its values, and the question of man's transcendental basis. Camus too, tried to solve the difficult spiritual problem that was uppermost in 1942. Claude Mauriac describes very well Camus's contribution to central spiritual mood of his generation (Thody, 1957: 9).

The crushing defeat of those who sought to represent the humanistic values of Western culture in the face of the Nazi invader, who spoke in the name of Western culture and claimed to redeem it from decadence, formed the background to Camus's writing. His early assumption that life had no meaning apart from itself and his disbelief in transcendental hopes or solutions—all this fitted the dark mood in French intellectual circles in 1942. The historical situation in which the French people found itself translated in practice into the shamefulness of the occupation, into the feeling that liberation was far away and the paths of philosophical and aesthetic deliverance had been closed off. *The Stranger* fitted the atmosphere of the period, and *The Myth of Sisyphus* provided an analysis of the existential situation.

The interrelationship between the pessimistic atmosphere in 1942, Meursault's indifference in *The Stranger*, and the attempt to explain both through the concept of the absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus* makes Camus a sensitive interpreter of the consciousness of that period. Meursault represents the assumptions on which *The Myth of Sisyphus* was based. He does not believe in the things that generally give meaning to life: friendship, career, love, family warmth. None of these has any meaning for him. Why, then, does such a man not commit suicide? And to Camus this should be philosophy's first question as he famously puts it in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Is suicide the necessary consequence of a life without meaning? The basic question of the justification for existence requires an answer before an attempt is made to set up a system of values or a moral framework of any kind.

The first sentence of *The Stranger* is one of the most poignant and penetrating opening sentences in the history of the modern novel, "Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know." The sparing use of words, like the conciseness of the whole book, reflects the line developed in this novella: total alienation. The son doesn't know when his mother died and is not especially disturbed by the fact. He does not ask for any more information in the old people's home, and his knowledge of the death of his mother is based solely on a telegram. The stranger—Meursault, the main character of the book, represented in the first person—is executed on the anniversary of his mother's death. Is Camus suggesting that the punishment closes a circle that began with a sin? Whatever the case, Meursault feels guilt about his mother's death. To the element of guilt is added that of alienation: his life is lived listlessly, meaninglessly. He lives in total emptiness, completely indifferent; passivity is his trademark. A stranger alienated from his life, his work, his friends, his neighbors, his girlfriend, and his mother, Meursault feels at home in his alienation.

The authentic Meursault is the alienated Meursault. A man accursed without a reason, and as such ostracized from human society. He sees himself as a perpetual sinner doomed to existential alienation, like his existential guilt. Meursault sends his mother to the old people's home because he is alienated, and he is alienated because he sins. Like the crucified one, he is burdened with sin without having committed any particular sin. A man can be a sinner without any causal connection: the thing is similar to a scapegoat. Sin lies at Meursault's door. He is born in sin and metaphysical alienation, and for lack of choice adopts them as a lifestyle. The only solution to Meursault's sense of sin is alienation, a mechanical, passive life without content. If he sins, his punishment is excommunication. The metaphysical runs parallel to the immanent: Meursault is burdened with metaphysical sin (being born in alienation) and with immanent sin (sending his mother to the asylum and her death). He lives with this in peace.

The presence of Marie, his girlfriend, breaks the symmetry of sin and punishment, a symmetry with which he has managed so far. When Marie tries to break this delicate equilibrium through her attempt to free him from his alienation by bringing him closer to society and life, she only intensifies his sense of sin.

In *The Stranger* women represent the cosmos, the world of experience, and Marie exemplifies for him the threat of breaking the alienation. Before, he acted without feeling; now, he feels without action. A reversal has taken place: Meursault now fears his alienation from alienation. His authenticity was expressed in his alienation, and his estrangement is his identity card in the world. Meursault represents the essence of the absurd: I'm a stranger, therefore I am. Suddenly, he is dazzled by the sun. His life is turned upside-down in a second. Until then he had believed he was free to plan his life, but his arbitrary fate makes him murder an Arab on the seashore. Absurdity is manifested in his fate, in the sun, in the murder, in the arbitrary trial, in the sentence, in his execution (Girard, 1968: 13–52). The absurd releases man from all responsibility. There is only one certainty in a man's life: the sense of being alive. The question is not that of improving one's moral behavior—for there are no moral laws and the arbitrariness of fate prevails—but that of whether to live more intensely and exchange quantity of experience for quality of life.

Meursault's alienation is not understood by society. The judge who interrogates him about the murder of the Arab on the seashore is not angry with him because of his crime, for he had seen many criminals, but because of that indifference and alienation. Meursault is indifferent at the sight of the cross. He does not understand the significance of his crime. He carries on as usual after the death of his mother and the murder of the Arab; he even feels tranquility after committing the crime. Like Raskolnikov, the hero of Dostoyevsky, whom Camus revered, Meursault finally reached a special condition of accursedness. Until now he had felt his alienation from society because he believed he was in a state of sin, but the moment the sin became public and society described him as a sinner, he felt liberated. The burden of sin fell off him the moment it was recognized. He felt that the period of his investigation under arrest was the best he had ever known. The antichrist found his place in the prison.

Alienation and the absurd are bound together. The judge could not understand why Meursault fired four additional shots. And Meursault, representing Camus, gives an ontological status to the absurd whenever one cannot ascribe a significance to a particular thing. The absurd is the tension between uncompromising reason and a world without meaning. The pointlessness of the shots showed that there is no significance in human actions. The anger of the believing judge at Meursault's indifference to the

cross and his anger at the meaninglessness of the four shots is therefore understandable.

In this way, alienation and the absurd are bound together in the figure and actions of Meursault: Meursault, who has no feelings, is also the person who fires four meaningless shots. Meursault murders "because of the sun," without any motive. Raskolnikov murders with a motive; this makes him a man and consequently redeemable. But Meursault is a nonmurderer and therefore unredeemable. A person's death is meaningless in itself. The perpetrator does not experience the murder, he does not feel any motivation as a murderer, and hence he does not see himself as a murderer. The man without feelings is now a murderer without motivation. He lives in a world without significance and he therefore cannot accept a god who gives significance to the world—hence his rejection of the cross. Murderers with a motive weep at the sight of the cross, but Meursault, who has no motive, is not moved at the sight of it. A crime, according to Meursault, is defined by the motive and not by the act. The criminals wept because they recognized their crime, but Meursault has no motive and thus is not a criminal in his own eyes.

The incident dominates the trial as the absurd dominates in life. Meursault's involvement in the murder was actually a matter of chance, but the fact that he was a murderer was not a matter of chance. Camus is really laughing at society's attempt to construct layers of significance in a world without meaning. Those responsible, the court and the judge, do not understand that a man stands before them for whom there is no motive or explanation, whose fate is determined by the hand of chance, and whose life is a perpetual alienation. Only we know that Meursault lives in a completely arbitrary world, without moral feelings and without motives. The judge tries as hard as he can to find a motive, as he is not ready to recognize the absurd. Such a recognition would undermine his world and bring him onto the threshold of nihilism. In seeking motives and forgiveness for the murder of the Arab, the judge and priest seek to legitimize their own worlds.

On one level, the absurd is dominant: there is no concrete motive for the concrete murder. On another level, when the son is executed on the anniversary of his mother's death, we are faced with a metaphysical significance. There is no connection between all the happenings connected with the murder, but there is a definite connection between Meursault's life cycle and his execution. Is Camus suggesting that the punishment closes a circle that began with sin? The significance is revealed on the level of sin and alienation. Meursault could have continued to take a distance from his guilt under a mask of alienation, but when he was prevented from doing this, he had no alternative except to murder, and in that way to make the metaphysical sin a tangible sin. At the time of the murder, at the moment

he accepted the tangible guilt, he was delivered from the sense of metaphysical guilt. From that moment he felt a tangible peace, and those were the best days of his life. Now he was at peace with himself and went to be punished for his sin. The balance between sin and punishment was restored. Through the murder of the Arab, the metaphysical sin and punishment evolved into an immanent sin and punishment.

Was the "stranger" the everyman whom Camus had in mind in *The Myth of Sisyphus*? At first sight, Meursault is not a good example of an absurd individual. In *Sisyphus* Camus described three types of men: the actor, the seducer, and the conqueror, who embody in their lives "a desire to extract everything possible." In Meursault, this quality of extraction is completely absent: he is an autonomous figure, and Camus does not make him a literary model for Sisyphus. Ironically, and perhaps in a Kafkaesque way, Camus does not find his hero in the three ideal types he puts forward but chooses an antihero, a clerk. Meursault is a clerk, an ordinary man, and not "psychopathic" or "schizoid" (Leites, 1963: 247–67).

A hint of the mythical interconnection between *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* is to be found, however, in the sentence in which Camus says "a temporary employee in an office is equal in value to a conqueror if he has the same consciousness of his fate." Meursault recognizes the absurdity of his life and concretizes this existential experience as much as he can. Although he is a stranger and outsider, his playing field is physical life: swimming, running, making love, feeling the sun shine on his face. These experiences give him happiness and confidence. His indifference is not an indifference to life itself but is a feeling that society corrupts life through a false belief, which is that the world has significance or importance. He perceives the emptiness of laws and the mistake of confirming the reasons for which he was sent to his death. His last wish, to see the crowds gathering at the site of his execution, expresses his rebellion and his scorn for convention.

The critics received *The Myth of Sisyphus* enthusiastically as soon as it appeared. It was praised as "an eye-opening analysis of the crisis of the modern consciousness, which is a crisis of values." It was said to be "the most faithful artistic expression of the evil of modern times: the absurd." From this agreed starting point of the absurd, Camus took off and discovered humanistic values. He never described himself as a humanist, nor as an existentialist or a philosopher. Five years later, in *La Peste* (The Plague) he condemned people who only thought about themselves, who did not consider the tragic nature of the life going on around them. Camus insisted that he was not an existentialist because from Pascal and Kierkegaard until today existential thought has denied man's capacity to influence his fate.

In his opinion, he was not a philosopher either: "What interests me is how man ought to behave," he declared. He meant to convey by this that

he was unable to analyze in an abstract way something about which he felt emotionally indifferent. There was consequently no mention in his works of the traditional philosophical problems of time and space, causality, free will and determinism, reality and appearance; and unlike the academic philosophers, he wrote only of what was known to him from personal experience. *The Myth of Sisyphus* has to be seen in that context. The tremendous success of the book reflects Camus's capacity to reflect the historical experience of his period in terms that apply to virtually everyone.

Rather than seeking to explain its existence, Camus sees the absurd as self-evident. We are conscious of our transience, our limitations, our end, in which the inevitability of death is the triumphant proof of the absurd. The intellectual expressions of the absurd reveal its true nature: we will never be able to satisfy our hunger for abstract knowledge because science cannot explain the world. The absurd is born out of the incompatibility of our longing for a definite explanation and the essential impenetrability of the world. The world cannot be logical or absurd: only man's consciousness interprets the concept of reason, by means of which the world can be judged as absurd. The absurd happens when two factors are present: on the one hand, man's pretension in thinking that the world must be explicable in human terms, and on the other hand, a world that cannot be explained: "The absurd is the clash between irrationality and the desperate hunger for clarity that cries out from the depths of the human soul." It arises out of the tension between the consciousness of death and the desire for eternity.

Kierkegaard, Kafka, Shestov, Husserl, Jaspers—all, according to Camus, came to terms with the irrationality of the world. They refused to recognize the primacy of reason. Jaspers and Kierkegaard gave the absurd a religious dimension, while Shestov identified it with God. Husserl and the phenomenalists found a definite value in individual things. In this way, they solved the problem of explanation: the solution was that our explanation is the source of the absurdity. Camus refused to accept this conciliatory solution. According to him, the absurd exists because the world is inexplicable in human terms. There is therefore no justification for putting forward an explanation for a world that by definition is beyond the reach of human reason: "To the consciousness of the absurd, reason is of no use, and beyond reason there is nothing." Camus refused to accept anything beyond human understanding. This hints at *L'Homme révolté* (The Rebel), which he wrote ten years later about the rebel who justifies man and refuses to accept a nonhuman world.

The Refusal to Be Afflicted by the Gods

The death of God is the birth of the absurd. Meursault in *The Stranger* rejects the cross in the law court and refuses to confess to the priest in his cell because he lives in an absurd world. Without religious faith the world has no significance and, according to Dostoyevsky, "If God does not exist, all is permitted." Nihilism lies at the gate. The aim of Camus's rebellion like that of Dostoyevsky's Christianity is to show that this does not have to be the case. Values exist. Why? That's just the way it is! That "just the way it is" bereft of any religious, rational, or moral pretension has the greatest possible validity.

The young Camus thought that Nietzsche found God dead in the soul of his age. We have killed God, we have murdered the king, and we are left with no purpose, without a tomorrow. We are strangers in our world, and we are facing a chasm. The world is "the place of our exile, but also our only kingdom" (Camus, 1965: 238–53). Nietzsche's heartrending question, "Where shall I feel at home?" is Camus's also. Now the days of wandering, the tiring search for justifications, the unsatisfied longings, are at hand. The existentialists' conclusions were the starting point of Camus's reasonings, but he was not satisfied with their answers. According to him, the existentialists sinned by taking an elegant escape, a "leap" that had always been the easy way out. Shestov, Kierkegaard, and Jaspers despaired of reason, escaping to the transcendental.

Sisyphus and Nietzsche came to a similar conclusion: both of them refused to be afflicted by the gods, and they affirmed life as it was, devoid of any values outside itself. If it had been possible, Camus, like Nietzsche, would have opted for pre-Socratic Greece. As Camus saw it, Greek mythology did not deal with the abstract, for the Greek gods lived and died and mingled with men. As against this, Christianity required an arbitration between the abstract and the immanent in the form of Jesus. For Camus, as for the Greeks, there could not be a separate abstract morality: Hercules refrained from doing harm because the children who were murdered cried out, not because of an order—"Lay not thine hand upon the lad!" Sisyphus had no boundaries: he went to and fro between death and life. He was punished for his insolence toward the gods and his contempt for death.

In the collections of his early articles *Betwixt and Between* (1937) and *Nuptials* (1938), the ideas that Camus developed systematically in *The Myth of Sisyphus* were already present. They included the temptation to forget one's humanity and lose oneself in pantheism, impossible though that is. One has to remain ironical, to be conscious of the tragedy of existence, to realize that there can be no love of life without existential despair: "Don't let them tell you any tales. Don't let them tell you that man is

doomed to death, and that he has then paid his debt to society." The refusal to admit to anything except the world as it is was one of Meursault's characteristics. *The Myth of Sisyphus* begins with the account of an incident that had already appeared in *Betwixt and Between*: a man committed suicide because a friend spoke to him coldly (Camus, 1965: 31–72). The same idea exists in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: a development from the assumption that the world is absurd to the conclusion that follows: one must live one's life more intensely. The end of life in a world without an end increases the value of life.

The heat of the sun, the cry of the children selling ices in the square, the enjoyment of going to the beach and swimming, the coolness of the evening in Mediterranean lands—all these are pleasures described by Camus in *Nuptials*, and they form the basis of Meursault's private character. The moral value that existed in Meursault after the disappearance of all other values is the essential basis admired by Camus in the simple pagan civilization of North Africa. The subject of *Sisyphus* is to be found in a statement in *Nuptials*: "I have to strip naked and jump into the sea!" Unlike the "cold" intellectuals of Europe, Camus felt at home in the direct physical dimension that was his logic for rejecting suicide. This physical and spiritual climate dominates the psychological atmosphere of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and this is what distinguishes Camus from other thinkers of the absurd.

Sartre, in his "Explanation to *The Stranger*," found that the descriptive, nonanalytical passages in the book expressed the vision of a world without order. To the indifference toward life is added the tragic nature of fate. Meursault's sentence is absurd by any standard, or perhaps society is ontologically absurd because it prevented Meursault from being happy. In his debate with Camus after the publication of *L'Homme révolté*, Sartre compared him to Meursault: "We discovered Camus, the man of the opposition movement, as we discovered the author of *The Stranger*, when the editor of *Combat*, the newspaper of the underground, joined Meursault, who cultivated honesty to the point of refusing to say that he loved his mother or his girlfriend." Sartre, eulogizing Camus after Camus's death in a car accident, linked the accident with the absurd: "I called the accident that killed Camus a scandal because it suddenly projects into the center of our human world the absurdity of our most fundamental needs" (Sartre, 1988: 164–67). Meursault is judged through a misunderstanding: not for his murder on the seashore, but because he did not cry at his mother's funeral. On another level, we see the absurd in the scrap of newspaper that Meursault found in his cell. It contained the story of a man who left his village in Czechoslovakia, grew rich, married, and after some 25 years returned to his village where his mother and sister had a small hotel. They did not recognize him, and as a joke he asked them to give him a room without revealing

his identity. That night, his mother and sister robbed him, murdered him, and threw his body into the river, as they did with all their guests. His wife, who was staying nearby, arrived the next day and unintentionally discovered who the guest had been. Upon hearing this news, his mother hanged herself, and his sister jumped into her grave. This was similar to the fate of Meursault. The absurdity was not merely passive—a consciousness of death and an absence of values—but an evil and cruel force.

The play *Le Malentendu* (The Misunderstanding) (1944) is a sketch that resembles the story that Meursault found in his cell (Camus, 1944). Here, too, the traveler, Jean, does not reveal his identity to his relatives, although he apparently longs to be identified by them. He says to his wife, "A man can't always remain a stranger. A man needs happiness, that's true, but he also needs to find his place in the world." Not everyone is suited to adopt Meursault's approach and to remain indifferent to the world. But Jean's desire to be recognized, his search for a world that will be a home to him, ends tragically. The tea that Jean's sister brings him as a welcoming gesture is prepared in order to make it easier for his mother and sister to murder him: both the guilty and the innocent suffer in the world of the absurd. The truth of our world is exile and parting. One does not have the consolation of physical life here as in *The Stranger* or *Nuptials*. People not born in the lands of the sun have no consolation. Happiness is a matter of luck, a matter of geographical or economic chance. The metaphysical pessimism of *The Myth of Sisyphus* finds strong symbolic expression in *The Misunderstanding*. The characters in the play twice demand answers to their questions. When alone in his room in the hotel, Jean wants to escape from the terror of absolute loneliness, "the fear that has no answer." The only answer is given when he rings the bell and an old, silent servant appears. At the end of the play, the servant again appears upon the stage in answer to Maria's desperate appeal to God to come to her aid: "O God, turn your gaze upon me. Listen to me. Grant thy mercies to those who love and are parted!" The servant answers with a single word: "No!"

The Stranger, *Sisyphus*, and *Caligula* are three different formulations of the question of the absurd, and at the same time three possible answers: Meursault commits murder, Sisyphus rebels, Caligula goes mad. Sisyphus's rebellion and Caligula's revolution are counterreactions to nihilism, the Nietzschean philosophy of the young Camus. Camus chose rebellion and rejected revolution.

Caligula was written in 1938, before the outbreak of the Second World War, and was first performed in 1945, at the war's conclusion. The play deals with the Roman despot who came to power in 37 CE at the age of only 25. He was wise, handsome, educated, and liked by the soldiers, especially on account of his father, the general Germanicus. His father's soldiers

gave him the nickname "little army boot"—in Latin, *caligula*. Germanicus was the great-nephew of the Emperor Augustus, the founder of the Roman empire. Caligula's predecessor as emperor was Tiberius. When Tiberius died, the Romans cried in their anger, "Throw Tiberius in the Tiber!" and Caligula's reign began against this background. For the first seven months he was sick in bed, and then there began trials for treason and the liquidation of both opponents and supporters. Caligula, thought to be a strong man concerned with the security of the state, appeared disguised as Venus and slept with his sister Drusilla, and his image began to be undermined. But the famous "fact" that supposedly demonstrated his insanity—his appointment of his horse Incitatus as a consul—is questionable. As a French historian has pointed out, asses are given high positions, not horses! Bankruptcies motivated him to order a series of murders of the Roman aristocracy, and when that did not help to establish his rule, he decided that a new war would not be a bad thing. An attempted invasion of England did not go well, but in order not to admit his mistake in front of his soldiers he claimed that he did not originally intend to go to war but had ordered his soldiers to collect oysters on the shore. When he was murdered on the January 24, 41, he cried out to his Brutuses, "I'm still alive!"

Although Caligula was a dictator of the classical era, Camus suggested he embodied certain qualities that forestalled modern totalitarianism. A dictator is interested in power and nothing else: there is no idea behind a dictator because a dictatorship has no philosophy of history; and totalitarian regimes boast of creating a new man and a new scale of values. When Camus put in Caligula's mouth the following statements said to Patricius, he had in mind the French Revolution and the ideological revolutions that followed in its wake in the twentieth century: "As the need arises, we shall have these people die; a list will be drawn up by us fixing the order of their deaths. When the fancy takes us, we may modify that order" (Camus, 1947: 19).

In this play, Camus looked for a formula that would serve as a bridge between the mythical subject and a modern style, the metaphysical treatment of political evil and mundane politics. He wished to be faithful to Suetonius's biography but also to the philosophy of the absurd. Caligula desired the moon, longed to bring the metaphysical kingdom down to the vale of tears, to vanquish the absurd, to defeat the tragic basis of life. Caligula does not rebel against the gods: he aspires to rise above them, to build himself a world of his own in which everyone will be happy. In Camus's words, he represents "the lack of proportion in the aspiration to the impossible, the destruction it contains, its failure." The play *Caligula* can be read as a political representation of Nietzsche's "superman." Caligula, whose freedom has no political or metaphysical limits, seeks to overcome the misery of human existence by creating a nihilistic utopia. His revolution is

expressed in an attempt to change the basic nature of the world, to destroy everything, even the distinction between good and evil. The play contains the following dialogue between Caligula and Caesonia:

> Caesonia: It's wanting to be god on earth.
> Caligula: No. It's something higher, far above the gods. I am taking over a kingdom where the impossible is king.
> Caesonia: You can't prevent the sky from being the sky in the sea. [. . .]
> Caesonia: I want to drown the sky in the sea, to infuse ugliness with beauty, to wring laughter from pain.
> Caesonia: There's good and bad, high and low, justice and injustice. And I swear to you these will never change.
> Caligula: And I resolved to change them [. . .]. I shall be transfigured and the world renewed; then men will die no more, and at last be happy (Camus, 1947: 23–24).

Caligula answers the absurd with the absurd. Reason has overcome the life force, and one therefore has to break all the rules and go mad. The contempt for life is punished in the severest way imaginable. When Caligula pretends to be dead and Patricius cries out, "By Jupiter, I won't die under him!" Caligula orders him to be killed, saying, "If you really loved life, friend, you wouldn't behave so frivolously." As the embodiment of the absurd, Caligula is a prophet who is determined to impose an awareness of his new regime. Unlike Sisyphus, who recognizes the gods and his limitations and rebels against them, Caligula fails in his attempt to be God. Camus does not believe in a man who is God, just as he does not believe in a God who is man, and in *The Rebel* he answers Caligula, "One has to learn to live and to die, and to refuse to be God in order to be man" (Camus, 1956).

