

## *ISRAEL: A Statistical Glimpse*

### *People*

	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2005</b>
Population	3,921,700	4,821,700	6,930,100
Civilian labor force	1,318,100	1,649,900	2,740,100
Jews in Israel, as a percentage of world Jewry	25	30	41
Life expectancy			
Females	75.7	78.4	82.3
Males	72.1	75.7	78.3
Infant mortality (per 1000 live births)	15.6	9.9	4.9
School population	1,200,700	1,451,300	2,109,500
Percentage of the population (15+) with 13 years or more of formal schooling	19.2	25.3	41.3

### *Population by Religion*

Jews	76.1%
Muslims	16.2%
Christians	2.1%
Druze	1.6%
Not classified by religion	3.9%

### *Population Distribution*

Urban localities	91.8%
Rural localities	8.2%
Of which:	
Moshavim	3.3%
Kibbutzim	1.7%

<b>Immigrants by Continent 1948-2005</b>		<b>Immigrants by Year of Immigration</b>	
Europe	1,801,530	1948-1951	688,000
Africa	493,638	1952-1959	272,000
Asia	427,383	1960-1969	374,000
America & Oceania	238,890	1970-1979	346,000
Unknown	31,656	1980-1989	154,000
		1990-2001	1,060,091
		2002-2005	98,913

## *Education*

University Students by Field of Study  
(Total 124,000 students in 7 universities)

Humanities	25.1%
Social Sciences	26.4%
Science and mathematics	16.4%
Engineering	13.9%
Medicine	9.3%
Law	3.2%
Business & Administration	4.3%
Agriculture	1.4%

\* Figures based on the Statistical Abstract of Israel, No. 57, 2006

The following article appears in the current issue of The Atlantic Monthly and is featured on its cover under the heading "Is Israel Finished?" While it might not be politically balanced, it raises many legitimate and poignant questions. We encourage a healthy debate and a lively discourse and hope to raise these and other issues during our tour of Israel. We include two response articles from the Jerusalem Post and Jewish Weekly.

MAY 2008 ATLANTIC MONTHLY

**The rift between a beleaguered prime minister and a grieving novelist mirrors the division confounding Israel. Can the two men overcome the differences that separate them? Can Israel overcome its paralysis to make the hard choice necessary for its survival as a Jewish democracy?**

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

# Unforgiven



PAOLO PELLEGRIN/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Jeffrey Goldberg reflects on Israel's formative visions and current dilemmas.

## **FLASHBACKS: PROPHESYING PALESTINE**

Jeffrey Goldberg looks back at a mixed bag of *Atlantic* predictions from the 1920s and '30s about prospects for a Jewish homeland.

**I**n early August of 2006, four weeks after the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah, which has as its goal the physical elimination of Israel (and the ancillary ambition of murdering, whenever practicable, Jews elsewhere in the world), killed three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two more in a cross-border raid, Israel found itself in an exceedingly disagreeable

position. The Hezbollah attack had prompted an immediate, and intermittently unrestrained, Israeli military response, which included thousands of bombing runs over Lebanon. The prime minister, the untried Ehud Olmert, a former mayor of Jerusalem who had taken office eight months earlier, promised to obliterate Hezbollah. In the past, Israel had destroyed far greater enemies—the Syrian air force, the Egyptian army, the Arab Legion—so it was assumed that Israel would make short work of Hezbollah, a force consisting of, at most, a few thousand fighters in possession of 12,000 short-range rockets. But within days of Israel's initial attack, it seemed obvious that the Olmert mission was in peril. The Israeli bombardment of Lebanon, which had resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Hezbollah members and innocent civilians, could not stop Hezbollah's rockets from falling on northern Israel. These rocket attacks had killed dozens of Israelis—Arab Israelis included—and had made the Galilee largely uninhabitable. Thousands of Israelis became refugees in their own country, fleeing south in search of shelter.

On August 9, Olmert's cabinet authorized a full-scale ground invasion. Israeli troops were already operating inside Lebanon, but in relatively modest numbers. The generals believed that an armored sweep across southern Lebanon could at least push Hezbollah's rocket teams back to the Litani River, well away from the Israeli border.

At the outset of the conflict, in July, Israelis had stood united with Olmert against Hezbollah. Israel's endless confrontation with the Palestinians is shaded with ambiguities; many Israelis wish to see a Palestinian state come into being in the West Bank and in Gaza, even as they doubt that such a state would bring an end to terrorism. With Hezbollah, there are fewer grays. Its sponsor, Iran, poses the most immediate threat to Israel's physical existence; many of its leaders are plainly anti-Semitic. Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is a Holocaust denier who has called Israel a "filthy bacteria." Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, has said in a speech, "If we searched the entire world for a person more cowardly, despicable, weak and feeble in psyche, mind, ideology and religion, we would not find anyone like the Jew. Notice, I do not say the Israeli."

Because the Hezbollah attack was unprovoked, much of the world had initially expressed sympathy for Israel. This took Israelis by surprise; it had been more than 40 years since they generally received such consideration from the international community. Even Sunni Arab leaders, who fear Shiite radicalism more than they dislike the Jewish state, expressed irritation with Hezbollah.

By early August, though, opinion was shifting, and the decision to launch a ground invasion just when credible cease-fire proposals were proliferating was controversial around the world, and even at home. This was at least partly because Olmert, a lawyer and party functionary, and his defense minister, a former union leader named Amir Peretz, seemed to be in over their heads. Their actions convinced some Israelis—particularly those on the left—that the decision to order a ground invasion revealed a kind of unthinking aggressiveness.

On Thursday, August 10, the day after Olmert's cabinet authorized the invasion, Israel's three most prominent writers, Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua, and David Grossman, held a press conference to call for a cease-fire. This was not an entirely marginal exercise. Writers in Israel play a role in the moral and political life of their country that is unfamiliar to writers in the United States. The three men were not reflexively biased against Olmert, who, unlike his main political rival, the former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, was something of a born-again leftist. Olmert had once been a prince of the right-wing Likud Party. But, like his mentor and predecessor, Ariel Sharon, Olmert had come to believe that a withdrawal from Palestinian territory was in the urgent best interest of Israel.

Olmert's main consideration was not moral but demographic: within the next several years, the number of Arabs under Israeli control—there are now more than 1.3 million Arab citizens

of Israel (there are 5.4 million Jews), and an additional 3.4 million or more Arabs who live in the West Bank and Gaza—will be greater than the number of Jews. The Israeli demographer Sergio DellaPergola estimates that by 2020, Jews will make up just 47 percent of the people who live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Political parties of the left and the center see the “demographic threat” to Israel’s Jewish majority as an existential menace nearly on a par with that posed by Iran and its nuclear program. The demographic trend has raised fears that Israel will become a state like pre-Mandela South Africa, in which the minority ruled the majority. But if the Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza were given the vote, then Israel, a country whose fundamental purpose has been to serve as a refuge for persecuted Jews, and to allow those Jews to have the novel experience of being part of a majority, would disappear, to be replaced by an Arab-dominated “binational” state. Yet Israel has not found a way to escape the West Bank.

Unlike Olmert, the three writers had been longtime advocates of territorial compromise with the Palestinians, in part for reasons of morality, and in part because they want to protect their country’s Jewish majority. In the days of near-hallucinatory ecstasy that followed Israel’s lopsided victory in the Six-Day War of 1967—in which Israel took possession of Gaza and the West Bank—Oz was one of the first Israelis to warn about the moral and strategic consequences of military occupation, and in the late 1970s he was a founder of the left-wing group Peace Now, which advocates Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. Yehoshua, who has been called the “Israeli Faulkner” by Harold Bloom, has repeatedly urged the United States to pull its ambassador as a “symbolic” way to protest the expansion of settlements in the West Bank.

Grossman’s fiction, much of it haunted by the Holocaust, concerns the durability of grief; his most accomplished novel to date, *See Under: Love* (1986), is a complicated weaving of fantasy and reality that recalls the work of Gabriel García Márquez. Grossman has been preoccupied with the ubiquity of death in the lives of Israelis and Palestinians for many years. Nearly a decade ago, he told an interviewer that Israeli couples “have three children so if one of them dies, there will be two left.” Grossman made his name internationally with a book of nonfiction prophecy, *The Yellow Wind*, which he wrote (originally for an Israeli newsmagazine) in early 1987. *The Yellow Wind* was an exposé of the occupation and its demoralizing effects on Palestinians, and on the Israelis who enforced it. The book presaged the first intifada, or uprising, which began in December of that year.

