ANTI-ZIONISM

A JEWISH HISTORY



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A JEWISH HISTORY

BENJAMIN MOSER



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To the Palestinian people

καί τήν ποθεινήν πατρίδα παράσχου μοι,
Παραδείσου πᾶλιν ποιῶν πολίτην μέ.

Grant to them the Fatherland of their desire,
And make them again citizens of Paradise.

You shall faithfully observe all My laws and all My regulations, lest the land to which I bring you to settle in spew you out.

—LEVITICUS 20:22

They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.

—JEREMIAH 5:28

The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.

—MICAH 6:12

But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence.

—JEREMIAH 22:17

I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.

—AMOS 2:6

Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you.

—HABAKKUK 2:8

I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised.

—OBADIAH 1:2

For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? Or who shall bemoan thee?

—JEREMIAH 15:5

Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts.

—MALACHI 2:3

This is the rejoicing city that dwelt without care, that said in her heart, “I am, and there is none besides me.”

—ZEPHANIAH 2:15

Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea?

—NAHUM 3:8

Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight.

—1 CHRONICLES 22:8

INTRODUCTION

MY GRANDFATHER'S HERZL



It is a big blue book. It is a fancy book, a book that would make an elegant gift.

It is a book that wants to be bought, seen, displayed, more than, or as much as, it wants to be read.

I had never read Theodor Herzl's *Zionistische Schriften,* or *Zionist Writings,* but for years I carried it around. It sat on different shelves, in different houses, in different cities, a talisman of a grandfather I never knew. His name was Franz Egon Moses. He was born in Breslau, which was then in Germany and is now in Poland. His family were prosperous commodities traders, and when he was born, in 1899, many might have envied his birth in such a family, in such a place. But it was the wrong time. He was fifteen when the Great War broke out, and when he turned eighteen he was shipped off to the trenches. After Germany's defeat, he walked more than a thousand kilometers from France back home to Breslau. He ate only turnips. He went to university, moved to Berlin, changed his name to the less-Jewish-sounding Moser, and was in the capital when the Nazis arrived.

He had a cousin born in California shortly before the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Those relatives returned to Germany after the business was wiped out. But the lucky accident of that one cousin's American birth enabled the family, decades later, to escape the Nazis. My grandfather arrived in New York in 1938. He worked as a night manager at Lindy's in Times Square, a deli frequented by Broadway stars, comedians, and mobsters. A brother found a job in Houston. Franz joined him there in 1943 and eventually started his own business, manufacturing paints.

In that same year, he met my grandmother, Elizabeth Lurie, born in Texas in 1909 and the director of the local Jewish Community Center. He had come to the center to buy himself a birthday present, an edition of the works of Sholem Asch. They married, eventually settled into a bungalow in a fresh suburb, and had three sons.

He died of a heart attack in 1959. He was sixty.

When I became acquainted with the details of his life, I understood how terrible it had been. But it was a luckier life than many others. He died in a

hospital in America—not in a muddy trench in France, not in a gas chamber in Poland—knowing that his sons were free citizens of a free nation.

I am the son of his eldest son, who was born in Houston a year to the day after the liberation of Auschwitz. I myself was born in Houston in 1976. In my grandmother's house, where I spent much time as a boy, were few souvenirs of my grandfather. From the street, the house looked like a million other tract houses in postwar American suburbs. Inside, though, were flickers of a portentous, almost Wagnerian taste, at odds with the sunny world of freeways and malls outside. Though my grandfather was long dead, I felt his life, his exile, surrounding me. But there were few witnesses to that life. In closets, in boxes, I would happen upon letters or photographs, but there were only a handful of German books, all published after the war, and presumably acquired in America.

The only book that survived from his life in Germany was that big blue volume of Herzl. A portrait of its author was embossed, in silver, on the cover. Edited by Herzl's friend Leon Kellner, it was published by the Jüdischer Verlag in Charlottenburg, Berlin, in 1905, just one year after Herzl had died at the age of forty-four. The book bore a little label on the inside of the cover: "Koebner'sche Buchhandlung & Antiquariat, Breslau I, Schmiedebrücke 17/18." I imagined this meant that Franz would have bought it when he was still in Breslau, before the outbreak of World War I; but why would a child buy such a large and expensive book, a book for adults? Perhaps it was a bar mitzvah gift, or given to him by someone he loved. In any case, he brought it with him when he left Europe in 1938. It was heavy. He dragged it to Amsterdam, to New York, to Houston. It survived the decades, safe in my grandmother's house, and then in my parents', and finally in mine. I know why I kept this souvenir. I don't know why he did. The writings of Herzl were available in any bookstore.

This book meant something to him.

My grandfather's copy of the *Zionistische Schriften* therefore meant something to me.

Its provenance, its very survival, seemed to sum up my understanding of Jewish history. Here was a man whose country had turned against him, and

who clung to the dream described in this book. And then his dream—Herzl's dream—came true. The emergence of the State of Israel only three years after the defeat of Hitler was a triumph so unlikely, so miraculous, that it seemed almost to justify the monstrous sacrifice of the six million. Hitler proved Herzl's contention that the Jews could never be safe in the lands of the Gentiles. And what came after proved that, as Herzl said, "if you will it, it is no fairy tale." The vision in this book had been dismissed, mocked; but the State of Israel was no fairy tale.

As I grew older, I began to wonder about the story.

It was so simple. It was, well, like a fairy tale: A phoenix rises from the ashes; a magic wand turns an orphan into a prince. The more I learned about the actual history of Zionism and Israel, the more I wondered what that fairy tale meant to my grandfather. Had he believed this story? Maybe the physical book—or the occasion it marked, or the person it recalled—meant more than the words it contained.

When I was already in my forties, I discovered that in 1935, three years before he went to the United States, Franz had gone to Palestine. His sister, Felicie, had found a job there. But his visit was short. For whatever reason, he went back to Germany. I was dumbfounded by the idea that a Jew would voluntarily return to Nazi Germany. Was my grandfather stupid? He was a lawyer. He became a successful manufacturer. His wife, my grandmother, was not stupid. Neither was his son, my father. And even stupid people aren't *that* stupid.

More likely, I thought, his return to Germany reflected our ignorance in the face of our own time. We read the news. We hear the warnings. When the climate scientists began raising alarms, we wondered how climate change would affect us—and meanwhile, because we could hardly have done otherwise, we got on with our lives. We see ourselves moving through history—fashions evolving, regimes ending, parents dying—without knowing where, in that history, to situate ourselves. We can't really imagine the gas chambers—and even if we can, we can't really imagine that we, ourselves, will end up there. Perhaps my grandfather's imagination failed him. He went back to Germany. His mother still lived there: Maybe that

was why. Three years later, having understood, he escaped. But he did not go to the land promised by Theodor Herzl. He went, instead, to another promised land, and to that land he brought this heavy blue book.

Did he read it? It bore no traces of previous habitation: no underlinings, no notes. Despite its wanderings, the spine was intact. It revealed nothing of my grandfather's personality. But when I eventually read it, it revealed another personality. Before, I knew of Herzl what most people of my background knew. I knew that he was the founder of modern Zionism. I knew him as he appeared in the embossed silver portrait on the cover: lushly bearded, intently gazing. I knew he was born in Hungary, became a lawyer, wrote some unsuccessful boulevard comedies. I knew that he became a journalist, the Paris correspondent of a Viennese newspaper, where he found a bit more success. I knew Zionism's locus classicus: At the degradation of Captain Dreyfus, convicted of treason on transparently fabricated charges, Herzl heard the crowds baying for Jewish blood. He understood that antisemitism was inextricably rooted in the European character, and that even in the most progressive states, such as France, the Jews could not trust in the goodwill of the Gentiles. He wrote *Der Judenstaat,* often translated as *The Jewish State* but more accurately *The State of the Jews,* in a fever. This pamphlet, included in the *Zionistische Schriften,* was published in 1896. My grandfather was born in 1899. Herzl died in 1904. His dream lived. Hitler proved him right about antisemitism. Israel—so it seemed—proved him right about the viability of a state.

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One of my favorite professors taught Scandinavian literature, and for a while I read a lot of Ibsen. His plays contained a device that I often saw replicated in other fictions. A beloved old man has died, or is chosen to receive some high honor. An admirer—a journalist, perhaps, or a relative—resolves to compose a warm homage. In the course of his research, and without mischievous intent, he discovers some hideous, unpunished crime.

When I began writing biographies, I often thought about Ibsen's device. I feared that a person I admired—a person in whose company I was about to spend years—would reveal some wretchedness. I was lucky. My first subject, the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, was a genius. To know her was to love her. And though I knew that my second subject, Susan Sontag, could be outrageous—some anecdotes belonged to the literary mythology of New York—I also knew that this was only one side of a complicated character, and could acknowledge her complexities without allowing these to overwhelm her heroic mind.

My experience of Herzl was different. I had long been disillusioned with the State of Israel. I studied Hebrew in college. I wrote extensively about Jewish matters, including the subjects of both my biographies. I did not like much of what I found in Israel. But I reflected that acquaintance with any country reveals unexpected warts, and I was aware that my family background—my childhood belief in the fairy tale—made me susceptible to disappointment.

I tried to keep that disappointment in perspective. Most realities fall short of ideals. But just as the ideals present at the founding of my own imperfect country seemed noble, so, too, did Zionism. The idea of rebuilding a persecuted people in the land from which, millennia before, they had been exiled; of reviving a language that, for centuries, no one had spoken—it appealed to my sense of romance, and of justice. I understood from an early age—because this was obvious even from the biased American news coverage—that Zionism had meant the suffering of another people. I remember—I must have been in my early teens—the shiver I felt at a picture in *The New York Times* of three Palestinian women attacked by Jewish thugs. I understood that the resulting state was not a place in which I myself wanted to live; but I had other places to live, and knew that others had not had the same options. I understood the centuries of suffering from which the idea had emerged. It was not the fault of ideas, I thought, that people had failed to live up to them. And so, though I was disappointed by Israel, Zionism remained, in my mind, something pure.

Perhaps, when I finally cracked Herzl's book, I might have expected to feel about him as I do about Marx. I do not agree with Marx on every particular. He was born more than two centuries ago, and lived in a world that in many ways is unrecognizable today. And though I do not endorse every regime, or every person, that has called itself Marxist, I cannot blame Marx for the deeds of people who, generations after his death, claimed to be acting in his name.

When I first read him, I was struck by his insight, and filled with respect for a man who devoted his life to creating a better world. The cruelties of capitalism that he addressed, like the cruelties of antisemitism that Herzl addressed, were real. That is why I might have expected—though this is something I am articulating after the fact—to be swept up by Herzl; to feel the pain of a man driven to despair by racism; to feel the anguish that drove him to an extreme solution, a solution that, with the benefit of hindsight, I knew was flawed. Just as I understood the problem that Marx wanted to solve, I understood the problem that Herzl wanted to solve.

For that reason, too, I opened my grandfather's Herzl with a certain sense of piety. I expected to feel a closeness to the grandfather I never knew, and to this man he had seemingly venerated. Reading this book felt like a debt to my own personal history, and like filling a gap in my education. Few writers had been as consequential to modern history. But when I cracked open the book, I found, in place of anything I expected—the Ibsen horror.

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The first chapter of the *Zionistische Schriften* is a five-page autobiographical sketch. One moment sticks in my mind. Herzl gives a draft of the manuscript of *Der Judenstaat* to a friend, who is overwhelmed by it.

"He suddenly started crying," Herzl reports. "I found this emotion quite natural, since he was Jewish; I myself had often cried while writing it." This was the emotion I had half expected to feel. But the man was crying for another reason: "He thought I had gone mad, and because he was my friend,

my misfortune made him very sad. He walked away, without saying another word. After a sleepless night, he came back and begged me to drop the matter, since everyone would think I was mad."

Der Judenstaat is short. It defines the Jews as a "people—one people," *ein Volk*. In the nineteenth century, this word's associations were political and above all racial, and therefore clashed with the traditional definition of the Jews as a community of religious believers. The pamphlet posits that antisemitism cannot be eradicated by assimilation or by any other means, and that the only way to solve the *Judenfrage,* the Jewish question, was by the reconstitution of the Jews into a modern nation-state, independent and with its own territory. Much of the pamphlet is taken up with practical and organizational considerations.

Yet as I read *Der Judenstaat,* the image of the crying friend recurred. Mental illness was associated with Herzl. His wife, with whom he had a miserable and abusive relationship, was mentally ill. All three of his children ditto. Two died by suicide. So did his only grandson. Was he himself mentally ill? If so, in what way? One who writes about the lives of artists wonders: If this were the case, would that change the way we read him? Would our judgment be influenced negatively, or positively? Many creative people suffer from mental illness or addiction. These diseases disqualify neither them nor their work. When in abatement, such afflictions can even enhance that work, lending it an experience—an empathy born of suffering, a maturity—that might be unavailable to a more stable personality. Liberated from convention, dismissive of the mincing rationality that holds back more calculating minds, the visions of full-blown madmen can be ravishing.

"The imaginations of a madman are much more colorful, wild, majestic, and frightful than those of Shakespeare," Herzl wrote in 1895. *Der Judenstaat* began as a creative fiction: not as a play, as Herzl had written before, but as a novel. For months, he wavered between presenting his thinking as a fiction or as the tract that was finally published. Its premise—a new civilization in a faraway place—was similar to many contemporary novels. These were books like Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues*

Under the Sea, which Herzl might have read as a boy, or H. G. Wells's *Island of Doctor Moreau,* published in 1896, the year of *Der Judenstaat*. Herzl's later novel, *Altneuland,* was explicitly fantastical: a utopian invention about two men trapped, Robinson Crusoe–like, on a remote Pacific island. Upon their return, they find a technocratic Jewish civilization, the New Society, has sprouted in Palestine.

Like Wells's or Verne's, Herzl's new society, at least in *Altneuland,* is fictional. But when reading *Der Judenstaat,* which is not fictional, one wonders whether, or to what extent, Herzl can possibly be serious. In fiction, eccentric inventions can indeed be "colorful, wild, majestic, and frightful." The artist can approach the visions of a madman—as long as the artist is conscious that he is creating a fiction. However caught up he might be by his creation, he can always leave it behind. He can put down his pen or close his computer and go downstairs for dinner. What is disquieting about Herzl is that one can never tell whether he knows where to draw the line between fantasy and reality. This is why his friend cried.

Herzl's mind was bursting with novelistic excesses. As he was composing *Der Judenstaat,* he confided his fantasies to his diary. A sympathetic biographer, Derek Penslar, recalls them:

> Herzl imagined himself as a great statesman, dictating terms to Hirsch and other wealthy Jews whom he had always envied and despised. He wrote that he would be an all-powerful leader and command unquestioning obedience in the future Jewish state. Bankers' daughters would be given in marriage to "vigorous young men" for the good of the state and the "self-fertilization of the nation." A "well-run secret police" would ensure Herzl's security. The Jewish state would be run by a Herzlian dynasty; his father Jakob would be the first senator of the Jewish state, and his son Hans would be its doge. Herzl envisioned a coronation ceremony with cuirassiers, artillery, and infantry, "marching in gold-studded gala uniforms." "The doge himself will wear the garb of shame of a medieval ghetto Jew: the pointed hat, the yellow badge…Only inside

the temple we wrap a princely cloak about his shoulders and place the crown on his head." Herzl wept at the grandeur of his own vision and the prospect of crowning his own son as doge. "Love and kisses to my Father-King," Herzl wrote in a telegram to his son on the little boy's fourth birthday.

This figure might have made a compelling character in a novel. But that is not how Herzl decided to write *Der Judenstaat,* and that, in a way, is the reader's loss. Such flourishes would have lent this work a bit of color. Like many bad writers, he confuses being boring with being serious. "The non-transferable goods which come under consideration are buildings, land, and local business connections," a sentence reads. "Overtime will only be permitted on a doctor's certificate, and must not exceed three hours," he drones. "In medium-sized businesses, where goods and organization equal, or even exceed, in importance, the personal activity of the manager, whose larger connection is also non-transferable, various forms of liquidation are possible." Perhaps tiring of these kinds of sentences, he insists that this book is not for lawyers: "This pamphlet is not designed for professional attorneys; therefore, I can only quickly sketch out my theory of the constitutional basis of the State." After expressing his preference for monarchy, he says that the state ought to be an aristocratic republic. Though he mentions Venice, he tactfully avoids appointing his four-year-old son as doge.

In Herzl's short career—recall that he was dead by forty-four—he had, in fact, practiced law. And more than the mind of the theorist, more than the mind of the playwright or novelist, one finds in the pages of *Der Judenstaat* the mind of the petty attorney. He is not deranged, as his friend feared and his enemies would frequently charge. Instead, his book reveals something worse. He is thoughtless, as in without thought. His motives are transparent. His solutions are childish. Things that would occur to other people—to any other person—do not occur to him. This does not seem to be out of malice. They just do not occur.

Take one passage, "Palestine or Argentina," debating where this Jewish state should be located. It is astonishing that Herzl devotes no more than

three paragraphs to this question. Argentina, "one of the most naturally rich countries on earth," has advantages: "The Argentine Republic has the greatest interest in handing over a piece of its territory. The current infiltration of Jews has generated upheaval there; we would have to explain the essential difference of the new immigration to Argentina."

To another mind—to any other mind—these sentences might suggest other questions. To Herzl's they do not, and he moves briskly to the second option:

> Palestine is our unforgettable historic home. Its name alone would suffice to summon our people. If His Majesty the Sultan gave us Palestine, we could take it upon ourselves to fix all the finances of Turkey. For Europe we would be a piece of the wall against Asia; we would become the first watchmen of culture against barbarism. As a neutral state, we would remain in contact with all Europe, which would have to guarantee our existence.

A government would give away enough land to form a new country: Argentina because of some unspecified "interest," Turkey because the Jews would fix its finances. One can point out racial clichés—Jews as financial cabal, Europeans as civilizers, Asians as barbarians—that were widespread in 1896; one can equally point out the absence of any reference to the people of Argentina or Palestine; but the rest of the work shows that Herzl is not ignoring or denying their existence, as "ignoring" and "denying" suggest intent. These inhabitants have just not occurred to him. (At least not here; in his later correspondence, he mentions the Palestinians as subjects of removal, as people who can be bribed to abandon their homes and their country.) Here, they are of no interest, and the places hardly matter, either. In the rest of the text, neither the word "Argentina" nor the word "Palestine" will recur. One might charge him with a humanitarian failure, but this is a moral charge, and the failure is not moral. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—published in 1890 and a book Herzl therefore might have read—Oscar Wilde writes, "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral

book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." And the failure of *Der Judenstaat* is writerly. The charge leveled at Herzl's theater was that his characters are one-dimensional, cardboard, stereotypes. A play or a novel filled with characters who confront no dilemma, are plagued by no doubt, and exist only to attack or advance certain views—is a bore.

Yet Herzl is thunderstruck by even his most modest thoughts. He devotes a great deal of energy, for example, to the proposition that the workers would enjoy a seven-hour workday. He is so besotted with this idea that he proposes that the state's flag be a white field with seven gold stars, one for each hour of the working day.

But not all of his ideas are so mundane. He sometimes astonishes the reader with flights of grandiosity that raise the same questions that confronted his weeping friend. Only three years before *Der Judenstaat,* for example, he had mused about converting the millions of Jews in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to Catholicism. This revolution—nothing less than the dissolution of the Jewish people—would take place in a ceremony in St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. Herzl comes alive when describing ceremonies, coronations, jewels, and pomp, and this ceremony especially seems to have captured his imagination. It would be led by no one less than the pope himself, and the pontiff, in exchange for this conversion, would agree to make Christians stop hating Jews.

It is very hard to describe this scheme without mockery—hard to understand it in any conventional terms, as one understands an opinion with which one may disagree. Once again, questions have not occurred. When one reads that the Argentines would hand over a portion of their country because they had the "greatest interest" in doing so—as if governments routinely handed over their territory to the authors of impassioned pamphlets—one wonders: Who and where were the Jews—any Jews—who might have agreed to this? The scheme has been described as novelistic. But the premise of a good novel should be plausible. This is just weird.

Herzl, as always, is serious. He endeavored to project an "icy calm," an unshakable demeanor befitting a visionary; and the seriousness with which he enunciates his bizarre ideas creates another barrier to understanding

them. Not because they are too complex, as in a difficult book on an unfamiliar subject. Their meaning is clear. Yet one nevertheless strains to understand how to take them as seriously as their author did, how to resist the temptation to dismiss his thinking as merely outré. One must remember that this author is not ridiculous, and that his writings cannot be judged as one might judge an unsuccessful novel or play. To mock Herzl, who "wept at the grandeur…of crowning his own son as doge," to dismiss his idea of himself as the founder of a dynasty, is to ignore the reality that he became one of the most important figures of his time, and that his writings had consequences for millions—and that, more than a century after his death, they still do. One must take them seriously because so many people—people like my grandfather—took them seriously.

The evidence of Herzl's life makes this task harder still. His chronic mendacity, his abusiveness toward his family, his blubbering self-pity make him personally distasteful; but a generous critic might classify these as the eccentricities of a talented personality. The thing one can never explain away is Herzl's dislike of Jews. This is so striking that one hesitates to mention it, including because those who have not read him often do not believe just how extensive, just how conspicuous—just how offensive, even to people not easily offended—this dislike really is. Herzl made comments that placed him among the most antisemitic extremists of his time. "I myself have only succeeded up to the present in making the acquaintance of one genuine antisemite," Arthur Schnitzler has a Jewish character say in his novel *The Road to the Open,* published in 1908. "I'm afraid I must admit… that it was a well-known Zionist leader." As Schnitzler suggests, Herzl's words stood out even among *non-Jewish* antisemites. Among Jews, nobody came close. But from its very foundation, Zionism depended on antisemites: cultivated them, flattered them. "The antisemites will become our most dependable friends, the antisemitic countries our allies," he wrote. These remarks make it hard to understand how he attracted so many followers—and make it easy to explain why so many Jews were so instinctively repelled by Zionism.

"Remarks": the wrong word.

For example, his fantasy of mass conversion, which appeared only three years before *Der Judenstaat,* was not realistic in the world of men and women. It was, however, realistic as a reflection of the mind that fantasized about it. The fantasy is that the Jews will disappear, will cease to exist *as Jews,* will sacrifice anything unique about themselves—anything about their culture or tradition that they might have wished to hand down to their children—in order to become like everyone else. This wish was sincere, repeated throughout his work. "That is why we must baptize Jewish children while they are still incapable of giving themselves an accounting, and while they can still feel nothing either for it or against it. We must submerge ourselves in the people." He has a particular loathing for rich Jews: "When we sink, we become a revolutionary proletariat…when we rise, there rises also our terrible power of the purse." He does not much like middle-class Jews, either: When, as an adult, Herzl attended a synagogue for the first time, he saw "bold, misshapen noses, furtive and cunning eyes." Until he realized that they formed a potential constituency, he sneeringly dismissed the masses of the Jewish poor. One of his plays, *The New Ghetto,* is full of ugly stereotypes: Jewish men as shady financial speculators; Jewish women as obnoxious, loudmouthed harridans. As he was writing the play, he confided to his diary, "In the special instance of this play I want to hide my genitals more than at any other time." (This obsession recurs: He did not have his doge-son circumcised.) It is a significant line from the founder of a movement that would smear its opponents, generation after generation, as "self-hating Jews."

An odd line, too, from someone who catalyzed a movement based on Jewish pride. But consistency was never a hallmark of Zionism. Its hallmark, from the very beginning, was opportunism, and a willingness to exploit Jewish fears and tragedies. This it derived from the founder of its political variant. In this sense, the story of the Dreyfus Affair becomes so profound. The story Herzl told about Captain Alfred Dreyfus's heartbreaking degradation in 1895 was that the crowd erupted in shouts of "Down with the Jews!" and that in that moment Herzl understood that the Jews would be left in peace only if they had a state of their own.

Like many Jewish children, I heard this story from my father—as he, perhaps, heard it from his. It was a good story. But like almost every story that Zionism would subsequently promote, it collapsed upon examination.

Herzl did report on the Dreyfus trial. He described it indifferently. In one report, he doubted Dreyfus's innocence: "Room to believe that Dreyfus in fact committed the shameful deed." The trial took four days. Only five days *after* Dreyfus was convicted did Herzl mention, en passant, that Dreyfus was Jewish, and during the phase that Herzl described as having brought him to Zionism, he did not so much as mention Dreyfus.

Not until more than a year later, when he met Bernard Lazare, Dreyfus's first advocate in the French press, did he describe Dreyfus as a Jewish tragedy. Herzl claimed that his play *The New Ghetto* was written "after the first Dreyfus trial and under its impact"—though the play was completed six weeks before the trial began. His own journalism does not mention anyone shouting "Down with the Jews!" They shouted "Down with the traitor!"—a significant difference. But the Affair was on its way to becoming one of the great human rights scandals of the day, and Theodor Herzl recognized a going concern when he saw one.

"What made me a Zionist was the Dreyfus trial," he started to say.

Only one consistent desire threads through Herzl's career: a frustrated man's thirst for power and glory. He loved fantasizing about coronations, honor guards, gold-studded gala uniforms. He was obsessed with manliness and the violence he associated with manliness: The reference to his circumcised genitals was not random. Though a Hungarian Jew living in Austria, Herzl was, at school, drawn to German nationalism, precisely for its associations with masculinity. He felt that Jews were not manly because they did not participate in dueling, which was of course forbidden by religious law, and imagined that others looked down on the Jews because of this: "Half a dozen duels will do a great deal to improve the position of Jews in society." *The New Ghetto* revolves around a kitschy medieval notion of honor: When a duel is called off, a Jew imagines that he is being mocked as weak. Herzl's anxiety about his masculinity was sharpened when he acquired gonorrhea, then incurable; and during another trial, of the

anarchist François Ravachol, he discovered a sympathy with, a fetishization of, terrorism—a sexualization of violence: "Ravachol has discovered another voluptuousness: the voluptuousness of a great idea and of martyrdom."

In a body of work in which so much feels fake, made up, and baffling, this desire—to be a man, to be accepted, to lead—feels absolutely authentic. Read through this lens, Herzl's contempt for Jews *as they were* and his vision of them *as they might be* could have appealed to people who felt excluded, held back. Perhaps my grandfather shared this frustration, which was the frustration on which Zionism fed. He had reason enough. His life, which had begun so promisingly, dispatched him to the trenches of the First World War—and then into the unprecedented humiliations of Nazism. He lived under Hitler for five years. Did that leave him with some dream of fighting back, of recovering a stolen self-respect? For many, the idea of Jews with power—dueling Jews, Jews who weren't going to take it—was intoxicating, and this promise of power was at the beginning of modern Zionism.

At the end of the *Zionistische Schriften* is an article that appeared a year after the publication of *Der Judenstaat*. It is called "Mauschel," using a distasteful slur for a German Jew. Mauschel was "a distortion of human character, something unspeakably low and repugnant," and he was a character that would recur, in different guises, throughout the history of Zionism: "Mauschel is anti-Zionist." Jews alarmed by Herzl's grandiose fantasies, Jews who asked the questions that Herzl so conspicuously failed to ask, find themselves smeared with words that might have given pause even to the most repellent racists. "Mauschel is a miserable scrounger in poverty and an even more miserable show-off in wealth," Herzl writes. "We are a nation of hagglers and crooks because Mauschel proliferates and plays stock market tricks. Mauschel has always provided the pretexts for attacking us. Mauschel is the curse of the Jew."

Herzl concludes with a threat of violence: "Mauschel, watch out! Zionism could do as Tell does in the legend. When Tell prepares to shoot the apple from his son's head, he has a second arrow ready to use. If the

first shot misses, the other is to serve as revenge. Friends, the second arrow of Zionism is destined for the Mauschel's chest!"

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There have been many definitions of Zionism. But perhaps the simplest is favoring the establishment, and then the existence, of a Jewish state in Palestine. For most of my life, this seemed entirely natural to me.

I did not grow up in a religious household. My parents had a cultural allegiance to Judaism, and this allegiance was related to their political views, which were on the left. We did not live in a Jewish neighborhood, but neither did we live in a non-Jewish neighborhood: We lived in a neighborhood. Synagogue was for holidays and special occasions, like weddings and bar mitzvahs, and it would not have occurred to my parents to send me to a Jewish school. Both had Jewish friends, but they did not, like some people, have *only* Jewish friends. They belonged to a cosmopolitan America in which people of different backgrounds mixed easily. They were committed to feminism and the environment. They opposed imperial wars.

Yet they were Zionists. They were far from fanatics: They traveled widely, but never bothered to visit Israel. They did not encourage us to do so, but neither did they discourage us. They were Zionists because everyone in America—at least as far as I knew—was a Zionist. Especially but not only if you were Jewish, you were a Zionist, and I did not knowingly meet someone opposed to Zionism until I was in my twenties. I remember the occasion, and I remember my surprise.

It was a friend, neither Jewish nor Arab, who had studied Arabic in college and spent time in the Arab world. She said that Israel was a bunch of foreigners who had no business in the Middle East, that Zionism was a horrible mistake, that Israel never should have happened. I listened almost open-mouthed, and because I respected this woman's intelligence and experience I found what she was saying even more shocking. In a country divided about nearly every issue, Zionism was so much a part of the

consensus that—amazing as it feels to write this today—I was not even aware that Zionism was controversial.

When I look back now, I am appalled to realize what this means. Despite the excellent education my parents provided me—the finest private school in our city, followed by an Ivy League university—I never encountered a course on Palestine, a Palestinian professor, or any real organized Palestinian presence. I realize now that what I did encounter was a denial of Palestinian existence so pervasive that I was not even aware that it was a denial. This is why I could be shocked by my friend's statement that Zionism was a crime. Today, I am shocked that I was shocked. Despite the advantages my education furnished, that upbringing turns out, in light of this essential question, to have been dishearteningly provincial. Perhaps what looked like education was no more than the veneer of worldliness, of sophistication, that a certain background lends.

At the same time, I was, of course, aware that *Israel* was controversial. Israel did terrible things—but so did every other country, not least the United States. Israel was involved in an ugly conflict, and like most people I knew in the hopeful place I was born, I was sympathetic to "both sides," and hoped that cooler heads would prevail, and that the problem would go away.

I was sure that it would.

After all, throughout my childhood, conflicts miraculously disappeared. The Soviet Union vanished. The Latin American dictatorships crumbled. South African apartheid collapsed. The Troubles in Northern Ireland were sorted. And in the meantime, we were always hearing about a Middle East peace process putting Israel and Palestine on a path to a "two-state solution." By the time I met an anti-Zionist, I had no doubt that the creation of Israel had involved an injustice. But this did not make Israel different from anywhere else, I thought. Rather than lingering on the past, I believed that we should strive to make things better for the future.

(All this—the belief in an inevitable progress, the desire to jettison the past, the optimistic view of the future—reflected the American mind of my time. That mind was shaped, as mine was, by seeing Palestinians in the

media only as victims or, more usually, as terrorists. Only much later would I get to know Palestinians as neighbors, as friends—as people.)

That is why the idea of being against Zionism, against the existence of the Jewish state, was a concept I would hardly have understood. To be sure, I was never invited to understand the concept. If I had been, I am sure that I would have bristled, and been suspicious of anyone who bruited it. I would have felt defensive toward my grandfather and Herzl's book, the book I—someday—meant to read. When I met a self-described anti-Zionist, I found the idea strange, intriguing, and also felt the wounded pride that so many Jews feel in the face of criticism of Israel from outside the Jewish world. To say that the state had problems was something I could easily accept. It was something I said myself. To say that the state *was* the problem was something I did not.

Thirty years passed.

The situation of the Palestinian people grew immeasurably worse.

The hope for an equitable solution came to seem worse than naive. The whole peace process, in whose progress I had always believed, came to seem like a bill of goods—like something for patsies, for chumps.

Over time, I understood what so many, Jews and Palestinians both, had accepted before me: that the state was, in fact, the problem; that Zionism was the problem. Yet for a long time—longer than I am comfortable admitting—I would not have comfortably called myself an anti-Zionist. The phrase felt extreme. Like many others, I lingered in the halfway house of liberal Zionism, expressing the hope that the state might be reformed; that, in different conditions, including by making peace with neighboring states, an authentic democracy might yet emerge. Even once I understood the fundamental justice of Palestinian claims, I was still opposed to symptoms rather than entirely grasping their causes.

Not until I first visited Palestine did I *feel* Palestine. I am referring not to the prettified Israeli areas of Palestine, with their beaches and their designer falafel, but to those places only a few miles away, where Zionism shows its real face. The occasion, in 2016, was the Palestine Festival of Literature, founded by the Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif. Calmly, patiently, Ahdaf took

us around the West Bank and into the borders of the Israeli state. When I look at pictures of myself from those days, I see someone who looks bloated; who looks tired; whose clothes don't quite fit; whose hair, despite vigorous combing, refuses to behave. These pictures are a perfect mirror of what was taking place in my interior. It is hard to take a picture of moral disgust, or to show what it looks like when your stomach is being turned. I don't have any better way to describe that experience than to say that it altered me physically. To see the reality of the occupation of Palestine was deranging, in the sense of disordering, disrupting. Whenever I have written about that experience, I have prefaced such writings by emphasizing that words and images cannot do justice to the experience of seeing the reality of Zionism. To walk down a street in Hebron where every house is shuttered—to be aware that I am allowed to walk down this street only because of the "race" to which I supposedly belong—is a feeling that I would not wish on anyone. At the same time, without that experience, I would not have understood emotionally what I knew intellectually, which is that what was being done to Palestine was unjust. And without meeting Palestinians—without meeting so many members of an entire nation that had been caricatured as Jew-hating terrorists—I would not have had the faces, the stories, that made this story so personal. Through meeting Palestinians, I became aware that I was still looking at the story of Zionism as a story of how Jews related to themselves. This was important, of course. It is the subject of this book. But I had not seen the other side of the story, which was how Jews related to real people in a real place. That is why—though this book is necessarily about Jews—it exists only because of Palestinians.

Still, as late as 2019, when I had long considered myself anti-Zionist, I wrote things that now strike me as ambiguous: as embarrassing, frankly. I was still using the language of human rights, of the two-state solution, of "both sides." Yet almost any Jewish person who rejects Zionism, including every person in this book, has undergone a similar journey. If it is hard to learn a foreign language, it is even harder to unlearn a native language—and Zionism, for me, was a native language. Unlearning it was an

evolution, a deconstruction, and did not happen overnight. Nearly all Jewish anti-Zionists have said and done and believed things that, in retrospect, make us cringe. As a boy, the South African resistance hero Ronnie Kasrils saved his money to plant trees for Israel, unaware that they were being planted atop the ruins of a bulldozed Palestinian village. In one way or another, we all planted those trees. What anti-Zionist Jews have in common is not that we have passed a purity test. It is that we have shown a willingness to try to unlearn that native language.

I traveled.

I read.

I met Palestinians.

And I began to move away from the securities of childhood. It was a painful process. Growing up always is. To ask the questions that Herzl failed to ask—and these were so obvious that it was hard for any honest person not to ask them—made the evolution feel inevitable. But it is with no pleasure that one unravels a fairy tale heard in childhood. To grasp that it was a fiction was to wonder whether I had been lied to—by people I loved, by people who loved me—or whether those people had themselves been lied to. To acknowledge the truth was to estrange myself, to become a kind of pariah. I could easily understand those people who, though they accepted the arguments of the anti-Zionists intellectually—though they understood the Palestinian cause—could not take the step, emotionally, of breaking with Zionism. Some chose to look away. Some fell back on the native language: on the mythology in which they had been raised.

I have often thought of how easy it would be, how restful, never to have stirred from the Zionist simplicity. I think with a pang of my grandfather's book. I think, too, of another book in my grandmother's house. It was called *The Jews in Their Land*. When I was a boy, that title did not seem ironic. I recall how little discomfort—how much pride—those words inspired.

The discomfort came.

Much of that discomfort was the sense of betrayal that comes from feeling duped. Worse yet was the sense that one's own people—those one had been told were one's own people—were capable of such cruelty, such

crime. It was a knowledge one might rather have been spared. But one does not want to live in ignorance or dishonesty. As a Jewish writer said, “When I became a man, I put away childish things.”

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The rabbis who opposed Zionism—and the idea was as irreligious as Herzl himself—insisted that one could follow Judaism or one could follow Zionism but one could not follow both. Zionism, they said, was a new religion, fundamentally opposed to Judaism. And in no aspect does Zionism more resemble a religion than in its insistence on dogmas. Hannah Arendt described the *Sprachregelungen,* the speech rules, that governed the Nazi hierarchy. “It meant what in ordinary language would be called a lie,” she wrote. And as I grew more acquainted with Zionism, I came to understand that its entire edifice was built on *Sprachregelungen*. I came to understand why, from the very beginning, it had ruthlessly enforced speech codes. As with any faith, its followers were trained to accept the revealed word.

Yet Zionism did not present itself as a religion. It presented itself as a modern, rational movement. It used modern, rational language; and it was through this language—through applying the same criteria that I would apply to any other moral or social or political belief—that I came to see how absurd it was. One element of this unlearning was a realization that for certain people, otherwise rational people, rational arguments made no difference. People who would never support discrimination or apartheid—much less mass murder and genocide—would somehow find a way to support these in the case of Israel. Because to believe in Zionism was to immure oneself in a moated rhetorical castle, a comfortable place where, as in a well-run hotel, every need had been anticipated, every question answered. One could linger inside its thick walls indefinitely—on the single condition that one accept the answers provided, and trust those who provided them.

One question, especially, could get the guards summoned, and see you booted across the drawbridge.

This was the most dangerous question, the question from which every other flowed:

Did the European Jews have the right to take over Palestine, a country that toward the end of the nineteenth century was between 95 and 97 percent non-Jewish—a population that, unlike the Europeans, had never harmed the Jews—and then, under the sponsorship of the Western imperial powers, boycott, occupy, exile, ethnically cleanse, and commit genocide against that country's indigenous population?

Did Israel, in other words, have a "right to exist"?

Such a question could only even occur to fanatics, to terrorists, Zionists would thunder. The fury with which it was greeted was theatrical, histrionic—and revealing, too. It hinted at why and how Israel was different from other countries. Most countries have some wicked queen—some bloodthirsty dynasty—lurking in the dungeons of their history. These characters or episodes are shameful. But they are in the past. They can be discussed with equanimity. The difference with Israel was that its crimes were not in the past. The state was founded in 1948, twenty-eight years before I was born. The Nakba of the Palestinians, the ethnic cleansing that accompanied the birth of the Israeli state, was not a one-time calamity. It had never ended. Its victims were still walking around, with keys to their stolen houses.

The threat against those who touched this subject was real. This may explain why so many people, even those who understand the questions, have tried to avoid the answers. Instead, they complicate the questions. They point out that, historically, there had been different definitions, different possible paths, for Zionism. Baruch Spinoza, that great patron saint of Jewish pariahs, once said that nothing *could* happen except in precisely the way *that* it happened, and those other possibilities for Zionism were not the way that it happened—and were never, I don't think, real possibilities. To crack a volume of Herzl is to see that—if there was any chance of taking his ideas outside the realm of fairy tales—there was only

one way to realize them. No matter whether he or his followers acknowledged their existence, the Palestinian people were there. And no matter how much propaganda was deployed against them, no matter what *Sprachregelungen* the colonizers invented and enforced, the Palestinians, like any other people, would never have relinquished their country to a passel of foreign invaders.

And so in the terms that were my terms—a belief in democracy and equality and individual dignity; a refusal of discrimination and racism and colonialism—I came to reject Zionism. Not all at once. Not smoothly or seamlessly. But gradually, in an awakening shaped by experience and encounters as much as by principle, I realized I could not accept the fairy tales, the "language rules." Everything inside me rebelled. My sense of responsibility to my ancestors made me refuse them; and so did my sense of gratitude toward, of belonging to, my own country; and so did my professional ethics: The reproduction of lies is as offensive to the writer's honor as murder is to the physician's. This loss of belief isolated me from my people, I thought. It severed one of the only connections I had to my grandfather.

But I had become a man, I said to myself with a sigh.

I had to put away childish things.

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As a child, I thought that Zionism was a unanimity. How would my life have been changed if I had known that it was not? If I had known how many of our most admired artists and writers, our most learned philosophers and scholars, our most courageous journalists and lawyers, our most eminent rabbis and statesmen, had denounced its principles and practitioners? What would have changed if I had known about the people in this book? What would have changed for me if, instead of being erased, such heroes had been honored as the moral aristocracy of the Jewish people?

At the very least, I would have known that the consensus in which I grew up was recent. I would have known that it was fragile, and that, rightly or wrongly, it had been imposed only with violence. I would have known that for nearly two centuries Zionism, far from being a natural outgrowth of Judaism, had been the most incandescently debated idea in the Jewish world. I would have known that Zionism was not even a Jewish idea to begin with. Long before Herzl, it was a Christian idea, and among Jews anti-Zionism predated Zionism. I would have known that certain prayers expressing the hope of a return to Palestine referred to a mystic vision, not to any practical political program, and that the Passover prayer that includes the phrase "next year in Jerusalem" was spoken even within the walls of Jerusalem, and referred to the dawn of the messianic age.

I would have known that until the nineteenth century, the hope of a Jewish return to Palestine existed mainly among a minority of Protestants, who thought it would usher in the Second Coming of Christ: a sentiment still much in evidence among such people today. I would have known that Jewish leaders rejected such ideas as alien, and that the Jews had never evinced any desire to immigrate to Palestine, though such immigration had been possible for centuries and was, in fact, at no time forbidden. I would have known that this explained why so few Jews lived in Palestine before the beginning of the modern Zionist movement, and that, though catastrophes had befallen the Jews across the centuries—and though millions had responded by moving to other countries—almost none, at any period, had moved to Palestine.

To the contrary of the narrative I learned—about two indigenous peoples tragically entangled in a dispute over a single small country—I would have known that only a handful of Jews lived in Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century, when Herzl wondered whether his state should be there or in Argentina. I would have known that even after the beginning of the modern Zionist movement the Jewish population of the country was around 3 percent, and that these people considered themselves Palestinian Jews, just as their neighbors considered themselves Palestinian Muslims or Christians. I would have learned that, rather than being a specifically Jewish

story, the history of Zionism was merely a chapter in the broader history of Western colonialism and imperialism. I would have learned that at a time when Europeans were colonizing the world, Palestinians of every background—including the country's native Jews—were terrified by the arrival of European colonizers to upend the country's social balance. I would have been invited to contemplate the mindset that allowed Herzl to focus on Palestine—in the non-Western, non-white world—rather than demanding a state in Russia, for example, where the Jews were brutally oppressed, or, later, following the Nazi Holocaust, in Germany. I would have been asked to ponder what it meant for Herzl to say that his state could only exist with, and depend entirely on, foreign imperialist patronage.

I would have known that most Jews regarded Herzl with the same bemusement that I felt after I read his book. I would have known that they were offended by his idea that Jews needed to abandon their own homes, languages, and countries and go to a place almost none of them had ever laid eyes on.

I would have known that the Jews cherished the rights they had gained from the end of the eighteenth century, especially following the American and French Revolutions, and saw Zionism as an attempt to unravel them. I would have been told how nervous these Jews were made by the Zionist suggestion that they might be loyal to some other place or polity, and how furiously they pointed out that Zionist claims that they were rootless, unassimilable foreigners echoed antisemitic calumnies. I would have learned how fiercely they resisted Zionistic vocabulary, words like "diaspora," which suggested they were not home in their own homes, or even, in certain contexts, "the Jewish people," which suggested, to antisemites and Zionists both, that they were separate in some sense other than religious. I would have learned that in almost every country and in almost every branch of Judaism, Zionists were a tiny minority, and that to the vast majority of Jewish people, Zionist nationalism, separatism, and militarism seemed like a decided step backward. I would have learned that those who resisted Zionism were part of a broader movement to resist

domination, to resist racism, to reclaim a notion of the universality of liberty—and that this movement was not only about or among the Jews.

I could have learned all this alongside the other arguments in this bitter debate, the only arguments I ever heard growing up. I would have learned that the Zionists said that the Gentiles would never accept the Jews. They said that no matter what the Jews thought of themselves, no matter how loudly they protested their loyalty, no matter how much they felt at home in their own countries—no matter how many of them fought and died for those countries—they would always be persecuted. No matter whether they called themselves a people or a race or a church—whether they thought of themselves as Germans or Americans or Brazilians—the outside world only ever saw Jews, and Jews could only rely on themselves. The Jews had no choice: They needed their own land, army, state. The Holocaust seemed to prove the Zionist argument. For many Jews, the rise of the State of Israel only three years after the defeat of Hitler seemed to be a miraculous resurrection, a guarantee that the Jews would never suffer again. For many—even Jews who had opposed Zionism, even those who never set foot in the Israeli state—pride in Israel replaced their lost religious faith. After the long night of exile, dawn had come at last.

I would have learned that this debate never ceased to rage in every country where Jewish people lived. I would have learned a respect for the breadth and vigor of Jewish thought, and learned that Judaism is far more than a nineteenth-century ideology derived from Christian eschatology and German racial nationalism, and learned that the state that many Jews support in the name of Jewish safety is, and has been since 1945, by far the most dangerous place in the world for Jews to live. I would have learned that even before 1945, sectors of the Zionist leadership welcomed Nazis, sought alliances with Nazis—even as they derided the Nazis' victims. I would have learned that to oppose Zionism did not mean amputating a part of myself. It meant placing myself in an alternative tradition—a hidden tradition, like those of the Kabbalists or the Marranos—a tradition of people who, though long dismissed and despised, were ultimately proven right.

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Proven right: but for a long time this story would have been the story of losers—of people who, for whatever reason, had been proven wrong. Their stories might have been curiosities, like the stories of the last pagans who resisted Christianity, or like the stories of the Americans who, after the Declaration of Independence, remained loyal to the British crown. But though their stories have been suppressed—though they themselves were subjected to every form of ostracization, including banishment and death—the Jews who resisted Zionism never went away. This was in large part Zionism's own doing. As the movement grew more apparently successful, as more and more people bowed to the inevitability it projected, its cruelty did not abate. It grew instead steadily more outrageous, stooping even to genocide—the crime of crimes—itself. It was determined to shock the world, determined to crush its opponents, determined to show that there was no depth to which it would not descend; and as time went on, the number of Jews who opposed it grew as well. These were the people who had been brought up on stories of their own people's genocide and were horrified that Jews could be associated with such an evil. These were the people who lived as with a constant throbbing toothache.

But in almost all cases, they did not have a tradition to fall back on. They did not know this alternative tradition because the stories of these people had been suppressed. This book tells many stories of just how brutal this suppression was. They—and when I say *they* I mean *we*—did not know how fiercely Jewish thinkers had resisted Zionism. We did not know that people from every religious background had fought it. We did not know that people on the right had fought it, and that people on the left had fought it. We did not know that paupers in muddy hamlets had fought it and that great magnates in their palaces had fought it. We did not know that Sephardic people had fought it as well as Ashkenazic people, that people in North America and Africa and Asia and Europe and Latin America had fought it, that men had fought it as well as women, that gay people had fought it as well as straight people, all from different perspectives, in different

languages, and for different reasons—or that, during every period of Zionism's history, Jews had risked their livelihoods and lives in order to insist that Zionism was not speaking in our name.

We often felt that we were the very first.

In writing this book, I aim to make such people feel less alone. I offer it as a contribution to the movement by so many noble people who are working to construct an alternative vision of Jewish life, free from racism, nationalism, and militarism. It is an attempt to say, especially to younger people, that we are not the first, and that we do not need to start afresh. In its attempt to uncover a suppressed tradition, this book does not claim to capture every nuance of that tradition. Each person in this book illuminates one angle, one perspective, on a vast question that has sprawled over nearly two centuries and that has engaged so many great minds. It begins in a tiny village in the forests of Eastern Europe and follows Zionism as it spreads—with an astonishing amount of luck, including the luck of finding imperialist sponsorship—to every continent where Jewish people live. It continues through two world wars and a genocide, all the way to the genocide we have been watching on our phones.

This book is deliberately and necessarily incomplete, including because the terrible wound at its center has never been healed.

Perhaps it is too much to hope that it ever can be.

Yet if we are not to collapse into a nihilistic abandonment of ourselves, our values, our future aspirations, we must work as if it can be healed. It is a famous precept of the Mishnah that although it is not our duty to finish the work of studying the Word of God, neither may we desist from that work. And so I offer my own work of illuminating a hidden side of the Jewish intellectual and moral legacy as a contribution to a continuance of that venerable patrimony. This legacy dignifies—it elevates and illuminates—all who choose to embrace it. The people who have borne it forward were not perfect. But though one may occasionally reproach them for the same slowness of comprehension for which I reproach myself, their tradition is open for renewal, for redefinition, for expansion: and I hope that future thinkers and activists will be yet bolder, yet more outspoken, in their

opposition to all forms of oppression. More than anything, I hope that they will shed the solipsism that has ever been a fault of the Jews and place the real victims of Zionism, the Palestinian people, at the heart of all they do.

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As I have written this book, I have often wondered whether anything would have been different if I had grown up with the Palestinian story. How would my life have changed if I had been taught about the Nakba, or disaster, of 1948, when huge areas of Palestine were ethnically cleansed and hundreds of thousands of innocent people condemned to permanent exile? If I had learned the stories of the people in this book, the Jews who, at every time and on every continent, had opposed Zionism? If I had been asked to consider the Palestinian story as part of a global panorama of resistance to colonialism and imperialism? I wonder. The Ibsen horror—the discovery of a great unpunished crime—is so common during the passage from childhood to adulthood that it might almost be called its definition. Nevertheless, it is salutary to see the world clearly, no matter how disappointing this proves. One would not wish to be other than what Hannah Arendt called a *real person*.

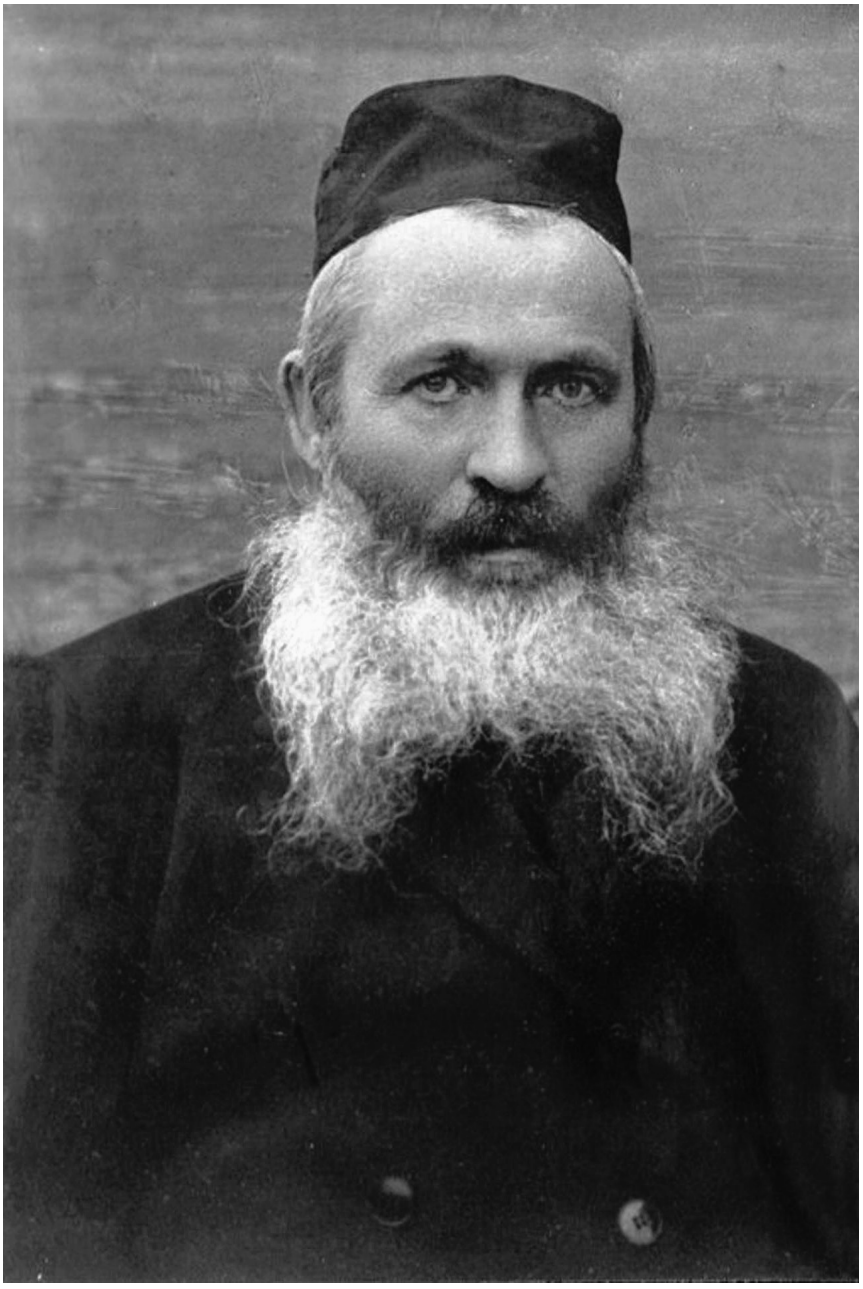
One puts away childish things.

One becomes a man.

One sheds illusions—and then is constantly appalled to discover how many more one has yet to shed.

THE SENSITIVE RABBI

Aaron Samuel Tamares



Among the first places where Herzl's impact was felt was in the tiny villages, the *shtetlach,* of the Pale of Settlement. This long crescent, stretching across the western edge of the Russian Empire, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, held a large percentage of the world's Jewish population, and these people had benefited less than nearly any other Jews in the world from the progressive movements of the nineteenth century. While so many places saw an evolution toward greater civic equality, in the Russian Empire, the Jews—and with them many other minorities—had moved in the opposite direction. Many were poor. They were barred from many schools and professions. They were not allowed to move freely: The Pale of Settlement was thus called because it was the only part of the empire where Jews were allowed to live. Beginning in 1871, a wave of pogroms broke out. Mass emigration began, particularly to the United States. So did the attraction of young people to radical new political movements. Some became socialist internationalists. Some became nationalists: Zionists.

The arrival of this new ideology brought wild controversy. There had been other forms of Jewish cultural revival, including attempts to recast a liturgical language, Hebrew, into a modern language. These included the Hovevei Zion, or Lovers of Zion, a loose and generally apolitical group that began to cohere after another wave of pogroms in the Russian Empire erupted in 1881. But Herzlian Zionism was different, partly because Herzl knew nothing about the Jewish religion and cared about it even less. Yet for discontented people in the thousands of towns scattered across the Pale of Settlement, this irreligiosity was one of his ideology's most attractive elements. The attempt to remake the Jews from a people united by a spiritual and cultural ideal into a political "people"—*ein Volk,* like the Hungarians or the Serbs—united by race had an air of novelty, of rebelliousness, about it. But rabbis everywhere instantly perceived a danger as grave as any since the seventeenth century, when the false messiah Sabbatai Zevi whipped up a millenarian frenzy that ended with his conversion to Islam.

For Aaron Samuel Tamares, the rabbi of the tiny shtetl of Milejczyce, the controversy would define his life and his ministry. Located on the edge of the ancient forest of Białowieża, on what is today the Polish side of the border of Belarus and Poland, even tiny Milejczyce, for Tamares, was sometimes too big. Nearly every day, weather permitting, he would head into the forest, where he composed most of his works. These were not, at first, intended to be read. "Whenever he became upset by an impure event that took place in society," he wrote in a third-person memoir toward the end of his life, "he fled to the forest and poured his heart out before the innocent trees—and, with their help, put pen to paper." When he began to publish, he adopted a pseudonym, "One of the Sensitive Rabbis." It was under that name that he became known throughout the Jewish world.

Tamares was born in 1869 near Malech, on what is today the Belarusian side of the forest, and married the daughter of the rabbi of Milejczyce, on the Polish side. Even as a boy, he wrote, he had always been sensitive. He came from a poor but distinguished family; his parents were "refined Jews who made their home in a large village full of half-wild goyim." His parents' behavior "was intertwined with a strict observance of the religious laws," and this "had no small impact on his religious feeling; it caused him to become quite pious, and planted within him a deep enthusiasm for yidishkeyt"—for Jewish ways. At school, which he reached via a road where he was harried by the peasant boys, he was a prodigy. "He used to pray with more devotion than any of the other boys," who mocked him: " 'Hey Aaron Samuel, did you hear? Such-and-such a rabbi from such-and-such a city'—they would devise names of rabbis and of cities—'has passed away.' " Distraught, he would run off, "quite upset about any misfortune; his heart would melt with sympathy."

Despite his aversion to "boorish goyim," he was also on "quite intimate terms" with some Gentiles. "In the summertime he used to sit in one of the neighbors' courtyards near his barn, reading his Talmud lesson while the neighbor stacked sheaves or threshed." Here, he had the experience that would mark the rest of his life. During the Russo-Turkish War—the boy

would have been eight or nine—this neighbor learned that his son had been killed.

> The fallen soldier's mother wept bitterly at the news—and the little Jewish boy wept with her. From that moment on, the boy's consciousness was consumed by an awareness of the depravity of war. The same woman had a painting from the war hanging in her house, which depicted Russian soldiers attacking the Turks with bayonets. The boy used to stand glued to the image for hours on end, bewildered by the idea that human beings could become accustomed to such acts, and wondering how the soldiers could endure such dreadful circumstances. He was also quite astonished that the bereaved mother could tolerate having such an image in her home, compelling her always to look upon the cursed event which had left so many mothers bereaved.

Tamares derived a lesson from this encounter. Although "the existence of evil in the world tormented him from a young age," he wrote, "his concept of 'the oppressor' was limited to 'the goy.'…And 'the oppressed'—were Jews only, as far as he could conclude from his own and his father's state of isolation in the village." A few years later, he learned of a secret society that "wished to overthrow the Czar because he oppressed the people." This group, which he understood to be called "shoshalists," was mostly made of Gentiles. This led him to a surprising question: "Could it be that goyim are sometimes also persecuted?" He remembered the soldier, "whose death he had mourned for several years alongside his unfortunate neighbor," and concluded that war was "the epitome of evil and slavery."

In 1890, when he was twenty-one, he left the religious school at Kovno because he found the students there to be careerists. He decamped for Volozhin, seat of a famous yeshiva whose students studied, in shifts, for twenty-four hours a day, reflecting the view that the world's very existence depends on the study of Torah. According to tradition, the pious would refine themselves through Torah, and then they would refine the entire

Jewish people, and then, through them, the entire world would be elevated in turn. This work was joyous. Tamares would preach throughout his life that the laws of the Torah did not restrict life but uplifted it, enhanced it—rendered it, as in the home in which he grew up, more beautiful.

The fundamental prohibition of the Torah is the taking of life. This implies a rejection of war and, together with the belief that the study of Torah was the pillar that sustained the universe, proposes a Judaic idea of heroism. The Jewish hero is not aggressive, violent, or dominant. His strength means the strength to study the law and obey the commandments. This is not a soldierly ideal: The Jewish hero is modest, merciful, and charitable, and these traits are even more praiseworthy because tradition taught that the Jew had been given a willful, even aggressive nature. These are the "stiff-necked people" who, so often in the Scriptures, bring upon themselves the wrath of God. Torah taught these people modesty and banished base instincts, foremost among which was violence. Many Jewish laws reinforced the prohibition of violence: The biblical ban on using iron in the building of the Temple, for example, was interpreted to mean that the messianic age could not be ushered in through war. The Jewish hero trusted in, and submitted to, the will of God.

In 1892, during a succession squabble, the Volozhin Yeshiva collapsed. A year later, "without the least bit of effort on his part," Tamares became the rabbi of his wife's hometown of Milejczyce. By his own admission, Tamares was not much interested in day-to-day rabbinical work. "What interested him was not bringing harmony to his congregation," he wrote, "but rather bringing harmony to the world," though these goals would not have been in conflict. The ambition of the Jewish people to save the world was his ambition too.

> He was burdened, together with his tendency toward spiritual purity, with a fiery temperament that allowed him no rest as long as his most sacred values were being trodden underfoot. Had the world ever asked him what he wanted? Of course not! So why should he start asking the world for permission?

Still, ministering to a congregation in a village of a couple of streets scratched out of a forest would never have satisfied someone like him, and so, though he had no training in journalism, and though his Hebrew was, at first, uncertain, he started to write for the Hebrew newspapers. The language of such newspapers was a manifestation of a movement called cultural Zionism. Though this would later take different forms, its basic idea was to revive Hebrew—which traditionally educated Jewish men, though rarely women, learned as a liturgical language—as a modern language. The relationship of "cultural Zionists" to "territorial Zionists," who wanted to settle in the territory of Palestine, was sharply debated, and would change over the years, but the cultural Zionists were not necessarily in sympathy with the territorialists, and often bitterly opposed them. Already in Volozhin, Tamares was attracted to pre-Herzl Zionism, particularly to modern Hebrew, and during his early years in Milejczyce, in the mid-1890s, he gravitated to this mystical ideal. His version had nothing to do with secular nationalism. It was devoted, instead, "to freedom and justice, to the struggle against enslavement and evil." There was talk of a "spiritual center" in Palestine, one that would assist the Jewish task of bringing justice to the world.

> The fire that burned within him forged its own language. His internal volcano, with its eruptions of sarcastic reproof against stupidity and evil, drew its lava from his mental warehouse of Torah: Talmudic aphorisms, Mishnaic expressions, Biblical flourishes. Those were the raw materials which he soldered into a unique style, and with which he cleared a pathway for himself into the public eye. If the force behind his writing was a volcano, then it goes without saying that the articles themselves were made of fire. Those who were of the same mind warmed themselves at the flames and glowed with pleasure. As for the others—they gnashed their teeth.

The Sensitive Rabbi often refers to his "fiery temperament" or "stormy temperament," and this temperament is colorfully revealed in his writings.

One imagines that a personality like this, ethically rigorous, thirsty for justice, keen to debate, easily offended, loathing moral turpitude, would be in danger, including in physical danger, in a city. I imagine Tamares knew this—and understood that, even if only for self-protection, he would have to cloister himself in a small place. Temptations to argue would be fewer, and he would have the time to transfigure the stimuli that bombarded him into coherent thought. Like that of many preachers, his work is full of exhortations and admonitions and harangues, and I imagine him raining down his vast arsenal of devastating metaphors—his encyclopedic knowledge of Jewish religion and literature—upon the bewildered heads of the blacksmiths and tailors and cobblers who attended the shul in sleepy Milejczyce.

Among the trees, Tamares composed most of his writings, and in them he would eventually enunciate nearly every objection that subsequent opponents of Zionism—the people in this book—would discover. The Jewish tradition contained the protests of the Orthodox and the Reform—even those of atheists. Conservatives could draw upon it—and so could liberals, radicals, and communists. As Tamares pointed out, this oceanic tradition contained nearly everything *except* political nationalism, the "territorial" or colonial option, but at the time he encountered Zionism, it had not yet consolidated into territorialism. It seemed possible to imagine a religious or cultural revival. To this, at first, he dedicated himself.

"The reading public seized upon his articles and devoured them with great anticipation," he wrote, his immodesty befitting his ambition. "There were readers who did not have the patience to wait for the postman, and ran straight to the post office to pick up the next installment."

His growing reputation earned him invitations to Zionist congresses. The first was held in Basel in 1897, after which Herzl wrote in his diary, "At Basel I founded the Jewish State." There followed annual conventions as well as more local gatherings, and the first Tamares attended was held in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1900. Tamares noted the way the attendees were dressed, contrasting "young whippersnappers with clean-shaven mugs, twirled mustaches and jaunty, self-satisfied grins" with the rabbis seated in

the front row. These young secular-looking Zionists conducted the proceedings entirely in Russian, a language many rabbis did not understand. The rabbis were intimidated, "barely breathing, lest they disturb the 'grand intellectuals' with their fancy Russian and their unfamiliar, 'elegant' words such as 'agitation,' 'propaganda,' 'party discipline,' etc."

Tamares was appalled by this insolence. The Zionists' clothing implied that the rabbis were fuddy-duddies, and though Tamares did not understand this at first, the use of a language that many attendees did not understand was similarly intended to contrast their modernity with the rabbis' backwardness. "Not a single word of Yiddish slipped out of these upstarts' mouths throughout the entire gathering, let alone any trace of ennobling Jewish thought…. Were these, then, the 'idealists' upon whom he had heaped his praise?" Tamares assumed that the police only allowed the gathering if it was held in Russian. "How astonished he was, then, at the comic conclusion on the second day. By chance, a policeman passed through the courtyard, and the entire pack of Russian-blabberers fled hatless out the back door." He realized that the gathering was illegal, and that the Zionists had chosen Russian as a way of humiliating the rabbis, "preparing to lord it over their constituents in the future Zionist state."

Zionism had the peculiarity, unique among nationalist movements, of having no colonial metropolis, no "mother country," against which to rebel. Massachusetts could rise against England, or Venezuela against Spain, or Poland against Russia, but Jews lived in dozens of countries. In some they were treated badly, but in many they were treated well: Following the American and French Revolutions, the ideas of religious freedom and equality were widely adopted, and by almost any measure the nineteenth century was the best the Jews had ever known. Until 1815, as the scholar Shlomo Avineri has observed, the Jews as a group had been mostly on the margins of European culture: "A history of Europe at that time need not contain more than a passing reference to the existence of the Jews, individually or collectively. By 1914, the intervening hundred years of emancipation had shifted Jewish life from the periphery to the center of European society." The spread of emancipation throughout most Western

countries undermined the Zionist claim that antisemitism was an inescapable feature of every society. Its persistence, mainly in the Russian Empire, seemed like a relic, soon to be swept away. Emancipation introduced troubling new questions to the Orthodox. And it left the rebels without anyone to rebel against.

In a brilliant sleight of hand, these early Zionists found an enemy in their own parents. Their idea of Zionism was modern, not because it was Jewish but because it was European. Judaism was backward; rank-and-file Zionists, the Sensitive Rabbi found, were "enamored of 'Europeanism' in general and the title 'Doctor' in particular." These people wanted to be part of the mainstream, and often felt held back: by antisemitism, to be sure, but also, and increasingly, by the tangle of rituals and prohibitions and laws that restricted even the limited mobility that mainstream society, especially in the Russian Empire, could offer. They were embarrassed by the rabbis, those shtetl relics in the front row, hardly able to understand a word of Russian. They wanted to look modern, to be modern, and were impressed by Jews who managed to be accepted by Gentiles: This was the appeal of "Herzl the European" or "Herzl the Doctor." Here was a man who rubbed shoulders with kaisers and popes. It was the stuff of fantasy for disenfranchised people in the Pale of Settlement, in forgotten corners like Milejczyce.

Part of "modernizing" was discarding religion. Zionists caricatured the fervor of students like those at Volozhin, haggling about the minutiae of Talmudic proscriptions, as the mincing convention of an exhausted scholasticism. Their otherworldly concerns were irresponsible when Jews were under attack, as they regularly had been in the Russian Empire. Clinging to tradition had left the Jews weak, pale-faced, defenseless, and the Zionists proposed, against the image of the yeshiva boy hunched over his books, a new model: the "muscle Jew," who unleashed the same aggressive nature that the study of Torah was meant to contain. The *yeshiva bokher* would be replaced by the broad-shouldered, suntanned soldier, grasping his machine gun. The Zionists would transform the Jews from a

pacifistic religious community into a warlike modern nation. Rather than redemption, they would seek power.

Instead of rebelling against the states and leaders who "strangle Jews every ten years in their own lands," as Tamares put it, the Zionists cozied up to them. Where other nationalist movements sought to overthrow imperialist powers, Zionism always sought to join them. From the beginning, when Herzl sought a sponsor, the movement had known that it would succeed only if it could find an imperial backer. The movement's champion would arrive in 1917, when Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, a promise to establish a "national home" for the Jewish people in Palestine. This was both undignified and irreligious, Tamares insisted: Judaism was "independent of land, kings, and lords." He had no doubts where this embrace of statism, militarism, and nationalism would lead: "It is completely incongruous and misleading to use the slogan 'nationalism,' inasmuch as it is the complete opposite of 'The Bible.' " The Jews were enjoined to resist the same nationalism that was threatening to swallow up the world: "Even if the ideas of 'nationalism' and 'terror' had already conquered the hearts of all the nations, even so it would be incumbent upon 'the people of the book, a nation driven and plucked,' that nation most expert in matters of justice and compassion, to withhold its assent." What was at stake was nothing less than the entire moral and spiritual legacy of the Jews. "Perhaps there was one people on earth, the Jewish people, which truly cherished the vision of Isaiah: 'Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,' " he would write, looking back, a year before he died. "But those Jews who would suddenly delight in the beauty of the 'loin of the warrior,' girded with sword, must go forth with high hand to revile the prophet Isaiah!"

Despite his unease, and though he had begun publishing some more critical articles on the subject, in 1900 Tamares was not yet ready for a full break with every form of Zionism, including cultural Zionism. A month after the conference in Vilnius, he accepted an invitation to the Fourth Zionist Congress in London. This event was big on spectacle, *The Reform Advocate* wrote, but "the Zionist movement has, up to the present, been

joined by less than a score of leading representative Jews in England." Tamares wrote little about the meeting. He noted that "the pure emptiness, bureaucracy, and officiousness which he had encountered at the Vilna conference was present to an even greater degree." But the journey to London was a dividing line in his life, and though he returned to Milejczyce disillusioned, he could not yet declare his outright opposition. He needed time to articulate exactly what it was that had so upset him. "He felt impotent and could not concentrate on anything," he later remembered.

He examined alternatives. He was attracted to socialism for its emphasis on equality. But its materialism, as well as its embrace of violence, alienated him. He rejected as childish its belief that politics could transform man. Nor did he like that socialism placed the blame on others, attempting, with its talk of class and revolution, "to relocate despotism to a new headquarters." More and more, Tamares found himself returning to the Judaic approach. Through the goodness inculcated by the study of Torah, the pious individual would, in turn, rectify all of mankind. "Who else ought to serve as the vanguard of human liberation and renewal, other than the People of Exile and Torah?" he asked.

Once he broke with Zionism, he began to worry that he had offended certain rabbis by berating them for their own opposition. Had he been wrong? No, he found when he went to a nearby city, "B." These authorities were not concerned about the problems he had identified, especially the Zionists' toleration of violence and veneration of secular power: "When it came to Herzl's dog-and-pony show—his 'audiences with royalty'—they too were quite impressed. Even here in B. they were smacking their lips over the lunches he had eaten with the Sultan in Constantinople." Their opposition amounted to an obsession with minor ritual breaches, he wrote. Yet Tamares knew that the rabbinical conflict with Zionism was neither trivial nor unprincipled. Their opposition was old and textually unassailable, and based on a profound disagreement about the identity of the Jews.

For religious people, Jewish nationhood was granted by God at Sinai. It had nothing to do with race, ethnicity, or secular nationhood, which was

connected to kings, to power, and to land. This was a completely different concept, and the reason Jewish nationhood was compatible with citizenship in non-Jewish states. Jewish religion *was* Jewish nationhood. "Our nation is only a nation through its Torah," wrote the Baghdadi rabbi Saadia Gaon in the tenth century. Though the Jews had briefly enjoyed political sovereignty, religious people believed they were exiled for their iniquities. In 70 CE, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple. The Jews scattered. Upon their exile, God imposed three oaths on the world. The Jews should not return "as a wall," which is to say by force or violence. And they should not rebel against the nations. The third oath bound the Gentiles: They were not to deal too harshly with the Jews. Any violation would bring calamity.

When modern Zionism first emerged, it was met with deep unease by most rabbis—and not solely because of doctrinal issues like the Three Oaths. The traditional authorities saw something far more grave: an attempt to redefine Judaism into a secular, nationalist identity by stripping it of its religious core. From the beginning, Zionism was aggressively secular. Its ideological antecedents were not in Judaism but in Christian eschatology and Romantic nationalism: in the very kind of chauvinism and jingoism that the Jews had forsworn. It embraced a definition of the Jews as a "race" that, the rabbis noticed, was the same definition the antisemites used. Both agreed that the Jews were foreign elements in the lands they called home. "Jews, what complaints have you against us?" Tamares imagined an antisemite complaining. "Why do you insist on residing here where, by your own Zionist admission, you are mere temporary aliens? Go on to your own country, Palestine, where you are now the dominant majority; and en route, be sure to thank us for our kindness in recognizing your 'historic rights' to the land of Israel!" Zionism substituted a vulgar national identity for a sublime religious identity. "Has our blood been shed for eighteen centuries in order to catch up with Bulgaria?" asked the great Talmudist the Hafetz Haim.

