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JEW AND ARAB

BY

ALBERT MEMMI

Merry Christmas
Ginsy. 1977



JEWES AND ARABS

Also by Albert Memmi

The Pillar of Salt

Strangers

The Colonizer and the Colonized

Portrait of a Jew

The Liberation of the Jew

Dominated Man

The Scorpion

JEW AND ARABS

BY ALBERT MEMMI

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
ELEANOR LEVIEUX

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To my Jewish brothers
To my Arab brothers
so that we can all
be free men at last.

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AFTER THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

As I put the finishing touches on this book, I realize that I am what may be called an Arab Jew and a left-wing Zionist. At the same time, I discover that our testimony, as Jews born in the Arab countries, has gone virtually unheard.

Now, that testimony is of capital importance. Not only because we have been and still are the neighbors, the brothers, of the Moslem Arabs, but because we have the most serious of accounts to settle with them.

This is why we are amused, or irritated, when we hear: "Israel must be integrated into the Middle East." "Zionism must be Levantized." Etc.

What about us?

Ever since I've been in Europe, I've had the strange feeling that the whole matter has become unfamiliar to me. I even used to say to myself, jokingly: "Another trick pulled by the Europeans! Even when it comes to Jewish misfortune, there's just enough for them: they've confiscated it for their Ashkenazim." As if there were only a Moslem East, and only a Western Diaspora! As if there were only an Arab-Moslem set of claims, by contrast with a West represented by the Jews!

The Moslem masses have been among the poorest on the

whole planet. But what about ours? Who has visited one of our ghettos and not felt frightened? Why shouldn't we too submit our reckoning to the world? The Arabs were colonized, it is true. But weren't we? What have we been for centuries if not dominated, humiliated, threatened, and periodically massacred? And by whom? Isn't it time our answer was heeded: by the Moslem Arabs? And to such an extent that—how many people fully realize this?—colonization by the French, the English, and the Italians, which the majority of Jewish intellectuals condemned for the sake of political ethics, was received by our own masses as a guarantee of survival.

The same with claims to nationhood. Happily, the world has recognized the legitimate rights of the Moslem Arabs. Why does it so delicately overlook ours? I know very well why: because in a Manichaeian world, our rights seem to get in the way of those of the Moslem Arabs. But simply because the Moslem Arabs were the victims of European colonizers, must we be eternally resigned to being their victims? Must we accept the hangings in Baghdad, the prisons and the fires in Cairo, the looting and economic strangling in the Maghreb, and, at the very least, exodus?

Here there is a second myth to be dispelled: these exactions are the consequences of Zionism, claim the Moslem Arab propagandists (and their ignorant European supporters stupidly repeat it). This is historically absurd: it is not Zionism that has caused Arab anti-Semitism, but the other way around, just as in Europe. Israel is a rejoinder to the oppression suffered by Jews the world over, including our own oppression as Arab Jews. From the time my friends and I were twelve years old, long before the sufferings of the European Jews, we conspired, amid an Arab world that had always been hostile, for the construction of a Jewish state.

The truth is that for the first time in centuries, the Jews, including the Arab Jews, are trying to parry the blows, and that is called Zionism. For the first time since the destruction of the Jewish state, the Jews are using the nation-as-response, and that is called Israel.

I have said it in writing again and again: I am not an enthusiast of the nation-as-response. I hate violence, and not just other people's violence, my own people's too! I am against any philosophy based on force. Only you cannot, unless you are a hypocrite, ask any being, whether singular or collective, to refuse to defend itself if it is threatened. I would like the conditions of violence to disappear, and I work tirelessly to that end. But I cannot call for less than what I never ceased to demand for the Moslem Arabs: I approve and continue to approve of the liberation and the national development of the Arabs. Why should I not wish for the same things for my own people? If that is what being a Zionist means, then I am indeed a Zionist.

However, I have said that I consider myself a left-wing Zionist. That means that I want justice for my people without injustice for the others. This includes those who are called Palestinians, even though, like ourselves, they often came from somewhere else: another historical truth. They also have the right to perfect their existence as a nation—just as we do. Both of us have been and still are victims of human history. Our experiences are strangely similar, even the myths we have derived from them, as we shall see in one of the texts that follows.

Are our interests irreconcilable? It is true that they are not easy to harmonize. But, luckily, they are not contradictory, provided there is a courageous decision to abandon all apoca-

lyptic visions and accept compromises and mutual sacrifices. We have certainly accepted them! Nearly all of our communities have disappeared from most of the countries with Moslem-Arab majorities.

Do I have something specific in mind? Yes, of course. This requires an *overall view* of the situation. The drama we are living through has not two partners but four: the already constituted Arab nations, the Palestinians, the Jewish Diaspora, and the Israelis, well over 50 percent of whom already—including Dayan, Allon, and Rabin—were born in the region. Well, at the risk of bucking some stubborn illusions, let's dare to say: a de facto exchange of populations has come about. Part of the Palestinians have gone to the Arab nations, and part of the Jews from those nations have gone to Israel. Naturally, this is only a generalization; it must be methodically reexamined and remedies for it must be made to measure. What is needed is to reclassify some of them, compensate others, welcome some of them, or, on the contrary, sometimes even accentuate the population shift. In other words, what is needed is to bargain! The same applies to the soil. We constantly hear of "Arab lands" and "Zionist enclave." But by what mystical geography are we not at home there too, we who descend from the same indigenous populations since the first human settlements were made? Why should only the converts to Islam be the sole proprietors of our common soil? Is it not time to deal the cards just a little differently?

In any event, all that can be done is to improve and legitimize these population exchanges; otherwise, violence and death will continue to reign. Have we forgotten our common genius for bargaining to such an extent that we see reciprocal destruction as the only way out?

Provided, of course, that other people are willing to let us

live. The Americans and the Russians benefit from our misfortunes, picking up where the English and French left off. As a socialist, I find the Russian behavior even more shabby, because it is cloaked in so-called virtue: but never mind these secondary sources of indignation. Since it has always, historically, been very difficult to escape the grasp of the great powers at any given moment, let us at least try not to be fooled by them and not to give in to them too much. Let us try at least not to let them fight using our children as ammunition.

It infuriates me that so much blood and mourning and so many tears are needed to settle a conflict where two human groups which have been equally beaten by history should be able to agree on a relative solution (all human solutions are relative). Peace will certainly be achieved someday: the Germans and the French managed to make peace, and so did the French and the English. Why not us, the Jews and the Arabs? Sooner or later, the Moslem Arabs will understand that we too need to live free, like them, and be politically adult, like them, on a scrap of the immense common territory which belongs to us too, though it is called Arab. So why not start right now to arrange the bargain on the best terms possible?

Main body of text, consisting of several paragraphs of faint, illegible handwriting.

I

THE JEWS AND THE ARABS

I
THE JEWS
AND THE ARABS

I

WHAT IS AN ARAB JEW?

An Arab chief of state has just made us a generous, and unexpected, proposal: "Go back home," he said. "Return to your native country." It seems many people were touched by this and, in their excitement, they believed the problem was solved. So excited were they that they did not hear the price that was to be paid in exchange: once we had gone back to our respective countries, Israel would no longer have any *raison d'être*. Because the other Jews, the horrible European usurpers, would also be sent "back home"—to remove the remains of the crematoria and rebuild their old, demolished districts, I suppose. If they were not willing to leave after all, then a definitive war would be declared; the chief of state was very clear on that score. People also seem to have been particularly struck by one expression he used: "Are you not Arabs like ourselves?" he is said to have added, "Arab Jews?"

On Saturday, November 24, 1973, four major European newspapers (*Le Monde*, *The Times*, *La Stampa*, and *Die Welt*) organized a discussion with Libya's Colonel Kadhafi. I was invited to attend by *Le Monde*, and my questions to the colonel were reported in the press the next day (see the following chapter). The magazine *L'Arche* asked me to develop further my statements concerning the relations between Jews and Arabs in Arab countries, and the following article was published in the magazine's issue of January, 1974.

Ah, what a lovely term! It even made us secretly nostalgic; yes, of course we were Arab Jews, or Jewish Arabs,¹ in our customs, our culture, our music, our cooking . . . I have said so often enough in writing, but must one remain an Arab Jew if that means having to tremble for one's life and the future of one's children? If it means being denied any existence of one's own? People know that there are also Christian Arabs; what people do not fully realize is the humiliating tactics they have to use in order simply to survive. *Jewish Arabs*—that's what we would have liked to be, and if we have given up the idea, it is because for centuries the Moslem Arabs have scornfully, cruelly, and systematically prevented us from carrying it out. And now it is far too late to become Jewish Arabs again. Our homes too, not just those of the German and Polish Jews, have been wrenched from us, destroyed, scattered; objectively, as one is supposed to say today, no more Jewish communities are to be found in any Arab country, nor can you find a single Arab Jew who is willing to return to his native country.

All right, I can see I'll have to put it more bluntly: the supposedly "idyllic" life led by Jews in the Arab countries is all a myth! The truth—since I am being forced to say it—is that we were, first of all, a minority in hostile surroundings and, as such, we had all the fears and anxieties of the overly weak, their constant feeling of precariousness. As far back as my childhood memories can take me, in the stories told by my father, my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, cohabitation with the Arabs was not only uneasy but filled with threats, which were periodically carried out. This extremely significant fact must be recalled: that during the colonial period the Jews' position was safer because it was more legalized. That explains the care and hesitation with which most Jews in the Arab countries made their political choices. I did not always approve of their

choices, but the Jewish community leaders cannot be blamed for their ambiguity; they were merely reflecting the deeply rooted anxiety of the people for whom they were responsible.

For, with regard to the precolonial period, the collective memory of the Jews of Tunis leaves not the smallest doubt. The few narratives and stories that remain to us of that time paint a somber picture. The Jewish communities lived in the shadows of history, in a climate of arbitrariness and fear, under all-powerful monarchs whose decisions could not be annulled nor even discussed. Everyone, you say, had to submit to those monarchs, sultans, beys, or deys. Yes, but Jews were delivered up not only to the monarch but also to the man in the street. My grandfather still wore distinguishing marks on his clothing; and he lived at a time when any Jewish passerby was liable to be hit on the head by any Moslem he met. That pleasing ritual even had a name, *chtáká*, and included a sacramental phrase that I have since forgotten. A French student of Arabic once protested to me, during a meeting: "In the Moslem countries, Christians were no better off." That is true, but what of it? That is an argument that cuts both ways, for what it is really saying is that no member of any minority lived in peace and dignity in a predominantly Arab country! There was, however, one considerable difference: the Christians were generally foreigners, and as such they were protected by their respective countries. If some emir or some Berber pirate wanted to enslave a missionary, he had to face the government of the country from which the missionary came, even the Vatican or the Knights of Malta. But no one was going to save a Jew, because the Jews had been born in those countries and as such were handed over to "their" monarchs' whims. Never, I repeat, never—except perhaps for two or three eras with very clear boundaries in time, such as the Andalusian period, and even

then—have the Jews lived in the Arab countries otherwise than as diminished people in an exposed position, periodically overcome and massacred so that they would be acutely conscious of their position.

Thus, during colonization, the Jews acquired a certain degree of security; this was true even for the poorest classes, whereas traditionally it was only the wealthiest Jews, those who lived in the European part of the city, who lived more or less decently. The population in those quarters was more cosmopolitan, and the Italian or French Jews were generally less closely in contact with the Arab population. Even those Jews, however, remained second-class citizens, subjected from time to time to an explosion of popular wrath that the French, English, or Italian colonizers, deliberately or through indifference, did not always quell in time.

I have experienced alerts in the ghetto—the doors and windows being closed, my father running home after hastily locking and bolting his store because of the spreading rumor that a pogrom was imminent. My parents stocked up on food in expectation of a siege, which did not necessarily take place in fact, but this gives some idea of our anxiety, our permanent insecurity. At those times we felt abandoned by the whole world including—alas!—the Protectorate authorities. I cannot prove that those authorities deliberately made use of such movements for internal political purposes, as distracting from a possible revolt against the colonial power, but that is what we—we Jews in the poor districts, at least—felt. My own father firmly believed that when the Tunisian infantry went off to the front during the war, the Jewish population was clearly handed over to them. We believed that the French and Tunisian authorities at best closed their eyes to the extortions practiced on our ghetto by which soldiers, or malcontents, relieved

their feelings. The police did not come, or else arrived hours after it was all over. . . .

Shortly before the end of the colonial period, we shared an experience with Europe: the German occupation.

In my novel, *The Pillar of Salt*, I have told how the French authorities coldly abandoned us to the Germans. But I must add that we also lived amidst a hostile Arab population. . . . That is why very few of us were able to get through the lines to join the Allies. A few people tried it anyhow; they were usually denounced and caught.

Nonetheless, we tended to forget that terrible period once Tunisia became independent. Few Jews, it must be acknowledged, took an active part in the fight for independence, but, on the whole, the percentage was not so very much lower than for the great bulk of non-Jewish Tunisians. On the other hand, our intellectuals, including the communists, and there were a great many of them, took a clear stand in favor of Tunisian independence; some of them fought in the ranks of the Destour. I myself belonged to the small team that, in 1956, or so, some time before Tunisia became independent, founded the newspaper called *Jeune Afrique*. I was to pay dearly for that, later on.

After independence, at any rate, the bourgeoisie, who made up a considerable portion of the Jewish population, thought that they would be able to work with the new authorities, that it was possible to get along with the Tunisian population. We were Tunisian citizens, and we had sincerely decided to "play the game." Ah! It would not have taken much to keep us on the Tunisians' side! But what did the Tunisians do? Just like the Moroccans and the Algerians, they liquidated their Jewish communities. They went about it with intelligence and flexibility. They did not use overt brutality, as in other Arab coun-

tries. It would in fact have been difficult for them to do so, after so many services rendered, so much assistance given by a large portion of our intellectuals. There were other reasons too: worldwide public opinion, which took a close interest in what went on in our countries, and the matter of American aid, which the new authorities so badly needed. But they strangled the Jewish community by economic measures. Where tradesmen were concerned, it was easy: all they had to do was refuse to renew their permits and refuse to grant import licenses, and at the same time give advantages to their Moslem competitors. With regard to the administration, things were no more complicated: Jews were not hired; or those already employed were faced with insurmountable linguistic difficulties that were not imposed on the Moslems. From time to time, an engineer or some big merchant was sent to prison on the strength of mysterious Kafka-esque accusations that made all the others panic.

Not to mention, of course, another factor: the relative nearness of the Israeli-Arab conflict. At every new crisis, every event of any importance, the rabble invaded the streets, burning Jewish stores; this happened again during the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Bourguiba was probably never hostile to the Jews, but always there was that singular "delay" that meant that the police didn't arrive on the scene until after the stores had been looted and burned. Under the circumstances, what is surprising about the fact that the exodus toward France and Israel continued, and even speeded up?

I left Tunisia myself, partly for professional reasons, for the sake of joining the literary world, but also because I could not have gone on living in that atmosphere of underhanded, and sometimes unconcealed, segregation.

Naturally, it is out of the question to regret the stands we

took, in the name of historical justice, in favor of the Arab peoples. I do not regret anything—neither having written *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, nor having applauded each time a people of the Maghreb became independent. In fact, I have continued to defend the Arabs in Europe itself, through countless administrative formalities, papers, signatures, manifestos. . . . But let's be frank: we were defending the Arabs because they were oppressed. If they are oppressed no longer, if they in turn become oppressors, or if they have unjust political regimes, then I don't see why they should not be asked to account for their actions. Today, Arab nations exist, and they have a foreign policy, they have social classes, they have their rich and their poor. Besides, unlike many people, I never believed in the liberals' naive assumption nor in the communists' sly claim that after independence there would be no problems, that our countries would be lay states wherein Europeans, Jews, and Moslems would cohabit on good terms with one another.

I knew, in fact, that once the country had achieved independence, there would not be much room in it for us. Young nations are very exclusive, for one thing; for another, the Arab constitutions are not very compatible with the lay, or secular, concept. Colonel Kadhafi gave us a timely reminder of that not long ago, and, in so doing, he was merely saying out loud what other people silently think. I was also aware of the problem of the more humble elements among the colonists themselves, the "petits colons," but I thought that all of that was the inevitable conclusion of an establishment doomed by history. I believed that the gamble was worth taking in spite of everything. After all, we never had had very much room in the country; it would be enough if we were allowed to live in peace. The situation was dramatic, but it was *historical* drama, not

tragedy; and solutions, though mediocre, did exist. But, no, as it turned out, not even that was possible; we were all obliged to leave, one after the other.

At that juncture, I arrived in France, and there came face to face with a fable that was very popular among the left-wingers in Paris, namely, that the Jews had always lived in perfect harmony with the Arabs. I was almost congratulated on having been born in one of those countries where race discrimination and xenophobia were unknown. That made me laugh. I had heard such nonsense about North Africa, and on the part of such well-meaning people, that I didn't react to this bit of chit-chat very strongly, I admit. But it did begin to bother me when it became a *political* argument, that is, from 1967 on. The Arabs then got the idea of using this countertruth, which moreover, fell on very favorable ground: the reaction against Israel after its 1967 victory. Now it is time to denounce this fraud.

If I had to explain why this myth has been so successful, I would list five converging factors. The first one is the fruit of Arab propaganda: "The Arabs have never hurt the Jews, so why do the Jews come and take their land away from them, whereas responsibility for the Jewish condition lies entirely with Europe? Full responsibility for the Middle East conflict lies with the European Jews. The Arab Jews have never wanted to found a separate country and are full of trusting friendship for the Moslem Arabs." This is doubly untrue: the Arab Jews mistrust the Moslems even more than the Europeans do, and they dreamed of the Promised Land, Eretz Israel, long before the Russians and the Poles did.

The second argument is due to the cogitations of one portion of the European left: the Arabs were oppressed people, therefore they could not be anti-Semitic. This is stupidly Manichaean: as if you could not be oppressed and racist at the same

time! As if workers were not xenophobic! Besides, the maneuver is too obvious: opposing Zionism, which bothers the U.S.S.R., with a clear conscience.

The third factor we owe to contemporary historians—including, oddly enough, Western Jewish historians. Having suffered the frightful Nazi slaughter, those Jewish historians could not even imagine such a thing elsewhere. But if we leave out the crematoria and the murders committed in Russia, from Kichinev to Stalin, *the sum total of the Jewish victims of the Christian world is probably no greater than the total number of victims of the successive pogroms, both big and small, perpetrated in the Moslem countries.* Until now, Jewish history has been written by Western Jews; there has never been any great Eastern Jewish historian. As a result, only the Western facets of the Jewish misfortune are known. Readers will recall the absurd distinction that Jules Isaac, who usually had better ideas, made between “true” and “false” anti-Semitism, the “true” being the result of Christianity. The truth is that it is not only Christianity that creates anti-Semitism but also the fact that the Jews are in the minority, whether in the world of Christianity or in that of Islam. I am sorry to say that by making anti-Semitism a Christian creation, Isaac minimized the tragedy of the Jews in the Arab countries and helped to create a false understanding of the question.

Fourth factor: many Israelis, extremely worried at the idea of their coexistence with their Arab neighbors, want to believe that there was already such coexistence in the past; otherwise the whole undertaking would seem hopeless! Whereas, in order to survive, it is better to be lucid and take one’s surroundings into account.

Fifth and final factor: our complicity, as Jews of and in the Arab countries, our more or less conscious complaisance as

uprooted people tending to embellish the past, people whose nostalgia for their native Eastern homelands makes them minimize or even completely erase the memory of persecution. In our recollections and our imagination, it was an altogether marvelous life, whereas our own newspapers of the times bear witness to the contrary.

Ah, how I would have liked all that to be true! How I would have liked us to have led an exceptional life compared with the usual Jewish condition! Unfortunately, all that is as false as can be: the Jews lived very badly in the Arab-dominated countries. The State of Israel did not stem solely from the unhappiness of European Jews. Unlike what part of the political left in Europe thinks—if thought there be—a people can very well free itself from oppression *and* in turn become an oppressor itself, oppressing, for instance, its own minorities. We see this happen with so many new nations.

And now?

Now, it is out of the question for us to return to an Arab country, as we are insincerely invited to do. The very idea would seem grotesque to all the Jews who have fled those countries—the gallows in Iraq, the rapes, the sodomies of Egyptian prisons, the political and cultural alienation, the economic strangling practiced in the most moderate countries. The Arabs' attitude toward us does not seem to me much different from what it has always been. The Arabs never did more than tolerate the existence of the Jewish minorities. They still haven't got over their surprise at seeing their former subordinates lift up their heads and even wish to win their national independence! For the Arabs, only one answer was conceivable: off with the Jews' heads. The Arabs want Israel destroyed. There had been great hopes for the Algiers summit meeting. But what demands were actually made there? Two

items recur, as a leitmotiv: *the restitution of all the land occupied by Israel, and restoration of their full national rights to the Palestinians*. There might be some illusions about the first argument, but what about the second? What does it amount to? To setting up the Palestinians as the masters in Haifa or Jaffa? In other words, the end of Israel. If that is not the idea, if the idea is merely to divide up the land, then why don't they say so? But on the contrary: the Palestinians have *never* stopped claiming the *entire* region, and the Arab summit meetings continue, all alike. The Algiers summit took up where the one in Khartoum left off; there is no fundamental difference from one to the other. In other words, the Arabs' official position, whether implicit or out in the open, brutal or subtle, is nothing other than the perpetuation of the anti-Semitism we have already experienced. Today, just as yesterday, it is our life that is at stake. A day must come when the Moslem Arabs will admit that we too, we Jewish Arabs, or Arab Jews, if you will, have a right to existence and dignity.

NOTE

1. The term Jewish Arabs or Arab Jews is not a very good one, of course. But I have found it convenient to use. I simply wanted to remind my readers that because we were born in these so-called Arab countries and had been living in those regions long before the arrival of the Arabs, we share their languages, their customs, and their cultures to an extent that is not negligible. So, if we stick to this legitimation, and not to arguments of force and numbers, we then have the same rights—no more, but no less—to the land as the Moslem Arabs. But we might note, in passing, that the term Arab is no more accurate, applied to such diverse populations, including those that call themselves and believe themselves Arabs.

2

QUESTIONS FOR COLONEL KADHAFI

Dear President Kadhafi,

I will confine myself to asking you a few questions from a background that is probably not shared with that of anyone else here.

I am a Jewish writer, born in a country with an Arab majority; I speak Arabic; I did not leave that country until the end of my adolescent years; and I have conserved very strong ties with the populations who live there and with their culture.

Furthermore, I understood very early, and approved, and upheld the national rebirth of the Arab peoples, for which I fought with my pen, and sometimes physically.

This is by way of telling you that, of the people here, and possibly of all the people in the world, I am one of those who understand you best. This in turn gives my questions special weight, and I trust you will give them special attention.

Is it true that you have stated that you have not come to discuss the size of the lands to be given back or the borders

As the time set aside for each participant in the meeting with Colonel Kadhafi was limited, I was not able to deliver these questions in full. The next day, however, several newspapers printed various excerpts from them.

to be rectified, or even an arrangement concerning the Palestinian Arabs, but to resume and continue the war until Israel has disappeared completely?

If that information is true, how can you so radically call in question the Jewish national liberation movement, and the state that stems from it, whereas you are one of the embodiments of the Arab national movement? Why would the Jews alone not be entitled to what you hold to be most sacred, after your religious faith, to a nation?

Is it true that you have said that once the European Jews were sent back to Europe, only the Jews born in the Arab countries could continue to live there?

Do you seriously believe that the German or Polish Jews, at least the few survivors, could go back and live in the places where their parents, wives, husbands, and children were burned in the oven?

In that case, what would you do with the children of those Western Jews, children born in Israel and who now make up 25 percent of the population?

Do you believe that the Jews born in Arab countries can go back and live in the countries from which they were expelled, before being plundered and massacred? Particularly since you want Islam to be fully reinstated, even, I am told, to the extent of cutting off thieves' right hands and sending the women back to the harem or to the promiscuity of polygamy. That is your business, of course. But do you think that someone who is not Moslem can go back and live under such laws, even supposing the Moslems were willing to let him?

Is it true that you have said that the Jews have always lived at peace in the Arab countries? And that you have nothing against Jews, only Zionists?

Can it be that you seriously believe in the myth, deliberately invented for the sake of reassuring Westerners, that the Jews led idyllic lives in the Arab countries?

As recently as 1912, Jews who dared to leave their districts in Morocco were compelled to take off their shoes, as if all of Moroccan soil was holy for them and they desecrated it if they touched it. Also in Morocco, in 1907, a huge massacre of Jews took place in Casablanca, along with the usual embellishments—rape, women carried away into the mountains, hundreds of homes and shops burned, etc.; in 1912, a big massacre in Fez; 1948, in Oujda and other cities. In Algeria, in 1934: massacre in Constantine, twenty-four people killed, dozens and dozens of others seriously wounded. In Egypt, massacre in 1948—more than fifty known deaths, and three times as many wounded—improved, this time, by dozens of bombs. In Aden, in 1946, the local authorities decreed that the Jews must not live like human beings; some months later, there were over one hundred people dead and seventy-six wounded, and two thirds of the stores had been sacked and burned. At the same time, the Jewish community of Alep, in Syria, was subjected to savage attack, which pillaged its holy places and of course left the usual spectacle of dead and buried in its wake. In June, 1941, in Iraq, six hundred people killed, one thousand seriously wounded, looting, rapes, arson, one thousand houses destroyed, six hundred stores looted. . . . Not to mention your own country: November 4 and 5, 1945, massacre in Tripoli; November 6 and 7, in Zanzour, Zaouia, Foussabar, Ziltain, etc., girls and women raped in front of their families, the stomachs of pregnant women slashed open, the infants ripped out of them, children smashed with crowbars. Again in 1967, despite protection by King Idris, one hundred more people were massacred. . . . But must I go on with this sinister inventory? All

this can be found in the newspapers of the time, including the local Arab papers.

The error which may have been made at Deir Yassine is constantly being thrown in our faces. Ah, but we have undergone a hundred Deir Yassinés, a thousand Deir Yassinés! And not only in Russia, Germany, or Poland but also at the hands of Arab people; yet the world has never been upset over it! (Just as I was correcting the proofs of this book, we learned of the massacre at Qiryat Shemona. Oh, the pain and irony of history: those unfortunate people machine-gunned in their beds, those children thrown out the window were all North African refugees! “Arab Jews”! and not European Jews.)

But what do I need with these historical references and reminders? My own grandfather and father still lived in terror of the blows on the head which any Arab passerby could give them at any time. I myself, as a child, played in the streets and alleys of an Arab city—just like you, I suppose, Mr. President. Do you remember what you thought of the young Jews and how you treated them? I remember only too well!

Now please don't tell me that all that is the result of Zionism. That's another myth.

Except during two or three periods, about which much nonsense has been said, for that matter, the Jews *never* had an idyllic life. And what is more, the Jews were not only at the mercy of the rabble but in fact had a statute that legitimized, as it were, their servitude. We are familiar with that statute: since the Abbasside dynasty, it has been in the Charter of Omar. Roughly speaking, and in the best of cases, the Jew is protected like a dog which is part of a man's property, but if he raises his head or acts like a man, then he must be beaten so that he will always remember his status.¹

We have a choice witness to this, among many others: be-

tween 1883 and 1884, the French priest Charles de Foucauld, who could not be suspected of being overly fond of Jews, wanted to travel incognito among the Arabs and had the incongruous idea of disguising himself as a Jew. Read his long recital of all the humiliations and threats that this temporary Jew had to endure!

The truth is that we lived in the Arab countries amidst fear and humiliation. I will not take the time here to recite another litany, that of the massacres that *preceded* Zionism, but I can make it available to you whenever you wish. The truth is that these young Jews from the Arab countries were Zionists before Auschwitz. The State of Israel is not the result of Auschwitz but of the Jewish condition everywhere, including the Arab countries.

Is it true that you have stated that if the Jews were determined to have a state, all they had to do was found it in Europe or America?

Do I need to tell you, you who are so concerned with your people's values, that you do not found a state just anywhere or with just any old values?

Why would we Jews from the predominantly Arab countries found a state in Europe—why not at the North Pole, for that matter? We were born on the shores of the Mediterranean, and we are very attached to that region, as you will surely understand. Why shouldn't this land, which you call Arab because you are in the majority within it, belong partially to us? Often our ancestors, Judaized Berbers, were older than yours. Need one only be born Arab in order to be entitled to everything and born Jewish in order to be entitled to nothing, except to being condemned to eternally remaining second-class citizens, exposed to humiliation and periodic massacres? And

if you really wanted to avoid having us come together on this particular bit of land, which we have called Israel out of faithfulness to a very old tradition, then why did you hound us and expel us from all the regions over which your power extends?

I am told that your chief concern, in this whole matter, is the fate of the Palestinian Arabs. If so, how can you reconcile that rumor with your constant affirmation of the unity of the Arab nation? Certainly the Palestinian Arabs' situation is tragic, just as ours is; but it must be recalled, at the negotiation table, that they are scarcely any more numerous than we are, and that they too often came from elsewhere, just like us. When you come right down to it, the Palestinian Arabs' misfortune is having been moved about thirty miles within one vast nation. Is that so serious? Our own misfortune, as Jews from the Arab countries, is much greater, for we have been moved thousands of miles away, after having also lost everything. And today there are 1,300,000 of us, *i.e.*, half the population of Israel. That figure, when added to the 25 percent of the population made up of children of Westerners born in Israel, brings the native population to 75 percent. In short, if we want to indulge in this ridiculous arithmetic, the Jews are on home ground in Israel at least as much as the Arabs are. But I repeat, Israel is the result of the entire Jewish condition all over the world; in other words, it is the result of Auschwitz too, and German, Polish, or Russian Jews are also on home ground in Israel. And no one has the right to challenge our possibility of taking in our past and also, alas!, our future survivors.²

Now, we are told that you have come to France to buy still more weapons and step up the use of petroleum as blackmail. If so, wouldn't it be disastrous to rekindle the flames, just as

a number of Arab countries are finally coming around to the idea of an arrangement that would put an end to our mutual suffering? As the old saying has it, a bad arrangement is better than a good trial. Is it not time we came to an arrangement, even a mediocre one?

Mr. President, I am familiar with your language, the language of the heart and of determination born of reformed dignity. I understand your type of language well, for it is my language too and that of the younger generations, both yours and ours.

Don't you think that you are underestimating the determination not only of the Israelis but also of Jews the world over? The new generations of Jews are not merely defending their Sunday drives in the family car or the gadgets manufactured out of petroleum by-products. They know that their physical and cultural existence is at stake.

When two such strong determinations, both concerned with existence itself, come face to face, the result can be endless misery or great benefit. You, today, have discovered that oil is a weapon; tomorrow the Jews will come back with an appropriate retort. Don't you think that we could halt this mutual suicide—at which powerful interests may be secretly rejoicing—right here?

Don't you think that you on your side and we on ours could turn our backs on our old quarrels, regardless of how cruel they have been? That we should make an effort to leave our respective myths behind?

Finally, now that each of our peoples has restored its characteristic essence, could we not bring them together to build a world where each of us would have our own nation, our free

state, united this time not by contradictory and destructive myths but by economical and cultural benefits?

Mr. President, I suggest not only that you abandon the idea of purchasing new weapons but also that, with the generous ardor that characterizes you, you should urge that a great conference be held, in Tripoli or Tel Aviv, or in some neutral country, in Geneva, for instance, if not, unfortunately, in Paris, where not only Arabs and Jews but also, of course, Israelis and Palestinians could come together in a fraternal spirit. For purposes of such a dialogue I, a Jew born among Arabs, am at your disposition.

NOTES

1. Although there is no really exhaustive book on our life in the predominantly Arab countries, it is useful to consult the following historians, more reliable than the others: Antoine Fattal, Louis Gardet, Robert Braunschvicg, G. E. von Grunebaum, Bernard Lewis, G. Vajda. And an excellent little book written by an Egyptian Jewess who uses as a pen name "Yahudiya Masria" can provide useful information on *The Jews in Egypt* (Editions de l'Avenir, Geneva, 1971). D. Littman compiled quotations from these authors in an article entitled "La situation des Dhimis," *L'Arche*, Paris, December, 1973–January, 1974.

2. No one would dream of forbidding a future Palestinian state to welcome Palestinians from all over the world, or even Syrians or Moroccans, if it decided in all sovereignty to do so. In the same way, no one has the right to challenge Israel's right to remain open to any Jew who is in danger.

3

THE COLONIZED JEW

They say that happy peoples have no history. What about the unhappiest, then! Who has given a thought to us, amid all the agitation of this past decade? The colonized peoples have been decolonized and the colonizers have ceased to be colonizers, and all this is fine; but what about us? Who has stopped to wonder what has become of us? What we were thinking, feeling, putting up with? Does anyone even know that we too were colonized for centuries, and not just by the French but by the Arabs as well? That our ghetto was one of the poorest in the world, that our exodus was one of the most pitiful?

I myself have never tried to take our case up seriously, at length. I wrote an entire book on colonization, in which I sketched a portrait of "the colonizer and the colonized," but how much of that did I devote to the colonized Jew? Only a few lines. I said to myself vaguely that it was not wise to try to say everything at once—which was true; that a sort of inventory of Jewish life in the Maghreb could be found in my novels. . . . But that the Jew had indeed been colonized, had endured all the deficiencies, humiliations, and destructions endured by other colonized men, had shown the reactionary

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and relational types of conduct of any dominated man—this I never said in so many words, and one day I will have to account for this, if only for my own edification.

Probably, as too-weak links in the chain, we did not want to annoy either the French or the Arabs—which is certainly an additional indication of our alienation. But it is also probable that we did not have a clear view of our situation because we preferred not to have one. The conclusion we would have drawn, the types of stance we would have had to adopt, would have been too frightening for us.

What was the Jews' situation, their physiognomy, their role in the colonized countries? They were characterized, I believe, by two specific features, which I did at least suggest, though too rapidly, in the *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: with regard to the Jewish condition in general, and with regard to the other colonized peoples.

To the extent that, in a colony, anything which is not on the colonizer's side bears a common denominator, the physiognomy of the North African Jew is largely identical to that of the colonized man: *the situation of the North African Jew is also that of the colonized man*. The situation into which the Jews were thrust, and their reactions to what went on, would have been excellent signs by which to interpret colonization. The colonial condition is by no means accidental and secondary; on the contrary, it is indispensable to an understanding of Judaism in the Maghreb.

Politically speaking, the Tunisian and Moroccan Jews belonged to the ranks of the colonized. I am leaving aside the Algerians, because it is the fashion to make that distinction, although I am convinced it is a distinction of form only, not substance. *The colonizer wanted it that way*. Without always

saying it openly, the colonizer carefully measured the amount of legal and political westernization doled out to the Jews. Naturalization was never tolerated in any but the smallest doses. For instance, it was not until a few years before independence that Tunisian Jews were able to obtain jobs in the civil service. And so forth. The colonized Jew did *in fact* share the restrictions and persecutions borne by the colonized people in general.

But this historic and very real oppression *was not experienced by the Jews in the same way as by the Moslems*. Sociologically and psychologically, the Jew's problem is far more complex than the Moslem's. Roughly speaking, the originality of the portrait of the North African Jew stems from two ambiguities.

The first one is an historical ambiguity, which has to do with the meaning of colonization. In the beginning, the arrival of the Europeans, which was a catastrophe for the Moslems, was a sort of liberation for the Jews. The interpretation placed on that event, of vital importance to the history of the North Africans, was to weigh heavily, to leave a nearly permanent imprint on each side's attitude toward the other. No matter what demands the Jews may have expressed later on, no matter how gravely they reproached the colonizers, they always harbored a little indulgence toward them: not as colonizers, of course not, but as representatives of Europe. Today, now that the North African Jews have to reconsider their relations with their Moslem fellow citizens, they are not very eager to recall those ties of affection. I think this is a mistake. During a period when construction is the order of the day, it is in everyone's interest that the balance sheet be complete and accurate.

The second one is the ambiguity that is common to any colonized man. In the initial stage of the itinerary that the

colonized person follows, he almost always feels a burst of enthusiasm toward the colonizer. The colonized man's condition is one of unhappiness: he is in political bondage, he is economically exploited, his culture is declining. Amid such gloom, the colonizer embodies prestige and strength, material comfort and spiritual superiority. Openly or otherwise, the colonized man begins to have an ardent desire to be like him. And the colonized Jew is no exception. Moreover, in his case, this saving urge is coupled with a deep-seated affinity. He enthusiastically copies the colonizer's customs, the way he dresses, and the food he eats. I will not take time here to describe the "candidate for assimilation" again; the whole chapter applies, if you simply replace the words "colonized man" by "Jew."