Though all three authors were advocates of compromise and believed that Israel’s settlement enterprise in the West Bank was a catastrophe, none was a pacifist, all were patriots, and all supported the initial retaliation against Hezbollah. “It would have been immoral not to respond,” Yehoshua told me later, but after the Lebanese government promised to rein in Hezbollah, “we had to say ‘Enough.’” Grossman did much of the speaking at the press conference that day. His main contention was that Israel had overreached in the pursuit of self-defense. “The argument that an Israeli presence on the Litani would prevent the firing of missiles on Israel is an illusion,” he said. “Even the argument that we mustn’t give Hezbollah a sense of security has been irrelevant for a long time. Hezbollah wishes to see us sink deeper into the Lebanese swamp.”

Grossman saw in Olmert’s invasion what he called an emblematic, and regrettable, Israeli response to terrorist threats, of a piece with Israel’s typical response to dangers posed by Hamas in Gaza. “Now we must look ... not to the familiar, instinctive reaction of the Israeli way of fighting—that is, what doesn’t work with force will work with much more force,” he said. “Force, in this case, will fan the flames of hatred for Israel in the region and the entire world, and may even, heaven forbid, create the situation that will bring upon us the next war and push the Middle East to an all-out, regional war.”



SEBASTIAN SCHEINER/CORBIS



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THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE NOVELIST: Ehud Olmert (left) and David Grossman

Grossman closed the press conference without mentioning his personal interest in the war: his 20-year-old son, Uri, was a tank commander then fighting in Lebanon. To do so would have been unseemly, and un-Israeli, he told me later. “The cause was to stop the war for the sake of the entire country.”

Grossman is 54, but he is trim and his face is unlined. He is reflective and self-contained, somewhat owl-like, but not without humor. We met on a cold day in Jerusalem, at Mishkenot Sha’ananim, an artists’ colony situated across the Valley of Hinnom from Mount Zion.

Grossman told me that after the press conference, he went home to work on his latest novel, which he had begun in May of 2003, when Uri, the second of his three children, was about to be called up for army service. Grossman’s oldest boy, Yonatan, had already completed three years in the army.

“I thought about writing a novel about an Israeli soldier, a tank commander, who goes to a big military operation,” he said. “His mother has a kind of premonition that he’s going to be killed, and she will do everything she can in order to prevent that from happening. So she escapes. She will not be at home when the army comes to announce the death of her son. She understands that bad news takes two people, one to deliver and one to receive, and she will not be there to receive. She starts a walk across Israel, a 500-kilometer walk, and she tells the story of her son’s life, from the smallest details to the largest things, to someone who is very significant to her. She believes that this will protect her son.”

Grossman himself took a similar journey while writing the book, spending weeks crossing Israel on foot, and he visited with army officers whose duty it is to inform families of the deaths of their children.

At 2:40 a.m. on Sunday, August 13, three days after the press conference, Grossman’s doorbell rang. There were officers at the door. Uri had been killed in action in Lebanon, in the village of Hirbat Kasif, when a Hezbollah missile struck his tank. He was one of 24 soldiers to die on the first day of the ground offensive. Five hours later, David and his wife, Michal, woke up Uri’s sister, Ruti, who was then 13. As she cried, she asked, “But we will still go on living, right?”

Yehoshua, who is close to the family, told me that the Grossmans had taken to turning off their outside light at night, to make it more difficult for a messenger to find the house. But on

that particular night, Michal had turned their outside light on. She later worried, she said, that in so doing she had “invited the terrible news.”

Among the mourners to visit the next day were Oz and Yehoshua. “Maybe he was trying to prevent Uri’s death by writing down his most terrible fears,” Yehoshua told me. “It’s a terrible tragedy that it didn’t work.”

Grossman recalled the visit of Oz and Yehoshua the day after Uri’s death.

“When Uri fell, the morning after, they came to the shivah”—the period of visitation and mourning that follows a Jewish burial—“and I told them I won’t be able to save this novel. I think it was Amos who said, ‘The novel will save you.’ The day after the shivah, I went back and started to work again.” I asked Grossman whether the novel has changed. “The writer changed, not the story. I knew how the story was going to end. I don’t want to say it.” There is more sadness in the book now, he said, “sadness for the fate of the young man, for the future of Israel, but I must say that the small number of people who have read it say they find it comforting.”

The novel is being published this spring. It could have a seismic effect on Israelis, who have, in their 60th year of independence, grown tired of losing their sons to war.

**T**he death of Uri has made his father, a man obviously vulnerable to existential worry, preternaturally aware of the insecurity around him. The 60th anniversary of Israel’s birth—it gained independence on May 15, 1948—is meant to be a celebration, but Grossman sees darkness ahead. “Our army is big, we have this atom bomb, but the inner feeling is of absolute fragility, that all the time we are at the edge of the abyss.” Israelis have violently contradictory feelings about their future. Their country is, by almost any measure, an astonishing success. It has a large, sophisticated, and growing economy (its gross domestic product last year was \$150 billion); the finest universities and medical centers in the Middle East; and a main city, Tel Aviv, that is a center of art, fashion, cuisine, and high culture spread along a beautiful Mediterranean beach. Israel has shown itself, with notable exceptions, to be adept at self-defense, and capable (albeit imperfectly) of protecting civil liberties during wartime. It has become a worldwide center of Jewish learning and self-expression; its strength has straightened the spines of Jews around the world; and, most consequentially, it has absorbed and enfranchised millions of previously impoverished and dispossessed Jews. Zionism may actually be the most successful national liberation movement of the 20th century.

Yet 60 years of independence have not provided Israel with legitimacy in its own region. Two of its neighbors, Egypt and Jordan, have signed peace treaties with Israel, but it is still a small Jewish island in a great sea of Islam, a religion that seems today more allergic than ever to the idea of Jewish independence. Iran poses the most ruthless threat to Israel’s existence—no other member of the United Nations has so insistently, and in such baroque terms, threatened the destruction of another member state.

The internal threats to Israel’s existence are severe as well. Israel’s greatest military victory, in 1967, led to a squalid and seemingly endless occupation, and to the birth of a mystical, antidemocratic, and revanchist strain of Zionism, made manifest in the settlements of the West Bank. These settlements have undermined Israel’s international legitimacy and demoralized moderate Palestinians. The settlers exist far outside the Israeli political

consensus, and their presence will likely help incite a third intifada. Yet the country seems unable to confront the settlements.

Israel's people are among the world's most patriotic—in a recent survey, 94 percent of Jewish Israelis said they are willing to fight for their country (by contrast, 63 percent of Americans are willing to fight for theirs), but 44 percent of Israelis said they would be ready to leave their country if they could find a better standard of living abroad. There are already up to 40,000 Israelis in Silicon Valley (and more than a half million across the U.S.), and the emigration of Israel's most talented citizens is a constant worry of Israeli leaders. "Jews know that they can land on their feet in any corner of the world," Ehud Barak, the defense minister and former prime minister, told me. "The real test for us is to make Israel such an attractive place—cutting-edge in science, education, culture, quality of life—that even American Jewish young people want to come here. If we cannot do this, even those who were born here will consciously decide to go to other places. This is a real problem."



PAOLO PELLEGRIN/MAGNUM PHOTOS

UNSETTLED: Israeli citizens protest the dismantling of settlements in 2005

There are other, more disturbing issues, ones that many Israelis don't care to address. Uri Grossman's death provoked in me all sorts of questions about Israel, its purpose, its mistakes and enemies: How can Israel survive the next 60 years in a part of the world that gives rise to groups like Hamas? How can Israel flourish if its army cannot defeat small bands of rocketeers? Does the concentration of so many Jews in a claustrophobically small space in the world's most volatile region actually undermine the Jewish people's ability to survive, an ability that was called into question little more than 60 years ago, when 33 percent of the world's Jews were murdered? I do not think it is merely a symptom of Jewish hypochondria to ask such questions.

Some of the questions forming in my mind were too indecent to ask a grieving father like David Grossman. But I asked him whether he believed that Zionism has succeeded in its mission. I framed the question impersonally, though I had been struck by what to me was an inescapable truth: if Uri Grossman had been born to Jews in America, rather than to Jews in Israel, in 2006 he most likely would have been a student at Harvard or Michigan or Stanford, rather than a commander in the Armored Corps of the Israel Defense Forces. The underlying premise of the creation of the state of Israel—its main mission—was to provide a refuge for

the Jewish people in their historic homeland. One of the many contradictions Israel faces in its seventh decade of independence is this: it is a country that is safe for Judaism, but not for Jews.

As a young Zionist in the late 1980s, I was drawn to the idea that Israel represented the most sublime and encompassing expression of Jewishness, so I moved there and joined its army. This decision was unfathomable to many of my new Israeli comrades. One of my commanders asked me, "Why would a person leave America to die in Israel?" Then he asked if we could switch places—he would move to New York and marry a doctor's daughter, and I would die chasing Palestinians through the casbah of Nablus. I was dreaming Leon Uris dreams, but he was having visions out of *Goodbye, Columbus*.