"Eighteen centuries" referred to another offense: the denial of the religious value of the Exile. The phrase *shlilat ha'galut,* "negation of the Diaspora," was popularized by Ahad Ha'Am. It came to connote a vicious

contempt for any Jewish culture outside Zionism: a view best summed up by the Israeli novelist A. B. Yehoshua, who said that any Judaism in the Diaspora was "masturbation." Even when not put in such candid terms, this was extremely offensive. It was a negation of Jewish culture, religion, history, sacrifice. It embraced many of the most vicious antisemitic clichés. There was something wrong with the Jews, who were diseased; who spoke a debased language (Yiddish); who were effeminate. Judah Leib Gordon urged them to "be a man out of doors, a Jew at home," thereby implying that Jews were not men. They must become "like unto all nations," thereby implying that they were worse than other nations. "The vocabulary of abuse in Hebrew literature—where Jews speak to one another without fear of exaggeration—is of a sort you will find only in anti-Semitic literature of the worst type," wrote Yehezkel Kaufmann, himself a Zionist, in 1936. He compiled a summary of this antisemitic abuse: "Jewish life is a 'dog's life' that evokes disgust"; "Not a nation, not a people, not human"; "Gypsies, filthy dogs, inhuman, wounded dogs"; "Parasitism, people fundamentally useless"; "Slaves, helots, the basest uncleanliness, worms, filth, parasitic rootlessness"; "a parasitic nation."

Tamares, in contrast, saw that the Exile had a positive meaning. It made Judaism a world religion rather than a local cult: This was also one of the principles of Reform Judaism. It exhorted the Jews to cling to Torah rather than to the grubbier passions engendered by kings, armies, or territories, and taught them that devotion would eventually—over the vast historical panorama that the religious mind contemplates—usher in an age of salvation.

Tamares rejected the Zionist claim that territory defined a nation. "They decided that a person should not be judged by his own merit but rather by his earthly possessions," he wrote. Our nation was not a nation through its Torah, in other words, but through its real estate. For him, this abolished the lessons of exile, which freed the Jews from the defiling pressures of politics and concentrated their energies inward: "Our testament 'to be a light unto the nations' does not place any burden of responsibility upon us to act or direct any thought toward the Gentile nations; rather this light should be

internally focused." The responsibility that the gift of the Torah had placed upon the Jews was heavy. The consequences of the failure to meet it were severe. If the Jews were to become like any other nation, "our nation will perish and our mission to the nations will die as well." Exile made life harder—"Our religion has been sculpted through persecution and exile and woven upon the same loom as our life, which has been very different from that of every other nation"—but it was also a "spiritual adornment." To negate the Exile was to destroy this adornment. "If we assume," he wrote, "that the exile is contemptible and harms the soul, what is our history worth, and what hope have we for our national future?"

Exile inculcated empathy. It "softened our hearts and planted in us feelings of compassion for, and participation in, the sufferings of others." And in the broader picture, it brought a paradoxical benefit. Nations who persecuted the Jews, who trusted in armies, came and went. The powerless Jews, sitting in the prayer hall, studying the Scriptures—trusting not in weapons but in God alone—had miraculously perdured. In one of the fulminating, expansive, incantatory sentences that make his prose so hypnotic, Tamares writes,

> Now that the bow of our might and our political arm has been broken these two thousand years, and we have already arranged our way of life in order to exist without a Jewish state; now that our people has already suffered political demise, and the soul of our people has already been privileged to shed the gross body of political pageantry and the burden of kings and officers, yet still fly about in the land of the living, even after the removal of the political body, to live the spiritual life without the gross needs of the flesh; now that our people has already been privileged to present before the world the great vision, that it is possible for a spiritual people, lacking all the material trappings of a nation, to outlive by far those people that have at their disposal material might and power: how, then, shall an eternal people such as this, purified now these two thousand years of the bodily dross, want to return and begin all over again, like those

> nations that suffer process and change, to return and again embody itself in the gross matter of "statehood," with all its politics and its host of intrigues, thereby staking its existence on a perishing entity, on dust that vanishes?

In 1905—five years after his disappointment in London and nine years before the outbreak of a world war—Tamares predicted that war's arrival in a book called *On Judaism and Liberty.* Nationalism, he warned, was preparing a "terrible feast for the whole family of humanity, a devastation the like of which has never before been seen, not even in the days of the Black Plague, a day of calamity, a 'world war' slowly but steadily approaching." He recalled the Jews to their duty to improve the world. "His belief that war was the matter that demanded the freedom fighter's most urgent attention, further strengthened his conviction that the Jewish people was called to serve as the vanguard of world liberation, for who else is more averse to war, more attuned to the horror of bloodshed, than the Jew?"

The war came.

"The ignominy of the Gentile world unfurled itself before the eyes of the Sensitive Rabbi."

In every country, the intelligentsia, "even the greatest humanitarians among them, the sentimental writers who used to lament the suffering of the poorer classes and bemoan the tragedy of life," supported the carnage. So—and here the rabbi was not entirely accurate—did the socialists. The slaughter gave Tamares more reason to believe that pacifistic Judaism had been right all along. "European culture, which had humiliated and spit upon the Jew, now took off its mask and showed its true colors—and the Jew could hold his head high again," he wrote. Still, for someone of his "stormy temperament," he was frustrated by his powerlessness. He tried to change minds around him: "Anytime he had a conversation, he found a way to point out the current fraudulence and distortion. Anytime he wrote a letter, he slipped in a few jabs at the present-day Golden Calf."

He started keeping a blacklist of Jewish public figures, especially writers, who were "carriers of the disease." Even tacit support could earn a writer a place: "As far as the Sensitive Rabbi was concerned, when a writer

uttered an expression like ‘Indeed, we are living in momentous times,’ it was enough to earn him a designation as a fool at the very least, if not a downright villain.” He knew this was nothing. He knew he couldn’t “quell his dismay about the war by means of such trifles as branding one or another writer as a carrier of the war-lackey pestilence, or throwing a barbed comment into a letter to this or that war-opportunist.”

After the war, Tamares wrote a tract, *The Assembly of Israel and the Wars of the Nations,* in which “he invested all his hopes for human redemption in the Jewish people.” He rejected the temptation to blame any one side: “as though the Allied Powers were writing tefillin while the Germans were preparing for war!!” He rejected the temptation to blame only the rulers: If people’s hearts bore no evil, calls for bloodshed would have no influence. He rejected nationalism as idolatry—“that idol known as ‘the homeland’ together with its worship known as ‘war’ ”—and rejected, too, the progressive belief in science. Nowhere had technological progress been matched by moral progress:

> Modern nations busy themselves in matters of civilization and social welfare with great hullabaloo: they sow and plant, build bridges, pave highways, manufacture, make fairs, etc. But the motivating spirit of all these activities is the lowest kind of egotism. All these occupations and activities are undertaken solely in the heated pursuit of wealth, possessions, and careers. The demon of destruction and annihilation, who oversees all these activities and structures established by his tool of gross egotism, stands behind them and completes them with an expression of mockery.

Surely, after having glimpsed the tens of millions of corpses heaped up by nationalism, including those of hundreds of thousands of Jews, the Jews would reject it—but they had not, and had indeed developed a nationalism of their own. This is why his greatest contempt was reserved for the Zionists, “who not only spoke like war-pimps, but also acted as such.” As nationalism set the world on fire, “our Zionist ‘romantics’ scrambled over to

warm themselves at the flames," he wrote. "Their beady eyes began flashing with wolfish sparks, in hopes that the time had come to manifest their lofty dream of a 'Fatherland.' " He called, now, for a pride in refusing the very things that had brought ruin to the world. The weak Jews, "driven and plucked," had proven stronger: "The pride and greatness of nations is insignificant when compared with our longevity and our marvelous history —longer than that of any other nation." The exilic vision was the hope that the Jews offered the world, the hope of a life outside—and above—political nationhood.

> Now, when European culture has broken its neck and its nakedness is revealed to all; now, when it rolls into the chasm together with all the pride and glory of territorial nations; now, when the utter devastation of the wealth and glory of nations who depend on their sovereignty and territories has become apparent; now, when the awful fraud of their spiritual and material life has been exposed; now, when their pastimes and their ideals (including their nationalism) are revealed as bankrupt…

Now of all times—when the very people whose opposition and reproach of nationalism had been proven correct—the Zionists rushed to embrace the same ideas that were laying waste to the world. Tamares denounced this folly with a typically colorful metaphor:

> In a certain country everyone was born a hunchback. Once, a straight-backed person visited this land, and seeing this deformity, thought to himself that the inhabitants of the land would see him as the perfect man. When the local population saw him, however, they keened and shared in his misery: "What a twisted individual you are. We must operate upon you and make you a hunchback."

The suggestion of deformity might not be casual. In those years, Jews were frequently portrayed as sinister, dangerous, and of abnormal

appearance: In the *Dracula*-inspired film *Nosferatu,* for example, which came out in 1922, Count Orlok, with his hooked nose, crouching lope, and long clawlike fingernails, was frequently read as a Jew. But for Tamares, the Jews were not hunchbacks. The Zionists were trying to deform them—to make them like everyone else—in the guise, ironically enough, of preventing "assimilation." Tamares loathed the word. It suggested that Jews who achieved legal emancipation lost their identity. For Tamares, the Zionists deliberately confused assimilation—becoming like everyone else—with the striving for civic equality, religious freedom, and human rights. Such equality, because it refused racial or religious distinctions, was the enemy of nationalism—and the Zionists therefore opposed it. Claiming to preserve the Jewish people, they were instead making them just like other nations, with their kings and armies and territories—a far more dangerous kind of assimilation, Tamares wrote in 1930: "Political Zionism aspires entirely to swim with the stream and be assimilated to the nations."

During the war, he saw that the Zionist leadership, especially Chaim Weizmann, schemed to turn the catastrophe to their own advantage. They were rewarded in 1917, when they secured the Balfour Declaration. "The reaction to the Balfour Declaration revealed already a long-standing self-deprecation before the territorial nations and the desire to become like unto them, a humiliating state of spirit which had hesitated to bare itself previously." After the war, Zionists continued to try to profit from it: "The self-designated Jewish delegation [went] to [the peace conference in Paris] to enter the Club and collect a share of the spoils of the bloodiest war in human history." Those who shunned the warmongers were right:

> If those at the helm of every nation taking part in this war who stoke the fire of this conflagration, who spew their poison and filth in public and then parade in the streets without the public instinctively shying away from contact with them, like the animals who avoided Cain after he did his dirty deed, why should we be deterred and ashamed?

Instead, the Zionists boasted of their closeness to these people. From a religious perspective, this was bound to bring disaster: The Jews' status as "the chosen people" had benefits, but it also had responsibilities. They had a "special capacity to befoul the ethical atmosphere more than any other nation." The Talmud leaves no doubt: "The effects of idolatry committed by heathen can be nullified, but those committed by Jews can never be nullified."

Tamares did not reject a Jewish community in Palestine—on the condition that this community not try to establish itself as a political and military state. Any Jewish culture that eschewed Judaism was worthless: "Without the study of Torah, 'Hebrew culture' is a barren wasteland, lacking all content." He drew sharp distinctions between his ideas of the Land of Israel and those of the Zionists. "The political Zionists yearn for a land upon which our kings trod, whereas our nation yearns for the land upon which our prophets trod." And traditional Jews seek not "the land where 'our fathers fought wars,' but the one where the prophets cast fire and brimstone on wars." Zionists aspire to "a land upon which our nation shall be 'a nation like all other nations'—whereas our people yearn for a land upon which our distinctiveness from all other nations shall be further emphasized."

Though a religious writer, he is also a practical thinker—and would have seen no contradiction between being religious and being practical, just as he believed that the commandments of Torah, far from being onerous, were enhancements of life. Violating the commandment that the Jew be "bashful, compassionate, and charitable" was an offense to God, and also to men: in this case, to the Palestinians. Tamares mentions that as early as 1897, a year after Herzl's *Judenstaat,* "it did not occur to anyone to ask" why the powers that persecuted the Jews "should make recompense for *their* wrongdoings by handing over foreign property, *Ottoman* land"—the land of an empire that did not persecute the Jews. He reiterated that he had never been opposed to Jews moving to Palestine as immigrants, "desirous of a peaceful place in which to work and create a life for themselves, a

place which would satisfy their romantic desire to hear echoes of the Biblical age still resounding on the mountains of Judah."

> A modest arrival of this sort would not have frightened and aroused the Arabs, and so it would have been possible gradually to establish there, in the land of our forefathers, a Hebrew settlement to the satisfaction of Jews everywhere, even though this yishuv did not dream dreams of "statehood" and "sovereignty," nor presume to dominate Jews everywhere as "teacher of all Jews in the Diaspora."

Religion was not an obligation; it was a convenience. Zionist refusal of the traditional commandments had rendered peaceful Jewish life impossible —"They entered amidst noise and shouting, with that ostentatious pride of 'occupiers' who have conquered a land and come into it to impose their dominion on the original inhabitants"—and conflict inevitable. "Relying on the strength of Balfour and drunk with pride at being near him, the Zionists hid their eyes from the fact that the actual place was not a newly-discovered, unsettled island located at the far ends of the earth, but was a place already inhabited by a people which was sure to feel the 'nationalist' and 'sovereign-political' aims as a needle in its living flesh."

Tamares saw that Zionism was not about bringing Jews to safe havens. It was about dominating "some 'uncultured' people which stole into the land and has lived there a mere 1,500 years." The point was to "subdue that 'uncultured' people now living there," and "not because Jews personally needed to emigrate, but in order to achieve a Jewish 'majority' and thereby become the 'dominant people' outnumbering the original Arab inhabitants of the land, who would then become a 'tolerated' minority." He mocked the Zionists' claims, typical of settler colonists, to be uplifting the natives. "For in all the thousand years it has dwelt in Palestine, this uncultured people has failed to build a single railway or electric station," he said. "So ill, in fact, was this savage people, that despite all these centuries breathing the air of Israel which makes men wise, it had not even invented the steam engine or electricity before these were dreamt of in Europe!"

Under British rule, Palestine was transformed from a land where sectarian violence was nearly unknown into one where race riots erupted regularly. The British Zionist Sir Herbert Samuel, who became high commissioner in Palestine in 1920, created the conditions for the settlers to flourish. The Palestinians saw that the British sided with the Jews, even blaming them for events such as the Jaffa riots of 1921, which originated as a fight between two Jewish groups, then inflamed Arab nationalist grievances, and ended up with brutal British repression of Palestinians. Throughout the 1920s, the situation grew worse, especially in Jerusalem, and especially due to the situation around the Western Wall. Believed to be the last remnant of the Temple—though the archaeology is highly contested—the wall is known to Jews as the Kotel and to Muslims as the Buraq Wall, after the winged creature, the Buraq, that bore the Prophet to heaven. Muhammad tethered the creature here, at the edge of the sacred enclosure, or *haram,* that surrounds the Temple Mount—along with the *harams* of Mecca and Medina, one of the three holiest sites in Islam. It was long administered as a *waqf,* or Islamic foundation. Under Muslim rule, Jews were allowed to pray there in accordance with the complex regulations that governed all the holy sites, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish, and until the advent of Zionism these arrangements, scrupulously enforced, sometimes caused friction but rarely erupted into sustained religious violence. The rules bound Muslims and Christians as well as Jews, and included such prohibitions as the use of certain musical instruments, the slaughtering of animals, and the disruption of Islamic prayers. They also forbade Jews to build permanent structures in front of the wall, and it was this prohibition that the Zionists, irreligious as they were, constantly tested.

In 1927, Yosef Hecht, a Haganah commander involved in the murder of the Dutch poet and former Zionist Jacob Israël de Haan, blew up the house of a sheikh in the Moroccan neighborhood, just in front of the wall. In 1928, fully aware that this action was illegal, Zionists erected a *mechitza,* a partition separating male and female worshippers, on Yom Kippur. The Muslims understood this to be an aggressive act: claiming the wall, and by implication the sacred enclosure itself. This was not an Arab fantasy, since

the Zionists frequently stated this ambition. A subsequent British Royal Commission investigation confirmed that the Muslims were alarmed by something more grave than a canvas partition: The Jewish settlers were seen "not only as a menace to their livelihood but a possible overlord of the future." The root cause of Arab hostility, according to the report, was "the disappointment of their political and national aspirations and fear for their economic future." This hostility was primarily due to the Balfour Declaration; to the orientation of the British mandate under the Zionist high commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel; and to the attitude of the new immigrants, mainly from Eastern Europe, who had started arriving in the country with precisely the "noise and shouting" that Tamares decried.

The policemen sent to remove the *mechitza* were attacked by Zionists. The British investigation confirmed that the Muslim endowment was, in fact, the lawful owner, but the Zionists were not discouraged, and the next August, following increasing agitation, Zionists began holding demonstrations. Rumors spread among the Muslim population that the Jews had cursed the name of the Prophet, and the situation quickly degenerated to the point that riots, and then even violent attacks on people and property, broke out across the country. By a perverse irony, the communities most affected, especially in Safed and Hebron, were Palestinian Jews, which is to say indigenous Jews. Most had been perfectly integrated into Palestinian life before the advent of foreign Zionists and were Arabic speakers. Many, too, were fiercely opposed to Zionism. And it was they who became the victims of the crumbling relations between Jews and Arab rioters who did not distinguish between Zionists and non-Zionists, though by some accounts the rioters focused on Zionist houses rather than those of Palestinian Jews. Many Jews were sheltered and saved by Palestinian Arab neighbors and friends, but dozens of Jews were killed in Hebron. The community was ultimately disbanded, bused out of their hometown by the British, making them the first, but certainly not the last, Arab Jewish community destroyed in the age of Zionism.

Even from the distance of Milejczyce, Tamares saw what was happening. In his final work, *Three Unsuitable Unions,* published the year

after the rioting in Palestine, he blamed the Zionists for scheming to profit from the blood spilled in World War I: “There has been no confession of guilt, not even this admission: we are responsible for the terrible catastrophe which has just befallen the Jews in the land of Israel.” Jews had always believed that the embrace of armed struggle would be punished. Religious people were not astonished by the fate of the Zionist poet Yosef Haim Brenner, killed in the Jaffa riots of 1921. He wrote, “Hear, O Israel! Not an eye for an eye. Two eyes for one eye, all their teeth for every humiliation!” To any pious Jew, this was above all a sacrilegious disparagement of a most sacred prayer, and punishment would be swift and decisive. But neither the riots of 1921 nor the massacres of 1929 moved the Zionists to repent. They did not say “it was we who incited our people to do this; it was we who taught Israel to go in the ways of the nations and commit even the most heinous of sins, the shedding of blood,” Tamares wrote. Instead, the Zionists demanded British “help in putting the Arabs in stocks.”

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A year or so after the publication of this book, the Sensitive Rabbi fell ill. He was taken to Warsaw, where, “with expressions of concern for the oppressed poor for whom ‘nobody is concerned’ on his lips,” he died, aged sixty-two, in the arms of a friend. It is sad that he had to die far from his forest, in the kind of big city he had spent his life avoiding, and sad, too, that the Jewish Telegraphic Agency announced the event under the headline “Death of Polish Rabbi Who Was Champion of Zionism.” In 1931, the catastrophe that would destroy thousands of Jewish communities in places like Milejczyce was undreamed of; his wife, Rachel, and two of his daughters, Miriam and Zirka, remained in Milejczyce. They were deported to Treblinka, where they were murdered on November 20, 1942. His other four children, Rivkah, Shlomo, David, and Hannah, immigrated to Palestine before the war.

Tamares gives us such a ringing sense of his own personality that the reader is curious about aspects of his life beyond the religious and philosophical, including his family. He writes almost nothing about it. From a brief article about his daughter Rivkah Perelis, who became a historian in the Israeli state, we learn that she joined a Zionist youth movement in 1926, when she was just thirteen. She did not emigrate until 1938, by which point her father was dead and the situation for Polish Jews had degenerated dramatically. He was alive when she joined He'chalutz Ha'tsair, the Young Pioneers. What did he think of this? She wrote that his ethical personality was the dominant influence in her life.

Four years after she joined, after the riots of 1929, when her father wrote *Three Unsuitable Unions,* his position had, if anything, hardened. Zionism grew steadily more militaristic over the thirty years in which he wrote about the subject. It introduced terrorism and colonial riots into the land of Palestine; the Iron Wall won out over the spiritual center. Tamares expressed admiration for the young people—including, we assume, friends and associates of his own children—engaged in peaceful work in Palestine. He also felt, perhaps naively, that they were being manipulated by the professional propagandists in London: "their masters and manipulators in Russell Street [where the Zionist headquarters were located], who misuse the bodily toil of our young halutzim [pioneers] for their own political purposes."

These polemicists did not honor peaceful work. Instead, they exploited and exaggerated it: "millions of Jewish parasites among the nations (according to the testimony of the Zionist leaders themselves), and a handful of stonebreakers in the land of Israel, whose every blow of the hammer is heard around the world, and whose praise passes all boundaries —as though no other people in the world had ever managed to build a road!" By 1930, Tamares had abandoned certain ideas, including the "spiritual center," with which he previously sympathized: "If Judaism is truly Torah, then it cannot be reduced to the confines of any particular territory. For as scripture said of Torah: 'Its measure is greater than the earth.' "

It is unlikely that his views would have changed if he had known the fate of his wife and daughters. He would have been happy to know that some of his children had escaped. Would it have mattered if they had escaped to the United States or to Argentina rather than to Palestine? From a religious perspective, or at least in the view of many Orthodox rabbis, the Holocaust offered no innovation. It was not the first time, after all, that Jews had contended with violence, which traditional thinkers saw as part of the divine order. Persecution had been a reality since Exodus. The answer was consistent through the centuries: God dispatched persecutors to punish the failure to uphold the commandments. Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman, a disciple of the Hafetz Haim who was himself killed by the Nazis, saw these horrors as a direct consequence of the Zionists' attempt to banish God from the hearts of the children of Israel, and the violation of the oaths—the attempt to retake the Holy Land by force—caused Jewish blood to flow as freely as "the blood of the deer and the antelope." That Wasserman himself had nothing to do with Zionism was immaterial, for the Talmud warns, "Once permission has been granted to the Destroyer, he does not distinguish between righteous and wicked."

Would the Sensitive Rabbi have responded with Wasserman's stoicism? From the time he learned of the death of his neighbor's son, he had seen the consequences of militarism and nationalism. But beneath his engagement was a fundamentally different view of history. Like most materialists, including socialists, Zionists saw history as politics—a story of states and rulers, of empires rising and falling: the Greco-Roman view, and also the secular view. It explains why Zionists, like socialists, can ask a secular question—What can be done for the powerless Jews?—and propose a secular answer: Create a powerful state.

The Judaic view of history is a religious view, and as such indifferent to politics. "No fundamentally new conception of history had to be forged in order to accommodate Rome, nor, for that matter, any of the other world empires that would arise subsequently," wrote the historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. To a religious mind, the reasons why empires rise and fall were so fully comprehended as to be of no interest whatsoever. Judaic history

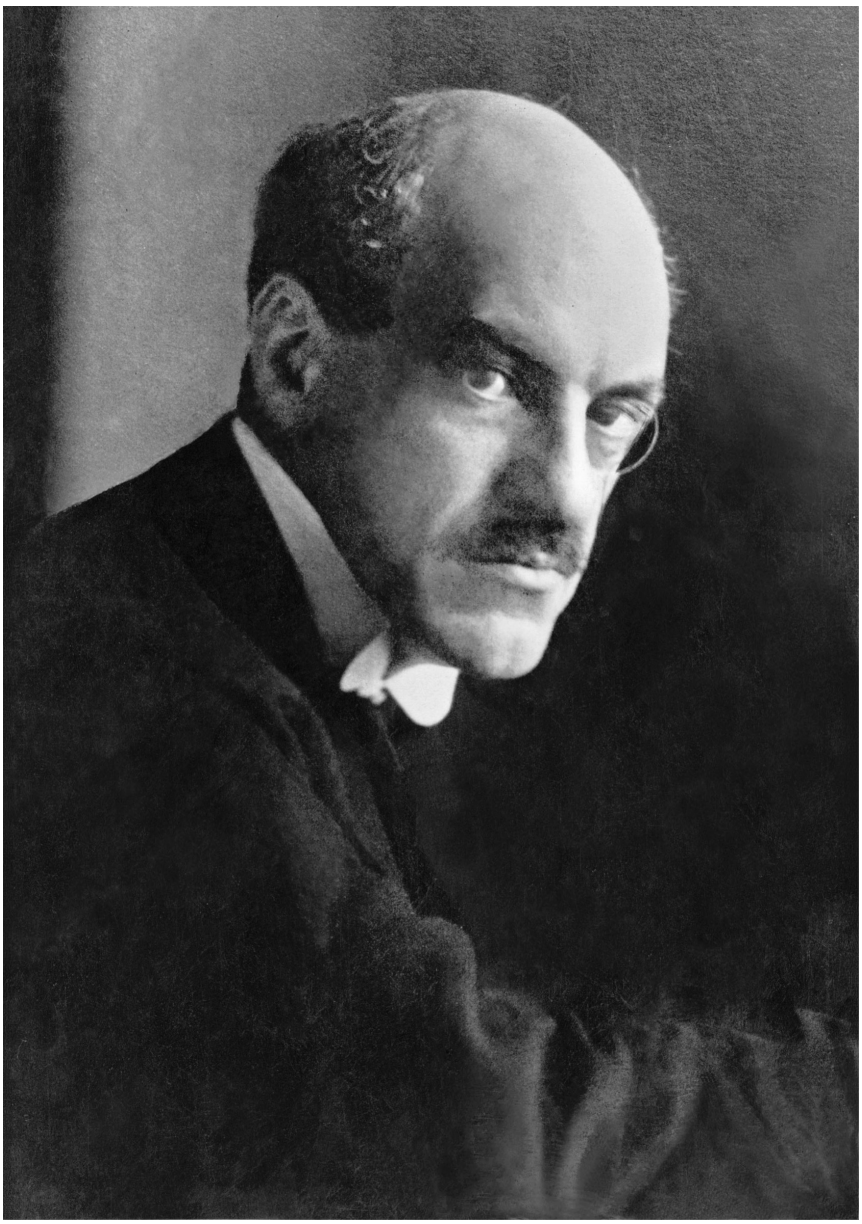
emphasizes moral conclusions, not the minutiae of processes, and sees the consequences of the defiance of "a stiff-necked people." The biblical epithet recurs because the Jews repeatedly stray, and because God just as repeatedly rebukes them. Judaism emphasizes that history is about *why* things happen—a moral lesson—and not about *what,* specifically, happened. If it is known that disasters are brought on by insubordination and sin, the specific character of the disaster becomes almost irrelevant.

Nazi Germany, then, was just another godless empire. It rose; it fell. Its bloody career added nothing to the lessons derived from previous catastrophes. Like those, it was a call for the Jews to repent. They defied this message, and for religious people the result was foreordained: "Wickedness and folly have exploded, a flood of fire consumes, and nations and kingdoms go forth to the blaze." The Jewish cemetery of Milejczyce was looted. The gravestones, including that of Aaron Samuel Tamares, were used to pave the streets.

2

A FIGHT IN THE COUSINHOOD

Edwin Montagu



On November 2, 1917, a brief letter was dispatched by the British foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jews. That letter, known as the Balfour Declaration, was the same that Aaron Samuel Tamares had denounced as a Zionist attempt to profit from the carnage of the world war. It contained one of the most fateful sentences in modern history:

> His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

In this text, a government, that of Britain, was promising the establishment of a national home for a foreign group in a territory that was under the sovereignty of another regime, the Ottoman Empire, and that belonged to a section of the Ottoman citizenry, its long-standing inhabitants, the Palestinian Arabs—Muslim, Christian, and Jewish. In that country, Jews represented at the time a sliver, 9 percent, of the population. This was an increase, driven by the immigration of Eastern European colonists, from 6 percent in 1900, and around 3 percent a generation before that. Yet it was not to the Palestinian Jews, who for centuries had lived in peace with their Muslim and Christian neighbors, that the land was promised. For the most part, these indigenous Jews were suspicious of the foreign settlers who had begun to arrive a few years before. The "national home" was promised, instead, to the Zionist movement to whom the letter was addressed. "I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation," Balfour concluded.

Why this entire country should be promised to a rather minor political movement is one of the mysteries of modern history. The Zionists

represented almost nobody, and did not have so much as an office: The Zionist Federation was run out of people's apartments. Nahum Sokolow, who worked with Chaim Weizmann, the head of British Zionism, lived in a tiny hotel room, where he kept the archives of the movement underneath his bed. In 1916, the total amount that English Jews contributed to Zionist funds was around £500. Even in 1917, the year of the Balfour Declaration, all Zionist groups in England had no more than four thousand members. And few Jews, in England or anywhere else, especially wanted to live in the "national home," although such immigration was at no time prohibited. Jews immigrated to almost every country. Most headed for the United States. Large numbers went to other countries in the Americas, Western Europe, South Africa, Australia: everywhere but Palestine.

Though it might have seemed far-fetched or absurd, the Balfour Declaration immediately alarmed the roughly 95 percent of the Palestinian population that rejected Zionism. They knew that numbers made no difference. The British were a tiny percentage of the residents of India, after all, and even in Algeria, the largest settler colony in the Muslim world, the foreign population never exceeded 15 percent. In the nineteenth century, almost all the non-white world had fallen under European rule. The Palestinians had reason to be skeptical of anticolonial rhetoric in the mouths of the colonial powers—Britain, France, Russia, and, eventually, the United States—that claimed to be fighting a war for universal freedom, as when, a few weeks after the Balfour Declaration, Woodrow Wilson announced his "Fourteen Points." These were the political and moral principles for which, he claimed, the United States had entered the war. The twelfth was "an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development" for all non-Turkish peoples under Turkish rule.

This point would not be respected. Still, after a war fought for the right to self-determination, it was felt that mere conquest was not enough to justify the takeover of new territories. Instead, the League of Nations, founded after the war, issued "mandates" to "administer" non-white countries. As the Palestinians knew, victory meant freedom for European peoples under Austrian and Ottoman rule. In the Arab parts of the Ottoman

Empire, whose populations were not consulted, the end of the war meant new masters. France assigned itself Syria and Lebanon; Britain took Jordan, Iraq, and Palestine. As part of the mandates, these countries were promised eventual independence—all except Palestine, which the Balfour Declaration had pledged to the Zionists. That pledge was incorporated into the mandate, which elevated it to the level of international law—although, as Palestinians pointed out time and again, it violated key elements of the League of Nations covenant. As Tamares had noted as far away as Poland, the immediate consequence was to spark the first mass intercommunal violence in Palestine: the first stirrings of a conflict that, still today, rages unabated.

That conflict might never have started—that fateful sentence might never have been written—if a family feud had turned out differently. From the beginning, Zionism had caused rifts within Jewish families, and this one was different only because the family involved was so wealthy and influential.

The Montagu-Samuel clan were the descendants of a Liverpool watchmaker. They had grown rich through a bank founded by a financial genius named Samuel Montagu, ennobled as Baron Swaythling. Alongside the families to which they were allied by blood and marriage, including the Rothschilds and the Montefiores, the Montagus and Samuels made up the Anglo-Jewish aristocracy, the "Cousinhood." The Cousinhood symbolized what Jews could achieve in nations where they were fully emancipated. This emancipation came later to Britain than it did to other Western countries, including the United States and France; the British Jews did not achieve full legal equality until 1858, when at last they were admitted into Parliament. The Cousinhood were keenly aware of their symbolic role: for their admirers, including the masses of poor Jews, as well as for their enemies, who saw their affluence as well as their tightly knit society—for generations, they had intermarried, worshipped, socialized, and done business together—as a sinister sign of Jewish conspiracy.

This solidarity was about to crack. The drama that unfolded in the Montagu-Samuel family mirrored the schism Zionism caused among the Jewish citizens of the leading imperial power of the day. The protagonists

were Herbert Samuel, son of Lord Swaythling's brother, and Edwin Montagu, Lord Swaythling's son. Though cousins, they had, in a sense, the same father, since Herbert's father died when he was six, and Lord Swaythling became his guardian. Both Herbert and Edwin would revolt against the religious orthodoxy in which they had been raised; both entered politics and rose through the Liberal Party. Yet that is where the similarities end, and pictures show the contrast: Herbert, with his neat mustache, full head of hair, and unrumpled forehead exudes placid contentment; Edwin, nine years younger, is balding, with pockmarked skin and bags under his eyes, looking more like a brooding *poète maudit* than a minister of state. Herbert looks like someone who limited himself to a single glass of wine, promptly lost every pound he gained, and went to bed on time. Herbert would die at ninety-two, Edwin at just forty-five.

Both had an idealistic streak. Herbert, who was elected to Parliament at the age of thirty-two, advocated classical Liberal Party positions: social reform, religious equality, deepening democratic freedoms. He worked to protect children from drunken parents and from being forced into prostitution and imprisoned in workhouses. He was generous to immigrants at a time of nativist agitation and dedicated to the abolition of the hereditary peerage that underpinned the House of Lords—though later, and in retrospect inevitably, he would join the House of Lords as a hereditary peer. In Parliament, he gained a reputation for being a hard worker with a methodical mind, characterized by a debate in 1912:

> AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN: The moment the British tobacco tax is reduced the Irish additional tax exceeds the limits provided by this Bill. (Hon. Members: "No.")
>
> HERBERT SAMUEL: That is provided against.
>
> CHAMBERLAIN: How?
>
> SAMUEL: It is in the Bill.
>
> CHAMBERLAIN: Where?
>
> SAMUEL: Page 13, line 28 [Clause 17, Subsection (3) (b)].
>
> CHAMBERLAIN: I admit I had overlooked that provision.

In 1909, Herbert Samuel became the first practicing Jew in any British cabinet. This was a cause of jubilation for the Anglo-Jewish community. But as the above anecdote suggests, he was more respected than loved: The adjective "grandmotherly" attached to his name. Throughout his career, he espoused causes that seemed prissy and puritanical even by the standards of the time. He opposed the right of women to vote and jailed suffrage activists. He was keen to maintain the distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. His notions of decency led him to advocate theatrical censorship. And his lifelong repulsion for homosexuality led him to execute Sir Roger Casement, a celebrated Irish human rights activist with whom he had once worked to combat the Belgian genocide in Congo. At that time, he praised him as "a gentleman of the highest standing and reliability," but when Casement was arrested in 1916 for enlisting German help in the cause of Irish independence, Herbert, as home secretary, had to decide whether to execute him. Despite worldwide protests, he ordered Casement hanged. He confided to his wife that his mind was put at ease by learning that Casement was gay: "Had Casement not been a man of atrocious moral character, the situation would have been even more difficult."

Herbert Samuel was a recognizable type: the privileged, self-confident man who genuinely believed himself to be progressive. Though not the kind of ogre who would ever speak disrespectfully of women, he was unconvinced that they should be full citizens. Though a believer in democracy, he thought that an elite should determine which art the public should be allowed to see. Though not a scrooge, he believed that philanthropy must determine which poor people deserved help. Though naturally too refined to mention sex, he had firm opinions about other people's private lives. And though never an outright racist, he believed in Britain's duty to an enlightened imperialism at a time when support for imperialism was far from unanimous. "The progressive party," he declared in 1899, "must not close its doors upon the man who believes in the high calling of this country amongst the nations & who, nevertheless, is not a Jingo. The party must, therefore, have a policy of rational patriotism."

Those who opposed this "high calling" noted that at a time when the sun never set on the British Empire, Britain itself was threadbare. Around the turn of the twentieth century, roughly a third of the British population lived beneath the poverty line, and at that time, when Britain was fighting the second of the Boer Wars for control of the South African goldfields, the state of public health was such that even when the British army lowered fitness standards to a minimum not seen since Waterloo, it still had difficulties finding enough healthy men. Many working-class people, including the backbone of Liberal Party voters, saw the connection between their deprivation and the expense of these colonial wars—the same wars in which their sons had no choice but to fight and die.

Herbert Samuel was a "Liberal Imperialist"—not, he told his constituents in 1894, a "Little Englander," someone who believed that Britain should tend only to its own niggling concerns. Though he denounced the atrocities that the civilizing mission might occasionally bring—particularly when those atrocities were committed by rival colonial powers, as in the case of the Belgian Congo—he also saw no contradiction between imperialism and liberalism. And rather than seeing the connection between imperialism and poverty, he saw the opposite: "The Empire created the wealth that made domestic social reform possible while at the same time uplifting the indigenous populations in the colonies." A contemporary critic found his posturing ridiculous: "His defence of imperialism, in which he makes England the sole arbiter of what is or is not good for other nations who are supposed to be weak, is of the most blatant and irresponsible kind."

In 1902, Samuel visited Uganda, where he traveled along a British-built railway that offered him the opportunity to marvel at "the antithesis between civilization and barbarism." The annexation of Uganda would result in "the elevation of the morals and the development of the intelligence of its remarkable people," he wrote. He sincerely liked the Ugandans, and sincerely wanted to uplift them: "It appeared to him to be a monstrous doctrine that the duties of this country were limited solely to the people of this country, and that because a man's skin was black you should not help him." In his attacks on the Belgian Congo, one report wrote, "he

was not one of those short-sighted philanthropists who thought that the natives must be treated in all respects on equal terms with white men. In the speeches he had made on behalf of the negro population of Africa he had never put forward such excessive claims."

"He says exactly the right word in exactly the right accent," wrote one journalist—mockingly. Beneath his correct accent were attitudes often expressed in less refined terms. In a controversy about Chinese laborers in South Africa, for example, he said he "had no wish to use hard words concerning the Chinese nation as a whole…. But the class of Chinamen who were accustomed to emigrate were in the main a degraded people. They were vicious, immoral and unclean." Locking them into compounds without women would encourage—well, you know: "He did not wish to dwell on a distasteful subject, but he asked the House to imagine what would be the effect of that vast body of men living together, and belonging to a race admittedly immoral." As a matter of fact, it was too bad that South Africa had an indigenous population: "Who could doubt that South Africa would have been a cleaner and happier place if the Kaffirs had never been there. But the Kaffirs were there; and they must naturally take their place in the economic system; and he was not, of course, going on the assumption that the blacks could be removed. But the helot system was always an evil system, and they wished as far as they could to work away from it, and to make Transvaal as far as possible a homogenous white country."

Samuel's just-the-facts delivery earned him a reputation as frigid. In H. G. Wells's novel *The New Machiavelli,* he appears as "a brilliant representative of his race, able, industrious, and inevitably uninspired." In many descriptions, the word "passion" appears, negatively. "His nature is a temperate zone in which there are no extremes of ice or fire," a journalist wrote in 1950. "He is not moved, nor does he attempt to move others, by the impetus of passion." Another said he was "as free from passion as an oyster." Even his generally sympathetic biographer, Bernard Wasserstein, described him as "singularly passionless."

But if Samuel put people off by his lack of passion, his cousin Edwin Montagu put people off by the opposite. Outspoken, not always able to stay

on the right side of the line that divides candor from tactlessness, Montagu displayed a determination to speak his mind that would make him powerful enemies, end his career, and contribute to his early death, and his affair with the prime minister's mistress brought down the government in the middle of a world war.

From the beginning, Edwin was unable to live up to the expectations his lordly father imposed. Born in a mansion in Kensington Park Gardens, then known as Millionaires' Row, he seemed to have everything: "Yet from his earliest days he was an insecure, overly sensitive child, shy, frail, morbid, fearful of the dark, endlessly worrying about his health and desiring constant affection and attention." After his first miserable year at boarding school, his parents dispatched him on a cruise around the world that they hoped would cure what ailed him. Accompanied by a tutor who made sure he rested on the Sabbath and ate only kosher food, Montagu visited Palestine, crossed the United States, and had his bar mitzvah in Australia. Back at school, he continued to be miserable until enrolling at Trinity College, Cambridge. He loved Cambridge. There, like Herbert, he broke from Jewish observance, occasioning a heated exchange with his father. "Nothing can reconcile me to the casting off of religious observance by any of my children," Lord Swaythling wrote. "If you are in such a haste to kick over what it has taken thousands of years of sacrifice and self-restraint to maintain, it would be hopeless to think of your returning." Edwin replied that his beliefs were nobody's business but his. "By race I am an Englishman and my interests are mainly in England but I will never forget that I am a 'Jew' and the son of a Jew and I will always be a good Jew according to my sights, my description of a good Jew differing from yours."

He nevertheless acquiesced, as Herbert had done, to observing the Sabbath when at home, and to spending important holidays with his family. This did not assuage his father. When Edwin decided against a career in medicine and determined to enter politics, his father was again incensed, and one of the richest men in England forced his son to live on the edge of poverty until shortly before Edwin joined the cabinet.

Like Herbert, Edwin rose quickly. From his first speech, as an undergraduate, when he advocated abolishing the monarchy, he consistently opposed hereditary privilege, discrimination, and racism. He was an architect of the great welfare reforms commenced by Herbert Henry Asquith, the Liberal prime minister from 1908 to 1916. When the Liberal landslide of 1906 created the first middle-class Parliament in history—for the first time, a majority of members worked for a living—Asquith appointed Edwin, only twenty-seven, one of his private secretaries. He became practically "a member of the Asquith family, spending more time with them than with most of his other friends and certainly more time than he spent with his own family—a fact that chagrined his parents, particularly his father."

Unlike the saturnine Edwin, Asquith was publicly cheerful and kept his demons stowed carefully away, but he was a heavy drinker, and enjoyed relaxing in the company of glamorous younger women. In 1909, the prime minister's eye fell on the twenty-year-old Venetia Stanley, the daughter of the fourth Baron Sheffield and Stanley of Alderley, renowned for her wit and for the eccentricity for which her family, too, was noted: One of her uncles became a Muslim and married a Spanish woman who was still married to another man; another uncle became a Roman Catholic bishop. Though she was not a beauty, and though she "had the reputation of rendering even the most virile man impotent," Venetia fascinated some of the most prominent men in Britain, and when, through his daughter Violet, she met the prime minister, three times her age, he was besotted. As fate would have it, around the same time, Edwin became besotted with her too.

The consequences were not immediately apparent. Britain under Asquith seemed to be making strides. So was Edwin: In 1909, Asquith appointed him undersecretary of state for India, and after Edwin visited India in 1912 —"the single most thrilling experience" of his life—he gained another passion. The diary of his journey through the subcontinent is a broadside against British racism and snobbery. And the experience led him, though a colonial administrator, to a different idea of India's future: a democratic, self-governing territory inside the British Empire. This was the formula

applied in the "white dominions," Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand. But it was fiercely opposed, on racial grounds, for India. There, public opinion did not matter, police brutality was rife, and, he said, the British were moving "nationalities about and…individuals about as though they were automatons." This was what brought disaster to Ireland and South Africa and what, before too long, would bring the same to India and Palestine.

When war broke out in 1914, the reformist mood of the first years of Asquith's government was swept away.

Among the unexpected consequences of the war was the prime minister's deepening dependence on Venetia Stanley. He wrote her up to three letters a day—including wildly indiscreet missives, dispatched by regular mail, in which the prime minister aired his views on top-secret questions of national security. That he expressed himself in this way to a woman who had all the worst characteristics of the British aristocracy—its flaky self-absorption, its performative laziness, its disdain for the consequences of its actions—made this still more astonishing. Later historians have been at pains to locate the charms that made her so intoxicating: The prime minister's fascination with her more resembled a chemical dependence than a conventional affair. His passion would be called "terrifying," "reckless," "deranged." Just as all addictions are aggravated by stress, so, under the pressure of leading his nation through the worst war in a century, was his.

Unbeknownst to him, Asquith had a rival: Edwin Montagu. When he became aware of Edwin's interest in Venetia, Asquith did not take it seriously. He saw only that Edwin was physically unattractive—"not a *man,*" he wrote, "a bundle of moods & nerves & symptoms"—and not how appealing he was in other areas. He was kind and generous; cultured and sophisticated; a rising star in politics; and, since Lord Swaythling's death in 1911, rich. As Asquith's son Raymond said, "If a man has both private means and private parts (especially if both are large) he is a convenience to a woman." Convenient he might have been, but Venetia did not love Edwin, and told him so. But she agreed to marry him under specific terms. She

demanded the right to extraconjugal caprices, and he asked her to convert to Judaism: His father's will had strict provisions that any child who married outside the faith would forfeit his or her share of the family fortune. "I never think of myself as [a Jew]," he wrote to Venetia. "It's a thought which does not intrude. You won't find it will. But all I ask is that when we are attacked or scorned, that you regard yourself as one of us by adoption, that you have thrown in your lot with us, and that honestly is the only time I find one ever thinks about it at all. If people never thought of us as Jews, Jews like myself would forget all about it." She agreed, but said, "I don't want to deceive you about my intentions. It is not whether I am right or wrong to change my label, but whether I am changing it enough, I can't do it more. I shall *never* think of myself as a Jew any more than I think of you as one." Her family censured her for "turning Jewish for the sake of £8000 a year!"

The engagement, in April 1915, shocked the prime minister. He was devastated to the point of contemplating suicide. "When your first letter came today," Asquith wrote after hearing the news, "if I had had a pistol at hand, I should without hesitation have blown out my brains." It was, he wrote later, "the most tragic fortnight of my life." He grew distracted, depressed, appearing to colleagues as "a shattered man," and only a few weeks after the announcement he stunned the nation by saying that he would enter a coalition with the Tories, his hated rivals. Like the war effort, this unnatural coalition stumbled, and by the end of 1916, Asquith was replaced by David Lloyd George. This was the entirely unpredictable set of circumstances that set the stage for the Balfour Declaration.

The transfer of power did not mean that a friend of the Jews replaced an enemy. Both Asquith and Lloyd George shared ideas about the Jews prevalent among the British ruling class. In an age when such statements were vastly more common, both were given to utterances that would now be considered antisemitic. These did not, however, translate into actions against Jews—in an age when those, too, were vastly more common. Asquith and Lloyd George occupied the left end of the political spectrum, and in the case of Lloyd George it was philosemitism that led to his most alarming pronouncements. "I was taught far more history about the Jews

than about the history of my own people," he said. Like many Christian Zionists, he had a mystical image of the ancient Hebrews that had little bearing on the actual lives of British Jews, who for the most part were poor people crowded into London's East End, and whom he generally disliked. He believed common conspiracy theories that likewise had little connection to reality, including that the Jews were the secret string-pullers of history. This led him to fear them, but, as Avi Shlaim has written, "the Jews were helpless, with nothing to offer—having no influence other than that generated by the myth of clandestine power." Then as now, Zionism would have gone nowhere without the appeal to this covert mythology.

Neither would it have advanced without an unexpected ally. Herbert Samuel, that grandmotherly stick-in-the-mud, nursed a secret passion. The question of how and why this passion arose is something of a mystery, all the stranger because it would be so consequential for the world. Perhaps, as for many Jews who had fallen away from religion, Zionism offered him a modern, secular replacement for that identity. That this ideology could so easily be married to British imperialism—"the high calling of this country amongst the nations"—made it all the more irresistible. Samuel seems to have embraced Zionism as early as 1900, only four years after Herzl published *Der Judenstaat,* but he kept this interest private because, he said, "the prospects of any practical outcome had seemed so remote." The war improved those prospects. In October 1914, when it allied with Britain's enemies, the Ottoman Empire made a decision that proved fatal to itself and to millions of its subjects. The foreign secretary, Edward Grey, responded by renouncing the traditional British stance in favor of preserving the Ottoman Empire. Turkey was "the sick man of Europe"—it is uncertain whether it was sicker than other fractious polities, such as Germany, Russia, and Austria—and Britain and France had long coveted its territories. With Turkey siding with Germany, Herbert saw his chance. He spoke with Grey about founding a Jewish settler colony in Palestine, in the heart of Turkey's Arab provinces. "British influence ought to play a considerable part in the formation of such a state," he said, choosing his words carefully, "because the geographical situation of Palestine, and especially its proximity to

Egypt, would render its goodwill to England a matter of importance to the British empire." The foreign minister expressed the same kind of "sentimental" attachment to the idea that other Christian Zionists displayed. Lloyd George was "astonished to find that cold and dry person suddenly kindled."

In December, Herbert met Chaim Weizmann, the Polish-born leader of the small band of British Zionists. Weizmann was not eager to meet him, expecting yet another anti-Zionist aristocrat of the kind that Herzl had envied and loathed. He began gingerly, sounding out his interlocutor: "If the Jews had at present a place where they formed the important part of the population, and led a life of their own, however small this place might be, something like Monaco, with a University instead of a gambling hall…" Herbert startled him with a far more sweeping vision. "He suggested that the Jews would have to build Railways, harbours, a University, a network of Schools. Etc.," Weizmann wrote. "The University seems to make a special appeal to him. He hopes that great things may be forthcoming from a seat of learning, where the Jews can work freely on a free soil of their own. He also thinks that perhaps the Temple may be rebuilt, as a symbol of Jewish unity, of course, in a modernised form." This science-fiction flourish sounded remarkably like Herzl's *Altneuland*.

It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Weizmann played on British ideas of secret Jewish power, including of the influence that, he hinted, the Jews enjoyed in Russia and America. This was the same basically antisemitic appeal to which the Zionist lobby resorts to this day, the insinuation that a small group of people enjoy such vast influence that they cannot be opposed in any particular. Weizmann suggested the dangers of allowing Palestine to fall into the hands of the French. And he appealed to imperialists by assuring that the state would serve, as Herzl had envisioned, as an outpost of "civilization." From the beginning of World War I, Herbert Samuel funneled these ideas, which he seems sincerely to have believed, into the highest levels of the government. Already in 1914, he acknowledged that the Jews were a tiny minority in Palestine, incapable of taking over the country by themselves. Instead, he proposed "the

annexation of the country to the British Empire," after which "Jewish immigration, carefully regulated, would be given preference so that in the course of time the Jewish people, grown into a majority and settled in the land, may be conceded such degree of self-government as the conditions of that day may justify." The cabinet members to whom this memorandum was addressed were amazed at "this almost lyrical outburst proceeding from the well-ordered and methodical brain of H.S.," as Asquith put it. This idée fixe soon became so much of an inside joke that Edwin could allude to it in a note to Lloyd George:

> As the desert sand for rain,
> As the Londoner for sun,
> As the poor for potatoes,
> As the landlord for rent,
> As Drosera rotundifolia for a fly,
> As Herbert Samuel for Palestine,
> As a woman in Waterloo Road for a soldier,
> I long for a talk with you.

To Venetia, Asquith wrote,

> I think I told you that H. Samuel had written an almost dithyrambic memorandum urging that in the carving up of the Turks' Asiatic dominions, we should take Palestine, into which the scattered Jews cd, in time swarm back from all quarters of the globe, and in due course obtain Home Rule. (What an attractive community!) Curiously enough, the only other partisan of this proposal is Lloyd George, who, I need not say, does not care a damn for the Jews or their past or their future, but who thinks it would be an outrage to let the Christian Holy Places…pass into the possession or under the protectorate of "Agnostic Atheistic France"!

Thus, amid a world war, Zionism—the concern of a small minority among a small minority—entered the agenda of the highest levels of government. Yet Herbert Samuel, home secretary through most of 1916, would not be in the cabinet during the crucial year of 1917. When Asquith's government fell in December 1916, he lost his job. Edwin Montagu had been offered the position of secretary of state for Ireland, which he refused: He did not want to be responsible for the bloodshed that inevitably attached to Britain's attempts to repress Ireland; for the cruel and pointless tactics, like Herbert's hanging of Roger Casement. Instead, in July 1917, he became secretary of state for India, which made him the only Jew in the cabinet in the months when the Balfour Declaration was adopted—though he would not be in the cabinet during most of the internal debate over the declaration.

His views on Zionism would be heard, though. They were the views of most of the Cousinhood, as well as of the majority of British Jews. The Cousinhood hated Zionism for many reasons, but what most alarmed them was the suggestion that British Jews were not British. It was one thing for non-Jews to say this. Arthur Balfour himself, who made no secret of his racist views and who had earlier campaigned to keep Jews out of Britain, wrote that Zionism would "mitigate the age-long miseries created for Western civilization by the presence in its midst of a Body [the Jews] which it too long regarded as alien and even hostile, but which it was equally unable to expel or to absorb." The Jews were a potentially subversive fifth column—could never be fully equal citizens—and their very existence created "age-long miseries" for Western civilization: It is hard to think of more classical antisemitism than this, which is why it might have been surprising to find this sentence printed in Balfour's introduction to Nahum Sokolow's *History of Zionism,* published in 1919. As it had from the days of Herzl, Zionism made explicit alliances with racists who saw the movement as a way to rid their own countries of their unwanted Jewish citizens—and this at a time when thousands of Jewish soldiers were fighting and dying for Britain.

It was this suggestion, made by antisemites like Balfour and endorsed by Zionists, that most offended British Jewry. On October 2, 1917, Edwin

authored a letter signed by "every Jew who is prominent in public life, with the exception of the present Lord Rothschild, Mr. Herbert Samuel, and a few others," in which he wrote, "At this moment Jews are constantly being attacked for being outside the great national feelings which the war has engendered, and of being cosmopolitan in their sympathy and international in their aspirations." If this was "a gross libel on the Jewish Briton," he wrote, "it is true of the Zionist." He quotes Zionists who agree that "they cannot be as entirely English in thought as the man who is born of English parents and descended from ancestors who have mingled their blood with other Englishmen for generations." Rabbi Moses Gaster, a Sephardic leader who was close to Herbert Samuel, had said that "the claim to be an Englishman of the Jewish persuasion—that is, English by nationality and Jewish by faith, is an absolute self-delusion." Chaim Weizmann said that "the efforts of the emancipated Jew to assimilate himself to his surroundings…deceive nobody but himself."

For patriotic Jews like Montagu, this was more than distasteful. It was nearly treason. "I would willingly disfranchise every Zionist," he wrote. "I would be almost tempted to proscribe the Zionist organisation as illegal and against the national interest." Zionism, he insisted, was "a mischievous political creed, untenable by any patriotic citizen of the United Kingdom. If a Jewish Englishman sets his eyes on The Mount of Olives and longs for the day when he will shake British soil from his shoes and go back to agricultural pursuits in Palestine, he has always seemed to me to have acknowledged aims inconsistent with British citizenship and to have admitted that he is unfit for a share in public life in Great Britain, or to be treated as an Englishman." He himself would never allow that he was foreign to Britain or alien to the British people: "Did I accept it, as a patriotic Englishman, I should resign my position on the Cabinet and declare myself neutral, or at any rate not primarily concerned in the present war. Nobody is entitled to occupy the position that I do unless he is determined to consider, and consider only, the interest of the British Empire." In his October memorandum, he quotes prominent Jews from America, France, and Italy. All affirm their loyalty to their own countries,

and all express shock that the Zionists would resort to such an ancient and dangerous antisemitic conceit.

A month after he entered the cabinet, Montagu wrote an impassioned broadside, "The Anti-Semitism of the Present Government." The text began with a surprising admission that calling something antisemitic was not necessarily a condemnation—that calling people antisemites, even the government ministers to whom the letter was addressed, would not upset them:

> I have chosen the above title for this memorandum, not in any hostile sense, not by any means as quarrelling with an anti-Semitic view which may be held by my colleagues, not with a desire to deny that anti-Semitism can be held by rational men, not even with a view to suggesting that the Government is deliberately anti-Semitic; but I wish to place on record my view that the policy of His Majesty's Government is anti-Semitic in result and will prove a rallying ground for Anti-Semites in every country in the world.

Montagu considers at length the most practical objection to Zionism. In order to make Palestine a "national home of the Jewish people," he wrote, "Mahommedans and Christians are to make way for the Jews…Turks and other Mahommedans in Palestine will be regarded as foreigners, just in the same way as Jews will hereafter be treated as foreigners in every country but Palestine. Perhaps also citizenship must be granted only as a result of a religious test." This acknowledgment was almost nonexistent among Zionists. So were the claims of other religions: "It is quite true that Palestine plays a large part in Jewish history, but so it does in modern Mahommedan history, and, after the time of the Jews, surely it plays a larger part than any other country in Christian history. The Temple may have been in Palestine, but so was the Sermon on the Mount and the Crucifixion." Unlike the Zionists, Montagu here displayed basic human regard for Muslim and Christian Palestinian Arabs. Still, his main concern was the antisemitism that Zionism would fuel. "I have always recognised

the unpopularity, much greater than some people think, of my community," he writes frankly. "When the Jews are told that Palestine is their national home, every country will immediately desire to get rid of its Jewish citizens," he continues. "Palestine will become the world's Ghetto." He concludes with the suggestion that the government do no more than treat the Jews in Palestine on terms of equality with other peoples.

But despite these protests, Zionism had been advancing within the government even as the British army was advancing into Palestine. The question of what to do with the country had become urgent; the idea that this question might best be decided by the inhabitants of Palestine did not intrude. With the support of non-Jewish and often antisemitic Zionist sympathizers in the cabinet, the vote was a foregone conclusion. As the Balfour Declaration started to seem inevitable, Edwin did his best to include language guaranteeing the position of the 90 percent of the population that now found itself reduced to the status of "existing non-Jewish communities," whose civil and religious rights—but not their political rights—were mentioned in the text, and likewise to include the statement that the "national home" would not compromise Jews living outside Palestine. But the battle was lost. The fateful declaration appeared on November 2.

Little more than a month later, General Edmund Allenby entered Jerusalem, inaugurating British rule. It was the first day of Chanukah. For Zionists, it was a day rich with symbolism. Even the irreligious Herbert, whose son was in Allenby's army, attended synagogue in celebration.

By then, Edwin Montagu was in India. "The Government has dealt an irreparable blow at Jewish Britons," he wrote, and "alarmed unnecessarily the Mohammedan world." Unlike Herbert Samuel, narrowly focused on Palestine, Montagu could see the connection between Palestine and India and Ireland. He saw that stoking religious and sectarian hatreds—the strategy of "divide and rule"—was bad for the ruled as well as bad for the rulers, who could quickly find themselves unleashing forces they would not be able to control. He saw that dismembering the Turkish Empire could lead directly to dismembering the British Empire. The predatory approach to

Turkey, which brought millions more Muslims under non-Muslim rule, was inflaming the Indian Muslims, whose opposition Montagu struggled to convey. His writings on the subject add another great unknowable to the question of what could have been if he had defeated the Balfour Declaration. If he had won in India and the country had been put on a path toward democratic self-government along the lines of Canada and Australia, could the catastrophe of Partition have been avoided? We cannot know. We can know the answer to a question he posed: "Are you going to keep your hold upon India by terrorism, racial humiliation and subordination and frightfulness?" In 1919, the choice was made for frightfulness.

The police brutality against which Montagu had been fruitlessly warning for years erupted in Amritsar, in the Punjab. There, on April 13, 1919, the British fired on a crowd of unarmed protesters, killing 379 and wounding 1,200. From the perspective of Britons like Montagu, as well as from the perspective of Indians who hoped for a peaceful evolution toward self-rule, the racist invective that followed was just as deadly, and made even the Indians best disposed toward the English aware of what the English thought of them. The officer responsible for the murders was feted, and vast funds were raised for his defense. Montagu, who loved India and was loved by India, was attacked, frequently in antisemitic terms—because, according to his enemies, it was his moderation that was to blame. "If he is Mr. Gandhi's friend he has not the right to be Secretary of State for India," blustered one Conservative MP. "If the right hon. gentleman continues we are going on the right road to lose India."

"No greater calamity could overtake the world than any further accentuation of its divisions on the lines of race," Lloyd George said, and the rest of Montagu's career would be spent trying to oppose this calamity. In 1921, amid a controversy about granting equality to Indian residents of Kenya, he wrote to Winston Churchill: "I exist in politics only for one purpose—the application of the principle of equal status for Indians within the British Empire." By that point, Churchill was secretary of state for the colonies, and he questioned whether "the democratic principles of Europe" suited "the development of Asiatic and African people." He pointed out to

Montagu that if Britain gave equal rights to Indians in Kenya—Indians were, after all, citizens of the British Empire—they would have to do so "to Arabs and black Somalis." Churchill added, "The idea that they should be put on an equality with the Europeans is revolting to every white man throughout British Africa."

As colonial secretary, Churchill was also responsible for the nascent British mandate over Palestine. His views about the Palestinians—"barbaric hordes who ate little but camel dung"—would later be explained by a bestial metaphor that connected Palestine to earlier settler-colonial projects:

> I do not admit that the dog in the manger has the final right to the manger, though he may have lain there for a very long time…. I do not admit for instance that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to those people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race or at any rate a more worldly-wise race, to put it that way, has come in and taken their place. I do not admit it. I do not think the Red Indians had any right to say, "American continent belongs to us and we are not going to have any of these European settlers coming in here." They had not the right, nor had they the power.

This was the man who would be Herbert Samuel's boss during his governorship in Palestine. Characteristically, Samuel had expressed grave doubts about the wisdom of accepting the position of high commissioner in Palestine, before just as characteristically accepting it. When he visited Palestine for the first time shortly after the war, he was shocked by the depth of the majority's opposition to Zionism. This did not encourage him to question Zionism. Instead, his focus was how to make it more palatable. Perhaps, he wrote to his son, it might help if the first British governor were not Jewish:

> It would render more difficult, I am inclined to think, and not more easy, the fulfilment of the Zionist programme. Arab Nationalist and Anti-Zionist feeling is a very real thing, and although it is probable that it will die down, perhaps in a comparatively short time, it is strong enough for the time being to cause much embarrassment. With a Jew as Governor, many measures would be viewed with suspicion and would provoke antagonism which would be accepted without much question at the hands of a non-Jewish British Governor. I shall not come to any final conclusion in my own mind until I have had an opportunity of talking the matter over with Dr. Weizmann.

In 1920, when he was offered the post as high commissioner of Palestine, these scruples vanished. He had occasionally expressed alarm at the aggression of the Zionists—"Reports are reaching me from unbiassed sources that the Zionists are behaving in a way which is alienating the sympathies of all the other elements of the population"—in terms that regretted such behavior because of its negative impact on Zionism: "The repercussion is felt here and the effect is a distinct setback to Zionism." He fell into a pattern of deploring "one or two unauthorised and powerful public statements" that supported ethnic cleansing—only to say, very demurely, the exact same thing:

> It may be possible that with complete agreement and goodwill a certain proportion of the Arabs may desire to remove to equally good or better land, possibly with some kind of financial inducement. If so, well and good, but any movement of that kind must be absolutely voluntary and conducted without any form of pressure…. There will be the most equitable and sympathetic treatment of the Arab populations of the country. If we were to go to Palestine to oppress other people it would be an unspeakable disgrace.

Despite his careful language, his appointment produced dismay among the Palestinians, who, aware of his Zionist commitments, saw their worst fears about the Balfour Declaration confirmed. But Samuel proceeded with his usual plodding self-confidence, alluding to an "unhappy misunderstanding" of the Balfour Declaration and insisting that the British "would never impose on [the Palestinian people] a policy which that people had reason to think was contrary to their religious, their political, and their economic interests." Such statements created another problem. They provoked the Zionists, who were constantly seeking ways to present themselves as victims. Sir Herbert—he requested a title at the beginning of his governorship, the better to impress the natives—warned Weizmann that "a very large number of Arabs, including a large number of the educated classes, have come to believe that Zionism means the overwhelming of themselves and their people by immigrant Jews, with the consequence that in the course of time they will lose not only their political predominance but also their lands and their Holy Places…. Now these people will not accept the fate which they think is in store for them without a fight."

This was, of course, exactly what Montagu had predicted. But after a rough start to his term as governor, Samuel believed that he had found a way to pacify the country, and when, in 1922, he visited England for the first time since departing for Palestine, he claimed, with his usual disingenuousness, that he was seeking only to define the terms of the Balfour Declaration. In fact, he was planning to push through a so-called white paper, a Zionist achievement in many ways more important than the Balfour Declaration. Energetically resisted by the Palestinian Arabs, whose arguments carried the day in a furious debate in the House of Lords, this official statement was nevertheless incorporated into the League of Nations mandate. It severed Palestine from what would become the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and assured the continuity of Zionist immigration into Palestine. Yet Samuel sounded so reasonable in a speech at Westminster that afterward Montagu wrote him a conciliatory note:

> You compressed accuracy, skill, knowledge and confidence into a very short space of time. The chorus of approval was universal. As you know, I regarded the Balfour declaration with strong opposition and disapproval, and even today would give anything that it should not have been made in the interests of the British Empire and of our race. But it seems to me that conflict of opinion on the basis of the policy must have ended when the declaration was announced and endorsed and any view held as to its advisability is only of historic interest. It is almost a platitude to say that Great Britain's promises in regard to the East particularly, and indeed elsewhere, ought to be kept and honoured without hesitation, and made as successful as human effort can make them. For these reasons I rejoice in your success yesterday and in your story of progress.

The last part of this note is puzzling. Perhaps an attempt to patch up a family rift, it nevertheless betrays a surprising amount of naivete from someone who had seen the question so accurately before. One of Samuel's priorities was to deny Palestinian requests for the democratic government that they had been promised, and, as Montagu ought to have known, Samuel was also going far beyond Britain's other promises, frequently misleading the British government about his actions, in order to tilt the balance in favor of the minority of European colonizers. These included allowing the Zionists to pile up weaponry and thereby create the conditions for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Montagu would have little subsequent reason to congratulate Samuel on this "story of progress." In Palestine, Samuel would be renowned for the froideur one of his assistants described—"At his office table and in discussion he was often icily cold and almost repelled those in front of him by the isolation of his manner"—and not long after his well-received speech in Westminster, the country began cracking up. "In a matter of days Samuel's apparently glittering success had vanished to be replaced by Arab quasi-revolt, Zionist protests, Colonial Office disapproval, and press criticism," wrote Bernard Wasserstein. Yet the conflict, he suggested, was a

simple misunderstanding. His solution was what would later be called tone policing. Arab fear of a Jewish state, immigration, theft of their lands? Nonsense, he said. “None of these things” were “included in the programme of the Government,” and “none of them are now contemplated by responsible Zionist leaders.”

At the same time, Samuel dismissed Zionist attempts to minimize the causes of Arab discontent: “They leave out the factor which is more important than any of them—namely, that the Arab national movement exists, that it is a reality and not an artificial creation fostered by British timidity and foreign intervention.” Yet these equivocations seemed designed more to shore up his own idea of himself as a thoughtful moderate, and never led him to question the extremism of the project that he was advancing. Since the Boer War, he had been an ardent imperialist who hoped that imperialism could be made toothsome. He insisted on the kind of language that would later be adopted by “liberal Zionists”: in the face of demands for the end of settler colonialism and race-based privilege, the language of dialogue and mutual understanding. He could describe the difficulties, but he could never see past the assurances of “responsible Zionist leaders.”

Lloyd George summed up his mind best when he said Samuel was “honest in the sense that he would account for every stamp used in his office.” He was not honest about the consequences of setting up a settler colony. By the time he departed, in mid-1925, intercommunal violence, once unknown in Palestine, was commonplace. The Palestinian scholar Sahar Huneidi has written, “His administration was seen by the Arabs, as well as many British officials, as having been largely a Zionist administration, disguised as a British one.” Indeed, his main legacy would be accentuating “divisions on the lines of race” in precisely the way that Lloyd George had said was the greatest calamity that could overtake the world. This was a matter of indifference to Samuel, whose unwillingness or inability to see patterns marked the rest of his long and tedious career. Sometimes his callousness toward the weak had comical results, as when he denounced “the vices of Sodom and Gomorrah” in the Lords. The writer E.

M. Forster sent him an article advocating “less social stigma” for homosexuals. Samuel, who had condemned Roger Casement—and who of course did not realize that Forster was gay—said he was “far from quarrelling” with that. But he added, “If homosexuality between adults is legalised, is it not likely that it may become very widespread, possibly catered for by brothels of a special type? Incomprehensible and utterly disgusting as it appears to all normal people, it seems to have the capacity to form a habit as potent as alcohol or drugs.”

Sometimes this cluelessness endangered entire nations. In the early 1930s, Samuel opposed Churchill’s calls for rearmament. In June 1938, he urged a polite approach to the Nazis: “The right course now is not to line up the nations for a conflict that is thought bound to come, but to take steps to obviate conflict.” In this spirit, he supported the Munich Agreement to hand Czechoslovakia to the Nazis. He spoke of Hitler in the same knowing terms in which he spoke of the Zionists, who found him such an easy mark:

> I said that I regarded Hitler as a man with a conscience—a conscience that sometimes led him to do things that were very bad; but he was not a man who would do what he knew to be a crime, as Napoleon would have done.

Without his unearned fortune, this “grandmotherly” prudery would have remained that of a provincial schoolmarm, and his belief that “a superior culture had every right to displace an inferior one” that of a workaday racist. He would die a viscount at the age of ninety-two. Edwin Montagu’s career would not be nearly as long. In 1922, he was forced to resign amid a chorus of calumny and antisemitic accusations—“that malicious and dangerous Jew,” “this mischievous Jew,” and so forth—and died just two years and eight months later. India, where he was beloved as few Englishmen ever were, was unanimous in its condemnation of these attacks. On the day after his resignation, Gandhi was arrested.

3

MURDER ON JAFFA STREET

Jacob Israël de Haan



Jerusalem: here God takes less pity
Than in any other single city.
The Wailing Wall: I bow my head
In a plea of quaking and dread.

—JACOB ISRAËL DE HAAN

On June 30, 1924, on Jaffa Street, an artery that connects the ancient city of Jerusalem with the modern suburbs to its west, a middle-aged man was walking past the Sha'are Zedek Hospital. He was on his way from evening prayers at the hospital's synagogue, where he had said Kaddish for his father, who had died a month before. For some time now, he had been used to aggression from Jewish settlers. A visitor from the Netherlands noticed that passing Jews spat on the ground when the man walked by. "They're not doing that out of respect for you!" he said. The man answered, "No, they're doing it out of respect for you. When I'm by myself they spit in my face."

The man's name was Jacob Israël de Haan. He was a forty-two-year-old Dutchman, born in a small village on December 31, 1881, to a local *hazzan,* or cantor, and by the time he reached Jerusalem in 1919, shortly before Sir Herbert Samuel would begin his unhappy reign over Palestine, De Haan was already one of the most remarkable personalities of his day. He had risen to notoriety twenty years before, in 1904, when he published a novel called *Pijpelijntjes*. The title refers to the working-class bohemian Amsterdam neighborhood called De Pijp, and echoes, as well, a common word for fellatio. The first explicitly homosexual novel published in Dutch, it would be considered thrillingly frank even today. One can imagine the scandal it caused in 1904. To protect him from backlash, De Haan's friends rushed to buy up any copies they could find, even going so far as to track down any that might have made it to Jakarta, in the Dutch East Indies.

Pijpelijntjes was remarkable for being the first gay novel in Dutch, but it was even more remarkable for how it completely ignored its pioneering role. The novel chronicles a relationship between two young men in Amsterdam. De Haan wrote the novel as if there were plenty of gay books

already in circulation, as if love between two young men had never been taboo. It is this freedom that makes *Pijpelijntjes* as shocking for readers today as it was for readers a century ago. The publication got De Haan fired from his job as a writer for the children's pages of a socialist newspaper, and made him notorious in a way that he seems not to have anticipated. His sincere outrage at his firing led him to blistering protests, and though he managed to get the editor who had dismissed him fired, he also accused him of ruining his health, which throughout his life was precarious.

In 1907, he married Johanna van Maarseveen, one of the rare female doctors in the Netherlands. She was quite a few years older, and not Jewish. At a time when many more or less openly gay people married opposite-sex partners, the marriage might be best understood as a devoted friendship, a partnership; reading their surviving correspondence, one feels that they loved each other in every way but one. The year after their marriage, De Haan wrote another gay novel, *Pathologies,* and continued to publish poetry and journalism. He returned to school, got a doctorate in law, and became a human rights activist. He made three journeys to Russia and returned with reports about the conditions in Russian prisons that were so influential that Amnesty International would later cite him as one of the organization's spiritual forefathers.

By the time World War I broke out, De Haan's outsider's hatred of injustice, his dagger-sharp prose, and his unflagging ability to work—all the more striking given his shaky health—had combined to make him a polemicist of the first order. But the causes he embraced disappointed him. Among the effects of the *Pijpelijntjes* affair was to distance him from the socialism in which he, like many Jews from traditional backgrounds, found a more modern expression of the faith of his forefathers. The attacks from his fellow socialists pushed him to embrace another cause, Zionism, that was just becoming fashionable. Theodor Herzl had published *Der Judenstaat* in 1896, only eight years before *Pijpelijntjes,* and in 1899 the Netherlands Zionist Society was founded. When De Haan embraced Zionism, it was on the rise, but it was nonetheless only one of the many Jewish causes and parties. The divisions among the Dutch Jews reflected

the divisions elsewhere. Some Jews, including some rabbis, were fervently in favor. Others, just as fervently, were opposed.