Caligula is the tragedy of the absurd man. This emperor first seeks his own freedom and is finally convinced that one can only achieve total freedom by destroying the freedom of everyone else: "After all, I haven't many ways of proving I'm a free man. We are always free at the expense of someone else." This conviction makes him commit terrible deeds: Caligula murders fathers and sons, sleeps with their wives, and takes the lives of his close friends. Because he could not materialize absolute good, he materializes absolute evil. The conclusion is that one cannot destroy everything without destroying oneself. At the end of the play Caligula admits that the destruction he caused around him, "of which the acts of the Creator are a poor imitation," did not bring him freedom or happiness but only a feeling of revulsion. The rejection of the gods will lead to the rejection of men, because in the attempt to bring things to an absurd state, the human values are canceled out.

Caligula wanted to be sure that through him everyone would recognize the absurdity of existence. Here we have more than a suggestion of the totalitarian principle of the imposition of a single possibility, a single truth, even if it is absurd. The critic Roger Quilliot wrote, "Camus verges on political prophecy. Nazism appears here under a mask" (Quilliot, 1956). Caligula's absurd logic is revealed in his arbitrary act of giving a gift to a slave who stole because he was quiet when he was tortured. Cherea admits that the insecurity that Caligula imposes on the world forces one to think. When Caligula is killed, he cries out, "I'm still alive!" He dies in the knowledge that he has failed because he has not passed beyond the limits of human existence, and he recognizes his finality: "I have chosen the wrong path. I have not achieved anything. My freedom is not true freedom." After Caligula, the revolt against the nature of the world and the presumption of changing the character of man gave way to a far more modest attempt at improvement and amelioration. Modern history has shown that man's humanity is lost whenever rebellion becomes a revolution, that concrete revolt is replaced by a political attempt to nullify historical man and give birth to a new human model.

In Caligula, Camus attempted an interesting but difficult experiment: to try to make the public empathize with Caligula despite all the suffering he causes (Coombs, 1968). Caligula, like a romantic hero, is not made happy by his growing consciousness of reality. Like the hero, he "sleeps two hours a night, and the rest of the time is unable to rest and wanders around in the rooms of the palace." He points out that his absurd fantasies cause fewer deaths than the smallest war waged by an enlightened despot. Two of the positive characters in the play—Cherea, the honest revolutionary, and Scipio, the young poet—are sympathetic to Caligula. Caligula and Camus have the same love of life and horror of death. Caligula's suffering and the execution of Meursault are problems of a society that fails to understand. The absurd is not tragic because of the irrationality of the world but because the possibility of happiness is in contradiction to the existence of misery. There is no significance in Caligula's suffering or the happiness of *Nuptials*. Caligula's suffering and Meursault's happiness in *The Stranger* exist in a world in which killing, sexual immorality, and the destruction of an empire are of equal value. Crime, guilt, and innocence have no value in themselves. This absence of values was central to the philosophizing of the young Camus, and he sought to create a new system of values in place of the defunct humanist tradition.

From Nihilism to Humanism

The philosophy of the absurd could not serve as a justification for the actions that Camus took at the time of the struggle against the Nazis and his work in the underground. He said, "We need to know if man, without the values of religion or rational thought, can by himself create his own values." He had to find a solution to the contradiction between his ideas and his actions. Camus could have claimed that the absurd was a literary matter with which he did not identify entirely and, pointing to his youth, could have said that he did not really want to be like Meursault, Don Juan, or Caligula. But although he was an actor, he did not display a cynical attitude toward his literary conclusions.

In February 1944, Camus published an unsigned "Lettre à un allemand qui fût mon ami" (Letter to a German Who Was My Friend) in the underground journal *Revue Libre*, which was printed "somewhere in France." It was the first of four letters that were published collectively only with the defeat of Germany. The second letter was published at the height of the war in the underground journal *Cahiers de Libération*, and Camus signed under the name Louis Neuville. The last letter, of July 1944, sent "from a city somewhere in the world, which is now preparing against you a celebration of freedom," was written in Paris (Camus, 1995: 26). Camus lived there and worked as a member of the staff of *Combat*, a journal of the Resistance that began to appear at the beginning of the uprising in occupied Paris.

The letters were dedicated to René Leynaud, a member of the Resistance who was killed by the Nazis and who for Camus exemplified spiritual rebellion in the face of brutal force. Camus wrote a moving introduction to a book of poems by Leynaud that was published after the poet's death. By the introductory quotation to the letters, taken from Pascal, which said that the greatness of a man is revealed when he touches two extremes, Camus intended to convey that yesterday's adversary can be tomorrow's friend and that the nationalism of the present would end in a united Europe. The two extremes are the internal and external aspects of humanity, or in Pascal's words, which were used as the epigraph of Camus's collected letters: "A man doesn't show his greatness by being at one extremity, but rather by touching both at once" (Camus, 1995: 2).

Camus's letters are evidence of his personal overcoming of his early Nietzscheanism. In the fourth letter, Camus stated that he and the German had thought in the past that "this world has no higher purpose." They did not believe in the significance of this world and arrived at a relativism of values according to which "one could define good and evil according to the viewpoint of each person." For the young Camus, the absurdity of existence was the dominant concept, but he did not renounce the world

as it is but only denied its significance. Dr. Rieux in *The Plague* ascribed meaning to a lack of meaning: although the world is beyond good and evil, one nevertheless has to act morally for no reason, as a command, as an assumption, as an instinct.

In the same way as for the young Camus, for Meister Eckhart there was no meaning in the world—that is to say, in this world. He therefore wanted to be "swallowed up in God," to lose his independence in something transcendental. But for him, self-annihilation in God was an elevation: the world is transient, but there is a higher purpose. As against Eckhart who claimed that all was worthless and that he therefore had to be swallowed up outside that worthlessness, Nietzsche, who arrived at a similar perception, elevated himself within the self-annihilation. Nietzsche thought there was no wisdom in losing oneself in something greater than oneself, outside oneself: in God, in the nation, or in anything else of significance. Wisdom consisted in giving one's affirmation to something that was nothing in itself. That statement was a hundred times more audacious, a kind of metaphysical suicide within an affirmation of the immanent. Camus might have said, my kingdom is the kingdom of this world; Eckhart said, my kingdom is the kingdom of heaven. According to Nietzsche, there is neither this world nor a next world; nihilism is immanent to existence, but Nietzsche nevertheless affirmed existence despite its meaninglessness.

In this amoral state of nature in which might is right, man is liable to feel himself impotent, and what is valued is the sensation of power or conquest. Were it not for the fear of the ruling authority—universal, rational, or moral—men would devour each other alive. The more Camus matured, the further he went from Nietzsche. The later Camus recoiled from the deification of existence and fate, from the total surrender to their arbitrary nature. An example of a philosophical surrender of this kind was Heidegger, who thought that existence and fate had replaced the Greek language with German (Heidegger, 1976: 267–84). As though Prometheus had returned the fire to the gods and renounced his independence, and as though Heidegger exemplified metaphysical subjugation, Camus's Prometheus proclaims metaphysical revolt. In the Greek myths that influenced the German romantics and Camus, there was an aestheticization of chaos and a cosmos of Promethean significance was constructed, but in the Nazi mythology, chaos overcame Prometheus. In that chaotic world, the scale of values was shattered and the difference between the actual and the ideal also collapsed. If the actual is sanctified, the ideal is annulled. Man is in revolt against arbitrary Caesars and gods: "Man is precisely the power that finally removes despots and gods."

The play *Caligula* and the novel *La Peste* (The Plague) (1947) described the absurdity of totalitarianism, the stylized nightmare, the abstract

character of the impersonal machine. In both of them its power-hungry, destructive character is prominent, not the personality of Hitler or Stalin but the nihilistic practice of totalitarianism. The totalitarian state under siege is depicted in *The Plague*, Algeria subject to a sudden wave of death that attacked Oran and caused it to become a "necropolis." The authorities in the city put all those thought to be "infected" in quarantine—an area of the dying—and trucks carried away the dead to be cremated. The horror is described by Dr. Rieux, the narrator, as "a monotonous stripping" that overtakes the city systematically, invalidating all assumptions and destroying all values, all traces of human respect. The streets of the besieged and plague-ridden city are strewn with human corpses, rats, and dogs. The plague spares hardly anyone: "Every man carries the infection within himself because no man is immune from it." Tarrou, son of the state attorney, whose father sentences both criminals and the innocent to death, saves people from the plague but dies of it in the end, in the despairing knowledge that there is no escape from it. It is precisely Dr. Rieux, the unbeliever, the seeming nihilist, who risks his life to rescue victims and foster hope and humanity among the suffering. The nihilist becomes a humanist.

The city is suddenly saved, for no reason. The plague was arbitrary, and the deliverance was the same. Mad with joy, the inhabitants of the city celebrate their deliverance, oblivious of the fact that the plague can recur, and the novel ends with the words, "And, indeed, as he listened to the cry of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew [. . .] that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good" (Camus, 1969: 278). "What was hidden from this happy crowd was that the cause of the plague was never eliminated [. . .] and that the day will perhaps come, to the misfortune of the human race and in order to teach them a lesson, that the plague will awaken the rats and send them to die in the jubilant city." The plague could break out again anywhere.

This analysis of totalitarianism aroused criticism. Just as Isaac Deutscher and Raymond Williams attacked George Orwell, saying that in *1984* he was inclined to a "mysticism of impersonal cruelty" (Deutscher, 1963; Williams, 1981), so Roland Barthes and Sartre criticized Camus, who in their opinion had failed in *The Plague* because it depicted totalitarianism as a mystical phenomenon and not the product of human beings: it was treated as an act of nature and not as a man-made occurrence (Barthes, 1955; Sartre, 1952). The fact is that the events described by Camus were truly fantastic. One can see *1984* as a world of pure nihilism, one stage beyond the reality of totalitarianism. Similarly, one can see *The Worker*, the nihilistic utopia of the protofascist writer Ernst Jünger, as one stage beyond the antiutopia of *The Plague*. Jünger hoped in *The Worker* for what Camus warned against in *The Plague*, and Camus explained in a letter to Barthes that the allegorical

story of *The Plague* described "the European movement of opposition to Nazism" (Camus, 1968: 339).

The young Camus and Hannah Arendt represented metaphysical perceptions influenced by the teachings of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Both of them followed the vicissitudes of nihilism up to its political realization by the totalitarian regimes. Although they saw a humanist potential in modernity, it also had a monstrous aspect: the communist faith gave rise to Stalinism. The goal sanctified values that lost their absolute character and became relative. Nihilist relativism exists at the heart of the modern consciousness.

There is no evidence that Camus read Arendt, but it is certain that Arendt read some of Camus's letters and was impressed by his personality. In the section on Camus's *The Stranger* and Sartre in an early article on French existentialism, Arendt said that the two French writers had no nostalgia for the past and that they represented a clear-sighted approach to modernity that did not try to hide the depths of the crisis of the Western tradition. In another article, she criticized forms of civil disobedience based on self-interest, and as an example she gave the name of Camus. In 1946, Arendt wrote enthusiastically that Camus was "a new kind of personality that simply and without any 'European nationality' is European." In 1952, at the height of the controversy over *The Rebel*, she wrote to her husband about having met Camus the previous day, describing him as the most distinguished man in France, standing above all intellectuals (Isaac, 1992: 17).

Camus's *The Rebel* and Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* appeared in 1951, and the following year saw the publication of Jacob L. Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. The writer, the philosopher, and historian traced the intellectual roots of totalitarianism and attempted to analyze the mechanism it contains. Six years after the war, these critics of totalitarianism refused to speak only about fascism: the roots of the evil lay in both the radicalism of the Right and the radicalism of the Left. Behind totalitarian transgression is faith in an abstract truth that justifies all means in its realization. The strength and weakness of totalitarianism, said Talmon, "is based on the assumption of the existence of a one and only truth in politics" that "implies a single harmonious and perfect régime" (Talmon, 2000).

Camus and Arendt refused to see political history in terms of a metaphysical construction like Nietzsche's "will-to-power," Heidegger's "modern world-picture," Strauss's "historicism," Voegelin's "gnosticism," or Adorno's and Horkheimer's "instrumental reason" (Strauss, 1965; Voegelin, 1987; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1974). Neither of them put forward a comprehensive critique of modernism or proposed a politics of cultural despair. They were content to expose the modern hubris as revealed in Prometheus's race toward liberty.

The Critique of Totalitarianism

Like Camus's "Caligula," modern man hopes for paradise, subordinates all to his objectives, and tries to prove to "the imaginary gods, that any man, without any previous beliefs, can, if he puts his mind to it, act out the absurd parts of perfection." Of course, this was not all that Camus saw in humanism: it was one possible side of it, but Camus refused to close his eyes to the contradiction within humanism or to disregard one of its axes. The source of human arrogance, according to Camus, is the murder of the king and the death of God, the sacrifice of nature for the sake of history, and those responsible were mainly three progenitors: Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. The Hegelian philosophy of history places man in a cosmic drama in which freedom is forever progressing. This Hegelian historicism is exposed by Camus as a true idolatry. In the Hegelian philosophy of history, authentic values can only be found at the end of the historical process. Hegel's thinking introduces negativity and destructiveness into the march of reason by claiming retroactively that everything was dialectically justified. In this quasi-mystical idealism Hegel saw the victory of the world spirit; Marx saw the victory of man as a worker in the framework of communism, in which man's relationship with his neighbor and with nature would be perfect.

Camus saw Marxism as "scientific Messianism." The metaphysical basis of Marxism was related not to the brutality of Soviet communism in the time of Stalin but to the failure to bring about paradise on earth. Camus, who wrote from the historical perspective of the military division of Europe at the height of the Cold War, realized that these lofty visions were a nightmare, that Prometheus had betrayed his civilizing mission. The idea that history could be summarized as a struggle between good and evil was alien to the Greeks: "They did not turn the human mind into a military camp." Camus did not give Marx the historical responsibility for the path taken by his ideas, but his observations nevertheless expose the question of Marx's responsibility as a problem. Marxism has a value as one of the legitimate heirs of the Promethean urge—the modern rebellion—and Stalinism corrupted this value. Camus refused to blame Marx for the rise of Russian totalitarianism. At the same time, the Marxist Promethean aspiration exceeded the limits of humanity. Marx's pupil Lenin made a doctrine out of Marx's theory, and Lenin's successor Stalin made it into a military camp.

It was the relativity of moral action, which began with Hegel's and Marx's struggle against the accepted morality, that according to Camus led to the Leninist revolution. Lenin sought to exclude morality from the sphere of the revolution because he believed it impossible to found a

revolution on the Ten Commandments, and he was therefore indifferent to morality. Lenin, as a Russian, saw it as his task to carry out the Russian revolution. The scientific basis of the revolution would be provided by the intellectuals, and the strategy would be determined by the revolutionaries and propagandists. In Lenin's words, "We are the Young Turks of the revolution, with the addition of a touch of Jesuit." The dictatorship of the revolutionary faction has no finishing point; on the contrary, the direct rule of the proletariat has justification for existing after the revolution as well. The proletarian superstate is not a temporary situation. Because the mechanism of the state is intended to end all exploitation, only when there will no longer be any possibility of exploitation on earth will this mechanism be sent to the trash heap. Camus discerned the Promethean weak spot of Bolshevism: for the sake of some far-off justice, injustice is justified throughout the whole of history. The empire would create ceaseless labor, endless suffering, constant war, and finally the time would come when slavery would turn into its opposite. We have to suppress all freedom in order to achieve the empire, and at the end of days the empire will be freedom. Promethean liberty has to pass through the Promethean Empire.

Camus believed that all the modern revolutions increased the power of the state: 1789 brought in Napoleon, 1848 brought in his nephew, 1917 brought in Stalin, the Italian 1920s brought in Mussolini, and the Weimar Republic brought in Hitler. However, the fascist revolutions were not really revolutions because they lacked the aspiration to universality. Mussolini and Hitler sought to found empires, but unlike revolutionary movements they idolized the irrational instead of idolizing reason and thus renounced the universal. They were the first to found empires on the idea that nothing had significance. Mussolini wanted "a holy religion of anarchy," and Hitler tried to found a stable regime on constant movement and negation.

In the Germany of continual war all values collapsed, and the morality of gangsters overcame the morality of Goethe. In his *Letters to a German Friend*, Camus disagreed with his friend, who said, "Don Quixote is powerless if Faust feels like attacking him" (Camus, 1960: 23). Camus claimed that Don Quixote and Faust were never meant to defeat each other. Hitler and his regime were unable to do without their enemies because they defined themselves solely in relation to their enemies. The demonic "other" gave validity and justification to perpetual battle, and Hitler thus embodied the life force, a biological policy. The logic of National-Socialist dynamism went from conquest to conquest, from enemy to enemy. As long as there were enemies, the terror would continue: there would be enemies as long as the dynamism existed. All the enemies were unbelievers, and they had to be brought back to the faith through sermonizing and propaganda, or destroyed through an inquisition or a Gestapo. Camus quoted a Nazi

newspaper from the time of the party congress, an official declaration of the party: "National Socialism is the only faith that can bring our people to redemption." Thus the worship of God and paganism, redemption, and nihilism were amalgamated.

Camus saw the destruction of Lidice by the Nazis as the first attempt in history to found a church on negation. The houses of the village were burned down, the men were shot, the women banished, the children reared in the religion of the Führer. Special regulations were enforced, and months were devoted to razing the area by dynamite, clearing away stones, sealing a reservoir with tar, changing the road, and diverting the course of the river. Finally, Lidice became nothing but the future. The cemeteries were cleared of the bones of the dead: nothing had existed before in this place (Camus, 1956). Hitler's crimes, including the murder of children, were without precedent in history, because in Camus's opinion there was no example in the past of a doctrine of total destruction. It was the first time that the rulers of a state used their power to create a mystique beyond all moral considerations, to base a religion on nihilism

What has to be understood and condemned, said Camus, is the doctrine of a superior humanity, a doctrine that ended with the systematic creation of subhumans. Nietzsche's ideal of a "superior breed of humanity" was perverted and politically translated into world dominion in the name of philosophical principles. But had this translation been entirely discredited? The more the mature Camus concerned himself with ethics and politics, the more critical he became of Nietzsche; what the writer of *The Will to Power* proposed was a deconstruction of the very idea of principle. Nietzsche was the prophet of nihilism but also its analyzer: the consciousness of modern man was apprehended thanks to the method of Nietzsche, who called himself the first complete nihilist in Europe. The starting point of his philosophizing was modern man's loss of faith. The philosophizing took the form of a method and led to a nihilistic conclusion (Ibid.).

The general trend of the modern era shows that man has lost the center of gravity that enabled him to exist. His metaphysical suicide led to a deep crisis of identity, a kind of estrangement from oneself, a questioning of values and an urge to destroy them. If the law no longer obligates, one can live above it or below it, and Camus observed, two generations before postmodernist relativism, that if one thing is not more true or more right than another, rightness has no meaning and there are no longer any criteria. Freedom disappears when boundaries disappear; the arbitrary reigns supreme, chance becomes God, and the only value is power. The affirmation of everything—crime and suffering, guilt and agony, transgression and murder—ends with the death of rebellion, blind obedience, and the deification of fate. Camus saw the "love of fate" as Nietzsche's paradoxical

definition of freedom. Nietzsche went back to the pre-Socratics who denied any purposes: this world is accepted unconditionally because it has no purpose. To say "yes" to everything including contradictions and suffering means rejecting any chance of improving the world. Evil is seen as one of the aspects of good, as part of fate; the deification of fate requires an absolute surrender to determinism. Life has been brought down to the level of commonplace biology.

But nevertheless, the question arises: what does Nietzsche's rebellious logic, a logic that knows no limits, lead to? Murder finds its justification not in Nietzsche's refusal to worship idols but in his crazy adherence to a reality without values. Saying "yes" to everything means saying "yes" to murder. Thus Nietzsche went from denial of the ideal to the secularization of the world and voiding it of meaning. Because the world is left without God and without a direction, Promethean man makes it his purpose to give it a direction that will bring it to a superior humanity, and Nietzsche's conclusion is the intention of organizing the future of mankind: "The mission of ruling the earth will fall to us." In this way, Nietzsche foretold the twentieth century because he identified the inner logic of nihilism and knew that the inevitable result would be world dominion.

From a description of the fate of humanity in a world without values or significance that the young Camus was concerned with, after 1945 his works turned to the practical consequences of actions on behalf of humanity rather than the nihilistic conclusions of the absurd. The common factor of the two periods in Camus's thinking was this: he never accepted a principle that was not based on a human criterion. He always fought against values that were external to man and rejected values derived from comprehensive systems, the philosophy of history, or accepted eternal truths. He always remained true to a philosophy of balance in which he found refuge from the world of abstraction. He called this approach "Mediterranean." In all his life and works he was a humanist whose values derived from conditions of oppression and injustice and were formed as a protest against them. Camus was an original thinker. In the 1940s, when the absurd was identified with suffering, he gave it a unique interpretation according to which it can also derive from happiness; and at a time when rebellion was identified with disorder, Camus showed that it derived from an aspiration to order and moderation.

Camus might have said that we have rejected exile and chosen the kingdom of this world: "In order to gain a 'sphere of influence' or a transient kingdom, man has to renounce eternity, eternal values, churches of all kinds, whether religious or political." That is why D'Arrast, the engineer in the forests of Brazil in the story "The Growing Stone," when he wanted to help the cook to keep the promise he made in a time of distress to carry the

stone to the church, helped the cook sinking under the stone, but he carried it not to the church but to his house (Camus, 1957). The tension between the lesser sanctuary in this world and the temple of eternity, between the transient and utopia, between rebellion and ideology, is exemplified by Janine in the story, "The Adulterous Woman." Janine is torn between fusion with the desert scene at night with the cold and the boundlessness, the sky and the distance, and her husband's bed, between her loneliness within togetherness and her alienation within freedom (Ibid.).

The Ethic of Limits

Prometheus's betrayal was the distortion of the ideas of the Enlightenment, the tragic deification of modern man. Camus saw absolute ideological thought as a kind of negation of humanity that annihilates the past for the sake of a future wrapped in mist. In an intellectual milieu that ardently sought a revolutionary absolute, Camus developed an ethic of limits, a political morality of rebellion.

The blood feud in Algeria presented Camus with a basic question: what should be the position of the ordinary citizen or the involved intellectual in blood feuds of this kind? (Gomez, 2004). The first step in finding an answer was to identify the situation correctly. Do we have here a "tragedy" or a "drama"? A "tragedy" is a conflict in which Antigone is right and Creon is not wrong, and, conversely, Creon is right and Antigone is not wrong. In Hegel's words it is a confrontation between right and right. A "drama," however, is a conflict in which there are good and bad, and it is easy to distinguish between them. Test cases of "drama" were the war against the Nazis; the struggle for Republican Spain; and the revolts in East Germany in 1953, in Poland in 1955, and in Hungary in 1956. Camus would have added the struggle of the Blacks in South Africa. In a "drama" one has to enlist immediately, take up a position—as in *Letters to a German Friend*—and openly support violence, though limited and controlled. Outstanding test cases of "tragedy" are the dispute in Algeria and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Because justice in a "tragedy" does not lie with either side, one has to oppose random terror like that of the FLN, which struck civilians. In a "tragedy" more than in a "drama" an ethic of limits is required.

Most of Camus's attention in the last months of his life was directed to the writing of what he called his *War and Peace*. He was not afraid of taking on giants like Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Nietzsche: adapting them was a form of wrestling, a kind of challenge. In 1957 he told journalists in Stockholm just before receiving the Nobel Prize that he was now sketching out the first lines of the "novel of my maturity." On his Christmas vacation, he explained to his wife that the draft of the book dealt with his life, but

at a later stage it would be less autobiographical. The title of the book, his wife understood, implied that everyone was the first man but also that a French Algerian was a person without a past, the product of a meeting of cultures. Faulkner's style began to infiltrate his writing, and he repeated words, sought out details from his youth, tried to give the Algerian drama a universal mold. Now on his fateful journey, he carried the 144 pages of his draft with him.