I didn't die, obviously, but his argument bothered me, and still does. The founders of Zionism believed that a state for the Jews would cure—or at least make irrelevant—the ancient European disease of Jew hatred. Remove the Jew from his insalubrious and constricted life in anti-Semitic Russia and give him a plow in Palestine, and he would become a "normal" person, deserving, among other things, the respect of Christians. The first Zionists had no sense that Muslims would object to the entry of thousands of Jewish socialists—women wearing pants included—into tribal, conservative Palestine. In his utopian novel, *Altneuland—Old-New Land*—the founder of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, imagined an Israel much like Vienna, a society of opera-going, German-speaking Jews who had shed their "pale, weak, timid" natures. Herzl did not imagine a Palestine free of Arabs, though he imagined the Arabs overjoyed by the gifts of science and hygiene brought by the Jews. The principal Arab protagonist, Reschid Bey, says: "The Jews have enriched us. Why should we be angry with them? They dwell among us like brothers. Why should we not love them?"

From *Atlantic Unbound*:

#### "THE KINGDOM OF THE SPIRIT"

(November 1961)

"It is impossible to understand the history of the Jewish people and their struggle for existence ... unless we bear in mind the unique idea which their history embodies." By David Ben-Gurion

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, was not unaware of Arab hostility to the goals of Zionism. In a 1934 meeting with the Arab leader Musa Alami, Ben-Gurion said that Zionism would "bring a blessing to the Arabs of Palestine, and they have no good cause to oppose us." Alami responded, "I would prefer that the country remain impoverished and barren for another hundred years, until we ourselves are able to develop it on our own." But Ben-Gurion believed that numbers would bring the cure. He said in 1933, "In the course of four to five years we must bring in a quarter of a million Jews and the Arab question will be solved."

Arab opposition did not die; it hardened. This opposition has, of course, gotten the Palestinians nothing; theirs is perhaps the least successful national liberation movement of the 20th century. But failure has not diminished the desire of many Muslims to see the end of Israel, and the ultimate success of the Zionist idea depends not only on Israel's ability to keep its citizens alive but on its ability to end talk of its impermanence.

"I think that this fear, this idea that Israel will not exist anymore—I cannot even utter specific, clear words because it's really frightening—this idea or fear hovers above us all the time," Grossman told me. "It is so present, even though we suppress it almost violently. Whenever it infiltrates the consciousness, it's almost paralyzing. You can see if you look at the numbers—how few we are, how many they are, how hostile this region is, how we have never been accepted into this region."

He continued: “If you see the tendencies of fanaticism, the way in which at every crossroads both sides almost always choose the more violent approach, if you see the fact that other religions, parts of the West, never really accept the idea of Israel ... It means something deep about us (and even more about everyone else), about Judaism and the state that we are still in, after 60 years of sovereignty—we have not accomplished statehood, the realization that this is a legitimate state. And we have a lack of confidence in our own existence. We also don’t really believe in our own existence. We have the formal symptoms of a normal state, but we still do not believe we are a state. Throughout history we were regarded, and we regarded ourselves, as a larger-than-life story, since the time of the Bible. We’re a story that other nations read and borrow. But if you are a story, you can end.”

Of course, America is *sui generis* in its acceptance of Jews, having brought them to the absolute center of its national life. This means that their story will come to an end not because of the actions of Iran, or of the Palestinians, but because they choose to end it, by assimilating completely.

I acknowledged to Grossman that, at a time of maximum distress, the late 1930s, America refused to admit thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi terror (if Israel had been created in 1939, not 1948, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Jews could have been saved). But the Diaspora, and the American diaspora experience in particular, no longer represents a danger to physical Jewish existence. Grossman steered the conversation away from issues of mere physical security. Israel still gives a Jew the best chance of feeling at home in the world, he said.

“Maybe if you live in other places, you are integrated, you feel assimilated. I wouldn’t like to live in any other place. With all the difficulty and criticism I have, it is still for me, as a Jewish person, the highest spiritual challenge and endeavor to see this country become a better place.”

Uri Grossman’s death became a national trauma amid the larger national trauma of the Lebanon misadventure. Grossman remained silent about the war, and about politics, from his son’s death, in August, until that November, when he addressed 100,000 Israelis at a memorial service for Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister assassinated in 1995 by an extremist supporter of the settlements. Olmert was on the stage as well; Grossman refused to shake hands with the prime minister, but he directed his words at him. “The death of young people is a horrible, shattering waste,” he said. “But no less dreadful is the sense that for many years, the state of Israel has been squandering not only the lives of its children but also the miracle it experienced—the great and rare opportunity bestowed upon it by history, the opportunity to create an enlightened, decent, democratic state that would conduct itself according to Jewish and universal values. A state that would be a national home and a refuge, but not *only* a refuge; rather, a place that would also give new meaning to Jewish existence.”

He went on to criticize the country’s leaders, saying that they could not “help a nation adrift in such a complicated state of affairs.”

“Mr. Prime Minister, I am not saying these things out of anger or vengefulness. I have waited long enough so that I would not be responding from a fleeting impulse. You cannot dismiss my words tonight by saying that a man should not be judged at his time of grief. Of course I am in grief. But more than anger, what I feel is pain. This country pains me, and what you

and your friends are doing to it. Believe me, your success is important to me, because the future of us all depends on your ability to get up and do something.”

Grossman then pleaded with Olmert to speak directly to the Palestinian people. He has argued that the flaw of the Oslo peace process of the 1990s was that the negotiators never spoke about the shape of a final agreement—including the shape of the future state of Palestine.

“Go to them over the head of Hamas,” Grossman said to Olmert. “Go to the moderates among them, the ones who, like me and you, oppose Hamas and its ways. Go to the Palestinian people. Speak to their deep grief and wounds, recognize their continued suffering. Your status will not be diminished, nor will that of Israel in any future negotiations. But people’s hearts will begin to open a little to one another, and this opening has huge power.”

Grossman told me that the self-created trap for Olmert is that he knows what needs to be done—leave the West Bank—but is powerless to do it. “I could give his speeches regarding peace,” Grossman said. “But when will he evacuate an outpost?” he asked, referring to newly built satellite enclaves outside existing settlements. “When will he speak to the hopes and fears of the Palestinians? When will he do something to save us?”

“David Grossman thinks that you haven’t done enough to remove outposts and leave the West Bank,” I told Olmert when I visited him a few weeks ago. The prime minister leaned back in his chair. His face took on a dark cast. “Listen,” he said with evident irritation. “This is why I am prime minister and he is a writer.” Olmert sighed. “I’ll tell you, I don’t like to argue with David since he lost his son,” he said. “I think there is an emotional part in the way he expresses himself about me, which has nothing to do with my views or my actions.”

Olmert is a man of medium height and build, with a high forehead and large features, who thrusts his jaw out when he speaks. He saw me in his office at the government compound in Jerusalem. The compound is an armed fortress, and the prime minister’s office is separated from the outside world by several layers of unforgiving security. Since the murder of Rabin, and especially since Israel began targeting Hamas leaders for assassination, the prime minister of Israel has become one of the world’s most comprehensively guarded men.

The office itself is unadorned and windowless, narrow—a submarine. On the wall next to Olmert’s desk hang portraits of various prime ministers, including Ariel Sharon and Menachem Begin. Two of his recent predecessors, Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, are missing. Where are they? I asked.

“I could answer,” Olmert said waspishly, “but I prefer not to.”

Olmert is said to be capable of projecting kindness, and he has a talent for sycophancy (his speech welcoming President Bush to Israel earlier this year was particularly overripe). But he can be a haranguing, preemptively defensive man. I recently watched Olmert address a small group of American Jewish leaders, including some who, unlike the majority of American Jews, are dubious about Olmert’s embrace of moderation, and his willingness to negotiate the future of Jerusalem. “I know everyone is very sensitive and very curious about Jerusalem,” he said. “Sometimes when I hear people talking to me about Jerusalem, I say, ‘Hey, excuse me, what exactly did you build in Jerusalem, that you are preaching to me? Who built more in Jerusalem and did more to protect the unity of the city of Jerusalem than any of

those who are wasting lots of energies and spending a lot of money in order to try and over swarm my position?" (Olmert later told me that unnamed American Jews are "investing a lot of money trying to overthrow the government in Israel.")

In the course of our conversation, I told Olmert I thought it wasn't entirely fair to discount Grossman's criticisms as being motivated by grief. The two men have been acquaintances for many years, and it is true that Grossman has refused to speak to Olmert since Uri's death. But Grossman today is critical of Olmert's approach to matters concerning the West Bank, and he has said that he would speak to Olmert, and even stand with him, if he believed that the prime minister was truly serious about taking the necessary steps toward reconciliation with the Palestinians.