"We want our own Land, our own Language, our own Art," De Haan said. Especially to the last he wanted to contribute. Around 1912, he started writing Zionist poetry that earned him a wide following among both Jews and non-Jews. There was a great hunger for renewal in Jewish culture that could parallel the radical experimental mood in the broader Dutch culture, to which many of De Haan's older friends, novelists and poets, had made generous contributions. He went about it with the energy that marked all his productions. In every country, the Jews were "strangers"—"enslaved"—"naked beggars," he claimed, and could only end their suffering by returning to the supposed home of their ancestors. There was not a little exaggeration in these early writings. Though there was antisemitism in Holland, and though De Haan and his family had certainly experienced it, it was nonetheless an advanced democratic country where the Jews, among whom were many learned and influential and wealthy men, had long enjoyed more freedom than almost anywhere in the world. Many of De Haan's characterizations seem to reflect his own flair for the snappy phrase, a talent that made him such a stirring, and later such a dangerous, propagandist.

Much of his early Jewish poetry focused on the lost idyll of his childhood. It recalled his parents' humble but pious home, and especially the family gatherings for feast days. Many of these—Pesach, Chanukah, Tisha b'Av—commemorated triumphs and defeats experienced in the Holy Land. This poetry appealed to Zionists. It also appealed to those many Dutch Jews who, having left the simpler life of villages and families for the modern life of big cities, cherished similar memories of childhood. In 1915, he collected his religious poetry in *The Jewish Song*. The book was widely praised for its freshness, and for the modernity befitting the burgeoning Jewish political movement. "De Haan is the poet of the Zionists," wrote a prominent Jewish critic. And in the same year that he published the book, De Haan returned to religious observance. Like many converts, he was more enthusiastic about religion than people who had never left. His fervor

could annoy others: He stood in the front row of the synagogue, and with his showy repentance was often felt to be making a spectacle of himself. He kept the Sabbath strictly, and the dietary laws: His wife believed that his previous stomach pains were the result of neglecting *kashrut*.

The outbreak of World War I strengthened his Zionist commitments. Though the Netherlands managed to maintain its neutrality, Belgium was not so lucky. The German invasion resulted in the flight of many poor *Ostjuden*—Eastern Europeans who made up the mass of Jewish immigrants—from Antwerp, with its large Jewish community, into Holland. During the war, De Haan was horrified by the sight of Jews being forced to slaughter other Jews by governments who used them as cannon fodder. He was just as appalled to see the enthusiasm with which some Jews were whipping up nationalist sentiments that could only lead to the slaughter of their coreligionists in neighboring countries. This, he wrote, was "the curse of twenty centuries of wandering." As the war came to an end, the news of yet another wave of horrifying pogroms in the East convinced more Western Jews of the need for a Jewish homeland, where they could be safe from an ineradicable hatred.

It was typical of De Haan that he was not content merely to write about Zionism. At the close of World War I, when Palestine was placed under a British mandate, he resolved to take a concrete step toward building the Jewish National Home by emigrating himself. It was a radical move. No Dutch Zionist had yet emigrated to Palestine. The announcement caused a flurry of comment from the Jewish community as well as from the national press. And he himself was torn, recalling the words of the old prayer: "Today in Holland, with God's will soon in Jerusalem, unoppressed and secure." Was he oppressed, insecure? "Here in Holland we, the Jews, have always, always, had it good," he admitted in an essay published shortly before his departure. He was successful, influential, admired. Should he go? "When I was a boy, nothing seemed more delightful than to be a scholar and a poet. Now that I am a man, I do not need to leave Holland because I disappointed that desire…. Yes, why indeed are we leaving?" He answered,

“We are going because we have never been gone. We are getting our land back, which we have never lost.”

When he finally departed, just after New Year’s in 1919, his adieus were dramatic, prolonged, and public. There were speeches, interviews, tears, and, as his train left Amsterdam Central Station, Zionists on the platform singing “Hatikva.” The journey from Amsterdam to Jerusalem took fifty-five days. “This is now the great event of my life,” he wrote as the train rolled into the little station. “The first houses of the City…And I swear to my Land and my City, that I will do nothing against the Sanctity of Israel in Zion. The odd little train grinds to a halt. I am in Jerusalem. I am home.” In the land he had dreamed of since boyhood, he prayed ecstatically by the Wailing Wall.

Yet his doubts began even before he entered the Holy Land. Already, in Cairo, he got to know some Arabs, and to understand their position in a land where they outnumbered Jews by ten to one. And soon after his arrival, his doubts about the enterprise began to leak through in his letters to friends back home. After only six weeks, he wrote to the novelist Frederik van Eeden, “I should have never left Holland. I should have stayed with you and [Johanna] and all my friends and acquaintances. But I can’t come back now because it would be too detrimental to Zionism in Holland. Everything here is still wild and empty. Run by materialistic professional Zionists.” He still wanted to help a project he had believed was romantic and beautiful, but the reality was too different. “There is an absolute lack of idealism,” he wrote to another friend. “And almost entirely no sweetness and so forth.” He noted Jewish paranoia: “Nothing in Jerusalem can happen now without its being blamed on the Arabs.”

A writer who had made his name with his fearless criticism quickly saw what was happening in Palestine, and his commitment to telling uncomfortable truths made him continue to tell them, regardless of whom he might offend. Weeks after his arrival, the British military governor, Sir Ronald Storrs, warned him “that if he were not more temperate in his language he might get beaten up by his own people.” Sir Ronald was struck by the figure of De Haan. “Facially he was an intellectual version of

Vincent van Gogh, whose dreadful glare of an unknown terror sometimes blazed in his eyes also." That unknown terror was reflected in the quatrains that would be published after De Haan's death:

> The Holy Land: there its streets are burning
> Where I in vain a meager shadow seek.
> Does the Land summon us for a new blessing?
> Or warn us away with a cruel curse?

De Haan's position as a multilingual journalist and lawyer brought him into contact with a wide range of the population. He knew the leading figures among the Jews, but also, and unusually among the Zionist immigrants of the time, took the time to get to know the Arabs. He strove to learn their language. He saw that the land was riven by rivalries, between the communities and also within the communities. "Everything here is politics," he wrote. Things had grown worse with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, and with the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann's statement, which justifiably alarmed the Arabs, that Palestine would soon be as Jewish as England was English. De Haan found himself becoming obsessed with the Arab question: "When I wake up and when I close my eyes. Day and night. Always. Always."

His deepest sympathy, however, was for the non-Zionist Orthodox, who had long lived in Palestine. These people saw their essential role as living a prayerful life in the neighborhood of the holy sites. Like members of other religious communities, including Christians of different nations and confessions, they lived discreetly, and often monastically. The advent of Zionist settlers made these older Orthodox residents profoundly uneasy. Less than 10 percent of the Palestinian population were Jewish, of whom roughly half were newly arrived Zionist settlers. The traditional Palestinian Jews were for the most part Orthodox, who stayed firmly away from politics in order to study and pray. They opposed the secular use of the holy language, including by the Zionist schools. They were appalled by disregard of the dietary laws and the widespread desecration of the Sabbath. And they

wanted nothing to do with nationalism, which their leaders understood could only lead to conflict with the Arab majority. For De Haan, the Jewish movement had always been *both* national and religious, and could not be national if it disrespected the religious. Without the laws that had kept the Jews together through the centuries, Zionism would become just another vulgar chauvinism. Through his meetings with Chaim Sonnenfeld, an elderly rabbi who was revered as a saint, De Haan grew closer to the Agudath Israel, an Orthodox movement that saw the Jews not as a nation but as a religious community, and he began to protest Zionist treatment of these traditional Jews.

Already in the summer of 1919, only a few months after he arrived, he was sending critical missives back to his newspaper, the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. To Zionists who reacted with shock or disappointment, he asked, "Would you really want for me to serve propaganda and [party] discipline by writing dishonestly and insincerely?" He was far more diplomatic in his public writings than he would later become, reserving his feelings for his private correspondence. The Zionist Commission, he wrote, "has done nothing but stir things up and spend money. The Jewish National Fund is one big fraud." He felt it was his duty to inform Zionists abroad that the movement was making the Jews powerful enemies, that relations between Jews and Arabs were declining. The new immigrants spoke no Arabic and made not the slightest effort to learn about the culture of the country, as many Jews had warned before the war. Instead, stereotypes predominated. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who would later become the second president of Israel, defined the Arabs as "ransacking, looting, pillaging, robbing, cheating." The tone was being set. "Every nationalism, including Zionism, is after all just a necessary one-sidedness," De Haan wrote.

He reported with sympathy the idea of the Arab mayor of Jerusalem, who said that the Arab peoples should be united into a single state, where Jews would be free to settle. He introduced other thinkers who said something along the same lines. "The Jews don't want to be simple inhabitants of an Arab land, but they want to rule it," said an Arab journalist he quoted. In many of these reports, he mentioned how much Weizmann's

phrase—that the country should be as Jewish as England was English—had rankled, and described how even Christian Arabs, previously sympathetic to the Jews, had been alienated by the excesses of political Zionism. They were particularly offended by the attempt to impose the Hebrew language upon them. “For De Haan it was clear that the Arabs in Palestine, without exception of class or religion, were starting to hate the Jews,” wrote Jan Fontijn, De Haan’s biographer.

At the same time, De Haan saw that the land could accommodate more Jewish settlement. But it was a shock to hear him say that Zionism had brought “a costly, hateful, and damaging class of people” into the Holy Land, along with nationalist tourists who supported the enterprise from afar without bothering to understand the realities of life in the land. He warned potential emigrants that the economy was a shambles, that the Jewish community was obsessed with internal quibbling, and that the Zionist press was peddling a delusion: “Sometimes you read enthusiastic descriptions in the papers. They are singing on their way to work. They are all healthy. And so on. That of course is drivel.” His denunciations alarmed believers: His articles, according to a Jewish newspaper, had caused “great damage,” and he was accused of airing internal issues in non-Jewish newspapers, like his own *Handelsblad.*

But De Haan was a person of passions. And as in many deeply sensitive natures, his religious, political, and artistic passions had their sexual counterpart. In his time and after, his sexuality was often portrayed as in conflict with his spirituality. A former friend, Abel Herzberg, who fell out with him over the question of Zionism, wrote, “He followed one lifestyle publicly, during the day, because at night, in secret, he betrayed it. The sin was sweet, the remorse was bitter, and prayer brought him comfort.” It was not only that he was homosexual: “He found it sinful. It made him suffer.”

This was at best only partially true. De Haan’s conversion to Zionism and Orthodoxy never meant that he stopped writing homosexual verse. Five years before leaving for Palestine, he had published a book called *Libertine Songs*. Like his novels, this poetry treated homosexuality as entirely natural and gave few hints of torment. But there are also suggestions that he might

have been attracted to Zionism as much because he was homosexual as because he was a Jew. Zionism, from the beginning, contained a powerful homoerotic element, which Max Nordau called "Muscle Jewry" in 1898. It was indebted to the racial pseudoscience of the time, as well as to a whole battery of antisemitic stereotypes. The old Jew, the Diaspora Jew, was slatternly, depressed, and parasitic. Centuries of degrading exile had weakened him. It had made him overly intellectual, limply effeminate. Only the Old-New Land would allow him to regain his masculinity—his muscularity. The insinuation that Jews were not real men was exactly the kind of discourse that so offended people like Aaron Samuel Tamares, but this promise of regeneration might have appealed to a sickly and guilt-ridden homosexual.

But it is not clear that De Haan felt the same way, at least not always. His poetry charts the electric interaction between body and soul. He wrote so openly about the attractive young men, often Arabs, whom he encountered in the Holy Land ("Beautiful men on beautiful horses") that readers grumbled about it in the Dutch newspapers. He was even more frank in his poetry:

Am I going to the Wailing Wall to pray?
Or for the little Moroccan boy?

Yet his poetry also suggests that his journey to Palestine did contain the hope for renewal as a hale, and presumably heterosexual, "Muscular Jew"—and that this hope had been disappointed.

With Adil…with Mahmoud, driven by lust.
With Hassan, with Khalil drinking together.
Ah: I've always stayed the same,
Only now with a different name.

Whatever he felt about his sexual longings, it seems obvious that this fraternizing gave De Haan a more intimate view of a broader cross section

of the Arab population than a heterosexual, or a more abstemious homosexual, would have had. He passed this intimate understanding to his readers. “We must view the Arabs as our fellow inhabitants and as our equals, which they are. They might have read fewer books. But their emotional sensitivity is more refined. They are wild, hospitable, and true.” And alongside those who presumably had read fewer books, De Haan also described others, like the friend who spoke accentless English and was planning to go to Europe to study philosophy, or his companion Adil, who would soon move to Germany to study engineering. The portrait of the Arabs that he offered was far more nuanced, far more sympathetic, than could be found in nearly any other Zionist’s writings. And these led De Haan inexorably to a single conclusion: “We are indeed a people without a land, but Palestine is not a land without people.”

His warnings went unheeded. In 1920, anti-Jewish rioting broke out in Jerusalem. “Our people were abused and plundered by their neighbors, with whom they had lived for years and years,” he wrote. “A wild folly. How much so? Even Jewish graves were violated.” Yet he wrote that this was entirely predictable and reproached those who had stubbornly insisted that the Arabs would welcome Zionist settlement. “We wanted to have a Jewish community here living in peace with the Arabs and the English. Now the Zionist Commission is at war with the Arabs, the English, and a large part of the Orthodox Jews.” The Jerusalem of which he dreamed had become “loud, hateful,” and the cause for which he had left his own country seemed boundlessly more tawdry than anything he could have imagined. “Zionism is a beautiful ideal,” he wrote. “So is socialism. Both have fallen into the hands of hustlers who do nothing for truth and ideals and everything for propaganda.”

A year later, in May 1921, another riot broke out in Jaffa. De Haan investigated. But the degree of mutual enmity, the bizarre conspiracy theories doing the rounds, made it hard to ascertain the reasons for the outbreak. The Arabs whispered that twelve hundred Arabs had been killed by airplanes. The Jews whispered that the Arabs had poisoned all the milk. Whatever the origins of the unrest, the consequences were to further derail

already bad relations, and when De Haan spent a week in Jaffa, he noted the growing gulf between Arabs and Jews. “We protest the Arab longshoremen who refuse to bring Jewish immigrants from the boats in the port of Jaffa. We also protest against the Arab boycott. But we think it’s quite normal that no Arab is allowed to live in Tel Aviv. That no Arab is received in a Jewish hotel. That companies in their statutes decide that they can only employ Jews. The Jews aren’t murderers, plunderers, arsonists. All they want to do is take over the land peacefully.”

He added, “The Arabs don’t want to be taken over peacefully.”

For De Haan personally, it felt like a defeat. “It has been two years since I left Holland,” he wrote to a friend. “How little of what we then expected has become reality.” Still, he resolved to stay on, because he thought that giving up would have been even more dispiriting to his readers. Even his journalism, he felt, was pointless. People did not want to know the reality. “The greatest authorities are those who have never been to Palestine,” he wrote. Even Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist leader in London, did not understand that if the Jews portrayed a Jew who employed Arabs as a traitor, they could not also insist that Jewish immigration benefited the Arabs. De Haan drifted further toward sympathy for the Arabs, on the one hand, and toward sympathy for the Orthodox community, on the other. Both were firmly anti-Zionist. And both trusted De Haan to advocate for them with outsiders.

As a lawyer, De Haan represented the Orthodox Agudah at the “Matzah Trial” at the end of 1921. This controversy arose over a tax on matzah, the unleavened bread that Jews consume during the eight days of Passover. The British had authorized the Zionists to collect this tax. If it seemed like a trivial matter, it was not, since the tax would fall heaviest on the most observant Jews, for whom matzah was an indispensable ritual product. By paying the tax to those they saw as their godless enemies, they would be forced to subsidize them, undermining their own freedom to practice their religion. Rabbi Sonnenfeld and his allies felt that this was blackmail. And the question of whether the Zionists were allowed to tax anti-Zionists went

to the broader question of whether Zionists were allowed to represent anti-Zionist Jews. De Haan and the Agudah lost the case. The Orthodox seethed.

Still, this was local politics, a petty communitarian dispute, compared with what came next. In 1922, as a representative of the Agudah, De Haan met Lord Northcliffe on his visit to Palestine. The greatest press baron of the age, the founder of the *Daily Mail,* and the largest shareholder in *The Times,* Lord Northcliffe was arguably the most influential man in the entire British Empire. He was astonished when De Haan explained that not all Palestinian Jews were Zionists. The Jews were led by a small minority of "hypernationalists" who were deeply offensive to religious people, and whose tools were "boycott, terrorism, and *Ha'aretz,*" the Zionist newspaper. *Ha'aretz* replied by calling the Agudah delegates, including De Haan, "traitors" and "scum." Threatening letters began arriving at his house, and he was attacked, with words and with stones, on the streets of Jerusalem. Rabbi Sonnenfeld, the austere and saintly leader of the Agudah, saw his monastic chambers invaded by men with their guns drawn. Another rabbi was bashed in the head. De Haan imagined what the Arab papers would say: "Just look what kind of immigrants they're bringing us. They beat up their own rabbis."

The meeting with Lord Northcliffe was a turning point. De Haan became the most hated enemy of the Zionists. He had been a prominent spokesperson with wide access to the kinds of foreign dignitaries to whom the Zionists liked to present themselves as the only spokesmen. The Orthodox had no other representatives who, like De Haan, spoke Western languages and were at ease with high-ranking Europeans. But that was manageable. And he was not saying anything that he had not said many times before. What had changed was that Northcliffe had invited him to say them in his *Daily Mail*. It was one thing to say things in Dutch, even in the important Jewish centers of Amsterdam and Antwerp. It was quite something else to say them in London—and in English. Following the meeting with Northcliffe, De Haan found his classes at the law school boycotted, and he soon lost his job. He was attacked in language that resembled antisemitic tirades. "The Amsterdam ghetto vomited out this

individual," an open letter read. "Free us from this curse! Eliminate this shameful stain!"

As he had shown with the *Pijpelijntjes* scandal nearly twenty years before, De Haan was not one to give in. He alternated between mocking Zionist propaganda ("They sing on their way to work—as long as there's someone around to watch") and serious attacks on the Zionist leadership. He echoed the religious criticism that Weizmann violated the Sabbath, he chronicled their financial corruption, and he took aim at the heart of the movement's moral appeal: "An Arab is greeted as badly in a hotel in Tel Aviv as a Jew in many German or American hotels. That is the odd thing: the Jewish extremists do here to everyone they don't like exactly what made them suffer so cruelly in exile." And he did this all in clear and logical prose, as when explaining why the Arabs opposed Zionist goals: "Because the Jewish National Home would necessarily become fatal to the Arab revival in Palestine. That there are big Arab countries somewhere else is no recompense for the Palestinian Arabs."

For all his bravura, he was becoming increasingly fearful. He wanted to return to Holland. Rumors spread about his sexuality, which was the only possible explanation for his sympathy with the Arabs. He was accused of persecution mania, of paranoia, but he was not paranoid. In May 1923, he received a letter from "Black Hand," a group that had borrowed the name of the Serbian terrorist organization that, nine years before, had killed Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo and set off World War I. The letter threatened his life if he did not immediately abandon Palestine. It specified that he would be killed on May 24.

"How wondrous is the twenty-third, when one is going to be shot on the twenty-fourth!" he wrote. "The twenty-third! Yes, the Black Hand has long fingers and I shall not escape. I am cold with fear. Because I am a coward. And my heart. Oh, my heart. How it races!"

The twenty-fourth came and then—with De Haan under heavy guard—went.

"How silly is the twenty-fifth," he wrote, "when one hasn't been killed on the twenty-fourth!"

But despite the harassment, he refused to be cowed. He wrote about the masses of disappointed Jews who were leaving, more than were coming in. He wrote about the "small and vain" Herzl, whose diaries carefully noted the compliments bestowed on him by famous figures ("You, flatterer of Kings and Emperors…"), and said that his great contribution had been to awaken a lust for power among the younger generations of Jews. And he continued to advocate for the Orthodox.

In the summer of 1923, De Haan was invited to meet the leaders of the Hashemite dynasty—Abdullah of Transjordan, his brother Faisal of Iraq, and their father, Hussein, king of the Hejaz—outside Amman. De Haan wore a white silk keffiyeh, of which a famous photograph survives, to an audience with Abdullah. The camp of the Arab kings was highly romantic. In the moonlight, De Haan and his interpreter discussed Omar Khayyam.

The emir expressed his sympathy with the Jewish people, but pointed out that the Arabs would never accept Weizmann's intention to make Palestine "as Jewish as England is English." In July, De Haan was invited to speak to Abdullah and Faisal again. "If Dr. Weizmann says that the Jews in Palestine want no political privileges, do you think that the Arabs believe him?" Abdullah asked. The emir emphasized that all Arab countries were open to Jews, but that they would not have any special political rights, including in Palestine, and offered a clear choice. "Either peace and friendship with all Arab peoples. Or chasing after something impossible in Palestine. I am for Jewish-Arab cooperation on the basis of equality in all Arab countries."

In January 1924, De Haan returned to Amman to meet Hussein of the Hejaz. The highest levels of the Arab leadership were trying to defuse the increasingly difficult situation, and they invited the Zionists as well as De Haan and Rabbi Sonnenfeld, who was elderly, and who was treated with great respect by the princely party. The king expressed his admiration for the Agudah, who brought a memorandum requesting recognition as the representatives of Orthodox Jewry. Hussein emphasized that the Arabs were resisting the Zionists, not the Jews, and clarified that this was "not because they are Zionists. But because they use violence and injustice to achieve

their aims." He explained to the Zionist delegation that his heart was open to the Jews—as long as they came in through the door, and not by breaking down the walls. After the Zionists left, the king spoke to De Haan. "We hear words and we see deeds. And then we make up our minds." After a pause, he said, "We know that the Zionists are oppressing the Orthodox Jews as well, and we wonder what would happen to the Arabs if the Zionists came to power. We don't trust them. Now they're speaking very moderately, because the time has passed for words like: 'Palestine as Jewish as England is English.' But who trusts that? Not I."

The request from the Agudah to be recognized as separate from the Zionists brought accusations of treason. "We met with King Hussein and you are justifiably upset," one rabbi wrote to the Zionists, "because we said that Agudath Israel authorized no other institution to speak in its name or on behalf of all of Israel; that you are not the masters of the people of Israel nor are they your plaything to do with as you please." De Haan himself was further attacked by the Zionists as having fabricated a statement by King Hussein that he considered the Zionists unjust toward the Muslims, the Christians, and the Orthodox Jews in Palestine, and that he would organize the Muslim world against Zionism. The king's confirmation of the statement did nothing to stem the attacks on De Haan.

In April, De Haan learned that his father was ill. He died on May 1. This loss, and the unremitting hostility that surrounded De Haan, weakened him, isolated him, rendered him apprehensive. Yet he refused to give up his freedom to write and to think. "There is not a hair on my head that would allow my freedom to be limited in this way," he told the Netherlands consul, who had been dispatched to force him to tone down his criticism of the Zionists. He was preparing to publish more evidence of financial corruption, and was invited to join a delegation to the recently elected government in London. Wary of what had happened when Lord Northcliffe visited Palestine, the Zionists decided to act before he could bring his criticisms to Downing Street.

In a land of hatreds, De Haan had managed to become the most hated man of all. The Haganah, the recently formed Zionist paramilitary

organization, recruited a twenty-one-year-old named Avraham Tehomi, born Avraham Zilberg in Odessa, who was angry about the meeting with King Hussein. Tehomi later recounted, step by step, what he had done. An assassination could never have happened without authorization, in this case by Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, then a commander in the Haganah. Tehomi sought out De Haan. He spoke to him at the synagogue of the Sha'are Zedek Hospital, where De Haan was known to pray twice a day. "I said to him: There is a lot of resentment against you in the community. People don't understand what you're doing. We left Russia after the pogroms where they killed Jews. We came here to save ourselves, and then along comes a Jew like you who is trying to destroy our last refuge. What are you doing to us?" Tehomi dropped a hint: "It's not going to end well." De Haan refused, once again, to stop writing. Tehomi started stalking his victim through the city.

On Monday, June 30, shortly before he was to sail to England, De Haan said the Aleinu—"It is our duty to praise God"—then walked outside toward Jaffa Street. Tehomi shot him three times; De Haan died almost instantly. Upon hearing the shots, the local police commander, David Tidhar, a member of the Haganah, deliberately sent his men running in the wrong direction.

At the funeral, which five thousand people attended, Rabbi Sonnenfeld spoke: "See the depths to which the Zionist leaders have fallen and cry out with a loud voice: 'Free yourself from this evil company.' " In Holland, the *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* wrote, "If this is what is called Zionism, which answers arguments with murder—this fanning of hatreds against a single man, who may have been too critical—with the consequence that it brings confused minds to desperate deeds like this one, then Zionism has learned much from the antisemites." A Zionist writer feared that "the stain of murder will not be eradicated from the judgment made by future generations."

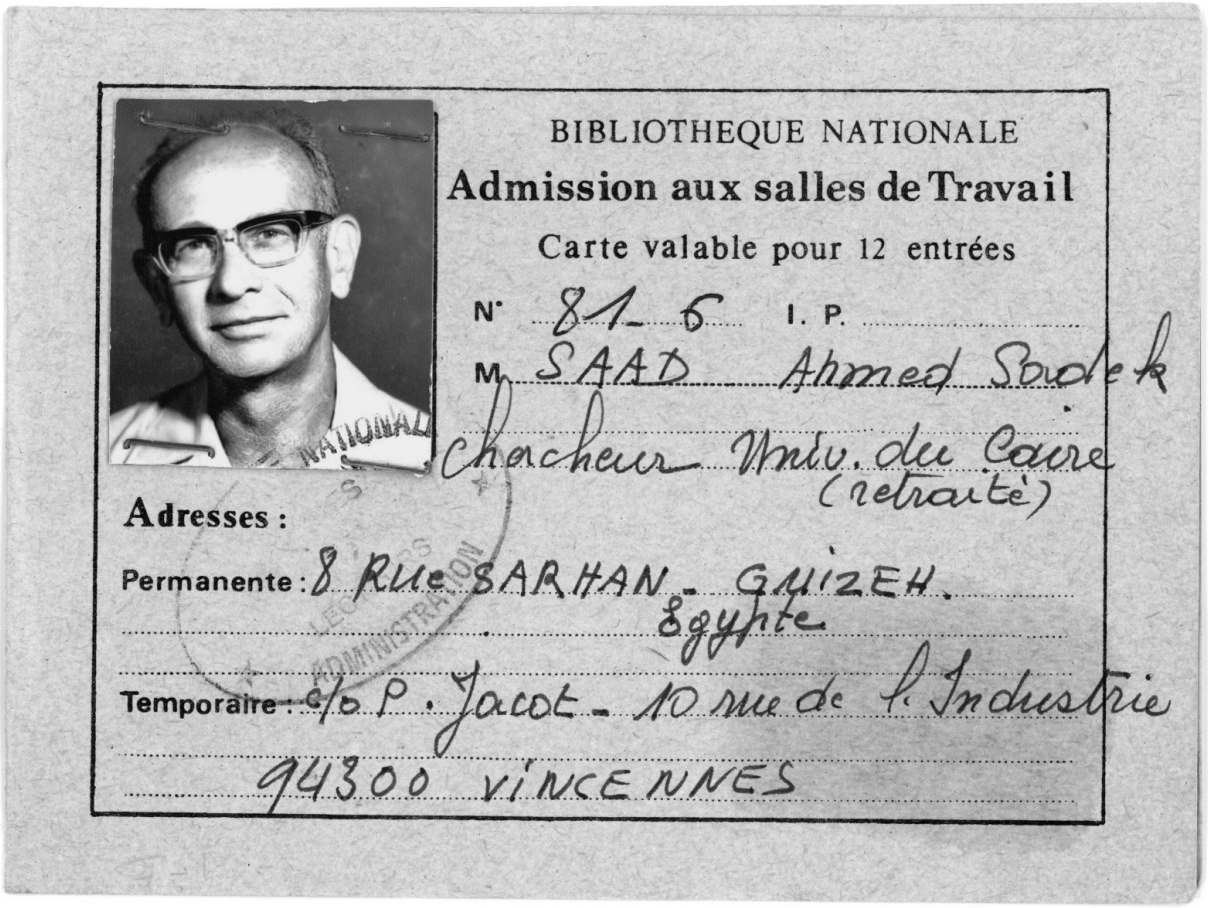
Tidhar made a name for himself as a crime writer. Tehomi spent much of the rest of his life in Los Angeles. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi became the second president of the State of Israel. Shortly after his death, the *Quatrains,* De Haan's intimate diary, which dramatized the struggle between soul and

body, appeared in Amsterdam. It was greeted as one of the most sublime achievements in the history of Dutch poetry. No one was ever brought to justice for his murder.

4

THE MAN OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

Ahmad Sadiq Saad



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BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE ADMINISTRATION

In 1947, a slim book, *Palestine in the Claws of Colonialism,* was published in Cairo.

Its author started writing the study in July 1945, two months after the defeat of Hitler and one month before the atomic bombings of Japan. At a time when much of the world was celebrating the end of the war and anticipating a victory for freedom and democracy, the Arab world dreaded another war in a region where the same powers who were fighting for freedom and democracy in Europe had long enforced undemocratic unfreedom upon them.

The Arabs feared another betrayal. After World War I, when they joined Britain to fight against Turkey in exchange for a unified, independent state, they were betrayed: Rather than independence, they saw their region sliced into "mandates," Britain taking Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine and France seizing Syria and Lebanon. As Herbert Samuel and Jacob Israël de Haan had seen with their own eyes, the Arabs knew that freedom meant *European* freedom. They knew that under whatever nomenclature—"mandate," "protectorate," "department," "alliance," or, more bluntly, "colony"—imperialism meant subjugation to foreign rule and, for the great majority, a poverty that often bordered on slavery. Even "independence" was a lie. In Egypt (which became independent in 1922) and Iraq (independent a decade later), Britain controlled foreign policy, military affairs, and the most important pieces of the economy: the Suez Canal in Egypt, the oil fields in Iraq.

Many knew that this bad situation was about to get worse. The country at the heart of the Arab region, Palestine, located at the point where Asia touches Africa, risked being excised from the Arab world entirely. Though its population was 70 percent Arab—down from more than 90 percent thirty years before—the foreign settler colony implanted there with the support of the British was growing restless, and as the war in Europe ended, its expansion was threatening dire consequences for the region. The American Harrison Report had recommended the introduction of 100,000 new settlers

to Palestine, and the British and the Americans were preparing to lift the restrictions on Zionist land purchases.

The author of *Palestine in the Claws of Colonialism* warned that it was essential to understand colonialism in this latest guise—and to understand that, though Egypt was preoccupied with its own struggles, it was a mistake to separate Palestine from the situation at home. "The Palestine issue is essentially no different from our own," the author insisted. "Perhaps reflection on Palestine and its developments may benefit the patriotic Egyptian directly, because it is such a clear case, devoid of the kinds of behind-the-scenes scheming that takes place in Egypt…. Palestine can give those who study it the main themes for our case as Egyptians."

With its detailed description of what colonialism had already done to Palestine, its understanding of Zionism's links to other forms of imperialism, and its prophetic annunciations of what Zionism, unchecked, would do to the Arab world, the book stands as the most eloquent statement in the Arabic language up to that time about Zionism. Yet it concludes on an optimistic note. Zionism is an impossible project, destined to fail, he wrote, both because the Palestinians and Arabs would never give up their resistance to it and because the demise of European fascism would make it easier for Jews to integrate into their own societies, all around the world. Nevertheless, the book's collection of dismaying statistics, its picture of what Zionism had already inflicted, months before the Nakba, make it shocking—and it is shocking, too, that it is the work of such a young man. Slender and good-looking, with a mischievous glint in his eye that sometimes shone through in his prose, he was only twenty-six when he started writing this book. It was already his third.

The name on the cover was Sadiq Saad, but behind this unimpeachably Arab and Muslim name lurked another, Isidor Salvador Saltiel, whose inclusion would have placed this text in a very different frame. His father was Sephardic, born in Egypt of parents from Izmir; his mother was from Odessa. His ancestry—part Sephardic, part Ashkenazic, partly with older roots in the Ottoman world, and partly traced to recent immigrants—was typical of the Jews of Egypt. The country had deeper connections to the

Jews than any other, including Palestine. In the Bible, in the book of Exodus, the Jews make their first appearance in Egypt. The Torah is given to Moses on Mount Sinai, in Egypt, a country whose Arabic name, *Masr* or *Misr,* seems to derive from the Hebrew *Mitzrayim,* meaning "narrow" and referring to the small green strip along the Nile, a plural form that alludes to the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. Egypt's Jews had a venerable intellectual, cultural, and religious heritage, including the philosophers Philo of Alexandria, Saadia Gaon, and Maimonides, that stretched back millennia.

Despite this pedigree—and despite the presence of several thousand indigenous Jews—Egypt's Jewish community more closely resembled that of a Western country (Argentina's, say, or Britain's) than that of Iraq, where the Jews spoke Arabic and belonged entirely, like Arab Christians, to a cosmopolitan Arab culture. Like the communities of the New World, many Egyptian Jews arrived in the nineteenth century, after the Suez Canal opened in 1869. Egypt underwent a fabulous boom sparked by the American Civil War, which cut off cotton exports to Europe and caused the value of Egyptian cotton to soar: from £1.5 million in 1861 to £14 million just three years later. "The country was covered with construction sites," wrote the French journalist Gilles Perrault. "Five thousand public schools were built—there weren't two hundred before—along with ports, railways, telegraph lines, canals, public buildings, the Cairo Museum, institutes…. They needed architects, engineers, scholars, financiers, lawyers. Specialized artisans were worth their weight in gold and the price of cotton never stopped rising." Many of these arrivals were Jews. Like Sadiq Saad's grandfather, some hailed from other parts of the Ottoman Empire; some, like his mother, from Eastern Europe. They took their places alongside the *mutamassir,* or "Egyptianized," communities: Armenians, Italians, Greeks, French. It was a heady time. Ismail Pasha, khedive of Egypt, said, "Egypt is in Europe."

Egypt was not in Europe.

In 1876, a mere seven years after the inauguration of the Suez Canal, it was bankrupt. Its finances were taken over by Europeans. In 1882, the

country came under full British control—and so it would remain, under different regimes, for the next seventy years. Sir Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, who in different capacities ruled Egypt from 1879 to 1907, expressed the British attitude in an essay whose title, "The Government of the Subject Races," dispenses with euphemism. "We need not always inquire too closely what these people, who are all, nationally speaking, more or less *in statu pupillari,* themselves think is best in their own interests," he wrote. "It is essential that each special issue should be decided mainly with reference to what, by the light of Western knowledge and experience…we conscientiously think is best for the subject race."

Over the decades of British domination, the country, and especially its Jewish communities, underwent a thoroughgoing westernization—so much so that even many Jews of Arab origin forgot their own language. "The grandfathers were totally integrated into the human fabric of the Middle East," wrote Gilles Perrault. European education had sliced the sons out of that fabric without so much as a change of address. "The grandfather hosted the greatest poets of Damascus or Aleppo, or frequented the cultivated elite of Istanbul; the grandson condescendingly said 'the Arabs' because the only ones he knew were his servants." Many Jews had foreign nationalities. Under a regime called the Mixed Courts—revealingly known as the Capitulations—foreign citizens were not subject to Egyptian law, giving anyone who could boast European ancestry, however implausibly, a reason to claim a passport. This made the Egyptian Jews different from their coreligionists in the rest of the Muslim world, and from Jews in nearly any other country. Over the decades, Jews, including the poorer members of the community, were educated in French schools, isolating them from their Arabic-speaking neighbors and turning even indigenous Jews, in the eyes of other Egyptians, into people who looked and sounded like foreigners.

The Jews were vastly overrepresented among the Egyptian left, more than any other community. Many Jews who would become Sadiq Saad's comrades in the communist movements came from prominent families, including the children of Egypt's great Jewish magnates. Reading French novels in their Nile-side villas, they had little experience of the nation

around them, and in their autobiographies a story recurs: of their encounter with the brutality of Egypt, of the moment they understood the reality behind the capital's opulent facade. Marcel Israël, whose father owned a cotton mill and who became a prominent anti-Zionist, saw that the workers at the factory were mostly peasant children, ranging in age from around seven to thirteen, working sixteen hours a day: "I saw the overseers armed with whips, circulating among the machines and beating the children to make them work faster." Another friend went to work in the countryside. He saw that it was more expensive to hire a mule than a man; he saw peasants, whose only food was bread and salt, getting killed while trying to steal onions. Egypt had the world record for blindness ("its only record"). One baby in three would die. An average Egyptian could expect to live twenty-seven years. To understand this panorama of misery and exploitation, many younger Jews turned to Russian literature: to Tolstoy, to Gorky, to Lenin.

Salvador's modest origins made him different from other kids who would become leftist leaders. He was born in a narrow alley in Shoubra, just to the north of Ramses Station in central Cairo. Called Omar al-Saay, the lane was just to the east of Bulaqiyya Canal Street, a commercial thoroughfare that separated a more prosperous west side of tree-lined streets and taller apartment buildings from the cramped area that the Saltiels inhabited. Yet they belonged, culturally, to the middle classes. "At home, we generally spoke French," he said. "We used English when receiving guests at monthly family gatherings, argued among ourselves in Italian, and in times of distress my mother would wail in Arabic—though it was the kind of Arabic spoken by the Nubian doormen." Salvador, called Sadi as a nickname, picked up Arabic in the streets. Someone from Shoubra would not need to discover the Egypt from which wealthier Jewish kids were screened: The neighborhood was more mixed in class terms than the exclusive areas that produced other Jewish leaders. It was also ethnically mixed, with a high percentage of Coptic Christians. The family did not stay in Shoubra. When he was four, the family moved to a villa in the fresher suburb of Zaytoun—a step up as his father's business started to prosper.

This affluence did not last. His father was killed in a car accident when Sadi was nine. His family moved to Alexandria, where they had relatives. They barely got by. By the time Sadi reached university, he would walk up the stairs last, behind his classmates, so they would not see the holes in his trousers. Poverty was not something that he would have to discover.

Sadi had his mind opened by a teacher who described past events with an uncanny relevance to the present. Anna Toubi (or Kayenko: Sadiq Saad gives her different names in his memoirs) was not even the regular history teacher at the Jewish lycée in Alexandria. She was a substitute, a daughter of Russian refugees who reached Egypt after the failed 1905 revolution. In her lectures on the French Revolution, she emphasized class struggle, and he was intrigued. She invited him to her home, where she lent him Marxist books. "I particularly recall *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels." With his methodical mind, the future engineer was attracted to "its tight logical structure and cohesion," discovering "a brilliant scientific tool for analyzing history and political currents of all kinds." He started attending different gatherings and gaining a nuanced understanding of current events. When he was sixteen, in 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia. This country, as big and old and important as Egypt, was the last uncolonized territory in all of Africa. The invasion came only a year after Italy had tightened its grip over Egypt's immediate neighbor, Libya; it already controlled the northern part of Somalia. For Egyptians, the fear of encirclement was terrifying, but in 1935 they had only bad options. "Egypt's enemy was British colonialism," he wrote, "and it was difficult for ordinary nationalists to concern themselves with another enemy." Many "tended to view the Axis powers as potential allies in the national struggle," he recalled, "a continuation of an earlier tradition of trying to exploit the contradictions between colonial powers." Yet the British, Egypt's enemies, were also the enemies of the fascists in Ethiopia and Libya. The communists were fighting both, including in Spain, whose civil war was one of the crucial battlefields of the time. Like many others, he thought that communism might offer a way out of Egypt's entrapment.

In its outlines, this story was common. “I believe that what happened to me was also experienced by an entire generation of Jewish youth in Cairo and Alexandria, who were shaken by the horrors of fascism and Nazism, and by racial persecution, and who found in the French and Spanish Popular Fronts—and in the role of the French Communist Party in particular—a source of hope and a political model.” Though they lived in Egypt, the Egyptian Jews were closer to what was happening in Europe than many non-Jewish Egyptians. “We were part of a wave of politicization that swept across young Jews in Egypt, especially those who came from European backgrounds.” The Nazi threat might have caused some to turn to Zionism, but the Egyptians, at the fulcrum of the Arab and European worlds, gravitated to the left. This tended to sharpen their skepticism of Zionism.

Sadiq cited the experience of reading a book by the German communist Otto Heller, *The Decline of Jewry: The Jewish Question, Its Examination, Its Solution Through Socialism,* published in 1931. This book was separated from the burgeoning literature on the “Jewish question” by the historical-materialist solution it claimed to offer, based on the writings of Lenin and Stalin. The “dictatorship of the proletariat” could provide a key based on the principles being implemented in the Soviet Union, where the Jews were considered one nation alongside the others that made up the postnational confederation of the Soviet Union. Heller saw Zionism as an outgrowth of British imperialism, an attempt to turn back the clock. Though clothed in Leninist language, *The Decline of Jewry* reflected the same conclusion that, from many other perspectives, other anti-Zionist writers reached: Jews should stay in their own countries and join the working class in its struggle for justice. “That book played a crucial role in our intellectual formation and in developing our firm opposition to Zionism,” Sadiq Saad later wrote.

In 1937, at eighteen, he returned to the city of his birth in order to begin his studies at King Fu’ad University, now Cairo University. Not long after, the semi-fascist Young Egypt Party organized a conference in support of the Arab right to Palestine. Its partisans entered a lecture hall and chanted slogans against Jews. “I stood up and protested,” he remembered. “I spoke —in Arabic with a foreign accent—about the difference between Judaism

and Zionism. I said that Judaism is a religion while Zionism is a political and colonialist movement. I called on the students to chant with me: 'Down with Zionism.' " He sensed the danger in having Jews conflated with Zionists, who in Egypt were a tiny minority, and the distinction between Jews and Zionists became essential to Sadiq Saad. He was approached by a Jewish student who tried to persuade the organizers not to attack Jews.

"I discussed the matter with the pasha," the student told him.

"Which pasha?" Sadiq Saad asked.

The other student named the wealthiest Jew in Egypt, Qattawi Pasha, patriarch of an illustrious family that claimed to have been established along the Nile since the eighth century. The involvement of such a grandee in a student squabble shows that if an eighteen-year-old with holes in his pants was worried that Zionists could fan antisemitism in Egypt, so were the highest echelons of Jewish society. The Young Egypt students met with the pasha. When Sadiq Saad heard about the meeting, the Jewish student made a gesture with his fingers that implied that Qattawi had slipped them some cash—a sign that the conservative Jewish leadership hoped that an understanding with both rightists and leftists could shield the community.

From the time he was young, Sadiq Saad, perhaps more than any other Jewish leftist of his time, manifested a desire to belong to Egypt: to be a full member of Egyptian society, unlike so many of his contemporaries, with their funny accents and their patina of Western culture. When he mentions that he spoke "Arabic with a foreign accent," he is speaking of the past. Before university, he spent a full year under the tutelage of a sheikh from Al-Azhar, the most venerable of Sunni universities, learning perfect Arabic, the language of classical literature, called *fuṣḥā,* "most eloquent." This was a language that few Egyptian Jews, except perhaps the Karaites, could speak or, more to the point, write: In a colonized country, the sign of an educated person was that he could write French, not Arabic. For Jews who got involved in left politics, the language barrier was almost insurmountable. (It was said of the charismatic leader Henri Curiel that the history of the Middle East would have been different if he had spoken better Arabic.) When Sadiq Saad started to write, it was always and only in

Arabic, and under an Arabic name: Sadiq from his childhood nickname of Sadi, and Saad from the anti-imperialist Egyptian hero Saad Zaghloul. Nobody is quite sure about Ahmad, one of the most common Arabic names, but nobody called him that: From his student days onward, he was known as Sadiq Saad. Yet there was always some anxiety about this identity. In 1975, looking back at his life in an interview, he mentions a literacy association he and his friends founded in the early 1940s. "Our primary aim," he said, "was to create some kind of connection with the Egyptian people": people, presumably, outside themselves. His anxiety about his Arabic could be touching: His daughter Mona remembers that once, when he emerged from surgery, his first concern upon regaining consciousness was to make sure that he could still speak good Arabic. "At the beginning," she told me in her living room, "you can see that he's fighting with his tongue."

As Sadiq Saad entered adulthood, this desire to belong would place him, time and again, in danger. The first time was in the summer of 1942, when the German and Italian armies under General Erwin Rommel invaded Egypt and came to within earshot of Alexandria. If Alexandria fell and the Germans managed to take the Suez Canal, Cairo would be impossible to defend. There was panic in the streets of the capital. Sadiq Saad remembered going to his roof and seeing smoke rising from the British embassy, whose employees were frantically burning documents. Foreigners crowded onto the trains to Palestine—among them, of course, many Jews. "The Nazis were coming," he remembered, "and we were Jews and communists. Should we leave or stay?" It was a heavy decision. A miscalculation could cost their lives. Many comrades fled. But Sadiq Saad and two friends resolved to stay. The dignity of the communist movement, they reflected, depended on its solidarity with those who could not flee. In the end, they were lucky. In the two great battles of El Alamein, first in July and then from October to November, the Nazis were chased out of Egypt—through Libya, all the way to Tunisia—never to return.

As these events shook the world, Sadiq and his group were working on studies of Egypt. In May 1945, the month that the war in Europe concluded,

they launched a magazine called *al-Fajr al-jadid,* "The New Dawn." Though short-lived—it would be quashed in July 1946, when a reactionary government came to power—it was an important experience for its contributors, giving them an outlet for their research. Alongside politics, *The New Dawn* had articles on philosophy, psychology, feminism, education, and culture, touching on Beethoven, African poetry, Maxim Gorky, films ("made by the rich to be seen by the poor"), Shakespeare, Langston Hughes, Anatole France, Romanticism, and Soviet theater. But its main contribution was a view that the one-size-fits-all internationalism—the orthodox communist view—erased specific circumstances. "The main error of the early communist movement in Egypt…was its failure to understand Egypt's unique national character," Sadiq Saad wrote. In the context of imperialist domination, "there can be no Egyptian communist who is not also a patriot." This ran against the Leninist belief that nationalism was a bourgeois distraction from working-class internationalism. But for the Egyptian communist, Sadiq Saad insisted, "patriotism was part of his communism, and communism part of his patriotism."

The period of *The New Dawn* was a time of fluorescence in his writing life. He published one book a year. *The Peasant Problem* came in 1945, *The Tragedy of Supply* in 1946, and *Palestine in the Claws of Colonialism,* a monument to this burst of early promise, in 1947. When it appeared, Sadiq Saad was twenty-seven. He maintained that what was happening in Palestine was essential to Egypt, and that it would redound—inevitably, calamitously—across the Arab world. In his staccato style, with his engineer's mind, he builds a portrait of what Zionism had already done, and offers a prophetic vision of what, unchecked, it could do in the future. Long before the term came into vogue, it is a description of settler colonialism, a project that operated in partnership with the British Empire but that was different from the British imperial project in Egypt. Zionism and British colonialism, he contends, had prevented any chance Palestine might have had for evolving into an independent, multiethnic secular democracy. With

piles of statistics, he creates a tragic picture of what Zionism had already wrought.

Sadiq Saad rejects the idea that Zionism is an answer to antisemitism, pointing out that by positing the permanence of antisemitism, "unrelated to social or governmental systems—whether democracy or fascism prevails," the Zionists "deny human progress in order to make Jews despair of their surrounding environment and withdraw from an active and positive role in it." (This is the same conclusion that many others, before and after him, would reach.) Zionism promotes a defeatist, demobilizing, depoliticizing attitude. He rejects the idea that Zionism had remade the Jews into an agricultural people—"In 1925, the percentage of land cultivators among the Jewish population [in Palestine] was 7.3%, and today it is 6.4%—the same as in the United Kingdom (6.4%) and in Belgium (7%)"—and in 1929, even in the agricultural communities, the kibbutzim and the moshavim, less than half the residents practiced agriculture, a proportion that in the subsequent decades had fallen. He rejects the idea that these were socialist communities: a common line that Zionists used to attract leftists. Instead, he emphasizes that these hokey, romantic appeals blinded Jews to the realities of class oppression in Palestine, and to the Zionist determination, typical of imperialism, to split a population along racial lines. The movement lies to Jews, "presenting Palestine as easily attainable and portraying the Arabs—not colonialism—as their enemies." He urges the Jewish proletariat in Palestine to find common cause with their Arab neighbors. "The solution to the Jewish question will come through solving the broader social problems," he writes, "and Jews must take part in the struggle for this solution."

Like any Egyptian patriot, Sadiq Saad loathed the British. In this otherwise sober book, he permits himself some mischievous references to "Great" Britain. He mentions early British proposals to establish Jewish colonies in Palestine as a means of "Tranquillization of Syria and the East," to take the title of an 1845 pamphlet by George Gawler. "Zionism was from the beginning an English movement," he quotes the Anglo-Jewish writer Louis Golding's saying, "not merely a Jewish one." He quotes David Ben-

Gurion: “Whoever betrays Great Britain, betrays Zionism.” He recalls the history of British duplicity toward the Arabs, including Lord Balfour’s telegram to Hussein of the Hejaz in February 1918, a few months *after* his famous declaration that “granted prominent Jewish colonialists rights in a land it did not own.” With the smug disconnect that characterized so many imperial communications, Balfour wrote Hussein that “His Majesty’s Government, in agreement with the Allies, are determined to uphold every movement seeking to liberate peoples from foreign domination.” Sadiq Saad recalled Lord Allenby’s statement, in November of that year, broadcast throughout Palestine, in which he said his goal was “to liberate the peoples who were under Turkish rule, and to establish national governments deriving their authority from the will and choice of the local populations.” Quoting Herbert Samuel would have been superfluous. For readers in Cairo, this language required little gloss. Sadiq Saad provides none. These quotations alone would have turned any Egyptian stomach.

He recalls the history of Zionist expansionism. In 1919, two years after the Balfour Declaration, Palestine’s Jewish population was 9.5 percent. By 1942, it had risen to 29.9 percent. As it would have done in any other country, this massive influx of foreigners created tension with the local population, and this tension “suited the colonial authorities perfectly, for it diverted the national struggle toward a secondary enemy and provided Britain with a pretext for maintaining its presence in Palestine.” Sadiq Saad impatiently dismisses Zionists’ claims to want to live in peace: “The goal of Zionism—whether disguised, as in the case of the ‘socialist’ Zionists, or openly proclaimed, as by the fascist Zionists—is to create a Jewish majority in Palestine.” Its “true aim,” he says, was “occupying Palestine and expelling the Arabs.” He reviews the history of land purchases from absentees like the Sursuq family, who were not Palestinian and who sold to the Zionists, in the early 1920s, a large part of northern Palestine, “22 villages, home to 1,746 families, totaling 8,730 individuals.”

Like millions of Egyptian peasants, these families and individuals were tenant farmers. The settlers expelled them from land they had cultivated for generations, and when they were made homeless, they found a worse

situation than even in Egypt. In other parts of the world, landless peasants could, at least in theory, find employment at other farms. But under the ideology of "Hebrew Labor," Zionists boycotted Arab workers. In practice, already, this meant apartheid. Sadiq Saad quotes Article 7 of the loan contracts issued by the Keren Hayesod, the Palestine Foundation Fund: "As long as the settler has not repaid the loans granted to him…he pledges to hire Jewish workers only." The expelled people could not find farmwork—and neither could they migrate to the cities, as surplus agricultural laborers did in every other country, including Egypt, where it might have been hard to find work but where they were not, of course, prohibited from seeking it. In Palestine, the Zionist cities, especially the largest, Tel Aviv, were, for practical purposes, verboten to Arabs.

British colonial policy and the privileging of Zionist enterprises distorted the Palestinian economy. By granting monopolies to foreign firms, imposing heavy taxes on the poorest, and favoring Zionist production while imposing "free trade" on the Arabs, the administration depressed prices for Arab goods—especially agricultural products—reducing their value by roughly half in the mandate's first decade. "Palestine, once nearly self-sufficient, was transformed into a region dependent on imports of foreign industrial goods and some agricultural products." As in so much of the colonized world, this economy, which historically produced mainly for domestic consumption, was reoriented toward export, directing already scarce land "toward producing agricultural crops that are profitable in international markets, rather than toward wheat and barley, despite the fact that this leaves the Palestinian masses hungry." This agriculture was highly profitable to the capitalist and left the country dotted with a modern-looking infrastructure, like railroads and ports, that serviced an export-oriented economy, but this "development" only aggravated poverty. The British and the Zionists constructed "a dual economy in which a new, foreign element —armed with capital, technical knowledge, and strong international connections—was implanted and supported by the British administration, while the indigenous Arab economy was increasingly marginalized." No people would have volunteered for such devastation, which is why the

British and the Zionists denied the Palestinians representation. As long as there was an Arab majority, elections were forbidden in Palestine. “The previous municipal elections in Haifa, for example, were held eleven years ago, with no new elections held since, and the last elections in Nazareth were eight years ago, also without renewal,” he wrote. “In reality, Palestinians—especially the Arabs—enjoy far fewer political rights than they did under Turkish colonial rule.”

Sadiq Saad chronicles the elaborate ways that the Palestinians were forced to pay for their own dispossession—“The Palestinian currency is issued in London by a special English committee, with Barclays Bank acting as its agent in Palestine. The currency is backed not by gold, as is customary in most countries, but by British or British colonial financial paper. In this way, the British Empire uses Palestinian state funds to cover some of its own colonial debts!”—and the cruelties inherent wherever there is taxation without representation: “A village like Adna in the Hebron district pays £700 annually in property tax, £651 in sheep tax, £970 in bank tax, and £260 for the village project—totaling £2,591—while the village receives only £260 for its rural school and £30 for health services…—a grand total of just £290 in return!” He shows the costs of maintaining “this complete system of political enslavement and economic exploitation.” Education got 4 percent of the budget. Health care got 5 percent. Police and prisons, however, got a stunning 26 percent, a portion that had increased *twelvefold* from 1923 to 1944, and which was paid for by the people being repressed. “Even though the country was already burdened with these imbalances, in 1937–1938 the people also had to pay £689,000 from their own pockets—to cover the costs of the British army in Palestine.” Palestine lived in an “atmosphere of terror,” he wrote. “The British colonial government uses methods of repression closely resembling Nazi brutality.”

Sadiq Saad traces the emergence of Palestinian national consciousness to the Ottoman era, “when there was neither a Jewish national home nor British military forces in Palestine,” and describes the “colonial propaganda —British and Zionist” that depicted this movement “as a racist movement directed against Jews (in which case, the British would need to create a

‘balance’ between the two elements via military occupation of Palestine), or as a reactionary movement opposed to Jewish ‘national’ demands and the ‘democratic’ Zionist system.” He traces the long history of protests: “The Balfour Declaration was imposed on the Palestinian people by force of arms, and every voice that rose in protest was met with repression, arrest, and execution. Yet despite this, the Palestinian people, through their national and popular forces, organized a series of continuous political and popular actions.” In 1936, the desperate Palestinian population rose against the British and the Zionists. The colonists’ answer to the uprising was to turn Palestine “into a prison that subjugates Palestinians—especially the Arabs—through continuous terror.” Sadiq Saad traces the response: “In suppressing the revolt, [British colonialism] employed the same techniques for which the Nazis and fascists had become infamous. In addition to direct military confrontation, it resorted to demolishing homes and entire villages, imposing collective fines on towns and villages from which gunfire was heard or where rebels were sheltered.”

Long before accusations of Nazism and antisemitism would be automatically wielded against every critic, Zionist propaganda “claimed that the movement’s leaders were supported by agents of German and Italian fascism, and therefore should be suppressed by force in defense of democracy.” Dissident Jews, too, were smeared, and worse: The methods applied to Jacob Israël de Haan were meted out. “If all that fails—if bribing leaders, flashy socialist rhetoric, racist propaganda, and fearmongering about democratic struggle don’t work—then let there be terror,” Sadiq Saad wrote, summing up the Zionist arguments. “Let armed fascist gangs form. Let Zionist critics be persecuted, silenced, or banned from the Histadrut”—the Jewish Federation of Labor, enforcer of apartheid—“or its executive council. Let those who wish to leave Palestine—after fascism was crushed and Nazism defeated in Germany—be intimidated. Only organized Zionist terror can keep the Jewish working classes under Zionist control in Palestine.”

As Sadiq Saad’s facts and numbers and quotations pile up, brick by brick by brick, a feeling of horror creeps over the reader. To read his book is

to feel that the Palestinians, even in 1947, were indeed "in the claws of" an inescapable force, one determined to exploit, disenfranchise, and pauperize them—one that had long been preparing the Nakba that would overtake them a year later, destroying homes, ravishing lands, ethnically cleansing 85 percent of the population, and forcing hundreds of thousands of innocent people into the bleak lives of refugees. To read this book is to understand that—long before 1948 or 1967—the Palestinians were under occupation: by the British who arrived, uninvited, with their phony promises of liberation; by the Zionists, who would stop at nothing. The reader sees this; Sadiq Saad sees this; but perhaps the most touching aspect of the book is his belief in working-class solidarity across racial or religious lines. As the Palestinian historian Abdel Razzaq Takriti has written, the Jewish worker in Palestine, no matter how oppressed by capitalism and imperialism, "was first and foremost a settler-colonizer, just as the French worker in Algeria and the Afrikaans worker in South Africa were." As in those two countries, "a liberation strategy cannot be built on the basis of winning over colonial workers who do not hesitate to support discrimination and colonial control—and even support genocide, as we see in Gaza."

Sadiq Saad does not mention his background in this book. But, like Jews throughout the Arab world, he also understood that Zionism endangered his own community. Egyptian Jews knew that no good could come from the perception that Jews, in open alliance with the hated British, were oppressing an Arab population. Other, more explicit attempts to draw a line between Jews and Zionists appeared at the same time. In June 1947, the same year that *Palestine in the Claws of Colonialism* appeared, a colleague of Sadiq Saad's, Marcel Israël, published a short manifesto for a Jewish Anti-Zionist League: "Against Zionism! For the Jews! For Egypt!" A similar Jewish anti-Zionist group had appeared in Iraq shortly before, yet in both countries they were banned because of a particularity that, until it is explained, is barely comprehensible to Egyptians today. In 1947, in the largest country in the Arab world, Zionism was perfectly legal. Zionists conducted their business in broad daylight on Soliman Pasha Street in the heart of downtown Cairo. What was illegal—what earned you a knock on

the door from the cops—was *opposition* to Zionism. The simple, obvious explanation was that Zionism was British. The British ran both Egypt and Iraq. Opposition to Zionism was therefore opposition to Britain.

In any case, the die was already cast. Actions such as Sadiq Saad's and Marcel Israël's came too late. On November 24, 1947, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, Egypt's delegate to the United Nations, said, "If Arab blood is shed in Palestine, Jewish blood will necessarily be shed elsewhere in the Arab world, despite all the sincere efforts of the governments concerned to prevent such reprisals." Although his words were often brandished by Zionists as evidence of an Arab threat to destroy the Jews, Haykal—a secular nationalist who had insisted on distinguishing Jews from Zionists—was saying no such thing. He was merely stating the obvious. Before the advent of Zionism, Egypt—again like Iraq—had known no antisemitic violence in centuries. But in November 1945 a coalition of right-wing parties called for protests on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. There was a rally, after which there were riots in both Cairo and Alexandria in which Jews were attacked. Six people were killed. The Ashkenazic synagogue was burned—but no others, suggesting that "the most vulnerable Jews were those most closely identified with Europe," writes the historian Joel Beinin. "This conclusion is strengthened by the prominence of Greek casualties in Alexandria." Jewish businesses—but also Coptic- and Muslim-owned stores—were looted. Nonetheless, Beinin adds, "the riots represented the first occasion in modern Egyptian history that Jews were collectively threatened by physical violence." As in Iraq a few years before, the authorities denounced the episode. The prime minister visited the riot sites. The king invited the chief rabbi to the palace.

When Haykal issued his warning, the United Nations was discussing partitioning Palestine into two separate states, one for Jews and one for Arabs. There were many reasons to oppose this partition, first recommended by the Peel Commission in 1937. ("Exactly what the Arabs should have expected from a commission headed by a conservative English lord," said Sadiq.) Despite heavy immigration, Jews made up no more than 30 percent of the population. If Palestine, already small, were divided into

even smaller states, neither would be economically viable or militarily defensible. But for Sadiq Saad, the main thing was the principle involved. He believed in a single, democratic, nonracial state, and knew that partition would have to be forced upon the majority by the same imperialist powers that had created the problem to begin with. Furthermore, the weakness of the resulting states would give the British an excuse to stick around: "It is as clear as daylight that British colonialism only entertained this bizarre and bewildering plan of partition in order to perpetuate the dilemma, tighten the knot, and maintain itself as the 'arbiter' over the inevitable, endless disputes that would certainly arise." On November 29, 1947—just five days after Haykal's warning that such a partition would doom the Jews of the Arab world—the United Nations voted for this bizarre and bewildering plan.

Devastatingly for the future of Arab communism, the Soviet Union voted in favor of partition.

Communists who looked to the Soviet Union as their ally in their struggle against Western imperialism were stunned by this betrayal of the Arab cause. Yet—as Abdel Razzaq Takriti put it—"when it rained in Moscow, people in Cairo got out their umbrellas." Arab communists tried to understand a decision that could only offend the entire Arab world. Sadiq Saad tried to thread the needle in his underground magazine *Al hadaf*. He published an editorial that criticized the vote without criticizing the Soviet Union. The decision reflected the interests of the Soviet *state,* he argues, which was not the same as the Soviet *party*. Such hairsplitting could not disguise that the vote spelled doom for the left throughout the Arab world, discrediting them in the eyes of millions at the moment that decolonization was gaining steam—in the very year of the independence of India. Soviet support for partition would soon prove a calamity for the Arab world *tout court*. The weakness of the left created a void that the religious right and military nationalists rushed to fill, helping clear the way for the Salafists and colonels to come.

As these momentous events were unfolding, the Egyptian monarchy was wobbling. A crackdown against the left had already begun. *The New Dawn* was banned in 1946, with one collaborator imprisoned for "incitement

against feudalism" (!). But the watershed came in May 1948, when the war so many feared was coming erupted. Egypt found itself at war with the new State of Israel, which had begun its campaign of ethnic cleansing of Palestine, "Plan Dalet," two months before. The Egyptians, like all the Arabs, were shocked by the violence against a neighboring Arab country, but it was a terrible war in which the monarchy further discredited itself. Egypt had roughly fifteen times the population of the new state, but the Arabs—as Avi Shlaim and others later demonstrated—were divided, outmaneuvered, and outgunned. Israeli planes bombed a residential neighborhood in Cairo, killing civilians during the Ramadan iftar meal, arousing anti-Jewish sentiment and setting off a series of attacks against Jewish targets in Cairo. Sadiq Saad was packed off to prison, along with approximately 1,300 opponents of the government, including 300 Zionist Jews and the same number of Jewish communists. The group was divided into communist Egyptians, communist Jews, and Zionist Jews. This did not amount to an attack on the Jews as Jews. "To establish a sense of proportion without in any way justifying the practice of detaining people without trial," Beinin writes, "the internment of about 1 percent of the Jewish community by the Egyptian government during its war with Israel can be compared to the practice of the U.S. government a few years earlier." Then, every single Japanese American on the West Coast, including even the families of American soldiers, was interned: 110,000 people.

The defeat of the Arab armies ushered in a period of uncertainty for Jews throughout the region. Afterward, Sadiq Saad reluctantly came to support a form of partition. He reasoned that now that the state existed, the important thing was to ensure that at least something could be salvaged for the native Palestinians. Still, and exactly as so many Jews had feared, "for the first time in the streets of Cairo you heard the word 'Jew' hurled as a threat or an insult," wrote the correspondents Jean and Simonne Lacouture. "That allowed the police to install a terror, under the pretext of fighting Zionism…. The Palestine War marked the beginning of Egypt's concentration camps, of torture as a means of repression and of extracting information, of informing on neighbors." The writer Raymond Stambouli

said, “The Palestine War hit us on the head like a club. It meant the end of what we had dreamed of and started to achieve. We considered ourselves Egyptians, even if we admitted that Egyptians saw us as foreigners. It was over. We weren’t only foreigners but Jews—a possible Fifth Column.” Yet the Lacoutures emphasized, “One mustn’t overstate the wave that overtook Egypt then, or imagine the violence of European antisemitism. One could even say that the Egyptian people showed, once again, a certain tolerance by not creating a bigger backlash against the Jewish minority after the conflict over Palestine.”

The property of those suspected of Zionism was sequestered. Zionist newspapers, which had circulated openly, were closed. Zionism, until so recently legal, was banned. It was not, Beinin said, “an inalienable human right of Jews to engage in political activity on behalf of a state at war with Egypt.” The Muslim Brotherhood, which did not distinguish between Zionist and non-Zionist Jews, started attacking Jewish property. The regime, which disapproved of these attacks, found it hard to defend the Jews too vigorously in the context of a war against the Jews of Palestine. Around twenty thousand Jews left in the next year. But at the end of 1948, when a different government was sworn in, a political amnesty followed. By January 1950, when the Wafd, the party of the liberal establishment, took the reins, all the prisoners, including Sadiq Saad, had been released. Most Egyptian Jews began to hope that it would be possible to return to normal life.

Sadiq Saad himself took advantage of his liberty to marry a woman named Donna, later Dina, Hamawy. The circumstances of their courtship are shrouded in mystery. Dina had been married, for a few months, to Sadiq Saad’s younger brother, who then committed suicide. The second marriage, their daughter Mona told me, seemed to have been required by custom, but the suicide caused such pain or shame that the very name of the brother remained unknown to Sadiq and Dina’s children, who were fascinated by how completely he had been expunged from the family’s correspondence and records. It was a strange beginning to a marriage that would know plenty of ups and downs: first because of Sadiq’s involvement in politics,

Mona later said, but also because Dina was worried that her attractive husband might stray. Three children followed: Rawia in 1952, Mona in 1956, and Sadiq in 1959.

Yet normal family life was stymied, constantly, by political turbulence. In July 1952, the monarchy was overthrown. This was a watershed in Egyptian history, and therefore in the history of the Egyptian left. In the thirty years since Egypt gained independence, Sadiq Saad had hoped for a peaceful evolution toward equality, democracy, and freedom from de facto foreign domination. He anticipated "a shift from a national movement led by the national bourgeoisie to one led by another force": the working class. But "a development that Egyptian Marxists had not foreseen" was a military coup led by the "petty bourgeoisie." These were the Free Officers, who eventually coalesced under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the son of a postal worker from Upper Egypt. When the last British soldier left, Nasser became the first Egyptian to rule an independent Egypt since Psamtik III was defeated by the Persians in 525 BC. He would establish Egypt as one of the centers of the postcolonial world, and Sadiq Saad credited Nasser with "eliminating the monarchy, expelling the British (eventually), redistributing land, establishing a public sector, and laying the foundations of a national independent economy," as well as with supporting liberation movements in Africa and the Arab world. Yet because the revolution neither arose from the masses nor allowed democratic participation, "it remained limited by the social base of its leadership and its reluctance to allow political freedoms." In fact, at first, its only clear goals were land reform and ending foreign domination. Its principal ambition was control of the Suez Canal.

But as Nasser was remaking Egypt, Israel delivered another blow to Egypt's Jews. As in 1950 and 1951, when the Iraqi Jews were bombed by Zionist agents, Israel launched Operation Susannah, later known as the Lavon Affair, in 1954. The plan was to firebomb civilian gathering places in Egypt—libraries, train stations, cinemas—including targets associated with Britain and the United States, a false flag operation that would then be blamed on the Muslim Brotherhood. The purpose of the attacks was to

compromise Nasser's relations with the West—it was not a coincidence that he was negotiating a withdrawal of British troops from the Suez Canal at the time—and invite Western intervention by portraying Egypt as a radical, unstable state. The turmoil Israel hoped would ensue would then create insecurity in the broader Arab region, an Israeli priority since the beginning of the state. As a bonus, it would help solve Israel's demographic problem by causing Egyptian Jews to flee. But the terrorists were clumsy. A bomb ignited in one saboteur's pocket as he was entering the Rio Theatre in Alexandria. The gang was rounded up. It included Marcelle Ninio, a relative by marriage of Dina Hamawy's, who led the police to an Israeli agent named Max Bineth, who—this, too, was not a coincidence—had been involved in the Baghdad bombings. No Egyptian civilians were hurt, though one of the saboteurs was burned. The saboteurs were tried in December 1954. For the Egyptian Jews, it was a terrible scenario. Despite the community's efforts to separate themselves from a state officially at war with Egypt, several conspirators were Egyptian Jews. Through the actions of a handful of mostly young and inexperienced people, the entire Jewish community was cast into disrepute.

There was never any doubt as to the group's guilt. (Israel officially acknowledged its role in 2005 by awarding medals to surviving operatives.) The international press nevertheless portrayed the trial as a Nazi-like kangaroo court, and slotted it into an expensively concocted tale of a Nazi-like Arab persecution. The charges were described as a "blood libel." It was a persecution "reminiscent of the days of Hitler." Nasser was "Hitler on the Nile," said *The New York Times,* and David Ben-Gurion said that "these acts remind us of those committed by Hitler before the world war." There were SS officers in charge of the "Egyptian Gestapo," and, Ben-Gurion claimed, during the Palestine War, "many of the Egyptian officers' vehicles were decorated with the swastika and many of these officers had copies of *Mein Kampf*." In Israel, Europe, and the United States, these fabrications were, as usual, reported as facts, and distributed by the World Jewish Congress and B'nai B'rith. By the time Don Peretz of the American Jewish Committee visited Egypt the next year and reported that the situation "in no way

resembles that as portrayed by most of the American Jewish press or by the American Jewish Committee fact sheets," the Hitler/Nazi/SS/Gestapo reports had been publicized everywhere. Despite their increasing anxiety, the Egyptian Jews nevertheless mostly stayed put. Fewer than five thousand left from 1952 to 1956. This was a significant drop from the numbers that departed immediately after the 1948 war.

In later years, when the Lavon Affair conspirators were freed and arrived in the Israeli state, Prime Minister Golda Meir would work herself into excesses—"I thought of the Jews throughout Jewish history who faced discrimination, torture, danger, broken in body but never in spirit. I thought of the six million Jews during World War II in Nazi camps, buried alive, tortured, gassed. I thought of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto who fought the Nazi tanks"—to welcome people who had been caught trying to blow up libraries and movie theaters.

This heady rhetoric was designed to obscure the questions that the affair might have raised in other minds: Why was the conspiracy carried out in the first place? Why had Israel felt it should endanger the Egyptian Jewish community by carrying out attacks on civilian targets? And why Egypt? Such attacks, after all, were not ordered in Manchester, or Miami, or Marseille: They were only ordered in Arab countries. This was partly because of the attitude that Zionism had always cultivated toward Arabs—striving to sharpen a schism between Arab and Jew that was essential to Zionism but that, before Zionists began colonizing Palestine, had never previously existed. "In fact, the Jews are Arabs," an Egyptian Jew said as recently as 1943. Zionist violence was increasingly making such a statement impossible, and Zionist propaganda was creating a myth, which they have insisted on to this day, that all the Arab countries were expelling their Jewish populations—a way of justifying the Zionist expulsion of the Palestinians. But the truth of the story was no more a concern to Zionists than was the safety of the fifty thousand Egyptian Jews. After the double disaster of the Palestine War and the Lavon Affair, Israel proved this with a final blow to the community. It had recovered from the first two. It would not recover from the third.

On October 29, 1956, following Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, Israel, with the support of Britain and France, invaded Egypt and seized the canal. Led by its own interests, the United States forced them to stand down, but for Egypt's Jews the Tripartite Aggression was a calamity. The antisemitic denunciations that the Jews were in cahoots with the imperialists to undermine the Egyptian nation were difficult to disprove when, in collaboration with two imperialist powers, a Jewish army had just killed thousands of Egyptians and seized the single most important element of the national economy. About a thousand Jews were detained. Thirteen thousand British and French citizens were expelled—not as Jews, though many were Jewish—and French and British businesses were nationalized, many, again, the property of Jews. In November, Zionists were barred from Egyptian citizenship, and in the five months immediately following the invasion, fearful of what might come, about a third of the Jews of Egypt fled the country—many abandoning everything they owned. They were not the only ones to leave: After 1956, almost all the *mutamassir* communities, Greeks, Italians, Armenians, and so on, departed in turn. Suez sounded the death knell for the old cosmopolitan Egypt—though under Nasser another cosmopolitan culture, African and Arab now rather than European, was about to be born. Cairo, under Nasser, would become one of the capitals of the postcolonial Third World.