There is something extraordinarily existentialist about the story of *The First Man*. A great deal has already been said about the 144 pages of the manuscript found on the scene of Camus and Gallimard's accident. It was very much a manuscript: crammed, hard to decipher, a first draft before being printed and corrected, like Camus's other books, six or seven times. The decision of Francine Camus and his friends not to publish it was due to both a fear of producing something unfinished that was perhaps unworthy of publication and a fear of the jealousy and hostility that did not decrease with time toward this outsider who dared to criticize Sartre and his circle.

Catherine Camus, the writer's daughter, decided, after her mother had died, to publish the manuscript with the original notes and addenda. What tipped the scales was the fear of a piratical edition by unauthorized bodies. The wager was more successful than was thought, and from the first week of publication the book was a bestseller. The critics praised it highly. The authenticity of the manuscript seemed to eclipse the author himself, and it was as if its course was preordained.

The manuscripts of dead authors have a life of their own. They are involved with live materials, bring together biographical details as they think fit, and take off for mythical destinations. Each manuscript has its own story. Some were rejected by publishers, some were published by friends or relatives, some were falsified, some reedited, and some simply disappeared. We recall that Max Brod refused to follow the instructions in Kafka's will to destroy all his writings. Gogol unfortunately did not have a Brod: in 1825 he ordered his servant to burn the second half of *Dead Souls*, and the servant, who interceded for the dead souls, finally obeyed his master. To mention the luck of others: Shai Agnon had his daughter Emunah Yaron, Sartre had his adopted daughter Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, and Walter Benjamin had his friends Georges Battaille, Gershom Scholem, and Adorno. Nietzsche, alas, had his sister Elizabeth Forster, who edited *The Will to Power* according to her racist criteria and even gave the book its name. Perhaps the most cogent example is Mozart who, on the request of a messenger, composed a requiem for an anonymous nobleman and saw this, his last, unfinished work, as a requiem for himself. In the middle of the "Lacrimosa" section he returned his soul to his Maker, and the work was completed by his pupil Süssmayer. From many points of view, *The First Man* was Camus's requiem.

Camus's last work, which was unfinished, raises questions concerning the fate and the independent existence of the manuscript. Whose book is this, or any book? The editor's? The author's? The relatives'? And who has the right to use the manuscript? Perhaps the manuscript, like its author, was taken from the refuse, from his hesitations, was something he forgot or that was forgotten, a deliberate distortion—and perhaps precisely because it had not reached its final form from the creative point of view, a sort of unbaked product, it is likely to be very powerful and impressive in its primal evidence. From this point of view, the first draft of *The First Man*, just as it is, is a powerful work because its unmediated quality, its brilliant directness, is simply more authentic than its author would have made it if he had succeeded in adding and correcting and erasing and refining.

In this era of alienated and pretentious postmodernist "discourse," one feels the lack of straight talk, the moral voice of the author in the best French tradition. Many Frenchmen are repelled by the "new philosophers," too important in their own eyes to raise their voice against chronic unemployment. The place of writers like Gide, Mauriac, and Malraux has been taken by intellectuals like Deleuze, Derrida, and Lyotard, whose sophistication convinces neither the head nor the heart. And here, as out of the midst of a fog, there suddenly appears a kind of existentialist Humphrey Bogart, as if he had always been there, who has no pose, who does not submit to the fashions of the hour, penetrates the hearts of the readers, seeks out traces of his father whom he longs for, loves his illiterate mother to the point of tears, and writes openly of his troubles.

Perhaps this is the late victory of the author-philosopher who refrained from calling himself an existentialist. Following the controversy in Israel about the translation of Céline's "first-class humanistic work" into Hebrew, the poststructuralists claimed repeatedly that one has to separate the work from its creator, and this was the pretext of their postmodernist heirs for overlooking Céline's Nazism. As against these, the existentialists, from Diogenes and Socrates to Nietzsche, sought a correlation between the biography and the work or, in other words, authenticity. They forestalled the authentic, unique existence of the man who considered himself to be some kind of "essence." Camus's authenticity is not expressed in a coherent life but in the tensions in his life and his books, in the hesitations of a moral man, in the distance between the actual and the ideal, in the contradictions of his character and of himself (Sagi, 2002). His writing was an aesthetic and to a large degree heroic attempt to create a form for these tensions, and the most notable of them was the sphere of his homeland, Algeria.

It is the cunning of history that the national wars in Europe gave birth to the Algerian problem. Following the defeat of France by Prussia in 1871, the French government encouraged the citizens of Alsace-Lorraine, which

had now been annexed to Germany, to settle in Africa. For many French, Algeria, the North African settlement, was their new world. Already in 1848 the French settlers in Algeria, the "*pieds noirs*," numbered a hundred thousand, and until the Arab revolt of the FLN in 1954, the European settlement grew to ten times its size and constituted some 10 percent of the population as a whole.

The First Man is a voyage of discovery in search of the mythical father. Lucien Auguste Camus was born in 1885, and his father died when he was a year old; his son Albert also lost his father at the age of one. Lucien Auguste fell in the First World War. Camus called the chief character of his book Jacques Cormery (Cormery was his father's mother's surname), one more proof that the book was autobiographical. Cormery stands before his father's grave, on which was written the dates 1914–1918. The special merit of the narrator, Camus, in all his books, is in the simple, heart-stirring descriptions, and there is always an existential conclusion that is also simple and touching.

Camus-Cormery grew up in a historical and cultural vacuum, did not know his roots, and his illiterate mother and grandmother were unable to reconstruct his lost father for him. The search for his father was the basic experience of his life and also that of the reader in the first part of the book, "Tracing the Father." The first man is a tabula rasa, without any traces. In an interview in 1954, Camus said, "That is how I imagine the first man, beginning from zero, who cannot read or write, who has no morality or religion. He might be, if you will, an education, but not an educator." A reference to Rousseau would be misleading: here, Camus is referring first and foremost to Nietzsche. He first thought of calling the book *Man*, meaning *everyman*, his response to Nietzsche's "last man," a citizen of the corrupt old bourgeois civilization on the point of collapse. The Nietzschean Camus turned his back on the "last man," the product of cold and alienated European history, and he sought to give birth to a man who built himself up from nothing in a new world.

It is an ironic fact that Nietzsche's book, *The Gay Science*, was the only one that was found next to the manuscript of *The First Man* on the site of the accident. Section 125 in *The Gay Science* is a famous nihilistic statement in the history of philosophy. A man runs in the market with a flaming torch and cries, "Where has God disappeared? [. . .]. We're all murderers! [. . .]. God is dead!" In one of the interviews, Catherine, Camus's daughter, said, "In my father's world, God was dead." There was no need to kill him. As a post-Nietzschean writer, Camus already found the ashes of God. The death of God was in his opinion a crossroads on which the absurd, but also happiness, was born.

6

Camus and the Israelis

Camus is for many Israelis a source of inspiration and an inexhaustible reservoir of insights. They return to his books again and again, grow up among their pages, discard as a result the cynicism and skepticism with which they were burdened on the way, and become connected through him with the Mediterranean whose shores link him to the Israelis and link the Israelis to their neighbors.

Camus and the Jews

The question of Vichy's treatment of the Jews was not an abstract one for the young Camus (Rybalka, 1980: 291–96). He experienced it close at hand through the family of his wife Francine, his schoolmates, neighbors, and fellow intellectuals (Roy, 1987). The anti-Semitic laws of the Vichy regime were imposed overnight on the 111,021 Jews of Algeria who changed from being French citizens to being "native Jews." They were not interned in camps or forced to wear a yellow badge, but they were rapidly dismissed from their jobs, separated from the population, and found themselves at the gates of hell. They were first made subject to a "numerus clausus" (e.g., only one out of seven children in any school could be Jewish), and afterward they were not even allowed to teach privately. An exception was André Bénichou, who received special permission to hold private classes.

Bénichou, a communist, a teacher of philosophy in a *lycée* (high school), and a friend of Camus who was three years older than him, suffered like him from tuberculosis. He read the manuscript of *L'Étranger* (The Stranger) in a single night and declared Camus to be a great writer. Because the law did not allow more than five children to be taught at one time, Bénichou, who was always persistent—and also in visiting Camus's home—had to teach the same course five times over to 25 pupils in all. When Camus had difficulty in finding work, Bénichou proposed to him that he should teach French in the private classes that he had moved from his home to the

office of a friendly architect and was prepared to move anywhere else that was possible. Camus taught for twenty hours a week and was a popular teacher because of his warm personality and his teaching methods. When he taught Molière, for instance, his pupils put on one of his plays. Simultaneously, he taught Jews in another private school that was not run by Jews.

Most of Camus's friends at that period in Algeria were Jews. Three of the most outstanding of them were André Bénichou, the sculptor and art teacher Louis Bénisti, and the translator (of Lorca, among other things) André Balmiche. He gave every possible assistance to his friend and former schoolmate Liliane Choucroun, who had been dismissed from teaching in high school. Camus and his wife's family launched an appeal for Bénisti, who was also forbidden to teach. They endangered themselves by putting him up in their home for a few days. When De Gaulle called from London for five minutes of silence and stoppage of work in sympathy with the "Free French," Francine Camus's mother, who worked in the post office, answered the call and as a result was suspended for two months. Camus made many Jewish friends in his travels between Oran and Algiers in the framework of the *Résistance*, and especially Jacques Shapira, a teacher who coopted students into underground activities in Belida.

At the end of January 1942, Camus had a terrible fit of coughing in his home. He vomited blood. Francine ran out in a panic—they did not have a telephone—to fetch their doctor André Cohen, the brother-in-law of Liliane Choucroun, who came quickly from the cinema. Camus whispered to his mother-in-law, "This time, I thought it was all over for me." He felt as he did when he had his first attack at the age of 17. The doctor told him to take a long rest and forbade him to swim, which was his chief enjoyment in Oran. Dr. Cohen himself was about to become a victim of the fascist plague that was spreading in Algeria: only 2 percent of the Jewish doctors were permitted to work in their profession, and there was a similar quota in governmental positions. When the decrees were imposed in Oran, Dr. Cohen had to stop working as a doctor. In order to raise his spirits, the Camus family invited him and Bénichou to spend a holiday with them near Oran (Lottman, 1979: 257–58). Was Dr. Cohen, the enlightened Jewish doctor, Camus's model for Dr. Rieux, the fighting doctor in *La Peste* (The Plague), the outlines of which he began to commit to writing at that time?

Camus, who was influenced by *Moby Dick*, needed a symbol that would embody the subject he wished to describe in his allegorical novel. The plague of typhus that was raging in the town of Tlemcen gave him his inspiration. In 1941, at the time of the plague, he wrote in the newspaper *Paris-Soir*, for which he worked, a short story that sketched out the main outlines of the plot of *The Plague*, which were fully developed about six years later. In his diary, Camus wrote in October 1941, "In 1342, at the time

of the Black Death, Jews were taken out and killed; in 1481, when there was a plague in Southern Spain, the Inquisition blamed the Jews."

The Vichy regime and the fascist and Nazi regimes were the plague that raged in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s (Moses, 1974: 419–29). In the south of France, in autumn 1942, Camus met André Chouraqui, who had been dismissed from the University of Clermont-Ferrand on account of the racial laws. Neither of them knew that the other was involved in the *Résistance*. Choraqui, who was to translate the Bible into French and write the history of the Jews of North Africa, had been taken into the home of a Protestant doctor in a village near Chambon. Camus visited him often, and, over a plate of couscous, the two Algerians would read all the passages in the Bible—49 in all—containing the word *dever* (plague). *Dever* resembles *davar*, the Word: in Greek, *logos*. Camus asked Chouraqui: can a word, any word, be interpreted in both a good and a bad sense? Is not the meaning of *dever* the destruction of *davar*, of *logos*, as in the cabbalistic notion: *tivgod ba-davar ve-tekabel dever* (*Tue la parole et tu as la peste*: Kill the word and you have the plague)? In a similar fashion, Camus expressed the feeling of those dark days: "We are living at the height of the plague, trapped like mice, closed up within madness" (Chouraqui, 1990: 242–43).

Jean-Paul Sartre, too, in December 1943 wrote an allegorical play, *Huis Clos* (No Exit), that was partly a parable of the occupation and partly an existentialist parable about people condemned to have no escape from others, to be imprisoned in their neighbors' lives. He asked Camus, whom he met in Paris on the opening night of his previous play *Les Mouches* (The Flies), to play the leading role and to produce the play. Camus agreed, though the production fell to someone else. After Sartre had written ten pages of the play, originally called *Les Autres* (Others), rehearsals began. The four roles in the play were given to Camus, Wanda Kosakiewicz, René-Jacques Chauffard, and Olga Kechelievitch, who married the producer of the play, Marc Barbezat. After three weeks, Sartre finished writing the script. On the tenth of February 1944 Olga Barbezat was arrested by the Gestapo on suspicion she was a member of the *Résistance*. Camus, concerned, immediately asked for rehearsals to be stopped until her release.

Marc Barbezat and his friends initiated efforts to have Olga released. Sartre thought the play must go on, and asked Gaston Gallimard to persuade the businessman Paul Annet-Badel, who had just purchased the Vieux Colombier theater, to stage it. Camus, who realized the play would be staged even though Olga was not released, abandoned the play and Sartre. He remained true to his principles (Cornot, 1990).

Camus's conduct toward the Jews during the war was exceptional and impressive, and he endangered his life more than once. In France after the war, many of his friends were Jews, and it is known that, unlike many

intellectuals, he took part in the *Résistance*, editing its journal *Combat* (Daniel, 1964: 77–106). These facts are especially striking in the case of a many-sided author who dealt with the events of the war both in his fictional works and in the philosophical essays he wrote for and on his enemies, and who fought against totalitarianism when it was at its height (Camus, 1945).

"Persecuted-Persecutors," the introduction that Camus wrote in 1949 to Jacques Méry's book *Laissez Passer mon peuple* (Let My People Go), is exceptional both in its style of writing and in its radical criticism (Camus, 1948: 717–19). This disturbing book did not discuss all victims or all the persecuted, but only the Jewish people, whom Camus saw as the very symbol of persecution. Three years after the end of the war, when most of the French had not yet internalized their shameful record with regard to the Jews, Camus showed he was aware of the hatred of which the French were capable. None of the Western peoples had taken responsibility for the fate of the Jews in the war, said Camus ironically, and if anyone was held responsible it was always someone else. They confused the minds of the Jews who returned from the German camps: perhaps the French were guilty, perhaps the Germans, and of course the Jews were . . . and therefore nobody was guilty. Leave us to sleep in peace! And so the French sleep the sleep of the righteous, happy in the knowledge that the hands of the British are not clean, that the Americans are dreadful (they don't allow the Jews to enter the big hotels in New York, but of course one can't compare . . .), that the Arabs are awaiting their turn, that the British are shy about it, and that the Russians deny everything (just look at those Russian hypocrites with their concentration camps!).

In caustic tones, Camus revealed the horror of the Holocaust, and against this he set the Holy Land. Here was a woman sterilized by the SS; the man forced to sleep with his naked sister; the mother who held her son in her arms while they smashed his skull; the woman taken to see her husband being killed; the survivors of the crematoria; all those who trembled day in, day out for years on end, and who are not at home anywhere; and here were those who were told of a land of citrus groves, where nobody would spit in their faces—and all of them were afflicted because Midianite custom decreed that it was impossible that they should not be afflicted, and all this took place in the midst of a great silence or self-righteous prattle. They are the enemies of Jesus, aren't they? Camus mocked the claim of the anti-Semites: this was a concentration of universal history in one instance. Then let's be finished with it, with this persecuted people and all other persecuted people regardless of their racial origins. The peoples of the world are tired of all the victims. The victims are rotting, and the fault is entirely theirs.

In her book, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Shoshana Felman, one of the leaders of the "Yale school," claimed that Camus wrote *La Chute* (The Fall) as a condemnation of his generation for their silence about the Holocaust (Felman and Laub, 1991). Joseph Dan, writing about Felman's book, added, "The chief character in *The Fall* is the silent witness, who was close to the suicidal act and did not even turn his head when he heard the death-cry. It represents an awareness of a testimony that did not form within him, and which poisoned his soul and finally resulted in his fall" (Dan, 6.10.1992). *The Fall* is about all suppression of testimony, the silence concerning the Holocaust and the murder of millions. The poison caused by the silence poisoned the whole postwar culture. Felman recalls that in Sartre's essay *Reflections on Antisemitism*, the Holocaust was not mentioned at all.

Clamence's evasion in denying responsibility in *The Fall* stands out in view of the acceptance of responsibility of other Camus heroes: Meursault in *The Stranger*, who accepted responsibility for the murder he committed but refused to feel guilt or remorse; or Kaliayev in the play *Les Justes* (The Just Ones), who agreed to pay with his life for the assassination he carried out. Camus said in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (The Myth of Sisyphus), "A man penetrated with the spirit of the absurd [. . .] is prepared to pay. In other words, it may be said of him that there may be people who bear responsibility, but no one is guilty" (Camus, 1942). The Israeli critic and translator Yael Renan, in her article "Poetics and the Ideology of Albert Camus," noted, "Clamence is prepared to take upon himself a 'global' indiscriminate guilt in which he stars as a grandiose 'Satan,' and in fact even as God, as in his one-dimensional world the other pole is eliminated. Thus, he evades taking a specific, realistic and binding responsibility for his decision not to jump into the water to save a drowning woman, and fails to recognise his meanness of spirit in which there is no inclination to evil and no inclination to good" (Renan, 1985: 165).

After the Nazi totalitarianism was defeated in the Second World War, totalitarianism continued to thrive on the other side of the iron curtain, accompanied by the silence of Western intellectuals. In 1952, at the height of the Cold War and when there was a fear that America might begin a Third World War, Sartre spoke at a peace congress in Vienna held under the auspices of the Communist Party. At that very time, crimes were being committed in the Soviet Union against the Russian people. Sartre spoke in favor of all the communist regimes, including that in Czechoslovakia, which was one of the worst. Criticism was not long in coming. Maurice Merleau-Ponty called Sartre's position "ultra-Bolshevism" (Brinker, 1992: 127), and Camus reacted immediately: "To go to Vienna in normal times is to participate in an act of the cold war, but to go there against

the background of eleven people (dissidents) who have been hanged—and next to each of whom was written the word 'Jew'—such an act is indescribable. We are once again faced with a typical betrayal of the intellectuals, and always for the same reasons. Like our people of the right who were ensnared by the Hitlerian magic, the people of the left have fallen captive to the communist power which is embellished with the name of efficiency." Pungent words, and one should notice the harsh analogy with the "Hitlerian magic" and the expression "betrayal of the intellectuals" (*trahison des clercs*), which was coined by the Jew Julien Benda.

About twenty years later, the (tragic) number 11 was again linked with Sartre in relation to the Jews. A short time after the murder of the 11 Israeli sportsmen at the Munich Olympics in 1972, Sartre wrote an article in a Maoist newspaper he edited in which he expressed sympathy and understanding for the motives of the Palestinian terrorists. There is no need, of course, to praise Camus's attitude to the Jews at the expense of Sartre's. Sartre's record with regard to the Jews, the Israelis, and Zionism is self-evident and is one of the most distinguished. There was his reasoned condemnation of anti-Semitism and brilliant analysis of its logic and roots, his consistently warm relation to Israel together with an honest attitude to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, his struggle for the immigration of the Soviet Jews to Israel, his refusal to join a choir singing "Palestine will win" at demonstrations of the Left, and his agreement to accept an honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University despite the fact that he on principle refused all prizes and honors that he was offered, including the Nobel Prize (Cohen-Solal, 1987). At the same time, the "morality of the oppressed" on behalf of which he labored sometimes afflicted him with blindness and caused him to adopt arbitrary political positions and a moral relativism deriving from the principle of revolution and his interpretation of liberty.

At a time when the Western intellectuals were silent during the trial of the Jewish doctors in the Soviet Union, three months before the death of Stalin, Camus arose and spoke up in a clear voice against the brutal trial and the anti-Semitic campaign that was waged after it. The strong position he adopted derived from a general outlook that in 1955 he described as follows: "We—the Algerian immigrants in France—we are the Jews of France, the victims of discrimination." In one of the discussions between Camus and his teacher Jean Grenier, the latter told him, "You have neighbourly feelings towards the Jews because of your revolt against injustice and your sense of humanism."

In 1956, at the height of the Cold War, the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and the Suez crisis, Camus expressed his warm attitude to the State of Israel in a letter to his friend Pierre Moinot: "In the general war in which we are now involved, it is not difficult to choose sides. I am against Russian communism, whose face we know, and I am in favour of the West, I am in favour of

the State of Israel that was born from the sacrifice of millions of people, and I am against the Arab dictatorships that were born from poverty and slavery, and whose poverty and slavery is all they have to offer" (Camus, 1990: 33).

The year 1958, two years before his death—after he received the Nobel Prize, after his bitter quarrel with Sartre, and at the height of the Algerian war—was a bitter time for Camus personally. Spanish republicans were among the few friends he had pleasure in meeting. They received him on January 22, and he sat and joked with them as, although he had decided to retire, he felt he had to answer their invitation. He could not refuse them because he had a blood relationship with them and because they had always supported him, even in difficult times. In his speech of thanks, "What I Owe to Spain," he described his difficulties as a writer attacked by the Left and Right, but who had to continue on his path although he did not satisfy anyone. He said he tried to do the right thing, to honor his profession, to be involved, to give his name where it was needed. If he had succeeded in avoiding the dangers of a sedentary life—the drying-up of the springs of creativity, writing, and friendship due to his exactitude and demanding nature, in his desire to respect the reader, whom he did not wish to disappoint—this was thanks to his exemplary friends in Israel, whose state was threatened in the name of anticolonialism so that one had to defend its right to exist. The world had not been able to provide the Jews with a home in their hour of need when it witnessed the slaughter of millions of Jews, and it was therefore only right and proper that the Jews should have a land of their own (Camus, 1945: 1905–8).

Camus in Israel

In the last meeting of the poet and literary historian Claude Vigée with Camus, a few months before the latter was killed in a car accident, Camus told him he wanted to return to Greece for a summer vacation. He wished to look once again at the sources of the eros in *Noces* (Nuptials) and in his early stories in Algeria. Camus wrote his doctoral thesis on Plotinus under the guidance of his teacher Jean Grenier. Vigée, for his part, told Camus about his wish to visit Israel. Camus replied that he understood why the Jews were drawn to Eretz-Israel: because of the light and the soil, similar to his mystical yearning for Greece. When Camus spoke of the light of Jerusalem, he meant, according to Vigée, the inner, cabbalistic light. He justified Zionism, and, as an added testimony, he also coopted Plotinus, who spoke of return to the mother country. In the same way, said Camus, one can appreciate the Jews' attraction to the promised land.