The prime minister was doubtful. "He doesn't really separate the personal from the political," Olmert said. "I have a lot of respect for David, but I think he's wrong. First of all, he's wrong; second, I don't like to argue with him." Of the three writers who aligned against him over Lebanon, he said, "Amos Oz is the most realistic."

When I told Oz that Olmert wouldn't address Grossman's critique, he said: "I don't think David Grossman is blinded by grief. Grief can be an eye-opener. He's a perfectly legitimate critic of the Olmert government." Oz also rejected Olmert's effort to draft him to his team. "I support the peace process that began at Annapolis," he said. "I don't necessarily support Olmert on what he's doing in Gaza," referring to recent Israeli military incursions.

Olmert is more unpopular in Israel than George W. Bush is in the United States. His business dealings have repeatedly drawn the attention of the country's police and attorney general, and his reputation is that of an inauthentic, calculating man whose skills lie mainly in the area of self-advancement. The commission of inquiry appointed to investigate Israeli mistakes in Lebanon was caustic in its criticism of his leadership, finding that Olmert acted hastily and with arrogance in the rush to war. The report was even more critical of army and defense ministry leaders. It characterized the Lebanon invasion as heedless and jerry-rigged. The commission's findings were a reminder that, as the former Prime Minister Ehud Barak once told me, Jews excel at many things but not necessarily at self-rule. "The last two experiments of Jews running a political state were not great successes," he said, referring to the Israel of King Solomon's time, which ultimately ended in the exile to Babylon, and to the Jewish commonwealth of the Second Temple period, which was conquered by the Romans, who scattered the Jews.

The purpose of my visit to Olmert's office was not to plumb his resentment-filled relationship with David Grossman but to discuss the meaning of Israel's existence. When I brought up the subject of existential threats, he recoiled. "When the leader of a nation of 75 million people with ballistic missiles, with modern weapons, with a declared desire to possess a nuclear capacity, threatens Israel with annihilation, can I ignore it? Can I say I didn't hear it? Of course I can't."

Olmert was more comfortable speaking about the Zionist idea and praising Herzl's prophetic powers: few men understood at the start of the last century, as Herzl did, that Europe would soon turn against its Jews so absolutely. And he spoke of the achievements of Jewish independence—the ingathering of Jews, most especially—all of which were unassailably remarkable.

Then I asked him to discuss the flaws in the execution of the Zionist program. He responded indignantly: "I don't care about it. Of course, I mean, I care about the flaws, I'm the prime minister. I have to improve things, I have to amend things. But when I celebrate the 60th anniversary of the state of Israel, what I have in mind are the enormous achievements." He

went on to discuss the largely successful absorption of 1 million Russian immigrants. “Of course there are flaws,” he said. “Who cares?”

With Uri Grossman in mind, I asked Olmert about a flaw of personal concern to me: Why is Israel less physically safe for Jews than America?

He answered: “I’ll tell you something that you have to realize, and this is the most important thing and this is the most significant thing. First of all, no people are safe anywhere, okay? Let me tell you, Jews are not safer in Israel than they are in other parts of the world, but there is only one place that Jews can fight for their lives as Jews, and that is here. They can fight as Americans, they can fight as Australians—but as individuals.” He banged on his desk. “Jews were persecuted, Jews were attacked, Jews were suppressed, Jews were killed. But they could never defend themselves as Jews.”

So the success of the American Jewish community doesn’t lessen the necessity for the state of Israel? “Never, never, no way,” he said. “By the way, Jews in Germany—and I don’t draw any comparison at all—Jews in other parts of the world were very successful all their lives, and that didn’t provide them with safety.”

**T**he prime minister of Israel should be able to muster an argument for the necessity of his country without forecasting a Holocaust in America. His was a careless and cynical statement, one that supports the notion that he is not Israel’s deepest thinker. And yet his record presents an obvious contradiction. On one crucial issue, Olmert is credited by many of the most doubting Israelis with sincerity and thoughtfulness: his newfound belief that the dream of a Greater Israel—one that incorporates the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights—is dead, replaced with the recognition that the land must be split between a Jewish democratic state and an Arab state. This sort of transformation is as rare in Israeli politics as it is in American politics. “His willingness to express his new convictions and to speak about them explicitly is both bold and calculated,” one of his foremost critics, the *Ha’aretz* political columnist Ari Shavit, told me.

Olmert is not the only one to undergo this transformation; an entire generation of Likud politicians, protected by the shade cast by the great fighter and Likud apostate Ariel Sharon, has embraced the argument that the occupation threatens Israel’s Jewish future.

I asked Olmert whether there was a moral dimension to his desire to exit the West Bank, and I made reference to a song of his childhood, written by Vladimir Jabotinsky, the founder of Revisionist Zionism. The revisionists are the ideological ancestors of the Likud Party. The song refers to the *shtay gadot*, or two banks, of the Jordan River: “The Jordan has two banks, and both are ours.”

“I would have loved to have *shtay gadot!*” Olmert said. It was not, as I first thought, an unconsidered outburst. He won’t call the dream of both banks immoral or destructively utopian, because it is a dream that many Israelis believe is just. “If there had been a 10 percent or 15 percent minority which is not Jewish there, then it would have been legitimate. But you don’t come to a majority and say to them, ‘Listen, we deprive you of your right to self-determination and at the same time we won’t provide you with the natural right of equality and equal votes.’”

“At the end of the day, it was about demography,” he said. “We couldn’t do it.”

The new leftists—or new realists—find justification for their position in the earliest history of Zionism. “Go back to the Basle program of 1897, the first Zionist Congress,” Israel’s ambassador in Washington, Sallai Meridor, told me. Meridor and his brother Dan, who was a minister in the government of Menachem Begin, abandoned their belief in untrammelled settlement several years ago. “Herzl asks Nordau”—Max Nordau, the essayist and critic who served as his deputy—“to come up with one sentence of what Zionism is to achieve. He wrote that Zionism is meant to create for the Jewish people a homeland in the land of Israel, assured by international legitimacy. One sentence, the whole story. It’s about Jewish people, about defining the community of Jews as a nation, one in the family of nations. Second, it’s not a state for all citizens, but for the Jewish people. Third, it’s in the land of Israel, but not necessarily *all* the land of Israel. And it has to be secured by international legitimacy.” Israel’s flagging international legitimacy is one of Olmert’s preoccupations. In an interview with *Ha’aretz* in November, he said, “If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights [among Palestinians of the occupied territories], then, as soon as that happens, the state of Israel is finished.” He went on to say, “The Jewish organizations, which were our power base in America, will be the first to come out against us, because they will say they cannot support a state that does not support democracy and equal voting rights for all its residents.”

As a young Knesset member of the Likud Party, Olmert was not nearly so concerned about Israel’s international reputation. He voted against the ratification of the Camp David Accords with Egypt, which had been negotiated by the leader of his party, Menachem Begin. Today, he says Begin was right. “He was smarter than I was.” If he were alive today, Olmert said, Begin would support an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. “Menachem Begin understood by 1977 that we couldn’t incorporate Judea and Samaria [the biblical names for the West Bank] into the state of Israel. We can’t do it, and therefore he did not do it.”

What Olmert failed to mention was that Begin himself accelerated the process of settling Israelis in the West Bank, and was in particular a zealous supporter of Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful), the near-messianic group that seeded the West Bank with Jewish settlements. Today, the settlers are a small but influential political constituency (there are 200,000 settlers in the West Bank—a majority of whom moved there for economic, rather than ideological, reasons—and another 200,000 in the eastern suburbs of Jerusalem), and they have deployed an effective argument against expulsion: Ariel Sharon’s forced removal of 8,000 settlers from the Gaza Strip three years ago, undertaken unilaterally, resulted not in peace but in a barrage of rocket attacks by Hamas on southern Israel, followed by a continuing Israeli military response.

“I’m not saying ‘I told you so,’ but I told you so,” the settler leader Pinchas Wallerstein said not long ago when I saw him at Migron, a settlement outpost near Ramallah. Migron is “illegal,” built without the approval of the government, but even the illegal outposts—there are more than 100—are in no danger of imminent evacuation. Olmert removed one, called Amona, in February 2006; more than 200 people, including two Knesset members, were hurt in the riot that accompanied the demolition, and Olmert appears wary of a repeat performance.