Not all the Jews left. In 1957, Sadiq Saad converted to Islam. On this occasion, he took the additional name of Ahmad. Had his lifetime of principled atheism been shattered by a spiritual revelation? It had not. Rather, he decided to become a Muslim in order to remain a communist. In the wake of the Suez War, a new movement to unify communist splinter parties was stymied by the insistence of one group that Jews be excluded: an exclusion that Sadiq Saad politely called chauvinism, and that he would never forgive. In Egypt, "Muslim" was an ethnic characterization as well as a religious one, and Islam is perhaps the easiest of the world's religions to join. Speak the words of the *shahada*—There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet—and voilà.

Sadiq Saad told his wife they had converted.

“To what?” she asked.

“To the majority religion!” he answered.

She was relieved. Islam treated women better, she thought; she had always hated the verse that Jewish men recite daily, “Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast not made me a woman.” In later life, she would try to learn more about Islam by delving into the Koran, a difficult text for those who do not have training in *fuṣḥā,* and quickly gave up. The next time her grandson Shehab came to her house, he found her reading *Ragol al-mustaheel,* “The Man of the Impossible”—one of a series of spy thrillers featuring a dashing Egyptian James Bond who performs incredible feats of patriotic derring-do, including attacking Israel, without, of course, any recourse to alcohol or extramarital sex.

Not long after his so-called conversion, Sadiq Saad was arrested in the roundup of communists that Nasser launched on New Year’s Day 1959. Rather than being kept at Huckstep, a taxi ride from downtown Cairo, he was sent to a prison that was grim even by Egyptian standards, beyond Aswan in the badlands of the desert south. He was there for five years, released ahead of a visit by the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, who demanded freedom for Egypt’s communist prisoners. Sadiq Saad never said what happened in those years. He referred only elliptically, in 1987, to “the unprecedented brutality of the arrests, worse even than during the darkest days of the monarchy and British control.” His family knew he was tortured. He never gave any details. He told his children that it was not “useful” to them to know, because they themselves might one day be arrested—as in fact they later would be. When he was in prison, Dina contemplated reverting to Judaism: She was angry that the communist comrades did not help a woman with three young children whose husband had been jailed. She hoped that what was left of the Jewish community might help, but in their diminished state they couldn’t. Rawia was seven when he was arrested; Mona was three; and Dina was pregnant with Sadiq, their son. Sadiq Saad missed five years of their childhood. Mona was eight when he returned.

“My father is a gentleman,” she told her mother.

“We’ll see about that,” Dina replied.

After his release, he worked as an engineer in a factory and wrote more books about political economy. He enjoyed classical music and taught his children to appreciate it; he traveled around the Arab world and Europe. By 1967, when Israel again invaded Egypt and occupied the Sinai all the way to Suez, the Egyptian Jews had mostly given up on life in Egypt. The wars with Israel and the enmity between Muslim and Jew that they fed; the stagnation of the economy and the seizure of businesses that had been part of Nasser’s nationalizations; the trickle of departures of so many of their friends and relatives—only a minority went to Israel—meant that this ancient Jewish community had petered out to a handful of survivors, including men who had converted to Islam in order to marry Muslim women. Sadiq could look back at 1947, when his book on Palestine came out, as a relatively tolerant time. Exactly as he predicted, Zionism brought disaster to the Arab world, plunging the entire region into a series of terrible wars and blocking the evolution that progressives had hoped would bring greater freedom, prosperity, and independence. Its victory entrenched the police states and the foreign domination that his generation had hoped to escape: Egypt’s military dictatorships would take billions a year in American “aid” that was mainly conditioned on offering protection to the Israeli state.

It was a relatively hopeful time, too, when it was still possible to believe that Zionism would fail, and that the end of fascism would hasten the integration of Jews into the Arab world. Though Sadiq Saad’s book became legendary, and though new editions were scheduled in 1969, 1972, and 1988, the book was never republished. At his funeral in 1988, his son, who had become a conservative Muslim, tried to shoo mourners away from the service. A friend of Sadiq Saad’s said, “His son didn’t want all those communists at the cemetery.”

5

THE HOUSTON SCHISM

Hyman Judah Schachtel



"Never a dull moment during the bygone year!!" wrote Leopold Meyer, president of Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, in May 1944. In and among the usual chatter in his annual report ("Mr. and Mrs. Isaac S. Brochstein and Mr. and Mrs. Sam Brochstein complimented the Congregation with two beautiful fern boxes, which appropriately adorn the Temple Altar") was a conflict so vitriolic that, in the middle of a world war, it landed Beth Israel in the pages of *Time* magazine and *The New York Times*.

This was not where Beth Israel liked to be.

The Greek columns on its facade, south of downtown on the corner of Holman and Austin Streets, proclaimed the stability—the unimpeachable correctness—of one of the city's most enduring institutions. Beth Israel was a flagship of American Judaism, its origins stretching back to 1844, when Texas was still an independent republic. It was proud of its status as the oldest temple in Texas and the largest congregation in the South. Its rabbi, Dr. Henry Barnston, had served for forty-three years. Its board was drawn from the same captains of industry—bankers, retailers, insurance men—who would have occupied such positions in any similar synagogue. These were not people—this was not a place—that went looking for trouble.

Yet trouble had found Beth Israel. In mid-1943, the congregation was riven by a scandal so intense that for months it relegated even the most shocking reports from Nazi-occupied Europe to the inner pages of the Jewish newspapers. The controversy went to the heart of what it meant to be Jewish and what it meant to be American, and created a schism that reverberated for a generation. It took its most fervent participants by surprise. The cause, as ever, was Zionism.

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On September 7, 1943, Beth Israel's Board of Trustees approved a single page of "Basic Principles." These—which would soon earn its authors comparisons to Adolf Hitler, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Spanish Inquisition,

and which would be called the Jurenberg Laws, reminiscent of the Nuremberg Laws—included seven points.

They proclaimed the unity of God. They vowed to usher in a messianic age of brotherhood, rather than awaiting a personal Messiah. They asserted the religious equality of women and men. They embraced the moral core of the Bible while rejecting rules that "regulate diet, priestly purity, dress, and similar laws…which today are entirely unsuited, unnecessary and foreign to the beliefs and observances of progressive Judaism in modern America." They said that Hebrew, unknown to most congregants, should for the most part give way to English so that prayer would not become a "soulless form." They promised to "help our co-religionists whenever and wherever the need may arise, even as we must help all mankind that may be in need, in accordance with the principles of our faith."

In American Reform synagogues, this was boilerplate. So, until recently, was the second of the seven principles, the paragraph that unleashed the controversy:

> We are Jews by virtue of our acceptance of Judaism. We consider ourselves no longer a nation but we are a religious community and, therefore, we expect neither a return to Palestine nor a restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish State. We stand unequivocally for the separation of Church and State. We are neither a nation, a nationality nor a race. Our religion is Judaism. Our nation is the United States of America. Our nationality is American. Our flag is the "Stars and Stripes." Our race is Caucasian.

No current member would be obliged to subscribe to these principles. Any new member must either accept them or, in case they could not, become "associate members," who would enjoy full access to the temple's religious, social, and educational services—everything but the right to vote.

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In September 1943, these principles provoked outraged howls. The outrage was not unpredictable. There had always been tensions among American Jews, and these, in Texas, had a specific character. The core Texas Jewish families traced their origins to Western Europe. Their ancestors had entered the United States through Southern ports, especially New Orleans and Galveston, which gave them a different political and cultural orientation from those who had entered through the East, and above all through New York. Their religious orientation was different, too: Far more so than in the North, Southern Reform congregations rejected anything that smacked of Orthodoxy.

From the late nineteenth century, Jews poured into the United States. In a single decade, from 1910 to 1920, the Jewish population of Texas doubled. By 1940, it had grown almost another 50 percent, to around fifty thousand. Those who arrived in the 1900s had very different cultural, political, and religious backgrounds from the older Texas Jews. They were more likely to speak Yiddish—and, as persecution of Jews increased following World War I, they were more likely to be Zionists. In the context of Texas, these differences might not have mattered, since the Jews, like other citizens of the fast-growing state, were adept at absorbing immigrants. But by 1943, there was a more urgent context.

That, of course, was the war. Interspersed among the 553 pages of documents relating to the Basic Principles in the Beth Israel archives are many that refer to the events not yet known as the Holocaust. These give an idea of what an average American Jewish community would have known, in those years, about those events. By 1943, much was known, some firsthand: Houston was full of refugees, among whom was my grandfather, a Berlin lawyer who had reached the United States five years before. Beth Israel collected the desperate advertisements placed in the national newspapers.

From February and March 1943, for example:

> Massacred By Foe, Ignored By Friend, A PEOPLE APPEALS TO THE CONSCIENCE OF AMERICA…

German Postal Authorities Now Use A Stamp Which Reads "Died in the course of liquidation of the Jewish Problem"…TWO MILLION JEWS HAVE ALREADY BEEN EXTERMINATED!

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN—Save the 4,000,000 remaining Jews of Europe by ACTION—NOT PITY!

These advertisements stressed the importance of allowing Jews to immigrate to Palestine, a small country where there was hostility to such immigration. They did not stress the importance of allowing Jews to come to large Western countries that could have absorbed them—Great Britain, South Africa, Brazil, Canada, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, for example—and neither did they stress, or indeed even mention, the most obvious destination of all: the United States of America.

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The first whisper of trouble, and the earliest document preserved in the archives, appeared in Houston's leading Jewish newspaper, *The Jewish Herald-Voice,* on January 7, 1943. Titled "We Reject Zionism: An Anti-Zionist Leader States the Position of His Group," the article was the work of a New York rabbi named Hyman Judah Schachtel.

Schachtel was thirty-five. He had been born in 1907 in London, where his father, an opera singer from Kalisz, had been recruited by Oscar Hammerstein to join a company he was hoping would rival the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. Following his opera career, Schachtel's father became a cantor and married a granddaughter of Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, a rabbi of Grodno, after whom the seminary of Yeshiva University is named. Unusually for a girl of her time, Schachtel's mother had learned Hebrew and Talmud. Because of this background, Schachtel said, "I had very little chance to be anything else but what I am."

The family sailed on the *Lusitania* in 1914, a year before a German torpedo sank the ship and killed nearly twelve hundred people. At Ellis

Island, a tragedy: The family's nanny, nicknamed Silly Lulu, was turned back because she was unable to read. "I can still see her screaming and my brothers and I crying because we wanted Silly Lulu to stay with us," he would later recall.

Schachtel grew up in Buffalo. He was a ginger who used to pray that he would wake up with his brothers' dark hair. "All redheads develop an inferiority complex," he said. His father died shortly before he was ordained in 1931, and then an early marriage ended in divorce. He then married a younger woman, a student at Vassar named Barbara Levin. His rich voice —"That's what attracted me to him in the first place," said Barbara—rang with authority. He joined the West End Synagogue in Manhattan, and was employed there when the article appeared in Houston.

In it, Schachtel rejected the Zionist idea "that we are Jews by race and nationality." It rejected the idea that Jews were homeless: "We American Jews are not homeless. The British Jews fighting valiantly for Britain do not regard themselves as homeless. Nor do the Russian Jews shedding their blood along the 2,000-mile front." And he took a long historical view. "True, the last two decades have been bitter ones in some countries [!], but those decades were only part of a stream of history which in the last century and a half has shown enormous progress in the expansion of freedom." The problem, as Schachtel saw it, was not homelessness; it was the denial of universal human rights. This was exactly what people as different as Edwin Montagu, Sadiq Saad, and Aaron Samuel Tamares had also maintained. In the middle of the war, Schachtel's message was optimistic:

> For us to maintain that postwar Europe will be eternally and unchangeably hostile to the Jew is to call the objectives of the United Nations so much poppycock and to imply that the world tomorrow will only carry on the evils of the world of yesterday. It is to accept a barren philosophy of defeatism to believe that while the Axis will be defeated, the Axis ideology will be triumphant. It is to grant Hitler NOW his victory in making Europe "Judenrein" (without Jews).

The documents do not say why this appeared in *The Jewish Herald-Voice,* but a movement was afoot to replace the seventy-five-year-old Dr. Barnston, Beth Israel's long-serving leader. Though unanimously respected and resolutely opposed to Zionism, Barnston was aging. The board tried to ease him out diplomatically, but he refused. They tried to ease him out less diplomatically, suggesting that they might go public with his shortcomings —"shaky delivery of sermons, poor health, and inability to draw a crowd," according to the historian Hollace Ava Weiner—and even showed him a surreptitiously snapped photograph that revealed the rows of empty pews at a recent service. The trustees feared that if something happened to him, his heir apparent, Robert Kahn, would replace him, and it was known that Kahn had Zionistic inclinations. Conveniently from their point of view, Rabbi Kahn was thousands of miles away in the Pacific, serving as a chaplain in the U.S. Army. They were seeking a suitable replacement for Dr. Barnston before Kahn returned. They found Schachtel.

Though every effort was taken to make Dr. Barnston's departure appear voluntary—the official reason was poor health—he was fired on May 19, 1943. This was four months after Schachtel's piece appeared, perhaps as an audition. By his own account, Schachtel was not looking for another job. As he told it, Rabbi Jonah Wise, son of Isaac Mayer Wise, called to say that a Mr. George Cohen of Houston—the owner of Foley's, one of Houston's most prestigious department stores, as well as the brother-in-law of the synagogue's president, Leopold Meyer—wished to meet him in his suite at the Waldorf Astoria. The meeting went well. Schachtel visited Houston, with its notoriously hot and humid climate, and was chauffeured from home to hotel to restaurant in such a crisply air-conditioned bubble that he reported to Barbara, in New York, that the place was "freezing." The welcome, though, was warm. Still, he was hesitant. "I loved New York City and couldn't see myself coming here," he remembered. "Whereupon some of the outstanding colleagues of mine in the country called me and said it is your duty to do this."

The board would not have dismissed Barnston without a ready replacement, and the reference to "outstanding colleagues" pressuring

Schachtel to go to Houston is a hint that the nationwide anti-Zionist camp considered it a priority to keep a synagogue as prominent as Beth Israel from embracing Zionism. There is no evidence that other candidates were considered. Schachtel had been active in the American Council for Judaism, which led the charge against Zionism in the United States. He had helped to round up signatures for an open letter from American rabbis, and was described as one of the new group's hawks. This earned him the opprobrium of one of the leaders of the New York rabbinical establishment, Stephen S. Wise, who blocked Schachtel's election as the head of the New York Board of Jewish Ministers. In reply, sixteen rabbis walked out. This defeat only made Schachtel more visible among the anti-Zionists. The American Council for Judaism was especially prominent in the South, with its more integrated Jewish communities, and brought him to the attention of the Houston congregation.

To the public, Beth Israel's board maintained that, following Barnston's resignation, they sought a man "becoming the importance and dignity of Beth Israel," one who "subscribed to the principles of the faith as taught by Dr. Barnston for nearly forty-four years, and from which the members of Beth Israel would brook no departure." The phrase "principles of the faith" was code for opposition to Zionism, and clearly understood as such. Only three days after Barnston's firing, a congregant named Jacob L. Farb, whose letters would reveal a taste for flamboyant metaphors, used the first of the Nazi comparisons that would punctuate the following months. "The deftness of the proceeding"—the firing of Dr. Barnston—"has all the earmarks of a 'blitz' plainly marked 'made in Germany.' "

Two months later, on July 14, Rabbi Schachtel was officially offered the job. On July 23, he telegraphed his acceptance. In the meantime, a special meeting was called for August 4, one that "likely will always be recalled by the members of Congregation Beth Israel as highly eventful, to say the least." Some were upset about Dr. Barnston's departure; some, about the failure to elevate Kahn. President Leopold Meyer noted that "for the first time in the history of Beth Israel…there were hopelessly irreconcilable factions within our Congregation, and, shockingly, that a small segment of

our membership was more devoted to National Zionism than to Judaism." The dissidents knew well, Meyer wrote, that "if Rabbi Schachtel were elected, the death knell of National Zionism within Beth Israel would be sounded." Rubbing it in, Meyer wrote that the "hopeless and helpless minority" went down to a "thunderous and ignominious defeat." He added, "The entire Jewish community was definitely aroused by the character of the claptrap presented."

Following the meeting, on August 13, Meyer appointed a Policy Formulation Committee, under the chairmanship of Israel Friedlander, founder of an important local bank, the Gibraltar Savings and Loan Association. On September 7, the committee approved the Basic Principles. After receiving a letter of protest, President Meyer summoned a general meeting on November 23. In advance of that meeting, letters, pamphlets, and articles started to fly around the nation, debating the meaning of Judaism and the place of the Jews in America.

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By 1943, the origins of Reform Judaism were mostly forgotten. The movement had begun in Germany but found its most fervent adherence in the United States, where, in the nineteenth century, its struggle with Orthodoxy occasionally unleashed violence. In Albany, in 1850, Isaac Mayer Wise, the movement's revered father, was assaulted in front of the Torah on Rosh Hashanah. The cops broke up the ensuing melee.

That was a long time ago, and that was not how things went at staid, respectable Beth Israel. In many ways, Beth Israel was a typical American Reform congregation. Its members were integrated, educated, better-off Jews whose families had been in America for several generations. They spoke English and were indistinguishable, in matters of dress and taste, from their Christian neighbors. They tended to be politically center-left, but were not, like many Yiddish-speaking newcomers, communists or socialists. They were anything but radical.

Yet Reform Judaism had once been radical. In one famous episode in 1883, a banquet was held to celebrate the first graduating class of the Reform rabbinical seminary, Hebrew Union College, in Cincinnati. At the banquet, *treyf,* or nonkosher food—clams, crabs, shrimp, and frogs' legs—was served. This seems not to have been calculated to offend conservative guests—the college had, in fact, hired a Jewish caterer—but the episode became notorious. A Philadelphia rabbi denounced the proceedings: "Men notably supposed to champion the Revealed Law sat at tables laden with the flesh of animals whose vital blood remained therein, and with that of loathsome things which creep in ponds and on the ground." To this, Isaac Mayer Wise impatiently replied, "It is about time to stop that noise over the culinary department of Judaism. The American Hebrew's religion centers not in kitchen and stomach."

Behind Wise's dismissal was a profound conviction. Decades later, the last survivor of that first Hebrew Union class, Rabbi David Philipson, would describe the essence of Reform as substituting "for the nationalistic, legalistic, and ceremonial form of Judaism—the product of the ages of exclusion, repression, and the ghetto—the universal and spiritual teachings that accentuate Judaism's message of ethical monotheism." Superstitious abracadabra, the thousands of petty directives governing diet and dress —"the culinary department of Judaism"—was getting in the way of a universal message. "The sublime cardinal elements are almost lost sight of in the multitude of thoughtless observance of rabbinical forms," wrote Isaac Mayer Wise in 1854. "Judaism has become a set of unmeaning practices."

The Reform party wanted to banish anything that interfered with Judaism's spiritual essence. The Reform prayer book shows how sweeping these changes were. It removed references to angels and demons. It banished allusions to the ancient sacrificial cult. It eliminated the description of the Jews as a chosen people, along with any negative references to non-Jews. No longer would they thank God "that thou didst not make me a Gentile"—or, for that matter, the same phrase that offended Dina Hamawy in Cairo, "that thou didst not make me a woman." The dietary laws, along with observance of the Sabbath, became matters of

personal preference. With the exception of a few prayers and phrases that nearly everyone knew by heart, Hebrew gave way to English. By 1943, restated in Beth Israel's Basic Principles, these ideas were mostly uncontroversial among Reform Jews.

The same could not be said for another principle, number two on Beth Israel's list: the rejection of Jewish nationalism. In the literature distributed ahead of the November 23 meeting, the board explained the history of this reasoning in great detail. The cornerstone of the entire Reform movement was the move toward universalism. This meant, in Leopold Meyer's words, "opposition to both Jewish nationalism and to such emphasis upon the racial, folkloristic, tribal vestiges of Judaism as stem from it." This had always been the Reform position: "its central and basic fundamental principle."

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Before political Zionism, this principle was connected to the messianic question: to the idea that the Messiah would ingather the exiles. The Reform rabbis had replaced a hope in a personal messiah with a commitment to working toward a messianic age of peace and justice, right here on earth. In 1869, a conference declared that "the Messianic aim of Israel is not the restoration of the old Jewish state under a descendant of David, involving a second separation from the nations of the earth, but the union of all of the children of God." In Pittsburgh in 1885, the clergy reiterated: "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."

The advent of Zionism caused the Reform movement to underline this principle. At a conference in Montreal in 1897, one year after Herzl published *Der Judenstaat,* Isaac Mayer Wise referred to "this unpleasant episode" by thundering, in italics,

> *That we totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish state. Such attempts show a misunderstanding of Israel's mission,* which from the narrow political and national field has been expanded to the promotion among the whole human race of the broad and universalistic religion first proclaimed by the Jewish prophets. Such attempts do not benefit, but infinitely harm, our Jewish brethren where they are still persecuted by confirming the assertion of their enemies that the Jews are foreigners in the countries in which they are at home and of which they are everywhere the most loyal and patriotic citizens.

Over the next two decades, as Zionism gained steam, the Reform movement consistently opposed it. In Indianapolis in 1906, they stated that "religion is the tie which unites the Jews" and expressed unqualified commitment "to the total separation of Church and State," which separation a Jewish state would inevitably endanger. In Buffalo, in 1917, they reaffirmed "the fundamental principle of reform Judaism, that the essence of Israel as a priestpeople, consists in its religious consciousness, and in the sense of consecration of God and service in the world, *and not in any political or racial national consciousness.*" In 1918, following the Balfour Declaration, the president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations rejected, at Chicago, the idea that "Palestine is to be a national home-land for the Jewish people."

> This statement assumes that the Jews although identified with the life of many nations for centuries are in fact a people without a country. We hold that Jewish people are and of right ought to be at home in all lands…. We are opposed to the idea that Palestine should be considered the home-land of the Jews. Jews in America are part of the American nation.

And in 1920, they stated the principal difference between the universalism they embraced and the nationalism of the Zionists: "Modern

political Zionism came into being as a result of the tears, the suffering and the despair of the Jewish people in the 19th century, whereas Reform Judaism arose out of faith and hope and confidence."

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Back in Houston, Beth Israel's board recalled this history to the congregants. Their opponents were slow to get going. A day before the November 23 meeting, a "Beth Israel Sentinel" was distributed, listing some of the names that had requested the meeting, and in whose prose one recognizes the inimitably florid style of Jacob L. Farb.

"They"—the protesters—"marched up Sinai—remember that mount in ancient Hebrew lore (some of us seem to have forgotten it); they helped to make a Roman holiday when the beasts were turned into the arena; they felt the heel of the Cossack boot; they felt the wrath of Hitler. Yes, among them were THE DISSENTERS." Among this group, Farb included himself. "I do not want the cloak of martyrdom," he insisted, though he acknowledged that "martyrdom is nothing new in Jewish life." He went on to liken himself to Captain Dreyfus.

Peering through the overwrought language, one can make out certain arguments. There was a hint of the class conflict between English and Yiddish speakers, between an old establishment and new immigrants. There was a contention that the movement had changed its mind: "Every convention statement on Zionism by the Reform rabbinate since 1937 has been favorable." This was partially true, but these statements reflected a determination on the part of the leadership to preserve unity by kicking the can down the road. On the surface, that was what the opponents wanted, too: "Most emphatically, the issue of Zionism has no place in the Temple any more than has the question of Democrat or Republican, B'nai B'rith or the American Legion." But the board's contention was that the issue *did* have a place in the Temple, and that rejection of nationalism was fundamental to their faith in a universal religion.

On November 19, the first shot had been fired in the national arena. *Congress Weekly,* the organ of the American Jewish Congress, published " 'Judaism' in Houston, Texas." The article began with a pair of what might be called Texas tall tales: "One Friday evening a leading member of Beth Israel passed the house of another member and noticed a pair of traditional candlesticks on the table. There was no doubt that Sabbath candles were being lighted. This was reported to the rabbi. On another occasion there was a dinner party at the home of a prominent parishioner and the absence of butter on the table was noted. The guests wanted to make sure that it was merely an oversight. The hostess rather uncomfortably explained that in times like these one feels like observing certain traditional customs, especially when they coincide with patriotic duty." The editorial called the Basic Principles "a set of 'Nuremberg laws.' "

Such fabrications would have been too brazen to be published in Houston, where petitioners took a far more measured tone. One letter to the board claimed that its signers were neither Zionist nor Orthodox but objected that the two-tiered membership was un-American, and that by denying voting rights to opponents, the board and the congregation failed to "abide by the true tenets of Americanism." They saw this as discrimination based on people's privately held beliefs. This the board rejected: "To deny membership in Beth Israel, for instance, to a Christian who does not subscribe to the basic principles of Reform Judaism casts no aspersions upon his religious views."

Whatever one felt about the Basic Principles, they were not adopted undemocratically. The November 23 meeting was the largest in the history of the congregation. More than eight hundred attended. Despite forebodings, civility reigned. A majority declared themselves deeply concerned by "forces which do not belong to the new world of emancipation and promise" and which were "attuned to and are a part of the old world's concept of segregation and despair for Jewish life." The vote, 632 to 168, would not be the end of the story.

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Across the nation, the Zionists went on the attack. Three days after the meeting, the *Jewish Examiner* of Brooklyn published an editorial. "We'll admit that the proposal of Houston's Temple Beth Israel to forbid its peculiar precincts to any Jew who may be an observer of kashruth is in its way a rather daring step," they wrote. "So, too, undoubtedly, is the leap of the suicide from the fortieth floor." *The Jewish Press* of Omaha said, "Whether the action of Rabbi Schachtel and his flock is the result of shame or escape or spite, we must leave to the psychologists." In an article titled "Pathological Jews" published in *The New Palestine,* an editorialist wrote, "These Jews defining themselves as 'Caucasians' seem to be straining to assure their Christian neighbors…that they are 'White Jews.' Is it possible that the spirit of Ku Kluxism has found a gilgul in Beth Israel?"

The phrase defining the Jews as Caucasians, Schachtel said, "had nothing to do with white supremacy." It was, instead, "the answer to Hitler, who said that the Jews belonged to an inferior Semitic race…. The racial overtones we rejected and especially we refused to accept what Hitler said we were." This was perfectly obvious, and in keeping with the old Reform insistence that Jews were not a race. But no argument was too spurious. To Beth Israel's reasoning, its opponents replied with lies: that it had banned anyone who kept kosher, lit Sabbath candles, or prayed in Hebrew; and that, as a result, it had entirely severed itself from the Jewish people. "We propose that Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, change its name," *The Jewish Advocate* wrote in early December. "It has now become Meth Israel—a ghost in Israel."

By the end of the year, Schachtel decided to reply by publishing an open letter. Titled "Let There Be Light," it set forth the temple's position. He clarified his own involvement: "When violent critics have assailed me as the 'arch priest' of these principles (at this time of writing, I have been here about seven weeks; and the principles were adopted four weeks ago) the truth of the matter is that I had nothing to do with either the formulation or the adoption of the principles as submitted." Once again, he went through the objections, including that regarding associate membership: "The doors are open to all Jewry, while, at the same time, the congregation is

maintaining itself as an American Reform Congregation, and is assuring its survival as such." In conclusion, he wrote, "the perilous practice of name-calling indulged in by the critics of Congregation Beth Israel is a sickening affair. Let us have fair play. Let there be light."

His appeal went unheard. Only five days later, the affair hit the pages of *The New York Times*. From the point of view of Beth Israel, nearly every word in the article was contentious. The headline alone—"New Jewish Credo Stirs Controversy: Houston Congregation Limits Observers of Dietary Laws"—contained two errors. Beth Israel maintained that the principles were not a credo, in the sense of a dogma. And observers of dietary laws were perfectly welcome. As Schachtel and many others had explained, "Any individual that desires to keep 'Kosher' is certainly free to do so but Reform Judaism rejects the idea that a Jew who does not do so is committing a sin." It had been six weeks since the meeting. How did this local dispute among the Jews of Houston, a city generally ignored by the national press, make it to New York?

There is a hint in the piece: "Opponents" charged that the principles were motivated by "ambition for power, in the interest of social and 'big money' groups, and fear that, if Palestine is restored, Jews here will be told to go where they belong." The first charge sounds like Jacob Farb, who had been making noise about the board's supposed contempt for "the Yiddish-speaking masses" and who, the day after the piece appeared, dispatched another yelp to the board. "On my calendar November 23 is a day of infamy second only to December 7," he wrote. He spoke of a "pogrom"; mentioned, as had now become standard, Nuremberg; said that Beth Israel "has achieved the sanctity and dignity of a concentration camp"; and compared himself to a victim of the Nazis: "I have no more lost interest in the sanctity of a Jewish house of worship than has, let us say, Thomas Mann lost his interest in the regeneration of Nazi Germany."

But the harangues of a grandiose parishioner were nothing compared with the national figures now weighing in. One was Stephen S. Wise, an ardent Zionist, a friend of President Roosevelt's, and the most influential rabbi in the United States, who had blocked Schachtel's election to the

rabbinical board in New York. In *Opinion: A Journal of Jewish Life and Letters,* Wise denounced Beth Israel with a vitriol that is astonishing from the pen of such a respected seventy-year-old clergyman. Rather than comparing Beth Israel to the Nazis or the Klan, he reaches further back:

> The Jewish Grand Inquisition of Houston, not satisfied with this evil and self-damning deed, has undertaken a mail campaign, sending far and wide throughout the land its noisome literature. Had the chief offenders…limited the exhibition of their unwisdom and bigotry to their own community, American Jewry might have been content to smile pitifully or scornfully upon these zealots in the cause of proscription and excommunication. But now an almost psychopathic local phenomenon has transferred itself into a nation-wide Jewish issue.

On January 17, *Time,* the most read magazine in America, published an article called "Storm over Zion." A picture of Schachtel was captioned "A set of Nürnberg laws?" But the text was fairer than that of the *Times*. "Many a U.S. Jew fears that Zionism appears to split his allegiance to the U.S. by committing him to a sentimental allegiance to Palestine," it explained. "Many a Jew resents any thought of divided allegiance, believes it gives anti-Semites a talking point." This was a highly sensitive matter in the United States, as it was in every other country. It was the accusation that made Edwin Montagu liken Zionism to treason in Britain; the accusation that the Nazis had used to justify depriving the German Jews of their citizenship; the accusation that the Jews of Egypt feared, with reason, would destroy their community. "Last week this question raised one of the biggest hubbubs in the U.S. Jewish press since the Reformed Jews broke with the Orthodox in the last century," the magazine wrote. It quoted Stephen Wise's attacks, and Schachtel's response: "Our congregation does not oppose Zionism. We simply do not participate in it."

Four days later, *The Jewish Ledger* of New Orleans riposted, "The laundry shortage can be the only valid excuse for Magazine TIME washing

in public the dirty linen of the Houston controversy…. We can appreciate the temptation to which TIME was exposed: a Jewish group denouncing a Jewish group and calling it Nurnberg! Yes, that's fit to print, even if not fit for dignified consumption."

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To counter the increasingly loud attacks, Beth Israel had, indeed, begun a mail campaign. The contrast in tone between its communications and those of its opponents was noteworthy. Among them was a speech that Julian Morgenstern, president of Hebrew Union College, gave in 1943. The Jews had been a nation in ancient times: "And for a full three-fourths of this period its role as a nation was inglorious, unhappy and dominated by a persistent and inavertible threat of doom. As a nation, as a self-governing political entity, Israel contributed little, perhaps nothing at all, to the content and progress of civilization."

> It accomplished absolutely nothing as a nation which distinguished it in any way from the many, little, neighboring nations and states… achieved no particular glory, conferred no special blessing upon fellow-nations, and made no distinctive contribution to world-civilization and culture.

In contrast, "as a people dominated by the consciousness of its relation to its God, Israel contributed much, very much, which was basic to the progress of civilization," he said, a Reform echo of the Orthodox Aaron Samuel Tamares. Modern Europe proved that when "ancient, smoldering racial and national antagonisms, rivalries and competitions were resuscitated and became the order of the day," the Jew was "the very first, most innocent, most helpless and most unresisting victim of this revival." This was why the denationalization of the Jews, rather than a tragedy to be lamented, was precisely what allowed their genius to flower. Uncoupled

from politics, the beliefs of a "backward, desert people" became a great religion.

Political Zionism would exchange the splendid heritage of the servant-people of God for "another little, racial state, precisely like Ireland, Lithuania, Czecho-Slovakia or Bulgaria." The vital question facing the Jews was

> whether at this critical moment in human history, when the world, seeking desperately a way of salvation from the maelstrom of destruction into which the resurgent racial nationalism of the nineteenth century has swept it, the absolutely unconditioned and climactic expressions of which we behold in the ideologies and programs of Nazism, Fascism and Japanese militarism, when the world is trying frantically to rescue itself from the impending cataclysm and is groping eagerly and with rising hopes for some form of organization which will transcend the now almost outgrown and outmoded pattern of nationalism, and especially racial nationalism, and offer some reasonable promise of world-peace, world-unification and world-progress, is it not foolish, is it not sad, is it not tragic for the Jewish people, which has dreamed the dream and voiced the hope and proclaimed the message of world-unity, and of world-salvation in such world-unity, to itself reject its message, its faith and its destiny, and seek for itself a salvation, impossible of realization, in the vain and exploded theory of restored racial statehood?

"No one—no one—can appreciate, unless he was there, what went on," Schachtel remembered later. "It was an unbelievable thing. I had calls at night, threatening my life and threatening my wife and little boy. You cannot imagine what was threatened, every day. And day and night it was like that."

There was, however, support. Letters poured in from all over the world, and Beth Israel highlighted those from soldiers serving overseas. "I have

always presumed that I was Jewish as far as my religion went, my nationality was always AMERICAN," wrote one private. A major serving in Australia wrote, "I have continually maintained, no matter where I have been, that I was of American nationality and that my religion was Judaism." A navy commander wrote, "Here is the first 'All-American' declaration by a Jewish congregation." A businessman in Ohio said, "I want you to know how much I applaud your action. I do so as a Jewish American and not as an American Jew."

These letters show just how offended Jews across the world were by the suggestion that they were not at home in their own countries, a suggestion often made by Zionists: recall Herbert Samuel's friend Rabbi Gaster's saying that "the claim to be an Englishman of the Jewish persuasion—that is, English by nationality and Jewish by faith, is an absolute self-delusion," or Weizmann's saying that "the efforts of the emancipated Jew to assimilate himself to his surroundings…deceive nobody but himself." Such utterances struck soldiers fighting and dying for their homelands as nothing short of treasonous.

Beth Israel also printed a letter from "a world traveler." Nearly all Palestinian Muslims, he claimed, were "sympathetic to the Jew, as long as he was content to remain a resident of Palestine, but in all my interviews, I do not recall a single Moslem who said he would be satisfied or would permit the Jew to take over the Holy Land." This contention could be found, as well, in a letter signed by many prominent Houston Jews. They rejected the notion that Palestine would make Jews safe. They claimed that "instead of Palestine coming to the aid of the Jews elsewhere, the Jews of other lands may more often be called upon to help solve the Jewish problems in and around Palestine itself. Should some of these problems be of a political nature…many involvements and entanglements will surely enmesh the Jews of the rest of the world."

Beth Israel nonetheless stressed the duty to aid Jews everywhere—including, of course, in Palestine. This commitment was not only rhetorical. Late in life, Rabbi Schachtel revealed that in the middle of the controversy, toward the end of 1943, he had been approached by members of the

Haganah, the Jewish militia in Palestine. “They had very little ammunition,” he said, inaccurately. “They fought as you might say with spoons and cups.” They asked him to arrange for a shipload of ammunition to slip out of Galveston without being stopped by the U.S. Coast Guard: “And that was done.” He made this claim in a later oral history: This would have been highly illegal, and has not been independently corroborated. For Schachtel, such support was meant to protect vulnerable Jews, not as an endorsement of a state, though the distinction would soon become academic. This support was necessarily secret, but had it been known among his opponents at Beth Israel, it seems clear, from the heated tone, that it would not have changed any minds.

February began with an editorial in St. Louis titled “Jim Crowism—a Temple’s Creed?” On Valentine’s Day, James Heller, president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, came to Houston, where he delivered an address titled “Beth Israel Against Israel.” With the orotundity that flavored so many of these proceedings, he said, “Few things in recent years have stirred American Jews more than the actions and resolutions of Congregation Beth Israel of Houston. One searches the pages of Jewish history in vain for parallels. Occasionally the theological wrath of the Jewish community, or of its leaders, was roused sufficiently to tempt them to an excommunication, like those hurled against Uriel Acosta and Baruch Spinoza.” But even the *herem* against Spinoza, he regretfully announced, “was a far cry” from Beth Israel.

While in Houston, Heller met with Beth Israel’s president, Leopold Meyer. “Your President informs you unreservedly that the conference with Rabbi Heller was far from harmonious,” Meyer wrote in the annual report he published in May. “You are also informed that this is putting it mildly!!” Heller had requested the meeting in order to discuss the position of the Zionist Rabbi Kahn, who was still on leave with the armed forces. Meyer explained that Schachtel had been elected by a vote of the congregation, 346 to 91, and that the only way that Meyer could offer the position to Kahn was to disregard that vote and fire Schachtel. Meyer realized that the issue

was Zionism, and he expressed astonishment: “It was impossible to believe that the attitude adopted by Rabbi Heller was becoming the occasion.”

Two weeks later, on March 1, Rabbi Kahn wrote a letter of resignation. He would not send it until March 26, and though it was dated San Francisco, it was postmarked from Dallas. Meyer noted this in his curt reply, seeming to imply that this resignation had long been in the works, and might have been handled, in person, while Kahn was in Texas. Had Kahn secretly visited Houston? Something, in any case, was astir. Kahn’s allies, local and national, included Dr. Solomon Freehof, the president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, who continued to press his case. In May, the board replied to Dr. Freehof by reiterating their strongly held belief that the Jews belong “not among the League of Nations but among the League of Religions.”

By May—a full year after Dr. Barnston had been dismissed—the board thought things were finally calming down and allowed themselves a victory lap that, in retrospect, would seem unwise. At the end of the month, Meyer published his annual report. It was heavy with tributes to Barnston. The now rabbi emeritus expressed his hope that “our minority will remain loyal to the traditions of Beth Israel and will help our congregational Ship of State to sail on.” He noted, as well, that the unseemly polemic boded ill for any future Jewish state. “We may well shrug our shoulders at the vitriolic abuse which has been poured upon Beth Israel. This only shows how very far we Jews are from being able to govern ourselves as a distinct nation.”

Israel Friedlander, chairman of the Policy Formulation Committee, cast aside Barnston’s diplomatic tone, as well as the careful, historically grounded language that had hitherto prevailed in the board’s public communications:

> Isaac M. Wise stated that “the Pittsburgh platform of principles was the Jewish-American Declaration of Independence.” Following that parallel, the triumph of these principles embodied in the “Basic Principles” of Beth Israel at the November 23rd, 1943, meeting of the congregation, may well be called the “Battle of Gettysburg.”

Underneath the congratulatory air was a hint of the personal toll the dispute exacted. In the report, Meyer mentioned "individuals whose very souls have been eternally seared, and whose hearts have ached as a result of scurrilous implications." He does not name names, but Friedlander would be dead just a few months later, in November, at the age of fifty-six.

The report was published on May 30. On June 6, the Allies landed in Normandy. On June 8, the Zionist members of Beth Israel held the first meeting of a new congregation, Emanu El, "God with us." They invited Kahn, by then in New Guinea, to lead it. My own grandparents left Beth Israel and joined Emanu El. Schachtel was present at the laying of the cornerstone of its new building, which opened in 1949. "I always taught my people here: We're going to have unity in this community," he said years later. This was optimistic. After the establishment of the Jewish state, Schachtel tried to bury the controversy. It was, he said, "futile to argue with history." Six months later, at the end of 1948, he resigned from the American Council for Judaism. "Anti-Semitism is being defeated by the courage of Israel," he wrote in his resignation letter. "The name Jew is now associated with courage, stamina, heroism, fighting power—the anti-Semites have been confounded." At least in public, he never explained this evolution. "There was so much hatred," Barbara Schachtel recalled. "He had to rise above it."

The rest of his long career reflected the gradual Zionization of the American Jews. In 1951, Schachtel gave a speech on an ecumenical radio show called *The Humanitarian Hour.* The talk was titled "The Fearless and the Faithful," and in it he eloquently summed up nearly every Zionist talking point, especially those that drew a direct line between the Holocaust and the foundation of Israel. He portrayed the Israelis as refugees from persecution who had no other place to go and who had no choice—*ein breira* in Hebrew—but to fight. "They were surrounded by enemies again and though they built little houses and tilled patches of the soil they did so with one eye on their work and one eye on the danger of a crafty enemy who waited to surprise them in the darkness of the night," he said in his mellifluous voice. "They cried aloud for help from some of the liberty

loving people of the earth, but there was not enough help and that which was to come was only promised help whereas they needed immediate assistance. And so they turned to the arsenal of the last resort—they relied upon themselves. Throughout the little country the besieged found a secret weapon forged on the anvil of their extreme despair. And this was their secret weapon, it was the phrase 'there is no alternative.' "

Perhaps, if Schachtel wanted to keep his job, he had no alternative but to say such things. "The rabbis, with a few exceptions, were not long able to resist the enthusiasm of their flocks, all the more shrill and vibrant the further away they were and stayed from the new state," said the French scholar Maxime Rodinson. Perhaps, despite earlier misgivings, Schachtel had sincerely come to admire Israel, which he, like many American rabbis, visited at the invitation of the Israeli government. Perhaps he genuinely changed his mind in response to the Holocaust. The small archive that survives of his sermons reveals little about his private feelings, but Israel and Zionism do not seem to have been a frequent theme of his public speaking. The fight scarred him. "He turned more inward, more pastoral, more psychological," wrote Eugene Mihaly, a professor at Hebrew Union College. "He eschewed the political arena."

For Americans and other Westerners, the question of Israel's legitimacy was, for the most part, no longer debated. The feeling that Israel was compensation for the Holocaust became so widespread that the anti-Zionists were mainly forgotten and, when remembered, came to seem like eccentric throwbacks. Following the war of 1967, when Israel scored an apparently miraculous victory over its neighbors, many holdouts came around. Rodinson wrote that the Jews "could not help feeling a thrill of pride at the success of those, their own cousins and brethren, who had shared their humiliation, and at seeing in them the resurgence of the Maccabean virtues. While before the war Zionism had been only a minority cult among the Jewish masses, now, after the holocaust which had devoured so many of their people, they felt uneasy about refusing their support to an independent community where so many had found refuge."

“That whole point of view became discredited,” said Mihaly. “It was a painful reminder for him. The whole profile of Judaism changed. The Holocaust came to haunt us.” Within a single generation, anti-Zionists became so rare among Jewish Americans that younger people were often surprised to learn they had existed at all. The year after the 1967 war, Beth Israel unanimously repealed the Basic Principles. It was an entirely pro forma gesture, since they had languished on the books for twenty-five years. “I felt fully vindicated in the stand I had taken,” said Schachtel’s old rival, Rabbi Robert Kahn of Emanu El.

Whether Schachtel’s conversion was sincere or not, the charge of insufficient loyalty would pursue him until his death in 1990. “Schachtel had come to Houston on the strength of his anti-Zionist credentials,” wrote the historian Hollace Ava Weiner, “a path to prestige that turned into notoriety and that his later accomplishments never quite eclipsed.” In 1975, Leopold Meyer, president of the congregation during the fight over the Basic Principles, said that though his own opposition was moot, he remained a skeptic. “It’s been in trouble ever since,” he said of Israel. “We’ve been paying the penalty ever since. God knows how it will come out.”

6

THE BAGHDAD BOMBS

Avi Shlaim



The specifics are mostly unknown to Western readers. But most will know the general outline: that the Arab countries avenged their defeat in 1948, when the Israeli state was established, by expelling their Jewish populations. Yet whereas Israel embraced its helpless brethren (the story goes), the Arabs condemned theirs to statelessness. Because the number of Jews in the Muslim countries was almost exactly the number of Palestinians expelled by Israel, this story, sometimes known as the double exodus, has a symmetry to it, and also seems to absolve Israel of the sin of the ethnic cleansing of the Nakba.

Like so many Zionist stories, this one is a little too simple, a little too much like a fairy tale, and—again like so many Zionist stories—relies on racist ideas. The reality is that the distinction between "Arab" and "Jew" only arrived with Zionism. Before, there were Muslim Arabs, Christian Arabs, Jewish Arabs, and "Arab" no more referred to a specific race or religion than the term "Latin American" did. These peoples shared a culture and a language that sprawled across countries and continents, and another thing they shared, despite their great diversity, was a history of European imperialism. The story of the expulsion of the Jews had the added convenience of shifting the consequences of the Holocaust from the Europeans, who had carried out the genocide, to the Arabs, who had not: that is, sending the Arabs the bill for European crimes. This was another kind of colonization, a moral colonization this time.

It is a complicated story, a story buried under layer after layer of propaganda and lies, orientalist fantasies and simple misunderstandings, and these complications explain why, in *Three Worlds: Memoirs of an Arab-Jew,* Avi Shlaim has had to bury the lede. About halfway through the book, with the methodical technique that made him one of his generation's leading historians, Shlaim detonates this central pillar of Zionism.

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Avi Shlaim was born to a wealthy family in Baghdad in 1945, in the heart of "the most ancient, the most prosperous, and the most closely integrated" community in the Arab world. Along with most Iraqi Jews, he was uprooted in 1950, and spent the rest of a difficult childhood in near poverty in Israel. The story of how the Iraqi Jews fled a country where they had lived since at least *597 BC*—a thousand years before the advent of Islam—could only ever have been personal to him, and one aspect in particular obsessed him. This was the story of the Baghdad bombs. In 1950 and 1951, five Jewish targets were attacked in Baghdad. Only one attack was fatal: the bombing of the Mas'uda Shemtob synagogue on January 14, 1951, which killed four Jews and wounded twenty others. The bombings sowed panic among the Iraqi Jews. By June 1951, around 110,000, including the Shlaims, had departed, and their community, "the living embodiment of Muslim-Jewish co-existence," vanished forever from the land of the two rivers.

The story of the bombs was shrouded in mystery. What made it the object of obsession for Shlaim was the rumor that they had been planted by Zionists. This was not his belief alone. Many Iraqi Jews thought that Zionists had, in fact, chased them out of their country. "All my relatives in Israel were utterly convinced, evidence or no evidence, that the Zionist underground engineered our departure from Iraq," Shlaim wrote. "The suspicion that Israel was behind the bombs, and that it was complicit in the confiscation of their property, had a profound effect on the attitude of the Iraqi migrants towards Israel…. It was like an open wound." An official version cast Zionism as the savior of Iraqi Jewry. Yet few Iraqis believed this, not least because of the way this proud community, which included many people of education and wealth, was treated upon arrival in Israel. They were sprayed with DDT, shipped off to the middle of nowhere, and housed in camps—camps that were sometimes surrounded with barbed wire. "The bitter irony of Jews behind barbed wire could hardly be missed."

For decades, stories about who was behind the bombs circulated among the Iraqi diaspora, and it is this mystery that Shlaim finally solves in *Three Worlds.* But first—and this is why he has to bury the lede—he sets the stage, introducing his family and a community that had lived in Iraq for two

and a half millennia. During World War I, Baghdad was one-third Jewish, a higher percentage than even New York. Twenty-five years later, the Iraqi Jews were gone.

It is a dizzying story, all the more powerful when told by a historian whose own life was upended by these events. If the title of his book, *Three Worlds,* refers straightforwardly to the three countries—Iraq, Israel, and England—that he inhabited as a child, the subtitle, *Memoirs of an Arab-Jew,* is a provocation. The line between Jew and Arab has been as rigorously enforced in the Israeli state as the line between black and white was in the United States. An Arab Jew, he writes, is "an ontological impossibility." In Israel, "you can freely describe yourself as a French Jew, a Russian Jew, a Romanian Jew or even as a German Jew"—but not, ever, as an Arab Jew. Yet that is what his family was, and had always been. "We spoke Arabic at home, our social customs were Arab, our lifestyle was Arab," he says. "I repeat, we were Arab Jews." Though Zionism has attempted to erase such people, he says, "Nevertheless, here I am."

Three Worlds covers the basic chronology. The British conquered Iraq after the Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of World War I. Iraq was one of the four countries the Western powers arrogated to themselves in the Arab world—without even a pretense of consulting the population, and in direct contravention of promises made in exchange for Arab support during the war. France took Syria and Lebanon. Britain took Iraq and Palestine, which included the east bank of the Jordan River, today's Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In 1932, Iraq became the first of these countries to gain independence. As in Egypt, which had gained a kind of independence a decade earlier, this independence turned out to be in name only, and Iraq, like Egypt, would struggle for decades to transform nominal independence into real independence. This struggle was all the harder because of Iraq's vast oil wealth, which the British wanted at all costs to control. In 1922, Winston Churchill, then colonial secretary, described the Iraqis as surly, unappreciative of British help. Their country, he said, was an "ungrateful volcano."

It was in this context that a bloody pogrom against the Jews erupted in June 1941. The Farhud would be drafted into a narrative designed to show that the Arab world was rife with antisemitism, and would even be described as part of an "Arab Holocaust." The problem was that—precisely as in Egypt—the Farhud had no precedents. "There had been no other attack on the Jewish community in recent centuries," Shlaim wrote. Instead, the Farhud occurred in the context of foreign domination: "a manifestation of antisemitism, but it was also the product of other forces, notably the British imperial policy which turned the Jews into scapegoats." This happened in other places where Britain stoked ethnic tensions: The examples of Ireland, South Africa, India, and Palestine speak for themselves. In Iraq, this policy created resentment and violence against Jews—but also against Kurds, Assyrians, Shias, and other groups who had lived together peacefully before the British invasion. The Farhud shook the Jewish community, but the violence was not repeated: "Jewish life in Iraq gradually resumed its normal course."

What sounded the death knell for Iraqi Jewry was the establishment, seven years later, of the State of Israel. The defeat of the Arab armies, including the Iraqi army, was "a deeply felt national humiliation." The loss of the country at the center of the Arab world devastated all Arabs, and was a deeply felt *national* humiliation in colonized countries such as Iraq: yet another humiliation on the long list to which the British had subjected them. Those who felt the sting included many Iraqi Jews. Like Egypt, Iraq boasted a Jewish Anti-Zionist League, made up of leftists who felt that Zionism was just another form of imperialism. What Iraq did not boast was Zionists: One estimate is that no more than 1.53 percent of Iraqi Jews belonged to the Zionist movement. Few wished to abandon everything they possessed in order to move to an impoverished, war-torn foreign country, and the Iraqi Jews mainly saw Zionism as a European import. Many years later, when Shlaim asked his mother if the family had had Zionist friends back in Baghdad, she was outraged. "Zionism is an Ashkenazi thing!" she exploded. "It had nothing to do with us!"

In any case, emigration to an enemy state had been illegal. In March 1950, the Iraqi government passed a law that allowed any Jews who wished to leave the country the legal means to do so, on a one-way visa. "With no other passports, the only country they could go to was Israel, with one suitcase and fifty dinars." This meant abandoning everything one owned and being banned from one's native country, which hardly made emigration attractive. Yet Israel needed Iraqis. In 1917, when the Balfour Declaration was issued, 90 percent of Jews in the world had lived in either Europe or the Americas. Only 10 percent had lived in the Arab world, spread across nine countries, including Palestine. In 1948, two-thirds of the European Jews were dead. This amounted to one-third of the Jews in the world. With this disaster, the 700,000 to 800,000 Arab Jews gained a new importance to the Zionist project.

This was because the Jews were a minority in Palestine. In 1917, at the time of the Balfour Declaration, they were less than 10 percent of the population and they owned only 2 percent of the land. In 1947, after heavy immigration over the previous decades, the country was still only one-third Jewish. Partition allotted this recently arrived minority 55 percent of the land, which would have still included a substantial Arab population. Even after the Nakba of 1948, there were still 150,000 Palestinians living alongside 600,000 Jews. But Zionism did not want a state where Jews could live with other groups of people. There were already many such states in the world. Zionism wanted a *Jewish* state, which is to say a state where Jews could dominate. To create this Jewish state, Jews would need to be inspired to immigrate, and whether this inspiration came by hook or by crook was immaterial. With the devastation of Europe, the state was forced to look to the Arab world.

Nevertheless, Zionists had contempt for the notion of Arab Jews, and for the Jews of the Arab lands themselves. "We do not want the Israelis to turn into Arabs," said David Ben-Gurion, born David Grün in Poland. "We must fight against the Levantine spirit, which corrupts men and societies, and preserve the authentically Jewish values which have been developed in the Diaspora," by which he meant in Europe. Ben-Gurion referred to the

immigrants from Arab countries as "savage hordes" who possessed a "substandard material and spiritual quality." In a speech in the Knesset in October 1960, he declared that the Jews in Muslim countries had "lived in a society that was backward, corrupt, uneducated and lacking in independence and self-respect."

The Arab Jews might be forgiven for not feeling flattered even by people claiming to compliment them, as when K. Shabtai wrote in 1950,

> This is exactly the "race" we need. We suffer from an overdose of intelligence, of brain-workers and of brain-work…. We need, like air to breathe, sizeable "injections" of naturalness, simplicity, ignorance, coarseness. These simpletons, these childish Jews, with their simple-mindedness and their natural intelligence…are a life-elixir against our over-intellectual worrisomeness.

Of the immigrants from Arab countries, Abba Eban (né Aubrey Meir), the Cambridge-educated South African who became Israel's foreign minister, said, "The goal must be to instill in them a Western spirit, and not let them drag us into an unnatural Orient." None of these sentiments—like the wonderment Golda Meir expressed when she said, "I can't believe there are Jews who don't speak Yiddish"—attracted the Arab Jews to Israel.

(In the 1970s, the Arab-Jewish group called the Black Panthers carried placards mockingly reading, "Golda, teach us Yiddish.")

The cold logic of demography would conspire to disrupt the life of little Ibrahim Shlaim. His early childhood took place amid all the luxuries that his father, a successful businessman, could afford—luxuries whose recollection, when the family found themselves impoverished in Israel, would form the basis of a powerful nostalgia for the place from which they had been exiled. Unbeknownst to this boy, Zionism and the 1948 Palestine War had fomented increasing hostility to Iraq's Jews. He stressed that this hostility was not of local origin: "Unlike Europe, the Middle East did not have a 'Jewish Question'—antisemitism was a European malady that later infected the Middle East." Instead, the Middle East had an imperialism

question. If it was true that antisemitic incidents were increasing, it was also true that the British, the de facto rulers of Iraq as well as the sponsors of the Zionist settler colony, could have put a stop to harassment of Jews with a phone call: Directly or indirectly, they still controlled the army and the police. They chose not to: because they were protecting Zionism, first of all; and, second, because internal squabbles among ethnic groups kept Iraqis from uniting to kick the British out.

Despite the increasingly precarious situation, few Jews rushed to leave immediately following the establishment of the Israeli state. As in other countries where leftist parties were heavily Jewish, persecution of actual or supposed communists pushed some Iraqi Jews to emigrate, though not all went to Israel. As in Egypt, governments came and went through a revolving door, seeking the crumbs of political power that had not been monopolized by the British embassy and the Royal Palace. Some of these governments were friendlier to the Jews than others. In this unsteady situation, some Jews registered for exit visas, as a precaution, but there was not a mass exodus until the bombings started. The first exploded in a coffee shop in April 1950, by which time only 126 Jews had registered to leave the country. Following this incident, 3,400 Jews registered at the emigration office. “Most of them were poor, with very little to lose,” Shlaim notes. Then, a few weeks later, another bomb hit a Jewish-owned car company, and then, the next month, a grenade was detonated in a Jewish neighborhood. No one was injured. Six months of calm elapsed before the only fatal incident, “the big bomb,” a grenade that struck an electricity cable in the Mas’uda Shemtob synagogue, killing four. “A new fear attacked the Jews,” wrote the Iraqi-Jewish writer Yitzhak Bar Moshe. “They felt that the earth was shifting beneath their feet, and they were assailed by apprehension of what was to come…. The throwing of the bomb is a new chapter in our recent period in Iraq, an abyss has opened up in front of us.” In June 1951, a bomb went off next to a Jewish-owned car dealership. By this point, many Jews were applying to depart.

The Shlaims reached Israel in September 1950. Five-year-old Ibrahim was now Avraham, Avi for short. His family’s experience of the new state

was typical. The Iraqis were pauperized and proletarianized. “For us Aliyah [immigration; the word means “rising”] entailed not ascent but steep ‘yerida,’ or descent, to the margins of Israeli society,” Shlaim wrote. “Once in Israel, we were subjected to a systematic process of de-Arabization: we were sprayed with DDT insecticide and catapulted into an alien, Ashkenazi-dominated country.” This cold welcome explains why rumors of Zionist involvement were kept alive for so many decades, but in the 1950s this painful question was nevertheless academic. However the Iraqis had reached Israel, they were there, and they had to make do. Avi’s mother, younger and more pragmatic, found a job answering the phones at the Ramat Gan city hall. His father, once one of the wealthiest men in Iraq, would spend the rest of his life mostly unemployed.

Avi grew up with a “continuous sense of inferiority” related to his Iraqi background. “I was particularly ashamed of speaking Arabic in public, because Arabic in Israel was considered an ugly language, a primitive language, and, worst of all, the language of the enemy,” he wrote. “I was so acutely embarrassed when my father spoke to me in Arabic in front of my friends.” This translated into apathy in an educational system designed to hold back kids from Arab and African countries. “A systematic process was at work to delegitimise our heritage and erase our cultural roots. The unstated aims of the official policy for schools were to undermine our Arab-Jewish identity and to turn us into loyal citizens of the new Israeli nation-state.” He did not know the details of this policy, which he would later discover, but he certainly felt them: “Being an Iraqi gave me a continuous sense of estrangement, both inside and outside the classroom.” He became passive. “I was struggling,” he wrote, adding, “Struggling may be the wrong word because it implies an effort on my part. In fact, I hardly made any effort at all.”

It was an unpromising beginning for someone who would become a renowned historian, but a pushy mother with a knack for networking managed to send him off to London for high school. He was fifteen. “As the ZIM cruise-liner sailed away from the port of Haifa, I experienced, for the first time in my life, a profound feeling of liberation.” He reached England

in the fall of 1961. Though he struggled with the language and the culture, he soon blossomed. At the end of school, the passive Iraqi boy who never raised his hand earned admission to Cambridge. First, though, he had to return to Israel to perform two years and two months of national service. His military career proved "singularly undistinguished." But if a couple of years of army service might have seemed like a parenthesis in a life that would subsequently unfold in Britain, the experience shaped his work profoundly. It was "the high point of my identification with the State of Israel," he wrote. The alienation he had experienced "was not as acute as it had been at school." He felt himself to be part of a common project, to belong to a nation that had never felt natural to him, and during the induction ceremony, when the cadets shouted in unison, "In blood and fire Judea fell; in blood and fire Judea will rise again!" he felt a thrill he would never forget: "I felt nationalism in my bones."

Shlaim often returned to this moment. He had experienced nationalism. He understood "its powerful stranglehold on the Israeli psyche." He understood Israel's self-image: "a democratic little country surrounded by millions of fanatical Arabs bent on our destruction." During his service, he believed that the army was "decent, ethical, and egalitarian" and fought only when attacked—never, of course, against civilians. He experienced the solidarity that was especially attractive for a boy who had always felt out of place, "a common sense of belonging to one nation and being surrounded by enemies on all sides." At the same time, and in a way that would become typical of his writings, he was able to step back and turn a commonplace on its head: "That Israel had enemies was blindly obvious; the question is who was responsible for the development of the enmity in the first place." He would devote much of the rest of his career to answering that question.

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In 1971, he married Gwyneth Daniel, whom he had met at the London School of Economics. She was studying social work; he was dating a friend of hers who, conveniently enough, soon fell in love with someone else. In

an odd historical irony, Gwyn was the great-granddaughter of David Lloyd George, the prime minister who issued the Balfour Declaration. “Looking back now,” Shlaim wrote, “I can still barely grasp the profound effect of the Balfour Declaration’s sixty-seven words and how they upended the life and fortunes of my family decades later.” Yet the Middle East receded in the early years of their careers. Gwyn became a family therapist. Avi’s academic work focused on Britain and the European Union. In 1980, they had a daughter, Tamar.

Around that time, they found themselves, like so many others who attempt to turn their backs on the Middle East, sucked back in. For Shlaim, part of this was meeting Palestinians. “I never met a Palestinian throughout my time in Israel or in Israel, including my time in the IDF from 1964 to 1966,” he said. He did not meet them in the Jewish school he attended in London—nor at Cambridge—nor in graduate school. The first Palestinian he met was a physician named Ghada Karmi, born in Jerusalem and raised, after the Nakba, in London. “I remember meeting you in the late 1970s in Oxford,” she told him in a joint interview in 2023. “There was a group of Arabs—a Yemeni and an Egyptian and you know, a few—and you would turn up and join us and nobody said anything—you were there, you were included, but I do know: We saw you as an Israeli, and the question in our mind was: What’s this Israeli doing, wanting to sit with this bunch of Arabs?” Shlaim said, “I remember thinking: I have so much in common with them, and they are so unlike the Israeli stereotype of the fanatical aggressive Palestinians.”

In 1981, Avi, Gwyn, and Tamar moved to Jerusalem to spend a year on sabbatical. The country was led by a former terrorist named Menachem Begin—a “spellbinding orator” who, years before, had impressed young Avi, who, in turn, found himself gravitating toward Begin. “I was angry and alienated,” Shlaim said. “I had no critical judgement and this made me easy prey for demagogues.” Though of Ashkenazic origin, Begin symbolized a revolt against the establishment that so many non-Ashkenazic people hated. This explained the paradox of Arab-Jewish support for anti-Arab politicians: “The usual explanation is that Oriental Jews brought with them

to Israel a deep hatred and mistrust of the Arabs and therefore naturally gravitated towards the overtly nationalistic, Arab-scorning parties of the right." This was not Shlaim's experience. To him, what was attractive about Begin was the respect he displayed toward the large segment of Israeli society—Jews from Muslim countries—who were tired of being disrespected.

With their help, Begin was elected prime minister in 1977. He concluded a peace treaty with Egypt that was sold as a prelude to a broader regional peace, but since the treaty did not address the root cause of Arab-Israeli tensions—the dispossession of the Palestinians—peace proved elusive. In 1982, Begin invaded Lebanon, promising that this war would buy Israel forty years of peace. The ensuing crimes scandalized the world. The event that became the symbol of this war was the massacre of Sabra and Shatila. These were two refugee camps in Beirut where an unknown number of civilians were killed by Lebanese Christian militias with support from the IDF, which blocked the exits to the camps to panicked people trying to escape. In Israel itself, hundreds of thousands demanded the resignation of Begin and his minister of defense, Ariel Sharon, who was responsible for Sabra and Shatila. With Tamar in a pram, Gwyn joined these demonstrations. She was encouraged by an atmosphere quite different from the apathy in her own country, under the reign of the right-wing Mrs. Thatcher. "There were almost no protests in Britain against the Falklands War," happening simultaneously. Israel's streets were filled with outrage. In contrast to the British press, hysterically calling for the murder of Argentines, the Israeli press was far less viciously militaristic, and the Israelis she knew were appalled.

What they were protesting, besides the war itself, was a war of choice. Perhaps for the first time, Israelis who believed that Israel fought only when forced saw that this was a lie. It was widely believed both inside and outside Israel: This is the note that Rabbi Schachtel was sounding when he said that the Jews had had no choice. Begin himself dispensed with the idea in a speech to the Army Staff College in the year of the invasion. Not only was Lebanon a war of choice, he said, so were other Israeli wars. The Suez

War of 1956, for example, as well as the war of 1967, began with Israeli attacks. “That was an important speech,” Shlaim said. “Because there was a broad national consensus around the notion of *ein breira,* and this notion completely collapsed.” It did not, alas, completely collapse. Many people continued to believe the classic Zionist trope of Israeli wars as purely defensive. Many still do. But some liberal Israelis and their supporters were ready to question dogmas—a propitious circumstance for a historian. The stage was set for a new look at old narratives.

But before the movement known as the New Historians could emerge, those historians themselves had to emerge. In Jerusalem, in 1981 and 1982, Shlaim was spending every day at the State Archives. “I used to go with a briefcase when it opened at nine in the morning and stay there until it closed, for a year. That’s my formation as a historian. And I was radicalized in the archives.” Day after day, he saw that the story he had been taught was a lie. “I didn’t have any radical ideas or revisionist ideas. It was the material that I was reading which completely, flatly contradicted the official line.” When he went back to England, Shlaim started writing *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine*. “It took me three and a half years. And as I was writing it, I examined Ilan Pappé’s PhD thesis at Oxford.” Born in Haifa to a wealthy German family, Pappé, nine years younger, had the kind of Ashkenazic background that Avi, as a boy, might have envied. Pappé’s thesis, later published as *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–1951,* “wasn’t well-written. The style was a bit clumsy.” But as he was reading it, Shlaim felt a thrill. “It was a profoundly original thesis.” He saw that Pappé was attacking one of Zionism’s central myths: that toward the end of their rule over Palestine, the British encouraged, incited, and armed the Arabs to strangle the infant Jewish state. “Ilan demonstrated conclusively that it was complete rubbish,” Shlaim said. “The real case is that Britain worked behind the scenes to abort the birth of a Palestinian state.”

Shlaim recognized how consequential Pappé’s findings would be, in part because they reflected the same things he had been realizing in the archives. These amounted to the discovery that with British encouragement, King

Abdullah of Jordan had colluded with the Zionists to steal bits of Palestine from its native inhabitants. The Jordanian army intervened not to help the Palestinians—the party line—but to seize their territory. This was generally known, but Shlaim's book proved it with documents from the Israeli archives. The language of *Collusion Across the Jordan* was that of a traditional work of diplomatic history, but its contention was revolutionary: that the Arab-Israeli conflict was not a "simple bipolar affair in which a monolithic and implacably hostile Arab world is pitted against the Jews." If at least one Arab ruler had "favored accommodation rather than confrontation" with Zionists—and even "cut a deal with the Jewish Agency to partition Palestine at the expense of the Palestinians"—then yet another one of Israel's founding myths would collapse. This was the myth that Shlaim would come to call "Israel's immaculate conception."

To say that Zionism, rather than opposing the imperial power, was colluding with it; to say that Israel had more troops than the Arabs in the war for Palestine; to say that the Arabs, rather than forming a unified and hostile bloc, were divided; to say that after the guns fell silent, Arab leaders sought peace but found no one to talk to on the Israeli side—taken together, this overturned the myth that Israeli children, as well as Jews across the world, had been taught. Shlaim paraphrased this myth as follows:

> The Jews accepted the UN plan despite the painful sacrifices it entailed, but the Palestinians, the neighboring Arab states, and the Arab League rejected it. Great Britain did everything in its power toward the end of the Palestine Mandate to frustrate the establishment of the Jewish state envisaged in the UN plan. With the expiry of the Mandate and the proclamation of the State of Israel, seven Arab states sent their armies into Palestine with the firm intention of strangling the Jewish state at birth. The subsequent struggle was an unequal one between a Jewish David and an Arab Goliath. The infant Jewish state fought a desperate, heroic, and ultimately successful battle for survival against overwhelming odds. During the war, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled to the

neighboring Arab states, mainly in response to orders from their leaders and despite Jewish pleas to stay.

This story contained a moral appeal that was easily translated into a political one—Jews as underdogs, Arabs as aggressors—and confirmed the sense, carefully cultivated at home and extensively marketed abroad, that the story of Israel was a continuation of the familiar story of Jewish victimhood. But as these historians began publishing, Israel's story became more than what Jacob Israël de Haan called the "necessary one-sidedness" of nationalism: It was a deliberately manufactured fraud. To attack the story of 1948—of plucky little Israel, packed with survivors fresh from the Nazi concentration camps, heroically facing down the wicked Arabs who were trying to finish the job—was more than an attack on a certain incomplete narrative. The Zionist historian Anita Shapira recognized as much: "That war furnished the founding myth of the state of Israel; and it is but a short step from questioning its justice to doubting Israel's very right to exist."

This was the New Historians' inference.

Shlaim was not fond of the term "New Historians." It was, he said, "self-congratulatory and by implication dismissive of everything written before." The Anglo-Israeli historian Benny Morris coined it in 1988, originally referring to four scholars—Morris, Shlaim, Pappé, and Simha Flapan—who, though working separately, had new access to Israeli and Western documents and used those records to challenge Zionist narratives. "Many of the arguments that are central to the new historiography were advanced long ago by Israeli writers, not to mention Palestinian, Arab, and Western writers," Shlaim wrote. This is true—Sadiq Saad had been among these pioneers—but it was also too modest. He downplays the contributions that these books made through the documentation they uncovered, and downplays the context in which they appeared. It was a moment in which challenges to official history had a greater chance of being heard. Forty years after the founding of the state, a decade after the treaty with Egypt, many had not despaired of peace. If the Berlin Wall could fall, why couldn't the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be solved? That peace required justice. Justice required setting the record straight. This was the opportunity that the

New Historians seemed, to their admirers, to be offering. It was a time, Shlaim wrote, "when historians mattered."

The first work of the New History was Simha Flapan's *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*. This book appeared in 1987 and dismantled seven myths surrounding Israel's foundation. Those myths, he wrote, "have hardened into this impenetrable and dangerous ideological shield." Flapan wanted to "undermine the propaganda structures that have so long obstructed the growth of the peace forces in my country." Perhaps because of this political goal—Flapan had spent his career trying to build bridges between Arabs and Jews in the left-wing party Mapam—the book, Shlaim said, was the "most polemical in tone." Flapan was not a historian, and because he'd had a long career in journalism and politics, *The Birth of Israel* was also perhaps the most accessibly written of this first wave. But Flapan—born in Poland in 1911 and by far the oldest of the four—died shortly after the book came out, and would play no further role in the debate around the New Historians.

In 1988, alongside Shlaim's *Collusion Across the Jordan,* Ilan Pappé's revised dissertation was published. A year before, Benny Morris's *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* had appeared. This book dismantled yet another central claim of Zionist historiography, that the Palestinians were not subjected to ethnic cleansing but had voluntarily abandoned their homes. Morris found no evidence that any Arab leader or Arab media had exhorted the Palestinians to leave: perhaps the first time that a major Israeli historian gave credence to the Palestinian story of the Nakba. In a preface to a revised Hebrew version of the book, "Benny revised the conclusion and placed a greater share of the responsibility at Israel's door," wrote Shlaim. "He is completely up-to-date on the documents released by Israel in the last decade on this issue. He has found more evidence of Israeli atrocities."

These books unleashed a burst of commentary, beyond the Jewish world and beyond the academic world. Many readers were sympathetic, including liberal Zionists who believed that an honest reckoning could advance Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation. There were attacks from allies of the

founders of the state, and especially from the partisans of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister. He emerged as a sinister figure, implicated in the ethnic cleansing and offering the key to another puzzle: Why, after 1948, had peace proven impossible? The traditional version blamed the Arabs, saying that Israel's neighbors refused, on antisemitic principle, any accommodation with the Jews. As Shlaim showed, however, the files of Israel's own Foreign Ministry were "bursting at the seams with evidence of Arab peace feelers and Arab readiness to negotiate with Israel from September 1948 onwards." Peace would have required taking back some refugees and adjusting the borders in reasonable ways, as well as ways that would have enhanced the security of the new state. The rulers of Syria, Egypt, and Jordan had taken a pragmatic approach, but the Israelis' own records showed that Ben-Gurion was intransigent, allowing the refugee problem to fester and choosing permanent conflict. "Whether Ben Gurion made the right choice is a matter of opinion," Shlaim concluded. "That he had a choice is now undeniable."

In 1987, the year Flapan's book was published, a popular uprising against the occupation erupted, later known as the First Intifada. But other developments, including a peace conference in Madrid in 1991 that culminated in 1993 with the Oslo Accords, seemed to offer some hope for peace. Exactly as the Israeli lawyer Felicia Langer predicted, these hopes would be disappointed. Because Oslo never meant halting the Israeli theft of Palestinian land for its rapidly expanding settlements, she said, "the failure of the peace process was already inscribed in the Oslo Accords." Yet at the time, many liberals, including Shlaim, hoped that, despite the injustice of those accords—the Palestinian leadership gave up the claim to 78 percent of historic Palestine—they might be a confidence-building measure that would lead to future progress. But in 1995, the apparently kindhearted Yitzhak Rabin—who had participated in some of the Israeli state's most vicious war crimes—was assassinated by a member of a movement that thought he was too soft on the Palestinians. The assassination brought the racist demagogue Benjamin Netanyahu to power. Israel ramped up settlement building and attacked the Palestinians

remorselessly, and in 2000, Oslo collapsed into the bloody uprising called the Second Intifada.