But from there on, the evolution of the Jew is going to diverge again from that of his non-Jewish fellow citizen. And this point is of prime importance.

I tried to demonstrate how assimilation failed, how, in fact, it was impossible, given the conditions of contemporary colonization. Rejected by the colonizer, the colonized man falls back on himself; he soon returns to his own traditions and values, which he revives and in which he finds his reasons for living and struggling. *With the Jew, however, this return to self does not occur*, at least not in the same conditions. The colonized man's second step, his second response, are virtually nonexistent among Jews, and for good reason: these traditions and values are not theirs. Let's probe further: if the Jew was to carry out a veritable return to self, it is not necessarily at this point that he would end up.

I am well aware that what I am saying is rather serious, but I firmly believe that it is better to see clearly and speak the whole truth, regardless of what it may be: how can a

colonized Jew change tactics in the name of Arabism, for instance, or Islam? Now, the young Tunisian nation and the Moroccan nation proclaim themselves "Arab States, of the Mohammedan religion." And I must add that *they cannot be seriously blamed for it*. A nation is not simply founded *against* other nations; it must have a content, it must have positive values. Those values may be debatable, and others may be proposed—social justice, socialism, what have you—but it must not be forgotten that those values will have no chance of being adopted unless a people consents to recognize them as its own. The only ideology which, for the time being at least, could succeed in the Arab countries was of course Islam and Arabism. Regardless of whether or not they as individuals wished to, the only type of nation which the Moroccan and Tunisian leaders could found was the Arab, Islamic type. To reproach them with this is to reproach them with working for the rebirth of their nation. And after all, seen from that angle, the situation is not basically different in Israel, where the state is far from being secular.

But, then, what becomes of the colonized Jew amid such a movement? Three possibilities would appear to be open to him. Not possibilities that he dreams up but ones that history imposes on him and which are contained in the logical sequel to this analysis:

The first one would be to pursue the process of assimilation to the Europeans, in spite of everything. The Eastern Mediterranean past is definitively rejected and the only way out seems to be to move toward the West. But conditions have changed: once the Maghreb becomes independent, the European himself is in a precarious position. And still more precarious is that of the Jew who persists in copying his European model. The practical lesson to be learned from this new state of affairs

quickly became apparent: the Jews had to leave the country at the same time as the French. Hence a strong tide of immigration toward France, a tide that had always existed but had never before been so high.

This has been interpreted as an indication of the North African Jews' anxiety over what was to become of them, or even fear for their physical safety. Perhaps that is part of it. But I do not think that is the major element in this exodus. Its real, or at any rate its most important, meaning is this: identifying their future with that of the French, they believe, rightly or wrongly, that that future has been cut off in North Africa, what with the Arab culture and Arab language replacing the French culture and language, a new political orientation toward the Middle East and the Arab League, etc.

So they go somewhere in France—Paris or Nice. They may have done no more than exchange an old problem for a new one, but now they are beyond the limits of our subject.

The second solution is for the Jews to adopt the new fate of the non-Jewish colonized people, just as they shared their fate, whether they wanted to or not, during the days of oppression. Since colonization came to an end, the Maghrebi have changed: they have won freedom, now they are going to discover the political responsibilities of modern men. In time, life in North Africa should not be any different from life in Europe.

The ex-colonized Jew decides to be a loyal Tunisian or Moroccan, just as the French Jews are loyal Frenchmen first of all. Sometimes the Tunisian and Moroccan nationalists invite them, even if only grudgingly, to be loyal citizens. This has been called a mere tactic. It is not only that; there is no such thing as a 100 percent pure tactic. If a tactic is adopted, that means that it corresponds more or less to the requirements of a certain reality. Even if the nationalists merely wanted to give

the impression that they are democratic and secular, this in itself would be a significant effort.

But a Jew who makes this choice will insist sooner or later that that effort be continued and accentuated. If he submits to the laws and customs of the new state, then in exchange he hopes that those laws and customs will not be so particularist that he cannot live under them without being ill at ease, or even experiencing a grave conflict. He wants to assume that the present physiognomy of the new nation is *temporary*, that it will change; he will fight for that evolution—just as the French or English Jews would fight against a reactionary or clerical government. Provided, of course, that he is allowed to put up that fight; that his Jewishness does not make him so suspect that he is forced to maintain the same cautious immobility that he was accustomed to maintaining. Unfortunately, that is what generally happens.

The third solution is to fall back on one's own totally Jewish self. When assimilation to the colonizer has failed and integration into the ranks of the ex-colonized is deemed impossible, one becomes Jewish again, with all that this can imply today. The European Jews are more hesitant in the face of the total implications of this reversion; they already have a nationality, a flag, political and social frameworks which are familiar to them and which they look upon as theirs. For the North African Jew, however, who (just like all other colonized people) has never had a nationality or a history of his own, Judaism once again becomes everything, provides the answer to everything: tradition and religion, culture and politics.

Obviously, the necessary conclusion in this case is Zionism and the departure for Israel. This was and still is the conclusion reached by many young men, who also take their families with them. This of course involves certain difficulties.

Thus, whereas for the vast majority of Moslems there was only one, obvious solution, the liberation and reconstruction of themselves, it was impossible to rally all the colonized Jews to one, single undertaking. Although they wanted to see an end to colonization, they hesitated as to what aftermath they wanted. And all three of the solutions I have just outlined were adopted to an equal extent, because they corresponded to three equally strong requirements: keeping a European option open (and let us not forget that this option was taken up and confirmed despite the vivid errors of colonization); continuing to associate one's destiny with the country of one's birth, with which one is actually in closest harmony (if the experiment had been feasible, it would certainly have been legitimate); and re-creating a more complete Jewish existence by returning to the sources and conquering the national dimension, which, for the Jews of the Maghreb, was a way of liquidating their own colonial oppression. When all is said and done, I do not believe that political morals can condemn any given attitude. No one solution could be found to an essentially ambiguous condition. It is clear, however, that the one which would run exactly parallel to the self-retrieval of the colonized Moslems, namely, the genuine and specific rebirth of the Maghreb Jews, would consist of their national reconstruction and affirmation; in other words, the State of Israel.

4

THE KINGDOM OF THE POOR

Our ghetto is our wound, whether gaping or hidden, our failure, our remorse.

From the moment of our first anxious awareness, which plunges us into endless agitation and a painful effort to readapt to the world, our ceaseless ambition is to achieve universality. Already, as young children in the skimpy yard of the Alliance Israelite school, where we compared ourselves vaguely with our Christian and Moselm fellow citizens, we tried to escape from the ghetto. In fact, we were urged to: "Speak French!" ordered the signs put up by the school principals.

And one way or another, many of us seemed to succeed in doing just that. Often we even left the country, studied in prestigious universities, changed our diet, our clothing, and the color of our skin, and wore glasses. We came to know other people, and whereas we stupidly tried to conceal our exotic background, they found that it added human interest. And then one day, sated with our own rebellion, capable at last of living without seeking frantically outside of our own selves, we returned to our native country.

This text, entitled "*Notre Ghetto*," appeared in *Cahiers F.S.J.U.*, December, 1953, then in *La Presse*, Tunis, February, 1954, and, finally, in German, with the present title, in *Merian*, Hamburg, 1967.

There we are, brand new young men, starting families and launching into our professions. It seems to us we have really reached our goal. We come from here and also there, especially from there. Of the city, we acknowledge only its European quarters, where we work and rejoice, eagerly awaiting touring Paris theater companies, faithfully attending concerts of sophisticated music. Though we have come back to Tunis, or Oran, or Casablanca, we have left some of our books, or a trunk, or more, in Paris or Rome. And if we hear that some great humanitarian movement—"Citizens of the World," "The Friends of Reason"—is looking for members, we immediately send in our contribution. This is the continuation of our cause, our momentum. Paris, for us, is the whole world, the confirmation of our adolescent hopes and wishes.

But one day, as the result of some unexpected stroll, of running into some cousin who has never left the starting gate, of some inordinately meaningful incident, we are tugged violently by the sleeve, and the whole edifice is on the verge of collapsing. Without clearly realizing what is happening to us, we discover that our fundamental problem was not actually that of the "Citizens of the World" or "the Future of Progress." There can be no mistake. In anguish, we are suddenly facing our shameful problem, we suddenly see that our wound has never healed, it is still bleeding: My God, what have I done to save the ghetto?

We clearly discover that if we do not find a solution to this problem, then all the rest amounts to running away, acting in bad faith, turning a blind eye to a blinding reality. What of universality? Meaningless, as long as your brother is coughing his lungs out and his children are literally dying of hunger. So all of us who are worth anything, who care about more than just eating well and making love well, come back to this throb-

bing sore. Not one of my comrades who, rebellious or ironic, went away, and was unfair to his parents and his friends, failed to come back after a few years and, tenderly, try during each vacation to liberate the ghetto he could not forget. And those university graduates with such a bright "European" sheen and often with bourgeois backgrounds—suddenly they feel a gap, and try, unsuccessfully, to fill it in by getting involved in benevolent societies!

Once this has happened, we can no longer avoid carrying the weight of the ghetto on our shoulders and in our hearts. What can we do for the ghetto, my God, what can we do?

The elementary school principal, a good man, phones me to say: "Come this afternoon. I want to show you the ghetto in the rain. Please come . . ."

Could I admit, to my shame, that I no longer wished to go there? That I could not stand the sight of it anymore? But then I would feel even more ashamed in front of the principal; he has had to contemplate it for eighteen years. I go to meet him before school lets out at four o'clock. He cannot resist the temptation to show me the children.

"Look at their shoes," he says. "Their poverty is obvious from their shoes."

What a fine way this would be to begin a film, this parade of shoes! Do these two feet belong to the same boy? Yes, they do! On one foot a torn and rusty sandal, on the other an exhausted ankle-boot with a strip of some indefinable color around the tongue. Esparto-grass contrivances, open sandals, bizarre, dilapidated objects, and the small feet in them blue with cold . . .

Suddenly he has one of the children step out of line.

"Mr. Tubiana! Haven't you seen this?"

The child has a huge abscess on his cheekbone.

"Yes, sir," answers the teacher. "I told him to go to the infirmary after school."

"After school! This can't wait, Mr. Tubianal!"

"I'm not a school principal," the principal tells me again, in his hesitant voice. "I'm a social worker."

In the schoolyard, children are playing. I express surprise: it's not time for recess.

"Oh, those aren't pupils. But they're always here. Where can they go? We give them a snack at four o'clock, and sometimes the evening meal too."

In passing, let it be said: I sincerely take my hat off to the aid societies; they do everything they can, and it reflects honor on them. But alas! This poverty is such a yawning abyss that no charity can fill it up. A drop of water on a burning hot stove. It would take the budget of an entire city, for the ghetto is an entire city of poor people, the kingdom of the poor! And then too, as others have already said, charity maintains the people whom it helps in their helpless situation. They are entitled to dignity and liberty and economic autonomy, entitled to stop being poor. Suddenly the problem is no longer a moral one. It becomes political.

We leave the school. And begin the terrible walk through the ruins.

A few years ago, the city fathers decided to change the layout of a portion of the city. Broad avenues, tall buildings—the idea was worthy of a city that was growing prosperous and ambitious for luxury. But in order to open up these breaches, the compact, twisting mass of the ghetto would have to be split apart. This was not considered a serious obstacle. The ghetto could no more defend itself than an ant heap when you kick it apart. And it is just as full—isn't it wonderfully amusing?—

just as densely populated. Really, each time a chamber of it gave way, you'd think they were ants, those dozens and dozens of creatures scurrying about, dazed. With grim humor, one of my sociologist friends noted that the space available to each inhabitant was, literally, as big as a tomb.

One morning, when the tenants have vainly tried every means of recourse, a demolition crew arrives on the scene, accompanied by a law officer. The women panic and weep, the children scream, the men are sent for hurriedly and make a loud outcry. But what can you do when the law has decided? Do you remember *The Grapes of Wrath*? Here we are plunged into the Book of Jeremiah: the men help to move out the furniture, and part of it is deposited with the neighbors and the rest in the mud. Then they go and get a handcart, and they leave. Where do they go? They answer vaguely: "We crowd in a little closer farther on." I am flabbergasted. Can they crowd in closer than they already have? "We manage. Come see. . . ."

In that room over there, there are two families. Two families in the same room! Yes, but each of them has a corner to itself! It's a long room, do you see? Here's where the Berdahs' side begins and here's where the Cohens' side ends. . . . Except in the winter, when we move all the beds into the middle, because the walls are dripping wet.

In spite of yourself, you may be thinking, deep down inside, an odious little thought that gives you the uneasy satisfaction of a strong man who knows how to be tough: maybe this demolition is a stroke of luck; after all, the ghetto must be done away with! Useless cruelty. The abscess will form again, as on a rotting body, elsewhere; the ghettos will spring up a few miles away, in l'Ariana, in la Goulette. No, no, if you're going to try that tactic, you have to go all the way—to massacre.

Sometimes, a decision in an isolated case enables a few

families to stave off the demolition crew. But the municipal authorities, diabolically, do not wait; they gnaw away half the crumbling structure until only three or four rooms are left, open to the sky. Ah, those houses cut in two as if bombed, and opening abruptly onto empty space; the setting is oddly theatrical, with scenes of weeping, distress, and fury. The children race to the very end of the rotten boards and my heart is in my mouth every time, for fear they will hit the flimsy fencing. . . .

All afternoon, led by my silent companion while the rain fell in a ceaseless drizzle, I went from nightmare to nightmare. Rain is supposed to be a gift from heaven? More of a curse! We go into one room. Of course each family—seven, eight, ten, twelve people—lives in a single room. On the bed, two basins into which drops fall regularly from the ceiling. The women all call to us at once from their doorways: “Come to my place. Come and see!”

One of them, seated on a stool, sobs: “It rains here inside the room the way it does out in the street. Where are the children going to sleep? Everything is wet, everything.”

“The whitewashed walls are so soaked through that you can poke your finger into them.”

The principal is obliged to be firm and fend off the exasperated women. Shouts are hurled after us: “Tell them we curse them, them and their children!”

Whom are they talking about? I have never found out. For that matter, would they know, themselves, what names to put on their misery?

Over here, the sewer has been stopped up for two months. The toilets overflow, the stench is unbearable and I back away.

“The city authorities don’t want to repair them. They say it’s not worth it, since they’re going to demolish the place. . . .”

“But meanwhile,” I protest, overcome with rage, “they’re being choked with excrement!”

“Exactly what the authorities are hoping for. Either that, or that they give up. But where are they supposed to go? All they can do is die here.”

“But something . . . something must. . . ”

“I will telephone tomorrow,” the principal assures the beseeching women.

Outdoors, he shrugs his shoulders.

“I’ll telephone. But what good will it do? They know my arguments already, and I know their answers.”

What with weariness and dejection, faces and individual cases begin to form a blur in my mind. The door that opens and releases darkness and a troop of children of all ages, with wide-open eyes: they have been brought up in the dark from the time they were born, because the mother and father are both blind. This motionless old man who lies on a bare iron bedstead in a nook crawling with vermin and does not answer our questions. These rooms where clothing, strung across the room, pretends to dry while the damp air and the moldy smell make us choke. The kids have big heads and big shiny eyes starting out of them.

“They’re all stupid,” grumbles the principal. “Out of the whole school, only four pupils passed their final elementary level examinations. Four!”

I think of the way Jews pride themselves on possessing an intelligence acknowledged even by their enemies. Our very difficulties, we explain . . . No! The mind must be nourished too. Below a certain minimum, one is not even strong enough to be intelligent. . . .

“Let’s go this way, shall we?”

We are coming to the Moslem brothel districts. In our city,

it is not enough to separate the dwelling places and the tombs; each side must have its own prostitutes. To make it easier to carry out raids, the police had one of the two entrances walled off. This means that the prostitutes, the pimps, and the creators of disturbances are trapped—along with a few families, way at the end of this snare. Four times a day, the kids who go to and from school and the girls who go out to work have to pass by the rows of unclad women.

We walk as far as the wall.

“Ah, the principal! Come in, come in! Hanouna, put down the board.”

In the half-dark, I look down at our feet, where a little pool of water overflows the shared patio. A raft in the form of a small choppingboard is thrown out to us. But we hesitate, so a woman comes out to meet us and boldly places her foot on the board . . . which sinks. The water comes up to her ankle.

“Oh, it’s gotten higher again.”

So we make do with conversing across the water.

“Every night there are fights. We lock ourselves in because the ‘customers’ make a mistake and try to break down our door.”

“My daughter works in town; she gets out late. Every night we wait for her at the entrance, and when we see her coming, a group of us goes to bring her home.”

“Do something, mister! What did they need to put up a wall for? A few more policemen on the other side would have been enough! Help us to get away from here!”

It is late, and we are sopping wet.

Why did I accept the principal’s invitation? Didn’t I know all this already? Maybe I need to brood over this bitterness and distress, need to come home unable to eat, unable to sleep. Maybe it is necessary so that I will vow once more that I must

... I must ... but what? I don't know. I must at least have the courage to continue accompanying the complaints of the ghetto with my own voice!

"Tomorrow, the nurse will tell me there's a fresh outbreak of ear infections with abscesses.

"We'll take care of them, we'll heal them. But what for, my God? What for? We'll fight to keep them alive until the age of ten, eleven. And then what? Then they'll slip out of our grasp. They'll develop tuberculosis or die of starvation or become delinquents. I'm retiring next year. Do you know what conclusion I'm forced to come to? That my life has been useless, completely in vain!"

Just a bit more vigorously he adds: "Ah, they should be left to die instead! Die in their cradles!"

I did not hold this blasphemy against him, for I could see that it was his excessive tenderness that had embittered his whole being and made it despair.

The rain has stopped now. A lake has been created in the middle of the little square, a still mirror reflecting a sky heavy with clouds and night. As we walk around the edges of the square, children break the mirror with their bare feet.

This is the preamble necessary to any meditation on the North African Jews. I know that many European Jews are still tempted by our deep-rooted cult of family, our sincere observance of religious ceremonies. And it is true that, spiritually, we do exist more than the other communities do. But forgive me for saying this: except in times of historical catastrophe, the weakness of many Jewish communities is their spiritual boredom, the boredom of people in good health, who don't know what to do with themselves. Whereas for us, it's a matter of life or death, and I don't mean spiritual life or death, un-

fortunately! The price we pay for our “colorful” existence and our traditions is our physiological poverty, undernourishment, syphilis, tuberculosis, mental illness. One-fifth of the ghetto’s inhabitants have been diagnosed as consumptives! What we experience is an every-day, all-day historical catastrophe.

I also know one of the solutions that are suggested: they should leave, they should abandon the land of their distress! We are ordered to choose: Paris, Tel Aviv, or Tunis? Make up your minds!

If I had had to choose, on behalf of my fellow citizens, among Tunis, Tel Aviv, or Paris, perhaps I would have chosen a Judaism open to the world. Regardless of my nostalgia, I would have foresaken our type of Judaism, which is too closed off. But in the last analysis, who can choose for anyone else? There are those who leave, and there are those who do not want to leave; must they be abandoned because of that? Shrug your shoulders, blame it on inertia and ignorance. Another thing I know well is that the masses seem to obey whims and can change with the violence of a veering wind. For the moment, we have to save these thousands of men, our brothers doomed to a meaningless death. For the moment, if we accept a common Jewish fate, it coincides with that of the ghetto.

5

SUCH AN EVERYDAY TRAGEDY . . .¹

Every Friday evening, it seems, the ladies of a well-known Jewish organization invite a guest to their weekly dinner. At the end of the meal, they have him speak on his specific profession, his political or social views. It is a clever and agreeable way of keeping up to date. Now once, some years ago, as I was passing through Paris, I received one of their invitations. How could I refuse those good ladies? Besides, I had worked with them in Tunis and at the time I had appreciated their devotion and their unselfishness—qualities which, it must be admitted, are rare among male politicians.

When the meal was over, the chairwoman very amiably asked me if I wished to speak. Not being familiar with their weekly custom, I politely declined: no, I didn't wish to, really. The charming chairwoman insisted. I thought she was being polite again: no, I had nothing to say. At which point the lady on the left, who was kindly acting as my guide, whispered in my ear: "You *can't* refuse; it's the tradition, all the Friday guests have to say something."

"Oh? About what?"

This text, published in *L'Arche*, in February 1962, was reproduced in *Documents nords-africains*, Paris, 1967.

“Whatever you like. You’re quite free, as long as you talk. . . . What about North African Judaism, since it means so much to you and you’ve just come from Tunisia. . . .”

If that’s all there was to it . . . And in fact, wasn’t the good chairwoman saying just then: “That beautiful North African Judaism! So picturesque, so dear to our hearts! So ‘authentic’ [the word was fashionable at that time], so devoted to its beautiful traditions!”

She even added (I recall it clearly): “That great reservoir for French Jewry, that new blood . . .”

“Ladies,” I began, “how could anyone refuse such a pleasant opportunity to talk on what he cares about most? To tell the truth, it is always unwise to ask people to unburden their hearts. . . . I know already that you picture the Jews of North Africa as picturesque people, praying in thousand-year-old synagogues, perpetuating traditions which have not changed since the time of Dido of Carthage. All this is true of course, at least partly. But there is another aspect of the situation, another truth: North African Judaism is doomed to die in a short time. In the not very distant future, the demolition crews’ hammers will knock down the ghetto walls. And then I don’t know what will become of those touching rites and those astonishing families that make you feel nostalgic. . . . The other aspect of the truth is that the Jews of North Africa are already beginning to think vaguely of packing up their belongings. And where will they go? They will come here to join you! I am only a modest herald, like the swallow announcing the onset of spring. So prepare to receive them. There will be much work for everyone, alas!”

For a couple of minutes I had been noticing a strange stirring among the assembled ladies, a sort of half-stifled uneasiness. . . .

Undoubtedly, I had made a blunder of some sort. Or maybe my whole speech was one enormous mistake. They had invited me as a writer; I suppose they wanted me to talk about the isle of Djerba and its community, which had remained unchanged for centuries, about those miraculous rabbis, the ancestral customs, or perhaps about the Mediterranean too! The squat cactus plants, as bristly as porcupines, and the agave plants as insolent as young girls, standing out straight on the red clay slopes that pierce the sky, etc. Instead, I had talked about poverty and confusion. I had described how a community that had been settled in the sunlight for so long that it had come to believe in its good fortune, an exceptional stroke of luck compared with the usual fate of the Jews throughout the world, felt dismay at the idea of having to move on.

I remember a discussion between Henry Miller and one of my Greek friends, Mimica Kranaki, who is also a writer:

“Ah, Mr. Miller!” she said. “Dear and admirable Miller, how we love you for loving Greece and the Greeks so much! But, unfortunately, all you’ve seen is the sun and the blue of the sky, all you’ve heard are the joyous raki drinkers’ songs and the craftsmen’s banter. . . . But you see, Mr. Miller, Greece is also poverty, sickness, and children dying.”

Nonetheless, I really did not want to shock my listeners. I had simply told the truth and, as usual, I had aroused uneasiness and anger. But this particular evening I was a guest, and I wanted to make up for my blunder. So I added hastily: “Ladies, this is a magnificent task for you, worthy of your courage, your devotion, and your effectiveness. Think of those thousands of poor people, the women, the children, those who will have to leave their jobs and everything else behind. Start

forming welcoming committees right now! Think about how to find them shelter, work, medicines, clothing. . . .”

By this time, my listeners’ faces were set and stony. What had I done? What had I said? It was clear that I had just made a second blunder, on top of my first. The chairwoman rose, forced out a word of thanks to me, and then desperately tried to close the parenthesis that my speech had opened. She was terribly sorry about the North Africans, of course, but she didn’t believe, no, really she didn’t, that their situation was going to become so hopeless. I must have exaggerated a good deal. . . . I had been either too pessimistic or too lyrical. Ah, these Mediterranean people!

One swallow, since swallow I was, does not make a spring, as everyone knows; the advance guard is not the whole army. . . .

And above all, she added firmly, their organization was not the least bit concerned with the Diaspora. All of their efforts should be focused on the magnificent country of Israel. That’s where my last blunder was. I sat down and tried not to draw any attention to myself for the rest of the evening.

A few days ago, the editor of a Jewish magazine telephoned me.

“Can you write an article for me on the refugees from North Africa?”

“No,” I said. “I have nothing more to say on the North African Jews than what I have already said in my books. As for writing about the event itself, I’m no journalist. And, anyhow, what good does it do? They’re here now; all you have to do is see them, in order to understand. . . .”

Salomon answered: “You’re wrong. People don’t *see* them;

the refugees don't parade up the Champs-Élysées or the boulevard de Courcelles. Your article will have a specific goal: to make our fellow Jews realize what a sad plight our refugees are in. I would like you to write an article that they will find touching. You must explain to them that there is a new tragedy in world Jewry.¹ A modest tragedy; no one is being killed, thank God, but still, tragedy. . . . My dear Memmi, I beg you to help us."

Feebly I asked: "Where can I meet these refugees?"

The editor in chief took care of the formalities and got an appointment for me at one of the reception centers for North African Jews. And so, for several hours, I sat down and limply watched these North African Jews. Oh, yes, I heard them and saw them, all right.

"... A room! ... I found a room! ... But it takes two hundred fifty thousand francs to get it. . . ."

"And how much do you have?" the director of the center asked patiently.

Silence. Then: "Nothing. Twenty thousand francs."

Adding very quickly, with that rapidity of speech I know so well: "But I can pay it back, you know! . . . I've already got work, I'll sign I.O.U.'s, I'll find you a guarantor, my brother has been here for a year already, I can start to reimburse you next month, a little each time. . . ."

Mr. Slama fills out a card. Name . . . spouse, number of children . . . (three, four, five, plus the elderly mother . . .), profession, date of arrival, etc.

"All right, come back and see us in a few days."

"But I'm supposed to see the landlord tomorrow morning, and there are two other people besides myself after the same room."

Mr. Slama sighs. "Look, I have to talk to the committee

about it, and the committee can't meet twenty-four hours a day."

"My God, what am I going to do! I won't get the room!"

Mr. Slama explains to me: "Generally, a lot of them are trying to get the same room, even a tiny hole of a place. The landlords got the idea pretty quickly. It's only normal, after all, that's business. Now they don't even bother to see applicants separately; instead, they call in everybody at the same time, make the same speech to them all, and then sit back and wait—two hundred fifty thousand francs, two hundred sixty thousand francs, two hundred eighty thousand francs—whoever makes the highest bid. . . ."

A tall young woman, dark and attractive, Corsican-looking, severely dressed in black skirt, blouse, and scarf, her eyebrows dark without makeup, her eyes bright, an air of self-assurance. She too already has a proposition.

"And where are you staying now?" asks Mr. Slama.

"At my brother-in-law's. They have two rooms; really one room and a vestibule. We sleep in the vestibule, on the floor. And, also, my brother-in-law has to leave early to go to work and he has to step over people on the floor to get by. . . ."

And there's the toilet. . . .

"How many of you are there?"

"Five in my brother-in-law's family, six in ours."

In the beginning, Mr. Slama tells me, they are almost always warmly welcomed.

"Ah, my father! Ah, my sister!"

They hug each other, they are happy to be together again. But as time goes by, the days becoming months, the promiscuity becomes unbearable. It's not that they lack solidarity; on the contrary, their solidarity is remarkable. But it's the poverty, the endlessness. . . . How many occupants of spacious

apartments could bear to have perpetual guests, and under such conditions?

An accountant: tidy appearance, tight-fitting raincoat, white hair, astonishing resemblance to the typical French civil servant, right down to his accent: he might be from Burgundy. He has come looking for housing and a job.

"No, I'm sorry," the reception center officer tells him. "It's the other way around: first the job, then the housing. That's a principle of this center, which we try to abide by, although there are some cases that are so urgent that we have to let the principle slide. But insofar as possible, we first help these people to find work, because they have to become solvent. . . . What else can we do? We have so little money, that we try to get it back at any price, even if it's just little dribbles here and there. We'll have use for it again."

Besides, of these two essential problems, housing and work, the second is relatively easy to solve. For at least there is work to be had. Not that there aren't any difficulties involved: the almost systematic and often pitiful downward change of category, for instance.

"What kind of work did you do in Casablanca?"

"Accountant."

"And now?"

"Warehouse employee."

"What kind of work did you do in Constantine?"

"Pastrycook."

"And now?"

"Warehouse employee."

Warehouse employee—this is the catch-all word, the euphemism for "man of all work." As long as the men are still young, still have strong backs and pliant muscles, it's all right. Besides, this is a good, hardworking people, willing and full

of vitality: "I'll work, I'll pay you back! I'll accept anything!" But once they're fifty, it's too hard. And on top of that, there are the new and unfamiliar surroundings, the difference in climate. . . .

Sometimes there are subtler difficulties, such as working on Saturday. Some of the people for whom the center finds jobs come back from the interview horrified: they would have to work on Saturday! They, who have observed the Sabbath all their lives, are now asked to break it! Never!

"What do you do in a case like that?"

"We try to find Jewish employers for these workers, these laborers. Obviously, that's not easy. One of our protégés regularly stayed home from work on every Jewish holiday, claiming that he was sick—until finally, one day, somebody realized the astonishing coincidence between his 'illnesses' and the Jewish calendar. Another man refused to accept any promotion or other advantage so that he could keep a job where he didn't have to work on Saturday.

"But they do at least find work, and that is an enormous stroke of luck, given the circumstances.

"The really excruciating problem that they all run into is that of finding a roof. Some of them, when they come here, are quite presentable, decently dressed, and armed with sufficient self-confidence. Don't forget: most of our 'clients' come from a middle class background; the rich ones are still staying put, and, anyhow, they won't come see us. The poorest ones are in Israel. Poor little clerks and craftsmen! Within a few months, they have gone downhill; their clothes are rumpled, their eyes are haggard. Often, illness strikes and that means catastrophe: going to the hospital, having to turn your children over to the welfare authorities.

"You, Mr. Memmi," says Mr. Slama, "you know what it

means to a Tunisian Jew to see his family split up, his children taken away by the welfare people." I certainly do know! The warmth of homelife among our people, the feeling of family solidarity, the way they shun having to deal with the anonymous administrative machine. . . .

From having witnessed this procession of applicants since this morning, having listened to this litany of desperation and poverty, I feel dizzy and nauseated.

" . . . How much do you have right now, to begin with?"

"Nothing."

"Here, I have a ring. Look."

Huge dark eyes. Such beautiful eyes! Large, wide, reaching far to the side, drowning in their own darkness and pain. . . . What beautiful children this would mean, later on, for French Jewry! How overjoyed I would be if I belonged to that anemic category of Jewish families, too old and too pale, like all old families, for that matter. How overjoyed I would be by this new young blood, by the prospect of renewal and rejuvenation thanks to this handsome people, hardy indeed as the cactus and sisal plants that boldly pierce the sky. . . .

"But why do these pastrycooks and accountants have so little money?"

"Because they were not able to carry *anything* away with them, except one dinar, a thousand francs . . . which they try to invest with the first taxi driver they find in front of the railway station. But they just get insulted for their pains: go back to that Bourguiba of yours!"

They are allowed to leave, as long as they leave without anything at all. Nonetheless, they try to bring along a mattress, or a blanket, or some clothes, but they are usually obliged to abandon these things at the customs post, in the

harbor. Once they're on deck, their own physical selves and the clothing on their backs are all they possess in the world.

"But why did you leave everything behind to come here?" The marvelous eyes hesitate. The woman panics and bursts into tears.

"I couldn't stand it anymore. My husband especially, he couldn't stand it. He was having a sort of breakdown. For months he didn't have anything in stock to sell. He didn't have one sou left. He would close up the shop and come home at eleven in the morning. He would cry like a child. The neighbors said to me, 'If he goes on like that, he'll go crazy.'"

It's best to face the truth squarely: either by force or in gentler ways, even the most moderate of the Arab countries get rid of their Jews. Yet I did not hear many recriminations on political grounds as such; rather, it was a case of impossibility. Their destiny as Jews compelled them to take another road. Their culture is French, and they could not imagine their children living their future lives in Arabic. Most of all, it was the inexorable economic process that began to grind down the Jews because it was misfiring. Nothing extraordinary about that; in many countries plunged into crisis this is how it often happens: it is the most vulnerable man who gives way or who must pay.

For instance, the butchers, all of them, were literally, systematically ruined: the currency circulation system was not yet running smoothly; it was assumed that all butchers were necessarily rich, so they were smothered in tax after tax, until they went bankrupt. Besides, since the customers for kosher meat were gradually disappearing, the Jewish butchers' days were numbered anyhow. A hatter sells ten hat-making blocks; he is suspected of wanting to leave the coun-

try and is denounced to the authorities. Immediately, he is ordered to compensate all his workers. He can't afford to; he has to sell his workshop in order to get the necessary sum together. And so he has to leave, still vowing that he hadn't intended to. No matter what happens, whether it is done carelessly or deliberately, the Jew is always crushed.

"Do you want some figures?" Mr. Slama asked me, at the end. "The number of arrivals for the past few months? The number of children? And so on."

No, I did not want statistics. I hadn't come for that. Michael Salomon hadn't even asked me to write a sociological analysis; his magazine had already done that several times, outstandingly well, too. No, he asked me to see and to tell. I have not even tried to paint a pathetic picture. I have simply seen, and I have told: it is unbearable; it cannot wait. If I haven't convinced you, if you don't believe me, if you hesitate, go have a look at the reception center. And after that, tell yourself, again and again, that all those people are only a tiny vanguard, that the movement is going to intensify, that the great bulk of them are not even on the move yet. And that only Tunisia and Morocco are involved so far, but that whatever the solution may be, Algeria will soon be sending its contingent. The bulk of them will be arriving soon; preparations must be made now. "Why here?" I have sometimes heard. Where would you like them to go? Where can they go, if not to a place where they find other Jews? Where they can count on the Jewish community?

They could go to Israel, I have also been told. They do go there too. Some of them go there, some of them come to France. That's the way it is. Unless we're going to treat them high-handedly, like displaced persons, or cattle, we have to resign ourselves to this choice. For the time being, they are

coming here in large numbers. The reasons for their choice are complex. They are leaving the Arab countries; they refuse to go and live in a country surrounded by the Arab world. Give them time to overcome this clutching fear. Their language is French, their culture is French. They imagine it will be easier to get along in France. Let us let time do its work. Some of those who settle here will leave again, for Israel. Meanwhile, those who arrive must be welcomed. I repeat what I used to tell my Zionist comrades ten years ago: Israel is the heart and the head. Israel is now our heart of hearts . . . but the Diaspora is the great, suffering body. Regardless of our faithful, vigilant solicitude, our total and definitive solidarity with Israel, we must never abandon that great body, scattered, torn, and forever threatened. After all, without that body, Israel would have been meaningless.

To all, and especially to the French Jewish community, which does, it is true, have to bear the heaviest share, I say: do not reject them, whatever your reasons may be, even if you think they are good reasons. They will come anyway. What needs to be done for them? I apologize for having to say it so crudely: for the moment, it's a matter of money. Much money will be needed in the coming months. How lucky that all that history demands of us, at this time, is money. We should thank heaven that a great country is willing to receive our people without too much hesitation. The country itself deserves our hearty thanks. We should rejoice that our latest immigrants give us so few adaptation headaches. They speak French; they will not attract attention: they will not "arouse anti-Semitism," as the expression has it. They are courageous, healthy, and solvent: "I'll pay it all back, down to the last sou!" "Look at my hands," a former businesswoman said to us. She now has a job packaging candies as they come out of the oven. Her

once-elegant, slender, well-cared-for hands had become red and swollen, but she did not complain. "I'll accept anything, I'll pay you back. . . ." For such simple, easy questions of money, are you—are we—going to let the old people die, let the young adults become broken down, let the girls become prostitutes? These are not just idle images: I have seen men of forty wither in a matter of months, and I have seen several of their daughters in the vicinity of the red-light district around the porte Saint-Martin, little brunettes, still plump, their cheeks still rosy and childish. These are our daughters, the daughters of Israel, the children of our little brother Joseph. Since when, among our people, do uncles abandon their nieces and nephews?

NOTE

1. Everyone knows about the dramatic situation of the North African or Portuguese workers in Europe. Who knows about that of the North African or Egyptian Jews arriving in France, often penniless? And yet the North African Moslem can, luckily, go back to his native country; the Jew cannot.

6

WHAT IS A ZIONIST?