The relationship between Vigée and Camus began in 1954, when the professor of literature at Brandeis University sent a female student of his

to Paris to write a thesis on Camus. In the framework of the relationships that developed, Vigée sent Camus, who was editing a series for the Gallimard publishing house, a manuscript called *Indian Summer* containing quasi-autobiographical poetry and prose. Camus gave a positive answer conditional on the agreement of the publisher, and asked to see Vigée in Paris in the summer. In their meetings, they sat in Café Lip next to the Deux Magots, opposite his former friends. Camus told Vigée that Sartre was mistaken in his understanding of *The Stranger*, which he tried to analyze in an ironic, Voltairean way, whereas for Camus it was a lyrical, existential account of his pilgrimage (Koren, 1997). Sartre also gave a distorted interpretation of Camus's last works, *L'exil et le royaume* (Exile and the Kingdom) and *La Chute* (The Fall).

"He called me Claude, and I approached him as 'Monsieur Camus.' Even after he received the Nobel Prize, he didn't act the 'great man,' and was a warm person full of boisterousness, irony and humour. He was a natural actor, and enjoyed pulling faces in the mirrors of the café as he imitated all the self-important writers as they humbled themselves when begging for their works to be published." Each meeting lasted two whole hours. Camus lit one cigarette after another; they drank coffee, sipped wine, and Camus was careful to pay for his young guest. In one of their conversations, Camus surprised Vigée when telling him about a new book he was writing:

> He said that all his books, including *The Fall*, were only a preparation, a passageway leading to his true life's work. He spoke about two books, *Le Premier homme* (The First Man) and *Docteur Juan*, but in the car in which he met his death, only the manuscript of *The First Man* was found. Nobody knows where the manuscript of the second book is to be found: perhaps Camus decided to combine the two. *Docteur Juan* was a combination of Doctor Faust and Don Juan, total knowledge and love, and that for him was the ideal man, but an ironic and cruel fate prevented him from completing the synthesis. Perhaps fate killed him because he was trying to do something forbidden to a mortal: to create a complete model of a man.

Perhaps Vigée was suggesting that Camus was a victim of the Promethean passion that he himself warned against.

A few months after Camus was killed, Vigée decided not to return to the United States but to emigrate to Israel:

> The lesson of his death for me was that one should not entrust one's life to fate; one should not provoke it and one should try to prevail. His death made me more connected to life. I recognised its fragility. I became a cautious man

> who believes that everything that happens to us is a miracle. Camus was an unpretentious person throughout his life, but he liked to take chances. He did not fear provocation, he did not protect his life sufficiently. In this he resembled two characters who tempted Providence: Doctor Faust who wished to be Lord of the Earth, and Don Juan who wanted to prove to himself that he was more than a mere mortal.

On January 13, 1960, Camus was to have dinner with Vigée in his home. A week earlier, the writer of *The Fall* met his death in that accident.

Many years after the accident that cut short Camus's life, the playwright Nissim Aloni mused, "I am considered a hard man, but when I heard that Camus had been killed, I wept. It was a real blow for me, an extraordinary event" (Ohana, 1998: 283–88; Ohana, 1977; Vigée, 1962: 58–63, 89–103). As one playwright speaking about another, Aloni once said to me about Camus, "Camus could not dispense with local colour. He thought that the colour of the sky in Algiers was no less important than the thoughts of a particular character." Aloni could also have been speaking about himself. His plays were full of kings and princesses, poker players and whores, Napoleons and butterfly catchers, gypsies and hens. That is how theater should be: a journey, a dream, a story—perhaps even myth, like the Greek theater that grappled with the basic problems of human destiny.

On the eightieth anniversary of Camus's birth, Aloni added, My most powerful memory of Camus is in connection with a long journey I took in the nineteen-fifties in a night train from Paris to Amsterdam to visit Yigael Tumarkin. In the railway-station I bought *The Fall* and read it throughout the journey, most of the time drunk and full of alcohol. The words became heavy like stones. The idea of the interconnection of the murder of the French king and the murder of God made me grateful to Albert Camus to the end of my days. He seized the central point of the modern age: life without a king and without God.

In mythology there is no king or God. Aloni and Camus made use of it, for mythology, both Mesopotamian and Greek, the product of space, has the pluralism inherent in polytheism. The mythical is the god of what is in the world before it becomes a rebellion against what is beyond the world. A transcendental religious faith in a Being beyond reality did not yet exist. The ancient gods lived and died among us, moved beneath earth and heaven, loved and hated and took revenge like human beings. There was no general adjudicator above them, no thought police. The myths lived side by side in peace; there was no spiritual inquisition. Aloni added, "In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus took upon himself an affinity with concepts like suicide and murder. I think few have succeeded in dealing with death with such purity of language and thought as Camus. In him the moonlight in a

North African city is as important as the idea itself. In general, in Camus one has the colours and smells of the sea, the sky, the sand. He felt a necessity of being close not only to philosophical rationalism but also to feelings and sights."

Aloni liked Camus's Mediterranean idiom: he was opposed to the postmodernist authenticity of discourse. Discourse uproots, speech brings forth. The postmodernist discourse became a monologue of cobblers talking among themselves, an esoteric anticreative jargon feeding on itself, tiresomely repetitive. The source of this discourse was Michel Foucault. Foucault and Camus both had tragic deaths: one from AIDS and the other in an accident. Foucault affirmed discourse; Camus affirmed speech. Both of them fought in their way against the totalitarianism to which modern Europe had given birth. Foucault sought to expose the things that lie behind words, the power behind knowledge, the mechanism of adaptation, the subtle censorship imposed by the consensus. Finally, he found the "spiritual revolution" of Iranian Humeinism to be the source of healing for democratic Europe. The aggressivity of the European continent led him to search for spirituality in the streets of Teheran. History works in strange ways. The one who adopted the Humeinist model when it started up in Iran has been uncritically accepted by the Left, while the one who foretold the metamorphosis of a narrow Algerian nationalism into the inward-looking, segregated society we know today is accused in France of abandoning the path of enlightenment.

And what remains when speech stops? Not discourse, according to Aloni, but silence. Aloni related, "I very much liked the story about Camus and Beckett who met every morning in a park in Paris, did not say a word for two hours, and left. That says everything, in my opinion. It shows the impossibility of speaking, of really understanding, of interpreting signs." This story of Aloni's creates a similar impression to the words of Clamence in *The Fall*: "Don't we all resemble one another, talk incessantly without speaking to anyone, always faced with the same questions although we know the answers in advance?"

Is it possible to imagine Camus as an Israeli author? The novelist Sami Michael thinks that if Camus were an Israeli, the Israelis would regard him as an immigrant, Camus would continue to write in French, and he would not be well known. It is a good thing that he was not an Israeli: in that way, we have had wonderful works (Michael 1997). The novelist Dan Zalka amuses himself with the thought that at least Camus would not, as was once the case, be asked to Hebraize his name. He acknowledges his relationship to Camus: "When I was young, I loved Camus. I read all his books, I knew some of his friends and his daughter as well. I was on his side in his quarrel with Sartre. He was a man I could believe in, straightforward and

clear. At the same time, one can see a certain ambiguity in his change from his youthful position of acceptance of fate to the more mature and moral position of *L'Homme révolté* (The Rebel) and *The Fall*" (Zalka, 1997).

In *The Stranger*, Zalka continued, murder was depicted in a truly magical way, like a ritual, a sudden blinding, an onslaught of satanic light. The murderer loses his consciousness. It is murder without a murderer. Meursault does not think for one moment of the victim, shows no remorse, but has a nonchalant attitude toward his act. "That murder is the only thing that defines him," said Camus, who, according to Zalka, later changed his amoral attitude. He began to draw close to the Russian authors he so much admired in understanding that the legal system is only a reflection of a more comprehensive system of justice: "We liked Camus because he was able to express a certain totality, a philosophical statement that was at the same time theological."

In one of the entries in his diary, Camus stated that "if the Greeks created the idea of despair and tragedy, they always did so through beauty and its depressing aspect. This was the very perfection of tragedy. The modern spirit, on the other hand, bases despair on ugliness and mediocrity." These statements have a special significance for Zalka, not one associated with ancient Greece or the classical world but a negative modern significance. Ambivalence is integral to Camus despite the clarity of his style. It is a very strange ambivalence that gives a cheap Parisian character to murder and avoids taking any moral position or making any meaningful observation. In Camus's thinking in his early works there is an admiration for the amoral aesthetic act, and that, of course, was contrary to the brave and moral position that influenced Zalka. During the Second World War, Zalka thought more than once of how to take revenge against the Germans. He wrote stories about revenge, and when he wanted to understand what it was, he thought of the moral dilemmas raised by Camus.

The Israeli cultural critic Jürgen Nirad also thought about the moral significance of Camus's observations in Germany in the 1950s (Nirad, 1998). He and his friends, who belonged to the first generation of Germans after Nazism, for obvious reasons had a real difficulty in identifying with Camus's emotional declarations in his *Lettres à un ami allemand* (Letters to a German Friend) about one's ties to one's people and one's country. They, who had grown up with the critical attitude toward society and culture of the Adorno school of thought, were also deeply suspicious of the traditional humanistic values whose failure had been so blatant and found it difficult to come to terms with Camus's emotional attachment to them. They found it particularly hard to accept his combination of national values and humanistic values, which seemed to them dangerous and even reactionary. They felt uncomfortable with the high-flown language of the

letters and with the fact that they did not seem to them to contain any real political analysis and, in particular, anything about the collaboration of the Vichy government and many French intellectuals with Nazi Germany. But they nevertheless appreciated the courageous voice they heard in the letters of a man and thinker who had expressed his beliefs "not after the battle [. . .] but at the height of the batttle." Nirad said that Camus in Hebrew translation makes it possible to hear the voice of an intellectual who even in difficult times did not abandon the basic principles on which every democratic society must base its existence. And indirectly, that voice has also a certain significance for Israeli society, which is also faced—after many wars and more than thirty years of ruling another people, and against the background of the continuing debate on the status of the non-Jewish citizens of the Jewish state—with the difficulty, which often gave rise to a spurious national-liberal rhetoric, of combining a vital and moral national consciousness with the preservation of its democratic character and consistently observing the rights of man within it.

The Mediterranean region is perhaps the reason why the Canaanite poets Yonatan Ratosh and Aharon Amir were drawn to translate the works of Albert Camus into Hebrew. Ratosh made a Hebrew—very Hebrew—translation of *The Plague*. Amir was the first to transpose *The Stranger* into Hebrew (Ilana Hammerman made an up-to-date translation) and also *La Mort heureuse* (A Happy Death). In the mid-1950s, Amir helped to set up the "Zohar" publishing house. Within its framework, he wanted to change the order of preferences of the publishing business in Israel and counterbalance the overemphasis on Anglo-Saxon culture by attracting the reader to modern French literature, which was then in one of its periods of flowering. In *Contemporary French Stories*, an anthology he initiated, *The Stranger*—together with works by Sartre, Marcel Aymé, and Roman Gary, translated by Haim Guri, Nissim Aloni, and Amir himself—were outstanding features. Of *The Stranger*, Amir says today, "When I re-read *The Stranger*, fifty years after it was first published in the shadow of the conquest of the German 'new order,' I have the feeling that it is still valid, that we stand today in the shadow of an attempt to impose an American 'new order.' The challenge of the 'absurd' freedom of man embodied in Camus's *The Stranger* retains its validity now as then."

Amir translated *The Stranger* from the English version by Stuart Gilbert, who belonged to the circle of Joyce, Beckett, and the Anglo-French group of the 1920s and 1930s. At the time that he did this, he made the decision to learn French. When he was in France in 1956–1957 as an Israeli journalist, he saw Camus a number of times in plays that were theatrical adaptations of novels, for example, Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* and Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*, which were shown on the French stage. The

play *Caligula*, which starred Gerard Philippe, he translated for Habima, the Israeli national theater. *Caligula* was shown in Israel three times: in the Habima Theater, in the Khan Theater, and in the Theater History Circle of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in 1993.

The story *The Fall* was made into a play and was shown in Israel as a one-man performance more than two thousand times with the participation and direction of Niko Nitai. It received very high praise from the critics. The theater critic Haim Gamzu wrote, "The transference of *The Fall* from literature to the theatre has been done in a gradual and effective manner through the wholehearted and fitting devotion of Nitai to this so-human text." In the newspaper *Davar*, Idit Zartal agreed that "Nitai's main achievement is his humility with regard to the text, the restraint with which he has treated the material." The journal *Be-Mahane* noted "the Hebrew spoken by the hero of *The Fall*, a spoken Hebrew—fresh, not high-flown." In *Prosa*, they said, "In making the monologue into a monodrama, Nitai has been Camus's representative" (Ohana 2000:94).

It was difficult for Amir to depict his own world without the strong and deep-seated presence of Camus. He thought that the influence of one writer on another takes place up to the age of 20 to 25, and after that it is a matter of fertilization rather than of influence. In his own writings, Amir often spoke of his deep affinity with Camus, which suggests an emotional common denominator rather than a spiritual or intellectual one. For example, in the story *Prose*, which he wrote about his teacher—Camus also wrote several times about his teacher—there is an atmosphere of the sea, of the Mediterranean. Amir identified with Camus, and in him, too, there was an "oceanic feeling," to use a quasi-Freudian expression, an identification with the cosmos and the infinite. Camus, in his opinion, was so eager to go to Greece, to find there the Mediterranean he was looking for, because Islam is not to be found there and the Christianity in that country is also problematic. Camus wished to see the Mediterranean as a pantheistic, polytheistic sea. Amir's comment on Camus was of course influenced by his "Hebrew," Canaanite approach. The Hebrew model was classical Greece, which left its imprint on the whole Mediterranean Basin, which was unified by the Macedonian conqueror. A. G. Horon, the scholar of the Ancient East and the person who in Paris in the 1930s exposed Ratosh to the "Canaanite" outlook, was proud of his Mediterranean orientation and gave himself the title "the father of Hebrew seamanship." His close friend, the sailor Halperin, was director of the nautical school in Italy; and Itamar Ben-Avi, one of the first people in the Hebrew revival, spoke in the 1910s and 1920s about "nautical Judea," by which he meant Mediterranean Judea. Amir saw the Mediterranean Basin as an arena of conflict, hostility, and armadas but also as a pleasant sea. It was the heritage of Camus

who discerned the fanaticism in the countries of the Mediterranean but at the same time sought the "sense of proportion" of ancient Greece and wished to find a balance between conflicting religions, ethnic tensions, and national confrontations (Sagi, 1998).

Sami Michael sees life in the Eastern Mediterranean as the embodiment of the absurd. With regard to the sentence in *The First Man*—"When I want to have a sense of security, I don't look towards the earth but towards the seashore"—Michael suggests that the shore is a path of escape. Camus, in his opinion, was a product of the Mediterranean, the sea of escape, of the unfortunate, of the poor Frenchmen who in the nineteenth century emigrated to Algeria to find redemption:

> In the Mediterranean region, there sprang up Moses, Mohammed and Jesus, who failed to bring peace to their area. It is a sea of wars and conquests more than a sea of peace and commercial activity. Edward Said claims that Camus was a colonialist writer. Is that really so? One can examine this claim by means of *The First Man* in which there are three different occasions in which there are meetings between new settlers and Arab children. The first time was on the night when Camus-Cormery was born. The Arab here was the wagoner who cleaned the house and prepared it for the birth. The second time was in his childhood in Algeria, in which there is a description of his deaf mother, his dominating grandmother, and his soulful uncle; and the third time was during the Algerian-French conflict when a bomb exploded next to Camus's mother's house, but she did not hear the echoes of the explosion, the explosions in the Mediterranean. Therefore, Camus's observation at the end of the book does not surprise me: "This book must necessarily be unfinished. For example, 'On the ship that brought him back to France [. . .].'"

Dan Zalka is less unequivocal than Michael and sees the Mediterranean as a trap. On the one hand, it is the classical sea, "Mare Nostrum" of the Greeks and Romans, of gods and adventures. It is the most extraordinary sea in the world. There is no other sea in which so many events have taken place. The Mediterranean embodies the Greek idea of *nostos* (homecoming), wandering and returning, Odysseus returning to his native Ithaca. On the other hand, fascism and other such evils sprang up on its shores. Camus, thinks Zalka, had an intellectual tendency to create a hero, a philosophical persona that could express his hopes and desires. That is, he had a kind of humanism in which there was an element of risk, a poetic power associated with the Mediterranean. Camus's readers appreciate him as a writer and intellectual who by means silences, confessions, and stratagems creates a poetic hero who embodies the tragic humanism of the Mediterranean.

In the public discourse on the Mediterranean identity of Israeli society that began with the founding in 1996 of the "Forum for Mediterranean Cultures," Meron Benvenisti's article "Deceptive Mediterranean Port" was of particular interest. In drawing an analogy between the essayist Jacqueline Kahanoff—to whom we devoted the evening on the Balfour Declaration in which we discussed the concept of Levantinism in her essays—and Camus, Benvenisti quoted Kahanoff's writings and "the beautiful but nonsensical words of the young 'pied noir' on the Mediterranean" (Benvenisti, 21.3.1996). Benvenisti saw the Mediterranean option as an escape from the Middle East and quoted a sentence from Michael Walzer's essay "Albert Camus and the Algerian War" in support of this idea: "The only authentic example of Camus's nonsense appears in the many pages he wrote (most of them at an early period) on the Mediterranean culture, an imaginary world of classical 'virtues' which neither his own people, the European settlers, nor the Algerian Arabs showed any sign of possessing." Camus's approach to the matter, said Benvenisti, brings us to the main point. The advocacy of "Mediterranean culture" is an escape from the real option, which the mature Camus favored and for which he fought, and whose elimination broke his heart: the option of the coexistence of the different communities living in the same country, Algeria, an option in which cultural ties, cross fecundation, intimate communion, and the sense of belonging to a common country were stronger than militant tribalism or than the introversion of national ghettoes. Benvenisti's conclusions from this analogy were clear: a despair of the possibility of coexistence, an escape to cultural cross-fertilization alone and, on a deeper level, a pessimistic acknowledgement of the validity of the deterministic philosophy of the Carl Schmitt school of thought, which posited an eternal opposition of "friend" and "foe." This was the counteroption that Benevenisti proposed to the Mediterranean option.

In his article "Mediterranean Excursion," the literary critic Nissim Calderon suggested that there is not one single approach to the Mediterranean but many different approaches, "for example, that of Camus, or that of Pier Paulo Pasolini with its wild character, which is completely different. And both of them are fascinating" (Calderon, 1996). But Calderon did see points of similarity between Jacqueline Kahanoff's approach to the Mediterranean and that of Camus. Both of them, he said, see the possibility of a multiplicity of cultures, and the Israelis would do well to return to Kahanoff and Camus because they give an exact account of a pluralistic cultural situation. Camus belonged to a minority group in Algeria just as Kahanoff belonged to a minority group in Egypt. It is true that the Jews in Egypt lived in different circumstances from the million French in Algeria. At the same time, there was a critical distance common to both Kahanoff

and Camus. Kahanoff called that distance "Levantine" and Camus called it "Mediterranean."

In the places where Kahanoff and Camus lived, movement was a necessity. The immigrants traveled from place to place in the Mediterranean, intellectuals who specialized in the exchange of data, cultural interchange. Camus wrote, "A thinking man spends most of his time looking for points of agreement between the ideas he has about things and the changes imposed by new facts revealed to him." Thus in Kahanoff and Camus, who were characterized by a critical pluralism, there was no all-justifying relativism. Of one's relationship to the "other." Camus wrote, "If one does not have the right to feel contempt for the other side, one nevertheless has the right to judge." Kahanoff and Camus did not idealize the place they came from; they experienced in their flesh the contradictions of the Mediterranean. Who is able to personify the idea of cultural pluralism as they can?

Is pluralism the solution in the Mediterranean world or is it the problem? (Ohana, 1999: 81–99). Bosnians and Croatians and Albanians and Macedonians do not enjoy pluralism today; they suffer from pluralism. The fragmentation of mankind into ethnic and religious units and an all-engulfing globalization are two sides of the same coin. Perhaps this is a particular instance of something that Tocqueville in another place and another time warned about: the tendency to separatism on the one hand and the omnipotence of naked force and tyranny on the other. In Israel, cultural pluralism is not the problem today. The outstanding contemporary characteristic of Israeli society is the fragmentation of the Israeli identity into secondary elements that overshadow the specific quality of Israeliness. It is like a postmodernist supermarket in which the "other" is the "other" of another "other," and there is no common sign language and there are no normative rules. If this is the state of affairs, who is to say that a combination of racial tribalism and religious nationalism will not be seen as legitimate in the absence of a common Israeli ethos? Is cultural pluralism something self-sufficient? Pluralism is an essential precondition for action: dialogue is action. What Camus proposes is a form of dialogue: between an Algerian and a Frenchman, between a German and a European. It is therefore not pluralism that is needed for the inhabitants of the Mediterranean Basin, but dialogue: the capacity to find paths of communication between immigrants in their new countries, the possibility of exchanging cultural goods, the courage to erect barricades against the "global village," and the talent to conduct a trade in ideas.

Camus's works have been warmly received in Israel. The works that have been translated into Hebrew are *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, *A Happy Death*, *The First Man*; the philosophical essays *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Rebel*, *Letters to a German Friend*, *Reflection on the Guillotine*; the lyrical essays

Nuptials, *Summer* (L'Été), *Betwixt and Between* (L'Envers et l'endroit); and the play *Caligula*. But how can one translate a writer of whom Nissim Aloni said, "His French aspires to a transparency and clarity to the point of abstraction, deriving from a strange and special light"? According to the translator Zvi Arad, transposing his works into Hebrew requires "a special carefulness because of his use of unusual tenses in the French language and concepts that are essentially new" (Cohen, 1992).

Adina Kaplan, the translator of *Betwixt and Between*, explains that Camus's frequent use of the perfect tense (*passé composé*), which is usual in French speech, as against the past historic (*passé simple*) leaves the Hebrew translator helpless, as in Hebrew there are only three tenses: past, present, and future (Kaplan, 1998). It is not only the special use of tenses that disappears in Hebrew translation but also the meanings that Camus gives to words. For example "the mother" (*la mère*) is identified with "the sea" (*la mer*), or there are the three meanings contained in the name "Meursault." One, *mer sault*, is "a jump into the sea"; the second, *meurt sault*, is "a leap to death"; the third, *meur sol*, is connected with the sun that illuminates and burns, that same Mediterranean sun that is also an arbitrary reason for murdering an Arab, and finally for Meursault's execution. *The Stranger* is comparatively easy to translate according to Ilana Hammerman, who made the second translation of the work. It is "a novella written in the first person, part confession, part impressions, possibly memories. It does not have the qualities that generally distinguish a tale a man tells about himself. Short, simple sentences, each one of them a self-sufficient unit. Each one conveys a certain fact, describes a certain situation, and then ends."

In his role as the editor of translated literature in the "Mossad Bialik," Martin Buber wrote to Camus and asked his permission to publish *The Rebel* in Hebrew: "Your book *The Rebel* is of such importance to human life at this time that I wish to recommend it to the Mossad Bialik." After about three weeks, on February 22, 1952, Camus replied, "I have read your book *I and Thou* with great appreciation, and I did not expect to receive from you words that bestow on me such pleasure and honour." With a characteristic modesty that demonstrated both his self-confidence and his pleasant manner, Camus acknowledged a correction he proposed to Buber, taken from the Book of Isaiah: "With regard to the publication of the book that you have proposed to me, needless to say that I am very happy about it. The Israeli editor who has translated *The Plague* has, however, a moral right, but I doubt if he will want to become involved with an unexpected publication. I will ask him through my publisher to make a decision without delay, and I will tell you what he decides. I prefer to have my books published under your auspices and I am grateful for the proposal." *The Rebel* was finally published by the Am Oved publishing house. In Buber's library there were two books with signed

dedications from Camus. In *The Fall*, it is written, "To Mr. Martin Buber, a contemporary portrait, with respect and appreciation," and in the copy of the speech at the Nobel Prize ceremony, it is written, "To Martin Buber from an admirer" (Wooker, 1976; Lodd, 1979).