These seismic developments made a deep impression on the New Historians, and pushed them into more political directions. From the beginning, Shlaim had strenuously disavowed a political motive. In 1999, he insisted that critics had misunderstood his purpose. "My job is to tell the story of the Arab-Israeli conflict as fully, as accurately, and as interestingly as I can," he wrote. He denied the charge from old historians such as Anita Shapira, who published a screed in *The New Republic*. Her suggestion that "the new historiography is driven by a political agenda and that its real aim is to delegitimise Zionism and Israel…is simply not true," he said. "[Morris and I] are historians writing about the past. Neither of us is involved in politics." Yet they were sucked into politics, including because, in the 1990s, there had been some movement to revise Israeli textbooks to account for their findings. "In the new books the term Palestinian is used not only to refer to a people but to a longstanding nationalist movement," wrote Ethan Bronner in *The New York Times* in 1999. "In study questions, students are asked to place themselves in the shoes of Palestinian Arabs living in Jerusalem or Jaffa as the Zionists arrived and built their settlements. The students read that the 1948 War of Independence against the Arab world was not as lopsided a contest as Israelis have been brought up to believe."

An idealist might imagine that this was the kind of acknowledgment upon which an equitable peace might have been built. Similar movements —to recognize the horrors of slavery, to include the contributions of women and other groups—were brewing in the United States and elsewhere. In many countries, curricula were revised in order to complicate older nationalist narratives and recognize past crimes, including slavery and colonialism. But this proved impossible in Israel. Hillel Halkin, an American immigrant to Israel, published an article called "Was Zionism Unjust?" in the right-wing magazine *Commentary.* "Predictably," Shlaim replied, "Halkin took the view that Zionism was not unjust and that it is Benny Morris and I who are unjustly harsh in our treatment of this noble, enlightened, and peace-loving movement." The novelist Aharon Megged

went further, writing in *Ha'aretz* that the New Historians were "leading their country towards collective suicide." If Palestinian perspectives were taught in schools, young Israelis would no longer feel proud of their country, nor believe in the justice of the Zionist cause. "In effect," Shlaim wrote, "they said that in education one has to lie for the good of the country."

He insisted that what people did with his writings was none of his business—that for historians "the real question is whether the facts we present are true or false." In retrospect, it was always too much to hope that historians could float above politics. He found himself drawn in, though he had respected certain Zionist pieties. "There are indeed those at the margins of the Israeli left who regard Zionism as foul and Israel as illegitimate," he wrote, for example, in 1999. "I am not one of their number." He regarded Israel to be legitimate within its pre-1967 borders: first, because partition had been voted by the United Nations in 1947; and second, because, in 1949, armistice agreements had been negotiated with Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. From the perspective of international law, this was justification for Israel's "right to exist." But this was a legal, not a moral, perspective. His hesitations annoyed many of his Palestinian friends, even those who loved and respected him. Gwyn mocked his equivocation: "Before 67 Israel good, after 67 Israel bad." Another friend, the Palestinian historian Abdel Razzaq Takriti, saw this as an attempt to find a position that would stand a chance of being heard. "He was grappling with the truth without severing his ties to the mainstream."

Yet though sometimes frustrated with his reticence, Palestinians sensed Shlaim's sympathy. "He understood what it meant to be an Arab at Oxford," said Karma Nabulsi, who became one of his closest friends. "The thing about being an Arab in Britain is that it's about the worst thing you can be." Perhaps in part because of his own background, Avi sensed this, Nabulsi said. "Once he saw it, he worked to ensure that there was a voice for us. He saw that he could play a role in making us equal in a place where automatically I should be equal." He supported Ilan Pappé, too, when, in the early '00s, Pappé gave his first public address that mentioned the term

“ethnic cleansing.” Pappé had previously hesitated to use a phrase that associated Israel with regimes such as the Serbia of Slobodan Milošević. He knew that the audience included potentially hostile members. “He wasn’t that confident to be in front of people and be aggressive, or be what they might think is aggressive,” said Nabulsi. He gave the speech, and when he was finished, the first questioner was Avi Shlaim. “He stuck his hand up and made a speech about Ilan. About how Avi changed his mind when he examined Ilan’s thesis. And how he changed his thinking, how it opened up everything. It was such a decent and courageous thing to do because there were these people sitting in the front row, just waiting to pounce.”

Shlaim’s friends, both Palestinians and pro-Palestinian Jews, saw his evolution. Ghada Karmi, the physician who was the first Palestinian he ever met, recalled their early encounters in a joint interview in 2023. She understood when they met that he was a liberal Zionist, but a Zionist nonetheless. On a practical level, this meant a person who wanted to improve the situation for Palestinians within Israel—perhaps through progressive laws, perhaps toward founding a Palestinian state in the occupied territories—but who did not reject Zionism or question the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. When they met again, years later, she was astonished by the change in him. “I could see it,” she told him. “You said: Thank you for your talk, it was really very interesting.” Karmi had been speaking about the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and had not expected Shlaim to agree. Instead of arguing, he said, “Fine.”

She was taken aback. “What do you mean, fine? Is that okay with you?”

He answered that of course it was okay with him.

“My God,” she thought. “Something’s really happened.”

Part of his radicalization came, as before, from the archives. In 1995, he began working on a new book, published in 2000 as *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World.* The title came from an essay written by Vladimir Ze’ev Jabotinsky, a fiery Zionist born in Odessa. In 1923, Jabotinsky wrote two articles in Russian called “The Iron Wall,” in which he enunciated the principles that would govern a century of Zionist foreign policy. Jabotinsky knew that the Arabs would never accept Zionist rule over “Eretz Israel,”

which he defined as all of Palestine, along with all of today's Jordan. "A voluntary agreement between us and the Arabs of Palestine is inconceivable now or in the foreseeable future." Jabotinsky scolded any Zionist who did not understand this. Such people "portrayed the Palestine Arabs either as fools who could be deceived by a watered-down version of Zionist objectives or as a tribe of mercenaries ready to give up their right to a country in exchange for economic advantage," as Shlaim wrote. Jabotinsky saw that this would never work. "Every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement," he wrote. "This is how the Arabs will behave and go on behaving so long as they possess a gleam of hope that they can prevent 'Palestine' from becoming the Land of Israel." They could be neither fooled nor bribed:

> We cannot promise any reward either to the Arabs of Palestine or to the Arabs outside Palestine. A voluntary agreement is unattainable. And so those who regard an accord with the Arabs as an indispensable condition of Zionism must admit to themselves today that this condition cannot be attained and hence that we must give up on Zionism. We must either suspend our settlement efforts or continue them without paying attention to the mood of the natives. Settlement can thus develop under the protection of a force that is not dependent on the local population, behind an iron wall which they will be powerless to break down.

In light of all the cant that came to justify Zionism, Jabotinsky's candor is almost refreshing. There is no pretense to being an indigenous people that later Zionists would affect: It is "settlers" versus "natives." Neither does Jabotinsky voice a hypocritical hope for peace. The local population would have to be beaten into submission. Yet the article does contain a solution:

> As long as the Arabs preserve a gleam of hope that they will succeed in getting rid of us, nothing in the world can cause them to relinquish

> this hope, precisely because they are not a rabble but a living people. And a living people will be ready to yield on such fateful issues only when they have given up all hope of getting rid of the alien settlers. Only then will extremist groups with their slogans "No, never" lose their influence, and only then will their influence be transferred to more moderate groups. And only then will the moderates offer suggestions for compromise. Then only will they begin bargaining with us on practical matters, such as guarantees against pushing them out, and equality of civil and national rights.

To the liberal screeches that ensued, Jabotinsky pointed out in the second article that "since no native population anywhere in the world would willingly accept an alien majority, the logical conclusion would be to renounce altogether the idea of a Jewish national home. Even to dream of a national home would then become immoral." Those who dreamed of a Jewish state in Palestine would have to understand and embrace this immorality as leading to a higher good.

The Iron Wall traced this idea through Zionism's first century. Both settlers and natives behaved exactly as Jabotinsky predicted. But what was shocking about Shlaim's book was its attack on the popular view that Israel had no choice. Instead, in war after war after war, Israel always had a choice. The Arabs were prepared to negotiate. Generation after generation of Zionists refused reasonable offers, and one effect of *The Iron Wall* was to make certain readers long, perversely, for Jabotinsky. However unrealistically—in 1923, the fantasy of conquering Jordan and Palestine was a pipe dream—Jabotinsky was, at least, offering a kind of solution. "I do respect the honesty of Jabotinsky, his admission that the Zionist programme could only be carried out unilaterally and by force," Shlaim said. Long after Israel obtained overwhelming military superiority—Jabotinsky's original goal—it continued to wage wars of choice.

The Iron Wall offers the thrill of good revisionist histories, that of listening to a countdown—three—two—one—before seeing a carefully built edifice collapse. For anyone raised with the David and Goliath myth, the book implodes something more than a belief that the Suez War of 1956

was Egypt's fault, say, or the claim that the Arabs had fired the first shots in 1967. Though Shlaim never mentions it, it disrupts something else as well. This is the myth of Jewish moral superiority. For many Jews as well as for millions of non-Jews, the Holocaust had granted the Jews the status of the ultimate victim-people. Unique suffering conferred unique status. This moral prestige was granted, by extension, to the Israeli state, and—by even further extension—to the Israeli army. Herman Wouk, the American novelist, two of whose sons fought in the IDF, called that army the "strangest" in the world, because it hates war "as much as the anti-nuclear marchers do." This was part of the "psychology" that, as Philip Roth once mockingly said, "can be translated into three words—'Jews are better.' " *The Iron Wall* showed that Jews were exactly like anyone else, capable of committing severe crimes the moment they got the chance. This revelation would be humanizing for some readers. For others, including many Gentiles, the nearly religious belief in Jewish moral superiority was too precious to relinquish.

And it was to this safe emotional haven that Zionism would retreat after the failure of Oslo. A year after the publication of *The Iron Wall,* Ariel Sharon—whose long list of war crimes was amply documented in the book—became prime minister. "Children must be taught Jewish-Zionist values," said Sharon, "and the 'new historians' must not be taught." The middle ground that Shlaim seemed to have been seeking, and that seemed to be emerging during the early 1990s, vanished. As Israel continued to radicalize, moderate reformism became impossible, and, as the subsequent careers of the New Historians proved, one had to pick a side. The conflict between so-called Old and New Historians now became a conflict between the New Historians themselves. Benny Morris lurched to the right. "My thinking about the current Middle East crisis and its protagonists has in fact radically changed during the past two years," Morris said in 2002. He abandoned the balanced view that Shlaim had admired and published an essay in *The Guardian* called "Peace? No Chance." It contains the rattles and coughs, the swelling cellos and basses, of a nineteenth-century opera: "I can see the father [Syria's former president Hafez al-Assad], on his

deathbed, telling his son: 'Whatever you do, don't make peace with the Jews.' " Alongside such concocted scenes, Morris blames the collapse of Oslo on the Palestinians. In his telling, Israeli control of Palestinian land was a "semi-occupation," and the Israelis hopelessly hamstrung by their quaint philanthropy: "The semi-occupier, with his giant but largely useless army, merely responds, usually with great restraint, given the moral and international political shackles under which he labours." Unaccountably, the Palestinians "deny that Zionism was/is a just enterprise."

"I already knew he was going to turn into a monster," Karma Nabulsi said of Morris. "I could see he was racist already, like, Oh, we were forced to do this." Still, in the history of the New History, Morris's so-called conversion became a turning point. "As I am not a psychiatrist," said Shlaim, "I cannot give you a full explanation of the causes of Benny's sudden veering from the extreme left to the extreme right." That veering mirrored a journey of Israeli society from the optimistic days of Oslo. The extreme right—the settlers, the ethnic cleansers—came to predominate. In this situation, Shlaim believed, historians needed to work even more urgently to offer other perspectives. "Precisely in such times of crisis dissenting voices are most vitally needed," he said. "Xenophobic and self-righteous national narratives only fuel and prolong this tragic conflict." Yet he was not quite ready to embrace the full anti-Zionist position. In 2010, he was still writing that he had "never questioned the legitimacy of the State of Israel within its pre–June 1967 borders. What I reject, and reject totally, is the Zionist colonial project beyond the 1967 borders."

This was the reasoning that led him, for a long time, to prefer the term "post-Zionist" over "anti-Zionist." Zionism had wanted to set up a Jewish state in the Middle East. With that goal met, the state could consign its founding ideology to the past, just as other states that emerged from conflict, conquest, or revolution had gradually normalized relations with their neighbors. The moment that this could have happened, Shlaim said, was after the 1967 war, when King Hussein offered Israel peace in exchange for withdrawal from the occupied territories. "That's the outcome I would have liked to have seen after the war," he said. "It was possible,

definitely." Was it? The theory of settler colonialism posits that such entities are *inherently* expansionist, that they require and generate ongoing conquests. So it proved with Israel. To accept the Arab offer would have meant drawing a permanent border—and that, precisely as the theory had shown, Zionism was unable to do. The hunger for more and more Palestinian land drove Israel to expand and expand, pouring salt in the already-gaping wound of indigenous dispossession, empowering the most extreme elements in the settler-colonial society, fueling Arab enmity, and guaranteeing itself a condition of permanent warfare.

In later years, like so many others who evolved toward a frankly anti-Zionist position, Shlaim would criticize his own thinking. Some shortcomings were the product of methodology. "I dealt with Israel's overt behavior, rather than with the underlying springs of Israeli action, settler colonialism, grabbing more and more territory. And I was also naive in thinking that when Israel negotiated, it was with the aim of achieving a settlement." This was the settlement that Jabotinsky presumed would follow the demonstration of overwhelming force. The belief that peace was Zionism's goal revealed a fundamental error, consuming the entire careers of diplomats as well as of historians. It was logical to believe that Israel wanted peace, but its actions, consistent with those of other settler colonies, revealed that its negotiations were a sham, aimed at credulous outsiders. "Netanyahu thought that these negotiations with the Palestinians are an American interest, not an Israeli interest," Shlaim said in 2025. "So he went along with it, but he never had any intention of reaching an agreement." *The Iron Wall* showed that Netanyahu was in the mainstream of Zionist diplomacy.

In the quarter century after that book's publication, Israel's wars became permanent. The settlements in the West Bank—the main project of the Israeli state—became permanent, too: In 2000, when the book was published, there were fewer than 200,000 settlers in the West Bank. By 2025, there were nearly 500,000, not including East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Talk of the 1967 borders, though persistent, had long since sounded delusional. The settler-colonial framework—the Palestinians'

understanding of Zionism from its earliest days—gained wider currency. Shlaim saw that this framework offered the only way to account for the nature of the Israeli state. But accounting for "the nature of the Israeli state" was not quite the remit of an old-school diplomatic historian. "My methods are as old as the hills," he said. "I go to the archive and report what I find." His reporting made his books riveting. "But diplomatic records aren't everything," he reflected. "I didn't dig deep enough to understand the nature of the Israeli entity." An understanding of "the nature" of a thing can be gained through documents, but it is not documentary; it is an understanding, like an understanding of a person's character, that comes through a mixture of feeling and facts, of intuition and knowledge. And an understanding of the settler-colonial nature of Israel led Shlaim back to his earliest intuition about Zionism, when, as a five-year-old boy, he was wrested away from his homeland and brought, for reasons widely suspected but never quite proven, into somebody else's country.

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After decades of grappling with difficult historical questions, Shlaim finally decided to look at his own personal history: the story of the pampered Iraqi boy who became a poor Israeli adolescent who became a senior British academic. And as he was researching the book, he stumbled across new evidence about a question that had lain unanswered for nearly seventy years.

Who was responsible for the bombs that destroyed the oldest Jewish community in the world?

In 2017, while visiting Israel, Shlaim started chatting with an elderly friend of his mother's. This man had been a member of the Zionist underground in Iraq, and this chance meeting led to others—which finally led to Shlaim's obtaining a section of a Baghdad police report on the interrogation of a Baghdadi Jew named Yusef Ibrahim Basri. The report proved that Basri had carried out three of the five bombings. The other two, including the deadly attack on the synagogue, were the work of an unsavory

Syrian Muslim. The nonlethal Zionist attacks may not have killed any Jews, but they did sow widespread panic, and when Jews were killed in the Mas'uda Shemtob attack, people who had not considered fleeing changed their minds. Basri's controller was a Mossad officer named Max Bineth, based in Iran, who supplied him with maps, intelligence, instructions, hand grenades, and TNT. Through no coincidence, Bineth was the same spy who, in 1954, would coordinate the attacks on Western targets in Egypt—the Lavon Affair, or Operation Susannah—that endangered the Jewish community of that country. Arrested in Cairo, Bineth committed suicide. "Like the bombs in Baghdad, [the Lavon Affair in Egypt] fed Muslim suspicion of the Jews in their midst and helped to turn the Jews from a pillar of Iraqi and Egyptian society into a potential fifth column," Shlaim wrote.

Here, seventy years later, was the buried lede: documentary proof that, as the Iraqis had always suspected, the Zionists had deliberately plotted to drive the Iraqi Jews from their homeland.

For so long, Shlaim had written as a scholar, a historian, and so he did in *Three Worlds,* where he used documentary evidence to show that Israel had helped put an end to two and a half millennia of Babylonian Jewry. But the nature of this revelation meant that this time he was also writing as a portraitist, an artist, remembering his family and the country they lost. And he wrote as someone who no longer eschewed a political agenda: to revive the seemingly impossible notion of the Arab Jew, and with it a hybrid identity that carried within it the seeds of reconciliation, of overcoming the artificial schism that Zionism imposed. "Arab-Jewish coexistence is not something that my family and I imagined in our minds," he wrote. "We experienced it, we touched it."

He expressed his political preference: "The outcome I have come to favour is one democratic state between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea with equal rights for all its citizens regardless of ethnicity or religion." This did not make the book in any way optimistic —"Today the situation is utterly bleak; it has deteriorated significantly in the course of writing this book"—but it did contain a seed of hope. "Apartheid in the twenty-first century is simply not sustainable," he wrote.

Soon after the book was published, bloodshed would erupt in Gaza and across occupied Palestine that would surpass even the Nakba. In *Three Worlds,* he had written that comparisons of Israel with Nazi Germany were inaccurate. “For all its sins, Israel has not engaged in genocide.” In 2025, his new book came out. It was called *Genocide in Gaza*.

7

THE CONSCIOUS PARIAH

Hannah Arendt



When she died in 1975, Hannah Arendt, "the *éminence grise* of the *éminences grises,*" was one of the most visible survivors of the great intellectual migration that, decades before, had brought many of Europe's leading minds streaming into New York Harbor. For American Jews, the refuge these people found in their country confirmed their patriotic sentiments and gave them, in the midst of a Jewish tragedy, the self-esteem they had always derived from Jewish achievement. These refugees flourished in the intellectual freedom that once prevailed in the United States; and the Nazi disaster—so calamitous for Europe—proved a boon for America's libraries and museums, classrooms and studios, hospitals and laboratories. Even amid the constellation of virtuosi exiled by Hitler, Hannah Arendt stood out. With her heavy German accent, Coke-bottle glasses, and wreaths of cigarette smoke around her head, she became a most unlikely celebrity. "I was reminded of what Bernhardt must have been or Proust's Berma, a magnificent stage diva," said her friend Mary McCarthy. "What was theatrical in Hannah was a kind of spontaneous power of being seized by an idea, an emotion, a presentiment, whose vehicle her body then became, like the actor's. And this power of being seized and worked upon, often with a start, widened eyes, 'Ach!' (before a picture, a work of architecture, some deed of infamy), set her apart from the rest of us like a high electrical charge."

But Hannah Arendt died a pariah. "Few of the eulogies which traditionally follow upon the death of such a prominent figure appeared in the Jewish press," wrote the scholar Ron Feldman. She had been "subjected to a modern form of excommunication from the Jewish community"—the victim, in the words of the Israeli historian Idith Zertal, of "a dybbuk-exorcising ritual." This might have been a source of ironic satisfaction for a person who had often described precisely that character: the "pariah" who, rejecting assimilation, *consciously* chose the status of the outsider; who lived honestly, refusing to be anything other than what she was. Arendt adumbrated the pariah's qualities, which she saw as the positive qualities of the Jews—"kindness, freedom from prejudice, sensitiveness to injustice,"

"the 'Jewish heart,' humanity, humor, disinterested intelligence," "fraternity"—the same qualities that had given certain Jews their vigor, wrote the historian Enzo Traverso: "The exclusion and marginality of the Jews, by forcing them to think against—against the state, against accepted ideas, against orthodoxies and domination—stimulated a creativity and generated a critical spirit of exceptional power and scope." Arendt called them *wirkliche Menschen,* real people. "Her friends were not outcasts, but outsiders, sometimes by choice and sometimes by destiny," wrote her biographer Elisabeth Young-Bruehl. "In the broadest sense, they were unassimilated." Arendt said, "Social nonconformism is the *sine qua non* of intellectual achievement."

These conscious pariahs, these real people, stood in contrast with the parvenus, who displayed what were described as the negative characteristics of the Jews—"tactlessness, political stupidity, inferiority complexes, and money-grubbing." Arendt discovered a tension between these two types running throughout Jewish history: "There have always been Jews who did not think it worthwhile to change their humane attitude and their natural insight into reality for the narrowness of caste spirit or the essential unreality of financial transactions." In Franz Kafka, Heinrich Heine, Rahel Varnhagen, and Bernard Lazare, Arendt identified the "hidden tradition" of those who, said Zertal, "by their very existence and refusal to accept the world as it was, and their effort to transform it into something else, made it a better place." Bernard Lazare, Dreyfus's first defender, the French writer from whom Arendt derived the pariah-parvenu typology, summoned Jews to embrace the pariah: "It is the duty of every human being to resist oppression."

Yet if some were born to pariahdom, Arendt, in a sense, had pariahdom thrust upon her: first by the Nazis, who forced her to leave Germany in 1933, at the age of twenty-seven, after she was imprisoned by the Gestapo; and then, in her maturity, by the Zionists.

The proximate cause of this second expulsion was a book published in 1963, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil,* which consisted of articles that originally appeared in *The New Yorker*. The

articles, and then the book, unleashed one of the great literary scandals of the day—a scandal whose vehemence mystified the woman at its center. "There can be no reply to a good part of the discussion," Arendt said, "because it all deals with a book that no one wrote."

There were sincere scholarly objections. But in the press, the campaign against Hannah Arendt followed the time-tested Zionist playbook. Slander the opponent as an "antisemite" and a "self-hating Jew" or even, in Arendt's case, as a "Nazi." Divert the debate onto something irrelevant, usually employing a generous helping of personal innuendo. Ignore the substance and focus on what would later be called tone policing. And respond to even the most sober scholar or journalist or rabbi or activist with hysterical, shrieking, overwrought emotion, rendering actual debate over actual facts impossible. When *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was published, these techniques were brought to bear on Hannah Arendt, and the fervor with which they were deployed paid ironic homage to her stature as the Jewish world's most prominent and most respected political philosopher.

The book's message was lost in the fracas.

Its origins were in the kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann in a grubby suburb of Buenos Aires in May 1960. Known as the "Architect of the Holocaust," Eichmann had overseen the deportation of millions of European Jews, and his capture by Israeli agents was seen as a spectacular triumph in the campaign to bring the Nazis to justice. Full of cloak-and-dagger twists (an anesthetist disguised as a flight attendant, a tense refueling stop in Dakar), his abduction made headlines all over the world. When Israel announced that Eichmann would be tried, Arendt asked William Shawn, her editor at *The New Yorker,* if she could attend the trial, for intellectual reasons, but above all for personal reasons: She wanted to see a man who had wrought so much devastation on so many people's lives—including her own.

It was her last chance to see such a monster up close.

Yet when she got to Jerusalem, she did not see a monster. Instead, she saw a man whose principal fascination was his lack of fascination—whose very ordinariness, obedience, and lack of imagination had turned him into a new kind of criminal. If someone who had played such a large role in the

deaths of so many millions might be thought to have some "diabolical demonic profundity," Arendt wrote, some "satanic greatness," all she could see was a man with "rather modest mental gifts" who spoke and thought in clichés, who never killed a single person with his own hands, and who did not even particularly dislike the people he was dispatching to their deaths. This did not rhyme with her previous ideas of "radical evil." Instead, this evil lacked so much as a compelling motive, an intention, as one might expect in a particularly perverse malefactor. Eichmann was "neither a monster nor a pathological sadist." He was perfectly conventional. He was "a completely normal man," said the psychiatrist who examined him. "More normal, at any rate, than I am after examining him."

Full of unsettling questions about evil, woven through with the moral probing of a profoundly religious thinker—"It is hard to think of a twentieth-century philosopher whose work as often used concepts like 'soul' and 'hell' and 'redemption' and 'blasphemy,' " wrote the philosopher Susan Neiman—*Eichmann in Jerusalem* became a classic. Few who read it can forget the strangely vacuous, strangely absurd man at its center. It has long been popular on university syllabi because Eichmann's personality is so eerily puzzling, and because the questions the book raises lend themselves to fruitful classroom discussions. What the book does not seem to lend itself to is the outburst that followed its publication, which went far beyond legitimate literary criticism—correcting facts, questioning interpretations—into full-fledged character assassination.

Mary McCarthy was among those who noticed the oddly repetitive nature of the language used to attack Arendt. It was, she said, as if it had come out of a "mimeographing machine." The Anti-Defamation League sent out a nationwide circular urging rabbis to denounce Arendt from their pulpits during the high holy days, when they had the largest audiences of the year. "A group of lecturers—some flown in from Israel and England—toured the country decrying Arendt as a 'self-hating Jew,' the 'Rosa Luxemburg of Nothingness' "(!), the Israeli dissident Amos Elon wrote. The *Intermountain Jewish News* of Colorado captured the mood with a headline: "Self-Hating Jewess Writes Pro-Eichmann Book." In France, *Le nouvel*

observateur wondered, “Est-elle nazie?” (Is she a Nazi?). A play about Arendt’s teenage affair with the philosopher Martin Heidegger appeared, which described her “as a silly bimbo sexually entrapped for life by her aging Nazi professor.”

In Israel, the book was not published in Hebrew until 1999—four years after the first translation of *Mein Kampf*.

The energy with which “the war between me and the Jews” was prosecuted—was bizarre. Reading the book now, one is confronted with a mystery. Why this author? Why this book? Arendt herself hardly responded to the nasty attacks, quoting Anatole France’s saying about the pointlessness of replying to absurd allegations, “If I am accused of stealing the towers of Notre-Dame, I leave the country.” Attacks on her book became attacks on her—“The image they had created was that of an ‘evil book’; now they had to prove it was written by an ‘evil person’ ”—and she agreed with an interviewer who said that the reaction was “an important political phenomenon in itself,” while still insisting that the attacks had nothing to do with her book. “Why can’t Johnny read?” she joked. Indeed, many of Arendt’s opponents boasted that they had not read the book. “It is a pity that you did not read the book before the present campaign of misrepresentation against it got under way from the side of the Jewish ‘establishment’ in Israel and America,” she wrote to the scholar Gershom Scholem. The charges, after all, didn’t make much sense: “As everybody soon knew and repeated, my ‘thesis’ was that the Jews had murdered themselves.”

Many attacks centered on a contention that the Nazi crimes were facilitated by the collaboration of certain Jewish organizations, the “Jewish councils.” These leaders were not responsible for the Holocaust, Arendt claimed, but without them, the murders of so many millions would have been considerably harder. The specific statistical claim remained contested even among sympathetic historians, but Arendt said that Jews stood a higher chance of surviving where such organizations did not exist. She did not assert that the councils *intended* to contribute to the Holocaust. She said that, as with Eichmann himself, intention—the motive that determines, in a court of law, the degree of criminal culpability—was irrelevant. Both

legally and morally, this was a disturbing claim, and her analysis of this criminal innovation, like her analysis of the motiveless criminal, was an important contribution to the study of genocide, law, and philosophy. But the questions of culpability themselves could only with difficulty be attributed to Arendt, who dedicated no more than a dozen pages to them. They had long been controversial, and became even more so with the appearance, in 1961, of Raul Hilberg's monumental *Destruction of the European Jews*. This book—which Arendt first rejected but then, in *Eichmann,* lavishly praised—showed in granular detail how the Holocaust actually worked: how the machinery of death over which Eichmann presided had functioned. It was a complex subject, and there was an important controversy about how that machinery had operated, but disagreements over this complicated historical question hardly explained the passion of the "stupendous barrage" to which Arendt was subjected. One need not have an especially suspicious cast of mind—or dismiss entirely the notion of motive—to wonder whether another question was lurking behind these accusations.

The first Israeli notices had been sympathetic. "The *Jerusalem Post* printed a friendly report from its correspondent; *Haaretz* published long excerpts; and the Schocken publishing house asked for, and then canceled, an option on the Hebrew edition," she wrote. It was canceled because, without Arendt's realizing it, she had become the target of an elaborate smear campaign. In March 1963, when she was in Switzerland, an acquaintance at the Anti-Defamation League alerted her that something was stirring, that an attack was coming. Only a few days later, the first salvo went out "to all regional offices, national commissions, and national committees informing them of the article series in *The New Yorker,* and stating its fear that my 'concept about Jewish participation in the Nazi holocaust…*may plague Jews for years to come.*' " The italics were hers. The ADL summed up the book in five sentences. It distributed this summary to "book reviewers and others when the volume appears." She thought that "to anyone willing and able to read," the summary would be

laughable. But the accusations were taken up, frequently word for word, across the United States.

While she was still in Switzerland, a high Israeli government official, Siegfried Moses, flew there from Israel to demand that she halt publication of the *New Yorker* articles in book form. This confirmed the location of the mimeographing machine: in the office of the Israeli prime minister himself. "I was informed by reliable Israeli sources that Ben-Gurion himself had intervened." As the "controversy" unfolded, she saw her attackers rely on Israel's "unflinching support, together with its consulates, embassies, and missions throughout the world," along with "both the American and the World Jewish Congress…B'nai B'rith, with its powerful Anti-Defamation League and student organizations on all campuses," and even on "four coordinated research institutes." Moses, who had known Arendt for years, surely knew that she would refuse to pull the book. She warned him that disparaging her book in this way would stoke divisions among Jews far more than anything that she had written, as was confirmed a few days later when the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim—another prominent Hitler refugee, who had been imprisoned in both Dachau and Buchenwald—defended her in New York. "The Jewish community is up in arms," a friend reported. "The result is psychological havoc. [Hillel House at the City College of New York] has had a meeting, with Bettelheim. After ten minutes everybody was screaming, calling each other liar and threatening libel suits. It was a kind of collective psychoanalysis."

She got a telegram from William Shawn, her editor at *The New Yorker:* "People in town seem to be discussing little else." When she herself got back to New York, she expressed her bewilderment at the "smear campaign," conducted "on the lowest level," accusing her of saying "the exact opposite of what I did in fact write." She found so much mail in her apartment, her biographer Young-Bruehl wrote, "that months were required to sort and answer it." Then, shortly before the articles came out in book form, the man who prosecuted Eichmann for the Israeli state, Gideon Hausner, turned up in New York. Arendt had taken a dim view of Hausner during her stay in Jerusalem. In a letter to her mentor Karl Jaspers, she had

described him as “unsympathetic, boring, constantly making mistakes” and then—ouch!—as “one of those people who don’t know any language.” Hausner came “at the [Israeli] government’s urging and for the express purpose of heating things up,” she said. “It is quite instructive to see what can be achieved by manipulating public opinion and how many people, often of a high intellectual level, can be manipulated.” He came to “answer Hannah Arendt’s bizarre defense of Eichmann,” according to the *Daily News,* and was joined at a meeting of Holocaust survivors by Nahum Goldmann, president of the World Zionist Organization. Goldmann told the audience that Hannah Arendt had accused European Jews of letting themselves be slaughtered by the Nazis and of displaying “cowardice and lack of will to resist.”

Big if true.

It was hard to believe that a German Jewish refugee, one whose reputation for gravitas had few equals, had spoken so flippantly. There had to be something else that had set off such a reaction, and readers acquainted with the history of Zionist involvement in the Holocaust will suspect what.

Arendt never defined herself as a Zionist. “I was very close friends with some of the leading people, especially the then-president [of the prewar German Zionists], Kurt Blumenfeld,” she said in an interview in 1964. “But I was not a Zionist. Nor did they try to make me a Zionist. At least I was influenced by it in a certain sense; namely in the criticism, in the self-criticism that the Zionists developed among the Jewish people. I was influenced by it, I was impressed by it, but politically I had nothing to do with it.” Neither had she defined herself as an anti-Zionist. When she fled Germany in 1933 and arrived in Paris, she worked at Youth Aliyah, an organization arranging for refugee children to immigrate to Palestine. Youth Aliyah was associated with what was known as “cultural” or “spiritual center” Zionism, a movement that crystallized in a group known as Brit Shalom, the “covenant of peace.” Its most prominent spokespeople included the philosopher Martin Buber, the educator Judah Magnes, and the founder of Hadassah, Henrietta Szold. This wing was associated with other apparently liberal movements, including the kibbutzim and the Hebrew

University. Many members of Brit Shalom opposed the partition of Palestine and advocated for a binational or one-state solution—hoping that in an independent, democratic Palestine, a new kind of Jewish culture could develop, including the Hebrew language.

This was the hope that had also initially attracted people like Aaron Samuel Tamares and Jacob Israël de Haan to Zionism. And it was during her work with Youth Aliyah that Arendt penned her most Zionist-tinged writings. Though she herself never expressed any intention to emigrate, she refers to Palestine as "our country," and to Jews in Palestine in the first-person plural. She mentions the "Arab determination to expel the Jewish 'invaders.' " She writes that "organized Jewish labor fought and won a relentless battle against cheap Arab labor," without adding that this victory came through implementing racial apartheid. She describes "the old-time Arab fellahin" as "a kind of relic, unfit for and superfluous to the new modernized structure of the country"—an ungenerous way, at the very least, to characterize a colonized population. In contrast with economic empiricists like Ahmad Sadiq Saad and, later, Maxime Rodinson, she accepted propaganda about Palestine before colonization. "The primitive Arab economy assumed a ghostlike appearance," she wrote, "and its backwardness and inefficiency seemed to await a catastrophe to sweep it away."

Yet these comments, with their frustrating lack of understanding of the Arab position, appeared mainly in articles she wrote toward the beginning of the war. After Germany invaded France on May 10, 1940, she was detained as an "enemy alien" at the Vélodrome d'Hiver, in Paris, the place from where so many would later be deported to Auschwitz. On May 23, she and other women were taken by bus across Paris: "along the banks of the Seine, past the Louvre, to the Gare de Lyon; it was a wrenching journey for those who had lived in Paris for years and expected never to see it again; sorrowful and fearful, many wept." They were brought to a camp at Gurs, near the Spanish border. On June 25, France was defeated, and in the resulting mayhem Arendt and some other women managed to escape the camp. "None of us could 'describe' what lay in store for those who

remained behind," she wrote. "All that we could do was to tell them what we expected would happen—the camp would be handed over to the victorious Germans. (About 200 women of a total of 7,000 left.)" As she had predicted, many of her fellow inmates were later deported from France and subsequently murdered by the Nazis.

Following this harrowing escape, she rejoined her husband, Heinrich Blücher, whom she ran into by chance on a street in Montauban. They were lucky to make it to the United States, where they arrived with twenty-five dollars in their pockets. She found work at a German-language magazine called *Aufbau*. In these early months, her main cause was the creation of a Jewish army, a cause that was promoted by an organization called the Committee for a Jewish Army. Arendt, wrote Young-Bruehl, was "unaware that the committee was the creation of three Palestinian Jews of the extremist Revisionist party": the rabidly anti-Arab group that was carrying out terrorist attacks in Palestine. Her involvement ended when she learned this, but her real break with Zionism came soon thereafter. In May 1942, a meeting in New York was held, known as the Biltmore Conference, from which the extremists emerged triumphant. It was the death knell for the non-state Zionism that Arendt had supported. Biltmore marked the moment when, she said, "the Jewish minority had granted minority rights to the Arab majority." In 1944, after another meeting in which the American Zionists did not even mention the Arabs in their communiqué, the Arabs were left with "the choice between voluntary emigration or second-class citizenship," Arendt wrote in an essay, "Zionism Reconsidered."

This essay, rejected by the Jewish magazine *Commentary* as "anti-Semitic" and published in *The Menorah Journal* in 1945, denounced Zionist nationalism and chauvinism as tendencies that could only lead to war. Arendt predicted that even if the Zionists "won" this inevitable war, such a victory would bring the Jews of Palestine neither peace nor security. "The 'victorious' Jews would live surrounded by an entirely hostile Arab population, secluded inside ever-threatened borders, absorbed with physical self-defense to a degree that would submerge all other interests and activities," she foresaw. Hopes for cultural revival would be dashed. "Social

experiments would have to be discarded as impractical luxuries; political thought would center around military strategy," and "the Palestinian Jews would degenerate into one of those small warrior tribes about whose possibilities and importance history has amply informed us since the days of Sparta."

Because of their history, Arendt wrote, the Jews had not developed practical political skills, and she saw this lack of "reality" mirrored in Palestine. "They escaped to Palestine as one might wish to escape to the moon, to a region beyond the wickedness of the world," she wrote.

"What upsets me in your anti-Zionist arguments, more than their content, which is open to argument, is the tone of your discussion," Gershom Scholem replied.

This focus on her tone, rather than on the unanswerable content of her words, would come to pervade the Eichmann affair as well, and tone policing would be an unmistakable hallmark of Zionists' attacks on their critics. Yet though Arendt was indeed an increasingly harsh critic of Zionism, she had not moved squarely into the anti-Zionist camp. She still favored a "Jewish homeland," but insisted on a distinction that was quickly becoming too hard to explain: "This goal must never be sacrificed to the pseudo-sovereignty of a Jewish state."

As the Zionist colony moved close to statehood, Arendt was increasingly shocked by its reliance on terrorism. In September 1948, five months after Israel's declaration of statehood, Count Folke Bernadotte, a United Nations diplomat, the grandson of the king of Sweden—and a man who had rescued tens of thousands of Jews from Central Europe—was assassinated in West Jerusalem. The point was presumably to send a message that the new state would defend its interests ruthlessly, and would not be bound by any outside rules. "The murderers have not been caught and the members of the Stern gang, whom the Israeli government had rounded up during the first days after the attentat, took advantage of their sojourn in prison to demonstrate to the world that even the police of the state of Israel sympathized with the terrorists and was prepared to fraternize with them," Arendt wrote. Bernadotte's assassin, Yehoshua Cohen, became

a close friend and bodyguard to David Ben-Gurion. Ten years after the murder, Dag Hammarskjöld, a Swede like Count Bernadotte, visited Israel in his capacity as the secretary-general of the United Nations. At dinner, Ben-Gurion placed Hammarskjöld next to Cohen. Hammarskjöld afterward asked a companion who the man was. This, he was told, was the man who murdered Bernadotte.

"What scum," the secretary-general replied. "I shall never come here again."

A couple of months later, Arendt wrote an open letter published in *The New York Times.* It was signed by a host of prominent Jews, including Albert Einstein, and referred to the massacre of civilians at Deir Yassin in April 1948, a centerpiece of the ethnic cleansing campaign that had begun even before the birth of the Israeli state. She denounced the "Freedom Party" as "closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy, and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties."

It was an uncomfortable fact, lavishly documented, that Nazis and Zionists shared many views. First among these was a racial idea of the Jews, the same idea that the Reform Jews, the Orthodox, and many others had so strenuously rejected from the nineteenth century onward. This belief was reflected in an insistence that—for the good of both Jews and Europeans—the Jews needed to leave Europe. "Race struggle is primary," wrote the proto-Zionist Moses Hess in 1862. Herzl's lieutenant Max Nordau said in 1903 that Zionism "is not a question of religion but exclusively of race, and there is no one with whom I am in greater agreement on this position than M. Drumont," the principal antisemite in France. At a convention in Leipzig in 1914, the Zionists declared that "the Jews had no roots in Germany." In 1919, the Nazi theorist Alfred Rosenberg, sentenced to hang for crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg trials, wrote that "Zionism must be vigorously supported in order to encourage a significant number of German Jews to leave for Palestine." Soon after the Nazis came to power, Chaim Weizmann, the leader of British Zionism, was forced to warn a colleague to curb his enthusiasm: not to be so open in expressing their common toleration of Nazism.

With the rise of Nazism, the Zionists instantly saw a chance. “It is in our interests to use Hitler,” Ben-Gurion said, “for the building of our country.” Berl Katznelson, his lieutenant, saw Hitler as “an opportunity to flourish like none we have ever had or will ever have.” To accusations that Ben-Gurion was indifferent to the fates of Jews under the Nazis, Ben-Gurion agreed. In January 1933, the month Hitler came to power, he said that “Zionism…is not primarily engaged in saving individuals” and that, in the event of “a conflict of interest between saving individual Jews and the good of the Zionist enterprise, we shall say the enterprise comes first.” This was, among other things, a shocking reversal of the Jewish religious and ethical tradition. After the Kristallnacht pogrom of 1938, he said, “Were I to know that all German Jewish children could be rescued by transferring them to England and only half by transfer to Palestine, I would opt for the latter, because our concern is not only the personal interest of these children, but the historic interest of the Jewish people.” If half the Jewish children in Germany died, it would be fine—if it advanced the Zionist cause. This was not so far off from the view of Chaim Weizmann, who in 1937 said, “The old ones will pass; they will bear their fate or they will not. They are dust, economic and moral dust in a cruel world…. Two millions, and perhaps less; She’erith Hapletah—only a remnant shall survive.” Individuals —“economic and moral dust”—made no difference. Only Zionism mattered.

In *Mein Kampf,* published in 1925, Hitler had written of “a great movement called Zionism.” The movement had been as marginal in Germany as it was nearly everywhere else, but when Hitler took over, the Zionists rushed to become privileged interlocutors with the regime. Their opportunity came in the wake of a spontaneous, worldwide boycott sparked by the Nazis’ cruel persecution of the Jews, including their own boycott of Jewish-owned businesses. Within only a few weeks, the anti-German boycott became a major challenge to Nazi power. The researcher Tony Greenstein catalogs the damage to German trade, from Panama to Greece and from India to Egypt, as well as in Germany’s main markets: By the end of 1933, exports were down 22 percent to the United States, 25 percent to

France, and in Poland sank from 173 million zlotys in 1932 to 108 million in 1934. The wine industry was collapsing, and so was the shipping industry; the Reichsbank had to "come begging to London" for a modest loan, and by May 8, 1933, the head of the bank threatened to stop paying interest on its American debt. The regime was on the verge of collapse. In the first half of 1933 alone, total German exports shrank by 51 percent.

The boycott quickly became a serious matter of state. Ahead of a great anti-Nazi rally planned at Madison Square Garden in New York City on March 27, Hermann Göring summoned the leaders of Germany's three main Jewish groups. These did not include the Zionists, dismissed as a "fringe movement." The Zionist historian Edwin Black has written, "German Jewry vehemently rejected Zionism as an enemy from within. Anti-Zionism was one of the few Jewish topics Reform, Orthodox, cosmopolitan and ghetto Jews could all agree on." Only a tiny percentage of German Jews belonged to Zionist organizations, but the Zionists nonetheless finagled an invitation to meet Göring. When the three leaders of the mainstream organizations declared that they were helpless to prevent the rally in New York, the Zionist representative stepped forward, "declaring that the German Zionist Federation was uniquely capable of conferring with Jewish leaders in other countries." In June, the German Zionist Federation, the Jewish Agency, and the Palestine Land Development Company started negotiating a pact with the Nazis that became known as the Ha'avara, or Transfer, Agreement. It was signed on August 7, 1933.

The agreement was a Zionist, not a Nazi, initiative. It was so toxic that it was deeply controversial even within Zionism itself. Under its terms, desperate Jews would have most of their property confiscated—they were allowed to take £1,000—in exchange for admittance to Palestine. This was not a lot of money for the emigrants, but it was more than many people had at a time when so many Jews were barred from employment in Germany. The number meant that only the wealthier and better-educated *Menschenmaterial*—"human material," Herzl's old word—could qualify. The seizure of their property—a small percentage would be doled out to them in Palestine—represented a double windfall, financial and

demographic, for the Zionist leadership. Though the Zionists later claimed to be saving the lives of German Jews, "the staunchest supporters of the agreement in the Yishuv did not see the saving of lives as an independent goal at that time," wrote the Israeli scholar Hava Eshkoli Wagman. "Rather they sought to extract German Jewish property for the benefit of the Yishuv." It was, in other words, a shakedown. But the leadership, said Eshkoli Wagman, "awarded precedence to the realization of Zionist goals and the building of Palestine over the struggle to preserve Jewish civil rights in the Diaspora." Once again, individuals did not matter. "It is Zionism's fate to be cruel toward the Diaspora at times," said Moshe Shertok, later Sharett, Israel's second prime minister, "when this is necessary in order to build the country."

The Ha'avara Agreement also contemplated the barter of Palestinian goods for German goods. This had the effect of breaking the boycott, and by June 1937, Nazi Germany had become the largest exporter to Palestine. Arendt, like many others, was horrified, denouncing the World Zionist Organization that, "against the natural impulses of the whole Jewish people, decided to do business with Hitler." She was shocked that they would "trade German goods against the wealth of German Jewry, to flood the Palestine market with German products and thus make a mockery of the boycott against German-made articles." She acerbically noted that "they found little opposition in the Jewish national homeland, and least of all among its aristocracy, the so-called kibbutzniks." And some of her later activism in favor of a Jewish army stemmed, her biographer wrote, from a desire to "channel spontaneous popular Jewish opposition to Hitler that had not had a focus since the boycott effort had failed"—failed in part because the Zionists had broken it.

After this show of generosity, it was no wonder that the Nazis displayed marked preference for the Zionists. In 1935, *Das Schwarze Korps,* the newspaper of the SS, said that "the Zionists adhere to a strict racial position and by emigrating to Palestine they are helping to build their own Jewish state." In that same year, Reinhard Heydrich—Eichmann's boss and a man who was considered bloodthirsty and psychotic even by his fellow Nazis—

wrote, “The activity of the Zionist-oriented youth organizations that are engaged in the occupational restructuring of the Jews lies in the interest of the National Socialist state’s leadership.” This was the year of the infamous Nuremberg Laws, which stripped Jews of their citizenship and forbade marriage, and even sexual intercourse, between Jews and non-Jews. Among their provisions was a prohibition of Jews’ flying the German flag—though they could display “the Jewish colors,” the blue-and-white Zionist flag. The introduction to the laws, a byword for the injustice of the Nazi regime, even contained a recognition that many Zionists endorsed their principles: “If the Jews had a state of their own in which the bulk of the people were at home, the Jewish question could already be considered solved today, even for the Jews themselves. The ardent Zionists of all people have objected least to the basic ideas of the Nuremberg Laws, because they know that these laws are the only correct solution for the Jewish people.” In the newspaper *Jüdische Rundschau,* the Zionists had endorsed the yellow star that publicly stamped Jews with a badge of medieval pariahdom—eight years before the yellow star became compulsory. The controversial Zionist Georg Kareski gave an interview to the Nazi newspaper *Der Angriff* under the headline “Nuremberg Laws Fulfill Ancient Demands.” Heydrich said that the laws were “in agreement with the great spiritual movement within Jewry itself, Zionism, whose position is based on the recognition of the unity of Jewry… and the rejection of all ideas of mixing.”

Even after the war began, in 1939, the Nazis had their admirers among the Zionists. Yitzhak Shamir, later prime minister of Israel, led the terrorist group Lehi, which actively sought an alliance with Nazi Germany against the British in Palestine. The British, who occupied Palestine, were the enemy, not the Nazis, and so, by his own admission, Shamir joined a group that courted Germany in 1941. On two separate occasions, Lehi put out feelers to the Nazis. In communications with a German intelligence officer in Beirut, they offered to join the war alongside the Nazis in exchange for “the establishment of the historic state on a national and totalitarian basis, bound by a treaty with the German Reich.” Joseph Heller, in his history of the group, wrote that, according to a memo discovered after the war in the

German embassy in Ankara, “Lehi would join the war” if the Nazis accepted, “fighting on the side of Germany.” This group, also known as the Stern Gang, were the same terrorists that Arendt had denounced for Deir Yassin, for the assassination of Count Bernadotte, and for countless other crimes that, she foretold, would lead the Jews in Palestine to endless war.

Examples of such behavior have filled books. Likewise instances of the vigorous measures the Zionist leadership took to block the escape of European Jews to any destination other than Palestine—measures that continued long after the defeat of Hitler. Attempts to help individual Jews were actively resisted if they worked against Zionist priorities. “Everything for the land [of Israel]—nothing for anything else,” said Ben-Gurion. He meant it. The Zionist leadership in both London and Palestine resisted the campaign in Britain to bring Jewish children to safety in that country—resisted so fiercely that the British colonial secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, said, “I remember at the time that Weizmann’s attitude shocked me. He insisted on the children going to Palestine. As far as he was concerned it was Palestine or nowhere.” If Jews could live safely in other countries, that undermined the central contention of Zionism: that Jews could be safe only in a Jewish state. In 1938, the Zionists therefore blocked a plan to bring twenty thousand Jewish children to the United States. The Ha’avara Agreement made sure that a German Jew “could not save himself with any of his assets unless he did so through Palestine.” At the Evian Conference of 1938, which President Roosevelt convened to address the refugee crisis, there were proposals to send Jewish refugees to Kenya, to Manchuria, to the Dominican Republic, as well as to admit them to the large Western countries that could have absorbed millions. The Zionist leadership worked to block them. “The greatest danger is that attempts will be made to find other territories for Jewish emigration,” said the future head of the Jewish Agency, Yitzhak Gruenbaum: “Immense dangers loom from the Evian conference. It could mark the end of Palestine as a land of immigration.” The conference yielded nothing positive for the trapped Jews of Central Europe. Yet the Zionists turned Evian’s failure into an argument for

Palestine, brandishing the world's indifference as proof that Jews could rely on no country but their own.

There was abundant proof of the way the Zionist press laundered the stories of atrocities emerging from Europe. "Jewish culture flourishing in the Warsaw Ghetto with 24 bookstores and libraries," Ben-Gurion's newspaper, *Davar,* reported on October 16, 1942. ("Probably not even Goebbels in his wildest plans could have elicited the kind of treatment the Hebrew press accorded to information about the Holocaust," the writer Shabtai Beit Zvi noted.) After the war, survivors who sought refuge in Israel were mocked as "sheep to the slaughter"; derided as *sabonim,* soap, from the rumor that the Nazis turned murdered Jews into bars of soap; condemned to poor and marginal lives; blamed, even during the war, for having brought the disaster on themselves. "They did not want to listen to us," Ben-Gurion tut-tutted in 1942. After the war, with stunning callousness, he asked of the six million, "What is there to understand? They died and that's it."

That was not it.

Just as Herzl belatedly perceived the utility of the Dreyfus Affair, David Ben-Gurion discovered, belatedly, that the Holocaust offered a unique opportunity to legitimize the Israeli state. It was the ultimate argument for a state that—the "argument" went—arose from the ashes of Auschwitz. "By means of Auschwitz—which has become over the years Israel's main reference in its relations with a world defined repeatedly as anti-Semitic and forever hostile—Israel rendered itself immune to criticism, and impervious to a rational dialogue with the world around," wrote the Israeli historian Idith Zertal. Only when one understands the extent of Zionist collaboration with Nazism can one understand the relentlessness of the campaign against Arendt.

The Eichmann trial was Ben-Gurion's attempt to capture the Holocaust for Israel, and it was this operation that Arendt's book threatened to explode. By focusing on other questions, Israel's propagandists distracted from Arendt's radioactive words about Zionism. Almost none of the masses of critics or journalists who covered the controversy seem to have realized

that neither the subtitle ("the banality of evil") nor Arendt's purported thesis ("that the Jews had murdered themselves") would have made *Eichmann in Jerusalem* worth spending years attacking. It was worth attacking because of what it said about Zionism.

Arendt opens with a description of the trial as theater. "The proceedings happen on a stage before an audience, with the usher's marvelous shout at the beginning of each session producing the effect of the rising curtain." She writes of "the show trial David Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, had in mind when he decided to have Eichmann kidnapped in Argentina." She described how the trial, Ben-Gurion's last great national project, was designed as a spectacle: how he allowed "the prosecutor to give press-conferences and interviews for television during the trial (the American program, sponsored by the Glickman Corporation, is constantly interrupted —business as usual—by real-estate advertising)"; how he had given interviews before the trial to outline its "lessons," the main lesson of which was Zionism. "The Jews in the Diaspora were to remember how Judaism, 'four thousand years old, with its spiritual creations and its ethical strivings, its Messianic aspirations,' had always faced 'a hostile world,' how the Jews had degenerated until they went to their death like sheep, and how only the establishment of a Jewish state had enabled Jews to hit back." She showed how he attempted to connect "Nazis and some Arab rulers"—while significantly failing to mention "present-day West Germany," where hundreds of Nazis still served in influential positions.

The reason, Arendt suspected, was that Germany "has paid seven hundred and thirty-seven million dollars in reparation to Israel during the last ten years; these payments will soon come to an end, and Israel is now trying to negotiate a long-term loan from West Germany."

(The famed Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal knew as early as 1953 that Eichmann was in Buenos Aires. He conveyed this information to the Israeli authorities. Arendt believed that Israel waited until German reparations payments were coming to an end. She wrote to a friend: "You see my mind is considerably blacker than even you thought.")

As the trial unfolded, it emerged that Eichmann was enthusiastic about Zionism. A superior in the SS had insisted that he read Herzl's *Der Judenstaat,* "the famous Zionist classic, which converted Eichmann promptly and forever to Zionism," Arendt wrote. "This seems to have been the first serious book he ever read and it made a lasting impression on him." Eichmann became obsessed with the "political solution," Zionism, rather than the later "physical solution," extermination. Eichmann was so sympathetic to Herzl that "he seems to have protested against desecrators of Herzl's grave in Vienna," she wrote—and, hauntingly, "there are reports of his presence in civilian clothes at the commemoration of the thirty-fifth anniversary of Herzl's death." Eichmann's zest for Zionism led him to acquire "a smattering of Hebrew, which enabled him to read haltingly a Yiddish newspaper—not a very difficult accomplishment, since Yiddish, basically an old German dialect written in Hebrew letters, can be understood by any German-speaking person who has mastered a few dozen Hebrew words." Eichmann even read a second book, Adolf Böhm's *History of Zionism*: "a considerable achievement for a man who, by his own account, had always been utterly reluctant to read anything except newspapers." In sum: "His schooling in Jewish affairs was almost entirely concerned with Zionism."

His personal contacts were with Zionists, and he admired in them their "idealism": meaning their commitment to an idea above anything else. An "idealist" was "prepared to sacrifice for his idea everything and, especially, everybody." This sympathy for Zionists had led him to work with a certain Hungarian leader:

> The greatest "idealist" Eichmann ever encountered among the Jews was Dr. Rudolf Kastner, with whom he negotiated during the Jewish deportations from Hungary and with whom he came to an agreement that he, Eichmann, would permit the "illegal" departure of a few thousand Jews to Palestine (the trains were in fact guarded by German police) in exchange for "quiet and order" in the camps from which hundreds of thousands were shipped to Auschwitz. The few

> thousand saved by the agreement, prominent Jews and members of the Zionist youth organizations, were, in Eichmann's words, "the best biological material." Dr. Kastner, as Eichmann understood it, had sacrificed his fellow-Jews to his "idea," and this was as it should be.

The book is sprinkled with illustrations of an ideological sympathy that bled into collaboration. Of the Ha'avara Agreement, Arendt writes, "The result was that in the thirties, when American Jewry took great pains to organize a boycott of German merchandise, Palestine, of all places, was swamped with all kinds of goods 'made in Germany.' " The Zionists had even invited Eichmann to visit Palestine, where he had just enough time to climb Mount Carmel before being deported by the British authorities. He went from there to Cairo, where he met the Zionist intelligence officer Feivel Polkes, who had just come from a meeting with the Gestapo in Berlin. In their meeting at Café Groppi, Eichmann and Polkes discussed forcing emigrating Jews to settle exclusively in Palestine, and Polkes assured him that the Zionists "were favourably disposed to the extreme German policy."

Arendt is too canny to reduce the story of the trial and the Holocaust to this mutual understanding. "The true distinction was not between Zionists and non-Zionists but between organized and unorganized people," she writes. Yet when *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is read through the lens of Zionist collaboration, it becomes a shocking, explosive, damning document, and one can only agree with the Zionists who felt it was an attack on the very foundations of Zionism. "There was and is a strong link between the Establishment in Israel and the leadership which was in charge of Europe during the war," a sympathetic correspondent wrote. The book strongly hints at this, and the outrage over Arendt's blaming of *Jewish* organizations for cooperating with the Nazis—a matter of record—becomes more understandable if one sees that the Zionists read this as her blaming *Zionist* organizations for cooperating with the Nazis: a cooperation Eichmann described as "of course the very cornerstone" of his work.

“To a Jew this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story,” she writes.

In some ways, Arendt held moderate views. She acknowledged Israel’s right to bring Eichmann to trial; recognized the justness of the death sentence; and even agreed, in a letter to Gershom Scholem, that the book is “very pro-Israel.” This phrase may mean that the book was in favor of the Israeli state’s rights in this case, or it might reflect her long-standing concern that a defeat for Israel “would be perhaps the final catastrophe for the whole Jewish people.” She said that “any real catastrophe in Israel would affect me more deeply than almost anything else” as late as October 1967—but she had said exactly the same thing in 1946, when expressing her fear that Zionists would provoke the war they did in fact provoke two years later: “I do not know—nor do I even want to know—what would happen to Jews all over the world and to Jewish history in the future should we meet with a catastrophe in Palestine.” By this, she means a catastrophe that would wipe out Jews in Palestine, not one that would affect a regime that, at the time of writing, did not exist.

But—like her distinction between “cultural” Zionism and “state” Zionism—such nuances were too complex in the context of a vitriolic public debate. In writing to Gershom Scholem, she might have been attempting to patch things up with someone with whom she did not wish to quarrel. His letter had accused her of lacking *ahavat Israel,* love of Israel. The term here means love of the Jewish people, not love of the State of Israel, another nuance that was hard to communicate in the context of a smear campaign. To this charge, she pleaded guilty: “I have never in my life ‘loved’ any people or collective—neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love ‘only’ my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons.”

Though “equipped for resistance with a splendid impertinence,” as a friend said, she had not wanted to pick a fight over Zionism. After publishing “Zionism Reconsidered” in 1945, she had largely stayed away.

She worked on other books, including *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* which appeared in 1951. “After the war it turned out that the Jewish question, which was considered the only insoluble one, was indeed solved —namely, by means of a colonized and then conquered territory—but this solved neither the problem of the minorities nor the stateless,” she wrote in that landmark work. “On the contrary, like virtually all other events of our century, the solution of the Jewish question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of the stateless and rightless by another 700,000 to 800,000 people.” In these productive years, between 1958 and 1963, she published three more books, *The Human Condition, Between Past and Future,* and *On Revolution,* and she refused most opportunities to comment on Zionism. In 1953, William Zukerman, the editor of the staunchly anti-Zionist *Jewish Newsletter,* tried to get her to write about the massacre at Qibya, where sixty-nine Palestinians were slaughtered in a raid led by Israel’s future prime minister Ariel Sharon. “The shortest statement to be made would be: Thou shalt not kill, not even Arab women and children,” she replied. “And this certainly is a little too brief. The whole business is absolutely nauseating. I decided that I do not want to have anything to do with Jewish politics any longer.”

This was surely too much to ask of any Jewish intellectual. Still, Arendt seems to have written *Eichmann in Jerusalem* without understanding that Zionists would try to use it to destroy her reputation—to exorcise the dybbuk. They accused her of embracing Eichmann. Joachim Prinz, president of the American Jewish Congress, said she described Eichmann as a “sweet and misguided man.” A historian named Israel Gutman mentioned Arendt’s “delicacy and great consideration” toward Eichmann, and cited an “untrammeled self-hatred” typified by her rejection of “the new Israel,” including her “attitude toward the Arab question.” Ben-Gurion’s mouthpiece *Davar* called Arendt a “Prussian Jewess” with a “Jewish-Prussian soul” who suffered from “disintegrated emotional elements” and added, “How varied and mixed are the components of malignant evil in Jews of Miss Arendt’s kind.” In fact, said a Zionist writer named Marie Syrkin, Arendt was worse than a mere sympathizer. She belonged to a new

class of murderers, those who were killing the Nazis' victims a second time: "Among these enemies Hannah Arendt now places herself." Her book, in other words, was re-murdering the six million.

"It was the low level of the controversy, the near absence of any intellectual substance, that most deeply discouraged Arendt," wrote Young-Bruehl. For many, the only permissible lesson of the Holocaust was Jewish moral spotlessness. Norman Podhoretz, who would soon become one of America's most aggressive spokesmen for Zionism, said, "In the place of the monstrous Nazi, she gives us the 'banal' Nazi; in the place of the Jew as a virtuous martyr, she gives us the Jew as accomplice in evil; and in the place of the confrontation of guilt and innocence, she gives us the 'collaboration' of criminal and victim." Arendt was careful not to use the word "collaboration," which Podhoretz places in quotation marks. But he saw, correctly, that Arendt did refuse such simplistic categories—as any self-respecting intellectual would have. But by establishing and enforcing these categories, by attacking Hannah Arendt, her attackers were placing Israel outside the bounds of criticism. They were placing the Jews—permanently—in the camp of the "virtuous" and the "innocent." Jews were good. Zionism, therefore, was beyond reproach.

This is why the campaign was never about Arendt—about her book or about what she said or didn't say. The "controversy" was forgotten, as literary tempests always are. But if the campaign did not suppress the book, it succeeded in a different way. It distracted. Substantive discussion was "swallowed up by and drowned in the artificial noise." There would never be a thorough airing of Zionist behavior during the Holocaust, which remained known to specialists but denounced as "blood libel" or a "conspiracy theory" whenever it threatened to rear its head publicly. The story, after all, was history, and the point of the Eichmann trial was not history. It was to create a mythology. Through Eichmann, Israel seized the legacy of the martyrs of Nazism and—for the millions who watched—draped itself in the mantle of victimhood, a providential recompense for the Jewish people's losses: a miraculous phoenix from the ashes. And for Ben-Gurion, who had presided over the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948,

the Eichmann trial left a final legacy. It established a new state religion: not Judaism, for which Zionism had seldom had any use, but a highly selective, violently nationalistic "memory" of the Nazi Holocaust.

Henceforward, Israel would be the Holocaust. Every policy would be justified by it; every war made inevitable by it; every brazen sacrilege, no matter how obscene, excused by it. "Israel today is self-defined as the nation of the Holocaust," Tony Judt wrote in 2010. The state that had accused Arendt of downplaying the Holocaust, of being coldly unsympathetic to its victims, would, with its cruelty and self-pity, have six million tools for bullying its critics, and brandish accusations of antisemitism so promiscuously that the word would eventually become meaningless. "Israel above all is now responsible for the devaluation of the Holocaust and the trivialization of Auschwitz," wrote Judt. This trivialization was so blatant that future generations "faced with the obligation to study the history of the Holocaust, or of anti-Semitism—will simply raise their eyebrows and yawn."

In the end, the campaign to destroy Hannah Arendt failed. She was too established, too respected. The accusations against her were too preposterous. No serious reader believed that out of "self-hatred" she said that "the Jews had murdered themselves." Instead, and in part thanks to the controversy, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* became a classic, and immediately began providing language for new generations of thinkers. During the Vietnam War, heating up precisely at the same time that the Eichmann controversy emerged, Americans looked at the bureaucrats drawing up maps, signing invoices, and organizing shipments—and saw Adolf Eichmann. When Arendt died in 1975, twelve years after the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* she might have been persona non grata in certain Jewish circles. But beyond them, she was America's most eminent philosopher—a woman who lived as a conscious pariah and died as a real person.

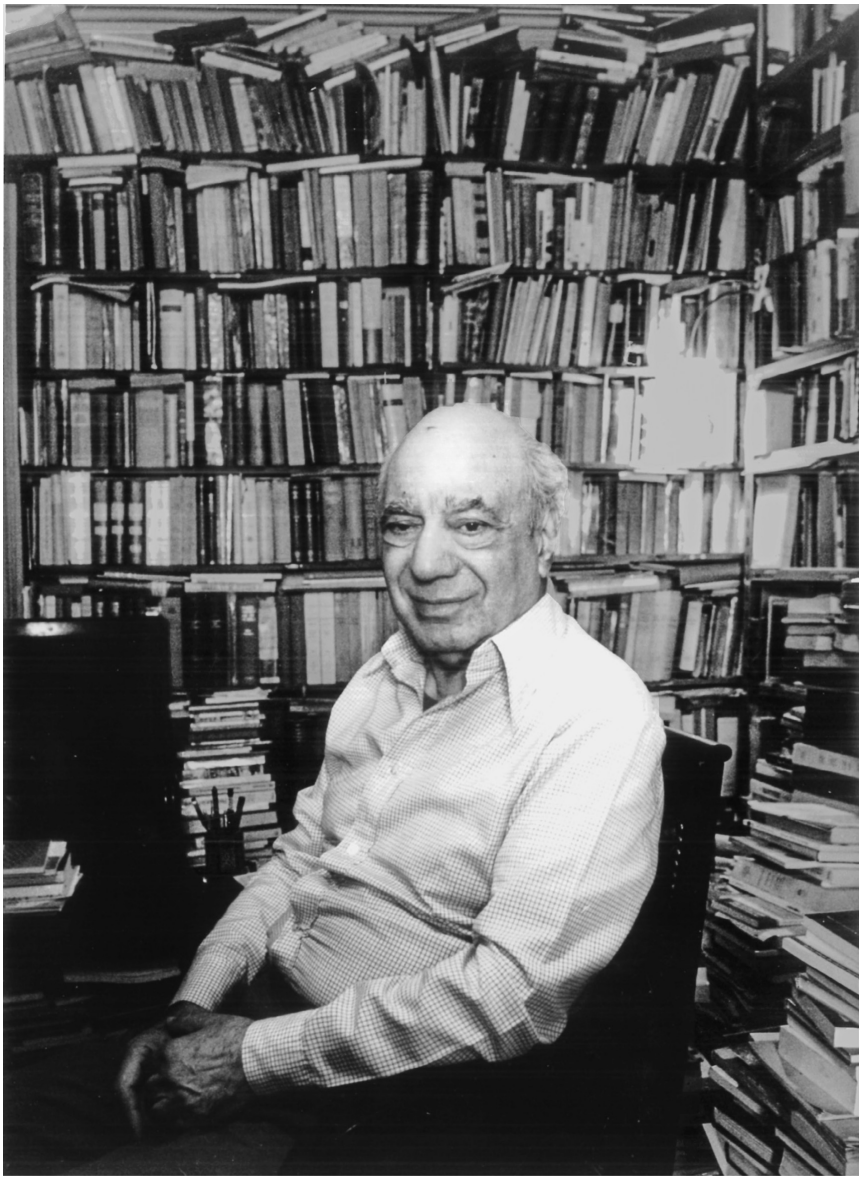
Yet in another way the campaign succeeded. The discussion that her book seemed destined to unleash was smothered, or at least forestalled. Perhaps the book became a classic because, though disquieting, it was not

disquieting *enough,* or not disquieting in the ways that its author intended. The debate was successfully refocused on the evils of Nazism, which was not quite a debate, since nobody disagreed that Nazism was evil. Nazism, moreover, had been defeated, and so discussion of Eichmann—was he evil, and if so, was his form of evil "banal"?—never threatened the self-image of Western societies. What was dangerous, what was successfully skirted, was any discussion of the darker questions Arendt raised, about the uses to which memory of the Holocaust was put by still-extant regimes. Arendt's reputation survived. But her book would be read only on the condition that its most controversial claims be left untouched—unexploded.

8

THE BIGGEST ANTISEMITE IN FRANCE

Maxime Rodinson



In early 1967, Maxime Rodinson lost his patience with Jean-Paul Sartre. At a time when philosophers might still be famous, Sartre was the most famous philosopher in the world, and in a country that treasured its reputation as the birthplace of the Enlightenment and the "mother of the arts," Rodinson was, by many accounts, the most learned man in France. Professor of Ethiopic at the Sorbonne, famed for his mastery of fifty languages, with a bibliography that included 1,218 publications, from an article on the ancient pronunciation of ق, the Arabic letter *qaf* ("an exemplary work accessible to everyone") to a standard biography of Muhammad to works on Babylonian cuisine, Rodinson was not one to be intimidated. It was during an editorial meeting of *Les temps modernes*—the journal founded only months after the liberation of France and run by Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir—that Rodinson energetically interrupted Sartre.

The magazine was preparing a special issue about the Israeli-Palestinian question. It was an important occasion. Though its circulation was never enormous, *Les temps modernes* was read all over the world in the highest political and intellectual circles. In a way that is today impossible to imagine, the periodical's statements about the great questions set the tone among the international left, and no question was as great as the Arab-Israeli conflict. War was looming. "I write these lines on Saturday, May 27, 1967," Sartre wrote in his introduction. "I can't wait any longer without considerably delaying the publication of this issue—and I can say, without being dramatic, that I have absolutely no idea if, in the weeks to come, the tension will relent or the Middle East will burst into flames." But the issue was not a statement on current events. It had been a year and a half in the making, and was perhaps as encyclopedic an attempt as had ever been made to chart the full range of perspectives on the conflict. The result was as thick as a Bible, 991 pages of small print, with contributions from forty-seven different writers. Like every other publication on the subject, it had been fraught from the beginning. Neither side would agree to dialogue, or even to debate. Instead, Sartre wrote, "each would ignore the other entirely" in the texts they submitted. "Between Arabs and Israelis, then, no dialogue.

Instead, two sustained dialogues: Israel and the West, the Arabs and the West."

Only one author rose above this divide: Maxime Rodinson, whose sixty-nine-page essay "Israël: Fait colonial?" would open the book. According to this binary, Rodinson, a French Jew, was "pro-Arab," but he refused, characteristically and on principle, to be racialized in this way. As the issue was being put together, he grew bored and impatient with Sartre's fudging, both-sides approach, "very idealistic, very abstract." Rodinson cut him off, amazed that a philosopher who "could read Hegel easily" could not grasp a fundamentally simple problem: "Israel is a people who is taking the place of other people, and the other people don't like it." It was frustrating to listen to Sartre's equivocations: "What kind of philosophy can penetrate ultra-evanescent essences and concepts and not understand the problems of our world?" This failure or refusal was all the more regrettable because Sartre had been such an eloquent leader in other anticolonial struggles. His advocacy of Algerian independence had given him an unequaled stature in that country, and as the issue was going to press, he was active in the struggle against American imperialism in Vietnam. Why the vagueness now? According to the Egyptian-French writer Alain Gresh, the question "weighed down even the most radical part of the left," and Sartre, who had lived through the Nazi occupation of France, was typical: "There was a taboo connected to the genocide and the Jewish question."

Sartre was not, of course, ignorant of the Arab perspective. He had just returned from Egypt, where he had met Nasser. Yet on the Palestinian question, he was sympathetic to Israel, which he, like many French leftists, saw as the country of the "survivors." "Most big-name intellectuals were fervently in favor of Israel," said the Syrian historian Farouk Mardam-Bey. This was typical, too, of the French population as a whole, and related to France's own colonial history: "There was a strong antipathy toward Arabs. I remember a poll taken during the first days of the Six-Day War: Two percent of the French had sympathy for the Arab countries." The press was flooded with anti-Arab articles, often openly racist, and in this context Maxime Rodinson already stood out. His commitment to the Palestinian

cause had begun several years before. When a chapter of the General Union of Palestinian Students was founded in France, Rodinson spoke at the first meeting. “Many Arab intellectuals who came through Paris were, thanks to him, much more sensitive to the problems of the Jewish world when they went back home,” said Mardam-Bey. “Rodinson was the friend who didn’t indulge you, very rigorous in his position, and that’s what I always admired about him.”

Unlike Sartre, scion of a distinguished French family, Rodinson was an outsider. Born in Paris, just off the Avenue des Gobelins, he grew up in a gritty industrial neighborhood, the 13th arrondissement, a place of abattoirs, gas factories, and—until just before his birth—open sewers. Both parents were immigrants, his father from Vitebsk, in Belarus, and his mother from Suwałki, in Poland. The couple ran a small workshop that made waterproof garments in the front of their apartment. The smell of benzine was hideous; the work, “nauseating.” Maxime, born in 1915, was named after the Russian novelist Maxim Gorky: The Rodinsons were communists whose central ideas, Maxime wrote, were about oppression and exploitation, and whose central commitment was to the abolition of the same. He grew up in “a small world dominated by militant exaltation,” a communist background that, despite its poverty, provided him with access to a broader world, and even saw flashes of celebrity. His father once played chess with a visiting Trotsky. He knew Bernard Lazare, the first writer who spoke out during the Dreyfus Affair and who inspired Arendt’s pariah-parvenu typology. He knew S. An-Sky, author of the celebrated play *The Dybbuk*.