I

Those readers who have been kind enough to keep up with me know that I was born in Tunis, in Tunisia, in a community so ancient that its establishment, or its conversion, is said to have occurred long before the arrival of the Arabs in the Maghreb and still longer before that of the various waves of Europeans.

But although we belonged, deeply, to the heart of those North African countries, we were fascinated, very early, by the experience of the West, by the extraordinary movement that was going on at our doorstep, and even in our midst, in the person of the Italian and French colonizers. And it was common for the young men to try at least once in their lives to go away and seek their destiny, even if that meant coming home beaten but with dazzled eyes. Many came back the richer for their sustaining dream but to some extent foreigners to themselves forever.

The major portion of this text provided the basis for a series of lectures in the U.S.A. in the summer of 1966, and also for an initial version of a chapter entitled "Small Portrait of a Jew" included in the first edition of *Dominated Man*, Paris, Gallimard, 1968. But it was not reproduced in the new edition, Paris, Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1973, nor in any foreign editions. It has been revised and augmented for purposes of this new publication.

So, I too had left my native country after the war, after the prison camps, after months of raging impatience, and one day I found myself in northern France, where the people were astonishingly silent, where the fog was so thick you could not see three feet in front of you, where hideous ruins persisted strangely in outlining a phantom city among heaps of stones that still smelled of death. The dream of the West had turned into a nightmare, but I could not turn back, back to the sun, my family, the community, to all that I had left so proudly, with all the disdain of which a young man is capable as he goes out to conquer the world without deigning so much as a backward glance. I even began to doubt the profession I had so ardently chosen, and even philosophy itself, which seemed to me at that time the only possible occupation for a man of any nobility.

In short, the only resource I had left was to write, that is, give some orderly expression to the difference between what I was and what I was becoming. If not, as I foresaw with certain fear, I would sink into the chaos. And so I wrote my first book.

I won't say any more about it, except that it is the story of a young man, who of course resembled me closely, and who was on the fence between two civilizations, who could not bring himself to snap the thread which bound him to the East, to the past, to his mother tongue, to his strange, illiterate mother who still danced magic dances; but neither was he able to accept the West, its hardness, its injustices, its false rationalizations and its fake morals; who, in other words, was on the verge of destruction, when he decided to leave everything behind, go to live in an imaginary country and never look back, so as not to turn into a "pillar of salt."

The book ended both badly and well. Well, since the hero

did manage to avoid madness and death, because of his determination to start afresh. But it did end on a note of solitude, until such time as a reunion with other men might come about, amid solidarity that would be courageous and combative, although without illusion.

In a sense, all of my later work has been a multiple effort to answer from several angles the various problems that were more or less consciously raised in that first book.

When, for instance, a man feels torn between two groups, two cultures, claimed by both at once, a mixed marriage may seem to him the ideal solution. In marrying a woman from the group that is foreign to his own, he believes he has overcome the agonizing split within him through the most intimate of all syntheses, that of love and the flesh. So in *Strangers* I told the story of a couple—a young Catholic girl from eastern France, the France that is so similar to the Germanic countries, a blonde with blue eyes, and a young Tunisian, Jewish, a university graduate, a doctor, yet attached to his own people by every aspect of his sensitivity, every part of his history, and above all by unremitting guilt.

That book also had a sad ending: the couple splits up, after several crises, and the birth of a child, which makes it urgent to make a decisive choice about the future. Even so, I do not think that it is pessimistic, as has so often been said of my books. It describes the failure of a marriage, but the reader can also learn from it everything one must not do to make a successful marriage. I have nothing whatever against mixed marriages, and I have often said so since. I consider—I continue to consider—the couple as one of the rare ways out of human solitude, and “it is not good that man be alone.” If a man finds the end of his anguish in a woman, no matter what she is like, he must make every effort to be united with her, do

everything to preserve that extraordinary happiness that every child avidly seeks: the most trusting communion possible with another being. I might add that one of the acquisitions of Western civilization that I admire the most is the autonomy of the individual: if a man and a woman believe that they need to live together, no one has the right to prevent them from doing so, in the name of any group or any philosophy.

However, the problem I was examining was this: when groups conflict, often seriously—in a colonial situation, for example, or in an anti-Semitic milieu, or in the current crisis between whites and blacks—can a mixed marriage heal the rending that individuals feel? I came to the conclusion that it could not. On the contrary: there was a frequent risk that the war between groups would break out within the couple itself, that man and wife would taunt each other with the suspicions and words characteristic of their respective tribes. This is what happened to my unfortunate heroes.

In any case, this is how I was led to examine those very conflicts that thrust group against group; this was the origin of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Like most of my books, this one had two meanings. First of all, it corresponded to a question I asked myself at a specific moment of my existence: what did the colonial experience in which I was involved signify? In order to answer it, I took a case history, my own life, as the basis for the portrait of a type of man in a social and historical situation in which it was particularly difficult to live. I would not have been able to draw the portrait of the colonized man, nor even of the colonizer, had I not been *native* myself to a colonized country, had I not experienced the colonial relationship even before becoming aware of it. Having suffered from colonial institutions and ways, having

felt the weight of the colonizer's privileges, all I needed to do later, in order to reconstruct the colonized man, feature by feature, was call up my own memories and contemplate the scars—some of which will never fade—of such a long humiliation.

The second result of my systematic investigation of my own experience of colonialism was the discovery of a *certain number of mechanisms* that bound the two partners of colonization to one another and which shed astonishing light, it seemed to me, on their respective types of conduct. This led to fascinating discoveries, for myself first of all. And, even so, I had not yet clearly realized that this duet, so well regulated that it rarely contained a single gesture, image, or phrase that did not have its counterpart, was to be found among other people, in other similar conditions.

Now, when I—quite naturally, and I will explain why—came to take up that other aspect of my life, namely, my dimension as a Jew, this initial work proved to be infinitely valuable. For I had already established the main part of my method of work, which consisted of shuttling back and forth between a concrete, experienced fact, whose subtle shadings I knew intimately and of which I could speak with certainty, and a generalizing supposition, or stylization, which I can compare at any time with that experience and which can never therefore be accused of being arbitrary. Obviously, no matter how thoughtful this reflection based on my own life, this unique experience, might be, it alone would not have entitled me to claim that such portraits were genuine. But, what had happened to me had not happened to me alone on a desert island! Not one of my feelings, not one instance of my behavior during this tortured period, had not been sternly compared and collated and judged! How could I fail to distinguish what

was felt by all, from what was strictly my own personal experience? How could I not recognize what bound me to the people about me and what placed me in opposition to them? All I needed to do, I thought, was to indicate carefully what was accidental and what was repetitive, and warn the reader in so many words every time I had noted something for the pleasure of its picturesque quality. And so, aware of the precautions necessary in order to extrapolate legitimately from private facts, I tried to erase everything that would have been superfluous detail or unduly specific and would therefore have weakened these portraits. And I must say that apart from a few critics who were refractory, as a matter of principle or politics or personal antipathy, or who simply disapproved of the very idea of drawing those portraits, most of my readers did on the whole vindicate my way of proceeding by recognizing themselves in the results. So true it is that above and beyond their specific traits, all oppressions are comparable, and any dominated man finds the main features of his own condition among other dominated men, above and beyond geographical or historical peculiarities, or the most varied disguises or alibis. . . .

But I am getting ahead of myself. For the time being, as I said, I was still absorbed by one particular, obsessive, and, as I clearly felt, necessary project: I had to draw the portrait of a Jew. This was no mere chance decision. But why the necessity?

Colonization was over. Country after country in North Africa had achieved its independence and I had applauded it, regardless of the doubts, the difficulties, and sometimes the despair that haunted us on certain days. In the end, I had even worked rather closely with the young nationalists: I helped to found the first Destourian¹ weekly of that time, and for several

years I was in charge of its cultural pages. People have tried to embarrass me by throwing this so-called contradiction in my face: after having approved the liberation of the Maghreb, I suddenly began to examine the separate Jewish fate, which implied a sort of divorce from the Moslem communities of North Africa. Personally, I do not see where there is any contradiction; or, if contradiction there be, then, as we shall see, these are the contradictions implicit in Jewish existence. For as I could clearly see and verified through my own everyday experience, our fate did not coincide with the fate of these young, happily newborn nations. Once I had obstinately rid my life of its colonial aspect, why would I not then, and with the same severity, examine its Jewish aspect? It was precisely because the colonial precondition had disappeared that I was now face to face with my Jewish problematics. In fact, I regret nothing: neither having contributed, even so slightly, to the just cause of the colonized people of the Maghreb, nor having undertaken to draw up the inventory of Jewish oppression: *since it is indeed another major oppression.*

For naturally, once again, it was that very thing which seemed the most important to me, which struck me most. This rapprochement with the situation of the colonized man, and the inevitable unveilings of the Jewish condition as it is experienced, greatly embarrassed a certain number of my readers, both Jews and non-Jews, conservatives and progressives.

Where the Jewish traditionalists were concerned, this was understandable: the Jewish destiny is a glorious one, that of the chosen people. How did I dare speak of the misfortune of being Jewish, of anxiety, of periodic catastrophes and even of permanent humiliation? Why dwell on the examples and the

consequences of oppression suffered by Jews, even in the so-called civilized countries? Wasn't the main thing the extraordinary mission entrusted to the Jews by God, and for which they were ready to accept anything, bear anything? But I, comparing their ideology with its concrete historical bases, setting it side by side with the sordid and often bloody reality, revealed the mythical nature of that ideology. By so doing, I disarmed the Jewish traditionalists; I dispelled the clouds that had hidden them and left them naked before the aggressive horrors of history. They defended themselves against me, if not against our common enemies, accusing me pell-mell of devaluing the past and the Jewish tradition, of taking hope away from the young people. They suggested that because I was an Eastern Jew, I could not understand the West, or even that I was simply out of my mind, and a great deal more nonsense, ascribable to the anguish they felt; whereas I firmly believe that becoming aware of a real situation is the first step toward liberation.

The partisans of progress also shied away from frankness—this time, for the future's sake. They preferred to deny reality rather than be thwarted in their triumphant march toward progress and worldwide unification. I, on the contrary, by emphasizing the persistent threat, and the separateness of the Jew, appeared as a divisive influence. But I continue to believe that you do not genuinely hasten progress by closing your eyes to men's real miseries and the ignominies of history. I was sharply reproached, for instance, with having written, during the Algerian war, that workers were not untainted with racism and that they had even extensively consented to the colonial wars. People were indignant now at my saying that anti-Semitism was broadly represented in all classes of society. Couldn't the colonial wars have been more

effectively combatted if the racism felt by the majority of the French people had been more adequately acknowledged? Is it not better to take into consideration latent anti-Semitism if we are to act seriously on the Jewish condition?

It was comical, in any case, to find so much ill humor, with regard to oppression of the Jews, among the very people who had praised me so when I depicted colonial oppression. Why? Because they did not believe that the Jews were oppressed? For other reasons that I dare not think of? In my view, there were just as good reasons to describe and denounce the one as the other. Truer still: although I had been colonized only by accident, I remained Jewish of necessity. And every step of the way, I found the same mechanisms, the same patterns of accusation, humiliation, lack of objectivity as with regard to colonized man. I will even state outright that in those two books, *Portrait of a Jew* and *The Liberation of the Jew*,² I often had in mind, above and beyond Jews, oppressed men in general, whoever they might be; and that the wealth of description, the extent of the details given, and the understanding of oppression come as much from that constant purpose as from the analysis of a condition that I know particularly well from the inside.

Lastly, this stage was inevitable along my own itinerary. I could not dodge it without distorting the very meaning of all my research. I am well aware that most of my fellow Jewish writers or journalists prefer to place that aspect of themselves in parentheses. I am not blaming them; every man arranges things his own way as between his life and his work. For me, it was impossible, since my whole procedure was a sort of balance sheet, and every step and every revelation was indispensable to the pursuit of my undertaking.

II

Here is the point I had reached when those two books were published, and here is what they meant in relation to my work taken as a whole:

Obstinately, I went on drawing up the *inventory of my life* which began with *The Pillar of Salt*. This explains the sort of severity, so often cast up at me as a reproach, with which I frequently treated my own people: I was being severe with myself, first of all.

I was trying to draw the portrait of a Jew. My own portrait and, by extension, that of Jews in general.

In this way, stroke by stroke, mechanism by mechanism, character by character, I was moving ahead toward my goal, *a portrait of the contemporary oppressed man*, which I hope to finish one day, if such a project can have an ending.

Now it is time to add that this continuous generalization was not the outcome of some swelling ambition, some insatiable appetite, that had seized me tardily and unnecessarily. It was my readers who forced me to it, to begin with—my colonized readers, my black readers, then my Jewish readers. Without them, I might have gone no further than a sort of confession, without obliging myself to make this systematic comparison and then making a more and more general extension of it. It is true that I had called my first book *Portrait of a Jew*—out of caution, so as to emphasize the personal experience contained in it. I quickly realized that in order to answer the question “Who am I, as a Jew,” I had to answer the more general question “What is a Jew,” at least indirectly. Most of all, I was able, every single day, to verify this cross-checking, this mutually supporting accumulation of testimony

through the letters I received and the readers I met, or through the types of behavior I noted all about me. I did not need all this, of course, when it came to Eastern Jews, whom I could reconstruct with my eyes closed; but how many times, in the course of a public debate, a Polish or a Russian Jew would stand up to confirm that our experiences, anxieties, and hopes were similar despite differences in local color. If I were to replace Arabic, which is my mother tongue, with Yiddish, I would find the same ambiguity that is felt by so many Jews with regard to language, the same intimate separation between a secret mother tongue, still spoken with one's parents but socially ineffectual, and the language of the majority, an impersonal tool, but indispensable to one's relationship with others. If we leave aside the couscous of the Tunisians and the gefilte fish of the Poles—which are savory details, certainly, but were actually adopted to fit the accidental circumstances of the long march—we find the same Sabbath atmosphere among all devout Jews.

In short, this means that there is *one common Jewish condition*—common at least to the vast majority of Jews, if not to all. And, of course, common above and beyond the distinctive social features, cultural shadings, historical junctures which give each segment of Jewry its own original physiognomy.

First of all, there are the common threat and risk, which periodically materialize. I have written that it is never easy to be Jewish, that the awareness of being Jewish was never altogether serene. This has been challenged, sometimes hotly, as if I had denied that at the same time there are joys and sources of pride that are uniquely Jewish. However, in my very first book, I described the white tablecloth of the Friday evening, the heady scent of the yellow and white narcissus, the Saturday morning strolls taken amid that extraordinary

impression of cosmic peace and that invincible aspiration to universal harmony that every Jew harbors in his heart. I agreed that one could feel some pride in belonging to the people who had given men the Bible, who had laid down the moral foundations of a large part of the world, and who had even survived so many catastrophes; who had, perhaps, gained a remarkable keenness thereby and, oddly enough, unlimited tenderness toward the human species.

Only, I also showed that the Jew paid an unduly high price for these joys, that they existed alongside the menace that never ceased to prowl, even around the capital cities, even inside them; that in this way Jewish anxiety is sustained and honed by the never totally silent echo of the Jews who are being oppressed, robbed, and killed at some point on the globe. Doubtless this misfortune is not always as intense, everywhere, at the same time; doubtless, it varies depending on the hazards of geography and the ups and downs of history; no doubt but what economic success helps the Jew considerably to live; no doubt but what anxiety is tempered or accentuated by the individual temperament: in short, a Jew's dimension as a Jew is not always brought home to him, and a lucky thing it is too. Only, all he need do is think about it, and immediately he feels, alongside the pride, the anguish and the potential threat.

But never mind. I have so often been told that some Jews have never felt that anguish, never been aware of that threat, that I am willing to pretend to believe it, despite the fact that bad faith is sometimes the only possible defense against savage reality.³ Despite the fact that even if it were true that individuals manage to forget, to lose sight of the collective destiny, the people taken collectively do not forget: the collective consciousness of *any* of the Jewish communities in the world is always vigilant, never entirely stilled.

It is now time to consider the second characteristic of Jewish existence: being Jewish does not only mean being aware of it; it also means submitting to an *objective condition*. I will come back to this idea; it is vital to this itinerary and to all similar efforts of mine. Being Jewish does not consist only of a set of impressions, feelings, worries, or moments of happiness which one may or may not feel. As if one could say, as you sometimes hear people say, with apparent tranquillity: "I don't *feel* very Jewish," and imagine one had settled the matter with a shrug of the shoulders. *Jewishness* is not merely a more or less fleeting way of being—of the subjective self. Being Jewish is a condition that is *imposed* on every Jew, chiefly from the outside, since it is chiefly the result of the relations between Jews and non-Jews. Now, a Jew can adjust to those relations, he can pretend to see nothing hostile in them, he can claim that he is seldom aware of them, he can even derive special pleasure from them: but he can never forget them for very long except by means of constant ingenuity and painstaking good will.

We naturally find here all of the *objective negativity* of the existence of any oppressed man. For a Jew, it can be summed up in one word: anti-Semitism. Long familiarity with iniquity must not blunt the scandal of it. It must be repeated that the anti-Semitic process is always the same—from worldly and almost playful denigration, which goes to the trouble of using disguises and finding alibis, to murder. As long as this rejection of Jews remains deep-rooted, I shall never be sure that a given group of men will not, one day, give in to a homicidal rage against Jews. More generally speaking, in fact, I am by no means convinced that the days of genocide are over; we have just had examples of it.

The fact is that we are not dealing only with words and opinions, which could be answered by arguments alone. A

famous philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, has written that a Jew is a man considered as such by other people. I find that quite inadequate. In my opinion, a Jew is above all a man *treated* as such by other people, and likely to be still more badly treated. The Jew is not just *accused*, *maligned*, besmirched unto mythical proportions; he is *genuinely* threatened, set apart, excluded; his life is periodically in danger. Now of course, here again, the weight of oppression is felt to varying degrees: sometimes, as in certain Arab countries, it is institutional and legal, and sometimes, as in Europe, it is diffuse and implicit; sometimes, as only thirty years ago, it reaches paroxysms; sometimes, as we know it today in the big cities, it is shamefaced, almost amiable. But I maintain that it is always there and easy to describe, even in this supposedly civilized universe. I have tried to show how it occurs in the Jew's political life, in his economic life, in his relations with other people's religion, with the dominant culture, etc.

Third and final point: being Jewish is also a *positive* matter of belonging to a group and a culture; it is not only a heavy negative burden.

It is amusing to note that whereas the anxiety and the objective unhappiness are violently denied by the traditionalist circles, the existence of a Jewish cultural tradition and the affirmation of a cultural community are as violently denied by the liberals. Yet those very same liberals strongly—and rightly—uphold the cultural liberation of all oppressed peoples, and sometimes even any and every ideological demand those peoples make, no matter how alienating it is. I have often wondered if this moderation on the liberals' part is not due to the fact that many of them are Jewish intellectuals. However that may be, their refusal is possible only as the result of a *misunderstanding* and of blindness to a *fact*.

The *fact* is that the very great majority of Jews throughout the world obviously belong to a culture and a group. The liberals tend to forget too easily how the Jewish masses live, feel, and think. I, naïvely, used to think you couldn't undertake any just political action without "sticking close to the masses." . . .

The *misunderstanding* is over the notion of culture. Sometimes they reduce it to the Jewish religion; and not being devout themselves (which is legitimate), they eliminate the problem by crossing it out on paper (which is frivolous), in a cultural universe where religion still governs the existence of the majority. Sometimes, with false humility, they admit their ignorance of the traditional texts, the Bible, the Talmud, the Zohar, and conclude that they do not participate in that culture in any way—if that culture exists, if it is not already dead and buried. The reason is that, for them, culture is chiefly a set of texts. Now, the culture of a people is not only a matter of books; it is a dense baroque monument of institutions, rites, collective habits, mental attitudes. It is possible for a Jew never to have seen a copy of the Zohar, or not to know that there are two Talmuds; yet he belongs to the Jewish culture because he buries his dead in a certain way and rejoices in his way when a child is born—both cultural traits, like the wedding ceremonies and the culinary ritual that those prestigious books, which he has never read, go into in detail. In this outlook, which is infinitely truer and broader than that of our new scribes, virtually every Jew participates—more or less, of course, as is the case with any kind of participation—in this common cultural universe. And if he does not, then his brother or his uncle or his cousin does.

As with any aspect, even the most positive, of a dominated man's behavior, there is another side to the coin that I find equally important: being Jewish also means *not belonging* to the same culture as other people. I like to offer this simple

example: even in the West, the societies in which we live are fundamentally religious, even though they may be secular on the surface. People's lives move to the rhythm of the major religious holidays, which provide the occasions for collective communion. This is normal and legitimate. It would be surprising if a group's religion, having impregnated for so long its entire life, did not also extend to its institutions. There is nothing scandalous about a majority spontaneously imposing its nostalgia, its joys, and its mourning. Only, the Jew, like any minority member, is relatively excluded from the collective memory, the deep-rooted cultural heritage. Now of course he can get used to this, he can even derive some pride from his solitude, which has perhaps some nobility to it. I simply note the result: a sort of constant hiatus between the Jewish citizen's public life and his private life. When the nation of which he is part celebrates Easter, he must stop work; when his own holiday, Passover, comes, he does not always have the right not to work. In other words, being Jewish also means *not* taking part completely in the dominant culture, not going to the same place of worship as one's fellow citizens, not living to the beat of the same collective rhythms, not always reacting with the same sensitivity, and it also means all the practical consequences that these things imply. Above and beyond its positiveness, and perhaps because of that very positiveness, a Jewish existence is always burdened with a heavy negative coefficient. This, as I have amply shown, is one of the clearest signs of oppression.

It may be recalled that a sort of intellectual referendum, several years ago, brought together a number of Jewish figures to discuss the question "What is a Jew?" Here is what my answer would have been. To me, being Jewish:

means *being conscious of being Jewish*.
is an *objective condition*.

means *belonging to a certain culture*.

This would not be cause for concern, had I not discovered at the same time that these involved, respectively:

consciousness of a *misfortune*.

a *condition of oppression*.

an *alienated culture*.

Having reached that point, however, I realized that I was bringing up a new question, as serious as the reply to it. Supposing your pessimistic diagnosis is right, people said to me, what remedy do you suggest? People urged me to deal as rapidly as possible with this new problem. I have often had to defend myself against this demand from readers. After all, although a writer may correctly describe a case of oppression, there is no certainty that he can always clearly see the end of it. One critic has gone so far as to say that there will never be a sequel to my project since I myself am more baffled than my readers by this dead end into which I had led them: the Jew remained an oppressed man.

III

The new question was this: if the Jew is in that situation, always threatened, in a world that is always profoundly hostile, how can that situation be transformed?

I noted first of all that man does not have an unlimited number of ways of replying to his destiny: although Jews seem to adopt a number of different attitudes, these ostensible responses are easily classifiable. It does not take long to find that many of them use the same more or less concealed mechanism: *rejection of self*. A second group makes use of *affirmation of self*. So I set myself the task of examining the self-rejection process, from the most obvious or banal tactics to the most unexpected, subtle, or embarrassing. To do so, I applied

the same method as in my previous book: I *told* how I had experienced these things personally, and I allowed myself to complete or compare that recital with the experience of the people around me, so as to discern traits that were typical. And I wondered, along the way, whether each of these tactics could bring the desired liberation.

For instance, the benign mania, which is so widespread in Europe, of *changing one's name*, revealed a most enlightening dialectic: a rejection of self, immediately countered by a resistance to that rejection. I was able to show that in a great many cases, there was a desire to preserve a more or less disguised link with the old name. The new name is almost never chosen at random but, instead, according to implicit criteria.

Jewish humor I found to be a veritable treasure-house of more or less conscious emotional and intellectual tactics by means of which the Jew tries to defend himself, to disarm his assailants, or to weaken his own anguish. That is why so many Jewish stories are about money: it is one of the favorite themes of the accusations brought against Jews, and the Jew has to account to himself for it.

The *assimilation* phenomenon is common to all Jewish communities the world over: the Jew has always assimilated. Certainly this was necessary, and it would be absurd to blame him for it, as some people would insist upon doing. And yet! When we take a closer look, we realize that along with assimilation there is a sort of vertigo, whereby the Jew clings to what he was before, so as not to be submerged in the midst of the other people. He ceaselessly invents new *survival devices*, which keep alive the difference between him and them.

But assimilation does not go far enough; in a society that is still religious, true assimilation would be conversion. Only conversion would make it possible to shift once and for all

into the majority group; it would save at least part of the children. But I have also shown the types of disorder that are the price of conversion.

In almost all of my books I have talked about *mixed marriages*.

I haven't room here to go into all those analyses, and I readily agree that details of them may be debatable. It may be argued that I overdramatize a given point or slide over another. My own sensitivity and temperament have colored these descriptions to a large extent, I agree. A specific application or theory may be challenged, a generalization may be rejected. But what matters to me is that the overall lesson be learned: *in an oppression situation, self-rejection does not solve anything.*

I have found that all the other portraits of dominated man bear this out: self-rejection destroys the oppressed man's soul so, and distorts his behavior so, that for that reason alone, it would be too costly a solution. Too often, it degenerates into self-hate. And finally, above all, *self-rejection works hand in hand with oppression!* After all, what does the oppressor want if not the destruction of his victim! In other words, total submission on the victim's part, his psychological obliteration, and, more or less obscurely, his physical obliteration as well—for I am convinced that, ultimately, oppression means the death of the oppressed man. In any case, rejecting oneself means at least being resigned to oppression, consenting to being mutilated. Such is the absurdity of self-rejection: intended to alleviate oppression, in the end it contributes to it.

Self-affirmation might seem healthier and more dignified. More effective too: the first step toward liberation must be self-acceptance. (Although no oppressed man can be blamed

for rejecting himself, and every oppressed man does more or less reject himself.) Today there are undoubtedly many proud-to-be-Jewish Jews, especially among the young people, and probably as a result of the founding of the State of Israel. But after all, I said to myself, affirming oneself as a Jew does not mean merely buying Jaffa oranges, clapping for touring troupes of Israeli dancers, and contributing to welfare funds! Clearly, I had to go further. I had to find out what was contained in that affirmation. What do you affirm when you affirm yourself as a Jew? What are the *positive* contents of Jewishness?

In other words, I had to look for the significance of belonging to a group, respecting its values and institutions. Let us set aside, for the time being, the notion of sharing a destiny with a group of other men. The problem of common values was a formidable problem in itself, especially with regard to a Jew, for the Jew has truly become a man of one ideology. This, in fact, is one sign of his abstractness, his separation from the world of men. What could Judaism, the Jewish religion and culture, offer to a modern Jew? I had to review one by one the major themes of traditional Jewish thought as well as the present evidence of a Jewish culture. It would take too long to set out here my analyses of various themes—monotheism, Messianism, the chosen people—and of what they can *really* convey to a Jew. I will merely take the example of contemporary Jewish culture.

It was clear to me that the notions of Jewish art, Jewish literature, or Jewish philosophy were necessarily equivocal and vulnerable. The Jew's living culture is constantly tempted by the culture of the majority and in danger of being absorbed by it. Now, I repeat, I see nothing improper in this spontaneous victory of the prevailing culture. Moreover, naturally enough,

a Jewish painter or novelist simply wants to be a painter or a novelist. Chagall, like Soutine or Modigliani, gets angry when he is called a Jewish painter, for he sees in that an underhanded limitation. But at the same time, a Jewish painter, writer, etc., is always taken over by the culture of the country in which he lives; the symbiosis always works to the benefit of the dominant cultures.

This victory is neither abnormal nor scandalous. Let's suppose that a Jew manages to constitute a culture of his own, amid the cultural universe of other people: would that rescue him from their universe? We have an image of this special domain, this preserve, a veritable realm within a realm: tradition provides us with it. No traditionalist, no matter how strict, manages to live completely outside the world of other men. Only through a series of successive compromises, adaptations, assimilations can he avoid what I have called "encystment," the spiritual ghetto. Generally speaking, *the culture of any member of a minority is doomed to steer a course between sclerosis and disappearance.*

Let me answer an objection that has often been raised to my argument: I have never denied the advantages that this falling back on self may have brought. I have indicated the historical and still current role of the Jewish religion in the collective survival of the Jewish people: religion remains for a long time the backbone of any oppressed people. (I could have wished, however, that the traditionalists would take the trouble of answering my analyses seriously, that is, *in detail*, rather than rejecting them en masse, as being an attempt on something.)

But I had asked myself a specific question: could faithfulness to a religion, confirmation of a tradition, religious or not, save the Jew from other men's hostility? For that had been

my aim throughout my lengthy search. I replied: No, it could not. I have no desire to indulge in irony, heaven knows, but the truth is that no prayer, no ritual, has ever deflected the assassin's arm. An anti-Semite isn't at all concerned about the attendance rate at the synagogue—unless, on the contrary, he is indignant at seeing so many Jews out on the sidewalk during Yom Kippur. Not to mention that this withdrawal into self cannot but accentuate the Jew's separateness. For, here we come to the crux again: *self-affirmation, in an oppression situation, also ultimately confirms the oppression.*

The tragic truth is that *in an oppression situation, neither self-rejection nor self-affirmation can free the oppressed man.* Worse yet, both of them, paradoxically, aggravate his misery.

We must come back to this fundamental point: *the Jewish condition is an objective condition.* Being Jewish is not just a matter of being devout or not, being attached to certain ethical values or not; it does not merely mean being considered a Jew by other people; affirming or rejecting oneself as a Jew does not change matters much. Being Jewish means *to undergo the destiny of a single group of men.*

This means that it is not merely a question of opinion but also a set of facts, traits, behavior patterns, and even of types of treatment undergone. Consequently, if this condition is to be transformed, it will never be enough to tackle the opinions held on either side, by Jews and non-Jews. It is *the objective relations* between Jews and non-Jews that *will have to be changed completely.*

Therefore I examined, chiefly, two attempts at solutions, both of which ended in failure: dialogue with the political left, and dialogue with the Christians. In both cases, the concrete Jewish condition, the living Jew, are given short shrift

in favor of an ideology. The reasoning used by the men on the left proceeds from that open-sesame simplification that they apply to so many problems: let's bring about the revolution, they say, and the Jewish problem will take care of itself. A man I knew when we were both university students breezily maintained, though he was a future psychiatrist, that after the revolution, there would be no more sexually impotent people. This theory does not seem to be borne out by what we know of the U.S.S.R. and the Eastern European people's democracies. More specifically, I have shown that the Marxists, following the example set by Marx himself, apply to the Jewish problem a pattern that is obviously irrelevant; for they persist in understanding it in terms of economics and of class struggle, whereas it is a phenomenon of an altogether different kind.

As for the Christians, for centuries they have stubbornly viewed the problem in terms of theology. That is their language, of course. But at the same time it spares them having to take care of making any concrete transformation in the condition forced upon the Jews. For instance, seriously combating the genuine, and not just metaphysical, racism of their troops. The latest Vatican Council does seem to have turned a new leaf, and naturally this is cause for rejoicing. But that timid step must now be followed by a veritable rush in that direction: recognition of the special social and historical oppression suffered by the Jew throughout the Christian world and the need for ceaseless action to put an end to it.

To tell the truth, neither side has realized, or wanted to realize, the *specificity* of the Jewish problem. This notion of specificity has become one of my most reliable tools in the course of my long inquiry about dominated men. Until now,

I have dwelt at length on the resemblances between the various oppressions, which have authorized me to speak of *dominated man*. But each embodiment of that man has his own original features. And a portrait of colonized man does not mean that one can dispense with a portrait of a Jew, or of a black. That is why, immediately after *Portrait of a Jew*, I wrote a book on dominated man, which is an extension and a verification of these themes, but is also a systematic comparison of the resemblances and differences between the different oppressed peoples.

Another reason for the importance of this notion of specificity is this: *one cannot propose any effective liberation if the specificity of each condition has not been grasped*. That is why I protested so strongly when attempts were made to reduce the colonial problem first, then the Jewish problem, to a matter of class struggle—in other words, when you come down to it, to an economic employers-workers pattern. It is reductions such as those that have made the ideology of the political left in Europe impotent.

What, then, is the specific meaning of the oppression of the Jew?

What have I done thus far?

I have shown that, historically, the Jew was an oppressed man and that he largely remains so today. I have described the various aspects of that oppression. I have taken into account the present-day lessening of Jewish misery in many countries; but I am not convinced that anti-Semitism has ineluctably disappeared.⁴ Then, I examined such false solutions as reverting to the faith, for instance, or settling into abstract universalism. By way of reminder, I spelled out a few useful truths: by and large, despite resistance on the part of Jews them-

selves, assimilation is refused to them by other people more than it is refused by the Jews themselves. Otherwise, the Jews would have disappeared, after all.

I was tempted not to go any further. Just as, before that, I had been tempted to stop at the end of my description of the colonized and the colonizer, without concluding that the destruction of colonization was inevitable. But then I did come to that conclusion anyhow—which polarized the attention of most of my critics on that one burning issue, to the detriment of the work as a whole.

Naturally, after hesitating again this time, I did go on, and I proposed what seemed to me the only suitable solution. And of course I believe deeply in the logical sequence of what is to follow.

What, then, is the meaning of the oppression of the Jew? I have demonstrated that the Jews are not oppressed only in the practice of their religion, or only as a religious group; they are not oppressed only as a cultural group; nor only in the exercise of their political rights, nor only in their economic activities, etc. The Jews are oppressed *in every one of their collective dimensions*. In other words, *they are oppressed as a people*.

I know perfectly well that this statement horrifies many Jewish intellectuals, who desperately strive to deny any and all Jewish unity. It is true that such unity is one of the themes in the accusation against Jews and that our intellectuals are—rightly—afraid of seeming to strengthen their adversaries' argument. They are afraid that that will make them suspect in the eyes of the people in whose midst they live. Not to mention another possible motivation, less noble this time:⁵ if they belong to a single people, then there's an end to their "univer-

sality" which enables them to look like disinterested judges in all of mankind's causes!

But, here again, we had better look this truth squarely in the face: whether we like it or not, we are looked upon as a special category of foreigners and we are treated as such. Unlike our universalists, the Jewish masses know this and take it into account. The Jewish masses never have more than a limited amount of confidence in their fellow citizens. That is why they constantly confirm their unity, for they know that when a catastrophe occurs, the only help they can hope for will come from other Jewish communities that have been temporarily spared. People ought to stop stupidly repeating that such solidarity cannot be allowed! That it is a reverse form of racism and other such nonsense. It is a perfectly natural self-defense reaction on the part of an endangered group. Let people stop persecuting the Jews, first, and then we will see what they can be reproached with. . . .

Thus, the Jews are oppressed as a people. If we accept the idea that liberation should be achieved on the basis of the *specificity* of each case of oppression, then we are now in a position to take another step forward: *oppressed as a people, it is only as a people that the Jews will be genuinely liberated.* Today, however, the liberation of peoples still retains a *national physiognomy*.

I have often issued a warning, to the effect that this last step is less logically necessary than the previous ones to the itinerary of a people. This is natural, since it involves a prediction, not an analysis of facts having already occurred. Furthermore, it may be felt regrettable that human history has taken on this national physiognomy. But that is the way things stand. It appears probable that the liberation of the Jews *as such*, like the liberation of other peoples, will have to

come about by way of the reconstruction of all their human dimensions, both individual and collective. And that the way to that reconstruction is through national reaffirmation.

This is how I came around to Israel—step by step, logically, not through some transport of religious or impassioned feeling. One can, conceivably, not be delighted by it; for a long time I was not so delighted myself, and I said so in writing. But once again we have to face reality; and the Jewish reality is substantially linked to Israel, to the myths and the truths connected with Israel. A comparison will help to understand this better: can the Arabs be separated from the Koran and from their geographical era? Can the French be separated, not only from France, but also from their cultural traditions?

I have been reproached with showing only moderate enthusiasm (I have also been reproached with having taken Israel as the conclusion; and I have also been reproached with not being more fervent in doing so). But I wanted to take inventory, methodically, and see where it led. That is why I have not been more sparing in my criticisms of that young state, of its political errors or its theocratic self-satisfaction. I have expressed reservations as to the diminutiveness of its territory. I have always emphasized the necessity of giving priority to improving its relations with the Arab world. (Very early, I wrote that, historically and morally, our most urgent and most necessary task was Judeo-Arab reconciliation.)⁶ All this, however, is merely a matter of criticizing details. The essential and undeniable fact is that from now on, the State of Israel is part of the destiny of every Jew anywhere in the world who continues to acknowledge himself as a Jew. No matter what doubts or even reproofs certain of Israel's actions may arouse, no Jew anywhere in the world can call its existence in question without doing himself grave harm. And the

non-Jews, especially the liberals, must understand that *Israel represents the still-precarious result of the liberation of the Jew, just as decolonization represents the liberation of the Arab or black peoples of Asia and Africa.*

I also acknowledged that the cost of liberation, as long as it has not been completed, is high; that the road to it is not always materially nor even morally easy. So it is with the Arab problem: unfortunately, as I have often noted, there is not always a preestablished harmony among the interests of all the oppressed. The conflict between Jews and Arabs is one of history's absurdities: a conflict between two oppressed peoples. Yet we must overcome it, while taking two equally legitimate sets of aspirations into account.