When the philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz was asked about Camus, he answered, "Camus is a great figure. I have a very high regard for Camus. It showed great wisdom to oppose Stalinism in France in the nineteen-fifties. Every man of intellectual stature was a communist" (Ohana, 1993; Ohana, 1995: 161–72). In comparing Camus with Leibowitz, it has been said that what they had in common was the belief that for the secular man as for the religious, the ideal could only be attained beyond the limits of time, although the Sisyphian efforts of Camus and the strivings of Leibowitz took place within our period. The idea that the ideal could be reached within history was regarded as a false Messianism: "Viewing action, particularly religious, as a striving and not as a means of attaining a goal, viewing the striving itself as a goal, as a way of life, is basically existential-Sisyphian." Although Leibowitz is liable to totally oppose a comparison of his article "Practical Commandments" (1953) with Albert Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), and although their starting points are different, both of them recognize the existence of an infinite distance, in Leibowitz between man and God, and in Camus between man and the world of the infinite (Hadari-Ramaj, 1988).

It was not only the philosophical questions that Camus dealt with and his inspirational novels that attracted his readers in Israel but also the analogy between the Mahgreb and the Masrak, between Algeria and the matter of the territories (Walzer, 1990: 269–82; Judt, 1998: 87–136). As the cultural critic Yoram Bronowsky said, "In the public discourse in Israel, the matter of the Algerian War of Independence and France's rupture with its old settlement has repeatedly been brought up. Many people represented De Gaulle as an ideal figure before the time of Yitzhak Rabin. When one compares Israel's withdrawal from the territories with France's exit from Algeria and when one knows more about the attitude of the French to the events of thirty years ago, it is difficult not to be subject to troubling thoughts" (Bronowsky, 1994). Bronowsky's conclusion after reading *The First Man* was that the book "was apparently intended to be first and foremost a lament about the death of a culture and perhaps also about the death of a certain option—the Mediterranean option."

Yaakov Golomb's article "Camus's *The Guest* (L'Hôte) as a Political Analogy," written the day after the "Cairo Agreement" was signed between the Israelis and the Palestinians, does not share this pessimistic conclusion. In *The Guest*, Camus told the story of the Algerian teacher Daru who was ordered by a policeman to deliver up an Arab "who had murdered his

cousin with a scythe" to the authorities in the neighboring town, where he would be tried. Daru does not deliver up the Arab to be arrested but gives him the option of escaping by returning to his tribe or giving himself up to the police. The Arab is at a crossroads and has to decide on his own what to do. That is authenticity. Golomb's conclusion was that "in realising that we cannot be tied to the occupation all our lives, in feeling that our authenticity as a fully autonomous nation which has to create its destiny and future on its own is in terrible danger, as the jailer in no less enslaved to his prisoner than the prisoner is to his jailer—in realising all this, we have plucked up the courage the give the Palestinians the right to form their destiny and lives in an authentic way, without any dependence on us" (Golomb, 1994).

A. B. Yehoshua, who is perhaps the most Mediterranean writer in Israel—certainly in his books *Mr. Mani* and *Journey to the End of the Millennium*—also used the story *The Guest* to demonstrate the importance of the moral context not only in a political action but also in a literary text (Yehoshua, 1998: 70–85). He asks: Does the decision of the teacher Daru not to deliver the Arab to the authorities and to permit him to escape to the desert seem to us morally correct? Yehoshua rules out a number of possible motives for his decision by a process of elimination. Perhaps Daru was behaving like Tarrou in *The Plague*, who on principle rejected capital punishment. Tarrou is an anarchist who rejects the law, but, in that case, in *The Guest* the law should be depicted in the most threatening manner, whereas here the law's representative, the policeman, is a very human old man. Perhaps Daru was behaving like the hero of S. Yizhar's story *The Prisoner*, who was uncertain whether to free an Arab shepherd or send him to a detention camp—an indecision caused by the behavior of his friends. But here, Daru was firm about his decision, although he was sorry for his friend the policeman. Perhaps Daru was using his authority as an educator to force the Arab through his passivity to give himself up. In *Crime and Punishment* too, Raskolnikov goes alone to the police station to admit to his crime although there was no evidence against him, like the Arab murderer in *The Guest* who goes alone to speak to the authorities although he could easily have escaped. But unlike Raskolnikov's, Daru's action has no motive; it is something absurd. He was like Meursault in *The Stranger*, who with a similar absurdity murdered "because of the sun," without reasoning. Yehoshua reveals Camus's philosophy that literature represents an absurd act as one having moral validity.

"I'm really a Jew," Camus's daughter Catherine announced all of a sudden in an interview with the Israeli press. "My mother is from the Tobul family in Algeria. I remember my grandmother and my uncles very well. In the time of Pétain, my grandmother demonstrated against the anti-Jewish laws and sat in jail. My mother and one of her sisters, who were teachers,

gathered together Jewish children expelled from the schools and taught them at home. They themselves were not in danger on account of their Jewishness because they were married to Frenchmen" (Negev, 1995; Calin, 1994). To the question of whether they practiced Jewish traditions in her father's house, she answered, "No, in his world God was dead and there was no tradition, not Jewish and not Christian. I am completely secular, and I grew up without religion with a tolerance of all ideas and beliefs. I am a mixture of Frenchwoman, Algerian woman, Spanish woman and Breton woman, and the important thing for me is the sense of pluralism, the feeling that I have many sources. My identity is Mediterranean. My mother's family was truly Jewish according to all criteria. I believe that according to Judaism I have the right to return to Israel." Did she think of trying to live here? "No, I'm like a cat: I hate to travel. But I feel a very great closeness to Israel and the Jews. After the attack on the synagogue in Paris, I took part in the demonstration. I'm very worried about the right: the rise of Le Pen horrifies me. To my regret, fascism is on a spree in France. One must be alert to the danger."

In an interview she did with *Haaretz* in 2010, Catherine Camus expressed herself similarly. Describing her father in connection with his book *Le Premier Homme*, which she had prepared for publication, she said, "He was and remained a solitary man at heart because of his impoverished origins, his resources, the circumstances of his life. It is an exile of sorts, and you Jews are familiar with it" (Levin, 7.1.2010).

Catherine Camus's personal declaration, "My identity is Mediterranean," is a late echo of her father's vision in his youth. According to Lena Shiloni, that vision was expressed in his book *The First Man*, which is set

> in the landscape of the Mediterranean, a landscape familiar to readers of *The Stranger* and of the poetic essays *Summer* and *Nuptials*. In a country without roots or an ancestral tradition one has to live the moment: the sea and sun and the pleasures of the senses, which Camus's prose describes so wonderfully. These descriptions are close to us Israelis, for the landscapes, the climate and the vegetation are well known to us. The partridge-shooting described in the book could have taken place in Galilee; the sea-bathing, on the shore of Tel-Aviv; the children, the chief characters of the book, could have been wandering around in Jaffa. (Shiloni, 1995)

One could say that Camus is the most "Israeli" of non-Israeli authors.

Part IV

Politics

7

The Politics of Political Despair

"The Politics of God"

Is there a Mediterranean politics? The countries in the Mediterranean basin have known all sorts of political regimes, from the Athenian democracy of the fourth century BCE to twentieth-century fascist Italy. Mediterraneanism is usually understood as a tolerant, open, and pluralistic concept. Still, there is the other side of the picture. In this chapter we will look at the fundamentalist backdrop against which Israeli Mediterraneanism is outlined.

Jewish intellectuals discussed questions of political theology, secular Messianism, and democracy from the earliest days of Zionism, and Israeli intellectuals discussed them from the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Palestine at the turn of the twentieth century. They warned of the dangers lurking in the minefield in which the theological and the political came together or, in the words of Jan Assman explaining the concept of political theology, in the "ever-changing relationships between political community and religious order, in short, between power [or authority: *Herrschaft*] and salvation [*Heil*]" (Assmann, 2000: 15).

In order to understand the different approaches of the intellectual groups that discussed the political theologies of Zionism and Israelism, I have followed the lead of the educationalist Akiva Ernst Simon (1899–1988) with his distinction between "Catholic" Judaism embracing all areas of life and "Protestant" Judaism that separates sacred and profane. Among the "Catholics" were Jewish thinkers like Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), Martin Buber (1878–1965), and obviously Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook (1865–35), Chief Rabbi of the British Mandate for Palestine, who were strongly attracted to the Messianic phenomenon, although they warned of its consequences in the sphere of practical politics. Buber and Scholem were ambivalent about political theology already in the 1920s, first

in Europe and later in Palestine. Among the "Protestants" were Akiva Ernst Simon, the cultural critic Baruch Kurzweil (1907–72), and the scientist and philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–94). These were Orthodox Jewish thinkers who warned against mixing the sacred with the profane. A third group comprised secular thinkers like the historians J. L. Talmon, Yehoshua Arieli, and Uriel Tal, and the philosopher Natan Rotenstreich, who made a distinction between the pope and Caesar, the kingdom of heaven and everyday politics. They were hostile to an unholy synthesis of religion, the realization of its metaphysical hopes in the present and its manifestations in contemporary politics. But there was too a secular intellectual such as Israel Eldad (1910–66), who combined the Messianic and the secular. These various outlooks among secular and religious thinkers prove that there are only variants of political theology.

The concept of political theology is an old one that made its appearance with Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE), but the modern discourse on the subject only began with the appearance of Carl Schmitt's *Politische Theologie* (Political Theology) and Walter Benjamin's early articles (Benjamin, 1978: 312–13; Schmitt, 1996; Balakrishnan, 2000). Eminent thinkers like Leo Strauss, Ernst Cassirer, Ernst Bloch, Karl Löwith, Erich Voeglin, Hans Jonas, Ernst Kantorowicz, Jacob Taubes, Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben engaged in a fascinating discussion of the subject, and in so doing cast a new light on major political events of the modern age (Strauss, 1975; Cassirer, 1979; Bloch, 1969; Löwith, 1958; Voeglin, 1952; Jonas, 1996; Jonas, 1984; Kantorowicz, 1957; Taubes, 1993; Derrida, 1995; Agamben, 1998; Agamben, 2005).

In 1919–1920, Schmitt participated in a seminar held by Max Weber in Munich, and later he contributed to the *Festschrift* of the great sociologist together with the Freiburg philosopher of law Ernst Kantorowicz. The article became the basis of Schmitt's famous book *Politische Theologie*, in which he abandoned neo-Kantian concepts of "supreme law" and "righteousness" in favor of modern Hobbesian formulas. He claimed that a legal theory has to relate to contemporary social and political conditions and that the "concrete situation," as he called it, took precedence over abstract constructions. Schmitt's thesis was that the modern secular constitutional state had lost its theological foundations. The strengthening of the state comes about through a strengthening of theology, and political theology is a challenge to the Enlightenment and an attempt to overcome the crisis of liberalism by finding a substitute for the political order. In Schmitt's opinion, political liberalism failed to take into account exceptional situations of danger and war that lie outside the normal legislative framework. Thus, one must ask, in what situations is the existence of the state endangered as a result of political or economic crisis? Who is the ruler in a state of chaos? The ruling power is no longer to be found in norms, in the people, or in legislation but in a person

or group capable of achieving a situation of *Entscheidung* and setting up a dictatorship. The danger reflects the crisis of legitimacy of modernity resulting from secularization, as we can see for example from the works of Hans Blumenberg and Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 1987; Blumenberg, 1983). This was also the problem of Zionism when it arose and of the State of Israel when it was established. What would provide a new legitimization after the disappearance of religious authority?

Was the secular Messianism—"that apocalyptic path," as Scholem called it—a vision of political philosophers or a political theology? (Scholem, 1971: 78–141). Does the assumption of the historian Mark Lilla, "we find it incomprehensible that theological ideas still stir up messianic passions, leaving societies in ruins," stand on solid ground? (Lilla, 2007). These shifting interrelationships between the theological and the political had concerned German and French thinkers who studied in twentieth-century political-religious thought. In Protestant tradition, the criticism of the split between theology and politics was the result of wrestling with the historical heritage of this division, and especially with that of the "two realms" in Augustine's teachings and the idea of the "two swords" (first formulated by pope Gelasius, 492–496) of the Middle Ages.

Humanist scholars of religion like Scholem, Simon, and Buber were close to the theological-political tradition. They were concerned that modern society in its secularism had lost all sense of the relationship between the sacred and the profane; between morality, religion and practical life. Uriel Tal has observed, "Modern man's sense of moral responsibility is based on the believing man's imperatives on the one hand and on the hope of a redemption which will come about in this world, in society, in the state, on the other" (Tal, 1984). Walter Benjamin, for his part, considered the dialectical affinity between the secular, political hope of liberation and the religious and Messianic hope of redemption. Tal described the challenge posed by theology as follows: "On the one hand it requires one to take up a position with regard to political and social affairs, and on the other hand, because its authority is metaphysical and thus absolute, there is a danger that adopting such a position will sanctify politics. Religion is liable to encroach on politics and politics is liable to encroach on religion" (Tal, 1979: 39).

David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the Israeli state and the first prime minister, on the one hand and Rabbi Kook on the other are good examples of different varieties of political theology. In some ways, they were on opposite sides of the fence. The former, a political leader, did not hesitate to appropriate the sacred, to mobilize hallowed myths and to harness them to the task of building the state; the latter, a religious mentor, did not hesitate to appropriate the profane, to mobilize Zionist pioneers and to harness them to mystical speculations concerning the coming of the Messiah. Each

had an essentially different starting point from the other, but the common denominator between them was the raising of the profane to the level of the sacred: the ploughman became a sacred vessel of Judaism and a central element in the process of redemption. For a short while there was a kind of meeting between these two opposite outlooks, but from that time onward their paths again divided. Rabbi Kook turned toward transcendental Messianism, which relied on the Ruler of the Universe, and Ben-Gurion turned toward Promethean Messianism, which relied on the sovereignty of man. In both cases there was a definite fusion between the world of the sacred and the world of the profane, and both men had a clear political theology, but Ben-Gurion was the most extreme expression of secular Messianism and worked for a politicization of the theological, while Rabbi Kook was the most extreme expression of religious Messianism and worked for a theologization of politics (Ohana, 2003; 2008: 204–25).

The Messianic idea, with its promises and dangers, has nourished social and national movements throughout history, but, as Scholem has observed, "Despite the many studies that have been made of the Messianic idea, there is still room for a more penetrating analysis of the reasons for the special vitality of this vision in the history of the Jewish religion" (Scholem, 1959: 193–239).

The prayer for the peace of the state, in which the State of Israel is described as "the first flowering of our redemption," was written by Shai Agnon (1888–1970), the Israeli writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize, at the request of the chief rabbi at the time, Rabbi Isaac Herzog. This association of the ancient Jewish yearning with the modern Jewish national movement was not, however, limited to prayers. The political-theological discourse passed beyond the sphere of religious belief and took place concurrently with the secular discourse, and both of them were lively debates on the significance of the new Israeli *mamlachtiut* and its affinity to the religious tradition in general and the Messianic tradition in particular.

The story behind the scenes of the metamorphoses of the expression *Tsur Israel* ("The Rock of Israel") in the Scroll of Independence is a fascinating one. Three weeks before the state was declared, Pinhas Rosen, head of the Judicial Council and the first minister of justice, asked the young jurist Mordechai Beham to make a rough draft of the Declaration of Independence. The lawyer, who had no experience of national legislation or of drafting national declarations, went to consult the conservative rabbi Dr. Shalom Zvi Davidowitz, a translator of Shakespeare and a commentator of Maimonides. "The meeting of the two," related law professor Yoram Shahar, who investigated the genealogy of the declaration, "produced the most religious formulation to be found in any of the drafts. The right of the Jewish people to the land, it proclaimed, derived from the divine promise

to the Fathers of the Nation. But after that, the further away Beham went from Davidowitz, the more the declaration took on a secularist coloring. The divine promise was toned down owing to historical, political and moral considerations [. . .]. The only remaining reference to divine intervention was the expression 'Rock of Israel'" (*Haaretz*, 5.5.2003).

The "Rock of Israel" was the Israeli-Jewish version of the concept "Divine Providence" found in the American Declaration of Independence. After many changes and recasting, Ben-Gurion took over the formulation: he and Moshe Sharett (1894–1965), the minister for foreign affairs; Aaron Zisling (1901–64) of the leftist party Mapam; and Rabbi Judah Lieb Hacohen Fishman Maimon (1875–1962) (Shahar, 2002: 523–600). Zisling asked for the expression to be taken out of the declaration, and Maimon wanted to say, "The Rock of Israel and its Redeemer." In the end, Ben-Gurion left the expression as it was. For the secularists, it symbolized the historical-cultural continuity of the Jewish people, and for the religious it referred to the Holy One, Blessed be He. From the moment the state was founded, there was an accelerated struggle over the significance of political theology within Israeli *mamlachtiut*: hence the attempt to impose the political on the theological, and hence the political principle trying to bear hug the theological.

In founding the state, Ben-Gurion had made the most significant attempt at nationalizing the Jewish Messianic concept. Zionism was a historical experiment in nationalizing religious concepts and metamorphosing them into the secular sphere. Ben-Gurion brought the matter to its ultimate conclusion in his attempt to nationalize the Bible and Messianism. *Mamlachtiut* (etatism), Ben-Gurion's act of nationalization in many spheres of life, was a broad, comprehensive, and multifaceted secular ideology that took hold of religious myths and harnessed them to a project of statehood.

In the middle, between Rabbi Kook and Ben-Gurion, were the religious and secular intellectuals who were repelled by the political theologies of both these giants. The religious intellectuals saw the theo-political detonator that the Messianic idea was likely to become. They preceded the secular intellectuals and warned at an early stage against Ben-Gurion's Messianic vision because this challenge had been imposed on them even earlier when they were exposed to the explosive interlacing of worlds in the political theology of Rabbi Kook. They had been there before: they felt that Ben-Gurion was playing with fire, and the fact that this did not frighten him did not make it any less dangerous.

At the beginning of the period of *mamlachtiut*, three essays appeared by orthodox intellectuals concerning the danger of mixing the theological and the political. The three articles were published in successive years. They were Akiva Ernst Simon's "Are we still Jews?" (1951), Baruch Kurzweil's "The Nature and Origins of the 'Young Hebrew' ('Canaanite') Movement"

(1952), and Yeshayahu Leibowitz's "After Kibiyeh" (1953) (Leibowitz, 1976: 229–34; Simon, 1953: 357–65; Kurzweil, 1948). In all three articles, religious thinkers warned against the bear hug in which the new Israeli nationalism held the sacred tongue; they warned of the radical effects of the Israeli national secularism that extended even to Canaanism and thus expressed the fear of a rise of a "territorial" or "Canaanite" Messianism.

"Canaanite Messianism"

"Canaanism" and "Messianism" are, on the face of it, opposites. Canaanism is a national, geocultural ideology in which a certain piece of land defines the collective identity of its inhabitants; Messianism is a religious belief that at the end of history "all human contradictions will be resolved." Canaanism is a secular concept based on a nativistic myth; Messianism is founded on nonhuman and ahistorical laws. Canaanism embodies the physical basis, the place; Messianism represents the metaphysical basis, "the Place" (i.e., God). Canaanism promoted Hebraism as a territorial nationalism, while Messianism laid emphasis on the universality of the Jewish religion. However, the rise of Gush Emunim after the Yom Kippur War in 1973 introduced a new type of political of political theology that could be called "Canaanite Messianism" (Ohana, 2008; Feige, 2009).

In Rabbi Kook, Simon saw a mixture of "concrete Messianism," as he called it, and an original approach to the relationship between the sacred and the profane. Zionism, in Rabbi Kook's religious philosophy, restored the equilibrium between the sacred and the profane. Simon's attitude toward a Messianic political theology could thus be summarized as follows: give the next world the Messiah, and give this world the expectation of a Messiah.

The Kabbala scholar Rivka Schatz, one of the intellectuals who have supported Gush Emunim, thought that the Messianic phenomenon is "greater than can be understood with the tools of scholarship we possess [. . .]. Rather than a principle that can be described, it is a language through which hidden desires are revealed, it is the ultimate depth, it is the sanctuary of awe and hope where the dreams are stored which are not revealed in history" (Schatz, 1990: 24–28). In other words, Messianism is a language that reveals the "ultimate depth" of humanity, and it is something greater than those who create it or those who use it. This concept is a retreat from the Promethean Messianism of Zionism, which depends on the free will of sovereign human beings, and a return to nonhuman structures, to transcendental Messianism. Baruch Kurzweil at an early stage criticized this

phenomenon of a return to transcendental systems greater than man or than man's capacity to explain them.

In his expression "the structure of the archetype," Kurzweil, a product of European culture, was referring to the transcendental school of thought, which interpreted history in terms of deterministic, nonhuman forms. One of its theorists was Ludwig Klages, who developed an antirational approach focused on the conscious creation of myths and the belief that reality itself, and not its representations, consists of "symbols" or "expressions." The worldview of Oswald Spengler was characterized by this interpretation of reality as a symbol: in his opinion, the significance of morphological forms is that forms rule over life by means of symbols and metaphors; it is they that create the social reality and not human beings with free will. This aesthetic and metaphysical approach to history includes George Sorel's "myth," Klages's "aura," Spengler's "morphology," Ernst Jünger's "gestalt," and mythical nonhuman concepts of the postmodernist era such as Claude Lévi-Strauss's "structure" and Michel Foucault's "episteme" (Ohana, 2000).

The Messianic myth as a nonhuman structure was in Kurzweil's opinion also likely to lead to a negation of human decisions and actions. He disliked the idea that human actions are directed by mythical constructs, that a "system," a "structure," an "arche," an "episteme" should have priority over man and condition his actions in history. The Messianic myth that Kurzweil warned against represented a moral and cultural relativism in which values changed in accordance with historical circumstances. The Messianic end justifies the means. Kurzweil was critical of postmodernist relativism whose paradoxical possible result could be an affirmation of fundamentalism. The transcendental Messianic language cast aside the Promethean Messianic heritage, which was based on the sovereignty of man; critical observation was abandoned for a passionate defense of the irrational, the mythical, or mystery. Kurzweil's intention, similar to the interpretive enterprise of Jewish philosophy's scholar Yehezkel Kaufman with regard to the Bible, was to eradicate myth. The danger was not an intellectual but a concrete one: playing with concepts of sparks and husks in the realm of politics could lead to a nihilistic theology.

But it was not only the religious intellectuals who warned about a political theology infiltrating the state of Israel and threatening to grow into a "territorial Messianism." The secular historians Yehoshua Arieli, J. L. Talmon, and Uriel Tal also saw the connection between the post–Six-Day War political theology and a Canaanite Messianism (Ohana 2008: 169–88).

Yehoshua Arieli warned against the territorial Messianism of the Greater Land of Israel movement, which combined the Revisionist ideology with Messianic religiosity of the Rabbi Kook variety. To this school of thought, one principle—the affinity of the people to the land—became an absolute

demand requiring full realization. The duty of redeeming the land had replaced the duty of redeeming the people. According to Arieli, an old-new aspect of Judaism was revealed once more as a result of the 1967 war. It seemed as though events had shown the hand of Providence. Judaism appropriated for itself the physical side of Zionism and the biblical promise of settlement and became a "tribal" religion. Nationalism was sanctified by religion, and religion was sanctified by nationalism. In this "tribal religion" a new people was created, different from the Jewry outside Israel, which lived according to the norms of *halacha* and modern life (Arieli, 2003).