If the world was entirely Jewish, it was so steadfastly antireligious that Maxime would later be astonished to learn that his mother, when she reached Paris at the age of eighteen, had still performed her evening prayers. There were no traces of this religiosity by the time he was born. He was not circumcised, and in the neighborhood people referred to the synagogue as the “Entreprise Générale de Fumisterie”: Bullshit & Company. They mocked the Orthodox, whose “last meal had left noodles stuck in the hairs” of their long beards. He emphasized the absence of antisemitism in the surrounding society. “In the light of what happened

later, the new generations imagine that, in France, the Jews…suffered from a simmering persecution or at least from a constant threat of persecution, that they lived in constant fear of something terrible," he said. "Nothing is more false, at least for the majority…. There was no palpable, aggressive antisemitism in France. They don't believe a word of it and will always bring up the Dreyfus Affair! But the Dreyfus Affair was forty years earlier!"

Later in life, he would express astonishment at the resurgence of religiosity among Jews. He rolled his eyes at "the commentators, and the commentators on the commentators" that filled tomes about the manifold intricacies of Jewish ritual. "It is fashionable today to work oneself into ecstasies about the spiritual beauties that these interminable discussions are said to contain about problems like whether if, at the Friday night meal, one must—supposing one is in Palestine, sacred land, and not in the countries of impure essence—recite the prayer for the sanctification of the Sabbath that is beginning before the ritual benediction of the glass of wine one is holding, or vice versa." This legalistic blather bored him. It was so transparently rational. But the irrational moved him. "What fascinated Rodinson was precisely that part of man that escapes reason," said the Lebanese author Maha Baaklini-Laurens. In Egypt, he attended gatherings where a spirit would incarnate in a participant. "It was not a game for him," Baaklini-Laurens said. "He was fascinated by the double face of a person. By the mask."

At school, his education was narrowly national. The students learned nothing about the history of other countries: "histoire" and "histoire de France" were synonymous. "Was France the only land to emerge from a primordial ocean covering the rest of the globe?" There was one exception: the colonies, to which "the French had brought internal peace, civilization, progress, in short, liberty and welfare to barbarian, savage peoples, dominated by bloodthirsty, slaveholding despots, subject to inhumane customs," he wrote. "The French brought these backward countries the zeal for work, the sense of order and rationality." The students supported this effort: "We had to buy little stamps…to help the beneficial action of the Republic to rescue and civilize the backward populations overseas. That

seemed to us a bit like supporting an anti-cancer or anti-tuberculosis league, or, more aptly, a group of admirers of Jules Verne." Even among leftist political parties, imperialism and colonialism were largely uncontroversial. With his usual equanimity, Rodinson commented later that "there is no need to be astonished or even outraged" by this left-wing collusion, pointing out that "at the time, except for a part (only a part) of the European socialist parties and a few rare revolutionary and liberal elements, colonization essentially meant the diffusion of progress, civilization, well-being."

Despite the passionate cultural and political interests of his parents, the family was poor. At fourteen, in order to contribute to the household expenses, he left school and got a job as an errand boy. It was not a bad life, he reflected: He could visit secondhand bookstores when he was out on a delivery, and on his free Saturday afternoons he took classes about pre-Columbian metallurgy at the nearby Museum of Natural History. He read ardently, especially about religious history, and including the works of Ernest Renan, the Darwinist, materialist historian of Christianity: Few, surely, were the teenage dropouts who frequented the grand baroque Bibliothèque Mazarine "to go back to the sources indicated by Renan." He saw his future: "It won't be fun to still be an errand boy when I'm thirty-five and have to bring croissants to the typists!" Yet as he made up his mind to continue his education, he faced an enormous obstacle: He did not have the *baccalauréat,* the high school exit examination, that would allow him access to a university—with a single exception, the National School of Oriental Languages, known as Langues O.

There was another advantage to Langues O: He could get a degree in only three years. ("I was fooled by the official brochure, which was a bit too optimistic.") This meant that he would be less of a burden on his parents. They were poor. To lose even his meager income would not be easy for them. He was nervous to tell them—and scared, too, of the examination. Admission required knowledge of two languages other than French. He had some notion of English. He decided to learn Spanish as his second, because it was reputedly easy for French speakers, and because his father had bought an encyclopedia that contained twenty-nine Spanish lessons. He

learned them diligently, without a teacher, and when he went to the exam felt that "my whole future hung in the balance." He was nervous about the languages, but he was also worried about his humble class origins—"a wretched proletarian, a poor lamb ignorant of the ways and customs of high society." Around this lamb, the examiners were "like devouring wolves. I had to hide as much as possible the visible traces of my proletarian background, my communist ideology, etc. Whatever people may think now, it had nothing to do with my Jewish origins. At that time that was no problem whatsoever. In that world at least: this was not Germany."

He got in. He wanted to study everything. There was a huge choice: "Oriental" languages began with Czech, "four degrees of longitude to the east of Strasbourg." He finally decided on Arabic, in part for practical reasons: The East Asian languages required four years, but with Arabic he could graduate in just three, after which he could find a job and help his parents. Many graduates went into the colonial bureaucracy: as "oriental secretaries," interpreters, or diplomats. The degree in Middle Eastern languages required three: Arabic, Turkish, and either Persian or Amharic. He eventually chose Amharic, in part because it was taught by the only communist professor. The first year was dizzying. He caught "the virus of comparative linguistics" and started doing, in addition to the required courses, Hebrew, Akkadian, and Talmudic Aramaic. Soon he knew all the Semitic languages ("around ten, plus all the Aramaic dialects"). A professor exclaimed, "Monsieur Rodinson, if there were Semitic languages on the moon, you would surely study them!"

In 1937, when he was twenty-two, he made three major decisions. He married Geneviève Gendron, one of the few women at Langues O, a student of Persian. He decided to go into academia and got his first teaching job. And he joined the Communist Party: not, he emphasized, because of his parents, but because he had devoted the same intense study to political questions that he did to every other question. Yet that study had demanded a price: He was still unable to dance, swim, drive a car, ride a bike, or put a record on the phonograph. "The complete man is supposed to be active," he said. "An impenitent intellectual, I looked down on intellectualism."

Intellectualism, though, would soon save his life. His lack of physical fitness got him exempted from military service in 1937, but he was mobilized in 1939, following the German invasion of Poland. Because of his higher education, he was allowed to enter the officers' training program, but he failed and was returned to the Supply Corps. Six months later, when the Germans were already at the Somme and heading toward the Loire, he was in Tours when the army decided to send ten men and three officers to supervise the Polish brigades in Syria. Other soldiers were grumbling about going to "barbarian countries," but Rodinson saw his chance. He spoke Arabic, he said to the commander's secretary, and since there were ten men who didn't want to go, couldn't he go instead? "Easy," the secretary answered. He asked for a ruler, crossed out one of the names, and put Rodinson's in its place.

In May 1940, as the French army was collapsing, Rodinson headed south to the Drôme, where his wife's family had a house. He bade farewell to Geneviève and their son, Daniel, who was a year and a half old. On May 28, he shipped out to Beirut from Marseille. He escaped by a hair. Twelve days later, when Italy declared war, the Mediterranean was all but closed. It was his first time outside France, and his first time in the Middle East: He was delighted to speak Arabic. From Beirut he went to Homs, then Damascus. Discharged in November, he got a job at the Makassed high school in Sidon, on the Lebanese coast. This was hardly a sinecure. Rodinson was so badly paid that he had to write home to France to get enough money to buy a pair of pants, but it was of course better than being in Europe. Like Syria, Lebanon had been taken over by France under the same mandate system that had assigned Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq to Britain. Just as Egypt, Iraq, and Palestine resented the British, Lebanon was seething with anti-French sentiment, and as a teacher of literature Rodinson had occasion to encounter it. When they read Descartes's theory that animals have no soul and that, when you kicked a dog and he cried out, this was a mere mechanical reaction, one of his students sneered, "Monsieur, Descartes was French, right?" Rodinson confirmed that he was. The student said, "You'd have to be French to say something that stupid."

He used the time to study Arabic. In a warring world, teeming with espionage, everyone was a potential spy, and even his purchases of Islamic religious texts were considered dodgy. After a semester at the school, he got a job buying books for the library of the French Antiquities Service in Beirut. This allowed him to travel all over the region, to Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt, and gave him a vast knowledge of the Middle East and its literature. He often traveled to Palestine, where there was much to acquire. “In order to survive, lots of Jewish émigrés from Germany had sold their books to the booksellers of Jerusalem, who were considerably enriched. You could find nice collections of works of history of the whole Syro-Palestinian region through the ages, and especially from biblical times. I became good friends with the Jewish booksellers of the city, because I was a good buyer.” He saw the “awkward attempts” of the Zionist settlers to avoid contact with the indigenous population. Once, in the Galilee, his party visited several kibbutzim, including Degania, the earliest of these settlements. “Along the way, we stopped in the neighboring Arab village where we spoke to the inhabitants. When we arrived at Degania, we told the people at the kibbutz that we went through the Arab village. Their eyes bulged: they had been living there for ten years and had never set foot there!”

Zionism itself seemed chimerical. Rodinson had no settled views on the subject, except that, as a communist and an internationalist, he opposed nationalism. At the time, there was talk about the possibility of a state, perhaps binational, perhaps federative; “the prospects for a Jewish state in Palestine didn’t seem possible except in some undefined future.” He was not necessarily opposed to settlements like Degania. “Colonies, little Jewish islands setting up in Palestine, could, after all, get along with the rest of the country, if they organized in a peaceful manner. We weren’t exactly against it, but, being detached from any religious affiliation—Jewish or otherwise—we didn’t like it,” he said, speaking of his family. Acquaintance with the kibbutzim did nothing to change his mind. “I was against it on principle,” he wrote. “The communists rejected it and (like many others) declared that it was utopian. There was no reason why those cooperatives would lead to a socialist society…. To see the model of a future society there seemed to us

ridiculous and absurd." The tension in Palestine, he said, was "exceedingly visible."

After nearly a year and a half of separation, Geneviève and Daniel managed to escape France. On September 25, 1941, they arrived in Beirut, where two more children, Claudine and Michel, were born. Rodinson had very little news of his parents. Contact with France was difficult, and the letters eventually stopped coming. "I felt real anguish about them, but I couldn't do anything," he said. "We were completely cut off from France." There were rumors, but nothing was certain. The news they did get came through channels they had reason to distrust. "We didn't know what was true, what was exaggerated by propaganda," he wrote. "The well-known excesses of the war propaganda of 1914–1918, the brainwashing about German atrocities at that time, made us skeptical. We were worried, but only up to a certain point…. Nobody dared to imagine the things that had happened."

In 1945, he learned what had happened. His mother was deported first, on February 9, 1943. The family had always had good relations with the neighborhood police, working-class people like themselves. "I am afraid these friendly relations might have contributed to the trust that my mother had for them (she says it herself) when they summoned her, at the beginning of 1943, to an interview that would end with a one-way trip to Poland." His father followed on March 2. Both were bound for Auschwitz; neither would return. When he learned of their fate, Maxime was filled with regret for the childhood pranks he had played on his nervous, easily spooked mother: "My regret is still vivid when I think of all that woman endured even before she was pushed into the slaughterhouse."

He wondered whether he should board the bus for Jerusalem: a short journey, in those days, and easily made. He did not. He was French. That, for better or worse, is what he would remain. In Schachtel's insistence on his Americanness, Sadiq Saad's insistence on his Egyptianness, or Montagu's insistence on his Englishness is something beyond patriotism or nationalism—beyond the refusal of a racialization that Hitler shared with Herzl, and that could only be repellent to any self-respecting person. It is

Hannah Arendt's or Jacob Israël de Haan's refusal to be defined by what others thought they were: the pariah's profound refusal of assimilation. Rodinson shared with many anti-Zionist Jews a determination not to allow an identity to be foisted on him. Like them, Rodinson chose to remain himself: Jewish, of course, but rooted in the secular, universalist tradition of French rationalism and Marxist internationalism.

Rodinson considered staying in the Middle East after the war. Ultimately, he decided to take a job in the Department of Oriental Manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. He remained there several years before, in 1955, he started to teach Ge'ez, the ancient Ethiopic liturgical language, at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. It was a niche. This was, in part, the point. He had never lost sight of the need to find some safe employment that would leave him free to study, and in this sense Ge'ez, which is quite close to Arabic, was perfect: not too many students, not too many dissertations, a decent salary, and plenty of freedom to pursue his own research. He enjoyed teaching. "At the beginning, the shock for me was his voice," his student Antoine Lonnet said. "You have to hear it at least once…. A slightly broken voice, gravelly, you kind of expected him to clear his throat." In that voice, he talked a lot. His affect was magisterial but friendly, at least to those he did not suspect of sloth. "You could not have a conversation with him if you were not adequately informed about the subject you were discussing," said Maha Baaklini-Laurens. "He could be very unpleasant and cutting. But if he was patient with people who didn't know something, he was impatient, on the other hand, with people who didn't make the effort. If the person was worth the trouble, he liked to transmit his knowledge."

"The first thing he kindled in me was to learn to be wary of ideologies," said the scholar Philippe Fargues. "He didn't have dogmas." In 1958, when Rodinson was forty-three, he "cut the cord" connecting him to the Communist Party. He was happy, liberated, recalling the shock that he felt at the death of Stalin, in 1953. "We were all in tears at the great meetings celebrating his memory. Our beloved chief who had just left us," he wrote. "Once the emotion passed," he saw that "many people that we had excluded

or called *petits bourgeois,* even inside the party or among close sympathizers, had been right and we had been wrong. Each in his own time reached more or less the same conclusion." What he took from Marxism was above all materialism, a sense of the real world, a distrust of any theorizing ungrounded in empirical reality. A friend remembered him at a conference about Islamic economic history: While listening to a paper about the livestock trade in a certain period in a certain country, another friend turned to Rodinson and said, "Tell them that economic history isn't about counting cows." Rodinson begged to differ. "It is also about counting cows," he replied.

Rodinson was fifty-two in 1967 when he began writing his essay for *Les temps modernes*. The question it asks in the title is whether Israel is a "fait colonial," a colonial phenomenon, or a "colonie de peuplement," a settler-colonial state.

This is a different form of colonialism from those practiced by the British in India, say, or the French in Morocco, in which a colonial power seeks to control a country militarily and economically but does not seek to displace the population. These are forms of external control. A settler colony is a form of internal control. In settler colonies, an indigenous population is subordinated, displaced, and even replaced by a new population of Western or European origin. In 1962, it had been theorized by the South African Communist Party as "Colonialism of a Special Type." South Africa was independent of foreign control but not of colonialism. "Non-White South Africa *is the colony* of White South Africa itself," wrote the Jewish South African resistance leader Ronnie Kasrils. In 1965, the Palestinian scholar Fayez Sayegh's *The Zionist Colonization of Palestine* made many similar points. In the twentieth century, this form of colonization still existed in other countries, including Rhodesia and Algeria. It had happened earlier in the entire American and Australian continents. For native peoples, settler colonialism meant the destruction of their societies and often culminated in genocide.

Rodinson quickly catalogs the facts. Zionism began as a frankly colonial movement at the end of the nineteenth century, when colonialism was not

considered disreputable, as Herbert Samuel's career of liberal imperialism suggests. He quotes Leon Pinsker, whose *Auto-Emancipation,* published in 1882, is a precursor of Herzl, and who writes of "the creation of a Jewish *colonial* community." Rodinson quotes Herzl, who told Cecil Rhodes that Zionism was "something colonial," which he intended as a compliment, and quotes Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who described Zionism as a "colonization adventure." These expressions were well known among the Palestinian and anticolonial movements but rarely surfaced in discussions that took place outside those movements. Rodinson contextualizes them alongside "numerous declarations as to the general interest of Europe or civilization (it was the same thing) or about the specific interest of one or another power in supporting the Zionist movement. It was perfectly natural in the atmosphere of the time. We do not need to moralize about it by applying to leaders or to the Zionist masses of the period criteria that are common today. But neither do we have the right to deny the reality of their attitude, nor to neglect its objective consequences."

When, over the course of the twentieth century, colonialism and imperialism acquired disreputable connotations, Zionism rebranded as an anticolonial, liberationist movement. Rather than taking over someone else's land, the Jews were returning to their own land. Rather than conniving with an imperial power, they had fought *against* Britain. Rodinson traces the strategy of dissimulation that had characterized Zionism from its beginnings. "They had to continue the Herzlian and post-Herzlian policy that consists of 'presenting the entire matter in the most inoffensive light,' " Rodinson wrote. Yet the Arab population knew exactly what was going on. They could hardly have failed to notice that, no matter what claims the Zionists made to descent from people who had purportedly lived in the land thousands of years ago, the immigrant population came, at first, almost exclusively from Europe. In 1922, the Jewish population amounted to a mere 11 percent of the total, which included around 3 to 5 percent of mostly anti-Zionist native Palestinian Jews. The new immigrants were hostile to the indigenous population. Their policy of Hebrew Labor—employing only Jews, buying only from Jews, forbidding Arabs to live in

Jewish settlements, expelling Palestinians from Jewish lands—was extremely provocative and actively hostile. This was the policy whose devastating consequences Sadiq Saad had chronicled so extensively in *Palestine in the Claws of Colonialism.* "Israel was founded on a boycott," wrote Patrick Wolfe, the Australian theorist of settler colonialism who developed many of Rodinson's ideas. Rodinson explained that Palestinian resistance to the settlers made perfect sense: "It was in the most legitimate fashion that the Arabs could consider that the implantation of a new foreign element in Palestinian territories (an element that at the time was overwhelmingly European) had been imposed upon them by a European power, thanks to the victory of one group of European powers over another group which had been joined by the Ottoman Empire."

He addressed those who insisted that Israel was not a colony because it did not have a "metropolis"—a mother country from which the colonists came—by pointing out that the entire West had consistently supported Zionism: a "collective metropolis." It did not matter that few Zionists came from Britain itself. What mattered were Britain's policies. "This country played the role of the metropolis of a settler colony [*colonie de peuplement*], because, no matter what the circumstances, it protected the formation and the growth of the Yishuv as in other times it had, for example, protected British colonization in North America, as France had protected French colonization in Algeria." The Zionists eventually rebelled against the British, but that happened in other settler colonies too: "Tensions often arise between metropolis and colony, the colonists frequently being annoyed by rules imposed by the metropolis, legislation that they do not control or at least not entirely and which often seems to them 'overtaken' by local conditions." When, in 1936, the Palestinians rose against British and Zionist control in a revolt that lasted three years, the British brutally suppressed them. In two terse sentences, Rodinson summed up half a century of Zionism: "Europe had collectively sent colonists with the goal of seizing a part of the national territory. During the period when the indigenous reaction could easily have kicked out these colonists, that

reaction was stopped by the British police and army mandated by the collectivity of European and American nations."

Rodinson does not write from the Arab perspective, as Sadiq Saad did. He writes, instead, from the viewpoint of someone who understands the Arab perspective—a perspective rarely heard, and almost unanimously rejected, in the West. The Arab rejection of the partition of the country proposed by the United Nations in 1947, for example, was nearly always portrayed as intransigence. As Rodinson understood, partition was an attempt to divide an already small country, assigning around half of it to a recently arrived European minority, and even in the part of the country assigned to them, the Jews were a minority. From the Arab perspective, this was preposterous and unjust. For Rodinson, the Palestinians could not have reacted in any other way: "I am not trying here to determine what could or should have been done according to different moral criteria, but to explain the Arab reactions so often misunderstood in Europe and how they could have been based on the nature of the facts. For the Arab masses, the acceptance of the UN decisions would have meant unconditional surrender to a diktat from Europe, exactly the same kind of surrender that the black or yellow kings of the nineteenth century faced when cannons lined up in front of their palaces."

To anyone aware of this history—and like all the peoples of the colonized world, the Palestinians were keenly aware of it—this comparison would have been obvious. Yet it stood against a powerful counternarrative, which Rodinson summed up in a later work, *Israel and the Arabs*. "To the peoples of the West, the Israelis were first and foremost Jews. Unable to rid their minds of the Jewish tragedy of 1939–1945, in Palestine they saw only the survivors of the massacre. This persecuted people had fled and recongregated in the land which historically was theirs, as the Bible shows; they had worked that land, and proved that they possessed the qualities which the West prizes above all: technical efficiency and military prowess." By leaving Europe, the Jews had, paradoxically enough, become European:

> Purified by distance and national regeneration, they now represented the quintessence of Europe amidst the dirty and backward masses of the languid and verminous Orient. Israeli and Zionist propaganda reinforced, as it was bound to do, these images. Israel, it was said, *was* the Jewish people. The fund of good will toward the Jews was mobilized in the service of Israel. The identification of Israel with the Jews, with all the Jews, was total.

Antisemitism is not a focus of the essay in *Les temps modernes,* but Rodinson writes about it extensively elsewhere. The colonial nature of Zionism means that "the conflict cannot be reduced to just another manifestation of anti-Semitism," he says in *Israel and the Arabs*. He rejects the idea that Jews had "an evil and diabolical 'essence.' " Jews are no worse, and no better, than anyone else: "Everyone must be judged according to his merits and his faults, all actions weighed according to their own true value. If these actions harm individuals or groups, those individuals or groups should be allowed to defend their position, their rights, etc., without being denounced as exponents of a doctrine which is repugnant in itself. Any other view would entail either that every Jew or group of Jews can, by definition, only desire and do good, or else that none of their ideas or actions must ever be criticized." There were plenty of examples of the latter. He mentions an article, one example that can stand for thousands of others, in which "a rationalist gentleman, certainly a philosopher, got mad because someone drew a caricature of an Israeli soldier brutally shoving a Palestinian; lots of worse things happen every day, but, for him, it's antisemitism to say so! I'm often tempted to react to this kind of conflation, but I tell myself that once again I am going to be vilified as an antisemitic Jew, which is not pleasant."

For him, Arab anti-Jewish attitudes were "war racialism," entirely predictable and sadly universal. He gave the example of World War I: "Among the Allies, it was common to think of the Germans as an accursed race. It was dangerous to point out that certain pure-bred Germans had been moderately competent musicians, for instance, or that others had made

some small contribution to Western philosophy." He warns the Arabs away from this form of war racialism: "They must appreciate that they themselves have perpetrated similar wrongs (and are still doing so, in some places) on other peoples. Secondly, they must recognize that this wrong was the doing of the Jewish Zionists, and not of all Jews." At the same time, he knew that this conflation was sown by a movement that claimed to speak in the name of all Jews: "The Zionists freely proclaim that Zionism is the natural outcome of the whole of Jewish history, something which belongs to the very essence of Judaism and to which all the world's Jews owe allegiance."

Rodinson refused that view of history—and refused, said Alain Gresh, "to turn the Jewish question into a metaphysical question." This was the "lachrymose conception" of Jewish history, which posited antisemitism as a permanent and ineradicable feature of every human society, and which sought to "transpose into the past the exact conditions of the decades marked by Hitlerism." As so many others—religious thinkers ranging from the American Reform Jews to the Orthodox colleagues of Tamares, secular thinkers including Hannah Arendt, Sadiq Saad, and Avi Shlaim—had said, this was negative and self-defeating. It was provincial geographically and culturally. It was also provincial in terms of time. For millennia, in dozens of countries and on every continent, Jews had lived in vastly different political and economic circumstances, some good and some bad, and for Rodinson, Gresh said, it was important to distinguish "between periods where there were powerful forces of antisemitism and those where there weren't…. Rodinson thereby opposed the stereotype of the eternal hatred of the Jews." The Arabs had not always been hostile. "Many Jews fleeing from Christian persecution have found a refuge in the territory of Islam," he wrote. As a Marxist, rather than embracing a mystical theory about a supposedly eternal hatred, he sought real-world, political explanations. The explanation for Arab hostility was simple: The Zionists had occupied an Arab country and abused its native Arab population. Without understanding Israel as a colonial phenomenon, it was impossible to explain its dependence on the Western powers and its difficulties in reorienting itself

toward its own neighborhood. For Rodinson, this was a simple explanation, and one that also explained the reaction of the Arabs. To classify all Arab political expressions according to their degree of support or opposition to Israel was to propagate "a mistaken and profoundly harmful conception of the problem," he wrote. "Just as those who cling to the legend of the gratuitous Arab hatred of the Jews or to the thesis of the Machiavellian myth, consciously elaborated, are fooling themselves and fooling others."

Zionism's religious appeals likewise cut no ice. Rodinson dismisses biblical claims: "I will not speak except in passing of historic rights to the land of Palestine which would pertain to all Jews, not insulting my readers by thinking they might be swayed by that argument." If the Zionists wanted to believe in fairy tales, that was their business. They could not insist that other people, especially their victims, believe in them too. But the goal of his essay is not to say who is right. It is to explain. "One can judge the goal praiseworthy, the wrong inflicted on the Arabs inexistent, the means excusable or even praiseworthy," he wrote. "But one cannot honestly deny the frame in which this project was inserted. It is even possible to judge the European expansion differently. The historian can also not judge it at all and limit himself to noting it." Nevertheless, Rodinson does judge the beliefs he saw underlying the project:

> Being Jewish does not prevent one from having double standards. Or one must be frank and declare that a given group of people is always right in any event, meaning the group to which one oneself belongs, here, following the antisemitic and Zionist criteria, the group of Jews. Such a conviction of the impeccability of one's "ethnic" group is a frequent phenomenon in the history of human groups. We call it racism.

He then dispenses with other justifications used to deny the colonial nature of Zionism. Propaganda made much of the kibbutzim, experimental collective farms, in order to cultivate socialist sympathies. Even were Zionism socialist internally, which he denies, that would be irrelevant to

how it treated those outside it. “This is a phenomenon very frequently seen in history, and even very normal, sociologically speaking, as depressing as it is for those who have high hopes for humanity,” he writes. “The analogy is obvious with the mental attitude of the French colonizers imbued with the democratic ideology of the French Revolution. It was for their own good that we conquered the Algerians and the Tonkinese. We were thereby getting them ready, for later—much later—to understand the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and still later yet could we apply it to them.”

He dismisses the excuse that many lands were purchased by early Zionists: “The brutal confiscation of lands is not at all a fundamental characteristic of colonization. Indeed, lands for colonization, all across the world, were acquired much less by direct force than by apparently legal transactions, the privileged position of the colonizer allowing tricks and legal detours that worked in his favor.” And like Avi Shlaim and the New Historians, he dismisses the chestnut that the Palestinians simply abandoned their homes during the Nakba of 1948: “Many Jews like the supreme chief Ben-Gurion wanted, quite logically, for the greatest number of Arabs to depart. His hagiographer Michael Bar-Zohar writes candidly: ‘He can be accused of racism, but then one would have to try the entire Zionist movement which is based on the principle of a purely Jewish entity in Palestine. The appeals that different Zionist institutions addressed to the Arabs to ask them not to leave the country and to integrate into the Jewish state are largely hypocritical.’ I couldn’t have put it better myself!”

The essay ends on a note of resignation. That Zionism is a colonial enterprise, “perfectly of a piece with the great movement of Euro-American expansion in the 19th and 20th centuries,” should hardly need to be said. It is “an obvious diagnosis and I have only used so many words to enunciate it thanks to the desperate efforts that have been made to disguise it.” Rodinson concludes by saying that war might be the only way out of the situation, an observation that, he emphasizes, gives him no pleasure. He then offers some advice:

> If there is any chance to see a peaceful solution one day, we will not get there by telling the Arabs that they have a duty to applaud their conquerors because they are Europeans or on the way toward becoming Europeans, because they are "developed," because they are revolutionaries or socialists (almost!), and even less because they are simply Jews! The most one can demand of them is that they resign themselves to an unpleasant situation and that by resigning themselves they will get some benefit from this resignation. It is not easy to get a conquered party to be resigned to defeat and this process is not made easier by bellowing about how right the victor was to beat him.

The Six-Day War broke out on June 5, 1967, when "Le conflit israélo-arabe," the special issue of *Les temps modernes* that opens with Rodinson's essay, was still at the printer. The war, in which Israel fired the first shots, expanded Israeli control into Syria and Egypt, all the way to the Suez Canal, along with the entirety of historical Palestine. Around a million refugees from the Nakba found themselves under the domination of the same regime they had fled. The timeliness of the publication, its illustrious editors and contributors, and the feat of having gathered so many prominent Arabs and Jews under the covers of a single magazine for the very first time brought it worldwide attention.

It was the subject of a long essay in *The New York Review of Books,* "Holy War," by the celebrated radical journalist I. F. Stone. "It turns out to be 991 pages not so much of dialogue as of dual monologue," he wrote. "The two sets of contributors sit not just in separate rooms, like employers and strikers in a bitter labor dispute, but in separate universes where the simplest fact often turns out to have diametrically opposite meanings." Stone gazes across the gulf separating the Arabs from the Israelis and notes that it becomes even clearer upon examining two French Jewish contributions, from Robert Misrahi, "a well known writer of the Left," and Maxime Rodinson. "While M. Misrahi's article appears with the Israelis, M. Rodinson's contribution—by far the most brilliant in the whole volume

—appears alone. He refused, for reasons of principle, to appear in the Arab ensemble. It is not hard to see why. For while M. Rodinson gives strong support to every basic Arab historical contention, he is too much the humanist (and in the last analysis no doubt the Jew) to welcome an apocalyptic solution at the expense of Israel's existence."

This nuance was lost on the many Zionists who attacked Rodinson. A book appeared in 1970 called *La gauche, Israël, et les Juifs* by a Zionist named Jacques Hermone, which had the dubious merit of gathering, in a couple of sentences, almost all of the epithets usually hurled against anti-Zionist Jews: "Rodinson is the most senior and the most wicked of this new generation of kapos who have dedicated their life to fighting their own people. His case is quite exceptional and resembles, in many particulars, that of an American Nazi, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, who committed suicide when his Jewish origins were discovered." Having said that, Hermone regrets that Rodinson has not followed the example and killed himself, too: "The only major difference is that Rodinson never had the courage to draw the conclusions of his own antisemitism by doing the same thing." Later, his son Michel Rodinson would recall an article in a pro-Israeli paper called "Rodinson, the Biggest Antisemite in France" and letters delivered to their home addressed to "M. Maxime Rodinson, renegade Jew." He was, said Farouk Mardam-Bey, "the most reviled of all" the pro-Palestinian intellectuals, "the French Jew who was the most attacked by Zionists."

After the heat of these initial reactions cooled, the essay settled down to a long life among anticolonial thinkers. It was translated into English in 1973, as *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* It was widely read among opponents of Zionism: The American scholar Norman Finkelstein, for example, described Rodinson as one of the essential authors for anti-Zionist thinkers of his time. Its influence endured in part because, though Rodinson said that his diagnosis was obvious, he was, for years, one of the only people making it. Today, only the most hidebound Zionist historians would quibble with any element of his analysis. "Since the New Historians have shed their critical light on the origins of Israel, Rodinson's essay deserves to

be read with serenity. To compare Zionism and colonialism no longer shocks anyone today," the French-Israeli scholar Denis Charbit wrote in 2007. "Whether Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Gershon Shafir, and Avi Shlaim have read this text or not, Rodinson could be considered as the precursor of this revised history of Israel."

Of course, the New Historians were not the only people to react to Rodinson. Few words were as likely to elicit Zionist outrage as the word "colonial." In *Les temps modernes,* Ephraïm Tari, a Belgian-born employee of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote, "It was toward a *land without a people* that slowly toward the end of the last century a *people without a land* began to gravitate." This claim, like the biblical claims that Rodinson dismissed, was surprisingly persistent, because denying it meant touching on Israel's Achilles' heel, its legitimacy: in Zionist terminology, its "right to exist." If the Zionists had returned to the empty land of their ancestors, the question of a "right to exist" would never have surfaced. But unlike that of any other state that emerged after World War II, Israel's right to exist was denied by hundreds of millions of people who saw it as an illegitimate interposition. Rodinson's sober presentation of facts shows that Arabs, far from the mystifying medieval hysterics often portrayed in the West, were right to see it this way. "The native population did not accept the settlement of what must be regarded as foreigners, who, moreover, presented themselves as colonists, as is demonstrated by the titles which they gave to their own institutions," he wrote, referring to the Zionist Colonial Trust, or to characterizations of Zionism as colonialism by Herzl, Jabotinsky, and Max Nordau. "The conflict therefore appears essentially as the struggle of an indigenous population against the occupation of part of its national territory by foreigners."

For Israel, the colonial paradigm was far more threatening than the human rights paradigm. Advocacy for human rights did not challenge Zionism. It merely expressed the hope that the Palestinians might be better treated. The colonial paradigm meant connecting the Palestinian struggle to contemporary struggles—in South Africa, Rhodesia, and Algeria, for example—that Western liberals supported with fewer qualms. It also meant

placing Zionism in the context of older cases of Western imperialism—North America, Latin America, Australia—and by doing so removed much of the special pleading upon which Zionism had always relied: that it was an answer to antisemitism or the Holocaust; that the Jews had an ancient claim to the land. Instead, and with a typically universalist view, Rodinson allowed scholars to see the similarities between Israel and these other cases, and became one of the intellectual fathers of the study of what would become known as settler colonialism.

To compare these cases was not to say that they were all exactly alike—a contention often made by Zionism's defenders. It was, instead, to see both similarities and differences. "There is nothing called colonialism or imperialism in itself," Rodinson had written. "There is a series of social phenomena showing many analogies between themselves, but also infinite nuances, upon which common usage has decided to place these labels." This would be put more concisely by the great Australian historian Patrick Wolfe: "Invasion is a structure, not an event." Wolfe saw the connections between Israel and other colonial societies. He found Israel exceptional, though not in the way it liked to imagine itself. "In the annals of settler colonialism, Zionism presents an unparalleled example of deliberate, explicit planning," he wrote in *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*. "No campaign of territorial dispossession was ever waged more thoughtfully." He praised Rodinson's essay, "the virtues of which include its early formulation." Yet Wolfe writes that Rodinson "failed to specify what it is about the Zionist colonial formation that makes it a specifically *settler*-colonial one." In Rodinson's essay, he does not examine what Wolfe describes as "settler colonialism's essential feature, its sustained institutional tendency to supplant the Indigenous population." Written before the war of 1967, Rodinson's essay does contemplate the desire to remove and minimize the indigenous population, but not to eliminate it entirely. Neither does he describe the institutional structures by which this elimination would be carried out, an ethnic cleansing that would become the main project of the Israeli state over the next decades—a project that would culminate, as in other settler colonies, in genocide.

Rodinson can hardly be accused of optimism. In 1970, he wrote that if Israel, in the early years, had pursued diplomacy—a possibility under Moshe Sharett in the mid-1950s, when Ben-Gurion was temporarily out of power—"the outcome of the discussions might well have been approximated to an acceptance of the status quo." Instead, Ben-Gurion returned, embracing the policy of collective reprisals and military aggression that culminated in the invasion of Egypt in 1956. Had things gone differently, "Israel would have been recognized, and perhaps saved. It might have been the salvation of Israel. But it would have been the end of Zionism." This would have meant an Israeli state that accepted the return of Palestinian refugees and made peace with its neighbors. It would have meant a transition into a normal state, with borders delineated by treaty and with a modicum of equality for its citizens. Despite Israeli propaganda that claimed the Arabs refused to make peace with Israel, later historians, including Avi Shlaim, confirmed Rodinson's contention that it was Israel that refused to make peace, precisely because it would have meant the "end of Zionism." In a land that, only a few years before, had been overwhelmingly Arab, Zionism meant establishing a Jewish state, racially pure and firmly majoritarian: a race-state in which Palestinians could never aspire to equality.

In 1968, in Cuba, Rodinson became one of the early proponents of what would be called the two-state solution. "Up till that point I was a prisoner of the nostalgic idea of communists in general, meaning that the ideal was to return to the situation of the mandate without the mandate, to the coexistence of the communities inside a unitary state," he wrote. "After having observed countries where two ethnicities coexisted, I progressively began to doubt. I saw that this often worked very badly," he wrote, citing Cyprus, India, Pakistan, and Ireland. He found certain statements too sanguine. Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, advocated a secular state, but, Rodinson replied, "Arafat is speaking of an ethnic problem and envisages religious tolerance as a solution. While this might be a good solution for a country like France, which doesn't have an ethnic problem, it is not possible (at least not right away) in Palestine. We

must therefore establish, at least provisionally, two political structures—I didn't dare use the word 'State'—which could get people used to coexistence, and later, one day perhaps, we could reach the solution of a single structure."

This idea, too, eventually fell by the wayside. Rodinson feared he had not convinced anyone. Among his disappointments was a failure to sway Sartre. In 1979, twelve years after the publication of Rodinson's essay, the Palestinian writer Edward Said was summoned to meet Sartre at the home of Michel Foucault during "a seminar on peace in the Middle East." Like many, Said had hoped that Sartre would lend his immense authority to the Palestinian cause. "Sartre struck me as worth the effort simply because I could not forget his position on Algeria, which as a Frenchman must have been harder to hold than a position critical of Israel," he remembered. Instead, a "strangely passive, unimpressive, affectless" man muttered banalities about peace, and said almost nothing about the Palestinians: "No reference was made to Israeli settler-colonialism, similar in many ways to French practice in Algeria." For Said, it was a "bitter disappointment." Until the end of his life, Sartre remained firmly pro-Zionist. "Whether that was because he was afraid of seeming anti-semitic, or because he felt guilt about the Holocaust, or because he allowed himself no deep appreciation of the Palestinians as victims of and fighters against Israel's injustice, or for some other reason, I shall never know."

Rodinson continued writing and teaching, living in an apartment in the Rue Vaneau that was so overstuffed with books that eventually there was no room for a second person to walk through the door. "Maxime always felt misunderstood by his three children," his son Michel wrote. "More than anything else, we saw the heaps of books, of files, of newspapers and of papers of every variety piling up, overflowing, inexorably invading the apartment, despite our mother's desperate attempts to keep a part of the house livable." He was misunderstood, too, professionally. "He didn't have a place," said Baaklini-Laurens. "An autodidact, he wasn't one of the boys. He wasn't Jewish enough, a traitor to the cause, too Arab, not Marxist enough for the intellectuals." Worse still, the warnings against nationalism

that he had absorbed from his universalist background had been ignored. “I knew him when he was already old and he was a bit disillusioned,” said Antoine Lonnet. “He observed bad things that were permanent in the relations between people and civilizations and was saddened by them. ‘Fundamentalism Forever,’ that’s the title of an article from the end of his career.” One issue was especially disheartening. “The question of Israel is as hopeless as ever,” he said in 1998.

He died in 2004. “His disillusioned skepticism did not prevent him from being politically courageous, and all the more so because he had lost the hope of convincing anyone,” said Michel. “He only thought that he had to keep standing up for what he believed was just, because maybe, someday, some of the seeds he had planted would sprout.” He taught at the Sorbonne until he could no longer walk up the stairs.

9

THE STATE AS CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE

Felicia Langer



In 1990, Felicia Langer settled in the pleasant college town of Tübingen, in southwest Germany. Of the city's ninety thousand souls, a third were students at a university founded fifteen years before the discovery of America—days that, even now, are easy to summon. With its half-timbered houses and its tangle of medieval alleyways, Tübingen is not much bigger than it was in the fifteenth century, and looks the way much of Germany would have looked before World War II. Best known to Germans as the place where the poet Hölderlin spent thirty-six years in a tower, ravaged by mental illness, Tübingen nonetheless seems far from the madness of Israel, where Langer had spent decades of her life, and where she was bitterly hated even by the standards of that land of bitter hatreds—mocked in the press, spat upon in the street. Tidy Tübingen took some getting used to. Her husband relaxed only when, immediately following a television appearance, she received a death threat.

"For the first time," he joked, "I felt I was at home."

By the time she got to Tübingen, the small, blond Langer, with her bright blue eyes and bright pink lipstick, looked more like a grandmother than like "Felicia the Terrorist" or "Felicia the Great." But behind her neat appearance was a life of deprivation and combat that reads like an anthology of twentieth-century horrors. Born sixty years before her arrival in Tübingen to a loving couple in the Polish city of Tarnów, Felicia seemed destined for happiness: the meaning of her name. Her father was a lawyer. They lived in a house with a crystal chandelier and a modern bathroom that was her parents' pride: a bathtub sunk into the floor, black-and-white tiling, and an elaborate toothbrushing system "like one at a dentist's." The house had Chinese porcelain, Persian rugs, and walnut furniture, but Langer would note that this luxury stopped at the door to the room where Aniela, their maid, resided. "Had the war and all its ordeals not come for me, I would wonder when and how I would have concluded that Aniela, too, had the right to an appropriate dwelling."

The war came.

Felicia had just turned nine.

“My childhood abruptly and forever ended.”

The family fled east, into the Soviet Union.

Felicia would always remember the kindness of the destitute people they encountered in the Urals, “their good-heartedness and readiness to sacrifice.” She loved school and the Russian language, which she learned to speak without an accent, but she was a refugee. “One never forgets the suffering of a refugee’s existence.” They lived in wooden cabins, two or three families to a room, without electricity or water. In winter, when the temperature could reach forty degrees below zero, they had to dig their way out through six feet of snow. They eventually reached Kazakhstan, a sunnier land, far from the front. Many refugees hoped that this would be an improvement, unaware that epidemics were raging, and that many who made it to central Asia would die of dysentery and starvation. Despite her mother’s ceaseless attempts to find food, the family started to go hungry.

Felicia’s pride was her shoes. Her parents were forced to sell them—which meant that when winter came, she could no longer go to school. Her classmates and teacher were sorry, but nobody had shoes to spare. “You’ll see, my darling, that this isn’t the end,” her father said. All winter he taught her. He focused on languages, including Latin. Her mother was forced to burn their books, page after page, to keep warm. “When the forest is burning, it is no time to pity the roses,” the saying went. Felicia knew that if she stopped feeling pain at every ripped-out page, something would die inside her.

Her father’s health was declining. He was imprisoned for refusing to take a Soviet passport, afraid that this would prevent him from returning to Poland. Felicia visited him in prison, the first of many horrendous prisons she would visit in the course of her life. “Decades have passed since then,” she wrote, “and prisons always take away my joy in life.” Her father’s face grew yellow. His body wasted. After he was released, he had a heart attack. One day, when men were being plucked off the street and packed into trains for forced labor, Felicia and her mother discovered her father at the door of one of the wagons. He had begged in vain to be excused on grounds of poor health. “Only you can save me,” he said to Felicia.

“I beg you to do my father a favor,” she said to the commandant. “He is sick and is going to die. He absolutely can’t work.”

The man checked his list: “He’s already told us that, but there’s nothing more we can do.”

“No,” she said. “He hasn’t said what I’m telling you, because he hardly speaks Russian. He’s going to die, believe me, he’s going to die. You are the only one who can help him. Without him I have nothing…. You must be a father yourself.” She burst into tears.

Her father was allowed off, looking “like a man who had come back from a place of no return.”

The tears were typical. The victory was not. Later, she would become an anomaly among great lawyers: considered great even though she lost most of her cases. This victory was temporary. The father she adored soon died. When he did, her mother lost her job. Mother and daughter set, once again, to wandering. They found a room, four bare walls with a plank to sleep on. Felicia was grateful that there was no mirror. Hunger and filth made her, at fourteen, look no more than ten. Her skin was covered with purulent wounds. In a hopeful moment, they were given a mantle to sleep under. It turned out to be infested with lice that chewed at the open sores on her body. At long last, her mother managed to get her admitted to a hospital. There, she was given a meal of almost unimaginable sumptuousness, a piece of bread and a glass of milk. Every evening, a patient read a chapter of *War and Peace*.

The war ended.

They returned to Poland.

Not a single relative had survived.

“Something in me rebelled. I thought: if there is a god, how can he allow such injustice.” But life began to look up: In Poland, back in school, she met a boy, Mieczysław or Mieciu, whose family had been murdered in the Holocaust. Because of the war, he had not completed his education; he announced that he wanted to marry her. She was seventeen, and she hesitated, finally agreeing to marry him in two years, after graduation. At the same time, her mother met a man who had lost his wife in the

Holocaust. She did not love him as she had Felicia's father. But times were hard. She wanted security. At the urging of this new stepfather, they moved to Breslau, a German city freshly assigned to Poland, where Felicia finished school. Her stepfather had a son in Israel, and he and her mother decided to go. Felicia and Mieciu had no intention of leaving—"We loved life in Poland, the enthusiasm with which people were building a new society"—but her mother was miserable.

"If you don't come, I'll kill myself," she wrote.

They came.

After their arrival in 1950, their lives in the new state were wretched. "They were never Zionists," their son said. "They understood the Palestinian situation in two minutes." Felicia worked making army uniforms, and then in a textile factory. She saw how unequal the society was: The factory owner drove around in a huge American car while she worked for a salary entirely destined for the rent on the miserable apartment where she and Mieciu lived. She felt more uprooted than her husband did. She longed to read and study. She missed Polish cultural life. She saw the discrimination—Ashkenazim over Sephardim, Jews over Arabs—and found relief by joining the Communist Party, the only party that had both Jewish and Palestinian members. This brought them in contact with like-minded people. Through these comrades, she started to visit Palestinian villages, and saw life under the martial law that governed Arab lives: "I got to know the tragedy of the refugees, which I had felt in my own flesh." Nevertheless, in a recently founded society, she still had a sense that change was possible, and among the communists felt "a romanticism that no longer exists." She and Mieciu managed to buy an apartment, though that was hardly the word. She put it in quotation marks, "apartment": an asbestos-lined basement that served as a bunker in times of danger. It was there, in 1953, that their son, Michael, was born. It was a day after her mother's birthday—the same day her father had died. Felicia felt hopeful about the future. She allowed herself to hope that by the time Michael grew up, there would be no wars.

(Mieciu said that an optimist is a pessimist with insufficient information.)

Three years later, the Suez War erupted when Israel, Britain, and France attacked Egypt, the catastrophe that sealed the fate of the Egyptian Jews. Though a war whose provocation was wildly disproportionate to any legitimate grievance, it was opposed in the Knesset only by the communists, and because Felicia was a communist, a neighbor tried to keep her and Michael out of the local bomb shelter. The woman cursed the Arabs, "who wanted to destroy us," and any Jews who opposed the war. Nobody, Felicia drily noted, stood up for a woman and a baby seeking refuge: the same indifference she would have occasion to lament throughout her life. At the end of the war, she started to hear about the crimes that Israel had committed, such as the massacre in Kafr Qasim, twelve miles east of Tel Aviv. There, on the day the war broke out, October 29, 1956, the border police killed forty-nine men, women, and children. The punishments for those involved were risible: Like so many before them, the defendants claimed that they were only following orders. One soldier, who had murdered forty-three Palestinian civilians, was released from prison after having served only three and a half years, and was then, in the same year, placed in charge of "Arab affairs" in the city of Ramleh.

Three years later, Langer started law school. Her beloved father had been a lawyer, and she had always regretted that she had not completed her education. Now, as the only mother in the school, she was badgered with questions about how she could leave her son with neighbors: questions, of course, that were never asked of male students with children. These included Ariel Sharon, future prime minister and already the author of a notorious war crime—the Qibya massacre of 1953, in which sixty-nine Palestinian civilians, the majority of whom were women and children, were locked into houses that were subsequently blown up. The raid was an example of the "Iron Wall" theory. "Now people could feel that the terrorist gangs would think twice before striking," Sharon wrote. "Now that they knew for sure they would be hit back." As the subsequent history of the Israeli state showed, this approach did not bring peace. But it did allow

Sharon's career to flourish. Over the next half century, he compiled a nearly unparalleled résumé of war crimes.

Langer was elected class speaker but had trouble getting a job after graduation. She was a woman, she had no connections in the nepotistic legal world, and, as she later learned, she had the wrong politics. Her values forbade her to represent people of whom she disapproved, including a pimp who was refusing to pay alimony. "He's a good guy, he's also very progressive in his politics, a real lefty," a colleague told her. She told her colleague what she thought of this "progressive" client. This rigorous attitude—which she would later bring into her work with Palestinians, when she refused to defend anyone who had injured civilians—shut her out of the traditional places of employment. She had to strike out on her own, working up to eighteen hours a day on routine legal work for poor clients—demonstrators against the military regime, unemployed people, abused women—who often could not pay. Despite this marginal position, she learned many years later that, as early as 1965, the intelligence services were assembling a file on her.

With the Six-Day War of 1967, Langer found her true vocation. Like the war of 1956, this war was provoked by Israel, as Chaim Herzog, later president of Israel, explained: "If Israel hadn't started this war in June 1967, the entire Middle East, West Asia as well as a great piece of the American continent, would have come under the influence of the Soviet Union. It was a matter of dominating an important piece of the world." On the eve of the war, a unity government was formed of all parties—except, as in 1956, the communists. "No enemy can harm the State of Israel so much as the current government that has decided to go to war," said Meir Vilner, the only Jewish deputy to oppose the war. As Sartre and Rodinson were arguing in Paris, Felicia and Mieciu were sitting in their car when the announcement of the declaration of war came over the radio. Felicia panicked at the idea of yet another war but was nevertheless relieved to recall that their son, Michael, was too young to fight. "I couldn't have known then that he too would not be spared when the second act of this endless Blitzkrieg broke out."

The war of 1956 had been brutal, but the media had not reported on it as they should have. As a result, many Israelis did not really know—did not really want to know—what exactly had happened, just as they did not really know that the war was provoked by Israel. Its leaders would later freely confess as much. "You have no idea how much blood we spilled [in Gaza]," a friend who had been there told Langer. "There was a pool of human blood on the ground. I saw geese drinking the blood." Langer had wanted to publicize the things she was learning about "the scorched corpses, the piles of shoes, the lines of Egyptian prisoners of war, the skeletons of tanks." Then, her friend had laughed at her naivete—at her assumption that journalists and the public they served either didn't know or would care if they did. Now, ten years later, when she heard her neighbors celebrating the Israeli conquest of Gaza, all she could think about were the geese drinking from the pool of blood.

After the Six-Day War, all of Palestine came under Israeli administration, from the river to the sea. "At the end of six days, little Israel became an empire: the West Bank of the Jordan, Arab Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and Sinai!" Langer wrote. The land included a million Palestinians who had been exiled from the 78 percent of Palestine that became the State of Israel with the Nakba of 1948. These people had taken refuge in Gaza or the West Bank, and with the whole land now under a single regime, Israeli Jews could explore their new empire and see, if they chose to, its human price. "The average Israeli could see with his own eyes those who since 1948 had been living in poverty and want, the ex-inhabitants of Ramleh, Lydda, Jaffa, Majdal and Masmiyyah," Langer wrote. "Some of the refugees dared to visit their houses; they even drank a cup of coffee with the new owners." These refugees were now occupied by the same state that had expelled them a generation before.

As the war changed the country, Israel accordingly changed its laws. Long before 1967, a system was in place that assigned different rights to people according to their ethnicity, similar to South African apartheid. In 1967, new peoples came under the rule of Israel, not all of whom were Palestinians. There were Egyptians in the Sinai and Syrians in the Golan,

and Palestinians had different rights depending on where they lived: within the 1948 borders, in Jerusalem, or in Gaza and the West Bank. These areas fell under an ad hoc system, more unequal than any other in the Western world, that would soon entangle their inhabitants in a web of repressive laws. Many Palestinian lawyers refused to collaborate with the occupation. "They boycotted the military courts, and the Palestinian defendants had nobody to represent them." One day, as Langer was going to the grocery store, she saw a boy spurring his dog to attack cats. She yelled and chased the boy off. When she returned home, she felt relieved—purified—for having stood up for the abused animals. Something inside her changed in that moment, she wrote, and she resolved to help Palestinians who were being deprived of their rights.

When Langer announced her intention to represent Palestinian clients, she heard the usual things that women hear: that the sexist Arabs would never trust a woman, especially a Jewish woman; that she would only get herself killed. Yet the first person who came to her was an imam wearing a red fez, Sheikh Musa al-Bukhari, accompanied by his wife. In good English, he told her that their son was being held in Hebron prison. Nobody would tell them why, but when he had picked up his son's clothes to wash them, he had found a shirt covered with blood. The father's eyes filled with tears. The mother began to sob, and at that moment the thing Langer always feared came to pass: She, too, started weeping. "Instead of exuding authority, strength, and decisiveness, I cried along with them. That's how we sat there, three grown people, and cried about the fate of their tortured son." Later, she would often be mocked for crying. But her tears were her connection to the people she represented. They were a rejection of the idea that to be professional meant to be passionless. And they were a reproach, in a hypermilitarized state, to the logic of machismo. With her pink lipstick and her pink manicures, Langer never pretended to be anything but a woman—and would eventually see her femininity as a sign of strength.

The Bukhari case, her first after the war, turned this small woman into a denizen of the underworld of prisons, military courts, and torture chambers that spread ever farther across Palestine. She would be hindered at every

step by bureaucrats who denied her permission to see files she was legally entitled to see, to visit clients she was legally entitled to visit; who forced her to stand for hours in the desert sun and to work, in winter, in freezing temperatures: demoralizing to her and to the people she represented. “One can easily imagine how a defendant feels when he sees his lawyer treated in such a way.” She saw the pleasure this treatment afforded the men who found themselves in charge of this underworld: In one prison, where inmates lived in packed cells for twenty-three hours a day, she saw “the flash of delight [in one warden’s] narrow eyes when he informed me that I couldn’t see those prisoners, or when he invented yet another refined spiteful reason to hinder my visit.” The pleasure was not only his. “I unfortunately have to note that many Israeli lawyers, elevated by the occupation to judgeships in the territories—and I am speaking of civilians, reservists, and military lawyers—seemed extremely satisfied with these roles.”

From the moment Langer started representing Palestinians, she became the focus of attacks. Taxi drivers refused to pick her up. Cars would jump the curb to try to hit her. She had to hire a bodyguard. When she fell and nearly broke her leg, a doctor at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem refused to treat her; when the door of her office was covered with death threats, the neighbors ordered her to repaint it: not because they disagreed with the message, they emphasized, but because the graffiti was not “aesthetically pleasing.” When she achieved one of her rare victories, preventing the deportation of Bassam Shakaa, the mayor of Nablus, Jewish terrorists placed a bomb in his car that blew off his legs. For her birthday, she received a bouquet with an unsigned card: “Congratulations on your birthday. May you live 120 years with both legs on the ground.”

The attacks extended to her son, Michael. Langer had cried with the Bukharis in part because she, too, had a son. He was fourteen in 1967. Because of her work and reputation, he was bullied at school. People would spit on the street when he walked past. His mother’s biggest worry was what would happen when his compulsory military service approached; she feared that the military would avenge itself on her through her son. Since

the early days of Zionism, it had been common practice to set children, especially children who came from leftist or religious homes, against their parents, and the army was one of the state's main tools for this brainwashing. Felicia and Mieciu knew that their fears were not theoretical. An officer at the martial court in Lod told her directly, "We'll get your son assigned to the military police, and he'll be the one to drag your clients to court in handcuffs."

In her long career, she wrote later, this was the most painful threat she ever received.

When the time came, Michael refused to serve in the occupied territories. He offered instead to work in a janitorial role within the 1948 borders. They assigned him to the military police anyway.

"Mother," he summed it up, "they want to take revenge on you through me."

She promised him, perhaps not in her most convincing voice, that it would be all right.

"What's going to be all right?" he shouted. "Nothing is going to be all right. I'd rather go straight to prison."

Mieciu persuaded him to go through basic training and then to refuse to serve in the territories. Michael agreed, and performed well. At that point, the senior officers tried to sway him through flattery. He was so gifted. He should do the platoon-leader course, not let himself be influenced by his parents—especially not his mother. He repeated that he would not serve in the territories.

"You're closing the door to your future," the officers said. "You'll regret it. We understand that your parents, and especially your mother, would be pleased. But from now on you have to think about yourself. We're saying this in your own best interest."

He said he would rather direct traffic. "The very fact that I am here is ridiculous," he said. "This is entirely my own personal decision."

At that point, good-cop concern switched to bad-cop rage. "If you turn down our offer, we're going to put you into the only possible place." Michael protested, and Langer came to try to reason with the officials, but

they claimed there was nothing they could do—although, as she very well knew, no other conscientious objectors were placed in the prisons. Once there, he was given work as a janitor and as a cafeteria worker. In the courtroom she was mocked: “We’ve got you now, Felicia. Your son is in the military police.” She answered, “But he isn’t here, and he will have nothing to do with your enterprise.” She was proud that he had made it possible for her to give such a retort, but her pride was not the simple pride in having been proven right. She saw what military service did to others. One day, in a prison where captives were tortured, she ran into Michael’s best friend. The “shy, polite, and good-hearted boy” who often visited their house had been transformed into a crude officer who spoke heartlessly of the people in his clutches.

Michael was only just spared that form of soul death. In her memoirs, Langer does not mention that he was so miserable in the army that he took some pills and slit his wrists. As a result of his suicide attempt, he was allowed to return to Tel Aviv. But then the war that Langer had predicted and feared arrived. As Langer knew, this war, too, was unnecessary: In 1971 and 1972, Israel had rejected interim arrangements that would have brought peace with Egypt. Michael was forced back into the army. For two weeks they were separated. When she saw him again, her nightmare had come true: “The person standing in front of me bore no similarity to my Michael. This was a thin, pale young man with the eyes of a hunted animal and a grimace in the place of a smile.” When she asked him what happened, he changed the subject.

Suddenly he said, “Mother, there are Arab prisoners of war here. But I’m not in contact with them.” He insisted that all he did was clean the courtyard and do the dishes.

She was aghast. “For the first time in my life I couldn’t reach him.”

By the time he got off on leave, he seemed to have aged a year. When he was asleep, she heard him screaming, “Mamduch, Mamduch, what have they done to Mamduch?” She decided she had to get through to him; otherwise, she was sure that she would lose him forever. She spoke to him again and insisted he tell her what had happened. He told her how, with the

blessing of their superiors, other soldiers had mistreated the prisoners, and that not all the prisoners reached the camp: Some were "lost" on the way. "He told me about the heavy shoes they trampled them with, about the bleeding heads slammed against an iron door; about soldiers whose hands were so swollen from the beatings they gave that they couldn't do the dishes." Michael didn't participate in the attacks on the captives, earning the resentment of his fellow soldiers. "Mother," he said, "they don't hate me any less than they hate the prisoners. They're ready to do the same thing to me." When he was discharged, he gave a detailed account of the torture he had witnessed to a human rights organization. He studied theater for a time but couldn't find his path; after another year, Felicia and Mieciu found him a scholarship to East Berlin. Except for a brief period in the late 1970s, he never again lived in Israel.

Yet Langer never liked to dwell on the cost to her and her family, always insisting that there was no comparison with what the Palestinians were going through. After the 1973 war, Langer began to chronicle the occupation in a series of books she would keep writing until her death forty-five years later. The portrait that emerges from her many books is of the State of Israel as a criminal enterprise: not criminal in the sense of foolish or outrageous or immoral—though those words certainly apply—but in the lawyer's literal sense of unlawful. She wrote book after book documenting the crimes of a state that constantly violated its own laws. She describes these crimes in prose that is lawyerly in the sense of detailed, dispassionate, matter-of-fact. Her books record a nearly endless succession of humiliations, bullying, and kangaroo courts—and this is only the part directed at her. These books also reveal the steel in her character: Felicia Langer, famous for crying on television, is not crying here. She is soberly setting down things she has seen "with my own eyes," the title of her first book. These are books one opens with a heavy heart. They are not, one knows, to be read at bedtime, or in the middle of the night. They are sickening, all the more so because the crimes they describe were never punished—and continue still.

They went mostly unread. *With My Own Eyes* could not find a publisher in Israel, and so Langer published it herself. Only three bookshops in the country sold it. "Naturally," wrote her friend and fellow activist Israel Shahak, "all the daily and evening papers and other media completely ignored it, and did not even try to answer the very grave charges made in the book—obviously because they thought them to be mainly true!" It was one of only three of her books published in English, by an academic press in Britain. It does not seem to have attracted attention outside specialist circles. Most of her later books were published by small presses in Germany. Their print runs were tiny. They received variable levels of editorial care. Yet Felicia Langer's collected works remain one of the most encyclopedic—and most damning—records of the war crimes committed by a modern Western state. Taken together, they are to Zionism what *The Gulag Archipelago* is to Stalinism.

They trace an evolution: in Langer's own life, and in the legal system in which she worked. At the beginning, without ever being naive, she nonetheless evinced a certain belief in the possibilities for a more just society. She needed this belief. She needed a certain trust in institutions, including in the police and the courts, in order to function: As a lawyer and as a citizen, she needed some belief in the possibility of justice, in the existence of basic rights. Her early books show the new challenges that the conquests of 1967 brought. Many tools for oppressing the Palestinian people had existed since even before the Nakba of 1948. These included the British law promulgated in 1945, the Defence (Emergency) Regulations, which allowed for the demolition of houses, the deportation of residents, and "administrative detention" (imprisonment without trial). When these laws were aimed at Jews, the Zionists denounced them as fascist: Yaakov Shapira, later attorney general and minister of justice, said that the emergency laws had "no comparison in any enlightened country. Even in Nazi Germany there were no such laws, and even things like Majdanek were de facto against the letter of the law." These laws turned out to have their uses when aimed at Palestinians. They have never been repealed.

Yet the post-1967 occupation required constant improvisation. There was an effort to maintain the outward forms of a justice system in a democratic country—lawyers, judges, trials—while eviscerating that system's moral content. "Oppression started," Langer wrote tersely. "The conqueror made sure to wrap it in a legal cloak." It was not immediately clear that the laws that applied to the conquerors did not apply to the colonized race. One of her early cases involved eight high school students, arrested for distributing leaflets: entirely legal for Jews but, unbeknownst to the boys, forbidden for Palestinians. They were mystified by the laws that allowed Jews to read legally published newspapers and participate in strikes or unarmed protests, while forbidding these activities, on pain of imprisonment, exile, and even death, to non-Jews. Jewish organizations attacked the government and called for withdrawal from the territories—as had the United Nations—but Palestinians were not allowed to call for such things. "Many strikes take place in Israel, and they are not considered crimes," one of the defendants, Henry Habash, insisted. "The distribution of leaflets is allowed in every other country of the world." The boys were inspired by the example of Gandhi's nonviolent resistance in India: "It is a form of opposition that can sometimes bring about better results than violence."

They were tortured. "This is the first time I hear that I beat him while he was naked," one policeman said, which was not quite a denial. A defendant, Zayid Sha'ur, was told, "You're just a flea and I want to put some electricity up your arse. We'll see then if you can bear it." There were threats to blow up their families' houses, including Sha'ur's, where fifty people lived. Langer said, "While this leaflet calls only for the withdrawal of the IDF from East Jerusalem, we can hear the voices of Jewish nationalists in this country who explicitly call for the elimination of the Arabs and their total banishment from the country." The president of the court interrupted her, saying that he had never heard this. "A curious piece of ignorance," she noted. The defendants were found guilty on all charges. "All the defence's arguments—including those of beatings and tortures—are rejected."

She saw that visible wounds covering the bodies of defendants were dismissed as no evidence of torture. She saw that legal title to property was dismissed as no proof of ownership. She saw the flimsy pretexts used to seize belongings, homes, lands. She saw the most thuggish people in Israeli society rewarded with suzerainty over the conquered people. She heard a constant rat-a-tat of racist remarks, as when she thanked a prison guard for a cup of tea: "Of course, we are not Arabs, are we?" She saw the people who made the regime possible. "We have to shoot them. If one gets killed, that will scare off the rest," a lawyer, a military judge, told her. "He talked like an educated man who kissed his children goodbye every morning before going to work, as did the parents of the children he had judged the night before." She saw how even apolitical Palestinians were radicalized by constant harassment, and how even the most absurd cases ended in conviction.

She saw an illiterate peasant named al-Wahish, arrested for "harboring" his son, described as an armed infiltrator. ("Infiltrator" meant a Palestinian refugee who attempted to return home.) The son had been sentenced to twenty-five years. The father being tried was mentally ill. "He did not understand what I told him," Langer wrote, "and only answered that it was potato-planting season." At the trial, she attempted to resign, saying that, due to his condition, she could not talk with her client. The court rejected her request. She appealed to the judges, pointing out that the authorities had destroyed his house, imprisoned his son, and exiled his wife and other children. As she was saying this, the defendant, who had been strangely calm, "suddenly went mad." The guards tied his hands behind his back. His head was bleeding profusely. He was given a sedative.

His daughter sat crying beside him as al-Wahish fell asleep on her lap. When the judges reentered the courtroom, the guards forced him to his feet and sat him on the bench. Langer could tell that he had no idea where he was, and when asked to stand for the verdict, he did not do so because he had no idea what the presiding judge was saying.

> In their sentence the judges stated that, while it was true that the accused had committed his crime almost without being able to prevent it, for his son had come to his home quite unexpectedly, and while it was true that his house had been destroyed and his family dispersed and he had become mentally ill, yet nevertheless "the maintenance of public order outweighs personal considerations. We therefore sentence him to ten years' imprisonment."
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> The courtroom remained quiet but tense. There were tears in the women's eyes. Only the accused man, convicted of being a danger to public peace, did not react. The guards stood beside him to prevent him becoming unruly and causing a disturbance. But al-Wahish was fast asleep when the sentence was passed.

Langer saw clients in extreme distress brought about by torture. She recalled one, Tarek Shumali, accused of having thrown "one or more stones" in the Ein as-Sultan refugee camp, "a godforsaken place, full of scorpions and snakes." In prison, Shumali was so tortured that he had to have a kidney operation and came to his trial in a wheelchair, an infusion attached to his arm. Even the soldiers were amazed that a person in his state had been dragged into court.

She saw how "the maintenance of public order" meant making the lives of Palestinians so unbearable that they would flee. No means were too cruel to encourage them to depart. She recorded the story of Yusuf Abdallah Udwan, taken to the Beer Sheba prison in 1970 with the promise that he, along with eleven other prisoners, would be released. "Next morning at six o'clock we were handcuffed and blindfolded and our feet were chained." The prisoners were driven for hours in what they saw was an armored car when the vehicle finally halted and the blindfolds were removed. An Israeli officer ordered them to walk east, "pointing at the dunes of the endless desert," and said that anyone coming back would be shot: "Anyone coming back in a month, a year, or any other time must know that only death awaits him here." The group was set loose in the burning sands. They had neither hats nor shoes.

> We started walking in the terrible heat of noon without knowing where our steps would take us. We were afraid of getting lost in the desert. We remembered the Egyptian soldiers who died in the Sinai sands after suffering hunger, thirst and sun stroke. We walked for more than two hours until suddenly we met a first-line post of the Jordanian army. They thought we were spies and started shooting at us. By a real miracle none of us were wounded, and finally we succeeded in convincing them, and we were taken to Amman…. Our feet were inflamed when we arrived in Amman. The skin of my shaved head had peeled off because of the sun. The desert was a nightmare.

Langer saw the devastation of the hundreds of towns that Israeli forces had blown up during the Nakba of 1948. Later, she visited Lidice, near Prague, destroyed by the Nazis in 1942 as a reprisal for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, Adolf Eichmann's boss. On the wall of the museum commemorating this crime, she saw a plaque with the words of Albert Schweitzer: "The victims of Lidice are immortal. The memory of the victims of Lidice must live on in the memory of mankind." She recalled three villages near Latrun—Yalo, Beit Nuba, and Emmaus—wiped off the face of the earth and replaced with a park funded by a Canadian Jew. The entirety of Palestine was dotted with Lidices. The map of the country showed how empty the vows emblazoned on the walls of the memorial had proven.

She sketched the procedure by which the inhabitants of these villages were expelled in the second massive ethnic cleansing in the history of the Israeli state. The 1967 war brought with it the biggest such event since the Nakba. The inhabitants were not allowed to take a single thing with them. "Not a single stone remained of the villages," Langer wrote. "I only really understood this when I saw where houses once stood; the work of demolition was more thorough than that of the Romans, who at least left a Wailing Wall." Anyone who tried to return home was shot. She described the sadism of the Israeli state. Machines showered candy on the children of

the settlers but spat out stones when Palestinian children approached, she wrote, and dogs were booby-trapped with explosives and sent to Palestinian and Lebanese communities. When people came to pet the dogs, the dogs exploded.

In her books, Langer skirts the question of how Israel's crimes compare with those of the Nazis. In this avoidance, one sees a contortion familiar to any writer who approaches the subject of Zionism. To keep at bay the most fundamental questions—questions that go to the heart of Zionism's legitimacy and morality—its propagandists lawyer every comma in every critique. It makes no difference how delicately phrased this critique might be; or how eminent the person making it; or whether the person is Jewish, or Israeli, or a Holocaust survivor, or even a Jewish Israeli Holocaust survivor. Every journalist, every editor, every professor, knows someone who has been attacked for reporting indubitable facts: bullied and boycotted, kicked out of jobs and homes. These attacks have the effect of installing a little Zionist censor inside a writer's head, constantly asking what one is allowed to say and how one is allowed to say it.

Is a certain word a "dog whistle"?

Does a phrase suggest a "conspiracy theory" or a "trope" or a "blood libel"?

Does the speaker denounce this?

Distance himself from that?

If the speaker is not Jewish, does she have a right to speak at all?

If she is Jewish, does she know enough about this "complex" subject to do it justice?

Creating skirmishes around language—enforcing rhetorical parameters—has always been a priority of Zionism. Many writers, including Langer, Avi Shlaim, and Hannah Arendt, try to calibrate their language in order to be heard—to avoid being dismissed as "extremists," "self-hating Jews," "antisemites." These writers know that because the Zionist narrative relies so heavily on the threat of Nazism—a threat that, they claim, only Zionism can forestall—nothing is more guaranteed to unleash Zionist viciousness than comparing Israel to Nazi Germany. This is not because the memory of

the six million is sacred to Zionists but because, since the dawn of Israel's independence, that state's behavior has invited this comparison. After the massacre of Deir Yassin in 1948, many of the most prominent Jewish thinkers—a philosopher of the stature of Hannah Arendt, a scientist of the stature of Albert Einstein—did not shirk from these comparisons, but the taboo was wielded with increasing bluntness as, post-Eichmann, Zionists came to understand the propaganda uses of the Holocaust.

They delimited its use by two propositions.

First, one must never forget the Holocaust.

Second, one must never apply what one has not forgotten to any other event.

Then what, one might ask, is the point of learning about it? Whatever the point was, it was never intellectual or moral consistency. For Felicia and Mieciu, Nazism never existed outside history. Something that had happened so recently was not, of course, something that could "never again" recur. Mieciu survived five concentration camps before the Red Army liberated him from Theresienstadt—"If the soldiers had arrived twenty-four hours later, they would have found nobody left to save"—and perhaps it is this bulletproof résumé that leads Langer to place Nazi comparisons in her husband's mouth. At one point, visiting her clients in prison, she found the prisoners' heads shaved in stripes, and numbers written on their heads.

Mieciu commented, "The Nazis did something similar to us. [The guards] learned from them."

Sometimes Felicia makes the comparison more directly, usually in the form of remembered dialogue. She said to one of the guards at Nafha prison, built in 1980 in a hellish corner of the Negev Desert, that only a devilish mind could put a prison in a place like this.

"That's our way of making the desert bloom," the guard told her, "and that is civilization."

"A civilization made out of prison camps," she retorted. She pointed out that the prisoners were numbered. "Does that not remind you of anything from our past?"

“If you only knew how many Ahmads and Mohammeds there are, and how confusing that is,” said the officer.

“If you only knew how many Bernsteins and Rubinsteins there were back then, and how confusing that was,” she answered.

“You can’t compare that,” the officer said.

You can’t compare that: That was the law, unwritten but the law nonetheless. As a lawyer, Langer knew how to respect the letter of the law while nevertheless flouting its spirit. She would insist—because it is the law that she insist—that you can’t compare Israel to Nazi Germany, and when she does mention Nazism, she does so with the wording of a clever lawyer: with clauses that preserve deniability. “It is the sad result in this last decade of our century that the main part of the people that survived the Holocaust refuses to understand its lesson,” she writes, for example, which is not a comparison but a lament. When writing about Nafha prison, she quotes defenders of the treatment of prisoners who have been tortured to death: “It is no secret that these prisoners like to drag the name of the State through the mud, and therefore do not hesitate to wound themselves, so that they can blame the authorities.” Anyone who knows anything about the Holocaust will be instantly reminded of how Jews were blamed for their own mistreatment, and Langer’s choice of words to describe the savagery she saw in the same prison will remind us of something else: “No disinfectant, nothing in the world will ever wash clean the crime of building prisons in the desert and then forcing prisoners to starve themselves to death for the right to breathe air and to see sunlight.” This is an echo of what Hans Frank, the Nazi administrator of Poland, had famously said at the Nuremberg trials: “A thousand years will pass and still this guilt of Germany will not be erased.”