Lastly, I did not hide the fact that these new ties, this sentimental solidarity with the new state, were likely to intensify the climate of suspicion in which Jews everywhere have always lived. But we have always been in danger; I do not believe that we can be in greater danger. Let us at least face danger with dignity. Above all, and once again, the perspective of accusation must be reversed. If the Jews had not been so accused, threatened, and periodically prevented from living, they would not have tried to secure a possible refuge. It is really too presumptuous of the people who have persecuted us for centuries, who have made us second-class citizens, often despite their own laws, to dare to reproach us with this ambiguity that they have cultivated in us regardless of our protests, our efforts, and the sometimes shameful pledges we gave them. What they call our double allegiance was forced upon us. We would have liked nothing better than not to need it!

What exactly is a Zionist?

A Zionist is anyone, Jew or non-Jew, who, having found that the Jewish situation is a situation of oppression, looks upon the reconstruction of a Jewish state as legitimate: so as to put an end to that oppression and so that Jews, like other peoples, may retrieve their dimensions as free men.

Or again, anyone who considers the liberation of the Jew as a Jew desirable.

Naturally, no one is obliged to be a Zionist. A non-Jew may feel that there are causes which are more important, or which contradict that one. A Jew can believe that he is not compelled to confirm that he belongs to his people, even when his people are in danger. One can wish not to be Jewish and slowly prepare for the assimilation of one's children: one can even not set very great store by freedom, be content with semi-bondage and deal with threats when they arise. After all, it's all a matter of what you can stomach.

My readers already know that I have not absolutely condemned anything. I do not believe that peoples are eternal, and the Jewish people may disappear one day. The fact of belonging to a given people does not constitute for me a mythical tie,⁷ and each man's freedom of choice, even if it often proves illusory, is important to me.

But if someone believes, as I do, that it is important for an oppressed person to regain control of his life, if someone believes that in order to do so, that person must become aware of what he is and of his precise place among men, and that he must then, on the basis of those data, set about transforming his condition, then, where the Jews are concerned, that someone is a Zionist.

Clearly, by so being, not only does one not abandon the great contemporary ideals of social justice and the equality of peoples but, in fact, one confirms them.

NOTES

1. Tunisian nationalist party, founded in 1922.
2. *Portrait of a Jew*, 1st ed., Gallimard, 1963 (new edition, Paris, Idées, Gallimard, 1969), and *The Liberation of the Jew*, 1st ed., Gallimard, 1966 (new edition, Paris, Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1972), form a whole. Both were published in English translation by The Orion Press, New York.
3. The reaction from certain Jews, especially, of course, from those in the bourgeoisie, was rather comical: they were annoyed at being described as oppressed and thus being associated with the inhabitants of a ghetto in central Europe or North Africa. Time and time again they advised me, with cunning good will, not to waste my time on a subject that was so out-dated and in such bad taste.
4. European Jews are no longer vulnerable, we are told, no longer in an exposed position. But all it takes is for them to disagree with the policy of some chief of state, and immediately they are insulted and threatened. I have not yet got over the trivial insolence with which Georges Pompidou, the French president until his death in 1974, answered a journalist who queried him about Israel: "There is no subscriber at that number." Nor did his predecessor, De Gaulle, hesitate to assert in public that we were a "domineering people." Whom were we dominating?
5. A contradictory position for, while they are afraid of losing that universality that protects them, as it were, from the general throng of their fellow citizens, at the same time they are afraid of being suspected of not "belonging" to those same fellow citizens. Therefore, at times they emphasize the first point, and at other times the second. But in both cases, they deem it more perilous still to acknowledge the fact of their belonging to Jewry.
6. *The Liberation of the Jew*, p. 242, ed. Gallimard.
7. Every time the *Jewish people* is under discussion, someone objects: "So you're coming back to the chosen people!" This amounts, once again, to expressing the problem backwards. The notion of "Jewish people" does not derive from that of divine choice. It is because they were oppressed as a people that the Jews consoled themselves with the idea of being God's chosen. Let the oppression end, and then we'll see whether the Jews go on much longer believing that they are singled out, in a superior way, by God (or by destiny). The Greeks, a small people living free on their own territory, ceased long ago to look on all the other peoples of the earth as barbarians.

II

ISRAEL, THE JEWS, AND THE ARABS

I

THE ARAB NATION AND THE ISRAELI THORN

Never, it seems, has there been such a feeling of powerlessness and unintelligibility concerning the frightful Middle East tangle. An Egyptian diplomat, with whom I was talking just a few days ago about the necessity of at least considering the possibility of peace, answered me sadly, and with secret dismay, I am sure: "You do not throw yourself in front of an oncoming locomotive." What is happening in Israel and on its borders is seen as not only horrible but also irresistible and insane. No one knows how far the mad machine will continue to go, causing catastrophes, ruins, and hatred to spring up in its wake.

With your permission, I will not go along with this unanimous and ultimately convenient attitude of resignation. What is going on in the Middle East is no more frightful or insane than what goes on elsewhere, or else the whole history of mankind is cruel and stupid—which it doubtless is; but in this situation of relative stupidity, what is happening between the Arabs and the Jews is legible enough for anyone who takes the trouble to try to decipher it.

This text appeared in *Le Figaro littéraire* of September 8–14, 1969, entitled (by the editor) "Israel Is Not the Arab Nation's Real Problem."

I am not a “friend” of the Arabs, one of those so-called “friends” who urge them to rush into any new adventure.¹ I have lived much of my life, the most important part of it, among them; I speak their language, I understand them almost to the extent that I understand myself. The Arabs’ intention seems clear to me, and legitimate too, even though I find some of the means they employ to that end debatable or dangerous. I have a fairly accurate knowledge of the humiliations they want to erase, the fears they want to exorcise, the hopes that may be stirring in them. But since I am not merely one of their *friends*—that is, since I refuse to take an attitude toward them which, at bottom, is paternalistic and is also, as I well know, a mixture of old colonialistic scorn and new-found benevolence—I do not reduce the Arabs to their emotions alone. I believe them worthy of having a *policy*, *i.e.*, of assuming the deliberate and rational conduct of their collective affairs—more or less deliberate and rational, of course, as with all peoples. Where that conduct is concerned, my readers will forgive me for recalling that I described it and approved of it long before those brand-new friends did. It consists essentially of achieving the national independence of their several countries, usually by wresting it from the colonizers, and, now, of going beyond independence in each case to the building of new societies. Surely these collective imperatives are enough to provide a social ideal and profound ethical satisfactions to many generations of men.

The Israelis’ intention is no less clear and, to anyone who has not already chosen sides for reasons that do not enter into an objective consideration of the question, it is no less legitimate: they intend to finish building a Jewish nation, not only so that today’s Israelis can at last live there in peace but also so as to offer a possible refuge to Jews whom misfortune may

yet strike. And we know, we can see, that such an eventuality cannot yet be ruled out: in too many parts of the world, the Jews' situation is still precarious, endangered, not only potentially but also, alas, really, as Poland has just had the dismal dishonor of reminding us, and—there's no getting around it—as in most of the Arab countries. Anyone who considers the Israeli adventure without taking account of the threats and oppression suffered by the Jews throughout history and still today at various points on the globe, without referring to the overall Jewish condition, is not really trying to understand anything about it. And to speak of *de-Zionizing* Israel or of dismantling its structure as a state, which is all that can provide protection to those individual refugees, is of course to utter the most astonishing piece of nonsense imaginable. In short, Israel's intention is also a national one; it was born of misery and oppression, it is comparable to that of the Arab peoples, and it is no less honorable than theirs.²

Only, alongside these objective factors, and the just political projects that stem from them, there is room for every possible mythical extrapolation, every type of deviation and diversion. Again, there is nothing original about that; this often happens in the history of peoples, in the unduly difficult periods of their destiny. It is not easy to build a nation, especially when, as in the case of the Jews, the very body of it has to be put back together again; or when, as in the case of the Arabs, a modern economy has to be launched from a point close to zero, and political institutions adapted to the contemporary world have to be completely reinvented. In order to mobilize collective energies, stir emotions, and put spiritual pressure on people, the Jews had to bring the full arsenal of their Biblical mythology into action. For the Arabs, the catalyst was the idea of a single Arab nation unifying vast

stretches of geographic territory and deriving from its mighty oil wells economic strength that would, sooner or later, be pooled in one common inheritance.³ The Arab leaders have consistently cherished this ambition, as proven to us, once again, by El Fatah's most recent seven-point manifesto. Although it emphasizes the revolutionariness of the Palestinians to such an extent that the reader sees only that side of the matter, it goes on to say that "since Palestine is part of *the* Arab fatherland, Fatah, the Palestinian National Liberation movement, will work to enable the Palestinian state to contribute actively to the edification of a progressive and *unified* Arab society." (By the way, in the light of these words, we can measure the sincerity of the famous statement on "a democratic and secular Palestine," in which Jews would have a rank equal to that of the Arabs.) Look at the most recent coup d'état to alter the picture in an Arab state, Libya. What do the new leaders say, immediately upon taking power? That they will base their policy on "freedom, socialism, and Arab unity" (statement by the new prime minister of Libya, on September 9, 1969).

I am taking the liberty here of denouncing this Arab myth, or alibi, because, first of all, I did not hesitate to examine at length, and to denounce, a certain number of traditional and still-flourishing Jewish myths. When, some time ago, I published two books on the contemporary Jewish condition, they did, certainly, win me a few new friends, but they irritated a still larger number of readers and made them lose interest in my work once and for all. Furthermore, when it comes to combatting the deviations, if any, of the Jewish leaders, and combatting Jewish mythology, the Jewish intellectuals can be counted on to take the lead. It is an everyday occurrence to see the lucubrations of the few supporters of a very large

Israel refuted in Israel itself, and a powerful Jewish left wing surely exists, even in Israel. I would so much have liked the Arab intellectuals to denounce their leaders and the official ideologies, even if a hundred times less virulently—not for the pleasure of watching that sort of jousting, but because I am convinced that, ultimately, such public debates are more salutary than all that false unanimity based on solidarity born of sentiment, or terror.

And finally, I am taking the liberty of speaking about a problem that is primarily the Arabs' business, not only because in the long run it all affects our common destiny but also because I defended the cause of various Arab peoples (and not *the* cause of *the* Arab people) at a time when it was folly to do so; today it is too easy. Or else, if we want to carry on, we must look for the most difficult attitude, the most costly to oneself, the only one worthy and genuinely beneficial to the Arabs. Just as it did not do the colonized any good if outside observers approved too readily of all their opinions and all their acts, so it does not help the Arabs to encourage them to go on with their myths and countermyths.

Now it seems clear to me, and in this I am in agreement with some of the best Arab minds, who dare not speak out, that "Arab unity" and the "single Arab nation" actually belong to some mythical future; as does the image, which stems from those, of "Israel as thorn in the side of that Arab nation." *Erasing Israel from the map of the Middle East*, for that is fundamentally what is involved, is an integral part of one of the myths of the modern Arabs and, even though the conflict goes back a long way, it is also an integral part of one of the myths of decolonization.

I have demonstrated, elsewhere, that one of the characteristics of a myth is its convenience. The unity of the Arab world

should give to the Arab peoples collectively the political might that each one separately is lacking, along with economic prosperity, by centralizing wealth that is unevenly apportioned and very badly administered; as well as a cultural rebirth based on a common language and a literature that is flourishing because it is understood throughout an extensive geographic area. However, this appealing program does not correspond to the realities of the contemporary Arab world. It is obvious that what we now have to deal with is a series of young nations that are too jealous of each other to go along with any form of merger in which they would be likely to lose the autonomy they have gained with such difficulty. Not to mention the obstacle of tremendously divergent regimes, social structures, interests, and even philosophies. This is clear from the enormous difficulties already involved in what might appear to be the most relatively easy achievement, the creation of a united Maghreb; and we know what came of Egypt's protracted efforts to form a single nation with Syria. It is true, speaking of convenience, that it is difficult for the young nations not to wonder, with anxiety, whether that unification would be beneficial to all, or would favor only one nation. To date, Egypt has been the most likely candidate. Now, the name of Algeria is beginning to be whispered.

The rank and role to be occupied by Israel in this edifice are clear; curiously, they are negative and positive at the same time and, in all events, very important. Israel is an intolerable impediment to the realization of such a grandiose plan. At the same time, the struggle against Israel must mobilize the energies of all the diverse Arab peoples and create a bond between them, reconciling contradictory interests and muzzling opponents within any of the Arab countries. In short, Israel's presence sustains and confirms the myth, showing the

impossibility of it and, at the same time, assigning that impossibility to a fortuitous cause. Despite consistent failure, there is room for hope, since the cause of failure is external to the Arabs. The myth therefore can remain intact.

At any rate, for our purposes, *the whole idea seems to be that realization of the Arab plan necessarily requires the destruction of the Jewish plan.* And unfortunately, regardless of whether it is a myth or a reality, the behavior of the Arab leaders is fundamentally rooted in this idea. Moreover, it is not unreasonable to believe that the lesson taught by the German advisors in Cairo falls in particularly well with this conclusion. Anti-Semitism, as diversionary tactic and catalyst, was one of the Nazis' best psychological tools. Destruction of the Jews, as the thorn in the side of the Reich, and then in the side of Europe, was one of the prerequisites to the construction of the new empire. Now, there are hardly any Jews left in the Arab countries, and even if there were, such an argument would be greeted skeptically. But henceforth there is the State of Israel in the side of the Arab nation: *Israel becomes the Jew of the Arab countries.*

That is why the Arab leaders refuse all compromise, and will continue to refuse it, perhaps for a long time to come. To accept even the slightest compromise would be to step onto the road toward peace and coexistence. To cease to look upon Israel as the absolute Enemy, the supreme danger, would be to abandon the perfect excuse, which can be fallen back upon whenever a difficulty arises—in short, it would mean giving up the myth. In this light, anything goes. This accounts for the haste—unbelievable to any objective observer—with which the burning of the El Aqsa mosque was labeled the criminal and diabolical act of the Jews.

I have just come back from Algeria. Some other time I shall

talk about all that links me to the Algerian people, who paid such a high price for their liberation, my gratitude for the way they welcomed us, the friendships I found there again. But at the same time, how can anyone fail to see to what extent the Judeo-Arab problem is obviously exploited by the present leaders, for the purposes of an internal and external policy, which is, in fact, very promising? Every day I read the only daily newspaper of free Algeria, the *Mudjahid*. It consists of two parts, fortunately not the same size; the first is devoted to vaunting the government's achievements, which is legitimate; the second is devoted to galvanizing the people's energy against the terrible imperialist enemy—which is not, as one might suppose, Europe or the United States, still less the U.S.S.R., of course, but Israel. . . . This went on every single day during my stay. Doesn't it seem obvious that *Mudjahid* is deliberately made up on this binary, Manichaeic pattern? Israel is such an effective diversionary device, in internal politics, for eliminating opponents within a people who are "always at war" (what war?)—and also, in external politics, should Algiers decide to compete with Egypt as leader of the Arab world, and I was told that Algiers is actively preparing for that role. The alibi is irresistibly convenient. After all, what other relationship could there be between the reality of the Algerian situation, the genuine cares and worries of the Algerian leaders, and their fictitious anxieties over an Israeli threat?

"But," the reader may object, "you've taken too obvious an example. Algiers is far away; Algeria has no borders with Israel, does not have to bear the refugee burden. But in the Arab countries that border on Israel, the problems are real enough!" Have I ever said, anywhere, that mythical or diversionary tactics do not presuppose the existence of genuine

problems? Quite the contrary: that is precisely how they are born—of problems that are too real, too difficult to solve. True, the Algerian example is too easy, but it clearly shows how such a device can be carried to an extreme: even if Israel had no effect on the lives of the Arab peoples, it would still be usable.

There is no denying, of course, that there are real contradictions between the two intentions, the Jewish and the Arab; conflicts of interest on such and such score, possible border disputes, differing political concepts, population problems—but *in the last analysis, there are no more contradictions than between any two Arab or Moslem nations*. Iraq has just expelled several tens of thousands of Iranians; yet war did not break out because of it, nor did anyone speak, in mythical terms, of wiping his adversary off the map. Algeria and Morocco did fight a genuine war with each other (which caused more victims than is generally realized in Europe) over a matter of border markers. Tunisia and Algeria almost came to blows over another matter of the same sort. If the Israeli-Arab problem were stripped of its adjuncts and its mythical diversions, it would be no harder to solve than the problems that cause Algeria to be eyed with anxiety by its two neighbors, Tunisia and Morocco, Egypt by Algeria and Libya, and Iraq by poor Jordan, which in fact fears everyone without exception. All it needs is for the Arab leaders to stop using, for purposes of carrying out their own ambitions (a large portion of which, I repeat, is legitimate), the epic project of the disappearance of the State of Israel. Sometimes one cannot help wondering to what extent they are duped by it themselves.

Once purged of that dimension, what does the Judeo-Arab problem look like? Merely like a problem of peaceful co-

existence; it involves some difficulties, of course, but what co-existence does not? Is there any life lived jointly that does not require compromises and concessions from both sides? If we turn our backs on the zone of mythical absolutes, where one side pictures itself standing triumphant and glorious over the huddled corpse of the other, then we encounter other questions, at once simpler and more difficult, but which have an incomparable advantage, superior to all the qualities of any myth: that of carrying with them their solutions. This is no place to propose specific, detailed measures. But all we need do is think of the matter again, leaving aside the phraseology and excess emotion of the times, which indeed make the problem seem tragic and utterly opaque, in order to see that it will necessitate the geographical reorganization of the region, a serious inventory of the resources, and, let us dare to say it, acceptance of an exchange of populations. For even the refugee problem is not insoluble, though we are led to believe it is. Do enough people remember that *800,000 Jews have left the Arab countries*, and that three-fourths of them are now living in Israel? That the Eastern Jews will soon make up half the population of Israel? (I am not speaking of the European refugees, since it is coldly supposed that they could "go back." Where? Those who suppose this do not specify.) Can anyone seriously believe that those 800,000 will also "go back"? They are refugees just as much as the others, sometimes without even a suitcase, 400,000 of them from North Africa and 400,000 from those same Middle Eastern countries that don't want them in Israel. Wouldn't it have been wiser in that case, or less mythical, not to force them to leave?

But, someone will protest, the Palestinians have now acquired a national vocation. All right, so be it. In that case, let them make specific territorial proposals, on the scale of the en-

tire region, rather than aimed at Israel alone. Let them think along serious political lines. Until now, the Arab countries had denied the existence of the Palestinians,⁴ but now they are only too happy to discover and use them in order to perpetuate their absolutist myth and diversionary tactic. The Palestinians' right to existence, and even to a national existence, must be recognized; but they must not, in turn, climb on to the same hobbyhorse of a myth and proclaim that what they too want is the reconquest of *all* Palestine and "the end of the Zionist State" . . . in other words, the same impossible apocalypse.

In any case, after all, there is no such thing as a historical problem that cannot be solved, if one is sincerely willing to settle down to finding a solution and pay the price of it. This nonrecognition of Israel, such that its existence is constantly challenged by guerrilla raids and border skirmishes, leading inevitably to periodic war (for that is what nonrecognition means; it is not just a legal measure, as is sometimes supposed), this open conflict, is the worst solution and the most costly, not only of course for Israel but also for all the young Arab nations. Whatever advantages certain leaders and certain ruling classes may derive from it, the overall price paid by the peoples involved is exorbitant, for this policy of waging war exhausts their economies' possibilities in advance, impedes all efforts at democratization, and leaves cultural development to stagnate—not to mention the lives that are wasted. According to a dialectic that I have described elsewhere, although the myth helps to make a difficult situation tolerable, in exchange it has to be sustained and in turn sustains that same situation all over again. This is why it is harmful. No matter how appealing it may be, revolutionary romanticism is every bit as harmful as the reactionary kind. A reactionary strives to prevent any and all change, to go back

into the past; revolutionary romanticism dashes off in the wrong direction and, in the end, ruins, mourning, and weariness cluster around it.

Where are the Arab leaders who will be courageous and lucid enough to understand at last that their countries' real problem is now that of internal reconstruction and that they must mobilize their people's strength toward that sole objective rather than wasting an enormous amount of it in a combat which, though they think it clever, is actually useless? To understand that it is vain to hope, or to pretend to hope, for the impossible disappearance of a young state, which is as necessary as their own, since it sprang from a similar collective need, and is therefore absolutely, unshakably determined to struggle for survival? To those potential leaders, I would like to offer this negative test: let us imagine that Israel has disappeared, which God forbid! How will that have decreased the Arabs' difficulties by one iota?

NOTES

1. Not to mention the friends who not only do not wish them well but in fact make use of them as best serves their own interests. Historians will one day appraise the great powers' responsibility in this connection, starting with Great Britain and France, and now the United States and the U.S.S.R.

But that does not mean that I can accept any more readily the explanation that says that both Arab behavior and Israeli behavior are due solely to foreign influence. Aside from the fact that protégés, as we know, always slip out of their protectors' grasp to some extent, what would be the point of independence for any nation if it was not used in a way that was at least relatively adult?

2. I do not mean to imply, however, that these two uses of myth are *symmetrical*, especially as concerns their consequences for the adversary.

The purpose of the Arab myth is to destroy the Jewish protagonist. What the first Zionists can be reproached with chiefly is having ignored or underestimated the Arab presence. Actually, there is no role for the Arabs in the Israeli mythology, whereas the Jew, on the contrary, is given the traditional role of absolute evil, which must be overcome. In concrete terms: the Jews, in the Arab universe, are in mortal danger, while the Arabs, in the Jewish universe, are in no danger whatsoever. The Arabs want to do away with the Israelis. The Israelis do not want to do away with the Arabs, and even if they wanted to, they would never be able to.

3. At this point the objection is that the Europeans are trying to form a federation; why shouldn't the Arabs? Why not indeed, with this difference: the Europeans formed nations *first*. New objection: why not skip that stage? Again, why not; but then, the Arabs would have to accept the minorities within their population, instead of demanding that they disappear.

4. "Palestinians," 300,000 of whom (nearly one-third of the Arab population at that time) actually arrived in the country during the time of the mandate, *at the same time* as the 500,000 persecuted Jews. And since the Jewish refugees are constantly asked to justify their rights, why is this never demanded of the Arabs, nomads who settled down because of, or were attracted by, the region's newfound prosperity? Or else, if the idea is that any Arab is at home anywhere in all of the regions of the world where Islam predominates, then why speak of Arab *refugees*?

The truth is that we do not have any reliable figures, and each side interprets what figures we do have as it wishes or as its tactics dictate. Demography, however, would seem to plead for historical equality between the two sides. All told, nearly one million Jews have had to leave the Arab countries since 1945. If we add to this the natural population increase through births, we find that there are approximately 1,500,000 displaced Arab Jews. Three-fourths of them have regrouped in Israel, which they consider their ancestral fatherland.

2

GROTESQUE FARCE OR RITUAL MURDER

On Wednesday, August 21, 1969, fire broke out inside the El Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. And, for a few hours, a storm raged over Islam and therefore over the entire world. No one knew as yet who was guilty, if anyone was; perhaps it was a short circuit, in a decrepit wiring system? Or someone's clumsiness? And yet a tremendous outcry arose immediately: the Israelis had set fire to one of the holy places of the Moslem faith. It's as if my own mother had been attacked, one lawyer wrote to an important Parisian newspaper. In all the Arab countries, there were demonstrations, strikes, public meetings; the various spokesmen vied with each other in statements of violence and passion. Even the level-headed, judicious Bourguiba chimed in with this frightening spontaneous concert, and it must be remembered that this was before all reliable information was available.

Twenty-four hours later, the Israeli police had found out who was guilty and arrested him. It was not an Israeli, not even a Jew. The incendiary was Michael Rohan, from Aus-

While I was reporting in Jerusalem in October, 1969, for Radio-Luxembourg, the weekly magazine *Match* asked me for this article. It arrived too late to be printed in that issue.

tralia, a Christian. In Jerusalem, there was general relief; the incident was over, people thought, at least as far as its political aspects were concerned. But people were mistaken. The anger of the Arab masses was taken up and confirmed by the leaders. A summit conference was convened and all Arab or simply Moslem chiefs of state were invited to it. On the agenda: solemnly proclaiming Israel's guilt and drawing the practical consequences of it. What were those consequences? Since such an act had been committed in the Israelis' presence, in Jerusalem, an end must be put to that presence. And once again there was talk of holy war, that is, the destruction of the State of Israel.

The Luxembourg radio and television network sent me to report on the ensuing trial. With fear and trembling, I went to Jerusalem. I needed to know the truth, not just for the sake of the mission given me but also for myself, for the sake of my image of Israel, for the sake of my many Arab friends, and also for those many friends, who were neither Jewish nor Moslem, and who were muttering: "Now see here, this is too much! What a senseless thing to do! Those Israelis won't let anything stop them! One day, they'll really go too far!"

For the case had surged back to the surface, even in the international collective consciousness, which was disturbed by the insistence with which the Arabs leveled their accusation. Yet the guilty man had confessed. He had told the whole story in detail and turned over his equipment, that of an arsonist: a big can for gasoline, a smaller one for kerosene, a funnel for pouring the inflammable liquids, the plastic tube for getting them through the lock. He had even gone to the trouble of photographing his gear himself.

"So what does that prove? The Israelis may very well have

been right behind him, pulling the strings. They're not stupid enough to do the job themselves!"

Why on earth would the Jews have wanted to burn down that unfortunate mosque?

"What about all those allusions, in Jewish traditions, to the destruction of the temple and to its rebuilding? Didn't the head chaplain of the Israeli armed forces speak of it recently? The Israelis have such an expansionist urge that they could no longer put up with places of worship belonging to another religion in their midst!"

In that case, they certainly chose the wrong time. Weren't they having enough difficulties, with the United Nations and elsewhere? If they did commit a crime, it's certainly not doing them any good. . . .

But all this was polemics and supposition. What I needed was facts, and I would reveal them no matter what they turned out to be, since I had been sent to Jerusalem for that purpose. Had Israel forgotten its duty to itself, and to us, to such an extent that, directly or indirectly, it had committed arson and destroyed an historical monument? I was determined to keep my eyes wide open and accurately report on everything I saw.

Now, what did I see? What did I put down in the notes I took every day? Forgive me if I sum up in one brutal phrase: the detailed recital, scrupulously reconstituted by a court that had no inclination to laugh, of a grotesque farce.

Let the reader judge for himself. During school vacations, a young Arab named Munir Hazzaz used to work as a guide for some of the many tourists in Israel. One day he had an out-of-the-ordinary client, an Australian named Rohan, who made this unexpected offer: if Munir Hazzaz could help him to understand why he, Rohan, had come to the Holy Land,

then Rohan would give him one thousand Israelis pounds. This was the beginning of some amazing transactions, the guide giving his client written explanations, then asking for his money, and the Australian solemnly declaring: "You have told me only a quarter of the truth; here, then, is a quarter of the money." So the clever young man wrote another letter, and the Australian decided that it was worth another 25 per cent, and so it went, until both partners were completely satisfied. At the hearing, it was revealed how Hazzaz went about fulfilling his side of the bargain. Thanks to passages from the prophet Zechariah, which Rohan himself had indicated to him, Hazzaz had understood that Rohan ardently desired to be designated as God's envoy for the reconstruction of the temple. All Hazzaz had to do was to go along with this and flatter Rohan's visionary dreams.

The only trouble was that the farce nearly turned into tragedy. The Australian believed so thoroughly in what the guide told him that he tried to set fire to the mosque which is located today on the site of the Jewish temple that was destroyed. For one brief moment, the Arab world thought there had been a premeditated aggression on its faith and had readied for war. Luckily, in the last act, everything collapsed into absurdity; the hero was mentally ill and the guide was a small-time crook.

The first surprise that awaited me in Jerusalem was the Israelis' total indifference to this trial. I tried to talk about it with the man in the street, the waiters at the hotel, the girl at the reception desk, the taxi driver. They give me evasive, almost bored answers. For them, it's perfectly simple: this guy set fire to a public building; he ought to be tried and punished. That's all. I insist. This public building was a mos-

que; and what about all that anger on the Arab side, those accusations, those proclamations of holy war. . . . They shrug their shoulders: as long as the war lasts, it might as well be that as anything else. Likewise, the local press takes little interest in the case; there is only one editorial on it, on the first day of the trial. Above all, the incredibly thin crowd in the courtroom. Elaborate security measures were taken, it is true; spectators were screened with almost discouraging frequency. There was no desire to see Rohan get assassinated. But, even so, the admission cards were not even all used up. And when the handcuffed defendant, shielded by policemen, was taken across the square to the police van, there was hardly anyone standing around to watch.

The first several days, in fact, I wondered why there had been so much effort and so much organization and why journalists from all over the world had been invited for such an unspectacular event. Of course this trial was not meant for the Israelis' benefit but for the benefit of public opinion the world over. Israel had been made to play a monstrous role before the whole world. Now it had to retort, in front of the same public. Theatrics in exchange for theatrics.

But, even so, the show could have been more ambitious. The courtroom, its walls covered with slats of light wood, was too modest, too democratic, like everything in Israel, a style midway between a kibbutz and Scandinavia; the judge's platform looked more like the stage of a provincial theater than a criminal court, with its wood paneling and painted ceiling. On that platform, amidst the black robes of the judges and lawyers, was one unexpected stroke of red: the skirt of the woman clerk, which corresponded to the only red touches in the public: a few Arab fezzes. This judge read the charges, the lawyer asked questions, the prosecutor continued the

reading, and all this was very long, thorough, prosaic, confined to facts only, terribly British, just like the training and even the looks of these Israeli men of law. As for the main hero, the defendant, he surprised everyone, for he was young, slim, elegant; he reminded me of an American actor whose name I don't remember, the one in *A Place in the Sun*, I think. He looked at the cameras, the courtroom, the spectators; he smiled; he seemed interested in his trial, but not much more than we were. Despite the glass cage, he appeared at ease. The prosecutor, Schamgar, stated: "After his first attempt failed, he lost no time in preparing for the second, which was successful."

Rohan smiled. Was he smiling with satisfaction, at having succeeded that second time? Or didn't he agree? Once he signaled through the glass, courteously but firmly. What was the matter? He was protesting: a passage from the proceedings had not been translated for him. They stop and begin again; he is satisfied and smiles. Strange, this smiling man. He is not in danger of a death sentence, but, still, his fate for years to come is being decided here. He seems to find it amusing; he is watching a play and his attention sometimes wanders, as it does when one watches a play that is not very absorbing. Sometimes he is interested, sometimes absent-minded, musing over something unrelated to the effort the actors are making. Michael Rohan seemed, at the same time, to be the author of the play, its leading actor and his own audience.

It became quickly apparent that the Israelis did not want to give this trial undue importance. But could they have, even had they wanted to? The successive hearings did reveal the incredible negligence on the part of the mosque's Arab cus-

todians and, behind those insignificant figures, the blame-worthy carelessness of their notables, the heads of the Waqf, grand administrators of the collective religious property of Islam, who obstinately refused Israeli aid in order to protect their own holy places but proved incapable of living up to their responsibility. They had even neglected to install a few new fire extinguishers amid all those rugs and all that wood paneling that had been growing dry for centuries. Anyone could enter El Aqsa, at any hour, despite the regulations—if only he handed out a few bank notes. The Israelis could also have exposed the bizarre and teeming Christian sects, that unhealthy mythico-religious fermentation, which the Vatican may not be very happy about and which ultimately unhinges minds like Rohan's, not very steady to begin with, or that of his friend Jones, who looks so astonishingly like him—the same smile nourished from within, the same *fin-de-race* overfineness of the features, the same mystical reveries stated just as calmly. But there is nothing criminal about any of this.

I may be wrong; the trial is not yet over, at the time of this writing, and who can be sure of having understood everything that happens during a trial, that extraordinary human machine? How can you be sure that the inquiry has brought everything to light and arranged it all in the right order? How many times have the undoubting beliefs of men of very good faith and keen minds ultimately turned out to be illusory? Not to mention the occasional deliberate deceptions. All I can say is this. For an attentive, objective observer, such as I tried to be, who attended all the hearings, read all the full minutes of the trial, as distributed regularly each day after each session, who discussed the trial with some of the world's most qualified journalists, often questioned members of the court and talked with a number of witnesses, this is the con-

clusion he can come to: no one is guilty in this unfortunate affair. Poor Rohan was not accountable for his actions, and he was not manipulated by anyone, except the "guide", who convinced us that he in turn was not acting out of any political purpose.

The Israelis simply chose to let the witnesses state the facts, and take as long as they wished. The Israelis, rightfully, believed that that would be enough to establish their innocence. And they achieved their goal, at least with anyone who observed the trial in good faith. Above all, the Arab witnesses came, despite the threats against them; they talked at will, in a natural and unrestrained way that spoke more eloquently than anything else in favor of Israeli democracy. Several times, Munir Hazzaz spoke directly to the audience and made them laugh, over the judges' heads, and the judges readily lent themselves to this collective amusement. One of the mosque guards, trying to explain how Rohan had behaved inside the mosque, sat down cross-legged on the platform of the courtroom. I might add that I came away with the same impression, the same conviction, where the Arabs were concerned: although they did try to take advantage of an unforeseen incident to serve their political cause and justify their passion, they did not send Rohan to burn El Aqsa, with malice aforethought, any more than the Israelis did. Nor did the court try to suggest any such thing. It did not, as I thought at one point and as I stated, over Radio-Luxembourg, try to make the accusation boomerang against the Arabs.

In short, Michael Rohan was not "put up to the job" by anyone; he was the only hero and pitiable victim of his own morbid impulses. He had soaked in all of that mystical aura which floats over Jerusalem like a perpetual fog and which in fact creates the exceptional climate of that city. And, what

is still more banal, we have to reverse the explanation, in order to understand. Rohan did not try to burn the mosque because he was a Christian, a fanatic of some mystic sect, who believed that in doing so he would hasten the arrival of the Jewish Messiah and save the world. No, Rohan was a pyromaniac; he needed to set fires, and he used that particular ideology to legitimize his act. He would have found a justification for it—a rationalization, as the psychiatrists say—somewhere, anyhow. Christians and Christianity are no more guilty in this incident than the Moselms or the Jews. Very wisely, Mr. Tunick, the defense lawyer, decided not to plead religious insanity but just plain insanity. After all, as he explained to us outside the courtroom, not all believers, even the most fanatic, go around setting fires.

So, what was the reason? Why was this incident blown up to such proportions? How did it come to be used that way? Aren't we compelled to believe that its significance was added to it by external sources?

I have said, pointedly, how discreet the court was. The reader will have understood that I regretted that discretion to some extent. That is because I am neither a politician nor a lawyer. Probably the trial was conducted in the most adequate manner possible, given the immediate, visible material that was available to the court. But this honest discretion and typically British or American pragmatism did not leave room to raise certain questions, capital though they were, about the way the Arabs and their leaders acted throughout this astonishing crisis and, to take things further than the crisis itself, about relations as a whole between Arabs and Jews. This Middle East conflict is actually like a chain: pull on one link and eventually the whole series of links is set in motion—the

whole Israeli-Arab dispute, then the entire destiny of the Jews, and, finally, all the difficulties now facing the Arab world and the answers the Arabs are desperately trying to find.