Arieli thought that, together with the fetishistic Messsianic vision, there had developed among the adherents of the Greater Land of Israel movement a Canaanite attitude to the land. Everything connected with the land of Israel—nature, the physical space, the seasons of the year, customs, and memories—had been raised to the level of sanctity. The original Zionist approach had been the superimposition of the Jewish people's desire for national independence and the people's distress as a minority scattered among the nations of the world. The new integralist approach sanctified the place as the sole source of legitimacy. Only when the historical attachment to the land of Israel contended with the ideal of a national home was there a need to choose between national territorial independence in part of the land of Israel and an attachment to the whole of the land of Israel. The majority in the Zionist movement continued to prefer national independence to an attachment to the whole land of Israel, and thus the order of priorities was fixed.

In his analysis of Jewish Messianism, Uriel Tal discerned two different schools of thought: the political-Messianic school of thought that saw present-day historical phenomena as a realization of mystical realities, and the school of thought that held that in social and political matters one should act with caution and self-restraint as God alone is an absolute authority and one should therefore avoid intervening in his name. Both schools of thought accepted *halacha* as normative and as a binding authority. The adherents of the political-Messianic school of thought claim that the only difference between the Messianic period and other periods is that in the former the Jews are once again free from subjection to foreign rule. In this period, redemption has begun, and it will eventually be realized on a worldwide scale. This claim brings symbols down to the level of reality—that is to say, a stone and a plot of land are not *symbols* of something sacred but are sacred in themselves (Tal, 1979: 4–15).

The peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians and the possibility of evacuating the settlements in Judea and Samaria made Israel Harel, one of the settler leaders and a father to members of the "Hilltop Youth" (the term commonly used for right-wing young settlers in Judea

and Samaria), who had some clear notions on the state of Israel, to write in his article "Unlike the Crusaders," "Baath secular circles and other Islamic groups have foretold for some time that our fate will be similar to that of the crusaders. Judging by the strength and fortitude we have demonstrated in recent years, our spirit and behaviour, the comparison is unfair to the crusaders. They at least succeeded in persevering in the intolerably difficult conditions of deprivation, isolation and insecurity of the Middle Ages for some two hundred years" (Harel, 1999). Is Harel suggesting that the descent from the settlers' Messianic vision of redemption to the nadir of defeatism is something so disastrous that the Israelis may be compared to the crusaders? Is this what the scientist, philosopher, and most radical of the Israeli intellectuals, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, meant when he foretold that the first "descenders" from the country would be the settlers in the territories? Harel aims to what I have aimed in this article: at the end of the day, the escape from politics through political theology leads to the politics of political despair.

"The Black Brigades"

"The politics of cultural despair," the expression of the historian Fritz Stern, is aimed to (German) intellectuals who uttered a cultural protest: "as moralists and as the guardians of what they thought was an ancient tradition, they attacked the progress of modernity—the growing power of liberalism and secularism" (Stern, 1961: xi). They revolted against Western civilization and warned against the loss of faith, of unity, of "values." This pessimist ideology has many variants, but the common denominator is the despair of the universal, objective, and general sphere in politics. Many faces to the escape from politics. Since Aristotle's and Plato's *virtue* (or the general good) via Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *general will* to Jurgen Habermas's *public sphere*, politics always was directed to the whole society—to the universal and not to the particular, to the objective and not to the subjective, to the general and not to the private.

The events of Hebron in 2008 and the disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005 are stages in the process of the sectoralization of the settlers who wish to break loose from Israel's secular democracy. The murderous acts of Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir after the Oslo Accords in 1993 can be seen as case studies in the politics of political despair.

In November 2008 several hundred Israeli youths violently collided with the police and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) surrounding the "House of Contention" in Hebron. This violent episode can be seen as another interaction in which the formal agents of the Israeli state confront

the settlers in the occupied territories. As before, in past evacuations from Gush Katif in Gaza and northern Samaria in 2005 ("the disengagement"), official representatives, entrusted with the protection of the same people they confronted, were referred to as "Nazis." In the following days Hebron experienced a confrontation among the settlers and the local Palestinian population during which their cars and houses were set on fire and many of them were injured.

In an interview held a few days after the evacuation of the "House of Contention" in Hebron, Gadi, a 16-year-old-teenager and a member of the "Hilltop Youth," said,

> The state is trying to destroy our existence here. We make it hard for them to breathe, get in the way of their expulsion edicts. What does talking help? It's just more blah-blah. The more incidents and disturbances we initiate here—against the soldiers and against the Palestinians—the more we can exact from them a high price for the very thought of evacuating this house that connects Kiryat Arba with the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and the better our chances will be of stopping it.
>
> What connection do I have to this country? Why do I have to pray for it or be happy here? Why do I have to respect its symbols? Or its policemen? Or its soldiers? Or its laws? Does it respect me? (Shragai, 2008)

"I know that the families who have already been living here for a year and a half don't like our behavior. They didn't like us at Neveh Dekalim either," he continued, referring to the town in Gush Katif, Gaza, evacuated in Israel's unilateral disengagement plan under a proposal by the former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that also included removing all Israelis from the Gaza Strip in August 2005. "The result," he continued, "was a disaster, destruction. Now no one can sidetrack me and my friends. We have no love for the Arabs. We have no love for the IDF. We have no love for this state. All they understand is force" (Shragai, 2008). Gadi is not shocked when Muslim gravestones are being vandalized in the cemetery behind the House of Contention, nor does he care that Palestinian civilians are being hurt and army property destroyed.

On Independence Day in 2007 Gadi had a serious clash with his father and mother, after they hung the flag from their house and went to the synagogue to recite "Hallel," the prayer of thanksgiving. He gave up on Israel today: "[T]his country is carrying out a transfer of its people. It is planning to do a transfer here in Hebron and from the entire area of Judea and Samaria [. . .]. The morals of the state of Israel are the morals of Gentiles of western culture." When he was asked about the future elections in Israel, he answered, "[N]othing will come out of this Knesset" (Shragai, 2008).

The same politics of political desperation resonates in the words of Yehuda, an 18-year-old radical activist who lives in Kiryat Arba and also took part in the violent clashes in Hebron:

> No one really controls us. Those from the Yesha (Judea and Samaria) Council, who claim they are our leaders, are haunted by fear and, in general, they shouldn't be dealing with struggles. They, as heads of councils, are dependent on the government after all. And after their failure in Gush Katif, why should anyone listen to them?
>
> We are the ones with Jewish morals, with the values of the Torah. The morals of the State of Israel are the morals of Gentiles, of Western culture. They are false and sick morals. They are upset about the suffering of an Arab, but not about the suffering of a Jew or about the humiliation of Jewish honor. You behave here not as the landlords in an independent state, but as if you were still in the Diaspora, small and frightened. (Shragai, 2008)

A decade earlier we had witnessed a precedence of the politics of political despair. There was something stupefying about the arrogance of the group surrounding Yigal Amir and about the pilgrims to the grave of Baruch Goldstein. It was a mistake to see their actions—the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the murder of 29 Palestinians while they prayed in the Machpelah cave in Hebron—as limited objectives, the attainment of which was their final purpose. These objectives were only the tip of the iceberg of the wider manifestation of revulsion at the political and cultural establishment as such, animosity toward decadent secular culture, contempt for the hedonistic consumer society, and distrust of democratic rules. The total alienation of these people from contemporary Israeli society resembles that of the students and intellectuals of the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany or the Red Brigades in Italy in the early 1970s. By setting fire to department stores, hijacking airplanes, robbing banks, blowing up public institutions, and murdering important figures, they hoped to shake up the German affluent society and create a provocation that would cause hysteria among the complacent Germans. Behind all this lay a deep despair (Aust and Bell, 2009).

The basic assumption of Ulrike Meinhof, the theoretician of violence, that "one has to challenge the fascism in society in order that it should be made visible to all," led to an affirmation of nihilism for, in her words, "One cannot change the world by firing a gun; one can only destroy it." The same applies to Goldstein, Amir, and some of the radical settlers of Hebron—one cannot change the secular and the democratic nature of the state of Israel. Ulrike Meinhof's distorted interpretation of Marxism resembled Goldstein and Amir's interpretation of Judaism: the common denominator was

voiding the content of its original significance, the abrogation of values, the failure to distinguish between means and ends, and seeing the reality of conflict as all that mattered. Thus their actions are revealed not as an ideological phenomenon but as a politics of cultural despair: their idealism became nihilism and their politics became terror (Ohana, 2009).

Political nihilism arises where faith in politics and ideology have been lost. Baruuch Marzel, one of the leaders of Hebron settlers, gave a good account of the process of radicalization of his friend Goldstein: "[H]e despaired of politics in the country." The ideological despair of Goldstein caused him to perform a nihilistic act with a political message, as if to say, "I don't believe in democratic processes, rational persuasion, or decisions by the majority." His murderous act was intended to awaken the dormant Israeli consciousness after the Oslo Accords.

Goldstein and, later, Yigal Amir's group conformed to the model of political theology put forward by Carl Schmitt. Schmitt saw politics as a continual confrontation between "enemies" and "friends," a belligerency that cannot be resolved. Schmitt thought that sovereignty did not reside with the people or the law but with the person or group able to make a decision and set up a dictatorship. The modern constitutional state had been stripped of its theological assets. Political theology is thus an attempt to overcome the crisis of liberalism by finding a replacement for the political order. Schmitt wanted to recreate the gordian knot that held together theology and the state, because he held that the weakening of the central government and the breakdown of authority derived from the crisis of secularism.

Schmitt's disciple from Kiryat Arba thought that the confrontation between Jews and Arabs was eternal, ahistorical. "The Arabs," said Goldstein, "are like a plague. They are a sickness that infects us." In an interview he gave to the journalist Tom Roberts nine days before the massacre, he declared that "the Israeli army sins against the Jewish people in preventing us from taking vengeance on the Arabs. We have to expel them." In the mythicization of his image that took place on account of the place (the Machpelah cave) and the time (Purim), the homicidal doctor was seen as a mythical sacrifice that hastened the redemption, a Jew "murdered for the sanctification of God," as was written on his grave.

The climax of political nihilism in Israel was the three shots of Yigal Amir's revolver. In his testimony to the Shamgar Commission, which investigated the circumstances that led to the murder of Rabin, Amir claimed that only after he had despaired of legitimate political activity had he decided to murder Rabin. His political actions in the settlement Efrat and those organized on the weekends by the students in the territories had no effect on the inhabitants of Israel, "the people sitting on the fleshpots." He saw the students as "materialistic people who were only interested in

a degree and a career." This was a personal admission that the murder of Rabin was more than an act of political protest: it was the culmination of cultural and political despair. In this respect, the murder of Rabin was also a dual murder. He was murdered once as the representative of the Oslo Agreements and once as the representative of Israeli secular and democratic culture (Peri, 2000).

Amir participated in the demonstrations of "Zu Artzenu," a group led by Moshe Feiglin that used aggressive and violent tactics in their protest against the Oslo Accords. Although Feiglin was a candidate to the Knesset on behalf of the Likud party, he still believes in taking initiatives in order to construct the third temple and to establish in Israel a Messianic political culture. He suggests transferring the Palestinians if they will not accept Jewish sovereignty. Motti Carpel, the author of the book, *The Faith Revolution: The Fall of Zionism and the Rise of the Faith Alternative* (Carpel, 2003) and the ideologue of the "Jewish leadership," Feiglin's political faction within the Likud party, predicts that when the crisis of Zionism will reach its climax, Feiglin will be there.

The rightist radical group and the "Hilltop Youth" are test cases for the limits of tolerance in Israeli democracy. They seek to prove that individuals or militant minorities have the power to change the course of events through a violent existential act, through shock treatment. They wish to destroy the tolerance, illusory in their opinion, of bourgeois society, which they see as a "repressive tolerance." When it seems that all possible paths of deliverance are blocked, violence raises its head and presumes to awaken the sleeping. All that is required is to pull the trigger of a revolver. As soon as cultural pessimism is combined with political theology, the justification is created for a strategy of violence: terror wishes to impose its own agenda.

In the postmodern era, transcendental Messianism has come back into our lives through the front door. It is active in the world of the post-Enlightenment—that is, in the world after the attempt to raise man to the level of God. Fundamentalism has internalized the Promethean initiative in order to increase its strength. In the premodern era, men waited with longing for the appearance of God, but they waited patiently and passively; in the modern era, they took their fate into their own hands and obliterated the traces of God; in the postmodern era they have lost their humility and want God to be summoned up immediately. This era has armed fundamentalism with Promethean self-consciousness and the power of technology and the media. This reversal can take place if the secular is sanctified: only the secular can bring God closer. Fundamentalism has reconnected transcendental Messianism with Promethean Messianism; the theological has once again been joined to the political. Will the Zionist Prometheus return the fire to the gods?

8

Where East Meets West

The long history of interaction between the East and the West has been characterized by two opposite approaches, one we will call "the crusader approach," the other, "the Mediterranean option." According to the "the crusader approach," the East and the West must permanently be in opposition and a violent confrontation between them is always imminent. "The Mediterranean option" maintains that, on the contrary, the two are in permanent dialogue, creative synthesis, and that it is in their reciprocal difference that each discovers itself. Let us first consider this dialogical possibility.

East Meets West

Zionism sprang up against the background of the rise of nationalism, the spread of secularism, and the dominance of Eurocentricity. One of the chief cultural ambitions of the Zionist movement was to create a "new man"—an idea that made its appearance in the period of the Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century, at the time of the historic encounter between the Jewish diaspora and European culture (Ohana, 1995). It was thought that the Jew could be transformed by the adoption of secularism and modernism and so be made fit to join European society. However, the myth of the "new Jew" came into being only when the idea of a separate Jewish nationality was accepted and realized in Israel. It was believed that there was an affinity between the people and the land: only in the land of the forefathers, in the East, would the desired change in the image of the Jew come about. Zeev Jabotinsky, in the Zionist Congress of 1905, spoke of the "Palestinian personality," and Martin Buber believed in a mystical connection "between the people and the land." The realization of Zionism in Israel linked ideology to geography, history to a spatial identity.

Zionism originated in Europe, and the various models of the "new Jew" were fashioned in Eastern and Central Europe. It is quite true that, as Shlomo Avineri wrote, "the history of Jewish people as it developed in the last 500 years and the Zionist movement as an intellectual and political force that gave birth to the modern State of Israel, are deeply interwoven with the histories and cultures of Eastern and Central Europe," but his starting point that "Israel is a Middle-Eastern country" requires careful examination (Avineri, 1996: 163). For example, the critic Shlomo Elbaz wrote in his article "Israel, the Jews and the Mediterranean,"

> In the early 1950s, there was a tidal wave of mass immigration, with a Sephardi-oriental majority alongside the survivors of the Nazi extermination camps. In a drive which was more messianic than ideological, the oriental and North African communities doubled the Jewish population of the country in less than three years. The Sephardi-oriental sector which was demographically in the majority in the Jewish population, was culturally devalued. These understood that Israel's future is linked to its Mediterranean destiny. But we are far from an in-depth rehabilitation of the Eastern Mediterranean element in our leadership, in our creative artists, in the average Israeli and public opinion. Apart from the problems of their integration into the social and economic fabric of their new nation, the oriental and Maghrebi Jews did not play the role which should naturally and historically have been theirs: to constitute a bridge between a composite Jewish society and the Arab world, a cultural bridge preparing and enhancing a political dialogue based on mutual knowledge and respect, as well as on the experience of coexistence in Islamic countries where the Jews had enjoyed an infinitely greater tolerance than in Christian lands. (Elbaz, 1994: 170–82)

It is paradoxical that from the 1920s onward, one of the models for the creation of the "new Jew" was the Arab. The Arab was seen by part of the Zionists as an exemplar of belongingness, of an existential and natural connection with the land, and he was the antithesis of the stereotype of the exilic Jew. The Jew was thought to be weak in body, overly spiritual, and physically uprooted, while the Arab was considered active, independent, and authentic and lived in harmony with nature. The East was not only a place of refuge from the Jewish exile in Europe but also a source of vitality and a place where the individual and national personality could be renewed.

Zionism was from its early days characterized by a highly ambivalent approach to the east. Theodor Herzl was among those who rejected the Eastern option, claiming in his pamphlet "The Jewish State," "For Europe we will constitute a bulwark against Asia, serving as guardians of culture against barbarism" (Herzl, 1943: 34). This approach was contested by some Zionist ideologues, who discerned vital values in the East; thus Ben-Gurion stated (in 1925) that "the significance of Zionism is that we are, once again,

becoming an Oriental people." As Yigal Zalmona, the curator of The Israel Museum, wrote,

> The Israeli self-image has been oscillating between these two extreme attitudes towards the East ever since the beginnings of the Zionist settlement of this country. The issue of national and individual identity rises to the surface mainly in moments of crisis, at times of unrest or during periods of an impending encounter or confrontation with the East. The desire to form part of the East in the deepest existential and cultural sense, or, in contrast, to detach from it—these are the two major impulses that come to bear on the evolving Israeli sense of identity. (Zalmona, 1998: 47–93)

Shall we turn a deaf ear to the words of the Egyptian journalist, Anis Mansour? "The Jews," he said,

> always had a tendency to shut themselves up and to isolate themselves in the world. Everywhere the Jews settled, they created ghettos of their own accord. Look at the Jewish colonies in Miami and Los Angeles; the Israelis have created a ghetto there as well, and they only associate with each other. In my opinion, the Jews' tendency to isolate themselves and to remain shut in upon themselves is what has caused the State of Israel also to constitute a ghetto in the Middle East. You are still suffering from a "Massada complex." This seems to be a profound complex in the Jewish mentality—the complex about assimilation. . . . Thus, before Israel begins peace-processes with all the Arab countries, it will have to deal with its ghetto-complex. Israel will not achieve real peace with its neighbours as long as it is isolated, closed-up, separated and patronizing. (Mansour, *Apiryon*: Spring 1998)

Although this was written five years before the Oslo Accords (1993), it is still relevant, even if somewhat simplistic and even if it fails to take account of the transition made by Israel from an indoctrinated and mobilized society to a privatized society looking for a binding civil ethos. But do we, for that reason, have to ignore what he says completely?

Mediterranean Architecture

One might find evidence to support his claim in Israeli architecture. Many of the architectural structures in Israel express this alienation in concrete, with buildings standing with their backs to the sea; claustrophobic shopping malls in the American style; hotels blocking off the shore from breezes or a sea view; private marinas closed to the public going up in rapid succession; or the monastic, fortress-like construction of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus and dozens of public buildings. The architect Elinoar Barzaki says,

> The need for correctly-planned streets is closely connected with the Mediterranean character. We are talking about very emotional people who, unlike the frozen Anglo-Saxons, touch and rub together with each other a lot. We are social animals who want to be together and to use all our senses. We saw this, for example, after Rabin's murder, when it was precisely the young people—the children of the television, computer and Internet generation—who streamed to the city square in order to be together, to make contact, to touch, to see things from close up. If the living-rooms of the city are properly planned, they will permit a full interpersonal experience to take place. (Zilberg, 1996)

Barzaki therefore recommends city squares to have an alternation of open and closed spaces, light and shade, as the squares, she says, are the living rooms of the city. When the writer, publicist, and painter Amos Kenan was asked what he would like to do first in the sphere of city planning, he immediately answered,

> I would pull down all the buildings and then build in a graduated manner, with the lowest buildings being situated on the seashore, from there becoming progressively higher, and I would then reverse the pyramid so that one could see the coastal plain and the Judean hills from the windows of the houses. I would try to preserve elements of the local culture in the buildings: arches, for instance. I would make long series of arcades so that people could walk in the shade. And I would not be ashamed to do what they did in Seville, where the avenues are planted with orange-trees. If you want, you can sit on a bench and pick an orange. And everywhere, there would be flowers of Eretz-Israel. I would try to make the colours blue and white, which are colours of the Mediterranean culture, predominate in the architecture instead of the grey of concrete. (Muskuna, 1996)

In September of 2007, the Israeli newspaper *Haarez* dedicated a special weekend issue to "Our Sea: From Atlit to Gibraltar, A Glance at Today's Mediterranean." A central subject of the issue was architecture. A number of Israeli architects were asked to respond to the prompt "What is Mediterranean?" Their opinions generally could be divided into two groups. One opinion is represented by the architect Baruch Baruch, head of the Architecture Department of WIZO Haifa, the Israeli representative of the Organization of Mediterranean Architects (UMAR). He said, "Modern Zionist architecture [. . .] did not come directly from the Mediterranean, but from the Mediterranean image of western architects such as Le Corbusier who traveled in Greece and Italy. After the European transformation it returned in an inauthentic fashion. On the other hand, the way cities were built here is entirely European, and there is therefore not a single building complex

in any modern Israeli city which could be called Mediterranean" (Baruch, *Haaretz*, 26.9.2007). The architect Eran Neuman, lecturer at the School of Architecture at Tel Aviv University, said "there is in the Mediterranean enormous potential to suggest a mode of multi-cultural existence, an alternative to American globalization. But for that one must listen to the sea, and to those on the other side of it, in Beirut, Alexandria, and especially in Gaza" (Ibid.).

The Mediterranean Option in Action

Because the Middle East is perceived as a political rather than a cultural milieu, and because political dialogue is much more effective when preceded by cultural and sociological discourse, the Israelis need to look for partners—and, if they do not exist, to create them—among social and cultural actors and institutions, in order to conduct this cultural discourse. This is one of the classic roles of civil society: to promote collaboration among institutions and create common themes and messages based on shared problems and interests.

What really is a "civil society"? It is not simply a case of all the citizens forming a political community, nor is it, as is frequently said, merely "public opinion." What we describe as "civil society" is the meeting of the autonomous subjects of the state and its institutions, united not only by values and cultures but also by the desire to act together and to assume specific responsibilities in projects of general interest. So "civil society" is the sum total of voluntary associations, local communities, cultural and research institutions, representative bodies in the private enterprise, and business sectors. Civil society, by both its attitudes and its actions, must support governments in their struggle against the common enemies: radicalism and extremism. And it has to do so with its own instruments: dialogue, tolerance, and moderation (Taylor, 1990; Shils 1991; Waltzer, 1991).

Civil society has to pressure governments as much as possible to show commitment to the construction of a more stable and peaceful Mediterranean area. It should also make an effort to ensure that declarations of desire for cooperation in the area are translated into suitable institutions with the capacity to generate projects and initiatives. In any case, the greatest contribution that civil society can make to peace and security is to maximize its own abilities, its own resources, in business and professional terms and in terms of creativity. Although it is true that there cannot be development without peace, it is also true that only development can lay the foundations for peace. There is a close link between security and growth in economic relations.

As for the situation in the Middle East, today we have the tentative, incipient Israeli-Palestinian peace, with its enormous consequences for the Arab world and its influence on the West. The process is and will be hard, but it seems to be irreversible. The Gaza Strip, previously a genuine disaster area of poverty and overcrowding, is rapidly attaining a per capita income of US$1,200, when Egypt has managed to achieve only US$600.