Like Begin, Olmert once was a friend of the settlers. I asked him why the country only recently awoke to the threat the settlements pose. He bristled. “First of all, this is something that must be understood with humility and compassion,” he said. “In 1948, we achieved independence with a divided Jerusalem, with the parts of Jerusalem that were the essential ingredients of the collective Jewish memory and something that we yearned for, for

thousands of years, not in our hands. In 1967 came the fulfillment, finally, of all the dreams of thousands of years by reaching the territories which are more intimately linked to Jewish history than anything else, particularly Jerusalem. So how can you wonder why we didn't have the emotional power to restrain ourselves from wanting to realize the fulfillment of our dreams? It took us time to grasp the full complexity of the situation. But how can you wonder, at the beginning, why we had this enthusiasm?"

I noted that by late 1967, David Ben-Gurion, then an old man in retirement on his desert kibbutz, was arguing that Israel should find a way out of the occupied territories as soon as possible. Did Ben-Gurion lack Zionist fervor?

Olmert litigated the question instead of answering it: "He certainly didn't say 'Get rid of Jerusalem.'"

What led to Olmert's conversion regarding the settlements was not only the realization—one that came to him over the course of three decades or so—that the permanent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza might undermine Israel's security, but also a recognition that the Palestinians themselves had changed.

"Listen, let's face it, I don't know what my position would have been had a change not taken place on the other side as well. What the Palestinians say—not all of them, of course—some of the declared, elected leadership of the Palestinian people say, 'I want to live in peace with Israel and I recognize Israel's right to exist.' They didn't say it 40 years ago, they didn't say it 30 years ago, 25 years ago."

The Palestinians, however, are fighting a civil war. Gaza is under the control of Hamas, which is the Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. The West Bank is under the control of the Palestinian Authority, headed by the Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas, who, over the past several months, has been negotiating a framework agreement for peace with Israel. All sides recognize that the Palestinian Authority would find it difficult to implement an agreement, but Olmert's goal is to negotiate the parameters of a final settlement as a way, if nothing else, to strengthen the hands of Palestinian moderates against Hamas.



PAOLO PELLEGRIN/MAGNUM PHOTOS

UNRESOLVED: Palestinian workers approach a checkpoint to Jerusalem in 2007

**T**he latest iteration of the never-ending Middle East peace process, launched in Annapolis late last year by President Bush, is in many ways a farce. Olmert's ruling coalition is unstable, and he is deeply unpopular. Bush shows no sustained interest in understanding the dispute. Condoleezza Rice is ignored across the Middle East. And Abbas's authority doesn't radiate far beyond Ramallah, the de facto Palestinian capital. The tragedy of this farce is that this could be the last time a two-state solution is seen as a viable option. It is a cliché for Middle East leaders to warn that time is running out, but today it seems that the possibility of a two-state solution is swiftly fading. Palestinian rejectionists and unbending Jewish settlement leaders are in harmony on this point. "It does not matter what the Jews do. We will not let them have peace," Ibrahim Mudeiris, the imam of the Ijlin Mosque in Gaza, told me not long ago. We spoke after Friday prayers. The street outside the mosque was crowded with angry young men who had been excited by Mudeiris's sermon, in which he identified Jews as "the sons of apes and pigs."

"They can be nice to us or they can kill us, it doesn't matter," he said. "If we have a cease-fire with the Jews, it is only so that we can prepare ourselves for the final battle."

For Palestinian radicals, the closing of the settlements would be a terrible blow. The smartest Palestinian strategists understand this. "The longer they stay out there, the more Israel will appear to the world to be essentially an apartheid state," the former Palestinian Authority negotiator Michael Tarazi told me a few years ago. "The settlements mean that the egg is hopelessly scrambled. Basically, it is already one state."

The hard-core settlers are as intransigent, and as patient, as their Palestinian counterparts. The mayor of Ariel, one of the West Bank's largest Jewish towns, told me that time is on the side of the settlers. Ariel, which has a population of roughly 20,000, is southwest of Nablus, the largest Arab city in the West Bank. "We have to hold on for a few more years, at most," Ron Nachman, the mayor, said. "Then the world will realize that the solution lies with Jordan." Nachman, along with many other West Bank settler leaders, believes that the Palestinians of the West Bank should be made Jordanian citizens. The Palestinians don't generally seek this. Nor do the Jordanians. But Nachman said that once the world realizes that Israel's presence in the West Bank is eternal, it will come to view the "Jordanian option" as a plausible solution. "Trust me, no one is throwing us out of Ariel," he said.

For many of the settlers, and certainly for their spiritual leaders, the state of Israel's democracy is of minimal concern. A couple of years ago, I visited the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, which has graduated many of the settlement movement's leaders, to speak to its rabbis about the balance between democracy and Judaism.

In early March, the yeshiva was attacked by a Palestinian gunman who killed eight students, mainly teenagers, in a library. When I had visited Mercaz HaRav, Rabbi David Samson, a teacher at the yeshiva and one of the leading proponents of its philosophy, had foretold the attack: "We are of course a target of terror. The enemies of the Jewish people know the importance of this yeshiva. We send forth the pioneers to build the state." In the course of a lengthy discussion, Samson explained the yeshiva's position on democracy. "Democracy is not a value for us. Justice is a value, and fairness, but not democracy. In the Book of Exodus, it says that the Jews shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It does not talk about democracy." The Arabs who live in biblical Israel, he said, can either choose "to get along with us, to live peacefully, or to leave." He said the Arabs would have the status of "protected foreigners" in Israel; they would have local autonomy, but have no say in the governance of Israel.

What if the world rejects this? “The world has always rejected the Jews. But God always provides.” God will punish the Jews, he said, if they divide the Holy Land. “A Palestinian state would be an abomination.”

A Palestinian state, of course, might not come to pass. Ziad Abu Zayyad, a former minister in the Palestinian Authority government, is a veteran peace negotiator and one of the few Palestinian leaders who still view a two-state solution as conceivable. “There are only two or three years left,” he said. “If this doesn’t work, then everyone will be arguing for a one-state solution.”

The one-state solution—the dissolution of Israel and the merging of the Jewish and Arab populations—is neither practicable nor, from the Israeli perspective, desirable. (In the 1940s, many Jewish thinkers endorsed the idea of binationalism, but the idea was rejected by the Arabs.) In any case, the dismantling of Israel as a Jewish state would, of course, demand the agreement of Israel’s Jews, who, for manifold reasons, would not want to live in a state dominated by Arabs. “I’ll make a prediction that Israel will not commit suicide,” Yehezkel Dror, the head of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute and a political scientist at Hebrew University, told me.

David Grossman, like most of Israel’s leftists, sees binationalism as simultaneously utopian and dismissive of Jewish feelings. “You know, binationalism doesn’t work in so many places in the world,” he said. “You see it in Belgium now. And they expect, with this really hateful combination of Jews and Arabs, that it will succeed here? It’s so wrong. Part of the cure for the historical distortions of both peoples is that they need a place of their own with defined borders. We have to heal separately. I’m a little suspicious of these people who would experiment on us with binationalism.”

Reality, he said, has made a Jewish state necessary. “Since the world has failed to defend Jewish existence, there is a need for a place for the Jews to implement their culture and their values and their language and their history, a place in which to recover.”

**B**ut what if Israel’s neighbors never give its Jews a chance to recover from history?

Since the collapse of the Oslo peace process, eight years ago, many of Grossman’s allies on the left have abandoned the idea that Arabs will reconcile themselves to a Jewish state in their midst. Benny Morris, a historian who has done much work to uncover evidence of Jewish sin, as well as Arab sin, in the birth of Israel, recently wrote: “The situation [Jewish] Israelis live in, and even more so, most likely face, is antediluvian, revolutionary and possibly apocalyptic.” When I spoke to Morris in Jerusalem, he described Israel as an “amazing success story” and, in virtually the same sentence, called it “the most dangerous place in the world for Jews as Jews, as a collective of 5 million people who are in danger of extinction in the short term from an Iranian nuclear bomb and in the long term by being overwhelmed by Arabs.”

Grossman, despite his existential fears, has not given up on the idea of compromise. In *The Yellow Wind*, he tells of the time he found himself trapped at Bethlehem University, as a Palestinian demonstration raged around him.

I write the following in my green notebook: Now, the truth. Are you afraid? Yes. And if something happens to you here, if they hurt you, do you think it will cause you to revise your opinions? To begin to surrender to hate? And if they were to hurt your child?

I set down the answer for the record and as personal testimony, and it is all written there, in the green notebook.

His private answer is now public; since Uri's death, he has not cast aside his opposition to occupation and settlement, or his belief in reconciliation.

But this does not necessarily suggest that he would make a sophisticated negotiator, or a sound strategist. Grossman believes that Israel must negotiate with Hamas, an organization that pays obeisance to Iran, that bases its charter in part on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and that has shown itself to be more interested in destroying Israel than in building a state of its own.

Of course, any such talks would necessarily grant legitimacy to Hamas and undermine the more moderate Palestinian leadership in the West Bank who remain Israel's best, and perhaps only, hope for a more tranquil future.