Let us interpret a little, since the court did not allow itself to. Let's just suppose something horrible and sacrilegious. Let's suppose that it had been an Israeli who set fire to the mosque, and that instead of lighting that clumsy little blaze (for, after all, the El Aqsa mosque is still standing and will be repaired), he had actually succeeded in lighting a big fire that had really destroyed the mosque. That Israeli would then be an arsonist, and would be liable to punishment if he was of sound mind or would be sent to an asylum if mad. Why should this be interpreted any differently from any morbid act committed by any ordinary citizen, of any ordinary country, against a monument cherished by a minority in that country? Why speak of holy war and of destroying the man's entire nation? Suppose a North African worker in Paris was suddenly gripped by some fleeting mystic folly and tried to set fire to a pulpit inside Notre Dame. Would France begin talking about a crusade? Would it propose a summit conference in order to draw all the European, and Christian, nations into a holy war against Algiers or Rabat? Some time ago, the synagogue in Tunis was burned down by rioters. Did anyone talk about casting doubt on whether Tunisia should *exist*, as a state and a nation? Or simply on whether the Destourian regime should exist, whereas its very existence, its nature, had allowed the minorities to live, etc. Not only did nothing of the sort happen, but in fact a few of us, speaking out of our friendly feeling toward that country's leaders, asked them not to mete out too heavy punishment to the young students who had been implicated in the unpleasant incident. That same

summer, a synagogue was burned in Budapest; in Germany, countless synagogues continue to be profaned. Yet no one has suggested bombing Budapest or Berlin, nor even getting revenge by setting fire to so much as one of those countries' consulates. Need we be reminded that for twenty years the Jordanians, who are so embittered today, had the opportunity to have a number of Jewish holy places under their control, precisely in this part of Jerusalem, in fact, among other places. They did not need to make use of a sick man. They systematically looted, destroyed, profaned, and scattered Jewish sacred items. Among the first relics that the Israeli guides, seething with rage, will show you today are Jewish tombstones used to build latrines.

The truth is that the fire in the El Aqsa mosque, no matter how holy it may be, is entirely disproportionate to the consequences that the Arabs maintained that they wanted to draw from it; or again, that the punishment that was called for was entirely disproportionate to the accusation, *even if it had been justified*, which is not the case. There is even a certain amount of irrelevance between the accusation that was brought against the Israelis and what genuinely happened. No one dreamed of demanding that the arsonists in Tunis or Budapest be executed, still less that the Tunisian nation or the Hungarian nation be executed, since after all the normal order in which to proceed is this: you consider the offense, you bring charges, and you punish in proportion. Where Israel was concerned, the ultimate punishment was immediately called for—because, in any event, Israel was already an *absolute defendant*. Here again, in order to understand, we have to reverse the chronology. It is not because the Israelis have done this or that that others want to eliminate them;

others want to eliminate the Israelis and any excuse will do for accusing them of absolute evil.

This is what explains the Israeli man-in-the-street's paradoxical indifference amid the summons to holy war against him: he is used to it. The overobvious must, in this case, be stated again and again: directly or indirectly, 50 percent of Israel's population was subjected to the extraordinary accusation brought by European anti-Semitism and culminating in the death camps; and the remaining 50 percent come from the Arab countries where, although the accusation was not carried to the point of extermination, it did make them the butt of scorn and a prey to fear. So the average Israeli shrugs his shoulders; the Jew he was not long ago, or that his father or his brother still is, has always been accused of crimes, preferably of diabolical ones. The typical example of those imaginary, monstrous crimes was what was still called, in the Prague of Kafka's day, the ritual crime. Periodically, some Jew was accused of having profaned a communion wafer or killed a Christian child in order to use its blood or raped a virgin. Generally, this led to a pogrom against the entire Jewish community; in other words, an attack by the entire majority group against the entire minority group. Often the so-called criminal was a feeble-minded individual; often it was discovered—too late—that there had never been any crime. But that didn't matter; neither the offense nor the personality of the poor unfortunate who was accused of having committed it was germane to the real objective. It was as if the Jews had to be accused of murder or sexual crime so that they in turn could be murdered; some justification had to be found for thus challenging their existence.

In my opinion, the accusation that followed upon the arson

at El Aqsa sprang from the same motives: *it was an accusation of ritual murder*. Only, the traditional Jew was replaced by Israel, and the accusation was brought in Arab countries. Israel did not commit this crime? Then it must have paid Rohan to commit the crime in its stead! Rohan was not paid by Israel? Rohan was mentally ill? Well, then, it's the Israelis' presence in Jerusalem. In short, no matter how you look at it, it was Israel's fault, directly or indirectly, unintentionally or deliberately. No matter how you look at it, Israel's existence is pregnant with catastrophes. Israel is guilty of existing. How can anyone fail to see that the process is triggered by this goal: an end must be put to Israel's existence, and any old accusation will do.

It has taken centuries for Christianity to be—almost—purged of its obsessions about Jews and their undesirable presence in its midst. Will we have to wait as long for Islam in turn to be cured of the same illness? Of course the situation is not identical; the Israelis form a nation that defends itself, sets up its own court to refute the charges. Public opinion throughout the world was not really convinced that the Arab anger was justified. Besides, history is created more quickly nowadays. At least I hope so, with all my heart, for the Jews' sake and the Arabs' and for the sake of their life together, which, after all, will certainly have to be worked out one day.

3

JUSTICE AND NATION

When I came to Israel for the first time, several years ago, a journalist asked me which problems seemed to me the most important. At that time, which was long before the Six-Day War of 1967, I answered that what had disturbed me the most was the Arab problem—by which I meant, in those days, the problem of the Arab populations living inside Israel—and the problem of the so-called Eastern Jewish communities. Those difficulties were not yet as acute as they have since become. Then came the war. When war breaks out, the most urgent task facing any people is to survive, to look to its physical salvation. It was normal to postpone tackling this problem of justly integrating the various Jewish communities and cohabiting on better terms with the Arabs. It was also natural that our task, as intellectuals in favor of Israel's existence, was to help in any way that could shield the collective Jewish existence from catastrophe. If Israel had lost the war, that would probably have been the gravest catastrophe of its his-

Entitled *Unity and differences*, this text is that of a paper delivered to the Zionist Congress, in Jerusalem, in 1972. It was read to an Israeli public that included several of the Jewish state's leaders. Under the same title, it was published in the *Cahiers Bernard Lazare*, number 36, July–August, 1972. In it I was merely reiterating views expressed in numerous articles since 1967.

tory, graver perhaps than the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis, because of the enormous hope that Israel had planted in the soul of the Jewish people. Immediately, we had to think of only one thing: Israel's victory. In other words, we had to be concerned solely with the national aspect and temporarily leave aside the social problems. To tell the truth, I have always been one of the few intellectuals on the political left to draw attention to the ever topical importance of the national problems, not only in connection with the Middle East conflict but for understanding all the countries of the Third World. I have often pointed out that in order to have a clear understanding of what was happening in those countries, not only their social difficulties but also their claims to nationhood had to be taken into consideration. Rightly or wrongly, their national goals are as important to them as their fight against poverty. This may surprise us, or sadden us, but it is a fact. These peoples want to be freed in every way, they want to regain a personality, even if this means taking care of their social problems at the same time or at some later time. This merely makes me all the more resolved to issue this reminder: social problems cannot be shelved indefinitely.

Well, the time to take care of them has probably come, for Israel, and all in all I am very happy about it. It is a good sign if, within Israel itself, the social issues can be raised so frankly. That means that the nation is no longer so preoccupied with the problems of its physical survival, its unity, and threats from the enemy outside the gates. The only trouble is that once social issues do begin to arise, they become as pressing, and as important, for the nation as had been its struggle to achieve a national dimension. It is not only a right to talk about them and outline demands concerning them—it is a duty, a contribution to the very building of the nation. Underestimating

the existence of social classes, underestimating their economic and cultural aims, may mean jeopardizing the life of the nation. In time of danger, it is the people's unity, above and beyond their differences, that must be stressed. In time of peace, even relative peace, to overlook those differences is to risk undermining the nation's real unity. To underestimate the social classes that make up the nation is to endanger the entire nation, for if the interests of society as a whole too deliberately override those of intermediary groups, if they crush individuals too heavily, then individuals and intermediary groups rebel, and the entire nation is imperiled. There is a dialectic between the national and the social dimensions which even the most nationalistic, the most totalitarian, regimes have perceived and have taken into account, because they knew that if pushed too far out of balance, the system would collapse. In other words, there must be respect for social justice; otherwise the nation breaks apart.

Before voting for the most recent Zionist manifesto, the *Jerusalem Program*, I read it attentively. Principle 3 proclaims that "The State of Israel must be consolidated because it is founded on the ideals of justice and peace exalted by the prophets." It is wonderfully convenient for a people to have guarantors who carry such prestige; but the prophets must not remain mere myths to which you doff your hat before going on to deal with reality. I feel certain, of course, that deep in their hearts, most of the great Zionist leaders hope to be ranked, one day, among the prophets; in which case they must give serious thought to present-day social justice, just as the prophets fought for justice in their day. Doubtless Israel's economy is fairly healthy and rapidly developing; which is reassuring, in terms of the Israelis' future standard of living. Doubtless, compared with other young nations, Israel is not

so badly off when it comes to national revenue. That does not alter the fact that the gap between the highest and the lowest incomes within the country is still far too wide and likely to obscure the socialistic physiognomy that we had hoped to see Israel preserve. Doubtless, that unduly large gap exists in many democracies, and it is far wider in France, or Italy. But one injustice does not excuse another.

What is more, if Zionism is not socialist, then it loses some of its meaning,¹ for Zionism is not concerned only with the building of a nation; Zionism has aimed for the social, economic, and cultural normalization of the Jewish people, as have in fact many—not all, unfortunately!—of the contemporary nationalist movements. We see proof of this all about us, in other young nations. In this connection, as I have often recalled, the Zionists, and many Jews of the Diaspora, assume that what is happening today to the Jewish people, and the Zionist solution that was chosen, are totally unprecedented events. I am sorry to disappoint them and to remind them frequently that all this is not so very original. There are many oppressions throughout the world, and the nationalist solution is the most common. I am not saying this so as to disparage Zionism; on the contrary, I find it very reassuring, and it legitimizes Zionism that much more, in case that were necessary. It is reassuring to think that the problems that one faces are being faced by other people too. And it is so convenient to compare one's own solutions with other people's. Between Israel and the other young nations in the world today there are certainly some fruitful comparisons to be made. I am pleased to find that Israel's social difficulties are far from being the most serious among the difficulties facing the young nations in general; but we must not forget that, past a certain threshold, Israel will go through the same convulsions.

The second problem, which we had to put aside, is that of the ethnic groups; now we have to come back to it. It is an extremely serious problem, although, there again, it is not peculiar to Israel. Throughout the world, and this time not just in the young nations, ethnic groups are waking up. It doesn't matter whether we consider this logical or abnormal, whether we are happy or unhappy about it: it is fact. Even in such old and apparently sturdy countries as France and England, there is a revival of regions or nationalities. In France today, for instance, a country that is certainly older and more structured than the young State of Israel, the revival of regionalism is such that if the central authorities do not give it more serious thought, they are liable to run into enormous difficulties soon. De Gaulle, who knew his people well, had had a presentiment of this.

Now, at this point, to my great regret, I must tell you how disturbed we were by certain very unfortunate words spoken at the highest level of the Israeli government. In a major newspaper, I read an interview with the chief of state, Mrs. Golda Meir. Irritated, I suppose, by the demands made by ethnic groups, she spoke of people who had lived in caves before arriving in Israel, who used bathtubs as places in which to store vegetables, and who used the pajamas which the government gave them free of charge as rags or even flags. Speaking of a very specific part of the population, namely, certain Middle East Jews, she even accused them of congenital laziness! I must tell you how deeply those words grieved me; and I am going to add something else, because it must be said here, and because it is my job to speak out: I add that that kind of language reminded me of a grim period in my life. That is racist language, the language of people in a dominant position talking about a dominated population,

which should be absurd in Israel. How can a socialist leader, whose political flair and total devotion to her nation I normally respect, have appraised the situation so mistakenly as to utter such words! A politician knows that his or her words have infinitely more influence than those of a writer or a journalist, precisely because we can express ourselves more freely, without worrying overmuch about whether we please our readers or displease them. In Paris, we have spent a lot of time and gone to a lot of trouble to explain, if not to excuse, statements like those. We have tried to understand the Israeli government's difficulties in having to deal with a population composed of such different economic and sociocultural levels. But those explanations and those excuses, if any, will not suffice for very long. Now solutions must be found to those difficulties. The worst "solution" in any case is to deny that such problems exist. In Algeria, for instance, there is a Kabyle problem. This may not be widely known enough, for the Algerian government does everything in its power to prevent the problem from becoming public knowledge. But the Kabyles themselves feel this problem cruelly, and sooner or later it will burst onto the scene again. Unless the Algerian leaders, who are usually experienced politicians, are in the process of solving that problem right now without talking much about it; I would like to think so. We have seen how things turned out in Pakistan. You can see how things are going between the English and the Irish. Black Africa is periodically and horribly shaken by comparable convulsions. These conflicts are not just class conflicts, along Marxist lines; they are also ethnical conflicts, and no matter how much that may astonish us, it must not prevent us from acknowledging the fact. It must be acknowledged that various cases of domination within a single nation are no less grave than cases of domination of one

nation by another. I am not one of those people who believe that politicians or dominant political groups are systematically and always deliberately Machiavellian. I do not believe that the Israeli leaders, or a portion of the population, have consciously sought to use Sephardim for the more menial tasks or have systematically prevented them from occupying positions of leadership or acquiring property. There are certainly social mechanisms that seem to elude our grasp. When a group that is socially and economically strong deals with a group that is sociologically weaker, then by some unfortunate fatality, the weaker group is crushed. This is probably what happened where the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim are concerned. The latter group came to the country earlier; there they naturally occupied the top positions and formed a sort of elite—but also a sort of feudal rank. In all events, it is up to the leaders of a nation to see to it that these relative positions of strength fade away or even disappear as rapidly as possible. Otherwise, the people concerned falls ill, as a society. First, differences between ethnic groups must be recognized; then full equality between ethnic groups must be promoted, above and beyond the differences. *The respect for different ethnic groups, the struggle against domination of one by another—that too is called socialism.*

As for the third point, I must ask you to forgive me in advance, as it is certainly one of the most unpleasant to discuss; nonetheless, it too must be taken up. I am afraid that many of you who applauded for me a little while ago will no longer feel like agreeing with me at all. But if you have assumed that I was in good faith during the first part of my analysis, why would you withhold your trust from me for this part? My argument boils down to this. If you agree that no nation can long tolerate an injustice within it, because such injustice

is likely to cause the entire nation to suffer, then you should agree that religious Jews in Israel hold too high a rank, play too large a role, and wield too much power.

So as to avoid useless polemical discussions, I would remind my listeners that I have never underestimated the weight and importance of the religious factor in the collective life of the Jewish people. Historically, their religion has been the most important factor in their unity and survival. What I am saying is neither accidental nor demagogical. I have devoted a great many pages to the role and significance of religion as a phenomenon in the lives of many other oppressed peoples. But it is also true that there exist today millions of nonbelieving Jews who are not and never will be willing to have their lives governed by principles and beliefs that they do not hold. (I thank the people who have applauded but, I repeat, I am not trying to achieve any sensational effect.) I believe this is a very serious matter. Last night, I was in a restaurant in Jerusalem. There I saw three young men, militant Zionists, doubtless of the finest quality. I talked with them for a few minutes. One of them is settling in Israel and the other two will probably follow suit. These young men each wanted a glass of milk and a meat sandwich. The restaurant refused to serve them what they ordered. Instead of giving in, the young men went to talk to the manager. They got nowhere. You should have seen how angry and indignant they were—and somewhat disdainful too, I am sorry to say. People often ask me: “Look, you’re a professor, you’re in contact with the young people in the universities. How is it that more of them aren’t Zionists? How is it that more of them—intelligent, effective young men, devoted to other political parties—don’t join Jewish organizations?” Naturally, there are many explanations, and it would take a whole study to cover them. How-

ever, I must point out that many of those young people, and I mean those who proclaim themselves as Jews, not those who deny their Jewishness, cannot accept the idea that the national rebirth of the Jewish people should force upon them beliefs and practices that no longer mean anything to them. They do not understand why they should fight for political freedom and, at the same time, a new intellectual servitude. To their way of thinking, all oppressions go together and all freedoms go together. I will not try to keep from you the fact that that is also my way of thinking. I might add, once again, that this situation is not peculiar to Israel and the Jews, contrary to what the orthodox believers maintain, in order to make people believe that the Jewish religion has some unique meaning. I have found exactly the same problems in the young nations of the Third World, particularly among the Arabs. Very often I discuss this with my students, who come from all over the world. I know that many of you don't like this comparison very much, but you are wrong, for it is very instructive. Why not recognize that by inserting religion in the constitution—except that there is no constitution in Israel, but that makes no difference—by continuing to refrain from separating religious from secular matters, by giving the believers too important a role, compared with their numbers, in the conduct of *political* affairs, the Zionists are behaving exactly like the Moslem states, which they make fun of, or the Spanish-style Christian nations, which they rebuke. For instance, in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco at this time, mixed marriages are violently disapproved of. Now, my very first evening here, I heard an important rabbi, speaking from this very platform, denounce mixed marriages.

Of course, I hardly need state that there is no question of depriving the believers of the position they should rightfully

occupy in the Jewish state. It is not we, the nonbelievers or the laymen, who lack tolerance; it is they. The Jewish state was created for *several* reasons; *one* of them was so that the practicing Jews could practice their religion freely. What we ask of them, on the other hand, and I do not believe it is too much to ask, is simply that they not require of us what we do not require of them. We do not in the least ask them to give up their beliefs or practices: why then do they ask us to hold beliefs that we find foolish, or to observe practices that we find abnormal? If you really stop to think, calmly, about this demand, it appears genuinely mad, quite contradictory in terms of logic. How can you demand of anyone that he *believe*?

Then, too, there is a painful, human problem involved, and I am appalled to see how easily the believers overlook it. As I said, on the first evening I heard an important rabbi call for the official disapproval of mixed marriages. Now, a few days before coming here, I attended a meeting of Parisian intellectuals; they were all pro-Israel, or even Zionists; most of them had contracted mixed marriages. What are you going to do with them? Are you going to blame and reject them? Are you thinking of their children? Are we going to continue putting up with this farcical excommunication, these exhausting, humiliating discussions? I know that many of you are thinking of the negative aspects of mixed marriages: you are afraid of the results they might have on Judaism taken collectively. But why not also think of the positive aspect—the way such marriages can enrich the Jewish people? The fact that a spouse in a mixed marriage becomes a new ally? It is even historically false that the Jewish people has always lived enclosed within itself. That is actually a persistent ghetto mentality. There were great periods when proselytism existed on a large scale; when there were various ethnic groups within the Jewish

people; there have been several Jewish kingdoms throughout the world. This is not sufficiently well known, it is not often mentioned. And even now, after all, what story wouldn't one have to invent in order to deny that the Jewish people is the product of many ethnic groups? The battle between the people who want an open universe, an open nation, and those who want to limit the nation to believers only—that battle is also going on everywhere in the Third World, in all the young nations. It is a struggle that brings the most generous and most intelligent forces into conflict with the most conservative powers. In short, religion can, if really necessary, be used to serve the cause of national liberation, but that cause must not exact a certificate of faith from nonbelieving citizens. *If it does, then, once again, by trying to make the unity of the nation exaggeratedly secure, it may actually stifle the nation and make life there unbearable.*

Now I come to one last point: the awkward problem of the Palestinians Arabs. I know how easy it would be here to give way to demagoguery, thoughtless statements, verbal oversimplifications. There are people who keep telling you that you simply ought to open your doors, immediately give back the territories occupied since the 1967 war, or even since 1947, and stop believing in Arab hostility; those people either haven't much to lose if you were to do as they advise, or else they are fools. For it is a fact that many Arabs throughout the world, many of their leaders, are obsessed by Israel's existence and genuinely want to see Israel wiped off the map, that geographical map that they take to be the seat of the great united Arab nation. Many Arabs, politically sincere though they may be, have not understood the importance and the significance of Zionism, *i.e., of the Jewish nation, as a fact.* It is the same mistake as is made by many men on the political

left the world over. If those Arabs and those people on the political left had understood that Zionism is the expression of an entire people, on the same level as the contemporary expressions of their own young nations, they would not talk so much nonsense and would not nourish a hope of seeing the edifice that is Israel razed to the ground. You do not uproot the investment made by a whole people without striking its very being. I know that this definitive aggression, this new *final solution*, would be to some people's liking. Other people, though they believe themselves less radical and less hostile, reason just as absurdly. They say to you: Israel exists; all right; but it should stop being Zionist. This proves that they have not understood the meaning of Zionism any more than the others have; for if you separate the Diaspora from Israel, you strip Israel of all meaning, since Israel was created by and for the Jews of the Diaspora.

Although that is the case—and I am sorry to have to say such obvious things over and over again—it is impossible, and dangerous, to continue to overlook the Palestinian situation. I want to make it very clear that I am not confusing or mixing the Palestinian problem with that of the Arab nations that have already been established. I find that when you come right down to it, these border issues are not very important, from the standpoint of international law and ethics, I mean. Borders are merely an expression of relative positions of strength and each side's security requirements. Each side has to gain something. There is no everlasting *reason* why Egypt should keep all of the Sinai, or such and such part of it, nor of course why Israel should reoccupy all of the Sinai. Nor does history ever supply any such reasons, unless history is made over into a set of myths. The only reasons that exist are those embodied in economic needs or arguments of

strength or—but alas, only incidentally—arguments of political justice. For our purposes here, each side must find a status quo that corresponds to its interests and guarantees it security. This is a matter of bargaining, not of principle. A more important problem, in my opinion, is that of the genuinely Palestinian Arabs—perhaps precisely because, appearances notwithstanding, there are not two sides involved. Certain Israelis have come to assume that they alone can decide, to suppose that with time things would eventually calm down. A serious mistake, that. Because what we have in this case too is the awakening of a nation. If we agree that the nationalist demands of our day are dogged and tough—and, I must repeat, I believe that they are—then we must not delude ourselves as to the meaning of the Palestinians' agitation. Sooner or later the *national dimension* of the Palestinians will have to be taken into consideration. I am not a politician, I am not in the thick of government action, which doubtless has its laws; I do not know how rapidly this nationalist process must be recorded, nor what practical measures must be planned. I do know that since politicians are bound by their political promises, they cannot always speak out clearly, whereas it is easier for us as writers to say what we think. I know too that a politician has tasks that are often contrary to each other or even contradictory, and that it may be imperative for him to avoid colliding with a given segment of the electorate. So perhaps this concern is behind the thinking of many Israeli leaders. They know, or at least I hope they do, that the Palestinian phenomenon is also a national phenomenon, and that a solution along national lines has to be found. Any leaders who do not subscribe to that interpretation at all, or who feel that it would run completely counter to Israel's existence, must start taking much more serious steps to in-

tegrate the Palestinians, beginning with the economic aspect. What is not possible, in any event, is to leave things eternally as they now stand. Even the use of roughly thirty thousand temporary workers is not enough. I am well aware that neither of these two proposals, which only seem to be contradictory—economic and political integration of part of the Palestinians into the State of Israel, and/or the creation of a Palestinian national entity alongside Israel—will easily win the approval of the Palestinians themselves, many of whom, it is true, think of only one thing: reconquering Israel. But, even so, it is in that direction that efforts must be made. Giving the impression that one is not looking for any solution to the problem is certainly the most disastrous position to take, in the long run, for it cultivates despair and hatred, from which nothing good ever comes.

These are, I think, what an observer who tries very hard to be objective despite his deep attachment to Israel sees as the important problems in the life of your young nation. And in them, I think, lie most of the causes of the uneasiness that grips your young men. At their age, they need logical and moral coherence more than we do. I think it is disastrous to pretend not to understand the impatience of the young demonstrators who, right at this very moment, while I am talking to you, are shouting in front of the door of the conference center. I am not in favor of disorderly demonstrations and undiscerning violence. But neither do I think that putting the demonstrators in prison—as I am told some of them have been—is a useful solution. If I were able to, I would ask mercy for those who have just been arrested.

I realize how presumptuous it is for an outsider to talk about grave problems to the people who live with them, whereas he does not share their day-to-day difficulties. By

way of excuse, I will simply say this: while we insist again and again that the affirmation, the consolidation, and the unity of the Jewish people are essential to its survival, at the same time rights and duties—particularly the right and the duty to speak—are not the prerogative of the Israelis alone. I would certainly not have given myself this disagreeable task of saying harsh things to the Israelis if I did not have the impression that by doing so I am helping, even if only ever so slightly, to elucidate their problems and, therefore, in a small way, to solve them. In other words, helping to achieve what is vital, notwithstanding the indispensable criticisms: the survival of Israel.

NOTE

1. Although Zionism is a national movement, it must also be more socialist than other such movements, because of the specific condition of the Jewish people, whose very body needs to be made strong and firm.

4

ISRAEL, THE ARABS, AND THE THIRD WORLD

My head is still humming too loudly and my eyes are still too dazed by all that I have heard and seen during my trip to Israel, so that I cannot answer all your questions calmly. Allow me to select from among them the one which seems most important to me and which perhaps embraces all the others. How, you ask, can anyone support, as I do, Israel, the Arabs, and the countries of the Third World all at the same time?

Your question is significant in itself, as it assumes that there is a contradiction in an attitude such as mine. I am well aware that many Jewish intellectuals and a great many students are experiencing a crisis today. On the one hand, they feel that the Third World's cause is morally sound and that it corresponds to the logic of history. Therefore, if they wish to behave like just men and conscientious militants, they must uphold with all their strength the Arab demands, the South

As I was traveling through Israel in December 1971, the magazine *Unity and Dispersion* asked me for an interview. But I was pressed for time and preferred to answer in writing. This text appeared in issue number 12-1972 of the magazine, published simultaneously in French, English, Spanish, and Hebrew. The original title was "Zionism, Israel, and the Third World: Resemblances, Specificities, and Affirmations of Nationhood."

American rebellions, the national rebirths among the black people, and the tremendous agitation in Asia. I too believe that. On the other hand, they are Jews. They know everything proves it to them, even if they refuse to acknowledge it—that their particular destiny does not coincide completely with any of these legitimate struggles. Most of the time, they cannot even act unless they carefully draw a veil over their Jewishness, as over an obscene part of themselves. In certain Arab countries, for instance, whose policy they ardently defend, they would immediately be suspect, if not in permanent danger, simply because they are Jews. Some of them, but fortunately very few of them, are so perturbed and their allegiances are so divided that they eventually harbor a lasting hostility toward Zionism—a pathetic result, since in so doing they are fighting an unnatural battle, and they know it, a battle against their own blood; for today Zionism is the most vigorous and coherent political manifestation of Judaism.

Others, though they argue from the same premises, cannot make up their minds to adopt such extreme behavior. They cannot abandon their solidarity with Israel, to which they have a visceral attachment. They know that from now on, whether they like it or not, they are represented by Israel, and they are proud of its achievements. All right then; they contribute to funds, take a trip there every year, and come back from it drunk with light and nostalgia, dazzled by the Dead Sea's unbelievable crystallizations, moved to tears by the archaeologists' slow resurrection of ancient cities, which finally give them a past that is more than just mythical. They feel vaguely reassured about their future and that of their children, merely at the thought that there now exist a Jewish army, a Jewish state, a Jewish national territory, even if it is one of the smallest in the world. At the same time, they con-

tinue taking part in demonstrations in favor of the poor and oppressed in every corner of the globe. They give to "appeals" for Viet Nam, for saving the Biafra refugees, for Bangladesh, and they are beginning to be upset over the fate of the Irish Catholics. Nonetheless, they think that in so doing they are becoming resigned to their weakness, their inability to choose. And sometimes some of them, weary of being discontent with themselves, decide to break away from what they take to be the values that inspire the Third World, that is, social and international justice. This merely plunges them into a new difficulty, since the edifice that is Israel is also intended to be faithful to the socialist model.

It is as if the unfortunate Jew was still pursued by his intolerable destiny, even after the birth of the Israeli state that was supposed to cure him of the continuous tension between himself and the world, to wipe out the separation that isolated him from his various fellow citizens amid the nations. I wonder if this persistent rending of the Jews' soul is not one of the signs of his accusers' stubborn rejection of him, carried to an extent that pursues even his Israeli incarnation. After all, what other young nation today, what other people that is reconstructing its mother country, is required to account for itself so fully, to demonstrate such perfect ethical and ideological coherence as is demanded of the Israelis and the Jews who identify with Israel? Pakistan and India have just fought a real war with each other; you side with one or the other, depending on whether you are pro-Chinese or pro-Russian. Did anyone challenge *the nature, the right to existence* of either of those countries, by way of punishing it for a crime against another Third World country? Israel, on the other hand, because of its conflict with the Arabs, is flung back into the ignominious hell of the imperialist nations. Or, better still,

is denied. As proof of their sincerity, young Jewish revolutionaries are required to call for the "destruction of the Zionist state." Now, what Frenchman or Englishman, even among the most adamant opponents to government policy, is required to justify the *existence* of France, or the *existence* of England? Who would dare to demand that they destroy their own country? The truth is that Israel is not really assimilated to either a Third World country or an old Western nation whose existence is taken for granted. Israel is assimilated to nothingness, to which it must return.

I must confess that I have never felt that I fitted into any of these categories (which are actually European). Never in this connection have I felt torn by any intimate contradiction stemming from an objective dilemma. Not that I underestimate the Jewish-Arab conflict. I have certainly written enough about it! It even affects me more than it does many other people—infinity more, in any case, than those who have only late in the day become dubious friends of the Arabs. I was born in an Arab country; I still have friends there and even, I believe, sturdy bonds of affection. I have many Maghrebian, Middle Eastern, and black Moslem students. I still speak Arabic with part of my family; and with every trip I find renewed confirmation that I am most naturally in harmony with an Arab country, with its light, its odors, its fruits, the quality of human contacts. Yet I experience the fratricidal collision between Jews and Arabs as a grave and very unfortunate historical accident, but not as an insuperable stroke of fate. To put it in more technical terms, let's say I view it as a *conflict* but not as a *contradiction*.

At the end of a long study, discussed in two books¹ and several short articles, I had come to the conclusion that *Zionism was nothing other than the movement that should put an*

end to the oppression of the Jews. That is: the Jewish form of the contemporary movements for social and national liberation. This meant that not only did I not see any *ideological* contradiction between Israel's aspirations and those of the peoples of the Third World, but in fact that I judged that the historical, social, and cultural steps involved were similar. Since the intellectual in me mistrusts man and his passions, I want to remind myself that my judgment dates back before the Six-Day War and the whirlpool of ideas it stirred in the minds and hearts of so many people, on both sides. I repeat: I did not reach that conclusion because it was personally convenient or tactically necessary for me to reach it. It came as the result of systematic research into the Jewish condition; it followed an essay on the condition of colonized man, and was in anticipation of a general inventory of the conditions of oppression. In fact, when my books came out, Jewish people reproached me with being somewhat cold in my analysis, with not showing lyrical enthusiasm for the Jewish state—which, after I had considered the various hypothetical ways out of the Jewish misfortune, seemed to me a logical solution. I did not even gloss over the difficulties involved in it. It was just that, having witnessed personally the birth of first one nation, then another, having to some extent participated, like many Jewish intellectuals, in the decolonization movements, I had been compelled to recognize that for a Jew, it was necessary, in addition, to take responsibility for his own destiny, which only partially coincided with that of his fellow citizens. Moreover, short of being blinded by a sort of social optimism, which would be closer to metaphysics than to sociology, why would anyone expect a miraculous, preestablished harmony between the political, social, and cultural aspirations of such widely differing human communities? Everything, on the con-

trary, would seem to suggest that the independence of ex-colonized people and the necessities involved in rebuilding their nation require, at least during an initial stage, a degree of institutional, religious, and linguistic unification that is likely to disturb the life of all the other communities, including, of course, the Jewish community. This is exactly what happened, along with, unfortunately, certain less acceptable types of behavior, such as the overeager haste to get rid of men who had devoted all their energies to helping liberation come about; this zeal even reached the heart of the Communist party, whose Jewish leaders were almost immediately replaced. Or—another example—the underhanded economic measures that succeeded in driving as many merchants and industrialists as possible out of business. Or, again, the way the administration was gradually purged of its Jewish elements, though they had all been perfectly loyal.

But I had too often described, beforehand, these steps toward self-assertion on the part of the ex-dominated population and the ways in which they would subsequently exclude whatever did not belong to the new nation, to be scandalized by them, or even to regret such events unduly, at least taken as a whole. They did, however, confirm to me that there were two different but equally legitimate tasks: continuing to help the decolonization process, and looking after the specific destiny of the Jewish minority. Although it was difficult to pursue both tasks at the same time, they were by no means contradictory. In a way, they were complementary.

This observation, broadened into a working assumption, was amply confirmed as time went by. Independent Algeria emptied itself of its Jews more rapidly and more completely than did Tunisia. And in Morocco, though the situation was

not quite so clear, the same phenomenon occurred. *There was definitely a Jewish condition, an oppression peculiar to the Jews, which called for specific remedies* that were still necessary after our Arab fellow citizens had been liberated. The original socio-historical conjuncture that was ours made it easier to reach that conclusion. We did not belong to old and very structured countries, such as France or Italy, where, despite alerts and hazards throughout their history, the Jews could believe in the durability of their insertion into the majority element of the population. We had witnessed the birth of our own nationality, whether Tunisian, Moroccan, or Algerian; the birth had sometimes been a touch-and-go thing, what with childhood diseases and congenital malformations, and that made us stand a healthy distance apart. Hence another reproach heaped upon me at that time: the Jewish condition that I claimed to be describing and the solutions to it that I outlined were only the story of our own personal experience. That was partly true. I was a North African Jew, who had undertaken to draw up a systematic balance sheet of his existence and his relations with other people. But, aside from its picturesque, anecdotal contents, why wouldn't an analysis of the basic mechanisms that governed our relationships with other people and with ourselves be enlightening? The only way of invalidating my descriptions was not by taking exception to them in the name of ironic or timorous skepticism but by proposing alternatives instead. Did I rule out, or challenge in advance, any confession by a Jew from Strasbourg or Minsk, on the grounds that his story would be too specific, and not sufficiently universal? On the contrary, the only way to build up a global Jewish picture is by hearing and then comparing a great number of such confessions, so as to establish the constants in them and the anecdotal

differences. Furthermore, with regard to the problem that concerns us, I actually had an advantage. I had been lucky enough, and in some ways unlucky enough, to witness the events in Tunisia; I had experienced the problems involved from day to day; I had been in virtually daily contact with several Algerian leaders. I had watched closely the liberation process in other countries. In short, having personally witnessed several unique socio-historic experiences, why wouldn't I draw some lessons from them? At any rate, it was in the light of those extraordinary historical close-ups that it became obvious to me that *Zionism was also the movement for the national liberation of the Jews, on a par with the other national liberation movements, in the Maghreb, in Africa, and elsewhere in the world.*

Better still: on second thought, I was doing no more than dwelling on one, somewhat obscured vein of the Zionist movement. Although the national dimension was of prime importance, it had been veiled by the first Zionists. Almost all of them, colonists or ideologists, were ardent socialists, and claimed to be internationalists and universalists, without perceiving that any rigorous internationalism would have trouble condoning the existence of different nations. Often of Russian origin, those first Zionists also harbored the same convictions as the revolutionary circles in their native country, which continued to look ambiguously on the issue of nationhood even after the revolution had triumphed, even after so many peoples had made impatient thrusts toward becoming nations. Lastly, the existence of a rightist wing within the Zionist movement, led by active and courageous men who were not without intellectual value, such as Jabotinski, but who underestimated the social problem, irritated the first Zionists and made them shy away from any overemphasis on

nationhood. Now, actually Zionism was, from its inception, not only a movement of the poor classes but also a claim staked by an entire, oppressed, alienated people, whose structures were gravely upset and weakened. Its strong social philosophy was certainly more demanding and theoretically more structured than that of most Third World countries. But, first of all, and explicitly, it was a movement of national rebirth and normalization.