The Oslo Accords created a revolutionary opening for dialogue. They were based, in principle and in fact, on two parallel channels: the immediate bilateral channel that focuses on resolving the disputes of the past and ending the state of war between Israel and its Arab neighbors; and the multilateral channel that provides a basis for and strengthens the bilateral channel by creating a safety net along with other actors, developing common interests, and coping with common problems. These common problems—water, economic growth, disarmament, and environmental issues—cannot be solved by one side alone or even in concert with our next-door neighbors but only on a broad regional basis. This regional (Mediterranean) principle, which Oslo employed, has not been altered despite the Oslo Accords' failure with the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000.

Building on the interdependence of the bilateral and the multilateral channels, we must develop the next phase and move beyond Oslo and Barcelona: promoting the "Mediterranean option" on the level of civil society rather than of governments. As such it can create a reservoir of common interests among peoples and especially among the civil societies of the region. The recognition of common interests and resolution of common problems, which can be accomplished only on a regional basis, must proceed at a pace and with a critical mass that assure its immediate visibility in the field. It is imperative that the nations of the region perceive the replacement of animosity and distrust by a new climate of cordial relations that reinforces the collective hope for peace. There is some room to expect that the "spring of the nations" that broke out in the Middle East during the winter of 2011 will lead things in a new direction.

It seems that it is time to expand and deepen the dialogue that began in Barcelona in November 1995 with the founding of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Despite the lack of a suitable historical perspective, it is important to examine and evaluate the potential latent in the Mediterranean civil society that the Barcelona initiative sought to establish (Pace and Schumacher, 2005).

The countries of the European Union (EU) had come to the conclusion that in order for the Mediterranean area to become stable, and for its inhabitants to enjoy greater peace and prosperity than they do at present, cooperation between the EU and the countries of the region had to be

increased. The imbalance that had developed in the EU owing to its enlargement and the inclusion of northern countries caused the "southern" countries to increase their pressure on the EU to direct resources southward and to balance its efforts directed to the East. The stream of workers that began to move toward the European countries from the Maghreb, Portugal, and Turkey and the resulting emigration necessitated a reconstitution of the economic and psychological frontiers of the continent.

From the very beginning of the Barcelona process, the European Union related to the Mediterranean not only in economic terms but also in political and regional terms and in terms of security. The overriding purpose was to increase the stability of the area. According to the Barcelona declaration, the general objective of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is to make the Mediterranean an area of dialogue, exchange, and cooperation in order to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity so as to consolidate above all democracy, respect for human rights, durable and balanced socioeconomic development, and intercultural dialogue (Institute Catala, 1995).

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the resulting creation of a free-trade area constitute a challenge and an opportunity to enhance the economic potential of both shores of the Mediterranean. It is obvious that for the nations of the Mediterranean, close relations with Europe represent an extraordinary opportunity, because partnership would create more favorable conditions for foreign investment in the area. The Mediterranean area also presents a number of congenital risk factors, which not only block the path to growth but also threaten everything achieved up to the present. Thus the flow of migration to Europe has created tensions, and this phenomenon must be tackled by the nations on both sides acting together.

Cooperation and dialogue between governments will be added to cooperation and dialogue between citizens. The presence of the civil society provides the fundamental element: the legitimacy of those who represent the living forces of the countries bordering the Mediterranean. Whether in matters related to information, urban development, higher education, research, or culture, the involvement of the civil society will add a new dimension to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The concept of *partnership* was one of the most novel aspects that emerged from the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. This is an idea capable of adding a more complex, flexible dimension to the simplistic objective of commercial cooperation, which had previously dominated the community's strategy in the Mediterranean area. The EU's intention to support economic changes on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Basin is part of this line of action. The objective is to stimulate the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean space founded on a free-trade area.

The Barcelona Declaration proposed a plan of action to fix both the framework and the priorities of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Among these the following are notable: the continuation of the structural reforms for socioeconomic changes, support for regional integration, investment, and the enhancement of cooperation between businesses (Batiss and Grenon, 1989). Here we find the idea of Mediterranean culture again: it is clear that if the north does not demand the adoption of the aforementioned Mediterranean ideals from the south, a north-south relationship free from aggressive mutual ignorance will be attained.

All this may assume unexpected forms if the cooperation processes go ahead. The demographic threat of the south, as a case in point, can be powerfully resisted in the south itself through a greater democratization and a greater access to wealth, however modest it may be. For instance, an illiterate Moroccan woman from the rural areas has an average of six children, whereas another who has received an education and lives in the city only has three (Sabour, 1996).

The immigration issue was perhaps the motive behind the Barcelona process. This process has three main elements (or "baskets"): an economic element, a political-security element, and a cultural-social element. The equation on which the Barcelona process and the new Mediterranean policy were based is the provision of European assistance in exchange for political and social reforms aimed at enhancing the stability of the recipient countries. There is no doubt that the main obstacle to joint Euro-Mediterranean development lies in the problematic peace process in the Middle East. Only a climate of peace—between nations and within them—can create the confidence and commitment necessary to bring about Euro-Mediterranean economic integration. Therefore, any Mediterranean strategy should incorporate a plan for the stability and security of the whole area (Stetter, 2005).

Israel, like the European Union, has a strong interest in enhancing the political and economic stability of the region and in restraining fundamentalism (Schaefer, 2002: 583). The interests of the European countries run parallel to Israel's desire to see the European Union devote greater attention to the area and direct economic resources southward to the Mediterranean Basin. This conjunction of interests is fraught with political, economic, and cultural potential. In the political sphere, an important factor is the "restraining" effect of the European presence in the Mediterranean framework. This presence can calm the fears of the Arab states of an Israeli "hegemony" over their economy and enables Israel to move a step forward in realizing the potential of normalization. Israel's participation in the Barcelona process also permits it to be more intimately connected with the effort of the European Union, leading to a closer mutual relationship.

Another aspect of this strengthening of ties could be a participation in multilateral activities such as an intensified dialogue with NATO.

In the economic sphere, Israel is not part of the equation underlying the Barcelona initiative—economic assistance in exchange for political and economic reforms. At the same time, it sees the mobilization of resources for regional cooperation and development, the participation of Israeli firms in the realization of the projects of the European Union, and association with European and international bodies in cofinancing activities as developments with great potential. The realization of this potential will help Israel to become integrated into the Eastern Mediterranean; promote normalization, stimulate dialogue, and increase understanding among groups in the various national societies (as in interreligious encounters, for instance); gain legitimacy for democratization processes (Israel should not play too prominent a role here); and assist in the eradication of illiteracy and the raising of the socioeconomic level of some of the neighboring states.

Such a broad perspective, with its strategic orientation, has been missing from the academic literature on the Mediterranean Basin. The lessons learned from examining its features may be projected on the entire region so as to develop strategies for the evolving polycentric Mediterranean civil society. The ideas expressed in this book should stimulate fruitful sociocultural cooperation and collaboration in the Mediterranean region. This will inspire the Mediterranean civil society, including institutions and policy makers, to work together in a way that can advance the political processes that are faltering in the absence of a viable social, civil, and cultural dialogue.

East Confronts West

The historiography of the confrontation between the East and West has a history of its own. The Muslim revolt against medieval colonialism has been used in modern times in support of the rebellion of the Arab peoples against European colonialism, but the European colonialists also used historiography for political purposes. The French imagined the campaigns of Charles X and Napoleon to be French crusades, the Germans made Frederick II Barbarossa into a national hero at the time of the unification of Germany, the Belgians adopted Godfrey de Bouillon, whose birthplace was not Belgium in the Middle Ages but became so in the nineteenth century. After the Great Exhibition of 1851, the British transferred the statue of Richard the Lion-Heart to a new site near the Palace of Westminster, where it has stood until the present day. In nineteenth-century Europe, the pan-European narrative of the crusades began to split up into rival national narratives: each people produced on its own soil its own crusader narrative. Each nation chose to

tailor its history to the territory in which it now resided. The Israeli historian Joshua Prawer had noted about the confrontation between the Christian west and the Islamic east,

> It can be said with some degree of certainty that the crusaders were not a bridge from East to West. Their orientalism, or, if one wishes, their Levantinism, was consciously held in check by the crusaders themselves. In order to transmit something, one first needs someone willing to receive it; but this reception depends on a respect for what is different, on a relationship with the "other," and on a positive view of the context. And here it can be said of the crusaders that their belief in their religious superiority, which was also perceived as a cultural superiority, resulted not only in a distancing from but also contempt towards the world around them. (Prawer, 1994: 37)

Foreshadowing Prawer, in 1958 the Israeli essayist Moshe Fogel published his article "The Crusaders and Their Strength and Weakness" in the first issue of the journal *Keshet*. Under the heading "The West—A Supportive and Destructive Factor," Fogel explained that "the crusader kingdom, whose existence was based on a religious ideology that on principle denied the right of any other religious ideology to exist [. . .] was unable to survive long" (Fogel, 1958: 158). He claimed that there was not a single example in history of peace and long-term cooperation between opposing ideologies: "The total dependence of the crusader state on Western Europe prevented it from striking roots in the region and made it an alien and hostile element in the local arena. In the final analysis, Western support was one of the main causes of the failure of the crusader 'experiment.'" Fogel's modern, secular conclusions also reflected the platform from which he was speaking: the Canaanite response to the crusader challenge, denying any rights based on religion, rejecting foreign elements and proposing the elimination of the dichotomy between East and West through integration into the region.

In contrast to Fogel, the historian Ben Zion Netanyahu is of the opinion that there is a deep cultural opposition between the Israelis and Arabs deriving from the hostility between East and West:

> Zionism is basically a Western movement. It is a movement that dwells on the borders of the East but which always faces the West. It is an accepted fact that Zionism was always an outpost of the West in the East. And so it is today: an outpost against the natural tendency of the East to penetrate the West and subjugate it. The Arabs consequently see us as an alien phenomenon, and they fear our strength, our expansion. They feel we endanger their culture, their religion, their social structure and regimes, and they therefore view us as a target. (Shavit, 18.9.1998)

About 1,200 years ago, said Netanyahu, Charles Martel stopped the Moors from conquering Gaul, and more than three hundred years ago the Turks were driven back from the gates of Vienna. The ancient Islamic imperialistic drive is common, in his opinion, to the Arabs, the Turks, and the Moors. This drive is liable to take the form of "a new Muslim Arab attack on the West." He claimed that Islam has always sought to subjugate the Western world, and had these two previous attacks not been stopped, Europe would not have witnessed the cultural development of the last five hundred years. The West is blind: "The decay in the West is the same decay." Netanyahu' s pessimism leads him to conclude that "it often seems to me that Spengler was right: the West is in decline." In addition to Spengler, he implicitly reflects the views of Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt about the "natural state" of relations between countries: "Each country, large and small, is like an animal in the jungle surrounded by beasts of prey who want to devour him. The Zionist public has not internalised the fact that the life of a state is first of all a life of continual struggle, continual vigilance and continual readiness for sacrifice."

One can find a reiteration of these views about the decline of the West in the words of the historian Benny Morris at the time of the Al-Aksa intifada. Like Ben-Zion Netanyahu, he compared the West to the Roman Empire in its decline: "The barbarians are attacking it and may destroy it [. . .]. The Arab world as it is today is barbarian" (Shavit, 9.1.2004). The barbarians the Romans let into their empire finally overthrew it from within. The war between civilizations, which is the main feature of the twenty-first century, is a struggle for a whole world of values of which Israel is in the forefront: "In the same way as the crusaders, we are a vulnerable extension of Europe here." Yasser Arafat, said Morris, understands the situation perfectly: "He wants to send us back to Europe, to the sea we came from. He really does see us as a crusader state and thinks of the crusader precedent and assigns us the same end as the crusaders." Benny Morris interviewed Ehud Barak, who was prime minister at the time of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians at Camp David in the year 2000. In that conversation, Barak said, "Arafat sees himself as a new Saladin—the Kurdish Muslim general who defeated the crusaders in the twelfth century—and Israel as another replaceable crusader state" (Morris, 6.13.2002). His conclusion was that the Israelis' connection to the land did not resemble that of the crusaders. In the year 2004 when Arafat passed away, Uri Avneri came to radically different conclusions from Benny Morris and Ehud Barak: "The greatest danger Israel faces is the danger of Saladin, of a counter-crusade, of the unification of the Arab world under the flag of Islam. Arafat was the complete opposite of that" (Shavit, 12.11.2004).

In the Zionist-crusader analogy, the idea that the *longue durée* of the East will finally defeat the West plays an important part (Landau, 5.11.2001).

Where these time concepts are concerned, Israel is clearly no exception. In September 1947 Abd al-Rahman Azzam, the secretary of the Arab League, told Abba Eban and David Horowitz, the representatives of the Jewish Agency, who sought the Arabs' agreement to the United Nations partition plan: "You don't constitute a fact. You are only a temporary phenomenon as the crusaders were in the past" (Karsh, 1997). In 1999, nine hundred years after the crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem, Dr. Azam Tamimi, a Palestinian who headed the Institute of Islamic Political Thought in London, wrote an article entitled "Nine Hundred Years and Two Crusades." He compared the two crusades that came from Europe. In both cases, he said, the language was religious, the motivations were secular, and the aim was to divide the Muslims. In his opinion, the victory of the Europeans was only temporary, and the liberation of Jerusalem after the 88 years of the crusader-European conquest portends an end to the Zionist-European conquest (according to him, within forty years) (http.msanews.mynet.net/scholars/Tamimi). One of the secrets of the resilience of the myth of *jihad* as a campaign of revenge and liberation is its dependence on long periods of time. The columnist Dr. Hilmi Mohammed el-Kaoud wrote in *Al Shaab*, the newspaper of the Egyptian Labour Party, "The Nazism of the crusaders finds nothing amiss in the actions of the Jewish Nazism [. . .]. Both of them believe in racism and in the superiority of the European race to other races" (http.memri.org/sd:ME'MRI). The solution he offered was long-term *jihad* that "would repel both kinds of Nazism—that of the crusaders and that of the Jews."

Dr. Azmi Bishara put forward a different, more complicated concept of time. He referred to the famous speech of Hafez el-Assad in which he said that the crusaders stood firm for two hundred years, and, after that, he added, "We will wait and see" (Shavit, 29.5.1998). It is not surprising that President Assad used to meet his visitors from the West in an office on one of whose walls was a huge painting depicting the Muslim victory over the crusaders. The American historian James Reston wrote in his book *Warriors of God* that the Arab ideology takes a long-term view of history (Reston, 2001). According to this way of thinking, it took the Arabs ninety years to get rid of the crusaders: the state of Israel has existed for fifty years. The Palestinian leader Faisal el-Husseini also said that as Zionism has existed for a hundred years it can only survive for a hundred years more. Bishara himself sees Assad's speech as a sign of weakness, "for someone who makes a speech of this kind is really saying that he is unable to liberate the Golan now, and he therefore has to wait. And I believe that perhaps Syria can wait for two hundred years, but the Palestinian people cannot." The analogy between the Zionists and the crusaders was invalid from his point of view because the period and the political situation were different. At that time

there was no Arab nation, "and the crusader state was not a modern state with nuclear weapons." But at the same time,

> [t]here are similar elements of invasion, foreignness, unrighteous conquest and use of religious symbols . . . and here, too, there is an invasion of the Promised Land. In both cases, the native-born were not taken into account: in that case, they were slaughtered; in this case, they were evicted. And what is happening now is that Zionism itself is strengthening the biblical foundations of its existence. And as with the crusaders, everything centres around Jerusalem. And in returning to the biblical foundations and belief in the ancestral land you yourselves are making Israel into a crusader state. But I am not willing to wait hundreds of years for a Saladin. I think that anyone who wants to wait is unwilling to do anything on his own and expects history to do his work and solve his problems. So, from my point of view, Saladin is not an option. (Shavit, 29.5.1998)

If Arafat and Assad wanted to be local Saladins fighting the Zionists from the West, Osama Bin Laden saw himself as the standard-bearer of the East against the Western crusade. Here, the ideas of Samuel Huntington, author of *The Clash of Civilizations*, are relevant to our discussion. Huntington's books claim that the arena of world confrontation had been transferred from a struggle between nations and ideologies to a struggle between cultures: the West versus the East. The historian Danny Gutwein thinks that Huntington reconceptualized the crusades, making a Western, European (and American) crusade in the Islamic Middle East into a global confrontation between East and West (Gutwein, 2003). In the first Gulf War, the American side claimed to be conducting a moral crusade: exactly the self-image reflected in the title Dwight Eisenhower gave to his memoirs, *Crusade in Europe*. But in the confrontation with Iraq, Arab states participated in the Western coalition, and the war rapidly became a struggle of symbols and cultural codes. A war of logos, to use the terminology of Naomi Klein, superseded the real confrontation, and the war in the Middle East became a Holy War between Saddam Hussein—Saladin and George Bush—Richard the Lion-Heart. The Israeli right adopted Huntington's thesis completely, and Western Christianity clasped Israel in its war against Eastern Islam in a bear hug. The struggle was now revealed as a confrontation between the West and the Jews on the one hand and the Arabs and Muslims on the other. This represented an overturning of the complex historical relationship of the Jews with the Christians and Muslims. It seemed as though the star of David had joined the cross in a struggle against the crescent. In the present clash of civilizations, in the struggle between Islam and Christianity, between East and West, is not Israel liable to find itself

between a rock and a hard place, between two "others": the "good" Christian other and the "bad" Islamic other? Are not the Israelis transferring the complex pattern of relationships between Christians and Jews in Europe to their relationship with the Muslims in the Middle East? Is not the self-image of the Israelis regressing from the sovereign position of a state to the exilic position of a victim, a victim of crusading zeal: that of the Christian West in the past and that of the Muslim East in the present?

Samuel Huntington constructed logos that obscured the realities of politics and history, semireligious concepts that masked the true confrontations. In his opinion, the Gulf War began as a war between Iraq and Kuwait, became a war between Iraq and the West and then a conflict between Islam and the West, and finally many non-Westerners began to see it as a war of the East against the West: for Muslims the war turned into a war of civilizations (Huntington, 2003). In the war of images, Huntington visualized Sadam as a crusader leader who this time had not been favored by fate: "Once again, the West was victorious; once again, this latter-day Saladin, who had raised the hopes of the Arabs, suffered defeat from the massive Western force that had forcefully penetrated the community of Islam."

During the Second Gulf War, George W. Bush said that the war and the fight against terrorism was a "crusade" that "is going to take a while. And the American people must be patient." This statement had a traumatic effect, and it was feared that it would be understood as announcing the beginning of a war of civilizations based on a historical precedent. The Christian West could be seen as a political and cultural entity that once again threatened Islam. Osama Bin Laden was quick to declare, "We, together with many of our brethren, have set up a world Islamic front for *jihad* against the Jews and crusaders [. . .] against the greater external enemy, the crusader-Jewish alliance" (http://www.haayal.co.il/story_1370). But already, three years before the attack on the Twin Towers, Bin Laden declared his intention of "fighting the Jews and crusaders." The crusader writing was on the wall, and the declaration of the spokesman of the El-Qaida organization on the Al-Jezira channel did not surprise anyone: "The ranks have formed against the nation of Islam and the Muslims. The crusade that Bush promised against Afghanistan and its godly people has begun. The Islamic people have groaned for more than eighty years under the yoke of the joint Jewish-crusader conquest" (*Haaretz*, 25.9.2001). Osama Bin Laden called for a worldwide, all-embracing struggle to be waged against the principles of Western civilization, of which Israel was the spearhead. The former chair of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) Abraham Burg wrote in the chapter "Will We Resemble the Crusaders?" in his book *Elohim Hazar* (God Is Back), that "a blockhead of a president [Bush] and a charismatic propagandist, Bin Laden, have brought the discourse of symbols back into the

centre of the confrontation" (Burg, 2004: 200–218). This symbolic confrontation between East and West corresponded to the struggle between globalization and fundamentalism.

The question arises of whether the fundamentalists with their religious radicalism and missionary propaganda are not equally globalistic and equally imbued with a worldwide global outlook. Globalists such as Bush and the capitalist-Christian coalition are also fundamentalist: already in the nineteenth century Alexis De Tocqueville perceived the cosmopolitan missionary arrogance of the French Revolution. Whatever the case, the historical crusades have been transfigured into the mythical language of "crusaderism" in which East and West are pitted against one another, and in which they see their worldview and that of their adversaries in the mirror of the medieval precedent.

"Crusaderism" and "Mediterraneanism" are geopolitical metaphors that we use to differentiate the two opposite approaches people use when they discuss Israel's identity and its relation to the region. "Crusaderism" emphasizes western Israeli society's foreignness to the Middle East, where it has been implanted. Both outside and inside Israel, critics use this metaphor to blame Israel for its colonialism, setting it up as a kind of boxing ring for the perpetual match between East and West. On the other hand "Mediterraneanism" sees Israel as a meeting place where East and West can sit down together to share cultural riches, increase mutual understanding, and benefit one another by their various differences and similarities.

Part V

Memory

9

A la Recherche du Temps Marocain Perdu

Casablanca today reminds one a little of Camus's Algiers, the metropolis before the civil war, at the time when French was heard in the streets against the background of the muezzin calling from the mosque, when it was not out of the ordinary to see girls sitting at cafés and bars, when cultures interacted freely and not at the point of a bayonet. Today, Morocco is a modern Muslim country thousands of light years away from contemporary Algiers. It's openness is easily suggested by the skirts of the policewomen directing the traffic at the intersections.

Evening is falling in Casablanca. The broad avenues of palms have a reddish tinge. A pleasant evening breeze wafts in from the Atlantic over the masses of people sitting in the cafés. Place de Verdun, which on another night would not seem particularly remarkable, is suddenly brought to life with new activities, and one is reminded that this place is a vestige of the city's Jewish community that at its height in the 1950s numbered eighty thousand people. Flower vendors, more festive than usual, in the square lay out bundles of wheat that have just been picked in honor of the Jews of the city. The *Petits taxis*, the small red taxis, are bursting with Jewish inhabitants and tourists who are beginning a meandering night journey from house to house in the best tradition of the Mimouna, a festival celebrated by Moroccan Jews at the end of the eighth day of Passover. However, many of the three thousand Jews now living in Casablanca do not need the taxi service: they come in expensive European cars.

In Casablanca, I met happy Jews. Jo Ben-Amo, president of the "Cercle Union," a well-regarded social club of Jewish businessmen, hastened in a Mercedes to the festival service at the Beit-El Synagogue. Moroccan Jews don't permit themselves to drive on days of the Jewish Festivals due to considerations of distance, as there are 37 synagogues in Casablanca. They simply don't make a "big deal" of it. They have a special combination of

tradition and openness, religion and modernity—a kind of laid-back religiosity. In deference to my unconcealable surprise, the businessman parked at some distance from the synagogue.

Further on, on the palm-lined Boulevard Moulay Youssef, next to the Arab Legion Park, stands the "Dez" Building: "The Young Jews' Educational Association." In the northwest of the park, the largest in Casablanca, sits the Sacré Coeur Cathedral like a huge old ship adorned with stained-glass windows, the poor Moroccan cousin of the church in Paris. Above everything else soars the Hassan II Mosque, one of the most impressive and magnificent in the entire Muslim world, built on the seashore in accordance with the verse in the Koran, "The seat of Allah's kingdom is on the waters." The mosque, the cathedral, and the synagogue testify to the pleasant, open, cosmopolitan ambiance of Casablanca. Something of this adheres to the Jewish community.