The West Bank leadership cannot be buttressed merely with rhetoric, or with ineffectual negotiations meant to erect only the scaffolding of an agreement. The Camp David negotiations in 2000 collapsed mainly because the Palestinian leader, Yasir Arafat, was unable to strike a final deal with Israel. But during the seven years of the Oslo peace process, which was meant to negotiate a Palestinian state into existence, the number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank nearly doubled. It is difficult to blame Palestinians for their cynicism about Israeli intentions regarding the West Bank. Only by closing outposts and dismantling settlements can Israeli leaders help the Palestinian moderates, and themselves. When I asked Olmert why he argues for an Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territory but allows the expansion of existing settlements and the continued existence of illegal outposts, he barked, "I dismantled Amona!" Amona is the outpost that came down in February 2006. "That was the most traumatic event, even more than the disengagement from Gaza. It was very violent."

Not one outpost has been dismantled since Amona was closed, and none seems slated for impending disappearance. This is the core of Grossman's criticism of Olmert. The prime minister, in his view, is a skilled rhetorician but a political coward, one who speaks the language of reconciliation but whose actions in Lebanon, and in Gaza, suggest something else.

There is a split on the left; some of Grossman's allies believe that he is, in fact, too hard on the prime minister. "Olmert is paralyzed because the people are paralyzed," A. B. Yehoshua said. "The whole country is paralyzed."

And tired. Benny Morris noted recently that, just as the West is tired of the hundred-year war in the Middle East, so too are Israelis. Morris's analysis contained an echo of a statement made by Olmert three years ago, when he was still vice premier under Sharon. "We are tired of fighting," he told the Israel Policy Forum, a liberal pro-Israel group, in New York. "We are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies. We want that we will be able to live in an entirely different environment of relations with our enemies."

Olmert's shift to the left did not occur in a vacuum. His wife, Aliza, has been a sympathizer of Peace Now, and his children have been left-wing activists. One daughter, Dana, is a prominent gay-rights advocate in Tel Aviv, and has associated herself with groups opposed to her father's policies. During the 2006 Israeli incursions into Gaza, she took part

in a demonstration that denounced the army chief of staff as a “child-killer.” One of Olmert’s sons has refused to serve his army-reserve duty in the occupied territories, and another son managed to avoid the draft altogether. Olmert’s family is not entirely unusual; the secular left, which once provided a disproportionate number of officers and commandos to the army, no longer does so; sons of the settlements now account for more than 25 percent of the Israeli officer corps. Which makes the left-wing Grossman family’s contribution to the national defense more striking.

I asked Olmert whether he would still like to reconcile with Grossman. “Look, I have responsibilities to attend to,” he said. “I met with every one of the bereaved families who was ready to meet with me. He was demonstrating against me rather than sitting with me. Which is perfectly legitimate, but I sit with many of the families. I think most of them came here and sat with me, something you don’t find in any other country in the world. If you would know how many hours I spent with the families of the fallen soldiers!”

Olmert blustered on for a while, comparing himself to Rudy Giuliani, stressing his commitment to peace and security, mocking his former Likud colleagues, and praising himself for the care he provides the families of the dead. He neglected to mention something I learned only later. For almost two years, he has repeatedly sent emissaries to Grossman, hoping for a reconciliation. These emissaries included his daughter Dana and a former speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, both sent to persuade Grossman to see him. Dana Olmert’s visit backfired; Grossman asked her to place herself in his shoes: Would she reconcile with her father, if she were Grossman? No, she said, according to people familiar with the conversation.

Burg’s message was unequivocal. Olmert is trying to save Israel by compromising with the Palestinians, and he is in dire need of help. The prime minister has permanently alienated the country’s right wing. The Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva announced shortly after the fatal attack that Olmert would not be welcome to pay a condolence call. “We cannot receive a prime minister who advocates against the spirit of the Torah and accept that Israel withdraws from a part of the Land of Israel,” a yeshiva official, Rabbi Haim Steiner, said.

Burg told me: “I believe that any person who wants to influence society cannot allow himself to be in a situation where you won’t talk to the prime minister.” But Grossman has so far rejected Burg’s pleas.

Burg’s visit was motivated not only by politics, he said. He is concerned about Olmert’s emotional well-being.

“The prime minister suffers the casualties of war,” Burg said. “He doesn’t sleep at night. He knows what Uri Grossman represents.”

The Jerusalem Post Internet Edition

'Atlantic' magazine: Is Israel finished?

HILARY LEILA KRIEGER - WASHINGTON , THE JERUSALEM POST

Apr. 6, 2008

As Israel prepares to celebrate its 60th birthday, the respected Atlantic Monthly magazine is keeping the champagne firmly corked.

Splashed across its forthcoming May front cover is the question, "Is Israel finished?"

In his 12-page article, Jeffrey Goldberg, an award-winning journalist and American Jew who made aliya and served in the IDF, asks a series of follow-up questions: "How can Israel survive the next 60 years in a part of the world that gives rise to groups like Hamas? How can Israel flourish if its army cannot defeat small bands of rocketeers? Does the concentration of so many Jews in a claustrophobically small space in the world's most volatile region actually undermine the Jewish people's ability to survive?"

"American Jews in particular need to realize that things are tenuous," Goldberg, who didn't choose the article's title, told The Jerusalem Post Friday. "It's good to ask the biggest questions. There's nothing wrong with that."

In searching for the answers, Goldberg spoke to a variety of Israeli politicians, writers and activists, including Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Prompted in particular by the death of left-wing author David Grossman's son Uri in the 2006 Lebanon war, which is a central focus of the piece, Goldberg asked Olmert, "Why is Israel less physically safe for Jews than America?"

To which Olmert replied, "Jews are not safer in Israel than they are in other parts of the world, but there is only one place that Jews can fight for their lives as Jews, and that is here."

The story also covers what Goldberg considers the threat within - as he sees it, the settler movement's progress in thwarting the will of the majority by making a two-state solution untenable.

"I'm worried. You can try to defend yourself as best as possible against the external threat, but you have to be aware of the internal threat as well," he said. "I'm very worried about the 10- to 15-year future of Israel. I'm worried about delegitimization, and delegitimization is a process that Israel can help along."

Goldberg's warning rings true to Israeli author and expat Leonard Fein, though he called the Atlantic headline "needlessly inflammatory."

"It breaks my heart. I'm desolate, but I think we're blowing it," said the Boston-based Fein, who founded Moment magazine and now serves on the board of Americans for Peace Now. "While I value [Israel's] economic progress and scientific contributions, I am very apprehensive about the next 60 years, and I think it's a perfectly appropriate thing to say at this time, rather than lull ourselves into an American New Year's Eve."

And many are saying it, as a slew of articles in the US press have seen Israel's milestone as cause for consternation and critical reflection rather than approbation.

"Sixty years is a very significant moment in an adult and a country. Therefore it presents an opportunity and a temptation for friends and foes to analyze, to pontificate, and that's what we're going to find. We're going to find people predicting great things, predicting dire things, asking dire questions," said Anti-Defamation League National Director Abraham Foxman, who had seen the Atlantic cover but not yet read the story.

"There are fair questions. Israelis are asking them, and friends of Israel are asking them out of love and friendship," he said. "I'm not troubled by good people, caring people, struggling with these questions" as Goldberg has.

Foxman noted he had another reason not to be troubled. He recalled marking Israel's 25th anniversary and hearing people asking, "Is Israel going to be there for the 50th?" That's one question that's already been answered.

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From: Jewish Weekly

Writing Israel Off

The 60th birthday is eliciting more dire predictions than bouquets.

The Atlantic's cover depicts Israel's star upon the red and green of the Palestinian flag. In the story, novelist David Grossman urged Israel to halt the Lebanon war just days before his son Uri, a tank commander, was killed in Lebanon.

by Jonathan Mark

Associate Editor

When Israel finally flatlines, don't say The Atlantic didn't warn you.

In May 2005, Atlantic published a lengthy speculation, "Will Israel Live to 100?" The answer suggested that the Zionist house was built more of twigs than of bricks. Now that Israel is hitting 60, the Atlantic asks again, more ominously and more immediately: "Is Israel Finished?"

The Atlantic's May cover — depicting the star from the Israeli flag placed on the red and green field of the Palestinian flag — comes at you with all the goose bumps of that song from "Cabaret," "Tomorrow Belongs To Me," only that "me" is them.

Jeffrey Goldberg, the Atlantic's masterful correspondent, builds his story around David Grossman, the Israeli novelist and leftist, who famously

and tragically called for a cease-fire in Lebanon in 2006, just days before his son, a soldier, was killed in that war's surreal and useless coda.