At first, Langer did not use even this coded language. She trod carefully. Censorship in the territories was stifling: *The Merchant of Venice* was banned, for example. Books were burned. Writers were imprisoned. “Is it not a shame to lock up a poet?” she asked the judge who had ordered the poet Sami Kilani imprisoned without charges. “He didn’t quite get why it mattered to me.” And she found herself in the Kafkaesque position of

defending clients against charges of possessing books that she herself had written: “After my book was banned in the small jail, it was clear that its readers would also be persecuted in the ‘big jail,’ the occupied territories.” One understands why the authorities would be eager to ban her books. They are full of great crimes—theft, rape, murder—but are at their most effective as a catalog of the indignities to which the population was subjected: an innocent man forbidden to make a final visit to a dying mother; a client expelled into Lebanon fifteen minutes before his trial was to begin.

Though careful about speaking, Langer was physically courageous to the point of recklessness. In March 1987, she visited a client named Siham in the Neve Tirza prison, where female political prisoners were jailed. Siham kissed her cheek by way of greeting. “Immediately after the kiss,” Langer wrote, “I felt an acid burning on my face.” She saw that Siham’s face was bloated and red, and that her hands were shaking. The room was steeped in a ghastly stench. Siham told her that the women were sprayed with some kind of poison gas while locked in their cells. As they rolled on the ground, screaming for help, the soldiers screamed back, “Drop dead!” This explained the smell that was still so overpowering when Langer visited a week later. Siham said that they hoped that a single witness would survive to tell the tale; that there was a Jewish public to which they could appeal. “Among you there are also decent people who have a conscience,” she begged Langer. “Speak to them, in our name.”

Langer was shaken by all she had seen. “I felt that I arrived from another, sheltered planet, in a place where the lives of women like me were delivered to utter lawlessness.” As she listened to Siham’s story, still feeling the burning on her own face, she could hardly believe that these symptoms could have come from tear gas alone. Something must have been added to the gas to cause them. She saw that Siham had paper tissues, and that these were still soaked with gas. She took them, and “spontaneously decided to suck in the remains of the gas,” she wrote. “I was convinced that this was the only way to let a doctor outside the prison see what had happened, and to allow a doctor to see what kind of gas was in the tissue.” It was rash. She thought it was the only way.

“Already in the car back to Jerusalem I fell ill,” she remembered. “I was coughing and my eyes stung.” Her face kept burning. She started choking. She felt extraordinarily panicky. She had a hard time finding a doctor who would agree to examine her and then to allow her to publish his findings; when she finally did, he would only provide a toothless statement: “shortness of breath, coughing, and irritated eyes.” She sought a lab to test the tissues to learn what had been put in the gas; not a single lab in the country would agree. She got back to Tel Aviv “completely wrecked.” After twenty-four hours, she felt well enough to publish a statement describing the effects on her. If the gas had such an effect on her a week later, “one can easily imagine how it felt for the victims of the gassing in their closed cells.”

Mieciu was outraged that she had risked her life by deliberately inhaling poison. Michael, too, saw how she put herself in danger. He once went with her to Hebron, where, after the 1967 war, groups known as settlers had set up nests of colonies in the heart of Palestinian communities. Claiming other people’s homes and property based on often fantastical biblical pretexts, these settlers had a reputation for violence and fanaticism, and even in that context the settlers of Hebron stood out as especially ferocious. Michael once went with his mother to attend a hearing at the court in Hebron, and as they were arriving, they saw a group of Jews beating up an Arab. Langer ordered the driver to stop. She leaped out, shouted at the settlers, and bundled the bleeding man into the taxi. The notoriously trigger-happy settlers might easily have killed her.

Her first encounter with them, years before, baffled her. Not long after the 1967 war, she arrived at Hebron prison and found Jews milling about in the prison courtyard: a woman with a small child, yeshiva students wearing skullcaps. They were clearly not inmates.

“They are the Hebron settlers,” one of the soldiers told her. “They live here, though they don’t work. They get money, a lot of money.”

“From whom?” she asked.

“From rich people, surely,” he said.

These settlers would start turning up more and more, including at Langer's court appearances. "Their faces would light up with unconcealed pleasure at the sight of the law punishing the inmates living in the cells a few steps from where they themselves lived." In the same prison courtyard, she once came across richly laden tables, surrounded by happy faces: There was going to be a wedding and a party. "The noise they made could be heard through the prison-bars. To be happy here, under the prison walls! What were they feeling, the Hebronites overcrowding the dark cells, when they heard those sounds of joy?" The settlement grew. Langer saw it sprout a nursery and a school. "It would be interesting," she wrote, "to know how a teacher explains to the children their imprisoned neighbors, yellow-faced, getting a daily fifteen-minute walk…and what can a class-tutor say when she meets, together with her class, a crowd of women and children with bundles coming to visit their dear ones…. How do they teach the children the concepts of good and evil, how do they prepare them for life?"

She would see the consequences.

She often had occasion to encounter Rabbi Moshe Levinger, the founder of the Hebron settlement. He had arrived in Hebron in 1968, renting a room in a Palestinian-owned hotel and then refusing to leave. Eventually, a deal was brokered whereby Levinger moved his followers to the prison where Langer first encountered them. In the following decades, he would compile an elaborate criminal résumé. Langer tells the story of Mohammed Adel, who lived with his nine children in a part of a building that the Hebron settlers had partially taken over. The settler children constantly bombarded the family with stones. Once they broke a window in Adel's house, injuring one of the children with shards of glass. The person who was punished, as almost always in these cases, was the victim. At Rabbi Levinger's insistence, Adel was then forbidden to use the roof of his house, and the rabbi came into the home with some of his accomplices and began smashing its fixtures. When Adel complained to the district commander, he got the recommendation to withdraw his complaint so that the settlers wouldn't damage his house still more.

Langer tells of Ibrahim Dandis, who had the misfortune to run a small textile shop on the ground floor of a Hebron building that the settlers had occupied. On the morning of March 21, 1981, the Dandises unlocked their shop and found a hole in the ceiling nearly five feet wide. They informed the police. They were told that the settlers had thrown a Purim party and that the floor unfortunately gave way beneath their feet. Dandis showed the authorities that the floor was made of concrete and reinforced by iron girders, rendering this explanation unlikely. That same day, Dandis and his father started to repair the ceiling. While standing on the ladder, they were attacked by Levinger, who tried to throw them to the ground and who injured Dandis's father's face and hands. The rabbi said that work was forbidden on the Sabbath. Son and father went back to the police. They were assured that they could resume work the next day, but in the morning they saw the iron girders with which they wanted to rebuild scattered on the street, surrounded by armed settlers. The shop, they discovered, was locked from the inside. The invaders had demolished the entire ceiling and built a staircase to their apartments. The goods of the Dandis family had vanished. The settlers told them that they could no longer return.

Langer's portrait of Hebron is one of the most indelible in her work: a minute description of an ethnic cleansing proceeding room by room, house by house, apartment by apartment. It was an operation that went hand in hand with the complete legal impunity that egged the settlers on to still more extreme behaviors. Five years after this incident, she was called back to the same building. The owners of several Palestinian shops, including Ibrahim Dandis, were being forced out to make room for thirteen settler families. The Palestinians refused to leave, and as a reaction the Israeli army isolated all the shops with stone-filled barrels topped with barbed wire. You could enter through a narrow passage, three feet wide, on both sides of which armed soldiers stood. "During my visit there with two other lawyers there was palpable tension," she wrote. "The shopkeepers had to have their shoes searched before they went into the shops." Langer said she was ashamed to witness this disgraceful theater. One of the soldiers laughed and said, "But it's lovely." She heard from the shopkeepers how the soldiers

harassed them, searching them and their shops several times a day and hassling any customers who managed to get through.

In despair, the Palestinian residents asked Langer to petition the Supreme Court for help. Even she, who had so often witnessed the perversity of the state, was astonished by the answer she got. The state was prepared, over time, to replace the barriers with something more decorative. "Anyone who thinks that this is my wild fantasy or from the residents' oriental imaginings should know that it was written in black and white," she wrote. She mused on what it might mean: "With a feeling for aesthetics the shopkeepers could have turned their prison into a blossoming garden and woven decorative flowers into the barbed wire."

The other side of the cruelty with which Palestinians were treated was the kid gloves with which Israelis were treated. Langer tallies example after example of the leniency meted out even to hardened criminals like Levinger. In 1985, he was indicted for assaulting a six-year-old girl. Langer saw how the courts reacted. "If he says that on religious grounds he would never strike a woman, and certainly not a girl, that is believable," the judge in Jerusalem wrote. On December 5, 1989, witnesses said that Levinger shot two people. The court was, as always, extremely deferential, and granted his request to reschedule the cross-examination so he could attend his daughter's housewarming party. When another father of the settler movement, Pinkhas Wallerstein, was indicted for killing one Palestinian and wounding another, the court reduced the charge from murder to manslaughter, reasoning that "settlers never kill Arabs"; he was let off with a slap on the wrist. She saw how murderers were supported from abroad, especially from the United States, where contributions to their legal defense were tax-deductible.

At the end of that year, 1987, an uprising broke out. Later known as the First Intifada, its immediate cause was the killing of four Palestinians in Jabalia, a refugee camp in northern Gaza, home to fifty thousand people, that was completely destroyed by Israel in 2024. The real cause of the intifada was the intolerable injustice against which Langer and so many others had been inveighing for years: a system that even the Zionist

historian Benny Morris described as “founded on brute force, repression and fear, collaboration and treachery, beatings and torture chambers, and daily intimidation, humiliation, and manipulation.” The response was predictably barbaric, and included what Langer called an “orgy of mass imprisonment.” As the already terrible situation got worse and worse, she was growing increasingly unsure that her efforts were making any difference. And she was exhausted after decades of labor. On her rare holidays abroad, she would sometimes nearly collapse. When they were walking and she thought she couldn’t go on, Mieciu would jokingly exhort her, “Keep going! Pretend there’s a prison just a couple of streets away!”

Langer grew increasingly convinced that there was no point in working within such a comically racist structure—of propagating, by her very presence, “the myth of the fair Israeli justice system.” In retrospect, she was amazed by how long she had believed that she could. “I thought there was hope. All those years, I had been bringing the Supreme Court treatises by the ton about every possible issue.” None of it helped. Worse, it had hurt. She realized that her clients were being punished even more severely for the crime of being represented by Felicia Langer. “In 1967, I convinced the Palestinians that it was worth acting inside this system,” she wrote. “I told them that despite all the obstacles I could help them. Now I feel that I can no longer do that. [Yitzhak] Rabin’s method, of breaking arms and legs, is imitated in an especially delicate manner in the legal system. The punishments, which were never moderate to begin with, have become extremely cruel.” Even her most legally sound arguments would be rejected. She was reduced to begging for mercy. She wondered, “Did I go to the Supreme Court in order to beg for mercy?”

The final straw was when the military court in Nablus refused to release a pregnant woman on bail. Monira was the mother of a small child. She was charged with throwing a stone at a settler who had killed her brother. It was not *the* reason Langer decided to close her office, she said. But it was as good as any: “When the French emperor during the invasion of Russia asked why the church bells were not ringing in the village next to which his army was camped, he was told that there were fourteen different reasons,

but the first was that there were no bells in the churches." She, too, could give fourteen different reasons for closing her office. But the only one that mattered was her conviction that, since the intifada, there was no point. High on the list of her reasons was the knowledge that her existence as a dissident gave the state a democratic facade, allowing it to pretend that defendants might receive a fair trial. She did not wish to serve as an "alibi," she said, as a "fig leaf"—a collaborator "in a system that forces one to compromise one's own conscience, one's professional responsibility, and everything else that one believes in."

Another reason: Decades of hatred had dragged her down. "When, without having done anything wrong, I would be called 'Public Enemy No. 1'—of course not officially—many interviewers asked me how I could live with so much hate. I didn't say it was easy, but I never admitted how much this hatred affected me. And how much it hurt me when hostile eyes burned my skin and when smiles disappeared on the faces of people I approached." She gratefully recalled the love she had received from her parents and from her husband, and announced that she would move to Germany. The reason was that her son, Michael, lived in Germany. But the choice was symbolic, too: a declaration that she was freer as a Jewish woman in Germany than in the so-called Jewish state. In Germany, she said, judges would no longer yell at her. In Germany, "at least I don't have to call them Your Honor."

For decades, Langer had believed that she needed to be physically present to fight for change. But she no longer believed that the Israeli state could be reformed from within, and she determined to carry on the fight by other means. She became a professor at the University of Bremen, where she taught about the dangers of systems that use the appearance of due process to mask injustice. In 1990, soon after she arrived in Germany, she received the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize, "for the exemplary courage of her advocacy for the basic rights of the Palestinian people." She, whose work had brought her so much pain, saw this award as "a kind of compensation for all the hate and bitterness that I had experienced through the years." The prize gave her a platform outside

Israel, which she would use whenever she could. “The lost battle is not a lost war,” she would say. “The fisherman always goes back to the sea.”

She lectured constantly. She wrote more books about Palestine. And she received more gratifying recognition: One of her clients, Samir Adib, gave his newborn daughter her name. In 2009, in the teeth of fierce Zionist opposition, she was awarded the German Federal Cross of Merit. Though she saw setback after setback, she never wavered in her belief in the eventual triumph of the Palestinian cause. “They still don’t understand that it is all in vain,” she said of the Israelis, “that all that is useless when a people is fighting for its freedom.” As she grew older, she came to understand that she herself would not live to see that freedom. No matter, one of her grandsons assured her. “Kitka,” he said, using Mieciu’s old Polish nickname for her, “you won’t see it. But we will.”

In 2018, at the age of eighty-seven, she was diagnosed with cancer. She was operated on successfully, and her surgeon was pleased with how the scars had healed. He asked whether he might bring her to the medical school in order to demonstrate his method to his students. With the public spirit that defined her entire life, she said that she would be happy to come. She sat patiently in front of the class as the doctor demonstrated various aspects of her condition. At a certain point, feeling that the doctor had gone on long enough, she asked if she could speak. He handed her the microphone. “Never forget the Palestinian people!” she exhorted the students. It was her last public appearance. She died on June 21, 2018. On a hilltop overlooking Tübingen, she was laid to rest next to Mieciu.

10

PALESTINIANS, THE NEW JEWS

Helena Salem



In the breakfast room at the Cairo Hilton, Helena Salem stood out. She was tiny: a little over five feet tall. She was young: a couple of years out of college. She was the only Latin American—"from an unknown newspaper from a forgotten Brazil"—and the only woman: Among the macho crew of foreign correspondents, she had more than her share of unwanted attention. And she had a secret. Though her last name was Arabic, she was, in fact, a Sephardic Jew. As war with the Jewish state raged within earshot of the hotel, this was a secret she was determined to keep. She belonged to the enemy.

She was isolated. The airport was closed. The only way to enter Egypt was overland, through the Libyan Desert, and the country was under military censorship. When war broke out on October 6, 1973, she tried to contact her newspaper, the *Jornal do Brasil*. But there was no way to telephone, and the best she could do was send a telegram to the paper's correspondent in Rome. For four agonizing days, trapped in the middle of a war, she heard nothing, and then, finally, she received a distressed reply, sending her to the Brazilian embassy and to the offices of the United Press International, where she could dispatch reports to Rio de Janeiro—though only in English, the language that the censors understood. Entirely by accident, she had become Brazil's first female war correspondent.

She hadn't meant to get herself into the middle of a war. After graduating from university, she had started working at the *Jornal do Brasil,* still unsure if she wanted to pursue a career in journalism. She was tempted by the promise the academy held out for sustained, serious study but was frustrated by academic language. "I'd always thought that those same ideas could be expressed so much more simply, with just as much depth. Journalistic language was so direct!" she wrote later. "Journalism was passion, direct communication with other people, running around the world, life in movement." Still, she wasn't sure. She was only in her early twenties. And so, instead of making a choice, she applied to spend a year studying in Italy.

When she arrived in Florence, she discovered that the course she was supposed to be enrolled in did not, in fact, exist. This left her free to visit museums, travel, and read, and one thing she read a great deal about was the conflict in the Middle East. Though she had never visited the region, it was a conflict to which her own history made her feel close. Both her parents were born in Smyrna, Turkey. Her mother arrived in Brazil as an infant; her father, as a young man. Both spoke Ladino, the Judeo-Spanish language of most Ottoman Jews. They were products of a cosmopolitan Mediterranean symbolized by a name shared by Muslims and Jews, and related to the Hebrew *shalom*. This was a world that, in many aspects, stretched all the way to Brazil. Despite the geographical distance that separated Smyrna from Rio de Janeiro, both belonged to the same sunny, watery civilization of port and market and agora. A Ladino-speaking immigrant to Brazil would understand the local language without effort. And after a few bewildering days of feeling stranded in Cairo, Salem started noticing more similarities than differences.

Still, those differences might have estranged her from the desperate world she was about to encounter. She was Jewish in a world where she feared that could endanger her. And there was another difference, this time socioeconomic. Salem's father, Maurício, had been extravagantly successful, the owner of a chain of opticians who had grown rich enough to live in a stone mansion in the posh neighborhood of Leblon, beachside in Rio de Janeiro. The house was staffed with a battery of live-in maids, drivers, and gardeners, and outfitted with a pink marble bathroom: a house so large that later, when it was torn down, it was replaced by two entire apartment buildings. Helena and her siblings were raised in the uppermost echelons of a highly stratified society.

But hanging over the three girls was a threat that did not menace their brother. He had a room to himself, equipped with a desk. Though the house was huge, the girls had to share a room—and theirs was equipped with a vanity table. They all knew that their duty was to marry a Jewish man. They would only leave home, virginal and veiled, to lead the same kind of life their mother led. This was terrifying. They knew about the humiliations that

had been heaped upon their bright and vivacious mother, Judith, when she married at twenty-one. As a girl, Judith loved to laugh, but when she married, she stopped laughing: Maurício didn't like it. Her adult life became a long martyrdom of hypochondria, depression, and tranquilizers —"crazy," Salem wrote, "without being crazy." Judith would confide her youthful dreams in her daughters: "I wanted to be a lawyer, speak in court, defend people." To this, Salem said, "She couldn't even defend herself."

The training started early. Her brother, Sérgio, would dump his clothes on the floor; it was the task of her older sister Lúcia to gather them up. "I suffered from her anguish, from her (mute) revolt against my brother's arrogance, I suffered from her suffering at having to pick up the clothes tossed to the floor by that King. She would protest, make a face, her eyes red, and she'd pick them up—there was no way to avoid it. Internally, I would promise, swear—not to a god but to my own heart—that I would never submit to a King, and made a point of never lifting a finger for Sérgio."

Being a woman "meant *not being allowed to* do many, so many things," she wrote. "And *having to* do many others. It wasn't good to be a woman…. And being a Jewish woman was even worse. When I grew up, I'd have to find a Jewish boyfriend, marry a Jewish man. Predetermination made that life totally unappealing." Later, in the Middle East, she would be astonished by how comfortable she felt there. "As a Sephardic Jew, I was so at ease," she later wrote. "In that world I'd found so strange at first, I felt at home. The women on the bottom, the men on top, the tearful singing, I was familiar with all of that. But then why did Arabs and Jews fight so much, if they were so alike? Maybe for precisely that reason." And she made a connection: "In the Middle East, getting to know the life of the Arab woman from close by, I concluded that it is just as bad to be a Sephardic Jewish woman as it is to be a Muslim Arab. The latter wears an explicit veil, hiding her face, her hair, her body. The former must wear a veil inside her head, inside her heart."

Her fear of being forced into a life like her mother's made her question the society around her. She attended a Methodist school, the Colégio

Bennett, where she came under the influence of a young Jewish history teacher named Hugo Weiss. His Marxist approach to history focused on the workings of power and its impact on regular, forgotten people. “Behind the Caesars a people existed, he’d say, clashing social forces; the beauty of the pyramids had been constructed with sweat, war, and death; the crimes of the Inquisition and the exploitation of the serfs were perpetrated amid the piety of the Middle Ages,” she wrote. And he talked to Helena about the Jews: “They aren’t the only people who were scattered, who suffered.” She understood: “Jews weren’t all that special—or they were just as special as everyone else.”

In her class of thirty at Bennett, a liberal school, there were three or four Jewish kids. Helena recorded the occasional humiliation, as when the Jewish girls were asked to raise their hands. They were going to get a present—“(from God? or from the Devil?)”—of a luxuriously bound New Testament. “The voice of Christ for the descendants of Judas/Jew/traitor/murderer. How shameful to have to go to the front of the class to take the little book.” She recalled other “presents,” other compliments, that made her feel different: one from the classmate who praised her by saying she wasn’t like other Jews, she didn’t hold herself aloof from others; one from a girl who explained Helena’s excellent schoolwork by saying that Jews were always the best students. This phrase made Helena as uncomfortable as one she heard later, that Jewish women were the best in bed.

When she was in high school, Brazil was convulsed by a series of crises that led to the overthrow of the democratic government on March 31, 1964. This event would define a generation—and a generation gap, said Tania Salem, a school friend who would marry Helena’s cousin Carlos. On the day of the coup, Tania said, her father piled the family in the car and drove down Copacabana Beach, crying with joy. Brazil had won—wrested from the claws of communism. The next day, at school, Tania and Helena found a radically different mood. Teachers were anxious, upset. They feared prison and torture; Helena’s favorite teacher, Weiss, would soon find himself the object of a police investigation and be fired along with three other teachers.

Many students, including Helena, quit in protest. Helena wrote him a letter that was used in his trial as proof of his character. But though he was acquitted, he could not get another teaching job. He died of a heart attack at the age of forty-two.

Despite the deepening repression, and certainly in part because of it, the 1960s in Brazil would become a time of reinvention, experimentation, and protest. This took personal forms: Salem found a non-Jewish boyfriend, got herself a prescription for the birth control pill, and moved into her own apartment. And it took political forms. With the independence of much of Asia and Africa—India in 1947, Ghana in 1957, Algeria in 1962—a new ideology, Third Worldism, came to define that huge swath of countries that belonged neither to the capitalist bloc led by the United States, the First World, nor to the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union, the Second World. Though Latin American nations like Brazil had long been independent, they shared with the recently decolonized a history of imperialism and exploitation. They greeted the emerging peoples hopefully, envisioning a world free from the ideological polarization of the superpowers: a Third World.

Exactly what this world would look like became one of the great questions for Brazilian leftists. Salem entered the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and studied social science, joining an academic community where everyone was on the left. Though the country was under the boot of a military dictatorship, Tania said, “We didn’t know anyone on the right.” The left was divided into a clutch of illegal parties, defined by a baffling alphabet soup of acronyms. The communists alone could boast the PCB, the PC do B, and the PCBR: respectively, the Brazilian Communist Party, the Communist Party of Brazil, and the Revolutionary Communist Party of Brazil. Salem remembered the discussions: “Does the national bourgeoisie enter into the revolution or not, the socialist stage, the national liberation stage, how many discussions and fights we had about the question of stages.” In her writings about this time, she would link the question of social and political liberation to her own yearning for liberation as a woman, and ultimately refused to join the communist parties: “I don’t want

to die, I haven't lived yet. I'm afraid of my own father. How am I going to face a cop, a torturer?"

Attracted to social issues, she considered an academic career but upon graduation joined the *Jornal do Brasil*. There, in 1970, she met another young Jewish journalist, Heliete Vaitsman. "We weren't communists," Vaitsman said. "Our vision was anti-imperialist, and the situation of misery in Brazil. The question was fighting social inequalities and the military regime." They were aware of how privileged their situation was. "At the *JB,* there wasn't a single black person. We were close to the world of samba: It was an act of resistance by the white middle class to go to black places, to the samba schools." If the young reporters came from a specific background, they were nonetheless apostates from that class. "Our dream was that everything should be mixed." The country was changing. The birth control pill arrived in 1968, the same year that the dictatorship began its harshest period of repression. And the press barons were conservative, attached to an idea of a Catholic, Luso-Brazilian civilization: "You would always have Monseigneur So-and-So in the paper, and 'Our Mother, Portugal.' You couldn't say that Portugal had colonies: It had 'overseas provinces.' "

The *Jornal do Brasil,* in those years the nation's most influential newspaper, was increasingly censored. It was also, increasingly, a center of resistance to censorship. Under the dictatorship, censorship was reaching ludicrous heights. In September 1972, Filinto Müller, a pro-government politician who had been a previous dictator's antisemitic police chief, found that his statement that there was no censorship in Brazil had been censored. These circumstances produced some memorable journalism, including when the *JB* called loud attention to censored articles by covering them with recipes, or long extracts from the poetry of Camões. This resistance came to a peak on September 11, 1973, just after Salem left for Italy, when news of a brutal coup in Chile reached Rio de Janeiro. The censors informed the editor in chief, Alberto Dines, that he could place the death of the Chilean president, Salvador Allende, on the front page—on the condition that he not make it the headline. He ordered a page prepared with

no headlines or photographs at all, notifying Brazil of the coup in long columns of uninterrupted black print.

Salem had been working in this environment for three years—mainly in the editorial department, almost never as a reporter—when she arrived in Cairo. She struggled to figure out how to act. At the hotel, she was the lone woman among four hundred male journalists. “I could hide that I was Jewish, but not that I was a woman.” She was constantly harassed: “With each passing day, this rare species became more and more desirable, regardless of the merits.” The neat Swedish reporters, so polite during the day, would get drunk at night and start calling her room. If she declined to answer, they would start banging on her door at three or four in the morning. During an interview, a respectable, neatly suited official at the Arab League came out from behind his desk and leaped on her: “Ah, Helena, I could give you so much information, so much…” She managed to flee, running out of the building.

Alongside Cuba, Algeria, and Vietnam, Palestine was one of the central questions of that time, but few Brazilians had seen it for themselves. All the big international papers sent their biggest names to Cairo to cover the war, but Salem didn’t know what to tell people about her name, which was Arab but not quite. Afraid of being unmasked, she settled on “Turkish,” which was technically accurate—but, she found, also unleashed awkward reactions: Turkey was Egypt’s former colonial power. “There was no way out for a Salem: either Jewish, or Arab,” she wrote. “Arab, then, and Arab Christian, Lebanese, from Beirut. Not my mother: She stayed Brazilian, Catholic, of course.” She had to figure out how to deal with the astonishment she evoked. At a press conference, an Egyptian military leader met her question with a surprised expression. “What’s a little girl like you doing in the middle of this war?”

It was a question Salem was asking herself as she found herself in the classic position of the pariah. “What makes me feel as close to the Israeli soldier as I do to the Egyptian?” she asked.

> Is it possible that they don't know how similar they are? How can I reconcile the girl who swore never to get married in the synagogue with the woman who is now taking on an Arab identity in order to move freely around Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, without fear of being bothered? How can I be both rejected by the Jewish community and distrusted by the Arabs? What to do with my interior veils of an eastern Jewish woman, who so intimately recognizes the veils that cover the faces of the Arab women?…What kind of journalist am I? And what if they start bombing Cairo? And what if I die here? How stupid that would be! If at least it was the revolution in Brazil…But to die in a war between Arabs and Israel…That has nothing to do with me.

These abstract questions faded when she first visited an Egyptian field hospital, full of mutilated children and people whose flesh had been burned by napalm. "The horror of the war…left the realm of ideas, of discussion, and took on another dimension." And without betraying her own identity, she tried to meet Egyptian Jews. She found a Jewish communist who, together with a dark-skinned African and a light-skinned Arab, was working toward a better future.

(Was this person Ahmad Sadiq Saad? She never says.)

Still, she was among her people: "among those men with no power whatsoever, full of dreams and smiles, optimistic out of conviction or out of a need to survive." But her desire to meet Jews led her into a faux pas: She asked to meet a "normal Egyptian Jew." The regime's press office dug up a "happy and integrated" specimen. She wrote about him.

> The Jewish community in Rio yelped, stung, outraged. It was already a lot to swallow daily reporting about what was happening in the Arab world (traditionally, the Brazilian press only had correspondents in Tel Aviv—the defeated don't need to be mentioned), but to go so far as to say that Jews in Egypt live well—too much!

Two months after arriving in Cairo, with the war over, Salem could travel to Beirut. It was a relief to get there, including because she was finally able to telephone Brazil. But she was unenthusiastic about Beirut, whose glitzy facade, as in so many Latin American capitals, covered up the brutality of most people's lives. In Lebanon, for the first time, she encountered Palestinian refugees. This was a shock. "In the camps, in the misery and inhumanity of the refugee camps, I started to understand, truly, that the source of the whole problem was there, in that people that, for nearly three decades, had found itself exiled, stateless, waiting." She had happened upon a subject that would occupy much of the rest of her life.

Four years later, in 1977, Salem published a book, *Palestinians, the New Jews.* The title sums up her viewpoint. It tells of an apprenticeship, an attempt to get to know a foreign world that at first befuddles. She describes the Palestinian resistance in terms that recall the Brazilian left of the time. It is a constellation peppered with acronyms—the DFLP and the PLF and the PNLF and the PLO, the PFLP and the PFLP–General Command—whose factions reflected, as in Latin America, the splintered nature of politics in societies living under repression. She traces their programs through jargon that, mutatis mutandis, could be taken from the manifestos of any number of Third World movements in the 1970s. "The PFLP is a Marxist-Leninist organization," one leader explains. "Al Fatah is a petty bourgeois organization. We have a program of common struggle, but in terms of the revolutionary struggle our politico-ideological vision is very different." She is interested in their views of armed struggle and revolution, ideas that would not be too different from those found in Latin America at that time.

Salem's vision is Latin American, too. "The Palestinians have their national characteristics, different from the Egyptians or the Algerians, though all are Arabs (just as a Chilean is different from a Peruvian, though both are Latin Americans and speak Spanish)." In Beirut, "which certain European and North American correspondents so enjoyed," she sees only "pseudo-Western bourgeois artificiality," the desire of a handful of Lebanese "to seem French, European, 'advanced.' " In Algiers, at an Arab summit, she saw the Third World turn the tables on the rich countries with

an oil embargo in protest of the Israeli occupation. “As a journalist from the Third World, it was with deep pride that I saw, for the first time, underdeveloped states taking a stance, endangering the developed world, frightened by the oil crisis that directly shook their comfortable way of life, attained until then at the cost of the suffering of so many people. The difficulties that Europeans and Americans are going through now might help them understand—they, accustomed to luxury and comfort—the privations of an entire people (the Palestinians), and above all the frustration of seeing their appeals fall on deaf ears.” And she noted ironically that her pride “caused a certain awkwardness among my European colleagues, for whom the most important thing was knowing whether the Arabs were going to turn on the oil faucets.”

For Salem, the most important thing, the central question, was the Palestinians. With the thoroughness of the A student, she reviews the history. There had never been conflicts between Jews and Arabs in the Holy Land until the arrival of the Zionists: “Capitalist, racist Europe exported its Jewish problem, freeing itself at the same time from the weight and the guilt accumulated in years of discrimination. By exporting its problem, it created another far worse one.” She recalls a description from 1924, the year Jacob Israël de Haan was assassinated, of the reactions to the settlers: “Is our country, by chance, a desert? the Muslims asked…. Do we, by chance, want to reclaim Andalusia under the pretext that, for eight centuries, we developed a brilliant civilization there?” She mentions that the United Nations voted for partition in 1947 “*without any consultation with the Palestinian population,*” and describes the plans to carve up the country as a “Western solution…to a problem whose origin was not in the Arab world.”

The heart of the book is her recounting of meetings with Palestinian refugees. Their camps, she says, “recall our favelas.” In the driest possible prose, she sketches a panorama across several countries. “We walk by people who walk in the middle of the mud, calmly, because there is no reason to hurry,” she writes from Qabr Essit, in Syria. She introduces her readers to Khalil: “Small, with slightly almond-shaped eyes, a flat head,

miserable, he reminds me of someone from the Brazilian Northeast…. His house is a cube. They sleep on the ground, under blankets. The small stove is on the ground, too; there are no chairs." At Baqaa, in Jordan, she meets an old peasant, thirty years a refugee, who says, "Let's hope we'll get to go home soon."

It is a hope that she often hears, including from a paralyzed resistance soldier: "I have never been to Palestine, but that's where I want to live. It's my country." At Burj el-Barajneh, in Lebanon, a woman named Fochria says, "When I left with my father in 1948, we thought we'd be back soon. We left my mother and sister, we came alone. Afterward, we weren't allowed back and they stayed. My mother died; my sister is still there." Another says, "No, I've never been there. But my mother always told me about it, told me my father had land there, that Jerusalem is beautiful. My dream is to go to Palestine. I don't want to be a refugee all my life." Another says, "We want to live like every other people." And they give her messages: "Please, tell your people what you saw. The Jews, the Americans are not our enemies. Our enemies are Zionism and imperialism." A man says, "Thank you for telling your people about us."

Like the women Felicia Langer visited in the prison where they had been gassed, the people Salem visits repeatedly express the hope that, having heard their stories, she will bring their plight to the attention of the people of her country. These refugees could not have known that it was precisely for this reason that Salem had been attracted to journalism in the first place, with the hope that, in a Third World teeming with armed movements and political parties, words might prove to be powerful weapons of their own. Like Langer and Salem themselves, these refugees posit the existence of a civilized, humane world, an outside community that, with sufficient information, can be inspired to act against injustice. It is to this community that their appeals are addressed.

These conversations have a devastating cumulative effect, all the more so because Salem's sympathy is never explicit. "There's nothing worse than reading or watching an interview in which the reporter tries to show off, be conclusive, talk more than the person being interviewed," she wrote later.

“And nothing more annoying than the actor who tries to be bigger than his character.” She keeps her commentary to herself, even when describing people and activities many journalists would call terroristic: “Many of these were condemned by other groups but, nevertheless, they brought notoriety to the [PFLP], making it known internationally.” The neutral tone also marks her as a Latin American of the left, a milieu that vigorously debated the question of whether and when violence was justified in resisting violent oppression. And she wrote that “the Western press hastens to show its indignation at Palestinian terrorist acts, but doesn’t bother to tell of the conditions that opened the way for that violence. They don’t publish with the same urgency the daily suffering, the daily death of thousands of refugees, nor the repression that they suffer in the territories occupied by Israel.” And, recalling the history of Zionism, she says, “Allow us…to note that the pioneers of organized terrorism in the Middle East were not the Palestinians but the Jews themselves.”

“I chose to focus my camera on the Palestinians,” she wrote. “I liked talking to them. At least we shared the rejection of imperialist domination.” That domination had seeped even into the language, and her resistance to that language becomes part of the story she tells. One challenge was finding a way to tell the story that contrasted with the ways her European and American colleagues, and also many Brazilians, were telling it. In the preface to *Palestinians, the New Jews,* the journalist Newton Carlos writes of the “sophisticated alienation” of much of the Latin American press. “The fashion is to see the world through the correspondents of *The New York Times* or any other paper from the United States and Europe. It’s not unusual for the Vietcong to appear as ‘our enemies.’ Or Greece as ‘a vital piece of our defense system.’ Things that happen in June, July, or August occur ‘during the summer’ of a given year.” Readers noticed this different perspective. Later, she would learn that “the more open and enlightened sectors, including of the Jewish community in Brazil, had followed my work with interest, one of the first approaches that was not entangled with the official Zionist position, hitherto dominant in the most important Brazilian media.”

Those reading her dispatches closely would have seen one thing clearly —and, when read another half century of bloodletting and misery later, poignantly. That is that the Palestinians, so persistently caricatured as Jew-hating rejectionists, were neither antisemitic nor opposed to some proposal that would have allowed the two peoples to live side by side. Behind the acronyms and the position papers and the warring factions was a sincere willingness to find a peaceful solution. All her Palestinian interlocutors hoped that progressive Jewish sectors would join them to create a deracialized state in which all would enjoy legal and social equality. There was a hope in the possibility of a civilized dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis, a dialogue that would create a model that was as much at odds with the Zionist idea of a Jewish state as it was with the Arab dictatorships that were vigorously oppressing Palestinian refugees. Like Sadiq Saad's, these hopes were couched in the Third World language of seeking an alternative to capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. The saddest part of reading *Palestinians, the New Jews* fifty years on is an awareness of just how badly these hopes were destined to be disappointed.

In Salem's telling, the Palestinian appeal to international law, to the United Nations, to non-racialism and democracy, is consistently rebutted by an intransigent Israel. She assembles a damning list of quotations by people who were considered heroes by many Jews, including liberal Jews, in Brazil and across the world. She quotes the historian Michael Bar-Zohar: "Ben Gurion does not believe and never has believed in the possibility of coexistence with the Arabs." She quotes the future prime minister Yitzhak Rabin: "The only dialogue possible between Israel and the PLO is on the battlefield." Abba Eban, the silky foreign minister, declared that the Palestinians "had no role to play" in peace talks. Golda Meir, the prime minister who became a feminist icon, said, "It's not as if there were Palestinians in Palestine who considered themselves a Palestinian people, and we came along to kick them out and take their land. *They didn't exist*."

Salem reflected on the "Greek and pagan" name her father gave her: "Helena means 'she who brings conflict.' " She got a hint of the conflict she was bringing when, during a stop in Rome between Tunis and Cairo, she

phoned her parents. “The community is angry,” her father told her. “They complain to me all the time. Try to do something about the things you’re writing.” The community was pressuring him. He didn’t know what to do. “Tell them I’m a journalist,” she told him. “I’m doing my job, reporting what I see.” As she flew around the Middle East, the problem seemed silly. But when she returned to Brazil in February 1974, she understood. “The Jewish community really was angry,” she found. “Even the Sephardic congregation that my father belonged to wanted to kick him out.” The stories she had been telling had had no room in the Brazilian media, which either reported from Tel Aviv or translated and reprinted material from pro-Israel American outlets. “Nobody could forgive me,” she wrote. “ ‘Antisemitic Jew’ was the immediate accusation”: the same accusation wielded against Rodinson, Arendt, and so many others. “And the Jewish community was no different from the rest of the country: progressive voices were marginalized, and the right wing dominated.”

Her reporting had made her controversial, with Jews and, to her surprise, with Arabs: “I got the feeling they liked me more when they thought I was a sister. It got complicated when they found out I was a cousin.” She gave a series of lectures at a university in Rio de Janeiro. “The first was calm, the second a bit tenser, the third exploded: young pro-Zionists versus pro-Arabs. They’d come to fight.”

Another surprise awaited her in Rio. Despite her vow never to marry the kind of squeaky-clean Jewish boy of whom her parents would approve, she met a man who was not only Jewish, and not only Sephardic, but the son of her father’s best friend, Jacques Levy: Their families had even lived in the same house in Smyrna, the Levys on one floor, the Salems on another. As kids, Jacques and Maurício sold buttons together in the street. Because Nelson Levy was seven years older than Helena, they hardly knew each other growing up. And if, from her parents’ perspective, Nelson might have seemed the ideal son-in-law, he had one glaring defect: He was a communist, a leader of the PC do B, living a semi-clandestine life at a time when the dictatorship was murdering or exiling many of his comrades. “He had no material or professional ambition, dreaming only of the revolution in

Brazil—he was the opposite of everything my parents could have desired for their youngest daughter." His dream of revolution brought her far more danger than her disapproving parents ever could. "I don't think she had any idea of the risks she was taking," said her friend Marco Antonio Maranhão.

After their marriage, she was still working at the paper, and still working on *Palestinians, the New Jews*. The book is short, around 150 pages, and dense with reporting. It was put together quickly, because her publisher, one of the most "combative" of the day, told her he wanted to bring it out as soon as possible, in just two months, while the war was still fresh in readers' minds. She rushed to get it to him, and once she did, he greeted it with fulsome praise. After a few days, he warned her that he was being subjected to certain pressures—but that there was no need to worry. After another few weeks, he revealed that one of the printing shops he worked with, Jewish owned, was refusing to print the book—but that, again, this was no cause for concern. Later, he told her that they had asked to see the original manuscript—which, needless to say, he had not handed over. Then, at a certain point, the publisher, who had always been warm and friendly, stopped picking up the phone. Salem took the hint. She asked a mutual friend to ask him to return the manuscript and release her from the contract. He refused, saying he was still planning on going ahead. At last, the year specified in the contract expired. She called him. This time, he answered. So much time had passed, he said. The book was no longer relevant.

This bad news was overshadowed by an event that would change her life forever. Salem knew that Nelson was involved in the PC do B. "But I hadn't told her many details," he said. One day, while working on a piece about a group of party members who had been arrested, she spoke to the group's lawyer. When she told Nelson about it, she said that she'd learned that if one of the members was caught, he would be killed. This member's nom de guerre was Osvaldo, and when she mentioned this, Nelson finally confessed to her that he was Osvaldo. Not long after—the same day she learned that the publisher was dropping her book—Nelson heard that the police knew his identity. He called Helena. She gathered her things, told a colleague her mother was ill, and asked her to close the section. She walked out, "like that

husband who says he's going to the corner bar and never comes back." She stopped by her apartment and left with nothing more than a change of clothes and her manuscript. Helena and Nelson went underground. They first stayed in Jacarepaguá, outside Rio, and then moved to a cheap hotel in São Paulo, "at the limit of the limit of marginality." She spent her time—she had a lot of it—reworking her manuscript. The police invaded the houses of her sisters and brother, turned up at the funeral of Nelson's mother, harassed his elderly father, and even followed his daughter from his first marriage, who was all of four years old. Two years later, Nelson and Helena were granted asylum at the Venezuelan embassy in Brasília, where they were allowed a thirty-minute visit from Judith and Maurício. Judith hobbled in on crutches; Salem was shocked to see how much her mother had aged. At the end of the brief and emotional visit, Helena entrusted her with the reworked manuscript.

It would be published in 1977, by Eldorado, a small publisher in the unglamorous neighborhood of Tijuca. If this was not the publication she might have hoped for, it was a triumph that it was published at all—including because by then Helena and Nelson were in Portugal. In September 1977, Judith and Maurício came to visit. Judith was so fragile that her doctors warned her against the journey. She was determined to come anyway. For three weeks, she and Helena, who had fought so much in life, were completely reconciled. At the end of those weeks, she had a heart attack. She summoned her remaining children from Rio. The day after they reached Lisbon, October 8, 1977, Judith died at sixty-two. A few months later, in June 1978, Salem walked into a pharmacy in Lisbon to get the results of a pregnancy test. It was positive. Her daughter, who would become the Brazilian novelist Tatiana Salem Levy, was born in Lisbon in January 1979. In August of that year, as part of Brazil's gradual restoration of democracy, an amnesty was decreed for political crimes. In September, Helena, Nelson, and Tatiana could return to Brazil.

There, she continued her work on Palestine. In 1982, she published a second book, *What Is the Palestinian Question,* in a series of brief overviews of contemporary problems. She asserts that the question is not

"religious or pseudo-racial" but "created by extremely specific political, social, and economic issues." These issues were complex, but it was not their complexity that made them unsolvable: It was "the emotions they evoke, because of the deep enmeshment between the political questions and the religious and/or emotional ones." She describes developments since *The New Jews*. In these years, the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt had been hailed in the West as the beginning of the end of the strife in the Middle East. Salem, however, explains why the Palestinians, along with much of the Arab public, saw them as a stab in the back: because they meant a political dismemberment of the Palestinians into separate polities, in Gaza, in the West Bank, and in exile; and because the Palestinians, once again, were not consulted, as they had not been consulted about the Balfour Declaration or the 1947 partition, "treating the Palestinians like objects and ignoring their inalienable rights and their legitimate aspirations." She contrasts the call of the PLO for a "democratic and secular state of Jews, Christians, and Muslims" with the refusal of Israel to allow the Palestinians under its control the most basic human rights. And she contrasts the Palestinians' standpoint with those of the Arab regimes upon which they were dependent: "Whether seen as more progressive or more conservative, the Arab regimes are, almost in their totality, directed by authoritarians, repressive (and therefore antipopular, afraid of the people) and subject to one or more imperialist powers." Any Latin American reader would understand exactly what that meant.

She quotes Felicia Langer: "beatings, electric shocks on the genitals, drownings, burnings with cigarettes, etc. Or straightforward execution. Another method used is individual expulsion: during the night, the prisoner is expelled from the occupied territories into Jordan or Lebanon, without the right to return." She quotes Dr. Israel Shahak: "The occupation regime in the Arab territories—far from being liberal—is one of the cruelest and most repressive I have seen in the modern world." Cruel, repressive—and pointless: "It has not managed to suffocate Palestinian protest."

But the picture is not hopeless. Salem describes movements within Israel like Peace Now, which she thinks could join with similar Palestinian

movements to create the basis for a nonracial future. (This was the same leftist or internationalist hope that Sadiq Saad had voiced in 1947.)

She describes diplomatic victories: “No longer is Palestinian a synonym for terrorist.” (This, too, was overly optimistic: The phrase “Islamic terrorism,” popularized by Benjamin Netanyahu around the time that Salem was writing, would go on to a long and prosperous career, branding the religion of approximately a quarter of the world’s population as inherently murderous.)

She describes the increasing power that the Third World could now wield in the form of oil, and she describes plans for an economic basis for a future Palestinian state. There would be reparations from Israel for lost property, as well as help from the Arab states, the United Nations, and Palestinians abroad. And there would be money from tourism: “The Palestinian State would necessarily include East Jerusalem with its Muslim, Christian, and Jewish holy sites…. The Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley are in the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip has attractive beaches.” She is under no illusions about how easy peace will be but sees it as a necessity: “What would be more dangerous: a PLO spread out among different countries and ceaselessly fighting Israel, or concentrated and focused on the construction of their small State, which, sooner or later, would have to have economic ties with Israel in order to survive?”

Because she had been underground and then in exile when her *Palestinians, the New Jews* came out, there had been little reaction to that book. But she had become, her friends say, “persona non grata” among much of Rio’s Jewish community. “She provoked a violent reaction,” said her friend Kristina Michahelles. “The community was outraged that a Jewish woman could question the State of Israel.” Her cousin Carlos Salem said, “She was hated by the Jewish community. My father was revolted by her.” This hatred took its toll and had physical manifestations. “Her hands were covered with sweat,” said Carlos’s wife, Tania. Helena never shied away from controversy, but she was never bellicose and did not like being considered what another Jewish journalist, Armando Strozenberg, described as “an extraterrestrial.” Still, her work would be recognized in unexpected

ways. Her car once broke down on the way to work. As she got out to look for a phone, some men on the street recognized her. They called for help and fixed her car: They were Palestinian.

In 1981, as they were settling back into Brazil, Nelson and Helena had a second daughter, Dina. In that same year, Salem published *The Church of the Oppressed,* a collection of articles by her and others, with a preface by the educational pioneer Paulo Freire. It focused on progressive Catholic priests. With the dictatorship entering its final years and the transition to democracy already under way, Brazil's landowners were taking it on themselves to hire armed bands to enforce discipline on their workers, often by murdering them. The priests who defended these workers were part of a movement, widespread in Latin America, called liberation theology, which preached the Christian duty to succor the poor: in Salem's words, "the image of Christ the liberator, the Christ who fought the power of the oppressors, the Christ who was born poor and was always with the oppressed." In 1985, the dictatorship ended, and in 1986 the book was made into a film that expressed the hopes of the new democracy for justice. Because she had already been to the remote area in the state of Pará described in the book and befriended the local peasants and priests, the filming went smoothly. "She was very sweet but also very active and political," said the director, Jorge Bodanzky. "She used her relationships to create a favorable environment for us to come in with cameras."

In 1982, the year after *The Church of the Oppressed,* she published *What Is the Palestinian Question*. Then, on International Women's Day in 1984, she separated from Nelson Levy. She soon got involved with another Nelson, the director Nelson Pereira dos Santos, whose films, from the 1950s onward, had dealt with themes hitherto ignored in Brazilian cinema —the same kinds of social-justice themes that she had always pursued. One of the fathers of the Cinema Novo movement, Nelson Pereira dos Santos was famous for having his film *Rio, 40 Degrees* censored on the basis that the heat in Rio never reaches that temperature. The real reason, of course, was that he showed social conditions that Brazil's rulers preferred to ignore. His most famous film, *Vidas secas,* based on a novel by Graciliano Ramos,

was about a family fleeing a drought in the Brazilian Northeast, and likewise became a classic. Salem wrote a book about Nelson in 1987, the first full-length biography of a Brazilian director; then she wrote another, about the Jewish director Leon Hirszman, who had made a film based on another work by Graciliano Ramos, *São Bernardo*.

But Palestine never left her, and she always saw her work to improve her own society as intimately related to Palestine. In 1991, she published her third book on the subject, *Among Arabs and Jews*. It was a memoir, her warmest and most personal book, in which she recounts the series of coincidences that brought her to the Middle East and the fraught family background that allowed her to understand it. She had long wanted to take her girls to the region when they were old enough, and in the same year the book came out she went to Palestine with Dina and a friend, the psychoanalyst Beth Adler. Tatiana couldn't join them, but rather than waiting for a better time, Salem went anyway. The reason for her hurry became clear to Adler on an excursion to the Dead Sea. As they rode on a bus through the West Bank, Adler was sitting at the front with Helena. Dina was just a few rows behind.

"Beth, I'm going to tell you something," Helena whispered. "If you tell anyone, I'll say you're lying."

Beth was surprised: She had never heard anyone introduce a story in those terms.

"I have cancer. But nobody at the paper knows. Nobody knows. And I want to work until the very last day I can."

At forty-three, she had been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. She could live another twenty years, she told her daughters. "I focused on that," said Tatiana. "I always thought, She has twenty more years." For a long time, she was healthy and kept working. In 1998, she contacted the director Luiz Fernando Carvalho, who was filming the adaptation of a novel, *Lavoura arcaica,* by the Lebanese Brazilian writer Raduan Nassar. Salem turned up—"so tiny, so thin"—at the hotel where Carvalho was staying. Together, they watched the forty minutes he had edited. She was impressed and decided to interview the actors and follow the process in

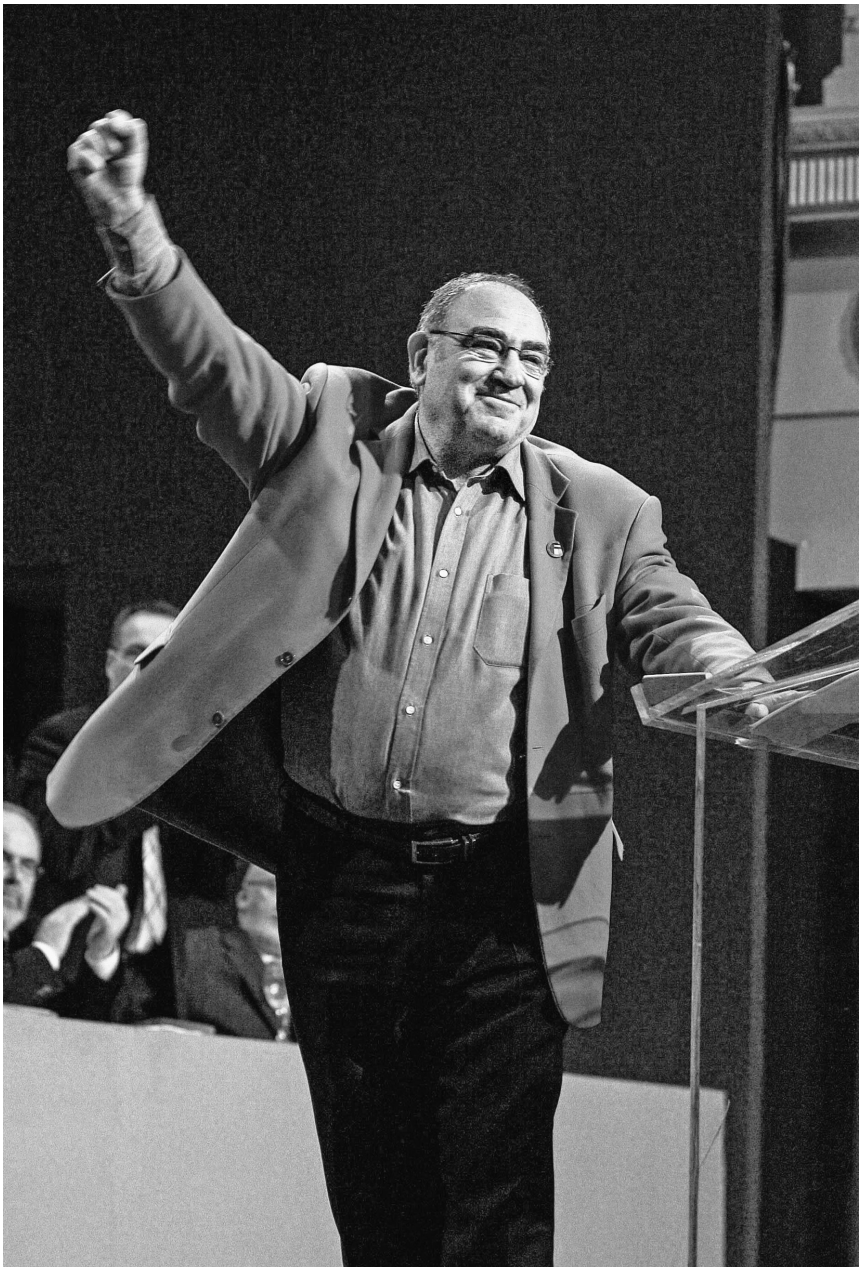
order to write a book about the film. (The film was later released in English as *To the Left of the Father*.) Carvalho talked to Raduan Nassar, who knew Salem's writing and had long admired her courage and conviction. She followed the production for several months, until one day she called Carvalho's secretary.

"I won't see the end of the film," she said. "The cancer has made me go blind."

She died on August 24, 1999. She was fifty-one. Remembering her, Carvalho said, "That's why she chose that film. Because it was about a dissident son. He disobeys his father's orders. He goes against the father's tradition. He makes a life of his own. He goes in search of freedom."

IN BED WITH APARTHEID

Ronnie Kasrils



As the sun sets over Johannesburg, I'm on a terrace on Rockey Street, the main drag of the teeming neighborhood of Yeoville. The street is packed with people from all across Africa, buying vegetables, selling phone accessories, getting haircuts, hanging out. It's lined with two-story buildings whose ground floors are given over to shops and whose upper floors, perched on stilts that form an arcade, contain apartments with the kinds of balconies I'm standing on now. It's an unpretentious, unfussy architecture, close to the origins of this city. Yeoville was founded only four years after gold was discovered on a nearby farm, a deposit that eventually produced nearly a quarter of the gold mined in the history of the world. That bonanza created one of the youngest of the world's great cities—and produced, in a single century, more history than some places manage to produce in a millennium.

Ronnie Kasrils has brought me to the Yeoville Dinner Club for a pan-African feast, and to show me the neighborhood where he grew up. Born in 1938—a time when many people, and not only old people, would have recalled the days when gigantic Johannesburg was a collection of tents—he is a legacy of a time when Yeoville was populated by immigrants from Lithuania and Poland rather than Congo or Malawi; when you heard Yiddish and Russian rather than Lingala and Shona; and when the evangelical church was the Orthodox shul where Ronnie celebrated his bar mitzvah. It was a neighborhood where every shop counter had a *pushke,* the blue-and-white box that collected coins for the Jews of Palestine, and where the only black people allowed were tradesmen and domestic workers.

It's astonishing that this Yeoville *boykie* has made it back here at all. For years, Kasrils was one of the most wanted men in the nasty police state that was apartheid South Africa. Forced to flee his country as a young man, he spent twenty-seven years in exile, in Britain, the Soviet Union, and half a dozen African nations, eventually rising to become a senior leader of Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress. Many comrades died in the struggle against apartheid. Many were maimed or imprisoned. But his own story was one of triumph.

Following the years of persecution—still undercover, still bearing a forged passport, still carrying around a fake mustache in case he needed to make a quick getaway—Kasrils returned to Yeoville in 1990. After the first democratic elections in 1994, he joined the government, becoming the deputy minister of defense under Nelson Mandela, and then, under Thabo Mbeki, minister of intelligence services, a post that he held until 2008.

Now eighty-five, Kasrils is South Africa's most eloquent Jewish opponent of Zionism. "Ronnie drives them crazy," says his friend Albie Sachs, who himself lost an arm and an eye in Mozambique when his car was bombed by the apartheid police, "and a lot of it is because he's *so Jewish*." And it's true: Sitting on the porch of his house in Greenside, in Johannesburg's northern suburbs, I recognize an intonation, a warmth, a mischievous humor that could only be Jewish. More than that, I recognize a steeliness in his eyes, a determination I've seen in many Jews in the face of cruelty and injustice. His opposition to Zionism has left him isolated from a South African Jewish community that is much diminished since the end of apartheid. But Kasrils's resistance to Zionism comes precisely from his Jewish background.

When he was young, and despite his mother's pushing his head down to spare him, Ronnie glimpsed images of the Nazi horror in overseas newsreels. Born five years after the Nazis came to power, he spent his childhood imagining where he would hide if Hitler arrived in Yeoville; he later calculated that 204 of his European relatives were murdered in the same regions of Latvia and Lithuania from which his grandparents emigrated. And he made the connection when he saw a nicely dressed black man beaten by a group of white thugs. "I remember the flash of a bronze knuckle-duster striking his temple with a sickening crunch while kicks and blows thudded into his body," he wrote. "White pedestrians scattered. I noted older boys from the Yeoville hood, tough guys I looked up to, scurrying out of the way like rabbits."

After the man was left bleeding in the gutter, Ronnie heard someone say, "The native must know his place. How dare he think he can become a white man by changing from animal skins into western clothing?"

A few days later, he asked his gentle mother, Rene, “Are black people being treated the way us Jews were treated in Germany?”

She hesitated as she tried to find the right words. “People were starved in those death camps and thrown into the gas chambers, so it’s not like that over here. But…it starts with the bad things we often see here, and the way black people are spoken to, cursed with horrible language, and beaten like we saw the other day.”

At school, too, he understood that the boys were being prepared for life in South Africa’s brutal colonial society. Older boys were served by younger boys called fags, and these older boys had the right to cane their underlings. “If you refused to abide by such a ‘philosophy’ and showed any signs of rebelling…you were up against attempts to humiliate, degrade, and strip you of self-respect. In such a process there are those who become passive and others with a streak of stubbornness who not only don’t give in but become more rebellious.” Ronnie fell into the latter category, especially in his confrontation with a headmaster with the unimprovable name of St. John B. Nitch. The result was “an intense hatred for those who wielded power as a result of position or size, displaying a bullying predilection to assault other human beings, especially those smaller, younger, or more vulnerable.”

The school did boast a number of remarkable teachers. Like Sadiq Saad at the other end of Africa and Helena Salem in Rio, Ronnie forever venerated the memory of one, Teddy Gordon, whose classes about the French Revolution were a revelation. “What was so magical about his use of words and comparisons was that one could not help but see the same conditions between the white rulers of South Africa and the African masses.” Until he walked into Teddy’s class, Ronnie had been an indifferent student. “But listening to Teddy speak, and very unusually for me, I found myself sitting back, totally relaxed, soaking up his every word.” For their final exam, the students were assigned to write an essay on the causes of the French Revolution. Normally nervous in the face of such an important test, “I completed the essay with ease,” he recalled. “It was a rite of passage for

me which occurred without my realization, far more relevant I would say than my bar mitzvah."

Three years before his bar mitzvah, the State of Israel was proclaimed. Ronnie became an enthusiastic ten-year-old Zionist. He set up a stall in front of his building to sell secondhand toys for the benefit of Israel, and contributed to a campaign by the Jewish National Fund to plant trees in a special South African forest there. Unbeknownst to Ronnie and unmentioned in the JNF propaganda was the fact that this forest covered the Palestinian village of Lubya, "whose inhabitants had been driven out in 1948 and their homes and property flattened to the ground." Later, he would be horrified and guilt-ridden by this discovery. "In time I had three such certificates framed and stuck up in my bedroom. Little did we know that over 500 Palestinian villages were reduced to rubble and eliminated, the ruins to be covered by trees—the former inhabitants camping in neighboring states as refugees."

Ronnie was about to join a youth movement called Betar, in part for its military-style uniforms, when he was stopped by the horror on the faces of the Sachs sisters, three slightly older girls who lived down the street. They asked if he knew who the leaders of Betar were. He didn't, and they told him about Jabotinsky, idealist of the Iron Wall, who had visited South Africa and modeled himself on Mussolini. "No less a person than Albert Einstein had issued a warning about the Betar leaders being 'fascist' or at least fascist-connected," the Sachs girls told him. "They had to explain that 'fascist' meant like being Nazis and that it was Einstein who had made the comparison." Ronnie was astonished to hear that Jews could be compared to Nazis. "They said I was being naïve—another word I didn't understand." And they gave him some sound advice: not to join any group just because it seemed "exciting."

The Sachs girls ridiculed the Zionists. They claimed that they were as dangerous as the Afrikaner nationalists who came to power in South Africa in 1948, the same year that Israel was born, and who were beginning to put into place a system called apartheid. This was an obsessive, Kafkaesque tangle of regulations designed to ensure the continued supremacy of the

roughly one in ten South Africans who were white. Justified by the same notions of "civilization" and "modernization" that appear in every colonial endeavor, apartheid reduced non-whites to semi-citizens and semi-humans, determining where they could live, where they could work, where they could travel, whom they could sleep with, where they could be buried. It was backed by a ruthless police force. From the beginning, it provoked fierce opposition.

But to Ronnie, Zionism was an inspiration. "It appeared that Palestine, like South Africa before the Dutch landed, was an empty land," he wrote. "For us the Zionist phrase 'A land without people for a people without land' had powerful appeal." The narrative was simple: "If there were people in Palestine, they were the British, who needed to go home, and the Arabs, who had plenty of land elsewhere in Arabia where they came from." Yet the sisters warned him that Betar was "a recruitment tool for the most extreme Zionist group, notorious for carrying out terrorism in Palestine and advocating seizing land on both sides of the Jordan River." Their father warned Ronnie's father, who shared their alarm, and Ronnie ended up joining a socialist group, Habonim, instead. At a sleepaway camp on a farm, the boys took turns guarding the tents at night. "It was easy to imagine we were on duty in a danger zone under possible physical attack somewhere in Israel." But a run-in with Jewish hooligans during the retreat "dented my romantic tendency to idealise my fellow Jews seeking to serve the Zionist cause. If an axe could be wielded so threateningly against a fellow Jew as had been the case in the camp, then pity the poor Arab who got in the way."

Ronnie was starting to smell a rat. At Hebrew school, the teacher pressed the biblical analogies to the modern State of Israel a bit too keenly, and while he was recounting the forty years the Hebrews wandered in the desert, Ronnie looked at the map of Africa on the wall. It wasn't that far from Egypt to Palestine, he said. Why didn't the Israelites just walk along the coast?

His teacher did not appreciate the question.

"They were being punished for their sins!" he ranted. "The weak and the less devout were being weeded out. *Of course* Moses knew the way, you idiot," he snarled. "He had to test his flock!"

I was on my feet, battle-ready to counter-attack.

"Is that why six million Jews had to die in the Nazi camps?" I wanted to know. "Were they weak and not good enough to survive as Israel's new inhabitants?"

"Get out! Get out!" he ordered.

Off I went, spewing a word I had recently learned: "Fascist!"

Through such experiences, Ronnie's enthusiasm for Zionism withered, and even more so as he grew interested in politics closer to home. His mother's cousin Jacqueline Arenstein was a communist who had been involved in the mine workers' strike of 1946. When African workers in the Witwatersrand mines, the engine of the national economy, walked off the job to protest starvation wages, the police broke the strike, killing at least nine, wounding hundreds. A decade later, in 1956, when Ronnie was eighteen, Jackie Arenstein was arrested and charged with treason along with scores of other activists.

The trial lasted a full year. At the end of 1957, charges were withdrawn against sixty-five of those charged, including Jackie, but the proceedings devastated his mother and were the main topic of conversation in their home. "A number of Jews were among the 156 detainees and some nervy neighbours bemoaned the fact of their involvement in politics since Jews had enough to worry about without getting involved in other people's troubles," he wrote. "There were honorable exceptions but there were no Jewish rabbis who stood shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Reverend Trevor Huddleston," the anti-apartheid Anglican bishop. Once he joined the freedom movement, Kasrils would be astonished to find there many whites of Christian origin: "I had laboured under the illusion that Jews were the only whites concerned about the racial oppression of blacks."

After graduation, Kasrils ended up working in Jackie Arenstein's hometown of Durban. He arrived shortly before one of the most

radicalizing events in South African history. A central feature of apartheid was the requirement that non-whites carry a "passbook," an identity card that specified exactly where a person was allowed to work and live and travel and that, in practice, gave the police wide latitude to harass and detain non-whites. Under Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, the pass laws were extended in a campaign known as grand apartheid. This meant that rather than the mere segregation of public facilities and restriction of political rights (petty apartheid), non-whites would be stripped of their citizenship and forcibly removed to distant areas. One such relocation area was Sharpeville, south of Johannesburg.

On March 21, 1960, a group that eventually amounted to twenty thousand people gathered at the Sharpeville police station, offering to turn themselves in for refusing to carry passbooks. As the police fired tear gas and began beating people with batons, airplanes flew low over the crowd in an attempt to scatter the demonstrators. When the crowd surged, the shooting began, and by the time the smoke cleared, sixty-nine people had been killed, including young people: Photographs revealed that many were shot in the back as they were trying to flee. It was an event that defined a generation of anti-apartheid activists. Among those it galvanized was Kasrils, who, before Sharpeville, had been approached by representatives of the African National Congress. Would he devote an hour a week to the cause? He was busy, and failed to follow up.

Now he realized, "It was not possible to live life as a free and independent agent within a system that produced atrocities like Sharpeville. I felt I'd been basking in self-indulgent luxury," he wrote. "The newspapers spoke of thousands of arrests throughout the country, including leading members of the ANC-led liberation movement. What could be done? What could *I* do?" The ANC was soon banned, and once it went underground it became difficult to join: When he tried, he mentioned that Jackie was his relative. The next night, her husband, Rowley Arenstein, a lawyer, turned up at his house. He was hiding from the police. Ronnie hadn't seen Rowley since he was ten. They began to get reacquainted. Rowley took him through the history of South Africa, and the history of Zionism. "Where others were

too busy to spend night after night giving you lectures on Zionism, Rowley would. And he would say: do not buy this nonsense that the majority of Jews are Zionists. No matter what the ratio is today, they have been a minority. I am talking about the working-class Jews who came out of Europe. They would smash the Zionists in the boarding houses and in the factories where they worked together."

The Arensteins' house was shot up while Ronnie was there. A ricocheting bullet grazed his cheek. The regime was cracking down, massacring people, as at Sharpeville, and freely resorting to torture. In that situation, without democratic possibilities, Ronnie saw the armed struggle as the only way to overthrow apartheid. He joined the Communist Party and helped found the armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto weSizwe, Zulu and Xhosa for "the Spear of the Nation." No sooner did he join than he met Eleanor Logan, the Scottish-born daughter of the owners of a Durban bookstore. Like Kasrils, she had been briefly married before, and she had a young daughter, Brigid. "As Che Guevara said, revolution is an act of love," Kasrils said. "It's love, really, that motivates us all." They shared an understanding of the situation, and of the need to act: "The times required the boldness and the audacity of striking blows for freedom." She and Ronnie fell in love.

Soon, he was arrested for distributing pamphlets. Acquitted on a technicality, he nonetheless lost his job. The millimetric space for speech became clear: He was denounced for using the phrase "One man one vote!" by a minister of Bantu affairs who accused him of "intoxicating the Bantu" with foreign ideas. He was served with a banning order, which prohibited him from attending public gatherings or meetings of more than three persons, but the group continued to meet in secret, including at a flat where, in mid-1962, an unexpected guest appeared: Nelson Mandela. Mandela, who had been on a tour of friendly governments in Africa, had secretly slipped back into the country. He told the group that the regime would face a guerrilla war if it did not accede to their demands. Shortly thereafter, on August 5, 1962, Mandela was arrested. He would serve twenty-seven years in the regime's prisons.

Umkhonto weSizwe's policy was to avoid injury to people by focusing its armed attacks on infrastructure and government offices. A breakthrough came when Ronnie and Eleanor learned that a construction crew had stored some dynamite in a town outside Durban. Eleanor noted the brand of the lock and spent days searching hardware stores for the right key; when she found it, they discovered a far larger stockpile than they had expected. It was soon being deployed across the country in spectacular attacks, including one on electricity pylons that plunged Durban into darkness. The idea, in the words of one comrade: "When they have to guard everything that opens and shuts in the country, they'll have no one available to control the people."

House arrest orders followed for anyone suspected of subversive tendencies. Kasrils himself had to report to a police station once a week, where a sergeant said, "If you don't clear off to Israel we'll deal with you here." He and Eleanor had discovered a tiny cobweb-clogged foxhole beneath the floorboards of their bed, and this would soon come in handy: Once, at 2:00 a.m., the police pounded on the door. Kasrils slid into the hiding place. He listened as Eleanor said that she and Ronnie had split up and were no longer in contact. They escaped to a small safe house in the countryside. Kasrils then headed to Johannesburg. Eleanor went to Durban. There, under one of the draconian laws that provided for infinite detention without trial, she was arrested. Kasrils was terrified. Many who disappeared into the regime's prisons, he was well aware, were never seen again.

Eleanor was sexually abused during interrogation, including by a police lieutenant who ranted "about how Jewish men misuse 'Christian' girls." But she knew that a white woman had a degree of protection that black prisoners did not. She went on a hunger strike, feigned a mental breakdown, and was assigned to a hospital for the criminally insane. "She was petrified of having to mix with the inmates," Ronnie wrote. "Lying in her iron bed on a threadbare mattress, she listened to the sounds of their awakenings…. The mentally deranged were slow to awake, but like drunkards shaking off the aftereffects of a night's binge, their groans intensified as they became reacquainted with their inner demons." One was pulling her hair out;

another banging her head against the wall; another screaming for her child —this was especially painful because Eleanor's seven-year-old daughter, Brigid, was with Eleanor's parents—while noisily sobbing, "Oh my baby Jesus! My sweet baby, why did they crucify you?"

Eventually, with the help of an employee who left a door unlocked, Eleanor managed to escape and rejoin Kasrils in Johannesburg. They realized that they had to leave the country, even without Brigid. Disguised as pious Muslims and in the company of two elderly activists, they headed toward the border, driven by Babla Saloojee, a witty man who tried to lighten up the tense drive. It was far; it was hot; the two old men were struggling; Eleanor's brown makeup was melting off her face; but they made it, and climbed over the border fence into British Bechuanaland. "I never imagined that I would be relieved to see the Union Jack," Ronnie later wrote. "Not for a moment did we anticipate that we were going into exile for decades." After their escape, while being "interviewed" about his activities, their driver, Babla Saloojee, would die by "falling" to his death from the seventh floor of police headquarters.

Ronnie and Eleanor lived abroad for the next twenty-seven years. During these years, the apartheid regime deepened its ties with Israel. At first, seeking allies outside the Arab world, Israel cultivated friendship with the African states that, beginning with Ghana in 1957, were gaining independence. Despite its origins and its involvement in imperial wars, notably its invasion of Egypt in 1956 alongside Britain and France, Israel positioned itself as an anti-racist, postcolonial state. "We naturally oppose policies of apartheid, colonialism, and racial or religious discrimination wherever they exist," Prime Minister Golda Meir—an American from Milwaukee notorious for saying that "there was no such thing as Palestinians"—told the United Nations General Assembly. These attempts soon soured, partly because of Israel's closeness to the South African apartheid regime.

Still, no matter how cosmetic and insincere, Israeli denunciations of apartheid annoyed the South African government. In 1961, Verwoerd, the author of grand apartheid and the man under whose government the

Sharpeville massacre had occurred, replied by saying, “They took Israel from the Arabs after they had lived there for a thousand years. In that I agree with them. Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state.” According to Sasha Polakow-Suransky’s *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel’s Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa,* South African Jews “pleaded with Israeli diplomats to take a softer line; they viewed Israel’s stand against apartheid not as principled opposition, but as ‘interference’ in South Africa’s domestic affairs and a threat to their own good relationship with the apartheid regime. They felt the same way about members of their own Jewish community who dared to speak out against the government.”

This was precisely what Ronnie found. “The Jewish community were so petrified by the National Party with its Nazi background that it would not emit a squeak against the government, just—in the Yiddish term: schtum—keep quiet.” The legacy institutions feared being associated with people like him. “They were very aggressive about these communists who are drawing unneeded attention to us Jews. So much so that when these Jews become victims of the apartheid state, the Jewish community, led by the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Board, shun them, absolutely shun them. They were vicious when people needed their help, for their children’s sake.”