In the "Dez," a game of football is in progress, the climax of a Passover tournament between youth groups in the club. About five hundred supporters and the members of their families surround the football field. The place looks like the Club Mediterranée. Next to the elegant sports cars one can see Jews who have come from abroad and who are looking for Moroccan Jewesses. In the courtyard inside there is a pleasant, welcoming atmosphere.

The president of the club, Aimé Levy, boasts, "This is the best community I know of. It has a big heart, a great king and a blessèd land." He is an accountant, the father of three, and has lived for three years in Beersheba. In the lecture hall, Rabbi Claude Sultan, director of the Centre Rashi in Paris, is giving a local patriotic lecture: "You are the most liberal Jews in the world, a model of tolerance and of a common life devoid of extremism." I admit there is much truth in what he says. On the roofs of the club, Muslim neighbors watch the two teams competing for the club cup. An Israeli can be surprised at the natural closeness of Jews and Muslims in Morocco. On the testimony of both Jews and Muslims, the Jewish community is the symbol of a tolerant relationship and interreligious dialogue on a day-to-day level.

On Mimouna night I make short visits to many homes. My first stop is the house of Jo Ben-Amo. This year, his daughter got engaged to a notable man in the community, and the young couple is the center of attention of scores of visitors. A description of the tables laden with delicacies is liable to arouse the reader's salivary glands, and so I forgo it.

The last stop is the "Dez" club. The Jewish community of Nice and the "Jewish association of the French Riviera" are guests there. The fact that an entire community, and one from a place that is well known, decided to celebrate Passover in Casablanca shows to what a degree the city and its Jewish inhabitants serve as a magnet for Jews in the world at large.

Simon Levy, director of the "Fund for the Heritage of Moroccan-Jewish Culture," says with unabashed pride that the community simply knew how to live in coexistence with Islam: "Not everything was rosy, but everything was human. We are the living testimony of a common life. The Moroccan state is Muslim, but the legislation, the laws and the conditions of daily life give us all civil rights, and, in addition, recognition of the right of Jewish law to judge in matrimonial matters." The government subsidizes both the *dayanim* (Jewish judges), who are government officials, and private schools such as the "Alliance" in which there are 1,200 children. Approximately 1,600 children learn in other schools.

About a quarter of the pupils in the Jewish institutions are Muslims. One of the parents told me about a Purim party in a school: "It was extraordinary to behold Jewish and Muslim pupils singing in Hebrew and Arabic in front of their parents. It was as though I were looking at a human paradise. There were no differences—this was Muhammed and that was Ruth."

From conversations with the deans of the faculties of the universities of Rabat, Fez, and Oujda, I learned of a renaissance of Hebrew studies among Muslim students. Hebrew is a second foreign language to them. There is a desire to become acquainted with the Jewish heritage and to know the Jewish side of Moroccan culture. According to Simon Levy, "It's not a renaissance, as it never died. It's the research that is new and which did not exist in the past."

It is impossible not to feel in conversation with the local people that the loss of the Jewish community in Morocco, which at its peak numbered about three hundred thousand souls, is still an open wound. From their point of view, the loss of the middle class; the merchants, large and small; and the representatives of the culture was not the end of the matter. There is a strong desire to be reunited. Every Moroccan, from the deacon of the university to the waiter in the hotel, sees the Moroccan Jews as nationals of the kingdom temporarily residing outside their homeland but entitled to come back at any time. They are seen in a similar way to our *yordim* (emigrants) in Israel, but without arrogance and with an intense hope for their return.

One of the deans compared the definition of rights in Morocco to that in America: "In the United States there is a melting-pot, and so you can't be a pure American. You're a black American, a Spanish American, and so on. It's the same here: one can be a Muslim Moroccan, a Berber Moroccan or a Jewish Moroccan. In Morocco there was never a problem of identity because we have a strong Sunni orthodox religion. You Jews and we Muslims were expelled from Spain together. Why? The Jews and the Muslims wanted to preserve their identities. We had the same problem and so we respect one another."

The Jewish singer Pinhas is a living example of the Jewish-Muslim symbiosis. When I told them in the hotel that I was interviewing him, they could hardly believe their ears. He is popular among the Moroccans, especially the Muslims. His recordings are sold at every street corner. Pinhas arranged an interview with me at eleven o'clock at night in the club of the al-Mounia Hotel, where he was appearing that month, a privilege of the stars. However that may be, Haled Baha, who plays the drums in his band, spoke of his appearance in Israel with the singer Raymonde, mother of the Israeli actress Yael Abekassis, who has many admirers in Morocco, both Muslims and Jews. With a royal delay of two hours, Pinhas duly arrived and a throng of admirers gathered around him. From the age of six he had appeared with his musician father in clubs, at private evenings, and at weddings.

Pinhas had sung and played in front of the king and his family in the palace in Rabat. No, he is not very fond of the Oriental music on cassettes in Israel or the Israeli groups of Moroccan origin. According to him, in their popular music, the Moroccan rhythm and inspiration are lost. He regrets that in this country they don't play the songs of Sami Almaghrabi, Albert Suissa, Petit Armo, and Petit Robert. His admirers, all Moroccan Muslims, waited patiently. A group of distinguished people from France, who came specially for his appearance, took their seats. When he finally started to sing at two o'clock in the morning, I realized it was worth waiting for. He radiated magic. These were songs that my father listened to on his old gramophone, first in Oujda in Morocco and then in Kiryat Gat in Israel: melancholy songs that slightly resembled the Portuguese "fado." I always asked for the gramophone to be turned off. They gave me a sadness that, in Israel also, I couldn't bear. On hearing the happy songs, when the accompanying band "Dnadniya" began to play a Moroccan "tahrij" in crescendo, my heart was filled with a great joy.

I recall the Israeli singer Shlomo Artzi. I met him a day before I flew here when I went round and round in my car in Tel Aviv in an attempt to locate the Moroccan embassy in order to get my visa. I went round and round, and I came back and asked myself: what is the key to the "Moroccan story" in Israel? Why on earth had things gotten so messed up here? I stopped at a bookshop to buy a book on the history of the Jews of Morocco. Inside the shop, Shlomo Artzi called over to me and we talked about my book, *The Last Israelis*. I told him that the messed-up story of the Moroccans in Israel gave me no rest. He disagreed and pointed to the successful implantation of the Moroccans in the country, of which I was an example. But in that case, I asked, why was "Shas," the ultraorthodox Oriental party, so successful? We parted amiably and promised to continue our conversation after the trip to Morocco. When I stood next to my car, I tried unsuccessfully to

remember one of Artzi's songs that I particularly liked. The song flashed through my mind and was instantly forgotten.

Morocco has become a place of Jewish pilgrimage, especially during festivals. I spent an intense week in Morocco, and the sense of community overcame me from the first moment. The boundless warmth, the families coming together for a short time, the prayers and meals together, the kisses, the body contact, rubbing shoulders—all this gave the observer from outside the feeling of an extended family. It is impossible not to be moved by the display of solidarity. Seen from Casablanca, the itemization of the concept "Israeliness" and the disintegration of codes in Israeli society seem more threatening and alienating than ever.

Many young people from France, Canada, and Israel visit here during festivals. In the inside courtyard of the "Dez" a few of them are in the throes of a heated argument. Abraham, a yeshiva student from Jerusalem who volunteers only his first name, is remarkable for his ideas and way of dressing. He says, "When I come to Netanya and I smell *mangal* (barbecues) on Shabbat, it makes me weep. The paradox is that this happens in a Jewish state. The religious are the only hope for the secular state." On the other hand, Aryeh Abutbul, a student of international relations at the Hebrew University who was visiting Morocco, maintains that "Shas" is a distortion of Moroccan Judaism: "When the Israelis see this 'Shas,' it only confirms their prejudices towards us. See how they celebrate the festival here, not like the religious consortiums in Israel." Abutbul protests against the attitude in Israel to Jews from Morocco: "In Israel, the name 'Abutbul' immediately conjures up the image of the 'knife-wielding Moroccan.' In Israel, they are surprised that I haven't got an accent and that I want to be a diplomat." Max Monsongo, who lives in Casablanca and works in the clothing trade, likes life in Morocco. "Here I have lots of Muslim friends. Here there is sun all the year round, and pretty girls. We don't have the tensions we have in Israel. Israelis who tell me to leave Morocco get on my nerves."

Most of the young Jews leave here in stages, as in the kibbutz. First they go to study in universities outside Morocco and then life takes its course. Tzippi Malka left Meknes in 1992 and is now living in Maalot. She is critical of her friends:

> There was nothing more for me to do here. The Moroccan Jews manage very well, but there is always a fear, though they don't admit it. The owners of enterprises, for example, don't have too much trust in their Muslim workers. It's a minority living in a state that doesn't belong to them. The Arabs depend on them, and from the economic point of view they prefer to work with Jews. In reality, the Arabs work for the Jews. Life for the Jews here is comfortable and inexpensive, and most of them have servants. Many

> of them nevertheless want to leave, but they lie to themselves. They stay because of their businesses. They are frightened of leaving at an advanced age and having to start everything again in a strange country. The young people don't have that problem.

From his office on the fifteenth floor of the BMC bank, Serge Berdugo, president of the Jewish community in Morocco, has a nice view. He explains:

> In Meknes, the town where I was born, the rabbis had a certain role in the community, but they were not idolised. They were intermediaries between God and the community: 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto the rabbis the things that are the rabbis.' My father was for thirty years the rabbi of Meknes. His task was not limited to the community alone but he was also involved in the problems of the Muslims. There was a tradition of inter-human and inter-religious contacts. The greater a rabbi was, the more unassuming he was. It was not in the way they distorted the image of the Baba Sali at Netivot. The graves of the greatest rabbis of Fez and Meknes are almost anonymous. It took three months until they located the grave of Rabbi Raphael Bardugo in Meknes—the angel Raphael!

"And what happened in Israel?" I asked.

> The Moroccan Jews in Israel claimed, quite rightly, that they were not given equal treatment and equal conditions. They chose to react in the only way open to them: by fighting. When one fights, not everyone is a Gandhi or a Mandela. They created 'Shas' as a means of defending their identity and values. Unfortunately, they did not succeed in explaining their intentions. 'Shas' is like a black-and-white television. On the way, they forgot that the particular nature of Moroccan Judaism does not have to be a means of warfare or a form of struggle but is a facet of Judaism as a whole, a representative of tolerance.

One of the most fascinating episodes in the history of the Jewish people is the story of the absorption of the Jews in Morocco over two thousand years. It is a story that has not yet been told. There are many reasons for this, and one of them is that there is little written evidence. The "wild Maghreb" absorbed peoples and tribes from throughout the old world—Berbers, Canaanites (Phoenicians), Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Blacks—and blended them into a multiracial society. The first Jews arrived in Morocco in the first century CE, after the destruction of the Second Temple. The exiles settled mainly in the Atlas Mountains, and, following this, Berber tribes converted to Judaism. In the seventh century, another wave of Jewish immigration joined Muslim tribes that had been expelled

by Muhammed and the caliph Omar, and these dwelt in the Sahara Desert. From the fourteenth century onward, Jews and Marranos expelled from Spain and Portugal arrived and settled mainly in the towns. As a result, one cannot know the history of Morocco if one does not know the history of the Jews of Morocco.

This self-knowledge makes the Jewish community in Morocco the standard-bearer of the Maghrebi-Jewish collective memory. Simon Levy has made his life's work the creation of the Jewish Museum in Casablanca, which, he says, is not something dead but the live preservation of a heritage in order that the Muslims should also know their past. As part of the work of preservation, the Danan synagogue in Fez, Beit El in Casablanca, and synagogues in the towns of Tetuan and Swera have been restored. Another project is the restoration of Jewish cemeteries throughout the country,

For some of the Jews, culture is an expression of politics. Left-wingers turn from the building of a socialist future to a rehabilitation of the feudal and monarchist past. They are enthusiastically devoted to it as the vanguard of the Moroccan-Jewish vocation of tolerance, interreligious dialogue, and mediation in the peace process. They point out again and again that the Israeli politicians of Moroccan origin—David Levy, Aryeh Deri, Meir Shitrit, Shlomo Ben-Ami—have always supported peace moves. They are proud of the fact that the Camp David process began with talks between Dayan and Tohami in Rabat, that Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres made Rabat their first stop after signing the Oslo Accords in Washington, that the Casablanca Conference was a signpost to the future. They do not want to be actors on the world stage. Their role, as one of them expressed it, is to remind the actors of their lines, like prompters in a theater.

In the streets branching out from Place de Verdun I look for the traces that the Jewish community left behind it. In Rue Le Sefed, the most Jewish street in Casablanca, there are a few butchers' shops with a sign with the star of David and the word "kosher" in Hebrew. I am directed to the "Cercle de l'Alliance," the Jewish club. On the second floor, there are young people who are speaking French and bending over tables, playing poker. My arrival is received with suspicion. I learned that they were told that I was an intrusive Israeli journalist, when I preferred to be known as an *Oujdi*, a Moroccan Jew born in the town of Oujda. They are not interested in Israeli politics. They are not interested in "mizrahi" (Oriental Jewish Israeli) politics either.

Near the "Cercle de l'Alliance" is the billiard club, "Club 28," belonging to Charles Lerdou. He is the owner of 250 clubs of this kind throughout Morocco. A well-built, agreeable man, he has walked on crutches ever since an accident in which his legs were crushed. His American grandfather met his Jewish grandmother in Algiers. He is totally secular and does not eat kosher, but his three sons are Sabbath-observant. He sometimes sends a

check to the Jewish community but is completely cut off from it. He has memories of the first guitar lesson he gave to the Israeli singer of Moroccan origin, Avi Toledano.

Jo Levy, a third-generation furniture maker, explains what "secularism" means for him. He describes himself as a man who knows how to accept others, to understand people or, in other words, to be tolerant and open. "God," he says, "is the greatest democrat I know. He made us all in his image: all of us, of all colours and communities. God is a message. He created man as an imperfect creation so that he would achieve his goals in progressive stages, slowly, in a development. Expressions like 'Greater Islam' or 'Greater Israel' frighten me. They set up obstacles. I am therefore a cosmopolitan, opposed to the concept of nation."

I press Levy on the subject of political prisoners in Morocco, the large number of royal palaces, and the resentment aroused by Hassan II's drive to raise money for the building of the mosque named after him. And he, as someone experienced in making his way through minefields, quotes the king: "The main thing is not what world we shall leave to our children, but what children we shall leave to the world." He had just come back from Hillary Clinton's lecture in Marrakesh and spoke of a special kind of democracy in Morocco. In his opinion, there had been great progress in the matter of human rights. He explained to me that, historically speaking, the varied geographical structure of Morocco—the Atlas Mountains, the Sahara Desert, and long stretches of shoreline—made it difficult for any central government to impose order.

Le Journal hebdomadaire is the most critical political newspaper in Morocco. Ali Lmrabet, a rising star in the media and a courageous Muslim journalist, is one of those responsible for the emergence of democracy in recent times. He raised a storm when he published an interview with Binyamin Netanyahu. I asked to talk to him about Jews and politics. "In the nineteen-seventies," he said, "when left-wing movements flourished here, the most outstanding leader was Abraham Tzarfati. He was banished from Morocco on the pretext that he was a Brazilian citizen. The present left-wing government of Abdul Rahman al-Yousefi has to bring Tzarfati back from France and recognise his movement 'Hallal Aman.'" (Meanwhile, Abraham Tzarfati has been brought back to Morocco by the new king, Mohammed VI).

Lmrabet gave examples of Jews who have taken part in political life in Morocco:

> Zion Asidon. A left-wing Moroccan leader, wanted to overthrow the monarchy. Today he is active in a movement against corruption in Morocco. Simon Levy of the *Union Constitutionelle* party is a member of parliament. Serge Berdugo has served as Minister of Tourism and André Azulai is economic

advisor to the king. I see no reason why the ministers David Levy or Rafi Edri, if they had remained in Morocco, could not have served as ministers in the present government. I regret that in the nineteen-fifties the Mossad worked to bring the Moroccan Jews to Israel. If the Jews hadn't left their country of birth, they could have continued to contribute to Morocco, especially in view of the lack of consideration they were shown in Israel.

I don't understand your Minister of the Interior Suissa, a Moroccan Jew, who forbade Moroccan workers to work in Israel. They were invited to work with old Moroccan women in Israel who did not feel comfortable with Palestinians. This shows that Suissa is a politician without humanity. It's an act against Moroccan women! Are our women allowed to work in Europe but not in Israel? This is racism and also arrogance. Look, for example, at MK 'Fuad' Ben-Eliezer. When I visited the Knesset in June 1998, he refused to speak to me in Arabic. It was natural for us to talk in our common language, and he still calls himself a socialist! This wouldn't happen in the Jewish community in Morocco.

I met Ali at the opening of an exhibition of photographs by the Jewish photographer Elias Harrus, "Portrait of Moroccan Jews From the Atlas and the Sahara." The exhibition in Rabat was organized by the Moroccan Ministry of Culture and was held in the *Kasbah el-oudi* (Casbah of the Udayas)—the City Fortress—an old and well-kept residential area. Under French rule, modern Rabat was built, with its new quarters. The capital city at the present time contains the royal palace, the government ministries, and the embassies, including the Israeli embassy. The prosperous Jewish community in Rabat today consists of about three hundred souls. The opening of the exhibition on the Jews under the auspices of the Moroccan government on the intermediate days of Passover was a happy occasion here. Several hundred visitors came to the opening, among them an Israeli representative accompanied by a bodyguard. The king's advisor André Azulai circulated among the exhibits together with the minister of cultural affairs, Mohammed Achaari.

The minister used the exhibition to explain his view of the Jewish Moroccans:

"The Jews were 'normal' citizens who lived in the mountains and the desert. They ate their own food, traded their merchandise, spoke their language, prayed to their God. Until they were uprooted, they did not know any other people than the Moroccan people, they did not love any place other than their own, and they never thought they would be uprooted from their homeland by a 'national project' carried out in the name of an ideology that never asked their opinion. These photographs are a kind of protest at the uprooting of Jews from Morocco and their transplantation through the illusory bestowal of a new identity. They demonstrate that peace can only be based on respect for the past and future."

On the way back from Rabat to Casablanca, I talked to Maurice Levy, a professor at Rabat University and a specialist in Moroccan Spanish dialects. In the past, Levy was active in the Communist Party, and today he is a member of the *Parti du Progrès et du socialisme* in the government coalition. "In this period of globalisation, the Jews of Morocco are scattered throughout in the world and number about 700,000 souls. We do not think of ourselves as seven thousand souls, just one percent of the total dispersion, but as part of the world-wide community. In sixty Jewish communities in the world there is a Moroccan majority. In New York there are four Moroccan-Jewish synagogues, and in Montreal there is a Maimonides Center. We make an effort to preserve the heritage of the Jews of Morocco and to cherish the common memory of the Maghreb," he said. Was Zionism responsible for the shrinking of Moroccan Jewry? Levy thought that if Zionism had been purely ideological, only part of the Jews would have left.

In Casablanca, strange-sounding academic words like the "multiculturalism" of postmodernist circles or the "footsteps" of the Jewish philosopher of Algerian origin, Jacques Derrida, acquire a different, more direct meaning. I find the fashion for the concept "multicultural" repellent, especially when applied to particular identities that see each other as the "other," a stranger with an alien culture that has to be known. It is liable to become an ideology of sophisticated alienation, not of human dialogue such as I observed during the week I spent with the Jewish community in Morocco.

However, I now see the advantage of a late maturation, of the idea that one can be several things at the same time, that one does not always have to choose between different possibilities. That it is not so terrible if there are contradictions in life, that a life of compromise makes it possible to live with tensions, or that tensions can enrich and not tear apart. One can be an Israeli and also like Sami Almaghrabi. One can feel good in Jerusalem and also in Casablanca. This is a kind of "multiculturalism" that can exist in a single person.

In my nostalgia for my long-lost childhood in the Maghreb, I have not forgotten the troubles of the exile. When I left the old synagogue in the Jewish mellah in Marrakesh and entered the Arab-Muslim casbah, I felt divided in two as if for a moment I embodied the hidden tension in the slogan of the Haskalah: "Be a Jew in your home and a man outside." In the Jewish cemetery in Casablanca three boys even shouted at me from a balcony, *Itbah al-yahud!* (Kill the Jew!). It is true that Israelism bequeathed to many of us and our parents the sense of authenticity and ownership of someone who is sovereign in his country. But have we not lost on the way to sovereignty and statehood some not inconsiderable qualities to be found in exile owing to its very nature, such as solidarity, the sense of community, and the feeling of belonging to an extended family?

Again and again in my conversations in Casablanca, the matter came up of the original sin of the Jewish community from Morocco in Israel in the 1950s as the main reason for its present social distress and identity problems. This explanation is only partly true, for how is one to understand the present reactions of Jewish students studying in Morocco, France, Canada, and Israel? What explanation can one give today for the arrogant attitude they meet in Israel whenever they identify themselves as Abutbul or Buzaglo? Why has a fine name like "Frecha," which in Mughrabit means "joy" or "flower," in Israel become an expression of mockery?

A matter of principle is involved here: the Israelis have not yet internalized the fact that they live in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Basin. They are in the East, but their heart is in the farthest West. The heart's desire of many Israelis is for impersonal American-type malls. They close up their balconies and open themselves up to the American village, for some reason called the "global village." Even when the educated among them read Derrida (in English, of course!), it is because he writes in Paris and lectures in New York. Would they treat him with the same deference if he had remained an Algerian philosopher? And what would have happened if he had immigrated to Israel and settled, say, in Yeruham or Ashdod? Would he still be "Derrida"? And by way of analogy, would Camus have received the praises of the French and of the world had he remained in Algeria?

The selective Israeli memory—more out of ignorance than ill will—goes back only as far as the demonstrations of social protest by Jews of Moroccan origin in Israel: Wadi Salib and the Black Panthers. The cultural heritage of the Jews from the Maghreb has survived at best in the smoke and smells arising out of the parks in which they celebrate the Mimouna. Here, then, is a proposal for the proper preservation of the heritage of the Moroccan Jews: the time has come to take the Mimouna out of the hands of the political and religious activists who have made it into a political festivity and turn it into a feast of all Israeli citizens, Jews and Arabs alike, symbolic of Jewish-Muslim brotherhood. It would be a day of celebration in the Hebrew calendar promoting interreligious dialogue, educating toward peace, and bearing a universal message of multiculturalism and Jewish-Arab fraternity.

The special history of the Jewish community in Morocco is important because it is imprinted in the Israeli consciousness only as a culture of protest and as a historical insult needing perpetual compensation. The time has come to study a forgotten Mediterranean civilization whose outstanding quality is a tolerant dialogue between religions, cultures, peoples, and nations.

The Mediterranean option is the Israelis' sole opportunity to live in peace with themselves and their neighbors. The place they have chosen

to return to and live in is the cradle of Western culture. This is where the three monotheistic religions, classical mythology, the *polis* and democracy, Hellenism and the Renaissance were born. In the cultural crossroads of our sea, Tel Aviv encounters Oujda, a unity is created through a meeting of East and West.

It is still not too late for a Mediterranean dialogue. Indeed, it is only beginning. One cannot always live with the Spartan vision of "the sword shall devour forever" and "the sea is the same sea." The sea is ours: stretch out your hand and touch it! And the shores too. It may be that, for many Israelis, the way to be reconciled with their Israeliness passes through the Maghreb. Now I remember the words of Shlomo Artzi's song "Under Mediterranean Skies": I am humming it. Such a lovely song.

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