Grossman is among those convinced that "Israel's settlement enterprise on the West Bank was a catastrophe." Grossman tells Goldberg that Israel's instinctive and flawed reaction, first to Hezbollah and now to Hamas, is that "what doesn't work with force will work with more force. ... Force in this case will fan the flames of hatred for Israel in the region and the entire world, and may even, heaven forbid, create the situation that will bring upon us the next war and push the Middle East to an all-out, regional war."

What neither Goldberg nor Grossman can quite explain is why Israeli force against Arabs is certain to ignite Arab hatred, but Palestinian force against Israelis has only the opposite result: Israeli exhaustion, a sense of futility, an urge to surrender all Jewish claims to Judea, Samaria and East Jerusalem. We're suppose to accept the logic that killing Palestinians will make more Palestinians want to fight, but killing Israelis will make Israelis (personified by Grossman) not want to fight at all.

Like the Israelite spies who scouted Canaan, seeing themselves as grasshoppers and the Canaanites as giants, Grossman says, despite having an army, "the inner feeling is of absolute fragility, that all the time we are at the edge of the abyss."

Goldberg writes, how can Israel survive "if its army cannot defeat small bands of rocketeers?"

To Grossman, "the idea that Israel will not exist anymore ... hovers above us all the time." Grossman urged Israeli leaders to "go to the Palestinian people," to the

“moderates,” “recognize their continued suffering,” and do the one thing that he is convinced must be done: “leave the West Bank,” evacuate each settlement as surely as in Gaza.

Of course, admits Goldberg, the Gaza evacuation “resulted not in peace but in a barrage of rocket attacks,” and he quotes a Gaza imam, “It does not matter what the Jews do, we will not let them have peace.” That was right after a sermon in which that imam said Jews were “the sons of apes and pigs.”

While Grossman, the grieving parent, is a compelling emotional centerpiece for Goldberg, one wonders whom exactly does Grossman represent? Goldberg acknowledges that “many of Grossman’s allies on the left have abandoned the idea that Arabs will reconcile themselves to a Jewish state in their midst,” settlements or not. There is “a split on the left; some of Grossman’s allies believe that he is, in fact, too hard on the prime minister.”

So if many of Grossman’s allies on the left have abandoned Grossman’s central idea, and those on the right don’t accept Grossman’s premise either, why should we conclude that Israel is finished if Goldberg’s only star witness is the atypical Grossman?

The Economist (April 3) is another publication that devoted thousands of words (and several stories) to Israel’s birthday, or was this another death watch? The Economist tells us, Israel’s “future is as uncertain as at any time in its 60 years of history.”

There is “impressive economic growth” but that has only “widened wealth gaps rather than easing poverty.” The economic growth “will slow inexorably unless several serious structural weaknesses are fixed, including a faltering education system, low workforce participation and a sometimes sclerotic public sector. A volatile political system makes these reforms hard to achieve.”

Politically, says the Economist, “talks on a Palestinian state look doomed to failure. If they do succeed, the need to give up the West Bank will re-ignite internal Jewish conflicts, but if they don’t, fears will grow that a separation from the Palestinians may no longer be possible, forcing Israel to choose between enshrining a form of apartheid and relinquishing its Jewish character.”

No reporter bothers to ask why the suggested Palestinian state smacks of apartheid, a place where Jews can’t live, vote, own land, or visit religious places, unlike Palestinians within Israel’s borders who are Israeli citizens.

Meanwhile, the Economist notes, “Many Jews from the diaspora already view Israel as spiritually impoverished and uninviting.” No one explains why there are waiting lists and thousands of American Jewish students going to Israel for summer programs and pre-college yeshivas, and enrolling in Israeli universities.

The New York Times doesn’t have to wait for Israel’s 60th to cover Israel more thoroughly than any non-Israeli daily in the world. Ethan Bronner, now on the Israel beat, took a look at West Bank roads (March 28), and the Israeli Supreme Court decision that accepted the government claim that security necessitates some separate roads, one for Israelis (including Israeli Arabs) and one for Palestinians. Of course, there were charges of apartheid by Jews, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

There was an excellent piece (April 1) by Steven Erlanger on how Hamas’ “insults to Jews complicate peace.” Of course, an “insult” to a Jew would be a “hate crime” if the exact same words were dished on an American campus.

Once again, we hear Islamic holy men calling Jews “the brothers of apes and pigs,” along with providing justifications for suicide bombings and rocket launchings.

We are told that “many religious leaders” believe Jews will have “the punishment of burning in this world,” with one saying, “We are sure that the Holocaust is still to come upon the Jews.”

Surely, that Holocaust will only target the settlers, right?

Israel, in the meantime, instead of defending Sderot, is turning it into a Yad Vashem of sorts, “a must-see stop” to elicit pity from foreigners and visiting dignitaries. Bronner writes (April 5), the town is “edging into the center of Zionist consciousness as a symbol of the nation’s unofficial motto, ‘Never Again.’” It’s quite lucrative. Big money is pouring into Sderot.

On Tuesday, April 8, unreported by any non-Israeli paper, Hamas fired 32 mortar bombs and three rockets at this presumptive Yad Vashem. Israel’s foreign ministry’s version of “Never Again” was, again, to send 127 trucks into Gaza, bringing medicine, diapers, and food into the land of the rockets, aid for the congregants of the imams who are calling for Holocausts, for Israel to burn.

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# The next Zionist revolution

Apr 3rd 2008

From *The Economist* print edition

## ***Zionism is nearly twice as old as Israel. The debate about what it means continues to shape the country***

THERE is "an ethical problem", says Mr Yehoshua, the novelist, when religion and nationality are bound up as one, as they are for the Jews. In biblical times, during the period of the second temple in Jerusalem, religious and nationalist interests often clashed, most notably when religious zealots started an unwinnable uprising against the Roman occupation that led to the destruction of the temple and the start of 2,000 years of diaspora. But diaspora, suggests Mr Yehoshua, allowed the Jews to escape the internal contradictions of a state run on religious lines.

Israel's birth, however, recreated a Jewish nationalist framework based on land, language, culture and everyday life. And once again it is in conflict with demands rooted in religious belief. To avoid repeating the cycle, argues Mr Yehoshua, nationalism and religion have to be disconnected. He calls this separation "the next challenge of the Zionist revolution".

Like it or not, Zionism is Israel's official ideology and will probably remain so as long as Jews are in the majority there. But it has always been a mishmash of evolving and often conflicting ideas rather than a coherent creed. The secular socialist Zionism of the state's founders is no longer in vogue. To today's *haredim* a Zionist state means one that upholds Jewish law; to the religious-Zionist settlers, one that returns the Jewish people to all of their biblical lands; to the secular left, a state that is democratic and liberal yet manages to maintain a Jewish majority. Others champion secondary goals for Zionism, like setting an example in what Jews call *tikkun olam* ("world repair", ie, do-gooding). Mr Jabareen, the Palestinian-Israeli lawyer, argues that the Israeli left's current weakness stems from its inability to resolve the increasingly visible contradiction between being a Jewish and being a democratic state, whereas the right is happy to resolve it in favour of being Jewish.

Jews outside Israel, meanwhile, are questioning all the traditional Zionist assumptions about what the country should mean to them. Israel as the gravitational centre of the Jewish world? Not necessarily, say the Jews of America, who are about equally numerous. Israel as a hothouse of Jewish spiritual and cultural life? It is more diverse here, say Jews in America,

where Orthodox rabbis lack the hegemony they have in Israel; growing faster here, say Jews in Russia, where the proselytising Lubavitch movement has engineered a post-Soviet resurrection of Jewish life; more vibrant here, say Jews in western Europe, where these days lots of non-Jews are studying Hebrew, Yiddish, Torah and Jewish cultural history. Israel as a Jewish safe haven? You must be joking, say Jews almost everywhere, eyeing the rest of the Middle East.

As a result, traditional forms of Jewish support for Israel are changing. Some of the wealthy foreign Jews whose names adorn almost every Israeli university building, museum wing, hospital ward and public garden now wonder if this is the best use for their money. American Jews raised over \$340m in emergency aid during the 2006 Lebanon war, but Isaac Devash, an Israeli philanthropist and entrepreneur, argues that they need to stop compensating for the state's failings and instead strengthen it by strengthening the society that upholds it. One of his own projects, Atidim, helps bright people from poor areas get a good education so they can go back and revitalise their home towns. Sizeable Jewish donations also support Arab-Israeli advocacy groups like Mr Jabareen's Adalah.