Besides, regardless of whether or not the Zionists clearly stated this characteristic, everything confirmed it. Negatively: profound collective oppression periodically endangering the people's very existence. (The Nazi era was not exceptional, as it is repeatedly claimed to be. Consider what the feast of Purim symbolizes: extermination just barely avoided.) And permanently, all the consequences of global oppression, the various types of alienation—institutional, cultural, psychological. In response to this historic misfortune, there were ceaseless attempts, partial and abortive, to create a nation. The history of them must be written one day; it will show that Jews have never ceased to feel a nostalgia for nationhood. Then one day came the overall, decisive response: the decision to bring about a radical transformation of the collective mind and body, the reconstitution of an independent economy, the emergence of an autonomous political power, preference for the rebirth of a single language, a tradition reinstated in a place of honor, search for a specific culture—in a word, Zionism, *i.e.*, the movement to free and rebuild the Jewish people that soon took shape in the form of the Israeli nation. No doubt about it, Israel was one of those young contemporary nations that were springing up like mushrooms all over the world, by virtue of both the soil in which it had germinated—the Jewish misfortune—and the problems that assailed it

and the solutions that it laboriously tried to work out. For instance, its anxious attempts to pinpoint its identity, surprising on the part of a people with a prestigious cultural tradition. That did not spare Israel the unending debate: "Who is a Jew?"—which, appearances notwithstanding, is not peculiar to Jews. The same search for collective identity makes a young Arab today wonder: "What is an Arab?," since Islam as religion and even Islam as culture are no longer adequate to cover everything; makes a young black wonder: "What is Negritude?"; and makes a young Latin American ask himself similar questions if he happens to have any Indian blood. Periods of mutation (and is there any more important such period in the life of a people than when it becomes a nation?) make this self-examination, this balance sheet of the past, this appraisal of strength, inevitable. For the old habits and the old rites and the old techniques may no longer be suited to entering a relatively unknown future. In other words, any adaptation generates anxiety; we can see this even in Europe.

So I have just returned from Israel. How could I close my eyes to the obvious: the nation has now asserted itself once and for all. Anyone who still challenges that statement should go see for himself! Even if I had still had any doubts, this latest trip would have convinced me. And not only had I not had any doubts, but in fact I had felt it necessary for the past several years to stress this nationhood. Not that the building up of socialism is considered there as a less important goal; in fact, it is crucial. Endless discussions center on social justice and freedom, on the fullest opportunity for each individual and the best possible management. But in order to understand what takes place in these young nations, there are two points of view to consider: social liberation, and national liberation.

People were so concerned with the social point of view, and rightly so, that they were blind to the national one, to such an extent that any national movement whatsoever was dubbed socialist and revolutionary, as if to apologize for one's involvement by disguising it. Not to mention accusing the other movements of being chauvinist and nationalist, in order to discredit them. So much for Israel. I have found it more accurate and more honest to demonstrate that *all* of the contemporary liberation movements, including that in China and even the Communist movement in Indochina, are also national movements. And as for concern with social issues, Israel was not in last place.

In that case, how should one answer the people who label Zionism a reactionary, imperialist movement? Well, by saying that they deceive themselves or other people, for obvious reasons. It is so convenient to designate a single, virtually mythical enemy and pretend to confront it with an illusory unity, hoping that it will become real unity one day. Nasser had understood this admirably, and so—may my Arab friends forgive me—did Hitler. Against Israel in the role of the devil, only Egypt (only Germany), heading the Arab world unified under its guidance and for its benefit (oil included), could respond victoriously. One Nasserian sociologist confirms this, with blunt frankness. “Seen from Egypt, that very unity looks like the only way to create a regional Arab whole, endowed with the raw material resources that are vital to the development of the Arab territories, the only way to see to it that economies complement each other. . . .”²

But Israel no more endangers the Arab world than the Jewry of the times endangered the Reich. A myth is never more than relatively helpful; sooner or later, reality prevails.

Egypt did not unify the Arab world, whose reality at present probably lies in the constitution of various nations. Nasser himself, it is said, was thinking of taking care of his own country more seriously when he died.

I don't want to examine the anti-Israeli arguments in detail once again; I have done it many times. "Israel receives American money"; "Israel is an outgrowth of imperialism"; "Israel is a colonial venture"; "Israel is neither a people nor a nation"; "Israel does not belong in the Third World"; "On the contrary, it is the aggressor of an oppressed people"; etc. Not one of these arguments can stand up to close examination for very long. "Israel receives American money" but who in the Third World does not? And from other sources as well? Egypt receives both Russian money and American money. Transjordan receives American dollars and also money from the oil emirates; Morocco and Tunisia both benefit from the American aid plan, as do Pakistan and India. As for Algeria, which claims to set the example of revolutionary purity, how many people realize that 80 percent of its trade is conducted with the West, not the U.S.S.R.? I don't see anything scandalous about that; it is clever, really, on the part of people who put on a convincing show of being absolutely intransigent. Most of the former French colonies receive aid from France, and the French government boasts of it. Why, for that matter, are only the Americans mentioned? Is French money any more innocent? Yes, but, comes back the retort, Israel receives money mostly from America, whereas the Arab countries receive money chiefly from Russia, with no strings attached. Not true! The Arabs paid cash for their latest weapons, which were very costly; besides, what the Russians seek, and obtain, is at least political and strategic. At the beginning of decolonization, I became convinced, upon looking more closely at the

economic questions in dispute between France and its colonies, that the military, strategic, and political advantages overrode the economic advantages as such, which were abandoned to the big colonists and a few companies. Moreover, Israel receives Jewish money, from America or elsewhere; that is, from its own people, for whom it was founded. This does not point to some vague, obscure mystery, as is sometimes suggested; on the contrary, it guarantees a relative degree of independence. Isn't it often said, with reason, that economic independence is the surest sign of a new nation's freedom? "Yes, *but* Israel is industrializing more rapidly than the others, because it disposes of Jewish capital and because there are more Jewish executives and they are more efficient." Must the countries that get off to a quicker start, such as Uruguay or Argentina, be excluded from the Third World? Is there a morality bonus for the countries that lag the farthest behind? Is the Third World a club where virtue is measured in degrees of poverty? At any rate, and despite what some Israelis themselves say, Israeli development is characterized not by European features but by those common to the developing countries: aid from the outside is indispensable, gray matter and investments are injected from abroad. The fact that the advice and the money come from Jews living outside Israel does not fundamentally alter the economic nature of the Israeli situation; it is still that of an underdeveloped country. At this point, what are called for are serious comparative studies, not these sweeping statements, which have only tactical value. In fact, a revision of these fashionable concepts, which are trotted out on all occasions, would be advisable. For instance, the concept of "Third World": it has rendered service to some extent, but it has done so much harm and is so vague, so badly defined, and is either too elastic or not elastic enough. I would

certainly prefer a more flexible concept: that of national births and rebirths, where Israel would be situated on a scale going from countries with slow industrialization to countries with rapid industrialization. At one end of the scale would be the poor countries of the Third World and at the opposite end Canada or Australia; these last two would really be more like settlements for populating purposes, but without an administration in a home country and without exploitation of a native people. It would be absurd not to include them on the scale, because then the French Canadians, for example, would have to be ruled out, along with any effort at settling or pioneering.

“Yes, but, Israel does not merely receive money and put to optimum use the human resources available among the Jews of the Diaspora. It is also an outpost or outgrowth of American imperialism.” Worse still, one author, Jewish by birth,³ has gone so far as to stigmatize Israel as a colonial phenomenon. In that view, Zionism is a colonial venture launched by the Jewish people to the detriment of the Palestinians and the other Arab countries. (Another variant has it that Zionism is an enterprise underwritten by the Jewish bourgeoisie, combining imperialism and colonialism.)

The weakness of this theory is so obvious that it will upset only those who have already chosen sides, without waiting to hear any rational arguments. I cannot make a detailed analysis here of this view either. Allow me, however, to sum it up briefly. Unless we play with words, as our author has, we do not find any of the features of colonization, in the contemporary sense, in the Israeli undertaking: neither the economic exploitation of a native majority by a minority of colonists; nor the use of cheap labor, trained and manipulated by colonists who hold tight to their position of superiority; nor the existence of a home country, with the resultant *colonial pact*

(raw materials traded for manufactured products); nor political and military power issuing directly or indirectly from that home country; nor cultural alienation to the sole benefit of the culture of the colonizing power. By the way, isn't it strange that the people who maintain that the Jewish people does not exist are the same people who speak, *at the same time*, of Jewish imperialism and Jewish home country! So here we have a home country without a people, and imperialism without either nation or empire! What a fine socio-historic monster that is! Nor are those same people any more embarrassed about making Israel out to be both the outpost of American imperialism and the vanguard of Jewish expansionism. But as we already know, nothing about the Jews is surprising; they manage to accumulate in themselves all the contradictory evils. This reeks of *The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion*, that false "document" concocted by the czarist police; and it certainly proves that they always embody absolute evil—or that the confusion is to be found in their accusers' minds.

"Yes, but Israel wages war and wins it. Israel has the best army in the world and boasts of it! Israel is an aggressor! That's no way for a socialist, Third Worldist country to behave!" Isn't this a clear case of sticking in the same rut? Yes, of course, Israel carefully keeps up its army and wins its wars; but if it stopped keeping up that army for one instant, if it was defeated just once, what would become of Israel? Here again is the real meaning behind this objection: whoever wants Israel to let down its guard and does not propose any alternative actually wants Israel to disappear. Yes, there are war and violence between Jews and Arabs. But what is so astonishing about that, particularly as it is happening in the Third World? Not long ago, Algeria and Morocco, which are as closely related as two nations could be—same language,

same religion, proclaiming a mythical unity—fought each other over a matter of a border marker, leaving several hundred people dead on the spot. Again over a border marker, war did not break out between Tunisia and Algeria simply because the Tunisians knew that they would not be able to hold off the Algerian army for even two hours. And it's no good saying that it was the fault, once again, of the French colonizers, who drew those artificial borders: must the errors of colonization be corrected by waging war? Why not keep the quarrel within the family and settle it there? There has been war between Egypt and the Sudan, between Egypt and Yemen; between the Transjordanians and the Palestinians; between the Kurds and the Iraqis. Have we already forgotten Biafra? And Bangladesh? As for deciding who is an aggressor, look at the definition given by the Russians: the fact of defending one's existence does not, say they, constitute aggression. Should one shoot first? Yes, for the best way of protecting oneself is by attacking, the Russians maintain. When no solution to a conflict seems to be feasible through discussion, discourse, or diplomacy, violence rears its head—and it then becomes secondary to know who started it. No one has ever been concerned with whether it was Algeria or Morocco that opened fire first. Remember that it was France that attacked Nazi Germany in 1939, and not the other way around. We even regretted that France did not attack earlier, so much so that many historians consider Munich a sinister mistake which gave Germany time to furbish the apparatus of war with which it nearly crushed the world.

The truth is that the problem of violence is one of the most complex and difficult of all problems. Revolutionaries in social or nationalist causes do not, so far as I know, reject its use if they believe it is the only means by which to bring about the

transformations they wish to see. Nor do either liberals or conservatives disdain it, if they believe it is the only way to defend their property, freedom, and the social order. No one would dream of reproaching Algeria or Morocco with keeping up armies, which benefit from French training and French advisers, and are not to be taken lightly; or of reproaching the Indochinese with having fought for the past thirty years; or of reproaching the South American *guerrilleros* with their often blind and horrid acts of violence. I am afraid that disapproval of violence never amounts to more than disapproving of someone else's violence.

Not that the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians, do not suffer from this conflict or harvest the poisoned fruit of violence. But the Jews also suffer and die from it—and, in proportion, more of them suffer and die from it. And not just in Israel. After all that I have said and unceasingly confirmed about my ties with the Arabs, I must recall once again, that in Moslem countries the Jews have always lived amid insecurity and humiliation and, at the very least, what is fashionably termed “cold violence” with, from time to time, an explosion of very “hot” violence. Isn't that enough to explain why the Jews would be prepared to wage war, rather than relapse into that state? And actually the truth is that it is not violence that is a scandal in this human world that we continue to live in (ah, how I hope, with all my heart and soul, that one day it will be possible to settle conflicts between individuals or peoples through negotiation!). What can scandalize us is the *meaning* of violence. Now, if conflict and violence there are between the Jews and the Arabs, they do not follow the colonizer-colonized model, with the Jews as the colonizers and the Arabs as the colonized. The Jews have just barely got rid of their English colonizers and have just escaped from an

extermination that nearly succeeded: after all, one Jew out of every three died, and in certain countries entire communities died! A number of Jews equal to the number of those Arab refugees who are rightly pitied have just left the Arab countries, and those who stayed behind still live in a climate of anguish. On the Arab side, nations have already been created, and the Israeli question really has nothing to do with their real problems. Drawing such a parallel is either too absurd or too convenient. *There is violence between the Arabs and the Jews because there is an historical conflict between two powerful and partially competing national ambitions, not at all between a social and revolutionary (Arab) movement and a nationalist and imperialist (Jewish) movement.* Similarly, the conflict between the U.S.S.R. and Israel is not at all a conflict between a socialist country and a country which is not socialist but rather between two national interests, between what the U.S.S.R. looks upon as its national needs in the Mediterranean region and the impediment which Israel constitutes to the fulfillment of those needs.

That is why I am not even sure that socialist Arab regimes, even if their socialism had been genuine, not just a front, would have found the path toward peace with Israel any more easily. Nor that socialists in Israel would be any more inclined to make peace. On both sides there is a problem of nationhood to solve which, for the time being, is absorbing most of their energies, whereas they would normally be devoted to handling social problems, which do indeed require peace. Some good, however, will have come of this considerable difficulty: it will have had the advantage of revealing that the struggle between Jews and Arabs is not a matter of contradiction but of conflict. In Marxist terms, this means that each movement need not necessarily eliminate the other in order to succeed, as in the

proletarian-employer contradiction or the oppressor-oppressed contradiction, where the nature of the oppressor must change, or the oppressor must even disappear, before power can shift to the oppressed.

It is true, then, that Zionism, the movement for the national liberation of the Jewish people, has come into conflict with the national aspirations of the Arab population, particularly those parts of it that are neighbors of the State of Israel. Originally, those Arab aspirations were not very distinct, but they become gradually stronger; obviously, that does not make them any the less legitimate today. This is a stroke of historic bad luck, and efforts must be made to palliate it. As I have shown elsewhere, it is a mistake to suppose that all just causes are automatically in harmony. Often, inevitable conflicts exist even between the demands and interests of different groups of oppressed people. The dockers in several large French ports suffered from the end of colonization and the fact that as a result, maritime trade grew rare. There can be competition and conflict between immigrant workers and workers who are nationals of the country concerned; employers know this and exploit it. The labor unions take it into account, even if they do not talk about it in public. There is no point in refusing to see these difficulties, in maintaining that they couldn't possibly exist (because of what law of metaphysics?). There is no point in choosing one side arbitrarily or according to some irrelevant political doctrine, deciding to label it socialist, and then heaping abuse on the other side, as representing chauvinist nationalism.

The truth of the matter is that there is young, vigorous, legitimate nationalism on both sides, the Jewish and the Arab, and among the blacks and the Asians. Instead of being resigned to apocalypse, to mad, fratricidal wars among peoples

who still lack everything, we should patiently seek solutions even if they are to be only moderately satisfactory to all parties. It is true that since today's socialism suffers from a sort of hardening of the arteries, in both thought and deed, we may question whether it is still able to comprehend such problems without obstinately reducing them to their social dimension and nothing more. I must recall a fact that stares us in the face but which men devoted to social progress always refuse to accept because it embarrasses them: as long as the problem of nationhood goes unresolved, class struggle remains hesitant. If we want that class struggle genuinely to take place, then the first thing to do is to put an end to the problems that affect the nation's overall existence. A refusal to consider the Middle East situation in this light is the surest way to delay socialism.

So the crux of the matter is clear. If we are willing to view Zionism as a national movement, it must be granted the respect and legitimacy which all national liberation movements deserve. Yet that is precisely what people, each person for his own reasons or in line with his own strategy, do not want to do. By stigmatizing Zionism, on the contrary, as a colonial or imperialist phenomenon, they single it out for universal blame and calumny and prepare the world for seeing it receive its rightful punishment. *By denaturing Zionism, by destroying it symbolically, they pave the way for its real destruction.*

For the seeming objectivity of the demonstration must not conceal its motivation and its purpose. Nowadays, everyone agrees that colonial situations must come to an end. Rarely, in fact, does a person who characterizes Israel in those terms fail to acknowledge that he is really in favor of its liquidation, regardless of the verbal precautions he may take by merely

calling for Israel's "transformation" or the renunciation of its "state-controlled structures," or its immediate integration in an Arab-led "democratic government," etc. When you consider the present situation of the populations in question, any such proposal comes under the heading of sociological fantasy, nonsense, or utopia. And in the immediate future, it would certainly mean the destruction of Zionism.

I hasten to add that I by no means reject proposals for integration, federation, or confederation. Although they are premature today and would indeed mean the death of the Jewish national movement because it is still too young and frail, they are certainly not to be ruled out for the future, when these different peoples will have been definitively transformed into nations and will be able to examine together how to pool their common destiny so as to put their natural environment to optimum use.

In short, these three obvious elements must be stubbornly borne in mind:

Oppression of the Jew is one of the oldest oppressions in history, and because of that, he is subject to more tenacious, varied, and extensive oppression than that of many other peoples, including the Arabs.

Zionism is the only *specific* effort to put an end to the total tragedy, social and historical, suffered by the Jew.

There is no inherent difference, except, of course, for shades of meaning, between Zionism, the movement of Jewish revolt and national affirmation, and other contemporary movements having the same origin and the same objective.

From this point of view, then, what are we to think of the relations between Jews and Arabs? Forgive me for repeating

myself, but what else can you do with obvious elements that people persist in not accepting? The Arabs too are completing their liberation and approaching the task of reconstruction amid a thousand difficulties, many of which lie within themselves. A Zionist who is aware of the nature of his own cause cannot fail to understand and approve of the Arab peoples' social and national ambitions, even though he may regret coming into conflict with them. Conversely, he is entitled to demand of the Arab peoples, clearly and openly, that they recognize his own demands for liberty and the reconstruction of his nation. There is nothing dishonorable or counterrevolutionary about being a Zionist since, on the contrary, it is the only way for a Jew to contribute to freeing his people *collectively*. In short, it is the only way today for a Jew to be a progressive *as a Jew*. Dodging the issue (like some of my political comrades who agree not to call themselves Zionist, for tactical reasons, because they think the term has been overworked) means doing a disservice to progressives all over the world, including the Arabs. It does a disservice to the Arabs especially, because it helps to keep up their illusion that Zionism is not a national movement, and should thus be easy to wipe out. The truth is that Zionism is the collective expression of the Jewish people and cannot now be uprooted, except by the death of that people. (A thought which does not make everybody shudder. . . .)

"Yes, *but* Israel occupies Arab territories; there are Palestinian refugees. . . ." Yes, true enough; and that too must be discussed, without complacency or demagoguery. At the risk of offending, I would begin by saying that the border problems with Egypt and Syria cannot be as important as they are commonly made out to be. Nor can I see what this has to do with socialism. Borders are merely the concrete, geograph-

ical expression of real, overall relations between states; this means that they must be laid out in a way that expresses reciprocal interests and security requirements. I do not believe that the U.S.S.R., or China, or Algeria, or Morocco, not to mention the so-called imperialist nations, looks at them in any other light; they have proven this on several occasions. Otherwise, how could we explain the border disputes between China and Russia? Who behaves in a socialist way? Who in an imperialist way? I am neither a military man nor an expert in geopolitics, and I do not know what is *indispensable* to Israel's security—the Golan Heights, Sharm el Sheikh, or a specific point on the banks of the Jordan. Nor do I know whether Egypt would be gravely endangered by the loss of Sharm el Sheikh, or Syria by the loss of the Golan Heights. I do understand that there is such a thing as national pride, and that it can be wounded. In the present situation, where these nations are on a footing of potential war with each other, there is probably some truth in each side's position. Therefore the only legitimate solution and the only one that has any chance of achieving something is that of negotiations from which each side could derive some advantage, in terms of security just as in terms of psychology or passion or even of myth if you like. Above all, each side must be persuaded that it would be more advantageous for it to make peace than to make war (which, unfortunately, is not obvious at first glance). In short, it is all a matter of bargaining and relative positions of strength, and it is not the Marxists who are going to contradict me. Peoples being what they are, we must all, having barely progressed beyond barbarianism, be prevented from cheating easily. And as a man from the Mediterranean shores, I might add that I am altogether convinced that a mediocre

agreement is better than continual war, profitable though it may seem. Anything else is mere talk, or hides other intentions, or, worse yet, reflects collective neuroses of fear and aggression.

And now let us consider the Palestinian population as such. But here again, let's be clear. This question is the most painful one and the hardest to deal with, and very possibly no satisfactory solution can be rapidly found without serious sacrifices *by both parties*. The Palestinians are unhappy. That is a fact. They are unhappy for several reasons: families are split up because the state of war cuts regions off one from another; their future is uncertain; they do not enjoy their full political, economic, and cultural rights; their demands for nationhood are unsatisfied; and, finally, because they constitute a minority and a minority is never in a comfortable position. This we Jews know better than anyone else.

It's not much use by now to try to determine who or what is to blame—the Arab countries, the Jewish threats, or their own anxiety—for the fact that they are displaced people. Arguing over the exact number of Palestinians is of only secondary interest. Nor is it helpful to recall that the Palestinian population was not always indigenous to the region. It is true that many of them came from Syria or elsewhere, attracted by the prosperity of the country that the Zionists had made fertile; it is true that they did not always have an awareness of nationhood. But now they are there; they have forgotten where they came from; their collective consciousness has crystallized and they are unhappy. The Palestinians are suffering a tragedy. This is what the Israelis must recognize and never forget. And I know that many of them know it and say it; and

many others keep silent because they fear for their own safety.

Even so, however, it would be absurd to question Israel's existence because of the Palestinians' unhappiness. That would amount to resolving a tragedy by means of a crime. For some time, verbal precautions have been taken, it is true, and I suppose this is progress of a sort; people merely talk of "transforming the structures of the Zionist state," of "de-Zionizing Israel," of replacing it with a "secular and democratic state"—which would be Arab. I have already said what we should think of such proposals: as the situation now stands, they would mean the destruction of Zionism, that is, of the Jewish state.

Thus, a *political solution* is needed. For a long time—well before the Arabs, I must repeat—we have acknowledged that the Palestinians have some right on their side; and at the same time we have consistently asked them to give up their excessive demands, their schemes that would be catastrophic for the Jews and for themselves. As long as they have not replaced their romantic projects by a properly political line of behavior, not the slightest progress will be made. The Palestinians, and the Arabs too, must recognize, and must never again forget, that the Jews have a state alongside them, in the midst of them, and that sooner or later it will have to be reckoned with and peaceful coexistence with it achieved. This means, in both practical and ideological terms, that they must stop seeking destruction of that state, or else there will be no end to the matter, no way out.

In short, what is needed is a country for each party: Israel for the Jews, and a Palestinian state for the Palestinians, either with or alongside Jordan; that needs to be worked out.

One final point, on which not enough stress is placed, it

seems to me: this certainly doesn't mean that all the Palestinians must be encompassed within that state. Let's think a minute. It would be absurd and scandalous to do that. Are we really to encourage the disappearance of all minorities? Must all the minorities in the world be shifted and shuttled till they are brought together with their majorities? And for how long? Isn't it obvious that the "minority" phenomenon will come into being again and again? Should a prohibition be laid, for instance, upon settling in a foreign country? Is that really a socialist solution?

The obvious solution comprises two parts. The majority must be given a country of its own, so that the minority will cease to be handed over, completely abandoned, to other peoples and instead will acquire a personality, a *background* that will give it self-assurance. Isn't that what Zionism is all about? At the same time, we must fight for a right that is still considered shocking, even though it is basic: the minorities must be treated on an equal footing with the majority groups. In other words, those Palestinians who wish it must be fully integrated into the Israeli nation. In economic, political, and cultural terms, the Palestinians must be made *Israeli citizens of the Moslem faith*. This implies two further necessities: that of having an Arab policy at last, and—let's bring it up again—that of separating two distinct areas, the secular or non-denominational and the religious. Of course it will not be easy, in the near future, to assimilate a hostile minority that feels that it has been defeated. The starting point might be what least offends the collective consciousness of a group, namely, economic considerations, and the task of assimilating the Palestinians economically, *on the same footing* as the Jewish immigrants, could be undertaken. Ultimately interbreeding—

yes, interbreeding could be envisioned. I realize that given both sides' frame of mind at this point, that is a virtually utopian suggestion. But it is a guideline, and in the long run it is the only effective one. The French Protestants did not cease to raise problems for the French government until they were considered as Frenchmen, just like the Catholics. I shall not go into the ethical side of the question; it is clear that regardless of our failures and our difficulties in this field, interbreeding is the true sign of a projected universal society.

Naturally, in the meanwhile, and even forever if they prefer, they must be allowed to remain different. They have a perfect right to do so. Isn't that what we ourselves have energetically clamored for? Until assimilation occurs, if it does, every group has the right to be considered a minority within the nation. That is historical justice. Every group of human beings, even if it has only an embryonic consciousness of itself, must be given the possibility to affirm that self. None of this actually seems insoluble to me, or even so very difficult, provided that we settle down to it and provided, above all, that we are not hindered by other schemes and other interests, particularly those of the great powers but also the Egyptian dream of Arab unity, soon perhaps to be taken up by a similar Libyan or even Algerian dream. With this point of view in mind, we might begin thinking again, at last, of a federation of the Fertile Crescent; within it the Palestinians would either be regrouped to form an additional state or mingled with the Transjordanians. It should be recalled that the experts—and I am shocked to see that their opinions are not more widely used and published—believe that the region is rich enough, potentially rich enough, above all, to feed everyone, including the entire Jewish people if it were to decide to come back to its ancestral land.

II

My trip to Israel has confirmed my analysis of the matter, which has actually become a commonplace. From this people, a nation is born; on this soil, it is at last reunited with its historical past, despite the yawning gaps left by deportation, dispersion, and countless instances of oppression. That past is embodied in monuments and sites whose names this people had been repeating for centuries, in a collective dream that has suddenly become reality. Although this nation has re-established contact with itself across a period of several millennia, it is a young nation nonetheless. It is growing as vigorously as all the others and suffers the same, normal growing pains: inevitable industrialization, hesitation over economic and social choices, the difficult genesis of a new culture, class struggle, conflict between generations, clashes that break out between ethnic groups, despite the frailness of this new collective body, as soon as war becomes more remote—in other words, as soon as the people's overall life appears to be in less danger.

Israel's internal difficulties must also be considered in this context of healthy crisis. Take a new phenomenon, which appears to disconcert the authorities: the rebelliousness of the young people. I believe it is explicable and normal. But we must distinguish between two sources of this malaise. The first is traditional, cyclical, and common to youth all over the world: impatience with the older generations who hold the political and economic power and who developed the cultural standards that have governed the nation's life. It is not that the old militants no longer see the cases of injustice, inequality, the individual disappointments and the social and historical failures; but it is as if they have been exhausted by a once-ardent

struggle and so have become gradually resigned as their life-span moves on toward its end. It is normal, healthy and natural that the young people should fight against the "Establishment," as it is called today, *i.e.*, that they should challenge an order in which they do not yet hold the rank that their impatience craves. Ardently, generously, they in turn hope to build a society where social justice will be achieved at last and failures will be avoided. It is good that they should believe that they can do infinitely better than their elders. Their own lives will teach them that one can never carry out more than a part of that program and—to remain within the limits of what concerns us here—that no social movement, Zionism included, reaches its goal 100 percent. But it is good for a group to preserve a horizon of values, which regulates its action; it is good that the young people should try again with all their young strength to transform the world. Their eternal revolt is the driving force behind the improvement and survival of the human species.

Care must simply be taken that this impatience and this healthy aggressiveness are ritualized, that is, that they are externalized without undue violence, which would then endanger the whole society, including the future and the life of the young people, themselves the finest flower of their species. I will not dwell further on this aspect of the conflict of generations; it is banal, common to all societies.

But no doubt there is another reason why the young people in Israel—and also in the Arab countries and the black countries, as the African leaders well know—have trouble finding their identity. (Similar disenchantment is found in more structured nations, such as France, England, and Italy, but the reasons for it are different.) Their nation, which is still being built right before their eyes, does not correspond to their ideal

image of it. They find that it is growing more and more dangerously akin to those Western nations whose social injustice and military brutality they abhor. They hoped—they still hope—to build a hitherto unknown type of society, even at the cost of sacrifices whose extent they do not always realize, and they violently reproach their elders with being content to take half-measures and accept aid, with strings attached, from the great powers. The Jewish-Arab conflict complicates matters even further for the young Israelis. They are not even the fighting companions of the Third World's other young people.

How should we answer these angry young men? First of all, we must answer them sincerely. It would be unworthy and ultimately harmful to lie to them; in the end, they can always tell if they have been lied to, and their disappointment is all the more violent. At the same time, the myths that flourish in those young brains must not be encouraged. For instance, let us first dispel one misunderstanding: on the whole, the ideal for which the people of the Third World, and not just their leaders, aim is to have the same standard of living and even the same customs as the people of the West. This may be considered regrettable, but it cannot be denied; all we need do is look at what really goes on in those countries. The fact that Israel is well advanced in this respect does not make it any more blameworthy. All these young nations will proceed to industrialize as soon as they can, and some of them are already beginning. The same goes for socialism. As far as I know, there are more socialism and more democracy in Israel than virtually anywhere else. Actually, there are considerable difficulties, common to all countries, in the construction of a socialist state, and the major one is economic. Technical considerations are not very heart-rendering and do not much ap-

peal to the imagination. But how can socialists, who are often Marxists, avoid them? How could they then seriously criticize the way the middle classes or the liberals handle things? The construction of any country, socialist or not, requires heavy, long-term investment—and not just of workers. Where and how are the sources of financing to be found? An orthodox socialist regime, with its strict control over capital, discourages investors, whether Jewish or not. It may be decided to do without investment and to take one's time. Or, in order to move ahead faster, a government may be tempted to go look for money where it is to be found: among those who have it at home and abroad. Doubtless that postpones the advent of a completely socialist society. But I am very much afraid that for the time being at least, the choice will necessarily be between a poor but egalitarian society and a society of inequality amid relative abundance. Of course the ideal would be a society at once wealthy and just. But where is the formula for it and the model?

In any case, these are formidable problems, and they are by no means peculiar to Israel, where they may be less overwhelming because of financial participation (often in the form of gifts) by the Diaspora.

But whether we like it or not, the rebuilding of Israel depends largely on Jewish and other capital. And the Anglo-Saxon pragmatism, so to speak, of the Israeli government is comprehensible; I have the impression that it is navigating as best it can between these two sets of demands, without holding to any one or even consistent doctrine. Could it in fact do so? I frankly admit that as a socialist myself, but one who abhors dogmatism, even socialist, I am not sure I would have acted any differently. While the end—building a nation with a maximum of social justice—seems clear, the means are

neither obvious nor even free of contradiction. But hasn't Marxism taught us that contradiction is daily bread to a militant? Probably what separates theory from practice is the difficult process of constantly adapting to a changing and contradictory reality.

Similarly, the young Israelis *legitimately* rebel against the excessive hold that religion and tradition have over daily life. Yet they do not fully realize that it is precisely in the Third World, not in Europe, that, generally speaking, religion remains most deep-rooted and influential. In a great many Third World countries, and especially in the Arab world, religion and nationality coincide. Mrs. Meir's statements bear an amazing resemblance to those of Houari Boumediene, the former student of Moslem theology, and not to those of a European chief of state. For some time, the Tunisian government has been worried over student unrest, which threatens to spread to other categories within society. And how did the government react, speaking through its leader, Hedi Nouira, liberal technologist though he is? We must "Arabize" more, he said, and also . . . increase the amount of religious instruction.⁴

There again, the young people do not—cannot—always understand their elders' concessions, which they take to be dubious compromises or the result of holding power too long. Except during a crisis, they rail against what they consider excessive attention paid to the nation's survival. For they found that nation right there when they were born, and they do not always know at what price the old people created it or how they care about it with every fiber of their being. This shows how great a distance separates the young people, forever perhaps, from the leaders of the old guard. Of course the young people can be asked to make an effort of historical imagination, especially if the nation is constantly being threat-

ened. But, at the same time, the old people must accept the fact that from now on, for the new generations, the most important problems are the new problems of collective living. In time, whether we like it or not, it is the young people who will be right more and more often. For the old people's feelings and thoughts belong to a period when the nation did not yet exist, when its people had barely escaped from oppression or were still oppressed, when they behaved as alienated men and women, whereas already the new generations are no longer alienated. Instead of being indignant about this, the old people should even rejoice over it, for this ignorance and impatience are living proof that they, the old people, have succeeded. And here again I am not talking only about Israel. At the very time I am writing this, I learn that two other general student strikes have just broken out, scandalizing the elders, one in Israel and the other in Tunisia, where the government has reacted by closing the law school for several months. In Cairo, a strike that astonished the world has just come to an end. How, exclaim the older generations, how can they stage strikes when the enemy is still at our gates and we are still threatened with destruction? But the young people are no longer very afraid of the enemy, and they don't believe in destruction, because—thanks of course to what their elders did—they were born into freedom.⁵

After all, no national liberation movement, including Zionism, can go on identifying eternally with one leader, one party, one government, no matter how grateful the nation is. It is true that during the initial phase—the fight itself, then the beginning of national reconstruction—one or a few outstanding figures will continue to embody the movement and benefit from the prestige that goes to victors and founders. Leopold

Senghor was and still is Senegal, but, happily, the Senegalese nation has since been born; now no one man will be able to express the full range of its diversity. It was comical to see the amazement with which one of my friends, just back from Tunisia, told me that for the first time, people had shouted: "Down with Bourguiba!" What surprises me is that it had taken the young Tunisians so long to start shouting, and I don't know but what Bourguiba, the cleverest politician in the Arab world, shouldn't be delighted that they finally did, for it proves that Tunisian youth is at last adult politically. What else, after all, was Bourguiba aiming for when he was a clandestine fighter or behind bars? Did he want to go on being the only "supreme combatant" forever, or did he want to see hundreds of thousands of young men reach maturity and be worthy of himself? Is the entire Algerian national movement identified with its present leader, Houari Boumediene? Or Egypt with Sadat?

Let's go one step further. Continuing to identify the entire nation with one man, one government, or *even with one national movement* (such as Zionism) is a subtle way of casting suspicion on that whole nation, every time one of its successive governments takes some debatable measure. We are very familiar with this; it is what the former colonial powers did. Every time one of their former colonies made a mistake, suffered relative failure, they called in question the entire principle of independence: "Was it really worth decolonizing?" Yes, it was definitely worthwhile, for you cannot weigh a people's overall independence on the same scales as small day-to-day errors. And I am sorry to see the Arabs and many liberals as well use that same ridiculous equation so often with regard to Israel. They believe they are denouncing the very

meaning of Zionism by suggesting that Golda Meir rules with an iron hand or that General Moshe Dayan is a horrid fascist (which is ridiculous anyhow).

What makes Zionism *legitimate* and relatively unattackable is its theoretical, political, or social inspiration, and not any specific action on the part of its leaders, who are fallible like all people engaged in politics, no matter how sincere and gifted. The young people must not be upset even by their own revolt. On the contrary, they must be reassured and encouraged: yes, you have the right to criticize, to refuse this or that policy and even this or that element in the Zionist program. You are free to find that a given point in governmental policy is not bold enough or is even retrogressive. Provided that you yourselves make the distinction between these fruitful and necessary challenges, which are normal at your age, and whatever might undermine the foundations of the Zionist undertaking, which is intended as an answer to the oppression that the Jewish people have suffered from for two thousand years and aims to re-create the people's unity and give them a "normalcy" comparable to that of other peoples. From that point of view, class struggle, the conflict between generations, with the youngest energetically rejecting the eldest, who have inevitably been transformed into the Establishment, distrust, competition, and the solidarity of ethnic groups—all these are normal occurrences within society. The people who deny this, instead of stopping to think and providing gradual correctives, are paving the way instead to revolutions and traumas of the worst sort.

In short, having granted so much recognition to the principle of nationhood, having laid so much stress on the importance and legitimacy of nationalist intentions in today's world,

we must add that *the nation is not an end in itself*. The building or rebuilding of a nation must rescue a people from oppression but cannot continue to be legitimate, nor can the nation have a clear conscience, if part of that nation still suffers from social oppression. If that is the case, then the newborn nation is in danger again, this time from within. If social justice is neglected, the outcome is violence. That is not a characteristic of Israeli society alone; it is a general law, and Israel will be no exception.