Israel’s warm relations with the apartheid regime took many forms. The two countries saw themselves as part of the same struggle for civilization. “The Jordan Valley and the Zambezi Valley are alike frontiers today of the free world,” Radio South Africa declared in 1972. Sometimes, Israel’s equations would go too far even for the tastes of apartheid. In 1973, *Ha’aretz,* often viewed as a liberal publication, published a cartoon of African leaders as cannibals, only to find its “sheer racialism” decried and compared to “the anti-Semitic cartoons of the Nazi era.” This was an uncommon slip. Israeli leaders were usually careful to respect the appearance of anti-racist language toward a regime shunned by most of the world. But after the 1973 war, which exposed Israel’s weakness, such caution was abandoned.

In 1975, South Africa’s prime minister, John Vorster, was welcomed to Jerusalem. Vorster was considered far-right even by the standards of

Afrikaner nationalism. A Nazi in all but name, he held views that were so extreme that he had been interned in South Africa as a potential saboteur during World War II, and he took a harder line with regard to racial matters than even Verwoerd had. This was the man who was welcomed to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem; praised by *The Jerusalem Post* as one who had "recharted his country's racial and foreign policy"; lauded by Yitzhak Rabin, remembered as a liberal, for embodying "the ideals shared by Israel and South Africa: the hopes for justice and peaceful coexistence"; and embraced by Shimon Peres, later prime minister and president, for "their common hatred of injustice."

"Going into the Holocaust museum, signing some book where these goyim could write their names and be honored—we just wanted to gag," Kasrils said, speaking of the Jewish members of the resistance. His anti-Zionist feeling stiffened. "This is the country where Vorster and Verwoerd and company had been so pro-Nazi. So now Israel is in bed with apartheid." The arms trade ran into the many billions, and even went so far as to include, in 1979, a nuclear test. "Secrecy about the extent of their ties was paramount," Polakow-Suransky wrote. "Disguise and denial became the norm." Though the extent of this collaboration was hidden, the resistance knew of it because they had a scientist spying for them—Renfrew Christie, arrested and tortured in 1980. At the same time, Israel's leadership had an awkward way of comparing Israel to South Africa. Rafael Eitan, the chief of the General Staff, said that "blacks in South Africa want to gain control over the white minority just like Arabs here want to gain control over us. And we too, like the white minority in South Africa, must act to prevent them from taking us over."

Kasrils's skepticism grew as, living abroad, he gained access to information that was unavailable in a South Africa under leaden censorship. He learned that an old Zionist chestnut—"The Arabs want to drive the Jews into the sea"—reflected a quite different reality. "In terms of who was driven into the sea: those pictures of Jaffa, in 1948, of seeing Palestinians in the sea off Jaffa, those photographs were seminal to my feeling about what Israel meant." After the 1967 war and the occupation of the remaining 22

percent of Palestine, he and a dozen fellow students marched to the Israeli embassy in London.

"You could even knock on the door and gain entry," he said. "And we said we had a statement to hand in to the ambassador." They were directed to the press officer's office in the basement:

> It had maps everywhere and the guy gives us a bit of a spiel about the terrorism that they face from the Palestinians…. And so we go up to the map and I say: Tell us about these pins. He says ja, every pin you see is where there has been an act of terrorism, and there were hundreds all around Israel and a few just inside of the border, and I said to him: Just tell me, you do not seem to have a pin here near Jerusalem on the Tel Aviv Road, Deir Yassin.

This was a Palestinian village of around six hundred people who, as the end of the mandate neared, signed a pact of neutrality. On April 9, 1948, they were attacked. Women and children were massacred; houses were blown up with people still inside them: a total of 107 people murdered, after which 55 freshly orphaned children were dumped at the Jaffa Gate. The surviving men were paraded through the streets of Jerusalem, where they were spat upon and cursed and, in some cases, later executed. Led by the future prime minister Menachem Begin, this attack was one of the opening acts of the Nakba, the campaign of ethnic cleansing that—before the Israeli state declared independence—had produced hundreds of thousands of refugees. Albert Einstein denounced the massacre the next day, and in December a list of Jewish luminaries, including Einstein, Hannah Arendt, and other refugees from Nazism, signed a letter to *The New York Times:* "The terrorists, far from being ashamed of their act, were proud of this massacre; publicized it widely, and invited all the foreign correspondents present in the country to view the heaped corpses and the general havoc at Deir Yassin." The letter—cited by the Sachs sisters when warning Ronnie away from Betar—mentioned the terror meted out to Jewish residents of Palestine who opposed the Zionists: "Teachers were beaten up for speaking

against them, adults were shot for not letting their children join them. By gangster methods, beatings, window-smashing, and wide-spread robberies, the terrorists intimidated the population and exacted a heavy tribute."

The village was replaced by a mental hospital.

Menachem Begin went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

When Kasrils mentioned Deir Yassin, the press attaché lost it.

"Get the hell out!" he screamed.

"You guys are the terrorists," Kasrils replied.

Still, his focus was South Africa. He and Eleanor saw the regime was weakening. They felt that liberation would not be far off. For a decade, from 1966 to 1976, they lived in London, where their two sons were born. Brigid was still in South Africa, which caused no end of pain: "Some of the most touching traumas of political involvement are not in the overtly political domain, but in the terrible wrenches that occur in personal lives." In those years, despite the happy home they had created above a shop in Golders Green, "there had been many an occasion when Eleanor had sobbed out her depression." Kasrils kept busy editing the papers of the philosopher Bertrand Russell—100,000 items, including more than 70 books, 1,000 essays, and 25,000 letters, from 1878 to 1967—and studying at the London School of Economics, where he gained a theoretical understanding of imperialism. The rest of the time he spent in training MK recruits. Some of this seemed straight out of John le Carré. He taught the recruits how to spot a secret policeman; how to smuggle messages written in invisible ink; how to make false bottoms in suitcases; and, especially for those to be infiltrated into South Africa, how to escape if they ever got wind of danger. Their actions achieved one of MK's main goals, which was to distract the security police and spread the message of the underground movement.

The collapse of the fascist regime in Portugal on April 25, 1974, unleashed one of the great revolutions in African history. A democratic Portugal finally relinquished its control of its five African colonies, including the largest and most important, Angola and Mozambique, which directly bordered South Africa. Fascist Portugal and apartheid South Africa

had been close allies, but now these important countries were available as bases for South African freedom fighters. And if April 25 was a date that determined the fate of nations, it also had an immediate impact on Ronnie and Eleanor's personal lives. It was Brigid's eighteenth birthday. That meant that after nearly eleven years of separation she was free to come to London. The family was reunited, but the reprieve was brief. Once again, history intervened.

In 1976, fresh from his visit to Israel, John Vorster imposed compulsory Afrikaans-language instruction on South African students. The townships, especially Soweto, erupted. Hundreds were killed, and images of murdered children brought the regime's already dreadful reputation to hitherto unplumbed depths. The massacre swelled the ranks of Umkhonto weSizwe. Kasrils was dispatched to East Germany—the communist countries supported the South African freedom struggle when the "free world" so often worked against it—where he began training these recruits. At the end of October 1977, he reached the newly independent Angola.

He was overcome with emotion. "We have been away from Africa for too long," he wrote to Eleanor.

He was dispatched into the bush to teach in camps that were at constant risk of bombing by South African jets and by infiltrators from the security forces. In 1978, after a short visit to London, Kasrils was asked to return to Africa full-time. Their sons were ten and twelve. The prospect of another separation was wrenching. But he and Eleanor knew so many people who were languishing in the regime's prisons or who, like Babla Saloojee, had paid for their courage with their lives. He resolved to return. He spent time in Angola, Zambia, Mozambique, and Swaziland, smuggling fighters into South Africa.

"We go to and fro throughout our embattled country or on the continent of Africa, even the four corners of the world, scarcely getting to know each other," he wrote in a memorial for a martyred comrade.

> A long dusty journey on the back of a truck; a shared room in some out-of-the-way place; maybe on rare occasions a few cold beers and

> jocular tales well into the night; more often than not, illegal border crossings and close shaves. Such are the conditions of often chance meetings…of discussing childhood, families, sweethearts, music, poetry, philosophy. Before you know it, someone becomes dear to you. You look forward to seeing them again. Then news of arrest, torture, death.

Yet by the end of the 1980s, victory was beginning to look foreordained. Nelson Mandela was released in 1990. In that same year, after an exile of twenty-seven years and still under an assumed name, Kasrils arrived back home in Johannesburg. Known as Red Ronnie, he was a wanted man, "armed and dangerous." He had to travel under assumed names and resort to wearing fake mustaches and wigs. But then, after the first democratic elections in 1994, he joined the government.

The end of apartheid was one of the many hopeful movements in those years. In the Middle East, there seemed to be some movement toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian issue. "South Africa will never forget the support of the State of Israel to the apartheid regime," Mandela said. "We are not free until Palestine is free." But the ANC, now the party of a government in which Kasrils was a minister, endorsed the two-state solution, which meant giving Palestinians around 22 percent of historic Palestine, which also became the official position of Yasser Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Oslo Accords, signed on the White House lawn in 1993, brought together Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. In 1995, Rabin would be assassinated by a right-wing Jewish Israeli who saw him as a traitor. "We all went and wrote in a condolence book," Kasrils recalled. "We were caught in that Oslo trap and not realizing where it was going."

During that time, many South Africans felt that the Israel-Palestine question would be resolved in tandem with their own. But South Africa was teetering on the brink of civil war, and the issue passed to the back burner. "I am very critical of myself," Kasrils said. "We were very preoccupied with our struggle. It was full-time. And one is in the false-mustache and clip-on-nose phase." Later, he would reproach himself for endorsing the

two-state solution, which, along with Oslo, would seem designed to fail, including because it failed to stop the influx of settlers into lands designated for the Palestinians. “It sounded reasonable,” Kasrils said, “if you forget that it is actually a colonial racist settler state. We became suckers.”

Yet even as apartheid was banished in South Africa, the concept was being revived in law. Since 1973, when the Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid was adopted, there had been attempts to define apartheid in terms that could apply to other countries. Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which was adopted in 1998 and went into force in 2002, “apartheid” no longer meant only the by-then-extinct South African regime. It was defined as a crime against humanity “committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group.”

The world’s eyes fell on Israel.

Many South African Jews “went bananas,” said Kasrils.

He himself was concerned that the word “apartheid” outside its specifically South African context might obscure the more widespread settler-colonial aspect, which he saw as connecting Israel to South Africa and other societies, including Ireland, Rhodesia, and Algeria.

Within the human rights community, the definition eventually became uncontroversial. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem all concurred that the Palestinians lived under apartheid, echoing the long-standing views of many of the most illustrious South African leaders. Already in 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon, Oliver Tambo, president of the African National Congress, declared that “the parallels between the Middle East and Southern Africa are as clear as they are sinister.”

> The onslaught on the Lebanon, the massive massacre of Lebanese and Palestinians, the attempt to liquidate the PLO and Palestinian people, all of which were enacted with impunity by Israel, have been followed minutely and with unconcealed interest and glee by the

> Pretoria racist regime which has designs for perpetrating the same kind of crime in Southern Africa in the expectation that, like Israel, it will be enabled by its allies to get away with murder.

In 1989, Archbishop Desmond Tutu said that Israel reminded him of South Africa. Kasrils would eventually go even further, saying that the Palestinians were "suffering hardships and methods of control that are far worse than anything black South Africans faced during the most dreadful days of apartheid."

As deputy minister of defense under Mandela and then as minister of intelligence under Thabo Mbeki, Kasrils had many occasions to meet Israelis and Palestinians. Recalling one conversation with two Israeli envoys pushing claims about Iran that the South African government knew to be false, he saw a tightly prepared performance. In a meeting with Mbeki, known for his courtly refinement, "they were like two comics playing off each other. With a guy like Mbeki!" he marveled. "I don't know what they were thinking about black Africa." And he met Palestinians. "By this stage, I'm politically savvy," he said. "I'm not surprised to meet somebody, no matter what color, no matter what religion, no matter what headgear, who is a reasonable person." These included members of groups classified as terrorists by Western governments, including Islamic Jihad and Hamas. "This doesn't shock me. It fascinates me. It interests me. It wasn't like you would imagine: 'God, you're meeting these Hamas guys.' Really, it was no big deal. But, of course, it was fascinating."

In these meetings, "I found that these guys listen. They want to know, what was it about the ANC that helped us to achieve victory. And I would talk to them about the question of how we involved whites, and the fact that we would accept the whites—whom you could classify as settlers, but who had lived here for so long—we accepted that all who lived here had a right to live in South Africa and be citizens." He emphasized the political aspects of any freedom struggle. "If you're able to obtain support of Jewish progressives, it's going to strengthen you, it's not going to weaken you," he told them. "Which is what happened in South Africa with whites. Even if it was a very small minority, it exposed the myth and the lie of racism, which

was why the apartheid system was so vicious to whites who opposed them." And for reasons both moral and practical, he counseled them not to attack civilian targets:

> You can look pragmatically at whether killing Israelis will help you. In fact, it drives them all together. You're saying that you'll bomb bar mitzvahs and weddings and restaurants. So you're giving them no hope other than to fight back and increase the repression. People need to see: "These guys are only actually attacking the military or the police or government targets. They're not attacking ordinary people." You need more sabotage, which I think they overlooked. So when I traveled with my military representative from Ramallah, I kept saying to him, "God, what gives with these Palestinians? Look at that. Look at this." I was pointing to this bridge, these pylons, this railway system. I said, "There's so many things that could be sabotaged."

As an atheist and a Marxist, Kasrils naturally preferred secular liberation movements. "But if there's not an advanced left-wing movement leading the struggle, do you then discount them because these guys are religious?" Such questions caused schisms among communists for generations. But it was not his impression that the Palestinian groups, including Hamas, were primarily motivated by religion. The basic issue was the theft of Palestinian lands. He supported their right to resistance: "It is no good blaming the victims for resisting their dispossession, just as blacks were not wrong to rise up against white domination in South Africa."

In 2000, the Palestinians rose in what became known as the Second Intifada. The viciousness of the repression under Felicia Langer's old law school classmate Ariel Sharon, with his decades-long record of war crimes, made it clear to Kasrils that the leadership was in no way interested in a solution. The pretense of peace negotiations was abandoned. The settler-colonists expanded under the aegis of a deity Kasrils mocked as the "God of Real Estate." The next year, he authored a petition, "Declaration of

Conscience by South Africans of Jewish Descent," endorsing a boycott on Israel. "For the first and the last time in my life, I spoke as a Jew," he said. He preferred to speak as an individual or a citizen: "The only time I am prepared to talk as somebody of Jewish origin is when I need to show that Jews everywhere stand up. I make it clear that the worst enemy of the Jews is the Zionists." The petition was a turning point. "I suddenly woke up," he said. "It took courage because it was going outside the ANC's comfort zone." Like Mandela, he still kept to the two-state solution and believed that justice for Palestine meant security for Israel—statements that he would come to view as "a dance, that kind of reformist, liberal dance. And it seemed progressive and advanced."

Six years later, with violence against Palestinians continuing unabated, Ronnie wrote a booklet published by the ANC. Titled *David and Goliath: Who Is Who in the Middle East,* it compared the situation in Israel and Palestine to that of South Africa. He described the walls being built around Palestinian communities and the roads reserved only for Jews as "a particular racial extreme never dreamt of by apartheid." He summarized the history, from the ethnic cleansing of the Nakba of 1948 to the campaign of "targeted killings" of Palestinian leaders. He mentioned that the population was now reduced to a mere 12 percent of historic Palestine: "The dispossession is reminiscent of apartheid and its 13% bantustans," the nominally independent "homelands" to which South African blacks were assigned so as to remove their citizenship.

And he cited sources that compared Israelis to Nazis. Like Langer, Arendt, and so many others, he preferred to quote. There were the words of Israel's first minister of agriculture, Aharon Cizling, after a massacre of Palestinians: "I often disagree when the term Nazi was applied to the British…even though the British committed Nazi crimes. But now Jews too have behaved like Nazis and my entire being is shaken." He cited an officer who, in the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv,* advised soldiers to study Nazi tactics: "If our job is to seize a densely packed refugee camp or to take over the Nablus Casbah, we must bring together the lessons of past battles, even

—shocking though this might appear—to analyze how the German army operated in the Warsaw Ghetto."

Kasrils closed with an appeal to South African Jews: "While we know that it is hard for most Jews to accept it emotionally, the state of Israel is in the wrong. Palestine was taken by force from its indigenous people who had resided there for centuries and have as much right to the land as the present day Jews who inhabit Israel." He concluded: "It is possible for diverse peoples to co-exist as we South Africans have demonstrated." For this pamphlet, he was attacked: "A spokesperson of the Zionist Federation tried to smear me by claiming I was not a proper Jew and had most likely not even had a bar mitzvah." He was sued over the mentions of the Nazis—the threat of lawsuits being one of the main reasons so many writers avoided even oblique comparisons. Though he won, the experience made him despair of reaching the Jewish community with moderate language. When he left government, this man, so obviously Jewish in mannerisms and appearance, was persona non grata among many Jews. He took this in stride. "God, I do not care what they think of me," he said.

When the attacks of October 7, 2023, occurred, Kasrils said that he was skeptical about the initial reports, which told of horrific violence against women and children. Claims that were never sourced or verified circulated of murdered Jewish babies hung on clotheslines, of forty babies that were purportedly beheaded, of a baby that had been burned alive in an oven, and of deliberate mass rape, rather than of isolated cases of sexual violence. These assertions were widespread. Some of these accusations, including President Joe Biden's claim that he had "personally seen" images of terrorists beheading children, were eventually, and in some cases immediately, debunked. But—as amplified by Israel's propagandists—their gothic horror left a deep imprint on people across the world and cemented the image of Palestinians as "human animals," in the words of the Israeli defense minister. Such stories paved the way for the killings of Palestinian civilians in a massacre credibly described, including by the government of South Africa, as genocide.

Kasrils acknowledged that atrocities occurred and pointed out that the same happens in every resistance struggle. “You don’t have control over your people as in a regular army,” he explained. He said that the question of how to respond to atrocities was a delicate one. “They should have immediately organized internationally a proper explanation of what it was they had done and where it had gone wrong, and be prepared, as Oliver Tambo would, as our spokesperson, to say, ‘We’re sorry about that. That was not meant.’ ” Once again, he saw similarities between Israel and the apartheid regime. “To claim that Israel is responding to provocation is the cynical old ploy of pinning the blame on the victims. We saw plenty of that in apartheid South Africa.” And to the lies about the attacks, he said, “This is where they’re utterly stupid. They used to come in with those scare tactics, which was the case here as well. It is arrogance, it is racist arrogance that makes them believe they can get away with it all the time.”

After the fall of apartheid, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that documented the regime’s crimes declared that approximately eight thousand people were killed from 1948 to 1990. Though the statistics will never be entirely known, that number was attained in Gaza in just a few weeks. By some reckonings, including that of the medical journal *Lancet,* the total surpassed the toll of the atomic bombings of Japan. Yet such brutality convinced Ronnie that Zionism was desperate and reaching its end. The apartheid regime was never as violent, he pointed out, as shortly before it relinquished power. He saw few reasons for optimism, but he had abandoned the two-state solution in favor of a single secular democratic state, and was encouraged by the protesters across the world, and by the presence of so many Jews among them. “It rekindles my Jewish origin. I suddenly see—and obviously it is not just Jews, but they are kind of the spearhead, like Jewish Voice for Peace—the protests in Grand Central, you know, those events, and you say, It is possible. My God. It is possible.”

12

THE HOLOCAUST ON OUR PHONES

Nan Goldin



The theater of Arles, in Provence, is one of the noblest fragments of the classical world. Built under the reign of Augustus, this stone hemisphere has been showing contemporary art since the Greek tragedies could be described as such, and tonight, in that tradition, the Rencontres d'Arles, the most prestigious photography festival in the world, is honoring Nan Goldin.

The Rencontres are culture—Culture, even, with a capital *C*. And despite her fame, despite all the elegantly dressed people streaming into the theater to see her, Nan Goldin has always been counterculture. She emerged half a century ago from the margins of American bohemia, and ever since has been an icon for everyone who shares her rejection of the vapidity, the cruelty, of so much contemporary culture. As Western culture produces calamity after calamity—from ignoring AIDS in the 1980s to arming the genocide raging in a different corner of the Mediterranean tonight—Goldin's valence has grown stronger, more electric.

Now seventy-one, she has lived more lives than most, and tonight that living has taken a toll. Her leg is bothering her. The last few years have been rough on her. Despite her reputation—a German newspaper described her as a "feared activist"—she is delicate, and the piles of red curls on her head almost overwhelm the woman beneath them.

"I didn't want the prize," she tells me. "It's called Women in Motion. I can hardly walk."

There is pageantry—a man wobbles terrifyingly across a slackline—and bureaucracy—the company that sponsors the prize highlights its commitment to diversity—before Nan Goldin finally comes onto the ancient proscenium.

"They're going to regret giving me this prize," she says, a bit nervously. "Just you wait."

She shows some of her renowned images of the drag queens and transgender people she lived with as a young woman. She shows the photographer David Armstrong, whom she met at school. They were fourteen. Nan introduced him to the word "gay"; he introduced her to the

queens. “He wasn’t a queen himself, but he was so androgynous and beautiful that men would divorce their wives when they saw him.” She has just done a sale of prints to support the trans people who are under attack by the Trump administration. “There’s a tip line to the FBI if you know of a doctor who’s working with kids in transgender health,” she says. “There are eight hundred bills against the transgender community.” She refers to a common line about her, which, to gay people, always sounds condescending. “People talk about my empathy for the gay community. It was my community.”

Applause.

She clarifies: “I’m queer.”

Another picture: “This is 1972, when it was actually illegal to go out during the day as a trans person. One friend of mine got arrested for impersonating a female, and it was actually a woman.”

She shows a recent work called *Memory Lost,* a visual diary of the time she mislaid to opioid addiction. The genre is indescribable, somewhere between cinema and photography. When she was young, she showed her pictures in a Kodak slide carousel in various venues in New York, and chose slides because she didn’t need a darkroom to produce them. The audience, at first, was her friends. Her friends were also her subjects. Popular in postwar America for showing beach holidays and children’s birthday parties, the slideshow was a decidedly suburban form, but her subjects were not suburban. They were the people who had rejected the suburbs or been rejected by them, people who, rejecting their parents’ own American dream, returned to the scuzzy cities that their parents, like Goldin’s own, had wanted to flee.

In a Nan Goldin slideshow, images reflect. Gestures echo, overlap. “It’s not about photography,” she says. “It’s about editing.” Seen on their own, the photographs can be hard to read—until you understand that nothing stands on its own, that everything is *in relation*.

In relation to the artist: “These are the people I lived with and loved deeply.”

In relation to each other: Like members of a community, the photographs come alive through their proximity to others.

In relation to the tradition: photographs of contemporary life next to old paintings that reveal the classical features of people now, and that usher those old paintings into the present day.

A woman's face, and then a Modigliani.

A girl glancing over her shoulder like a figure in a Bronzino.

A man looking at another man with the same eyes with which a friend, five centuries dead, gazed at Raphael.

Sometimes torn or overexposed, the images are raggedy, blurred, even when printed in expensive books. The colors are fiery orange, harsh yellow, crepuscular blue. Saints and goddesses and animals look at us—and aren't particularly impressed. Empty places, empty spaces: a room someone just walked out of; a bed from which someone has vanished, and won't be coming back to. Goldin's work is filled with the missing—with cemeteries, with ghosts. It is a glance down a darkened street, a field from the speeding train, a drunken face brushing past a mirror. Beautiful people, but not *the* beautiful people. The people Goldin photographs are the people who were never quite sure what to do with their faces.

"To win an award at this point in the world," she says, not finishing the sentence. "I'm not sure they're going to be happy." *Memory Lost,* the work about opioid addiction, is not the reason she's worried.

"Stick around," she says. "I have a surprise."

Nervous laughter runs through the amphitheater.

"We need some silence."

The crowd applauds when the word "Gaza" emerges on the screen. Then, in this antique amphitheater, a succession of images appear.

Two girls playing in a colorful bedroom.

A cook making pizzas.

A large supermarket.

A street vendor selling fruit.

A seaside city packed with tall buildings.

Children playing in a park.
Children swimming in a fountain.

(There is no sound. The colors are bright, saturated. The trees are bright green. The sea is bright blue. The umbrellas are bright red. The sunset over the water is extravagantly orange.)

Kids flying handmade kites along the beach.
A boy on an improvised playground.
A man playing with three dogs on the beach. One dog's forefeet are injured. He limps, but his tail is wagging happily.
A group called the Sulala Animal Rescue feeding strays.
Kids on a swing.
A child's birthday party: cake, candles, a proud father.
Then: A group of young people, dressed like regular city dwellers out for a stroll in the park, stand on a sandy flat. They are watching smoke rise from the densely populated city.

(It is a perfect summer night in Provence. There is a pleasant breeze. The wind blowing across the gigantic screen makes it billow, giving the images an added level of motion, of aliveness—and clearing the smoke from the forest fires, fueled by global warming, that are raging in Marseille and in Narbonne, just out of sight, on either side of Arles.)

A group of children walk down a corridor in a warehouse packed with tents.
A tower of flame rises from a neighborhood.
A man shakes his phone, hands trembling uncontrollably, collapsing with tears. A caption: "He waits for his friend, trying to contact him after the house is destroyed and turned into rubble."
As people mill about a ravaged neighborhood, a great explosion shakes the area just behind them.

More explosions.
An entire street seems to collapse as terrified people flee.
A street after these strikes, buildings mutilated, like rotting dead bodies.
A smiling Red Crescent worker is comforting a shaking little girl. The caption: “Children afraid to cross what the army says is a safe corridor.”
A column of refugees along the beach: “A million Palestinians returning to their destroyed homes and towns in the north of Gaza.”
A ghost town of blackened buildings.

(The theater is silent. The wind blows.)

A group walks as airplanes and missiles whiz over their heads. The children cover their ears and sob.
A camp of tents at night.
Homes in flames.
A darkened neighborhood, lit up by the light of bombs.
Bombs falling on a city like fireworks.
“Israeli warplanes bombed a house in Rafah, southern Gaza.”
Heaps of corpses in body bags.
A man being buried with a press vest and a Palestinian scarf as other journalists, identifiable from the same vests, pray.
“Israel’s war on Gaza has killed 232 journalists—an average of 13 per month.” —Al Jazeera, April 2025.
Bodies covered with shrouds in a mosque.
A little boy in a yellow T-shirt, four or five years old, kisses a foot wrapped in a body bag.
A pretty young woman with dark rings under her eyes says, “When they asked me, ‘Mom, does it hurt when we get bombarded? Do we…’ ” She pauses and wipes away tears. “ ‘Do we feel the pain or do we just die at once?’ And I have to explain to them, ‘No,

don’t worry. It’s not going to hurt.’ Their father is like, ‘Don’t worry, it just goes “whoosh” one time and that’s it.’ ”

“More than 50,000 children reportedly killed or injured in the Gaza Strip.” —statement from UNICEF, May 2025.

A tweet from @hiddenpalestine: “American security contractors fire live rounds and stun grenades at Palestinians, not in combat zones, but at food distribution centers in Gaza.” Subtitle: “I think you hit one! Hell yeah boy!” Terrified, starving people, surrounded by cages, press their bodies to the ground.

People flee through a dusty wasteland ringed with barbed wire.

A headline from Al Jazeera: “Drugs Found in Flour Bags Distributed by US-Israeli Aid Centres in Gaza: Media Office.” A hand shows the pills: OxyContin.

(Everyone who knows Goldin’s work knows that OxyContin almost killed her when she was prescribed it as a painkiller for a routine medical condition. Since the drug was introduced, nearly a million people have died of opioid-related overdoses in the United States.)

“A total of 18,741 children in Gaza have been hospitalized for acute malnutrition since the beginning of the year.” —statement from the UN, June 2025.

A girl in a red sweater: “My soul is tired of this life. My soul is tired.” She is no more than five. “I am scared, I am scared, I am scared. It’s cold, cold, cold. My soul is sick of this. It is sick of this. Look. We are tired of this darkness.”

A picture of a bustling street in prewar Gaza, lined with palm trees and tall buildings.

The same street, reduced to a lifeless ruin.

Another street, where piles of rubble loom over tiny-looking people.

Hundreds of people in a hellscape that was a city.

A satellite photo of green agricultural lands in June 2022.

That same area, lifeless as the moon. May 2024.

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If Goldin's early slideshows took viewers into unfamiliar territory, this film is uncanny because it shows a story that has become so familiar, so intimate, to billions across the world. What feels unfamiliar, tonight, on a breezy summer evening, is seeing it in public, together. Over the last two years, we have been watching this privately, in our homes, in our beds, when we are making dinner, when we are on the subway.

For so many of us, Gaza is the first thing we see in the morning and the last thing we see at night—and we have witnessed much worse than the film we have just seen, shocking atrocity images like something from an age of medieval barbarism. There was a longer version that included these images, but Goldin decided to remove them. She knows that we have seen them. "It's the Holocaust on our phones," she says.

At the end of the film, it feels uncomfortable, indeed almost obscene, to clap. The audience is on edge when Goldin sits down to speak with the French writer Édouard Louis. He begins by describing one of the great themes in the history of photography: the idea that sympathy can be enlarged by showing images from other places and other experiences. "We deliver information, therefore we change the world," he says. "But we are wrong."

As he recites a sample of the crimes we have been seeing on our phones, a Zionist heckler starts yelling.

Goldin stands from her chair.

People boo the heckler.

Chants erupt.

"Free Gaza. Free, free Palestine."

Louis and Goldin let it go on for a while. Then, acknowledging the heckler, she says, "Horrible things happened on October 7. It's true. One thousand three hundred Israeli civilians were killed. Now seventy-five thousand Palestinians have been killed. Whose life matters? Whose lives matter?"

The crowd cheers.

“Has there not been enough revenge?” As the woman continues to screech, Goldin continues. “From the beginning it’s been a land grab.” The shouting continues. “It’s a way to extinguish a whole people. Extermination of a whole people. For their land. This is the reality.”

She goes on: “I’m sorry, but Israel is a culture of victimization as a weapon.”

More applause.

“They are replicating what was done to them. They are committing a genocide. They are victimizing…Say what?” she addresses the heckler, who is still shouting. “Did you know that OxyContin is in the flour? It’s crushed in the flour that’s given to innocent people who are starving! Drugs in the flour. How much more evil can you be? Do you know that? Do people know about that?”

The crowd erupts: “Free, free Palestine!”

She insists: “It’s a war on children.”

The heckler goes hysterical as the entire audience, united, demands that she shut up.

So much of the exchange is predictable. It is the same playbook Zionists have used for a century. There is the overwrought emotionalism; the shouting people down; the disrespect for dissenters, including (especially) when those dissenters are prominent Jews.

This is boilerplate. What is new—what shoots a ray of hope through the night—is the unanimity of the audience. In the last two years, thanks in large part to the pictures on our phones, an evolution has occurred—even, one feels tonight, a revolution. Long before the appearance of the mobile phones that made it possible to scroll through a holocaust, Goldin’s slideshows derived their power from accumulation: click, click, click. These moments added up, often unconsciously, but in the same way that a reader soon forgets the individual details and dialogues and descriptions that provide the backdrop to the story in a novel, those details, those individual images, make our understanding of the broader story possible. In Goldin’s work as in the pictures on our phones, the aggregate lends images like these their magnetism.

Even a few months before, this unanimity had not been the case. It had certainly not been the case more than half a century before, when Goldin discovered a cache of photos of Palestine.

Born in Washington, D.C., in 1953, she grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, the kind of prim suburb that one associates with the prosperity—and the conformity—of postwar America. Silver Spring was a step up for her parents. Her grandparents had fled Eastern Europe and landed in Boston, where her grandfather, born in Bucharest, worked in a box factory: He spent twenty-five years shoveling coal into a furnace. Her father, born Hyman Goldenstein, got into Harvard at a time when there were strict quotas limiting Jews—and this was the most important fact in his life. "The first word I learned was 'Harvard,' " she says. "I wanted to put it on his gravestone. When he had to go to the assisted living community, he asked how many people there had been to Harvard." Hyman shortened his surname and became a pioneer of public broadcasting, then a professor at Boston University. But, he lamented later in life, "in the more fundamental areas of education, which I can describe only imperfectly as understanding self, building character, fashioning moral values, finding meaning, Harvard left me untouched." This was a reference to the great tragedy of the family's life, the suicide of Nan's older sister, Barbara. Nan was eleven; Barbara was eighteen. In one of her works, Nan returned to the railroad tracks Barbara lay down on. In her pictures of the suburban station, the tracks are peaceful in the green trees—and then are shot through with blinding orange, the sun like an explosion.

Nan no longer wanted to stay home. In *The New York Times,* she saw an ad for a school in Connecticut, the Byton School. It was run by gay people, though this was not mentioned in the ad in the *Times.* "My boyfriend, the black cook, was married to the director," she said. That was how, when she was fourteen and met David Armstrong at another school, she knew the word "gay." He found it liberating. Byton was "an experimental 'hippie' school," she said. "We didn't have classes very often. My diploma was signed by a little kid and the ink ran." Instead of studying, Nan and David and their friends spent most of their time at the movies, where she

discovered filmmakers like Antonioni and Jack Smith. She dated guys who would have horrified her parents, including, when she was seventeen, a one-eyed "Cyclops monster" who had been in prison in Texas. "He was tall and hideous but he got us dope." This man brought her a book.

Zionism and Peace was assembled by a Syrian named Mahmoud Tarjouman in Damascus in 1968. Assembled, rather than published—seemingly cobbled together on a kitchen table, with a text of a few hundred words—*Zionism and Peace* is an indictment of Israeli terror: grainy, black-and-white, badly printed photographs above concise captions.

"Can Jerusalem forget the zionists?" beneath a picture of the ravaged city.

"I have lost everything," beneath a picture of a woman standing in the ruins of her town.

"How would you feel if that child was your own?" beneath a picture of a small child with a sawn-off leg.

"What crime this child, victim of Israeli aggression, has committed?" beneath a picture of a small corpse lying on the street.

"Victimes of Napalm, The Internationally prohibited bomb," beside two destroyed bodies.

"Who is the Slayer? Who…The Victim? Speak!!" beside a picture of an old man with his eyes blown out.

"Can the World right the wrongs committed by Israel?" beneath four pictures of maimed amputees.

"Finally, they found their loved ones," beside a photograph of three people searching through a pile of corpses.

"Hitler's crimes were no worse," beside three photographs of bodies heaped up in the open air.

It is a series of images—a slideshow—and taken together, the images made an overwhelming impression on seventeen-year-old Nan. It is easy to see why. The book is still moving, still enraging, today. For fifty years, she thought of the book, whose title she had forgotten, and it was not until 2024 that an archivist found her a copy; it cost her $700. The book has grown even more resonant because nearly sixty years later we know that the

crimes it documents would go unpunished, and grow steadily worse; because we know that the victims would not only be exiled and murdered but defamed, for good measure, as terrorists; because we see how dramatically this modest book contrasts with the slick Israeli propaganda from the same time—and because we see how similar these pictures are to the pictures we are seeing on our phones.

"I turned against Zionism right there and then," she says. "I refused ever to go to Israel. I refused to let my work go. I refused to let my retrospective go." This resolution made her something of a pariah. Her parents were proud to be Jewish—"Whenever I mentioned a new friend, they always said, 'Are they Jewish?' "—and occasional synagogue goers, but Nan found the whole thing a bore. "Liberal Judaism was just fucking corny," she said. "There was nothing of substance." Though her siblings had bar mitzvahs, Nan was allowed to take pottery class instead. Her parents' pride in their heritage extended to a vague pride in Israel—part of the post-1948 consensus among liberal middle-class American Jews, a consensus that isolated Nan from the Jewish community. "I didn't know other Jews who were anti-Zionist," she says. "I went to some PLO meetings in the eighties, by myself. There was no internet: You just heard about these things and went."

She had never aspired to the kind of Jewish society that seemed so desirable for her parents, the children of poor immigrants. She gravitated toward artists and misfits, drag queens and junkies, and from these encounters, in these communities, she started making her art. From the start, her photography was democratic, down-to-earth: She got the pictures developed at the drugstore and then showed them to her subjects. "The queens would make piles of all the pictures of them, and compete for who had the biggest pile," she remembered. "And I learned early what it meant to let people have their own edit. Because they would tear up pictures that they didn't like. And that started my lifelong commitment to letting people see their own pictures, and have a say in how they're shown." Her approach was new: "I was always photographing them to show them how beautiful

they were. Most of the photographers in the world who were photographing trans people were photographing them as freaks."

Some of these photographs, though not the photos of trans people, made it into a slideshow called *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. She began making it in 1981 and was still tinkering with it forty years later. "I can't show the *Ballad* without changing it, even if only a little," she says. It is about seven hundred images, give or take; give or take, about forty-five minutes long. It is remarkable for its intimacy. "The diary I let people read," she once said. "The diary is my form of control over my life. It allows me to obsessively record every detail. It enables me to remember." There she is with black eyes and puffy curly hair, "confiding in us," Vince Aletti has written, "drawing us close, teasing, whispering, bursting into laughter, choking up—telling us more than we might want to know, showing us more than we're comfortable seeing." There is a famous picture of Nan with a black eye, from a man who beat her up so badly that she almost went blind.

(Afterward, he borrowed her lipstick to write the words "Jewish American Princess" on the mirror.)

The Ballad of Sexual Dependency turned Goldin into a figure who symbolized for rebellious young people in the 1980s what figures like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac had symbolized for rebellious young people in the 1950s. But as *The Ballad* was propelling her career, she was battling addiction to cocaine and heroin. "In the process of withdrawal from addiction I suffered a kind of amnesia, a profound loss of identity," she wrote. "During early recovery I picked up my camera again. Through my work I began to reconstruct myself, to fit back into my own skin. I discovered the light after years in the dark." Once she got clean, she wanted to reconnect with the friends she had lost touch with "during my last few years of isolation and destruction." But her world was dying: Many of its denizens were gay men or drug users, the two groups immediately affected by a disease, AIDS, first reported in the United States in June 1981. Her response was a show, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing,* which opened in November 1989. It included work by twenty-three artists. The show was controversial at a time when gay people were under attack and censorship

was on the increase. Goldin wanted "to prove that a gay aesthetic continues to flourish. To prove that sex = death is a false equation. To show that homoeroticism cannot be disappeared." In an essay about the show, Sarah Schulman, herself a distinguished Jewish opponent of Zionism, wrote, "Looking back, it is hard to understand how radical this concept was, to not want to disappear. 'We' just wanted to stay."

The show became a landmark. But not for another twenty-five years did Goldin discover the cause that would make her the most prominent artist-activist of her generation. The occasion was minor. In 2014, she developed tendinitis in her left wrist. A doctor prescribed her a painkiller that was marketed as abuse- and addiction-proof. Given her previous struggle with heroin, she was wary of the opioid OxyContin, "but I thought I could handle it." She was right to be wary: For three years, she found herself sucked into "the darkest place you can ever visit," opioid addiction, and nearly died before she finally managed to check into rehab. Later, she read an article about the company that made the drug, Purdue Pharma, and the staggeringly rich Jewish family, the Sacklers, who owned it. Every museum, it seemed, had a Sackler Gallery, honoring a family that knew of the dangers of a drug that, by the time Nan sought treatment, was killing 115 Americans *per day*. In January 2018, she published a series of photographs in *Artforum* showing the paraphernalia of her OxyContin use. A couple of months later, she and a group trickled into the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and made their way to the Sackler Wing. There, in the glass pavilion housing the ancient Egyptian Temple of Dendur, Goldin and her group threw empty orange prescription bottles into the reflecting pool surrounding the temple. They called on the museum to refuse further donations from the family and insisted that the Sacklers fund the kind of treatment that nearly no one could afford. (Her own cost $2,000 a day.) The group organized a protest at the Guggenheim that involved throwing thousands of prescription-style flyers into the round atrium, a photogenic protest seen across the world. Though the Sacklers resisted, their name was tainted and eventually started being hacked off the prestigious walls that it had once adorned.

Goldin's name, meanwhile, was better known than ever. In 2021, Patrick Radden Keefe—the author of the *New Yorker* article that she had read about the Sacklers—published a book, *Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty,* that featured her. There were television series about the opioid crisis and her role in fighting it—and then, in 2022, *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed,* a film by Laura Poitras about her life and work.

Once, Nan Goldin had haunted the margins: the ratty lofts, the opium dens. Now she was beloved, mainstream—an "icon," a "national treasure." As she neared seventy, she could have coasted on that reputation for the rest of her life. But three and a half weeks after her seventieth birthday, Hamas launched its attack on Israel. In previous years, Israel had tried to ignore the Palestinian problem, pursuing relations with Arab countries while locking the Palestinians into large open-air prisons like the Gaza Strip. Israel occasionally burst into these ghettos in order to massacre people—they called these incursions "mowing the lawn"—and in 2023, *before* October 7, Israel had killed more than two hundred Palestinians. Jabotinsky's Iron Wall theory—that violence would force the Palestinians to surrender or leave—had been tried, decade after decade after decade. The American writer Nathan Thrall reflects that, up to a point, the Iron Wall had succeeded. Forcing the Palestinians to relinquish a claim to 78 percent of their homeland, as Arafat had done at Oslo, might have been reckoned a success for Zionism: the compromise that Jabotinsky believed would eventually come. What Jabotinsky had not reckoned with, however, was that Zionism did not brook compromise. It did not want a normal state with borders guaranteed, like those of other states, by treaty. It did not want part of the land, or to live peacefully alongside the indigenous people: As settler-colonial theory would later establish, it wanted *all* of the land, and it sought to *destroy* the indigenous people. Violence and mayhem were all Zionism had ever known, and it did not have the moral or intellectual means to develop an alternative. To anyone who had seen the pictures that Nan saw as a teenager, it was obvious that Israel would seek bloody revenge for its humiliation on October 7. Anyone who had not understood where this would lead had only to listen to the Israeli officials' announcements: They

proclaimed loudly their determination to commit ethnic cleansing and genocide. In the West, one was not allowed to notice.

It was in this context that Goldin, along with eight thousand other prominent cultural figures, signed a letter published in *Artforum* on October 19. "We, the undersigned, reject violence against all civilians, regardless of their identity, and we call for ending the root cause of violence: oppression, and the occupation," the letter read. "We ask arts organizations to show solidarity with cultural workers and call on our governments to demand an immediate ceasefire and the opening of Gaza's crossings to allow humanitarian aid to enter unhindered." Though carefully phrased, the letter appeared amid a moral panic about antisemitism, which had been generously redefined to include virtually all opposition to any policy carried out by the Israeli state. And though many of its most prominent signers were Jewish, the letter was vigorously denounced for failing to "condemn Hamas," a boilerplate phrase that soon became required in every public statement in support of Palestinian rights. It wasn't long before the phones started ringing.

Goldin got nervous. Four days later, she texted the novelist Rachel Kushner. "She said she'd been getting absolutely piled on with warnings that her prices would drop to nothing and she'd have no career and was alienating the art world," Kushner explained. Goldin was distraught, Kushner said. "Of course, she has her beliefs and principles, but it was a given that this would have very serious practical implications." They ended the conversation without having made up their minds. The next day, Kushner saw Goldin "speaking about Gaza on social media and about everywhere else. She had been warned loudly it was going to be career suicide. And then almost immediately she doubled down. She started speaking out and never stopped. She clearly went, Fuck it."

David Velasco, the editor of *Artforum,* in whose first issue as editor Goldin had launched her campaign against the Sacklers, saw Zionists "get together and decide which artists they would essentially torture." According to Goldin, these people coordinated their attacks on a WhatsApp chain. "Collectors, gallerists, reporters, art collectors, art buyers," she said. "They

made a vow to destroy us." She said the group included the Israeli gallerist Amalia Dayan, granddaughter of the war criminal Moshe Dayan, who had used biological warfare to poison the wells of Palestinian villages in 1948 and who was one of the most rabid advocates of the Iron Wall. ("You shall continue to live like dogs," he said of the Palestinians.) Velasco recalled that Yana Peel, the director of the "culture" fund at Chanel, made calls, too. Previously ousted as director of the Serpentine Galleries in London when her family's investments in the Israeli spyware company Pegasus were exposed, Peel threatened to pull Chanel's advertising. Velasco got emails from people he had never heard of—and then, on October 26, he was fired. It was "a head on a pike, standing as a warning to other art workers who might dare to criticize Israel," said the art historian Claire Bishop. "There is a before and there is an after in the art world," said the art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson. "That is how stark the discourse feels after the magazine fired David."

"I have never lived through a more chilling period," Goldin said. On a personal level, she seemed fine. She had kept up her resolution to speak out, not to be silenced by Zionists. In November, she called off a project for *The New York Times* in protest of its "complicity with Israel." In December, *ArtReview* placed her in the number one spot on its list of the most influential people in the contemporary art world and praised her for "sticking to her guns despite pressure from collectors, galleries and institutions." But there was a cost. "Before October 7, I had never sold so well in my life," she said. "I thought I was going to be rich for the rest of my life. Afterwards, my market was dead." She worried about her studio employees: Critical acclaim and a respected name did not translate into making payroll. Still, she was in the middle of a career-spanning retrospective scheduled for four major European cities. *This Will Not End Well* had opened in Stockholm in October 2022 and traveled to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam on the day of the Hamas attacks. The next stop was Berlin, at the Neue Nationalgalerie, where it would open on November 23, 2024.

The climate of censorship in Germany had grown increasingly unhinged following the attacks. It extended to Jews like the Russian American writer M. Gessen, who was to receive the Hannah Arendt Prize in Bremen. Rather than receiving it in a grand ceremony in City Hall as other winners had, Gessen received the award in tiny room F61: Gessen had violated a *Sprachregelung* by comparing Gaza to the Warsaw Ghetto. The Jewish South African artist Candice Breitz was accused of signing a letter endorsing a boycott of Israel that she had not, in fact, signed, and had an exhibition about sex workers in Cape Town—a show that had nothing to do with Palestine—canceled at the Saarland Museum. The American artist Laurie Anderson resigned from a teaching position in Essen: Together with Goldin, she had signed a letter in 2021 that, the Folkwang University of the Arts announced, "takes up boycott demands from the anti-Israel BDS movement," though neither the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions movement nor any kind of boycott was mentioned. The Palestinian writer Adania Shibli was disinvited from an event honoring her at the Frankfurt Book Fair. The entire selection committee for Documenta, Germany's most important contemporary art show, quit, writing, "We do not believe that there is a space in Germany for an open exchange of ideas." The American writer Nathan Thrall had an event at the Union International Club of Frankfurt canceled due to Zionist pressure. A day after it was meant to take place, he won the Pulitzer Prize for *A Day in the Life of Abed Salama*. At the Berlin Film Festival, the Israeli-Palestinian team of Yuval Abraham and Basel Adra won the prize for best documentary for *No Other Land,* about Israel's ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. The minister of culture, Claudia Roth, applauded—later clarifying that she was, in fact, only clapping for the Israeli.

The American writer Susan Neiman called this "philosemitic McCarthyism." Although Germany was often praised for having put its dark past behind it, its cultural leaders revealed that they had, instead, derived a specific lesson from that past. This was not a duty to oppose racism and genocide, but a duty to support the Israeli state in even the most extreme of all circumstances: of an ongoing genocide. Germany no longer suffered, as

previous generations had, from collective guilt. It suffered instead from collective guiltlessness. German media, politicians, and cultural bureaucrats seemed to agree that being German meant having internalized the "lessons of the Holocaust" so deeply that they were immune to racism: so deeply that the descendants of Nazis could presume to censor and cancel the descendants of Jewish victims of the Nazis. This right had accrued to them not *despite* their Nazi background but *because* of it. This bizarre inversion allowed a discussion about "imported antisemitism"—meaning among people of Muslim background—to flourish unironically, as if the land of Hitler had needed to import antisemitism. All Western countries had politicians, businesses, and newspapers complicit in the genocide, but Germany's elite outdid itself in the slavishness of its collaboration. Among other reasons, this was curious because it did not reflect public opinion. Polls showed that Germans were as shocked by the genocide as people everywhere else.

In this context, *This Will Not End Well* arrived at the Neue Nationalgalerie.

Goldin knew Germany. She had spent years in Berlin. She was friendly with many of the canceled artists. She knew the director, Klaus Biesenbach, though much more slightly than he would imply. ("He said we were family," she said. "We hung out a few times in the early nineties.") And she dreaded the opening. The alarm bells had started ringing a year in advance, when the museum began making a series of unheard-of demands, including a contract trying to limit the content of her speech. "I just kept hoping they would cancel," Goldin said. There were comical incidents during the discussions, as when Biesenbach's blond German assistant started to sob during a Zoom call. "I could never say anything against Israel!" she said, weeping. The museum kept making provocative gestures. Goldin had inserted a slide at the end of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* expressing solidarity with Palestine and Lebanon. In perhaps the only friendly piece that appeared in the German press, by Hanno Hauenstein in the *Frankfurter Rundschau,* she explained that the museum wanted the slide to mention Israeli victims as well as Palestinian and Lebanese victims. She agreed, but

this did not seem to make a difference. She sent an email to Biesenbach saying, “You may not have used the word censor, but you used coercion.” She was told that her slide would jeopardize the museum’s funding. But even after she agreed to mention Israel, the museum refused to allow her to use the slide. “In what world are these two incidents not coercion?” she wrote to Biesenbach. “Why would I ever ask a museum if it’s okay to update my own work?” After consulting high-level bureaucrats at the Ministry of Culture, the museum finally backed down.

(In Milan, the next stop for the retrospective, there was no curatorial or political interference. The film on Gaza that had premiered at Arles was shown on a loop without controversy and became an integral part of the installation.)

Biesenbach then organized a symposium without consulting the artist. This conference was meant to display “alternative viewpoints,” which of course meant Zionist viewpoints. Goldin had no idea it was happening until a friend sent her a press release. The conference was meant to insulate the museum’s leadership from blowback. It amounted, in practice, to an insult to an artist at her own retrospective: an unprecedented breach of protocol. But beyond the bad manners, it was a textbook case of what in the Palestinian movement is known as normalization. This means presenting the occupation as having “two sides”—as a “conflict” or a “war”—rather than as a colonial occupation. Normalization often appears in the guise of “dialogue.” It reinforces the idea, popular among Western liberals, that there are two equal parties, as in a war between states. It obscures the correct understanding, which is that there is an occupier and a people under occupation.

“Klaus hired the biggest bodyguards I have ever seen,” said Andrew Heyward, her representative at her gallery, Gagosian. “They were militarizing the museum and setting it up for this confrontation.”

When the artist took the stage, she asked the audience to remain silent for four full minutes.

“The four minutes you spent standing in silence represents one hundredth of a second for each of the 44,757 people killed in Palestine by

Israeli forces," she explained. "Were you uncomfortable? I hope so."

She referred to the museum's attempt to police her.

"The museum has kept its promise to allow me to talk, and I thank them, but they claim that my activism and my art are separate, even though that has never been the case."

Her refrain—"Are you listening, Germany?" "Are you afraid to hear this, Germany?"—took direct aim at the faux moralism that allowed censorship to be institutionalized in the guise of protecting Jews. She mentioned the cancellation of artists, writers, and teachers, "some for something as banal as a like on Instagram. Many of them Palestinian, 20 percent of them Jews." And she said, "Criticism of Israel has been conflated with antisemitism. Anti-Zionism has nothing to do with antisemitism. This is a false equivalency used to maintain the occupation of Palestine and to suppress those who speak out."

It was a powerful speech, as much for the place and time as for the sentiments she expressed, and could only have been deemed "controversial" by those who had chosen to ignore the images on their phones.

Biesenbach took the stage.

He mouthed clichés:

"We agree to disagree"—without saying what he disagreed with.

"Israel's right to exist"—not, of course, Palestine's.

The crowd booed.

A bit later, he read his speech a second time, for the cameras.

("That speech was Klaus's audition for the directorship of MoMA," one art-world eminence said with a laugh. "As if.")

If anyone thought that Germany's toxic political climate forced him to behave this way—the Neue Nationalgalerie was, after all, a state institution, dependent on funding from a government that was enthusiastically funneling weapons to Israel during the genocide—Biesenbach made his views clear in a lachrymose interview with *Der Spiegel*. The interviewers, Ulrike Knöfel and Philipp Oehmke, threw softballs. Biesenbach's tone of victimization, his insistence on German rectitude, and his contempt for anyone speaking out in opposition perfectly capture the mood of Germany's

cultural and media elite. Biesenbach keeps the focus firmly on himself. He is speaking, he says, "as a person who, at age nineteen, went to a kibbutz." He drops names—"From this telephone I can call Bruce Nauman or Jasper Johns"—and complains that Goldin was mean. "A week later there was an evening event at the Metropolitan Museum to which we were both invited. We sat two tables away. At least a dozen people came up to me. They had read my speech. Some of these people cried and embraced me." Goldin, however, ignored him. "I would never have thought that Nan is so cold." Was he angry at her treatment? the interviewers ask. "Not angry. I felt empathy and vulnerability."

This empathy did not extend to the extraordinary onslaught to which Goldin was subjected in his country. Like the attacks on Hannah Arendt, this barrage formed an exemplary chapter in the history of Zionism. But whereas the attacks on Arendt came from Jews, the attacks on Goldin came from Germans—in the name of Jews. The attacks on Arendt were directed by the Israeli prime minister. The attacks on Goldin arose spontaneously from journalists doing the bidding of politicians—politicians who, again spontaneously, were doing the bidding of Zionism. Like Friedrich Merz—the federal chancellor who praised Israel for doing the *Drecksarbeit,* the dirty work, on behalf of the West—some of these politicians were direct linear descendants of Nazis. That this near unanimity was achieved without visible coercion might have been reckoned a success for Zionism, validating its approach of ignoring public opinion in favor of cultivating the powerful. It might be reckoned an even greater success if one recalls that these attacks came at a time when Israel was committing a genocide.

The day after the opening, Claudia Roth—the minister who had applauded only the Israeli and not the Palestinian—condemned Nan Goldin "in the strongest terms." The head of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation described her speech as "insufferable" and "harmful." Dozens of journalists took the cue. What emerges from a perusal of a thick pile of their articles is a view that art ought to be deferential—an ornament to power and never a challenge to it—and that the artist must be polite, decorous, and grateful for any crumbs that power deigns to throw her. This

was the society that the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei described as "governed by regulations, yet lacking individual moral judgment," when he explained why he had left Germany.

> Here, at a deserted street, people stop dutifully at a red light. Not a car in sight. This, I once thought, is the mark of a highly evolved society.
>
> At the heart of bureaucracy lies a collective endorsement of power's legitimacy, and therefore, individuals surrender their moral judgment—or perhaps never developed one. They abandon challenge. They relinquish dispute.

Ai Weiwei's article, commissioned by *Zeit Magazin,* was itself censored. And the invective against Goldin reveals that a significant portion of the German cultural elite remained every bit as deferential to authority as it had ever been. It also reveals a journalistic class that could not conceive of an artist as a disrupter—much less as a prophet. Another irony, because it was as a disrupter, as a prophet, that Goldin had become a great artist.

In *Die Welt,* Cornelius Tittel denounced "without question the saddest, most unworthy, and shameful moment in the 56-year history of the Neue Nationalgalerie." Goldin had "transformed [the museum] into a place of hatred," wrote Stefan Trinks in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. "The artist created a scandal with her opening speech and tricked the host, the museum director Klaus Biesenbach." By applauding Biesenbach's courage "in giving [Goldin] the possibility of delivering a speech that was expected to be controversial," Nicola Kuhn, in the *Tagesspiegel,* implicitly endorsed the idea that museums might forbid artists to speak. "The artist thanked the museum badly," Kuhn wrote. "You might say: Nan Goldin flunked the test. For her, all that matters is self-promotion." This was the only possible motive. "Nan Goldin simply abused her art," wrote Marcus Woeller in *Die Welt,* "in order to get herself a stage as an activist." Accusations of antisemitism were not long in coming. Tittel said that Goldin had turned the museum into an " 'unsafe space' for our Jewish fellow citizens." In an

article in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* called “Jews as Useful Idiots of Jew Haters?,” Michael Wolffsohn pointed out that the museum was near the Holocaust memorial, and that the opening took place a few days after the anniversary of Kristallnacht. “In Auschwitz too all Jews were alike,” he said.

Then, referring to Goldin, he added, “Even, at the end, the Jewish kapos.”

None attempted to contend with the assertions Goldin made in her speech, even if to refute them. When described at all, those claims were mocked with quotation marks. “She compared the military actions of the country in Gaza and Lebanon with ‘pogroms’ and called it a ‘genocide,’ ” wrote Peter Richter in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* and in *Die Welt* Woeller wrote, “It is a ‘total eradication of the conditions for life of an entire population,’ an ‘ethnic cleansing,’ a ‘land grab.’ ” During “her clichéd anti-Israeli speech,” Andreas Kilb of *FAZ* wrote, Goldin made the “categorical statement that anti-Zionism could not be antisemitic.”

She was not stating facts; she was advancing a “narrative.” In the *Tagesspiegel,* Kuhn wrote that “Goldin uses the narrative of the censorship of artists,” as if the incidents to which Goldin was referring—reported across the world—were one woman’s fantasy. She was—the word recurs—“one-sided.” The *Artforum* letter was *einseitig,* according to Woeller; Sandra Kegel in *FAZ* mentioned the *Einseitigkeit* in Goldin’s speech, Hermann Parzinger of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation denounced her *Einseitigkeit,* and so did a Berlin senator named Joe Chialo. Kilb allowed Goldin her opinions, “even when they are factually false and immoral,” but described neither those opinions nor what was false and immoral about them. There was no point. Goldin was “the world champion of simple thinking,” wrote Roman Bucheli of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*—comparable, in this sense, to Donald Trump.

Some Germans might have paused before attacking a Jewish artist for denouncing a genocide. (“The idea that descendants of Nazis would tell me I’m antisemitic is just outrageous to me,” Goldin said.) Instead, there was an emphasis on manners, on decorum, on politeness. Woeller of *Die Welt*

mentioned her “red hair, loud voice”—she does not, in fact, have a loud voice—in contrast to the politeness at the symposium that was arranged without her knowledge. There, people “spoke quietly, and nobody—with a few exceptions—interrupts” (Peter Richter, *Süddeutsche*); and “all sides would have a chance to speak” (Andreas Kilb, *FAZ*); and there was not only “empathy in a single direction” (Julia Encke, *FAZ*); and people wanted “to break out of the logic of a binary combat culture” (Tobias Timm, *Die Zeit*) and “the logic of boycott and counterboycott” (Jakob Hayner, *Welt*); and there were “hardly any argumentative positions, few contrasts, a seated audience” (Sophie Jung, *Tageszeitung*); and there was room for an Israeli director, Sharon On, to regret that the genocide had led to “social exclusion and professional boycotts,” and to wonder how it was possible “that Zionism suddenly had become a dirty word.”

“I didn’t give a fuck,” Goldin said. “At my age, I only care what people I respect think. I got hundreds of messages from people I hadn’t seen in decades. I was celebrated by those I care about.” She was pleased, in fact, that her speech had made such a thunderous impression. That was the whole point. “The only reason I didn’t cancel the show in solidarity with Strike Germany”—an anti-censorship group—“was so I could give this speech.”

“Artists are here to disturb the peace,” James Baldwin said in 1961. “They have to disturb the peace.” Not everyone wanted artists to disturb the peace. They had not wanted this in 1989, either, during Goldin’s widely acclaimed and widely attacked AIDS show, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing.* Then, too, the bureaucrats had demanded the same freedom from discomfort that Klaus Biesenbach and Claudia Roth were demanding now. “The killers and their complicits, they demand the alluring surface of respectability,” Sarah Schulman wrote in the catalog of the retrospective. “They demand the cloak of comfort. Not just material, but also the comfort of righteousness. They must own neutrality, objectivity, normalcy, appropriateness, and public standards.” They were angered by any artist who challenged them. “Why were the perpetrators so angry?” Schulman asked. “Because the vulnerable were supposed to submit.”

Goldin had seen the climate of fear in the art world, and often mentioned how different things would have been if artists had stuck together following the publication of the *Artforum* letter. Thanks to Zionists who threatened artists with losing representation, galleries, teaching positions, and livelihoods, many of the original eight thousand signatories had gone silent. By the time she was honored at Arles, she was aware that this silence had left her, but especially artists less celebrated than she, exposed. "Just think," she said, "how different it would have been if everyone had stuck together." If Nan Goldin—perhaps the most respected visual artist in America—was under attack, more precarious artists had even more reason to be nervous. "The famous people have to speak out because it protects the less famous people," she said. She was depressed by how few artists who did have financial security were willing to risk taking a stand. She felt jittery about how her film would be received.

But after Berlin, after six more months of watching Israel's holocaust, something had changed. People throughout the world had started to remember what a real artist was: not a clubbable bootlicker, not a pillar of a hated system, but a voice of opposition to cruelty, an advocate of human dignity—a disturber of the peace. Everyone was horrified by the silence of those climbers and careerists who were only ever thinking of themselves, who had abdicated the duty of the artist to speak the truth, and that night, as we chanted for a free Palestine, there was a feeling in the air: that something was changing, that something had changed. Nan Goldin, who had been so maligned in Germany, was surrounded by love and admiration and gratitude—gratitude that someone still stood for something, gratitude for the permission she gave others to stand for the same thing.

There was hope in the air when, after the final ovation, we scattered back to our overpriced hotels, back to our suffocating Airbnbs. After we stretched out in our beds, we took one more glance at our phones—and saw more pictures of children in Gaza whose legs were being amputated without anesthesia, more starving, desperate people in the dust of a blown-up city. The slideshow continued, and the feeling of togetherness we had just experienced started to edge into an atomized despair. We were back where

we had been—back in our separate rooms, back to being forced to sit and watch a holocaust unfold in our hands.

—

We see things on the phones. And those phones give us more than information about Palestine. They tell us who the people around us really are. They show us who has spoken out and who has not. They have shown us who is courageous, who is principled, and who is not. They have divided us—all of us, alas, every single one of us—from people we thought were our friends, from people we thought we respected, from people we never would have imagined would be all right with genocide: from people, even, whose entire careers were based on opposing genocide.

And they have let us know that we are not alone. We post whatever we feel we can bear. We try to scream loudly enough to be heard. We don't want our shame, our pain, to cause people to write us off. We worry that we are going to repost something from some dubious source, or something that is going to be taken out of context, or something that will get us banned. We wonder how much we'll be allowed to disturb the peace. We get excited about every positive development.

We talk.

We send links.

Nan sends me things:

An article, "What Happened to Gaza's Zoos Under Shelling and Bombing?" by Hadeel Farhat. "Israel's genocidal campaign has spared no one—not even animals, left to face death in silence in abandoned zoos." I can't read beyond the first paragraph. She sends a post from the Sulala Animal Rescue, which she has supported with an auction of her work, raising almost $300,000 for them.

I can hardly watch.

She sends me a website called www.newyorkwarcrimes.com, "Exposing the New York Times: The Paper of Zionist Record." It has a compilation of quotations from the paper's writers, editors, and administrators. There is

Thomas Friedman (“Israel had me at hello”) and Patrick Kingsley (“From the *Times*’ stolen home in Jerusalem”—the *Times* bureau operates from a villa seized from the Karmi family—“Kingsley co-wrote in the poet and scholar Refaat Alareer’s obituary that he was ‘known for posting hateful comments about Israel and its citizens’ ”). There is Bret Stephens (“I think [AIPAC] is an organization that does extremely important work”) and Jodi Rudoren (“Some political opinions, like about abortion and Israel, are grounded in core values”). There is a list of *Times* journalists—Ethan Bronner, Myra Noveck, Isabel Kershner, David Brooks—whose children served in the Israeli army. There is a list of *Times* journalists who themselves served in the Israeli army.

The satirical website *The Onion:* “ ‘New York Times’ Issues Apology for Reporting Palestinian Deaths.”

I send Nan something I wrote about canceling my subscription to the *Times*.

“They are Gassing People in Gaza *To Death,*” reads a post she sends me, referring to tear gas. “ ‘These cases were murdered by traumatic asphyxia—a direct cause of death,’ said Dr. Abu Al Rish, Deputy Minister of Health in Gaza.” The victims were civilians awaiting aid. “He noted that some children arrived with severe secretions and ejections through their eyes and noses.”

Nan texts that she sat next to a bigwig at dinner who was going to help her get a French visa. With the political climate in the United States, she is thinking of moving back to Europe.

dollface I’m not sure he’s gonna help.

uh-oh hon what did you say

called him a nazi

She texts me about meeting Mahmoud Khalil, the Palestinian activist at Columbia University who was unconstitutionally detained in March 2025. His wife was eight months pregnant, and during the 104 days he was imprisoned, his first child was born. “I asked him about his attitude toward Jews because I heard him say one of the best things I’ve heard,” she writes. “He said the Jews were in the forefront of the encampments because that’s what Judaism is. The teaching of Judaism is to help the oppressed. It’s what I’ve always tried to say.”

She sends a YouTube video: “The REAL Reason Gaza is STARVING—EX-UN Chief Drops BOMBSHELL.”

A piece from Al Jazeera: “Israel to Fund Tour for MAGA and Pro-Trump Influencers: Report.”

We post the images from *Zionism and Peace,* the book that she saw as a girl, to Instagram. People are shocked to see how similar they are to the images we are seeing now. Lots of people write things to the effect of “Nothing started on October 7.” The post gets nearly thirteen thousand likes.

Between the horror of watching this holocaust unfold, we feel something else, too: growing solidarity, growing vigor. A feeling of reconnecting to something deep in ourselves—“I was brought up to believe that Judaism was a culture of compassion,” Nan said, “of love for other people, of trying to help other people, of endless compassion”—and to all who feel loyalty to that culture. She is encouraged by the presence of so many Jews among the protesters, by the feeling that she is no longer alone. “It’s meant so much to me,” she said. “All those years I didn’t know any Jewish anti-Zionists. I didn’t meet any. I’m just meeting them these last two years.” Tentatively, slowly—and, as we are every day aware, far too late for far too many—we feel Zionism’s wicked grip weakening. It has its defenders, to be sure, but simply because people defend something does not

make it defensible, any more than the fact that people respect something makes that thing respectable. And we feel our own determination strengthening. We feel the ever-stronger bonds that connect us to each other, and to the Palestinian people who suffer so much in our name. We learn about those who are with us, and about those who came before us in this fight, which is a fight for all of us. And as we see the bombs that are trying to destroy the best part of who we are, we feel more determined than ever not to let war and death have the last word.

—

A few days after the evening in Arles, I fetch Nan from the station in Bordeaux. It is a beautiful summer evening in this verdant part of the world. As we are driving to my home, we talk about what she said in Arles, about letting people decide for themselves how they wanted to be seen: about humanizing them.

"You said you photograph people with love," I said.

"I said I photograph the *people* that I love," she corrected me.

"That's like me," I said. "I write about the people that I love."

This story takes place during a state of emergency and a public calamity. It's an unfinished book because it's still waiting for an answer. An answer I hope someone in the world can give me. You? It's a story in Technicolor to add a little luxury which, by God, I need too. Amen for all of us.

—CLARICE LISPECTOR, *The Hour of the Star*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A friend suggested, half jokingly, that I include in the acknowledgments a list of the people I have lost while writing this book. Don't name names, he said. Just drop enough hints that anyone in the know can figure it out. I was tempted: It seemed like a mischievous way to acknowledge the reality that any Jewish person who works for a free Palestine—who as much as speaks the words "Free Palestine"—will lose people. We all know this. What we can't know in advance is whom, exactly, we will lose—and this is a sickening surprise. The morons and the racists are one thing. The people we respected and loved are another. They can be people we imagined were kind and civilized and decent—and who, over the last years, have revealed themselves to be far more comfortable with infanticide and ethnic cleansing than we ever would have wished to suspect, about them or about anyone else. It is odious to lose friends. But as time passed, I saw that I did not lose them. They lost me.

In any case, I did not want to place this section under the sign of loss—for the simple reason that I have gained so much more, in writing this book, than I ever could have lost. I have gained the friendship of people of every background, people whose dignity, morality, and courage have been a beacon. I have gained the posthumous friendship of the great figures from the Jewish past whose stories are in this book. I have gained—less one-sidedly, I hope—the friendship of the great figures from the Jewish present I have had the honor of knowing personally—Avi Shlaim, Ronnie Kasrils, and Nan Goldin—who opened their homes and hearts to me. I am proud to have a photo by my beloved Nan on the cover of this book.

I am grateful, too, to the relatives and friends of the people in this book, as well as to those who, throughout the world, helped me to tell this story. In Germany, to Michael Langer, Célestine Fünfgeld, and Shira Cohen. In Brazil and Portugal, to Tatiana Salem Levy and Dina Salem Levy, as well as

to Carlos Salem, Tania Salem, Kristina Michahelles, Armando Strozenberg, and Beth Adler. In (and around) South Africa, to Simon Kuper, Adam Kuper, Richard Kuper, Peter Beinart, Sasha Polakow-Suransky, Roslyn Sulcas, Kathryn Gawith, Mark Gevisser, and Albie Sachs. In England, to Anna Mathias, Karma Nabulsi, Gwyn Daniel, and Chana Morgenstern. In Canada, to Yakov Rabkin. In France, to Michel Rodinson, Sophie de Closets, Maxime Catroux, and Juliette Lambron. In (and around) Egypt, to Shehab Ismail, Rawia Sadiq Saad, Mona Sadiq Saad, Ahmad Shokr, Mona Anis, Joel Beinin, Katharine Halls, Hisam Kaeem, Samy Arié, Sharif Abdel Kouddous, Mohamed Abou El-Ghar, Magda Haroun, Yoram Meital, Amir-Hussein Radjy, Yasmine El Rashidi, Omar Hamilton, Ali Hussein al-Adawy, Jack Shenker, Sarah Sarofim, and Heba El-Shazli. In the Netherlands, to Paulien Loerts, Elik Lettinga, and Esther Hendriks. In the United States, to Jennifer Sharp at Hebrew Union College.

This book began when I visited Palestine with the Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif. Her Palestine Festival of Literature brought me and so many other writers to see Zionism firsthand, and from the standpoint of its victims. For years, I wanted to write about the subject, but not until a conversation with the American poet Rachel Levitsky, a moral exemplar to me and to so many others, did this book start to take shape. While writing it, I have relied on the Palestinian historian Abdel Razzaq Takriti, whose encyclopedic knowledge of Arab history is matched only by his generosity in sharing it. He is the finest of scholars and the dearest of friends, and his exhortations to maintain hope because of—and never despite—the darkness of the times we are living through have been a source of great light.

I am especially grateful to the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library. The administrators of the program, Salvatore Scibona, Paul Delaverdac, Drew Weitman, and Nora Tomas, made it a happy haven, and it was a joy to complete this book in the company of so many distinguished writers. Like the great institution that houses it, the Cullman Center witnesses—and strives to perpetuate—the noblest traditions of my country.

This book could only be published by those whose *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben,* heart and mouth and deed and life, witness their sympathy with Palestine. In the United States, my literary agent, Bill Clegg, and his foreign rights director, Marion Duvert, are two such people. At a time when many warned it was too dangerous, too "controversial," to write this hidden history, they encouraged me from the first moment I mentioned it. My editor, Thomas Gebremedhin, took on a project he knew could be treacherous because of his commitment to resisting injustice in all its forms through publishing books like this one. Johanna Zwirner and Bill Thomas were likewise unshakable during this process. Oliver Munday provided the perfect design for the cover. Linda Friedner combed through this manuscript for legal issues. Amanda D'Acierno, Denise Lee, Karlyn Daigle, and Chris Drapeau listened as I coughed and wheezed through the audiobook. Elena Hershey, Michael Goldsmith, Sara Hayet, and Bianca Ducasse from Doubleday publicity and marketing worked hard to get this story into your hands. I was just as lucky in the U.K., where my agent, Matthew Hamilton, and my publisher, Kishani Widyaratna, have been unblinking in the face of ever-deepening repression of pro-Palestinian speech. My sister, Laura Moser, was my first reader, and this book has been immensely improved by her eye and ear. This history would be too painful to write without the possibility of stepping away from it and returning to a happy home, which is why I feel so lucky to have Arthur, Lex, and Basso.

And to all those who, through conversations and friendship, supported me in different ways—Sarah McNally, Sheila O'Shea, Nathalie Farman-Farma, Michael Martens, Rachel Kushner, Nathan Thrall, Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, Mia You, Deborah Feldman, Janine di Giovanni—thank you.

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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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2: Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamares. Image in the public domain via Alamy.
3: Edwin Montagu. The National Library of Israel's Schwadron Collection. Central News Agency via Wikimedia Commons.
4: Jacob Israël de Haan in Arab dress. Wikimedia Commons via University of Amsterdam.
5: Ahmad Sadiq Saad. Identification card, courtesy of Shehab Ismail.
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