This is what I used to say to my Israeli friends, at gatherings marked by a moving warmth and simplicity: it seems that basically, out of anxiety or pride or self-defense or in order to claim some priority, you cannot manage any more than your enemies can to agree sincerely to the normalization of the Jewish national movement. I must admit that for me, that was one of the few things that disturbed me during my stay. Many Israelis appear to be dazzled: what is happening all around them, and which they are creating with their own hands, seems to them so unique that it is beyond comparison to anything. Not even the people who keep cool heads, out of the clouds of myth, and their feet safely on the ground of social reality, can bring themselves to compare their undertaking with that of other peoples. On my table I have a book published by the "Labor Movement," the Histadrut, I suppose. The first sentence reads: "Nowhere in the world is there any example comparable to the rebirth of Israel and the social options chosen by Israeli society."⁶ This does not, however, prevent the authors from situating that society, throughout the book, within the labor and socialist tradition. But, first, they felt the need to make that proud and fallacious claim. They do not see that by doing so, they bring grist to the mill

of their worst enemies, for the entire apparatus of anti-Israel war is built on the notion that Israel is neither a nation nor a people; it is at most an artificial undertaking, doomed to dissolve as time goes on. I have even asked myself *whether the Jews' own rejection of a sociological and historical normalization is not a persistent sign of the interiorization of the rejection by other people, in other words, of oppression.*

After all, isn't it precisely that comparative method that enabled us to situate and understand the Jewish condition among the other conditions or cases of oppression; and which should enable us to carry the analysis further and legitimize the Jewish national movement? Every step of its way to liberation, then reconstruction?

The Hebrew tongue is reborn, reincarnated in the extraordinarily rejuvenated body of this old people. It is an astonishing performance, this patient restoration of an age-old language. True, it was never quite extinguished, for so many communities throughout the entire world piously kept it alive. How justly proud Israel can be of having succeeded in inserting it again into daily life, in having it heard freely out in the open, in the streets and schools, on everyone's lips—school-boys, tradesmen, and lovers—in forging it anew as an instrument for national unity! But we must realize that every instance of national rebirth encounters a similar problem even if the circumstances are not always identical and the solution chosen varies from one region to another. Almost everywhere the adults, prisoners of a bygone day, have difficulties that are met as best they can be, while all hopes are invested in the schools, the great unifiers of the new generations, the only institution capable of making the nation accept a more difficult language, cleansed of the bastard forms stemming from servitude. There can be no doubt that for the Arab world, for

instance, only compulsory public schooling is, perhaps, capable of overcoming the fragmentation of the language into local dialects. Doubtless the Jews' situation and their linguistic tribulations are not identical to those of other peoples. Neither the history of the Hebrew language nor the conditions of its rebirth are those of other languages. But this simply proves that there is no such thing as one single way of formulating the difficult problem of a young nation's relations with its inherited or borrowed language, that several choices are open. We could draw a parti-colored map of the present linguistic situation in Africa, Asia, and South America. The Zionists found that they were in a certain linguistic situation, one of dispersion and fragmentation,⁷ which is in fact one form of the Jew's alienation. In response, they chose Hebrew, the language of the Biblical texts and the various commentaries, rather than Yiddish, for instance, though it was the language of the majority, or—why not?—English, language of the colonizing British and of the powerful American Jewish community. It is not a bad solution. If we could keep a cool head amid these questions that arouse strong collective passion, we would have to have the courage to say that it is not certain that it was the only nor perhaps even the best solution. For Hebrew will continue to be a regional tongue, little spoken elsewhere. But let's leave that aside. What I'm trying to get at is that it is neither scandalous nor sacrilegious to compare the linguistic procedure adopted by the Zionists with that of other young nationalist movements. On the contrary, it is indispensable to make that comparison, if we want to understand what is really involved. Take, for instance, the astonishing vigor of the linguistic unification, despite the efforts that immigrants have to make, despite the difficulties of perfecting a tool still ill-adapted to modern life, despite what

seems from the outside to be the excessive emphasis on the cultural past, as pledge of mythical or ideological unity. Compare all this with the cares that preoccupy the Arab intellectuals; and your astonishment grows considerably less. You have to know nothing about the Arab world in order not to see how very agitated it is over this matter of linguistic unification. Yet the Arab nations are lucky enough to have at their disposal what is apparently an indestructible language, based on prestigious texts. Yes, but the diverse and geographically separated Arab peoples now speak dialects that are so remote from the great and beautiful classical tongue that if a Moroccan and a Tunisian meet, and if neither of them has been to school, they can barely understand each other. And what is more, within these young nations, there are large minorities which do not speak Arabic at all. Although 90 percent of Tunisia's inhabitants speak Arabic, only 65 percent of Algeria's and only 50 percent of Morocco's speak it. Under those conditions, how, and along what lines, should each nation be unified? How could this be achieved among all the Arab nations? How can the classical tongue be enriched by all the linguistic wealth that the vernacular has accumulated? How can it be adapted to the needs of science, technology, and modern life? What language should be used by the newspapers? By radio and television? By writers and schools? Don't the Zionists recognize all this? And among the blacks, there are so many similar problems! Perhaps, the devout Jews would say, but Hebrew is not merely a means of communication between men; Hebrew is a sacred language, the language of the Bible and the dialogue with God. Well, what about Arabic! Isn't it the sacred language of the Moslems? The language of a single book, the Koran, which contains, all at the same time, a theological system, a philosophical system, a

code, a moral system, and even counsel for everyday life, like the Torah. Not long ago it occurred to me, as I reread the history of an Arab country, that Islam too is the *civilization of a book, whose message is carried by a mobile people*, with its rejection of all iconography, its constant, detailed, and literal reference to the Koran. The Arab conquerors always carried it with them and imposed it every step of the way as they galloped eastward from Arabia to India and westward from Arabia to Spain. It would be interesting to examine and compare precisely how this cult of a book affected the comparative behavior of the Jews and the Arabs. A very instructive comparison could be made of the ways in which Arabs and Jews, each of them the people of one book, treat the written word. The Jews, for instance, go into ecstasies over the way the scholars interpret the basic texts and add commentary to commentary, giving all the commentaries even if they contradict one another. But that is also what the Arabs did, scrupulously and respectfully gathering and preserving all the versions, even those that embarrassed them. The Arabs often copied the Hebrews, it is true, but later on the Jewish thinkers made use of Arab intellectual patterns for a long time.

How many times during my stay did I hear this lofty assertion: "We are the only people in the world whose religion, language, history, and political life coincide! There was never but one Jewish kingdom, with but one religion, and since that kingdom was destroyed, we have been dispersed and unhappy." Implicit conclusion: since Zionism has rebuilt a Jewish state, we ought to restore that ancient unity on which our historical glory rested. But forgive me once again for being so irreverent as to say that that is a spiritual view, a compensatory myth. People always speak of *the Jewish kingdom*

of Palestine. Now, as everybody knows, there were two kingdoms. And what people forget is that, after their destruction, there were others—at least three others—throughout the world, which are fairly well-known: one in Arabia; a Berber one in North Africa, which survived down to the sixteenth century; and the famous Khazar kingdom in Europe. The Jewish religion and Jewish ethnical group have not coincided absolutely. Unless you decide to label everything having to do with the Jewish religion “the Jewish ethnical group”; but then isn’t it obvious that that is tautological? That what you find in this basket is what you wanted to put in it? When someone hesitates, or doubts, or departs from a certain orthodoxy, the others pretend that he hasn’t doubted and instead has remained faithful; and if he becomes insistent, if he overdoes it, then he is excluded, cut off like an ailing limb . . . with the possibility that in the long run he will be reclaimed, like Spinoza, for example, and soon perhaps Freud.

I know the answer to this objection too. This veiling of reality, these quarantines, are made necessary by the very essence of Judaism, which is unitary and adamantly opposed to any facile proselytism. But that too is historically false; the serious historians have now shown us that.⁸ In the early days of Christianity, Jewish proselytism was aggressive enough to vie with the first Christians for the peoples of the Roman empire. In fact, even this is inaccurate, for “Christian” efforts to convert, in those days, were simply a variant of Jewish efforts to convert. Only later was the distinction made and did awareness come of a definitive separation between the two. Once the Judeo-Christians had triumphed, more for tactical than for ideological reasons, the others fell back on their own resources and gave up conquering the ancient world or, more specifically, the Roman world, for they continued elsewhere;

the Judaization of North Africa, for instance, did not come to a halt. As a result, and contrary to what the myth maintains, and whose genuine meaning is thus revealed, firmness in unity and in falling back on one's own resources is as much a sign of defeat as it is a display of victory. It is during periods of defeat, or at least of reconstruction, that institutional unity is stressed and mistrust is shown with regard to anything heterogeneous.

If careful thought was given to these considerations, they would completely alter the habitual view of the Jewish people's image of itself, an image which it has patiently fashioned over the centuries since it became resigned to filling the rank of defeated people among the peoples. It has not always been so enclosed within itself, so distrustful of factions and hostile to any attempt at conversion. But, once again, we must close this vast window. We cannot take in everything in so few pages.

The other day, as I was meditating on all this, I had an idea that was slightly crazy, but never mind, here it is. If I were a practicing Jew, I think I would campaign from now on for conquests through proselytism, not only with regard to unfortunate non-Jewish wives but aimed at entire populations. I would decide that the time has come to open up Judaism again, since the temple is in a fair way of being disintegrated and can be rebuilt. After all, how have the founders of new nations succeeded in putting down roots in a given region and becoming established there? Forgive me for the brutality of the socio-historical observation I am about to make, but I am not responsible for it: they have done so either by exterminating the native population (take the American example of massacring the Indians or herding them onto re-

servations, which amounts to the same thing) or by *converting* the natives to their own religion or ideology (the Arabs themselves, in the past, offer an example, and, today, the Russians. The Arabs managed to settle in the land of the Berbers by turning the Berbers into Arabs. The Russians have turned their satellites into Communists). The counterproof is that *where the Arabs had succeeded*, the French in North Africa failed because they refused to assimilate the people they defeated. Conclusion where Israel is concerned: since in modern times it has, happily, become unthinkable to kill off a native population, the Israeli Arabs must be *assimilated*; *they must be made into Israelis*, or else the reciprocal tragedy will go on and on. This, in fact, is valid both for the secular state and for believers; any way you look at it, the Arab minority must be made into Israelis.

Once again, regardless of the ups and downs it may have experienced in the past, religion has *become* the surest criterion for belonging to the Jews as a group. It has been of utmost importance in the group's survival. This does not mean that there cannot be other criteria as well, provided they too are asserted and accepted. Thus it would be enough that a Jew live in the Jewish condition, become aware of it, and subscribe to the fate of the community as a whole, for him to be considered, negatively and positively, as a Jew. But even if you give in concerning the importance of religion in the past, and even in the present, your partner in dialogue will switch keyboards, saying that Judaism is a way of life and not just a religion, that that is the real originality of Judaism, that one must accept the whole package, ideology and religion, collective behavior patterns and individual obligations.

Well, all right, once more: Judaism is all that; but that is not original either. Again, look at Islam. That is what my Arab

friends tell me over and over, as soon as I begin to challenge such and such an element of that other "totality." The Arabs likewise and stubbornly assert, despite the obvious diversity of the real situation, that Islam is one, that in Islam people, language, history and nation coincide. A position that is every bit as convenient, attractive, and false. I am almost inclined to take the opposite view, to believe that this grip of a totalitarian collective ideology on all of existence is by no means a sign of strength and progress on the part of the body social, but rather the continuation of periods of insecurity, when the group, to avoid disappearing altogether, requires strict allegiance by each individual. It is true that such modern ideologies as Marxism require this oneness between the private individual and the member of the group, each one devoting himself entirely to the whole. But it is worth noting that aging Marxism, now that it has achieved certain triumphs, is already becoming less demanding.

That is why some time ago I proposed distinguishing henceforth between *Judaism*, *Jewry*, and *Jewishness*, *i.e.*, considering separately, at least methodologically, three different aspects: the values of which religion is but a part; the people (who could belong to different ethnic groups); and the way of living the fact of belonging to that group and to those values. The way could vary with each individual without his incurring anathema. Similar distinctions can be made between Negroism, Negritude, and Negrity; or again between Mohammedanism (Islam), Arabness, and Arabism.

"See here," said one of my partners in dialogue; he was annoyed. "Are you going to end up denying that there is anything singular about being Jewish? After all, our problems are not exactly *identical* to other peoples' problems! What other

people lived for so long scattered all over the globe? What other people has been persecuted so long and harshly? And, finally, what people is rebuilding itself as a nation after two thousand years of exile? You must at least acknowledge that there is something disturbing about all that! That the Jews have a destiny which is unique!"

Indeed all this is rather dazzling, and we must even add, what other people possess the Bible, the basis of so many other peoples' culture, the source of inspiration for their moral codes, the lawgiver shaping their social patterns, the origin of their myths? What other people maintain with two major portions of mankind, Christianity and Islam, such extraordinarily ambivalent relations—gratitude and resentment, respect and aggressiveness, love and hatred?

At this point however, I must call upon the additional notion of specificity,⁹ which, it is true, I have scarcely mentioned until now. I am so thoroughly convinced of the singular character of the Jewish culture and Jewish condition that I believe such singularity has occurred relatively often in the history of mankind. Although I will not indulge in the current, overeasiness demagogical affirmation that all cultures are equally valid, I will say that many, if not all, cultures are unique and singular. In other words, I firmly believe in a *relative singularity*—that of the Jews, for instance, or of another remarkable people, the Greeks—but not in an *absolute, i.e., unique, singularity*. That is what I mean by specificity. The fact of noting a certain number of original features among the Jewish people does not in any way entitle us to conclude that the Jewish physiognomy and Jewish condition are totally unique. This would amount to reiterating, though in apparently altered terms, the religious affirmation that the Jews are God's chosen people, and to ruling out all objective research, which can proceed

only by means of comparison, classification, and the search for correlations, if not causes. If I had to choose, I would prefer that the chosen-people theme be used only for theological and mystical purposes.

The Jewish people has suffered social, historical, and cultural mishaps, experienced tragedies, and imagined practical and mythical solutions that are comparable, if not identical, to other peoples' solutions. . . . Take even that famous belief in being God's chosen: how very many peoples believe they are unique! What compensatory myth is more widespread? It is flourishing again today, in Africa and elsewhere. What is more, the Aztecs, while they were still cut off from their contemporary world, in the days before the Spaniards came, looked upon themselves as the chosen people. The whole human species is inclined to think so. Actually, aside from the physiognomy and behavior patterns that are specific to each human group, they have in common certain fundamental mechanisms that analysis can reveal amid psychological and sociological diversity. The relationship between oppressors and oppressed, members of a majority and members of a minority, are comparable everywhere in the world, among peoples and groups from differing civilizations. And, unfortunately, the responses to these multiple instances of oppression can be listed and classified. I say fortunately, for it allows us to hope that a sociology of oppression can be established. But at the same time, no people or situation is comparable to any other people or situation. That is why sociology of that type can only come about through slow and minute investigation, in fact through the rapprochement of several comparable conditions. Yes, the Jews are different from the Arabs, who are different from the blacks, who are different among themselves. Yes, the Jews have the Bible, which means that they are hated and re-

spected by the Christians and the Moslems, who are their spiritual sons. But the Arabs have the Koran; one day we must look more closely at their exact relationship with so many poorly Mohammedanized peoples, such as the Turks or the Iranians. But the American blacks, who are to a large extent the spiritual sons of the American culture, admire and execrate that culture at the same time.

We might also remember the extraordinary tangle of emotions that the ex-colonized man harbors toward the culture of the colonizer. It all needs to be clarified, and there are several of us who are applying ourselves to the task. Take one example among a thousand possible examples, one that struck me during this trip: an important official magazine was called *Unity and Dispersion*. That could have been the title of an Irish, an Italian, a Lebanese, or even a Chinese magazine! This is because similar sociological traits have led a great many members of those peoples to swarm and bustle among the peoples who play host to them, and as a result they are admired and detested and sometimes brutalized by them. The leaders of the various movements of national rebirth make great efforts to call back the exiles, so as to consolidate the mother country by forging its unity.

I might add that the militants must not be discouraged by the fact that such phenomena become common. On the contrary, they should find it bracing, for it means that all these difficulties, far from being incomprehensible mysteries which elude us, are actually intelligible and, therefore, to a certain extent, under our control.

Oh, I realize this is not a simple matter. Why shouldn't I admit it? At the same time as I try to see it more clearly, I cannot quite shake off an old worry: a people's tradition—the set of time-tested recipes and effective lies, the backward-

looking and forward-looking images that a people contrives of itself—is a crutch. Now, a crutch does help a man to walk. Doubtless it would be ideal for a people to move ahead without any crutch; it must be helped to become strong enough so that it will no longer need a crutch. But what do you do meanwhile? If you take away its crutches, aren't you likely to do that people harm? If, for instance, you tell a people that it is unique, that it is better than all the others, that the cultural treasure that it possesses is more sublime than all the others, that may help it to live. It must also be tempting to make political use of the consoling, backward-looking or forward-looking myths. Religion was and still is a very effective cement for a collectivity. What we must add is that it can also be a means of persuading, putting pressure on individuals as well as on groups. Conquerors know this; it provides them with a convenient and effective ideology, forceful because of its "nobility" in harmony with the collective superego. The Arabs, who conquered North Africa in God's name, were expelled from it, in the name of the same God, by the converted Berbers. In the wars waged by the Christian kings and in the crusades, temporal goals were certainly mingled with spiritual ones. Not so very long ago, in my native country, the rabbis could still have a bastinado administered to the recalcitrant, or could even have them thrown into prison, with the help of the local Arab sheikh. In the West today, the pressure is moral and psychological. Israel is even relatively behind the major Western democracies, since religious regulations once again shape civil law, conjugal life, and the fate of children, and are accompanied by important sanctions. It is true that in this way religion, and culture as a whole, provides a convenient identity card, in the context of the difficult search for a collective personality; it is a permanent source of communion and

exaltation, a dress suit that flatters the body social. How dare you lay hands on it! protest its defenders—spiritual and political leaders—when it assures us of such a grandiose past and promises us a splendid future.

As you can see, I even understand the irritation and anxiety that grip so many people as soon as you pretend to lay a finger on their values and their institutions. I notice how upset my Arab or black students become when I take up certain aspects of their respective problematical national situations. It takes considerable boldness to venture into those areas, where fear is mingled with hope, where what seem to be edifices of reason have foundations that go deep into the collective subconscious and into history. To tell the truth, I must admit that I haven't much hope that collective behavior patterns will become more rational *in the near future*. Judging by the difficulty with which a psychoanalyst manages to bring a single individual to take a healthy attitude to his own problems, we are very far from daring at last to analyze, without fear or too much passion, the collective phantasms called ideologies.

Yet that is the only useful direction to take, and certainly the most dignified one: any man devoted to truth has to be a myth-hunter, regardless of the dangers involved. Of course we might say, what people is worthy of the truth? What people can bear it? And if people can't bear it, why should I persist in talking to them about it? But in so saying, am I really respecting my people? I sometimes wonder if it is not better to do as so many leaders of these new states do, that is, take a stance of prudent pragmatism. After all, maybe it is they who are right, in *practical* terms. If that is the condition their people are in, the condition of their beliefs, of the fears and hopes of the majority, if for the sake of the nation's unity taboos must continue to seem unviolated, then perhaps their political in-

stinct is advising them wisely. If a minority of that people suffers from this, has trouble bearing these collective rites and habits, because they no longer satisfy it, so much the worse for it; the minority will be compelled to put up with them as long as it is indispensable to the nation's health that they do so.

But isn't this taking too static a view of a people's reality? A policy must take into account what is real and what is possible. It must also choose on the basis of *projects* and in the name of a certain vision of self and of the world.

When you reject mixed marriage for the sake of preserving the uniqueness and the "chosenness" of the singular chosen people, are you perfectly sure that that purity, that unity, and that quality of being chosen, which are the mythical translation of those requirements, have always prevailed and deserve to continue prevailing? That there has always been a refusal to welcome deserters? Wasn't that refusal caused by the anemia of the people? Is it not time to revert to a sounder policy? Are you perfectly sure that so many of us—converted North African Berbers or, still more to the point, Poles and Russians—are not even more recent Jews? We are lucky: we have the same sun and the same dry ocher-colored earth as the whole rim of Mediterranean basin, whereas when the unfortunate Ashkenazim want to remember their Jewish childhood, they close their eyes to dream of snow and mud, which haven't much to do with the land of the Bible.

And besides, once again, are Jews the only people to live such historical dreams? Is it generally known that although the North African Arabs call themselves the most Arab of all the Arab peoples, only 80 percent of them in Tunisia, 35 percent in Algeria, and a mere 10 percent in Morocco are actually Arabs? Yes, yes, I know, they have become Arab because they believe, because they speak Arabic, and practice Moham-

medanism. But let us at least realize the relativity of such claims and the relative extent to which they should influence our destinies.

Perhaps, too, time goes by more quickly than is grasped by the intelligent sensitivity of the persons who were the great political lions of their day but are so no longer, for the new generations. If these taboos have become unbearable for too large a segment of the nation and make it feel too oppressed by the other segment, then the edifice that shelters both of them is in danger. On the very evening I delivered a speech calling for a banal and, moreover, inevitable secularization of certain institutions, Mrs. Meir hurried to issue an energetic statement that there could be no separation between religion and nationality. Now, what was she talking about? About political strategy or sociology? About the past, the present, or the future? Where the past is concerned, she was certainly right. Once again I must repeat, in order to obviate overeasiness such as those aimed at me amid an otherwise warm welcome: religion has been one of the prerequisites to the survival of the Jewish people, just as the Moslem religion has been for the survival of the peoples of North Africa and the Middle East. For the time being, it is no longer quite so indispensable, precisely because of the vigorous action led by men and women who resemble Mrs. Meir, people named Bourguiba, Nkrumah, or Senghor, who transformed their oppressed peoples into free nations and therefore no longer have so pressing a need for the cement, the collective pressure of religion. Everyone knows in Israel already that compulsory religion is also an election gambit and gimmick; like the Moslem religion, written into the constitutions of the young Arab nations, it is a way of keeping a firm grip on recalcitrants, who will inevitably become more and more numerous. As for the

future, we shall see. If Israel turns itself, at this speed, into a sort of Western-style socialist democracy, how can it borrow only the features that suit some people? How can it keep down forever the growing revolt of the nonbelievers and the majority of the young generations? How can it sustain the myths that belonged to the ghetto mentality, or at any rate to the prenatal period, when these young people were born free? These brand-new boys and girls do not understand why or agree (nor do I, I must admit) that a process of national liberation should be accompanied by even temporary spiritual bondage, at a time when such bondage seems even more crushing and humiliating than does poverty. Perhaps it is time to treat the young nations as adults.

In short, a comparison between collective myths and individual behavior patterns "banalizes" them and strips them of any useless, dangerous romanticism. A systematic comparison of collective behavior patterns and values would enable us to stand off at a greater distance from our respective taboos, to go beyond the narrow tribal horizons that lie dormant within us even while we live in large cities. Only through comparison with the other young nations, including the Arabs, will Israel fully understand itself or will Jewry, in its present state of fermentation, become fully conscious of itself. Just as, in order to understand the old Israel, it is not to Poland (nor to Mea Shearim) that you must go, but among the nomads, so it is to the young nations that you must look in order to understand the new Israel and the new Jew, in Israel and elsewhere. Conversely, I am convinced that the Arabs would be better able to handle their problems if they were willing to consider courageously their real current identity, which is the birth of many nations,¹⁰ instead of stubbornly going on living amid a nostalgic dream of by-gone centuries, during which

they derived fabulous but fleeting glory from ephemeral unifications. Instead of shutting their eyes, to make Israel symbolically disappear by not naming it, by wiping it off the maps, they would derive enormous experimental benefit from what is going on in Israel. I am convinced that if they too wished to compare their experience to that of other people, including the Zionists, their own affairs would go more smoothly.

Now it remains for me only to apologize, not for having dealt at such length but instead, for having dealt so briefly with such a vast and delicate matter. It would take a whole book to do it properly. I also apologize for having touched, sometimes roughly, and especially as an outsider looking in, on topics that are so sensitive, particularly for a people just over the threshold into life as a nation. Finally, I am sorry to have been compelled to remind both sides, Jews and Arabs, that their Judeo-centrism and their Islamo-centrism, which is another variety of Judeo-centrism, ceased being appropriate since all of Asia and Africa and the Americas entered contemporary history. From now on we must get used to living on a planet-wide scale.

NOTES

1. Cf. *Portrait of a Jew* and *The Liberation of the Jew*, *op. cit.*
2. Anouar Abdel Malek, *Anthology of Arab Literature*, Paris, Seuil, 1965.
3. Maxime Rodinson, in *Les Temps modernes*, special issue number 253 bis on Israeli-Arab relations, p. 25.
4. Unfortunately, the Tunisian government did not confine itself to this

appeal to Islam. It went on to denounce the influence of the Zionists and the Jews in the student strike, and the students did not appreciate this attempt to denature their movement, a reaction that is all to their honor (cf. *Le Monde* of March 3, 1972).

5. Among the difficulties of identity that are specific to Jewish young people is certainly the problem of emigration (*aliyah*). A precise answer is called for:

a. *Emigration to Israel is the logical sequel to the Zionist commitment.* There is no doubt about it. Just as for an Algerian, for example, the ultimate gesture was to take up arms to help free his people. Similarly, in the postcolonial period, the national ethic requires the young intellectuals of the Third World to come home to their respective countries, to make their contribution to the building of the nation.

b. Even so, we can acknowledge that there are different degrees of commitment. Not all ex-colonized people took an equal share in the anticolonial struggle or in the rebirth of the nation. It would have been absurd to refuse to let them participate. It would be equally absurd to underestimate the part that the Diaspora as such played in the consolidation of Israel.

c. In all events, and as a result, the *volume* of the *aliyah* must not be used as an argument against Zionism. While it is true that the country needs to be more populated, and that there is a demographic imbalance between Israel and the Diaspora, this is not a unique situation either. There are more Lebanese living abroad than in Lebanon; the same goes for Armenians, I believe; and the proportion of Irishmen who have emigrated is high. Does anyone challenge the existence of Lebanon? Or the Armenian demands? Have you noticed that if the number of emigrants to Israel rises, people cry out that there's a danger that Israel will submerge the Middle East; and that if the number declines, the conclusion is that Zionism does not represent the collective wishes of the Jews, that there is no Jewish people, etc. This contradiction proves, once again, that Zionism is considered wrong in advance, regardless of what its real nature may be.

6. *Israel; toward a new society*, publication of the Zionist Labor Movement, Tel Aviv, 1969.

7. Concerning the relationship among language, domination, and national rebirth, I ask the reader to refer to my *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

8. See the decisive work by Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, Boccard ed., 1948.

9. On specificity, see *The Liberation of the Jew* and especially *Dominated Man*, *op. cit.*, where I apply it to the condition of women.

10. "If Karl Marx had read the Koran, he would not have written *Das Kapital*," (remark by Colonel Kadhafi, head of the Libyan government).

Note Added in July, 1974

Now that the new oil situation is going to enable most of the Arab countries' economies to get off to a start, should the Arabs be excluded from the Third World? Actually, as I have shown elsewhere, the notion of Third World has ceased being functional. At any rate, for what concerns us here, namely Jewish-Arab relations, it cannot provide us with an alibi.

5

WHY NOT RECOGNIZE NATIONHOOD FRANKLY?

For a time, perhaps, the curtain may fall, at least partly, on this unfortunate affair. Let us hope so, in any case, and take this opportunity to sum things up.

Among the weaknesses and errors of the political left in Europe over the past several decades, history will probably remember its failure to recognize the rebirth or the solidity of national or ethnic identity, chiefly among the oppressed peoples.

Let's get this straight. It is not that national identity is a value in itself that one must exalt—which is what the ardent nationalist does. And it is very understandable that that universalist political left should feel very impatient, or mistrustful, about the reaffirmation of national groupings. But we are dealing with *facts*, and its underestimation of them has led the left to place an erroneous interpretation on events and therefore to behave in a flagrantly ineffectual way.

The first time this weakness became obvious was at the start

This text, and the one that follows, are the contraction of three articles, entitled "In favor of a Socialist Solution of the Jewish-Arab Problem," in *Eléments*, Paris, December, 1968; "In favor of Frank Recognition of Nationhood," in *Eléments*, Paris, March, 1971; and "Verbalism and Socialism," in *Cahiers Bernard Lazare*, May, 1973, number 40-41.

of the Algerian war. Whereas the North Africans clamored for *national liberation* and called themselves *nationalists*, and *patriots*,¹ rightly or wrongly postponing the elaboration of an economic and social program, the men on the political left who consented to help them first insisted on a guarantee, in the form of just such a program. Not to mention the Communist party, which would have preferred the liberation to take place under its direction and even, at least indirectly, under the direction of the Communist party of metropolitan France. In other words, it denied even a relative degree of national autonomy on the part of the colonized peoples.

We will not, at this point, go once again into an analysis that we have already made many times. We have also shown how that error originated: in a determination to reduce all social conflicts to a matter of class struggle, whereas there obviously exist several other types of conflict.² In addition, so many men on the political left were so blind in those days, despite the facts, despite the warnings, that we were obliged to ask ourselves another question: why did they so stubbornly refuse to see that what were involved were national struggles? And we theorized that although they made themselves out to be internationalists and universalists, perhaps their own conduct was nationalistic: they could not bear to see their former colonized become totally independent. Internationalism might have allowed them to maintain their former privileges in a sort of socialist federation, just as today people patiently search for undefined cultural or linguistic communities. Often, the radicalism of the left is nothing more than chauvinism, disguised as universalism. At all events, the result was virtually total paralysis. And the matter was ultimately settled between the nationalists and the bourgeoisie.

The second occasion on which we have been able to witness

the naïveté and the falseness, if not the contradictions, of the interpretations dreamed up by many of our companions on the left was provided by the Israeli-Arab conflict that concerns us here. The reader will recall how a similar version of that antagonism was immediately suggested: it was said to be a struggle between socialism and imperialism, with the Arabs representing socialism and the Jews imperialism. Barely a few days ago two delegates from a French socialist party, the P.S.U. as it happens, signed an incredible statement at the Kuwait congress, which once again quite simply called for the destruction of the State of Israel.³ Did they believe it themselves? We may assume so, despite the frivolousness, in that case, of their position. But then, what reality, what ratio of strength, were they referring to? And if it was just a tactical maneuver, as I was given to understand by one of them, Serge Mallet, how many stupid acts and even crimes have been cloaked in the mantle of tactical maneuvers!

Or else, once again, the explanation is so absurd, so contradicted by a simple examination of the facts, that one wonders why so large a segment of the political left clings to such patently inadequate patterns of thought. An inventory of the Arabs' "socialist" ranks is eloquent: Jordan's Hussein, who also receives American support? King Faisal of Saudi Arabia? Colonel Boumediene, a military dictator who overthrew Ben Bella, who was at least more socialist than he? The king of Morocco? Bourguiba? Are even Egypt and Syria more socialist than Israel?

Here, of course, we have that famous pirouette: *objectively*, even when feudal, the Arabs are socialist, for they are moving in the direction of history. Heaven, how the wind of history has shifted lately! It blew very hard against Yugoslavia, but that country ended up in the right direction; Czechoslovakia

seemed to waver dangerously; Hungary had to be crushed before it could be silenced. And aren't we told that China, the hope of world revolution, is today the major obstacle to the unification of the socialist world? Tomorrow, will it be Viet Nam? And Cuba? Isn't the truth more banal than that? Isn't the truth that the suitable direction in which history should move, and the wind should blow, is the one shown by the Russians' placards, regardless of what the historical and meteorological reality may be? The Arab world is labeled socialist simply because the U.S.S.R. wants it to be, and for the same reason Israel is labeled imperialist. And the additional question we asked at this juncture was the same as the one we asked a couple of pages back: why do the Russians support the Arabs and condemn Israel? Does the real reason lie in this simplistic and obviously false scheme of Arab socialism versus Israeli imperialism, or in the Russians' eagerness at this time to get a foothold in the Mediterranean?

For years now some of us have been calling for a resumption of research into socialism that would not be subject to immediate tactical requirements or respectful of tradition. Our demands have been considered almost an act of aggression, or even the beginning of a rupture meriting punishment by excommunication. As if the best type of faithfulness was not renewal and inventiveness, so as to solve unfamiliar problems!

To stick to the point we are concerned with today, we may summarize the matter this way: *the difficulties of the forces on the left stem, once again, from a misunderstanding of national identity that goes a long way back in time.* In order to realize how Marx pictured nations, we must remember the types of nation he was able to contemplate in his day: they were on

the rise, in the process of full economic expansion, and to him they appeared formidable. For the proletariat of the times, impoverished and scarcely aware of its potential strength, this tête-à-tête within the national framework could not help but work out to the advantage of the employers. Hence, the necessity of urging an alliance among the various proletariats, against their middle classes. The famous slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" is more a piece of advice than a statement of fact. Marx felt nothing but distrust, scorn, and hostility toward nations, nationalist movements, and nationalist demands, which he found cramped, and of bourgeois origin, even though, through the same dialectical movement that characterized his thinking, he foresaw that the bourgeoisie had opened the way to universalism.

We do not have room here to indicate, explain, and coordinate the various passages in which Marx dealt with the problem of nationhood. First of all, to put it roughly, he perceived nationalism as a negative effort; this is clear whenever he takes up the colonial problem. Except on the Irish question, and toward the end of his life, when Marx made fun of the French internationalists, who were actually comfortably installed in the bosom of their own nation, his thinking did not advance beyond the idea that liberation of the colonies would come about through the liberation of the proletariat in the mother countries. In other words, thanks to a social liberation, and indirect, at that. Perhaps he would have changed his mind if he had witnessed the decisive way in which contemporary colonial demands, whose national dimension is too obvious and too direct to go unnoticed, have burst onto the scene.

It was Lenin and Stalin who were to be brought face to face with national awareness. It is not without significance that, in this connection, Lenin was induced to engage in polemics

with a Jewish party, socialist but openly Jewish: the Bund. It was in the course of that controversy that he uttered a number of condemnations, definitively reiterated since, of "petit bourgeois nationalism" and "national cultures," which he considered nothing but bourgeois cultures. But internal discussion with Liebermann, the Bundist, was not all; things were changing in Asia and Africa and those peoples' delegates attended the international conferences as socialists and at the same time as representatives of oppressed *peoples*. Except perhaps with regard to the political problem of power, Lenin's special genius is mostly that of a supreme tactician, rather than of a theoretician. Unlike many socialists at the time, Lenin quickly understood, after some hesitation, that this new aspect of socialism had to be taken into account. Although he did not exactly outline its theory, he recognized that its demands were legitimate, though he did lay down this condition: the class struggle had to continue to be of paramount importance. Basically, on this point, he remains faithful to the teachings of Marx and subordinates national liberation to social liberation. The weakness in terms of dogma of Stalinist thinking, which was all the more dogmatic because it was weak, did nothing to help solve the problem, aside from showing that it was urgent to formulate a more specific and complete doctrine on this point.

In short, Marxist tradition left the Communist parties relatively without serious theoretical support on a topic that took on increasing importance, as so many peoples throughout the world awakened to national ambitions. And if, according to good Marxist logic, it is action that must provide the verification and even the very flesh of the theory, the failure of the Communist parties in most of the decolonized countries should prove that they had not clearly understood decoloniza-

tion. Unfortunately, not being very logical with themselves, discovering the importance of nationhood, and not knowing very well how to link it to the traditional teachings, they prefer to juggle with words rather than think the question through for themselves. Among the results of this is their mania—which can be laughable or annoying and at any rate reveals a deep-seated embarrassment—for dubbing any political mutation that they find useful “socialist and revolutionary,” while any that hinder them are labeled “reactionary.” But one cannot live forever in a dream world of scholasticism or tactics, and often the real world takes its revenge—when the new leaders send the Communists to prison.

Isn't it time at last to wonder where the *theoretical* reason for these failures lies and to *reappraise the awareness of nationhood*?

I realize what distrust such a question immediately arouses. In political terms, Marxism is basically a theory of class struggle. Men's progress and liberation are the result of this struggle between the *socially* dominated and their dominators. Since national struggles require at least temporary unity among the protagonists, the reproach is that they leave privileges intact and postpone the transformation of social relations within the nation. That is relatively accurate.

But clearly this argument is merely the tautological rephrasing of Marxist thought on this point. It always presupposes that the struggle for nationhood is in itself a negative fact veiling the only positive fact: the combat on the social level. Now, is it permissible to state the problem in a different way, namely, that the national liberation movement is *also* a movement for human progress?

To keep within a prestigious tradition, let's try to spell out some additional themes.

1. *In response to oppression of a nation, liberation of the nation.*

This proposal has two dimensions: practical and ethical. For what is involved is a genuine oppression, which does not merge into the social oppression, in that it affects all segments of an overall group; all classes are concerned, in differing degrees, of course, but the fact is that the whole nation, or the whole group with a vocation for nationhood, is concerned. And if it is desirable to put an end to this overall oppression, then appealing to only one class, even if it is the biggest one, will never be enough.

Mao Tse-tung himself did not hesitate to talk about "co-operation between the classes" because he had concrete, first-hand experience of the problem; he was not just meditating on other peoples' problems from a distance. Just as it is no accident that new thinking on the problem of nationhood and on the relation between classes and the nation has begun at last among the peoples who have not yet completed their independence (for instance, in Egypt, or among the Jewish theorists).

Why would the oppression of a national vocation be any less scandalous than the other forms of oppression? Why would national liberation be less moral than other forms of liberation? In both practical and moral terms, whenever there is a problem of nationhood, it must be given suitable attention and the type of action most likely to solve it must be sought.

2. *National liberation is often the prerequisite for social liberation.*

Too often, the presence of a dominating power or the economic and political pressure it brings to bear prevents the actual achievement of social liberation. Sometimes, in fact,

with the collusion of the privileged elements of the dominated people, or with the help of a resigned attitude on their part. This tension drains the collective energy and occupies the collective mind and emotions. With his extraordinary political intuition, Lenin foresaw this but, as I have explained above, he could not carry it any further into action. However, in that case, it can seem preferable, in strategic terms, to take care of the dominator first of all, involving the entire nation in the job if possible (look at the whole problem of the *national bourgeoisie*). As long as that national liberation has not been achieved, the social liberation is likely to go on being mortgaged, as it were. This is why national liberation often appears as a *necessary prior condition*.

3. *Lastly, the awareness of nationhood is a positive social fact.*

The two previous proposals assume, of course, that national identity is considered neither a perversion nor an illusion, nor even a mystification. That is, a malady of the body social, or a sort of delirium; that is, in the last analysis, nothing at all. Certainly that awareness of identity can be put to perverted uses. By playing on a people's nationalistic feelings, you can charm it into some adventure or make a class forget its interests. But it is up to the dominated classes, the socialists, ourselves, to fight so that that doesn't happen, *so that the social struggle is not dissociated from the national struggle*. This does not mean that awareness of nationhood does not exist as such. *It corresponds to a level of social reality*, which has other requirements than those of each separate class. It is a bit of intellectual sleight of hand to get out of the dilemma by saying that the proletariat *represents* the whole nation, and by adding that the other social classes or groups have been *trai-*

tors. What and whom have they betrayed? Not themselves, at any rate; and no one represents everyone completely.

Isn't it more Marxist, methodologically speaking, to ask to what *real situation* does this demand correspond? It is so stubborn, and so prevalent among so many social groups, even those which, economically, are the most disinherited. Why wouldn't socialist thinking, which has legitimately denounced so many reactionary myths, apply such fruitful rigor to itself? Or, again, if in spite of everything you want to look on awareness of nationhood as merely a stage, a detour, a means used by history to achieve its end, the happiness of mankind, one day, then what, in this long march, does not constitute a means, a mediation? And what would make the notion of class more of a mediation than any other social reality (for let's not forget that in Marx's own perspective, it is destined to disappear)? This, by the way, seems doubtful. Let us say, at least, that the *nation is a mediation between class and mankind*.

Surely there is no need to repeat that the idea here is not by any means to rehabilitate any given *nationalist doctrine*, postulating the absolute primacy of national identity (which, paradoxically, is what we find today among some of the so-called revolutionary movements), a doctrine making that awareness of identity a *value* superior to all others and, without realizing the contradiction, asserting that the reality of its own nationhood is superior to the reality of all other nationalist movements. A nationalist doctrine of that sort obviously runs counter to all *internationalism*. It is enough that we should recognize awareness of nationhood, denounce all national oppressions, and acknowledge the legitimacy of all national liberations. That would still leave us with the full problem of bringing the various nationalist affirmations into

harmony with one another; in other words, the necessity of an *international* set of morals.

Let's summarize, once more, what we believe to be the only accurate interpretation of today's events:

1. *National liberation movements, as such, are progressive, since their intention is to abolish a type of oppression.*

2. *The Arab peoples have begun or are completing their respective national liberations.* And that, as such, seems *legitimate* to us. Just as we found the various decolonizations legitimate, as *national movements*. We did not have to baptize them acts of socialism in order to recognize their justification. It is enough that they enable the peoples to manage freely their own destiny again.

3. *Zionism is likewise the national liberal movement of the Jews.* And we find it equally legitimate. Far from suspecting it, for that reason, far from condemning it as imperialistic, we believe that it ought to be defended, as such, by all the progressives throughout the world. For what is Zionism but the most coherent effort ever made to respond to the oppression suffered by Jews the world over?

NOTES

1. It is true that they quickly came to understand that it was wiser to call themselves revolutionaries and proclaim that they were making *the revolution* come to pass. As a result, what country today does not have its *revolutionary council*, even if it is made up of army officers? I believe even the Greek colonels call themselves revolutionaries.

2. For instance, the conflict between colonizers and colonized cannot be reduced to a solely economic conflict, still less to a conflict between classes. (See my *The Colonizer and the Colonized*).

Nor can the oppression to which the Jew is subjected be reduced to an economic diagram, despite the efforts made by certain Jewish Marxists. (See my *Portrait of a Jew*.)

3. It is true that the French Communist party did not sign this text, nor did the Christian Progressives. But this split proves, once again, the contradictions in contemporary socialist thinking (if it can be called thinking); for after all, between destruction of the State of Israel and peace with the State of Israel, there is more than a shade of difference. Moreover, the Christians, called progressive, have gone through another mutation, unfortunately, and not in the direction of conciliation; instead, they encourage bloodshed. Look at what *Témoignage chrétien* has become.

6

IN FAVOR OF A SOCIALIST SOLUTION

Does this mean that socialism gets short-changed? What is socialism all about?

Let's attempt a definition: socialism is an *ethical* choice, which is made possible by socio-economic analysis and is armed with *political* means.

This ethical choice consists of fighting for social justice within the nation, and political justice between nations. Ultimately, within the nation, it means fighting for the elimination of class differences, if not of the classes themselves. And, outside the nation, fighting for equality between nations, if not the elimination of nations, which is rather inadequately termed internationalism.

But it is clear that this choice, which is undeniably the most generous and may, in the long run, salvage mankind, cannot be carried out unless the historical, social, and even cultural conditions of the groups involved—classes and nations—permit it. The case may, however, be quite different: the socio-economic analysis may still be vague; political means may be lacking; the relationship between the options that are open and the tools of management that are available may go unperceived; worse, the options may be contradictory. That has

already plunged more than one socialist movement into a paralyzing sort of neurosis.

What options do we have at this point?

We believe they are obvious to any men on the political left. We are for the freedom and prosperity of the Arab peoples (and allow us to repeat, with some embarrassment, so great is the competition nowadays, that we do not recognize a monopoly over Arab friendship on anyone's part). But the counterpart of the freedom and prosperity of the Arab peoples must not, under any circumstances, be the oppression of the Israelis or the continuation of the oppression of the Jews elsewhere in the world (not to mention the wish to exterminate them, which has been announced and never genuinely denied!). That, it seems to us, is the only truly socialist solution, the most serious criterion for judging whether or not a political attitude is an attitude of the left: does it seriously desire an *agreement* that takes into account the *existence*, the *freedom*, and the *interests* of *both* partners? All those who, for a variety of reasons, make dialogue impossible between two dominated peoples or who, worse still, jeopardize the existence of one or the other party are contradicting their proclamation of socialist faith. And if our Arab socialist comrades continue to deny to Israel the *political* right to exist, then on that score they are not acting as socialists.

Of course the difficulties are sometimes enormous; and we have demonstrated elsewhere that, notwithstanding a certain historical optimism, solidarity does not automatically exist between oppressed peoples, whose interests may be in conflict. Luckily we do not think that the difficulties in this case are insurmountable. Various solutions are possible, even in the immediate future, even taking into consideration the economic, cultural, and emotional conflicts between the peoples

involved. But even if there were such contradictions, we would have no other choice; we cannot possibly ignore the nationalistic aspirations that bind the two sides, before hoping to reconcile them in the brotherhood of socialism.

Otherwise we slip into leftist or Messianic verbalism. I harbor no particular antipathy for those attitudes, which are often more generous than are many others. In fact, I believe that in every intellectual there is a leftist and an anarchist. But I do deplore their ineffectualness and their irresponsibility, and I even fear the dangers they create.

Similarly, within each of these young nations, many political militants are bewilderingly ignorant of the mechanisms of economics. If economics is a science, then economic mechanisms are the same everywhere and are as imperative for capitalists as for socialists. It is the options that differ. The same is probably true for the mechanisms of collective psychology and for social, political, or cultural mechanisms. So it is not, but definitely not, enough to be an ardent socialist, in order to build a socialist world. You have to know how to distinguish between what is possible and what is impossible, between what can be achieved in the very near future and what can be achieved gradually and through adjustment; you have to know what can be surprised into being and what may, possibly, warrant the use of violence. Otherwise we slip back into verbosity or, worse still, into revolutionary romanticism, which sometimes gives rise to catastrophes. Finally, "revolution" is not a magic word, radically and instantly transforming everything. We can see that everywhere in the world where the socialists have come to power.

Israel is under indictment from the right and indictment from the left. I will leave aside the accusations brought by the rightists; they are generally either expressions of opposi-

tion on nationalistic grounds or mystical affirmations. As for the first category, I have nothing to say in reply; what is involved is indeed a struggle of interests. And as for the second, I don't know how to answer because we don't speak the same language, we don't live in the same world and are not likely to meet. To tell the truth, I am really interested only in the criticisms from people on the left. They are my people, their ethics are mine, and I hope to build with them a world for all; it is among them that you will find the greatest number of Jewish intellectuals; and that is fine. The intellectuals must prevent group awareness from drowsing, and youth is the yeast of any society.

Where Israel is concerned, what can a socialist, Jewish or non-Jewish, hope for? Inside the country, three things, I think: social justice, a just peace with Israel's neighbors, and recognition of the rights of the Palestinians, as one of the nation's minorities, pending more complete integration. But, there again, that socialist would have to consider the concrete conditions of such a program; there can be no doubt that the protracted war effort, the tension between Israel and its neighbors, the disruption it causes in the life of the Arab minorities, and the mistrust towards all the inhabitants of the camps—all of these factors make the building of socialism chaotic and slow it down considerably. If we try to gloss over these difficulties, we slip into that virtuous verbalism that continues to do so much harm. That is why we say: the first thing to do is make peace. The rest will follow, perhaps; but if there is no peace, the rest is largely illusory. That is why we say: a socialist must fight for peace; if not, even socialism will not escape being short-changed.

The Palestinians are dominated, in a manner of speaking; yes, dominated. I have never been afraid to say so. How

could they not be dominated? I noted this during my very first trip to Israel, a long time ago. But that is not a specifically Israeli situation. On the contrary, that, unfortunately, is the fate of all minorities. We Jews know that at first hand. In Egypt there is a Coptic Christian minority; the recent incidents, where churches were set on fire, revealed to people who did not already know it that there is a Coptic problem. Not to mention the frightful way in which Nigeria solved the problem of the people from Biafra. We are socialists; this means that we want to fight for full equality for the Arab minority within the Israeli nation. But we cannot fail to know that it will take a long time to achieve this, precisely because the Israeli nation is still young, because it—probably rightly—mistrusts its minorities, because it needs to affirm its identity, etc., just like Algeria or Libya, which have quite simply kicked out all minorities. Why shouldn't I say so? Compared with the way most young nations act, the way Israel acts does not seem to me the worst. We should not consider ourselves satisfied; we must constantly be vigilant, so that political morals—in other words, socialism—are not short-changed. But it would be absurd to demand more of Israel than of any other young nation.

Moreover, outside the nation, concerning the people living in the camps: naturally we should fight for the recognition of their rights to nationhood. But we must acknowledge, and take into account, the fact that it is difficult to fight for the national rights of people who deny your own such rights. Is there an Israeli *occupation*?⁹ Of course there is! But Russia too occupied territories as a result of the war, and even without war! You cannot ask the Israelis to be completely invisible and to put up with everything. Not one army in the world can, or

ought, to consent to that. We simply hope, and we fight to help bring it about, that that occupation, like all occupations, will cease one day. In other words, we must fight so that the overall conditions of that occupation will cease. Otherwise, everything is mere empty talk.

At this point, I might add that I would like the ultimately rather vague concept, or rather notion, of internationalism to be wielded less naïvely. Many of our friends treat internationalism as a fact, stymied by all sorts of obstacles that the wicked place in its way. The “objective” truth, as it is called, is probably the opposite. Internationalism is still ahead of us, not behind us; it remains to be built and conquered, and in fact is far from being achieved. We must fight for that equality between human groups, fight to dispel their reciprocal fears, so as one day to achieve that international or supranational or possibly anational society. But that imposing and marvelous wish does not entitle us to overlook the current conflicts, the egoism and the prejudices that still maintain a dizzying gap between men and between nations. The interests of the various groups may conflict with one another, and it is more Marxist to come out and say so than to believe in a universal harmony. Israel cannot seriously be asked to practice perfect internationalism when no one, absolutely no one, not even the socialist countries, truly practices it. Who can seriously maintain that the U.S.S.R. is not looking out for its own national interests and does not, therefore, come into conflict now with one side, now with another? The U.S.S.R. supported Israel as long as it thought it could use Israel as a base from which to penetrate the Middle East; now it supports the Arab countries because today it believes that that is the better strategy. This does not make me despair of my socialist options; it's just that I believe it more effective to take into

account the peoples' spontaneous egoisms, which will not disappear overnight. The Israelis of European origin know that all too well. Before this war, they believed so hard, with their whole soul, in internationalism and universalism, but these did not save them. Think of the socialists, the Communists, the Bundists of the Warsaw ghetto, whose dismal anniversary we will shortly celebrate.

Thus, it is time to stop camouflaging or minimizing the national dimension of the demands by the peoples of the Middle East. I noted this in a chapter on "The Colonial Problem and the Left," published as long ago as 1958.¹ Ultimately, the French left, embarrassed by that national obvious dimension, or blinded by its own profound desire to be face to face with a revolutionary situation, not only failed to have an accurate understanding of the colonial situation but in fact had to leave it to the right-wingers to settle the matter, for in the end it was De Gaulle who, willy-nilly, and with costly slowness, finally officialized decolonization. Today, too many men on the political left—aided, it is true, by the cleverly socialist slogans of the nationalists themselves—have pretended to see, first of all in the behavior of the Arab countries and now (abhorring those same countries, although they have scarcely changed) in the Palestinian movements, the social revolution under way, whereas what is involved was and still is a national reconstruction movement.

So true is this that, now that the hope of a settlement can be glimpsed on the horizon, *a settlement on nationalist terms*, the men on the left are suffering, and trying to prevent it, on the pretext that such a settlement is despicable and dangerous. That at least is the distinct impression I got a few days ago when talking with one of the leaders of a French revolutionary party.

Not that the Palestinians do not include, compared with other Arab countries, possibly a greater number of socially advanced elements. Nor that, being unhappier in national terms, they are not more unstable and therefore more likely to contribute to a transformation of that Arab world (although, there again, the various Arab governments discreetly but firmly disclaim any connection with them).² But there can be no doubt that their dearest wish is to achieve nationhood first, and that it is only afterwards that they will contribute to the possible building of socialism. Zionism too is a movement for the social and cultural reconstruction of a people, probably more socialist than the great majority of Arab regimes. Something that those same men on the political left deny, or shrug off, with the same rigidity in their fossilized ideas. How can they fail to see that if Zionism were destroyed, that would deal a very severe blow to socialism even in those regions, and throughout the world?

In short, we are entitled to dream of what a completely socialist Middle East would be like, where there would actually be fraternal collaboration, a binational or even anational symbiosis. Meanwhile, must we, even temporarily, reject a solution that would save much suffering and bloodshed? And which, in fact, would do much to direct the entire problem toward socialism? Refuse this on grounds that it is not along those lines that the problem should begin to be solved?

May I take the liberty of predicting that that is what will probably come to pass in the Middle East? That that is the social and historical *reality*? And therefore that if socialism has any chance of succeeding in the Middle East, it must take that reality into account? But I suppose that these remarks will scarcely bother so many of our friends who have grown accustomed either to not seeing reality or to despising it,

when it is impertinent enough not to live up to their expectations. Or those among them who, impatient with history, simply jump over the obstacles and reconstruct peoples and regions on the basis of the model they want them to follow in the future. Or will my remarks irritate those, less innocent, who are glad for a far-off diversion, hoping it will solve their impotence to handle their own problems?

NOTES

1. Reproduced in *Dominated Man*, Orion Press, New York, 1968.
2. By the way, it is not the Zionists who have wronged the Palestinians; it is the Arab states, who first overlooked them as a nation, who contributed to their exodus, who confiscated the lands that should have been used to constitute the Palestinian state on whose creation the United Nations had decided, and who have not really restored their status to them. Today it is the Western countries that are footing the bill for the refugees' upkeep. Now, how many people realize that in 1973 the annual per capita income in Italy was \$1,500, in Great Britain \$2,000, in Saudi Arabia \$2,400, and in Libya \$3,950? Why do the Arab countries always display only negative solidarity toward the Palestinians?

ISRAEL

You want to know what Israel is? Ask yourself first what a Jew is.

Well, what is a Jew?

A religion? Not only that. A nation? He possesses neither state nor territory. A people? He is scattered throughout the universe. A language? He speaks hundreds of languages. A culture? He has the culture of the other peoples. . . . Who, Jew or non-Jew, has not tried his hand at one time or another at this great scholarly game, only to give up quickly, defeated by the constant difficulty of clearly and distinctly grasping what makes a Jew a Jew?

The reason is that the Jew is defined not only by what he is but also by what he is not. The Jew is not exactly from here, he doesn't come exactly from there, he doesn't quite belong to this people, or that past. Whether he likes it or not, whether he consents to it or not, he is also a reference to an elsewhere of the most disturbing sort: an elsewhere that is nowhere. An elsewhere that is above all an absence, a void that cannot be filled, a phantom that cannot be exorcised.

Text commissioned by Editions Albin Michel, in Paris, to accompany a volume of photographs. Reproduced by La Terre retrouvée, January 20, 1974.

There is of course the Book, which may or may not be sacred, but in any case is extraordinarily inspired; but the giddy whirl recommences instantly: that very Book, the Jew's reference, is itself a reference to an elsewhere—to what vanished land, to what lost temple, to what strange fruits, of which my father, once a year, went I know not where to obtain an example?

And then suddenly this void, this phantom becomes solid flesh and is called Israel; that imaginary country, those unknown fruits, Israel my shadowed face, my absence from among the nations, Israel my nostalgic reference, Israel my difference begins to live, yes, really—am I dreaming?—to live somewhere on the globe, bordered by a real sea and a river, a lake with live fish, blossoming hills and a desert where you really die of thirst. Ah, if you only knew what this reincarnation *really* means to a Jew, this rebirth to the history of his collective being, until now an airy, vaporous, evanescent thing, which suddenly starts to coagulate, harden, exist to an extraordinary extent! Actually, I'll tell you a secret: the Jew doesn't quite believe his eyes as yet.

Some people even say that Israel has not only entered, but has in fact broken into, their lives. Perhaps, but no sooner did Israel break in than they recognized it and recognized themselves in it. Which is why they are sometimes violent: without having asked for it, they have been handed a faithful mirror, and as everyone knows, it is never easy to look at your own reflection. Already they must have recognized themselves, with shame and pain, horror and pity, in the ghosts of their charred and slaughtered friends and relatives. Now they are face to face with their own portrait as farmer-soldiers. And even if they rejected that image, the whole world would confirm the evidence given by their mirror and would either

congratulate or insult them because of it. Don't they actually, deep down, feel a vague pride, which increases their amazement and anger?

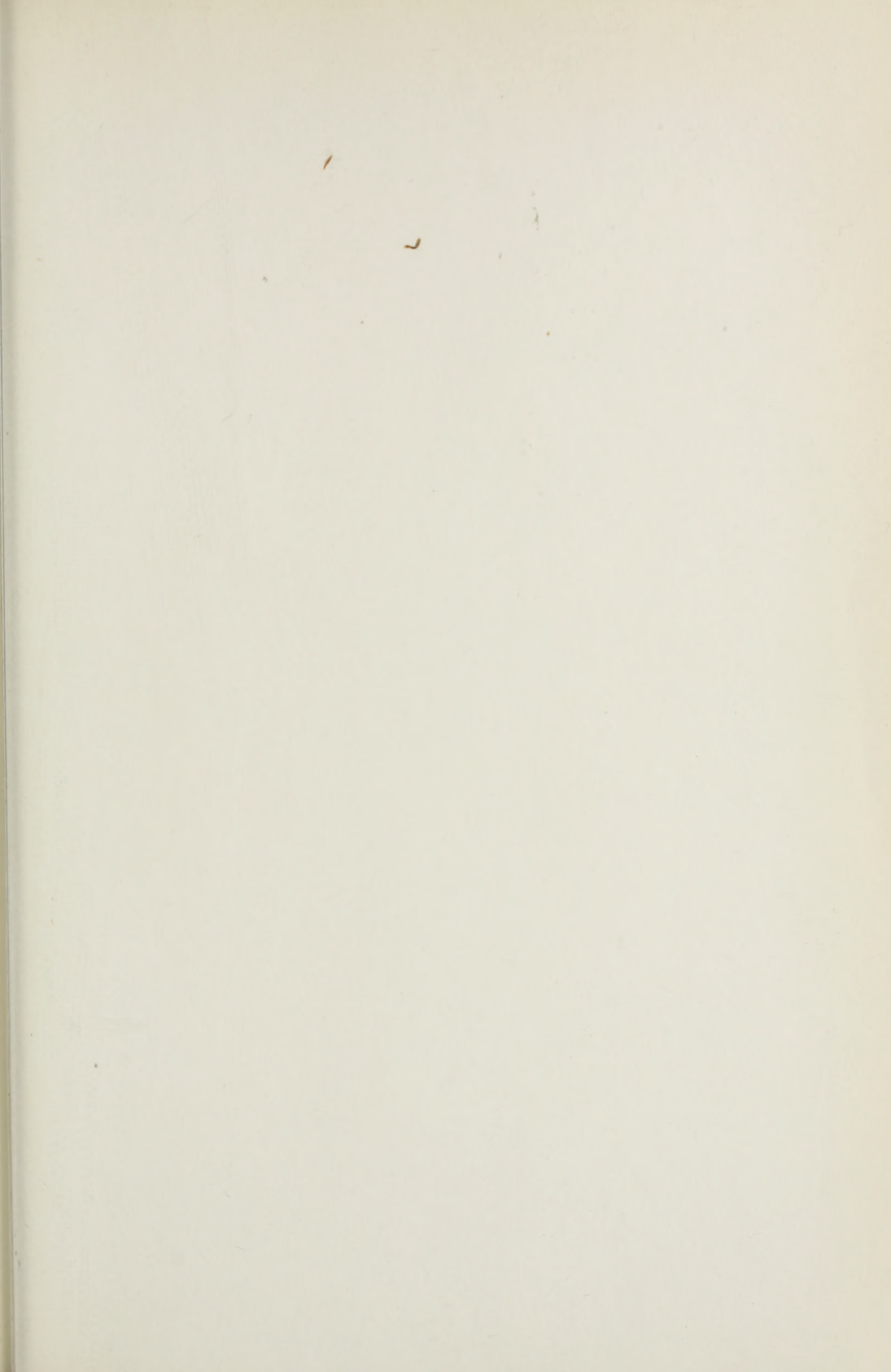
I say that no Jew today can think of Israel without feeling disturbed.

But I mention those people only as a reminder, and because they, as an exception, confirm this immense discovery: Israel has restored to the Jew virtually his whole being.

Let's go back to that complicated game we were playing a little while back: plucking off the elements of the question one by one, hoping to reach the core-definition, the way you pluck leaf after leaf off an artichoke and eventually find the heart. All right: the Jew had no state, no nation, no flag, no land, no language, no culture. His religion, to which he clung desperately, had never placed him in the majority. His memory, which he obstinately cultivated, never told him anything but his own miseries. Do you know what that's called? It is described as, experienced as, and called oppression. The Jew was one of the oldest victims of oppression in universal history. Israel has almost put an end to the oppression of the Jew.¹

NOTES

1. A number of readers have reproached me with having confined myself, so far, to making an inventory of the Jewish condition in the Diaspora. Although I believe that I have often shown that Zionism was latent in that condition, here anyhow are what I believe the role and meaning of Israel in the Jewish destiny to be.



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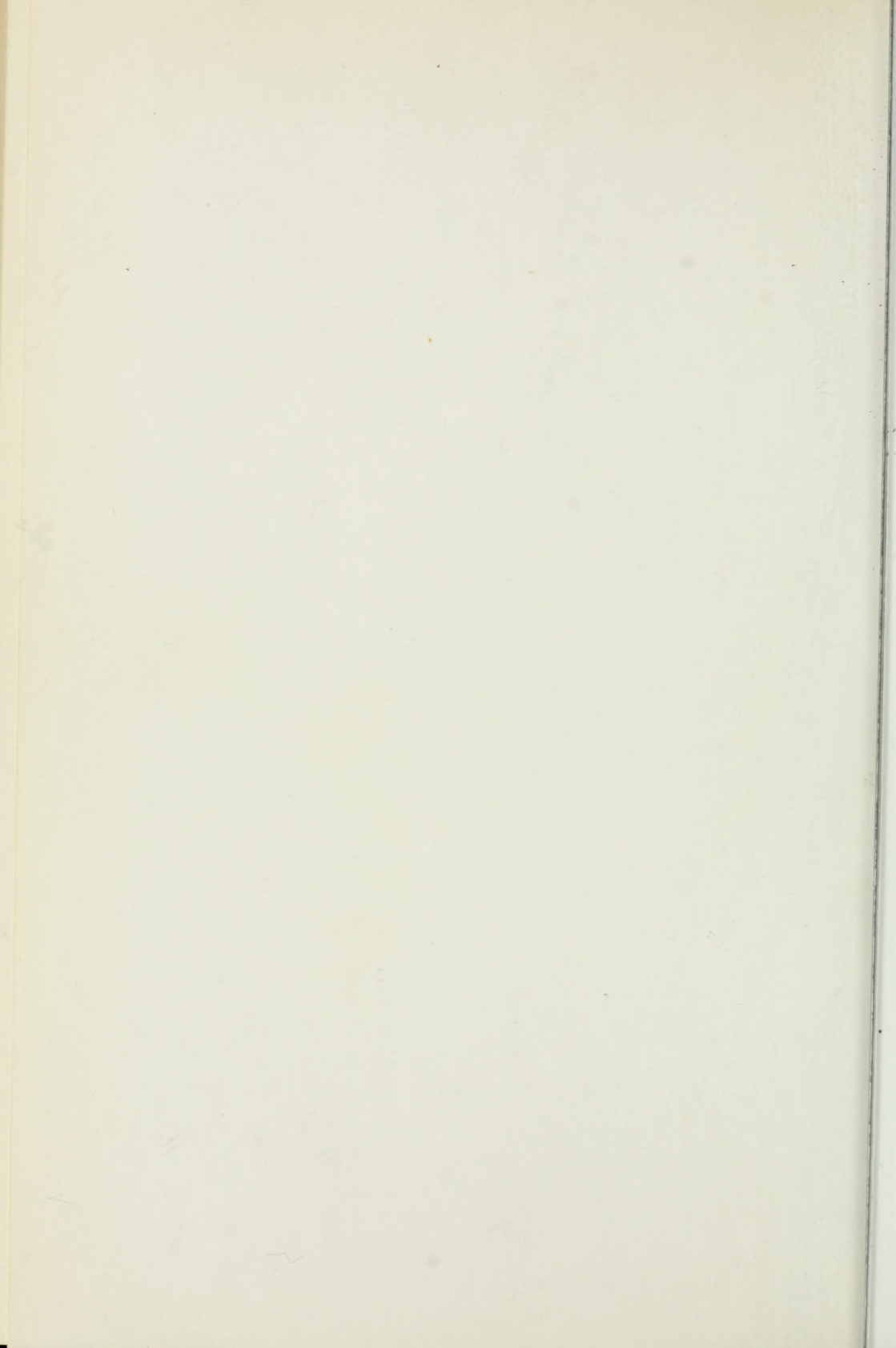
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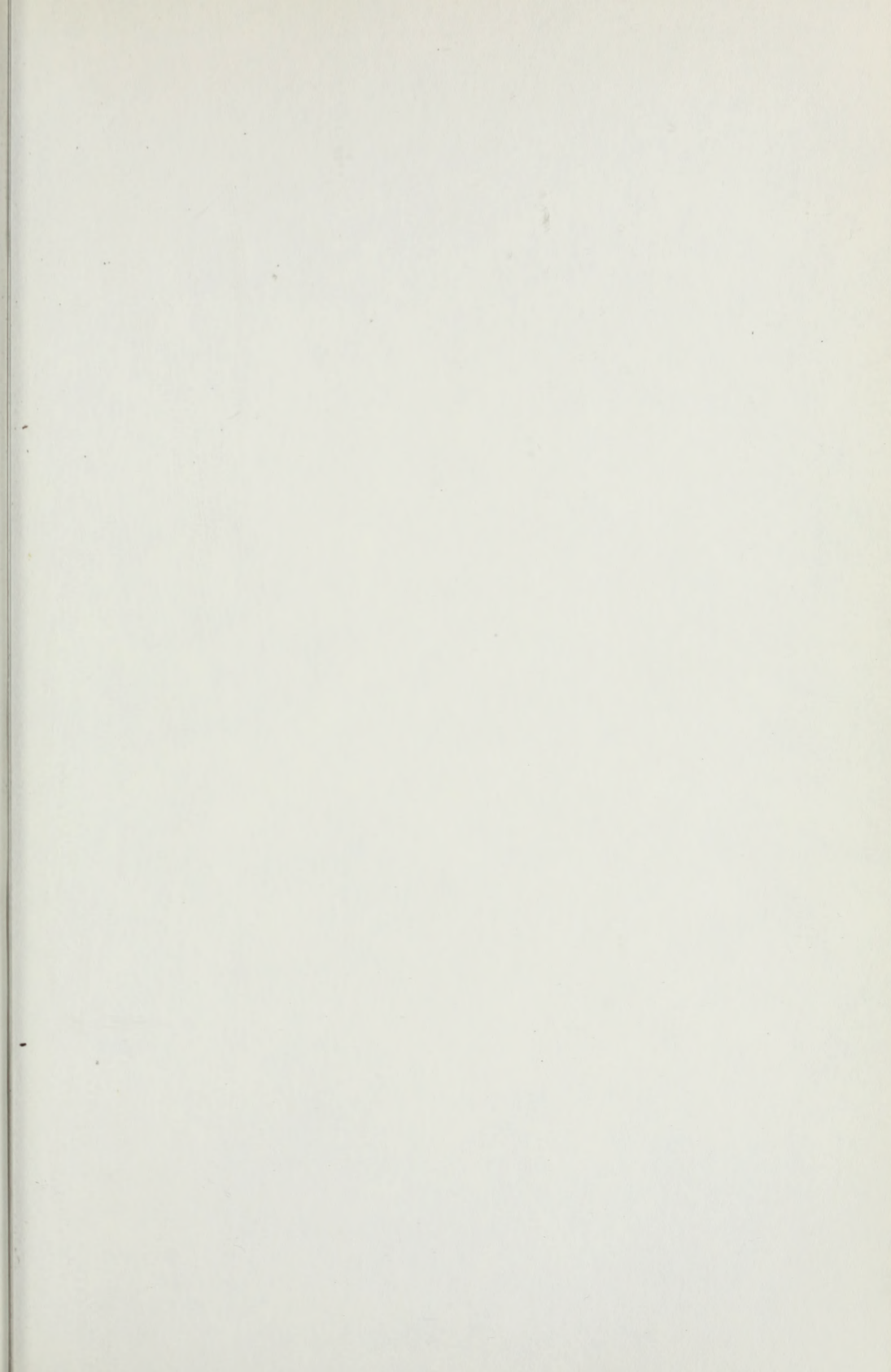
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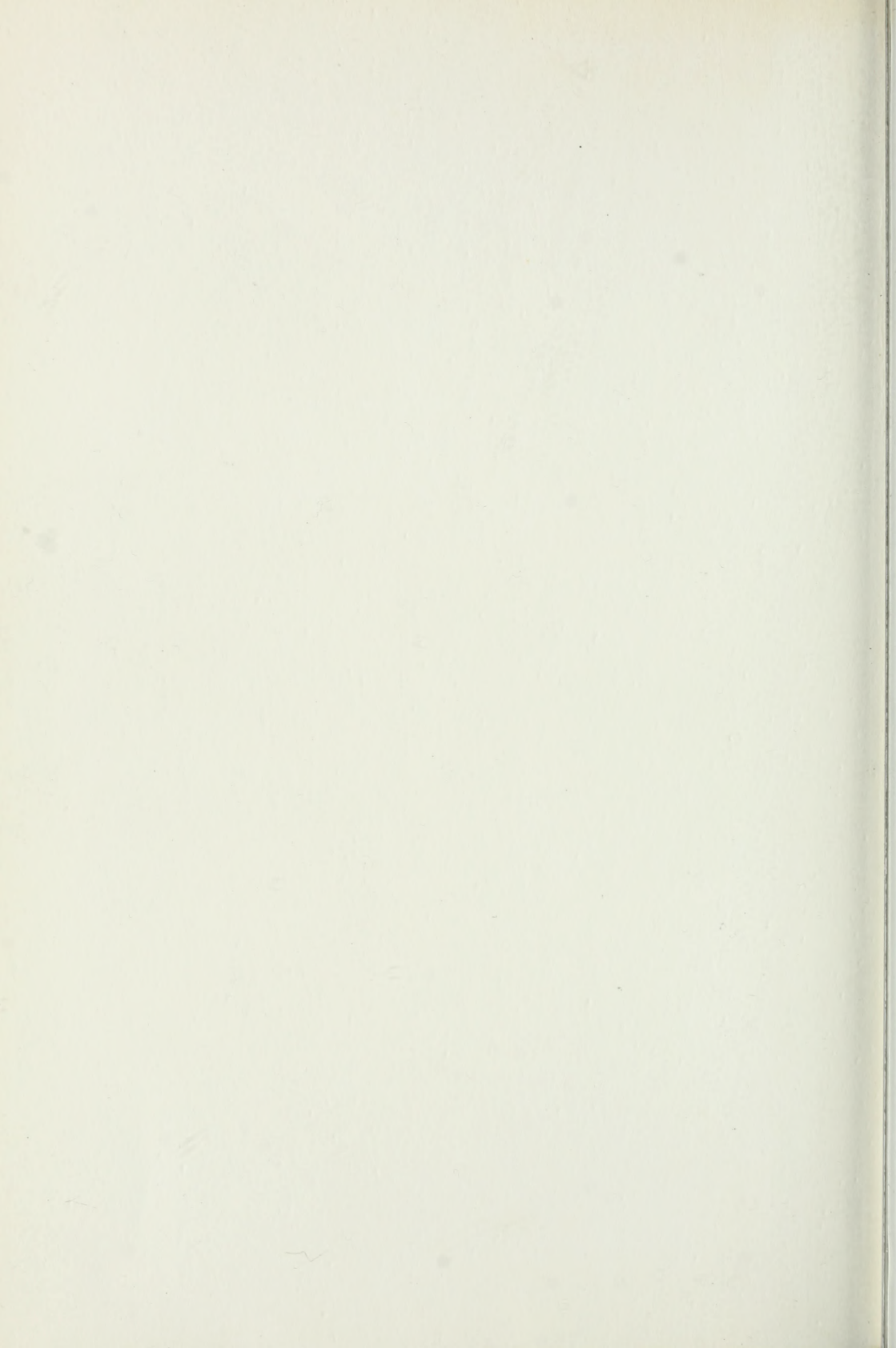
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ALBERT MEMMI was born in Tunis in 1920. During the Second World War he was arrested and interned in a forced labor camp, from which he escaped. After the war he studied at the University of Algiers and at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he received his degree in philosophy and where he now teaches. He has traveled and lectured extensively throughout the United States.

Memmi considers all of his books autobiographical to some extent, and *Jews and Arabs* is his eighth book to be published in this country. The others include three novels — *The Pillar of Salt*, *Strangers*, and *The Scorpion* — as well as *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, *Portrait of a Jew*, *The Liberation of the Jew*, and *Dominated Man*.

Photograph of Albert Memmi by Jacques Robert



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