For its part, Israel is starting to rethink what it expects of the diaspora. Ze'ev Bielsky, the chairman of the Jewish Agency, the main body responsible for promoting *aliyah*—Jewish immigration—still claims to believe in a goal set in 2001 of attracting a million new immigrants by 2020, which would mean quadrupling the current immigration rate with immediate effect (in fact, last year it reached its lowest level in 20 years). It is the kind of fantasy that sets some diaspora Jews' teeth on edge. But behind the scenes Mr Bielsky's agency and the government are also discussing a new "partial *aliyah*". This would allow people to enjoy most of the benefits of citizenship but still spend the majority of their time abroad, and allow Israel to reap the most from a globalised workforce.

Can Zionism evolve enough to allow Israel's non-Jewish citizens to feel truly part of the country? Mr Yehoshua envisages that with time, the growth of an inherently Israeli, post-diaspora culture could permit the separation of church and state. Arab-Israelis, while maintaining their own distinct culture, would then feel they belonged to Israel as much as British Jews, say, feel they belong to Britain. But that, he says, is "in the distant future". And it certainly will not happen unless Israel can ease its other problems: the structural weaknesses in the economy, the wealth gaps, the social divides and, most importantly, the conflicts with its neighbours.

# On Israeli Culture

## Steve Israel

Israeli culture is fascinating, but defies easy definition. Despite the small size of the country, its culture spreads out from many different bases, all of which will be addressed in this essay. To make a journey into Israeli culture is to take a trip into the furthest depths of the psyche of its people – precisely what this essay aims to do. Before such an undertaking, however, a number of background elements need to be pointed out. Enjoy the journey!

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## **On Israeli Culture**

### **1. Introduction**

#### **A. Defining Culture – Human and National**

To begin with, the word 'culture' requires definition. This is one of the more elastic terms in the lexicon, containing several possible meanings. This essay is based on two definitions that need to be examined simultaneously; it will draw on the connection between them, and the way in which they influence each other. The first defines human culture as the total way of life that people live; the other defines it in terms of artistic achievements in a variety of creative fields.

Thus, the culture (in either sense) of a particular national group clearly reflects the specific way of life or creative expression that it lives or produces. This is always quite difficult to characterize since – especially in the modern world – very few nations have a lifestyle that totally differs from that of their neighbors. Indeed, in the modern world of the so-called 'global village', in which Western culture is so all-encompassing, it is increasingly difficult to speak of distinct national cultures. With the decline of traditional cultures in many parts of the world, the distinctions between them have clearly waned as well. This subject will be discussed later with regard to developments that have taken place over the last few generations in the very young culture of Israel.

#### **B. Jewish Culture, Religious...**

Firstly, however, there is the question of Jewish secular culture and its roots. 'Culture' is a neutral term that reflects a group's way of life and its creative expressions, regardless of its ideology. If a group's way of life is based on a particular religious ideology, then their culture is likely to be – at center – a religious one. This was indeed the case for the Jewish people for thousands of years: their dominant, unifying ideology was religious. According to this ideology, the group's way of life and creative impulses existed under the umbrella of a belief that this was God's world and that God had mandated a particular way of life for them.

According to official Jewish ideology as it developed over thousands of years – most especially from the destruction of the Second Temple with the rise of Rabbinic ideology as the national belief – all life was to be lived in terms of religious observance. The legitimacy of specific modes of behavior was judged according to its degree of conformity with this ideology. Where certain aspects of Jewish life and creative output were seen to conflict with these principles, they were condemned or considered devoid of value. It is impossible, however, to generalize, as if the Jews' way of life in different times and places was identical: the lives of medieval Jews in Spain and in the German 'Ashkenazi' lands differed in many aspects. Nevertheless, common cultural presuppositions and ideology united Jews all over the world.

### **C. ...and Secular**

This ideology started to break down among European Jewry from the time of the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment), whose roots can be traced to the late 18th century. Gathering strength during the 19th century, this movement undermined many of the suppositions on which the Jewish way of life had formerly been built. From this era onward, the idea of a legitimate secular culture became increasingly accepted among certain Jewish sectors.

This is not to suggest that all those Jews who accepted the validity of secular culture abandoned all of the traditional Jewish ideas about God and God's world. However, many no longer accepted the idea that all aspects of life must be lived under the total control of Halacha and the Rabbinic agenda. As the legitimacy of secular expression became increasingly accepted, the way was paved for new ideas, ideologies and ways of life that had previously been shunned.

### **D. Zionism: a Movement of Secular or Religious Culture?**

This secular mode of expression gave birth to Zionism and, eventually, to the State of Israel itself. Within the Zionist movement – and within the State that followed – fierce struggles developed between the proponents of Rabbinic ideology and those who opposed them. Finally, it became clear that the proponents of Jewish secular culture had become dominant. Thus Zionism, the Yishuv (the pre-State Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael), and the Jewish State all developed within a fundamentally secular framework in which religion and religious (Orthodox) Jews had a place but did not call the tune.

### **E. Defining Israeli Culture. The Approach Taken in This Essay**

In this way, instead of Israeli (and modern Jewish) culture's being another expression of traditional Jewish ideology, a very different situation developed. Traditional Judaism has become one – among many – elements that have shaped the growth of Israeli culture (in both senses) over the past generations. The significance of this cannot be overstated. The national culture of Israel (both before and after the establishment of the State) has been shaped by many different influences. Some have profoundly affected the way of life (cultural definition number one) and yet have had only a limited effect on creative expression (cultural definition number two).

Most surveys of Israeli culture tend to concentrate on the second definition, only introducing aspects of the first definition wherever relevant. They therefore tend to be reduced to long lists of names of writers, musicians, films and plays, which are of limited usefulness to people making their first acquaintance with Israeli culture. It is hoped that the different approach taken in this essay will be more useful, in its attempt to examine the interaction between the two definitions of culture. A series of forces and phenomena will be examined briefly that have significantly influenced the Israeli way of life (definition number one); then ideas

and examples will be offered regarding ways in which these have been expressed in the creative arts (definition number two). It is hoped that surveying Israeli culture in this manner will be both more useful and more challenging than the standard type of survey.

Such an analysis will be less than comprehensive, however. By limiting the number of central themes and influences to thirteen, many more marginal elements will be omitted. Furthermore, the elements that are surveyed will not be examined in maximum detail: that would require a book of several hundred pages. Secondly, there will be no attempt at an exhaustive survey of cultural expression; rather, central examples of the main forms and media of cultural expression will be offered. Not all the relevant aspects of artistic expression in relation to each of the subjects chosen will be mentioned; nevertheless, it is hoped that this general survey will introduce the reader to the range of forms of cultural expression in Israel. Individual cultural creators are mentioned as examples of wider phenomena, rather than sole proponents.

With these caveats in mind, it is time to begin this survey of the main influences on Israeli culture. They will be examined in roughly chronological order, according to the beginning of the main period of their influence on the Israeli way of life. However, the expression of each subject will be brought up-to-date. This will make for a rather bumpy progression from subject to subject, but it seems to be the best and least complicated way of treating the subject.

## **2. Zionism**

Any survey of the influences on the specific way of life that has developed in Israel must begin with Zionism. In other places, ideas introduced to a population became an integral part of the culture of that society, but modern Israel was born out of an idea without which there would be no Jewish society or State here. Reiteration of this basic point is essential to understanding the impact of Zionism on this country.

One of the most important discussions within the Zionist movement dealt with the type of culture that the Old/New Land (the title of Herzl's futuristic novel on life in Eretz Yisrael) should produce. There were already questions regarding the relationship between the old and the new, and the West and the East, in the early stages of the movement. Indeed, both are expressed in Herzl's book. The Zionist organization was the arena in which the main discussions on culture were fought out in the early days; however, the focus for these questions gradually moved – appropriately – to the Land of Israel itself. As the different streams of Zionism developed, each formed its own concept of the culture that should flourish in Zion.

All of these streams spoke of the development of something fundamentally new in the Jewish world. Under Herzl's sway, political Zionism conceived of a way of life in Eretz Israel infused with advanced Western culture. Religious Zionism talked

of the need to blend 'Torah Ve'avodah' (Torah study and work) into a new kind of a culture for the Jewish people. Labor Zionism believed that laboring on the soil, as working men and women constructed their own lives, would result in a culture based on the relationship between the people and the land. There was also a stream called cultural Zionism, built round the ideas of one of the greatest of all Zionist thinkers, Ahad Ha'am. He spoke of the need to secularize the Jewish heritage and use the finest Jewish values, culled from the works of the Prophets, as the basis for the new society. It was the friction between these varied visions that created the foundations of the new society and its way of life.

One notable creative expression of Zionism was the conscious attempt to produce an art form that would be suited to the land and its nationalist movement. The leading name in this regard was that of Professor Boris Schatz, who immigrated from Bulgaria at the beginning of the 20th century. He opened the first art school in Palestine: Bezalel.

Schatz tried to inspire his students with the need to create a national art. The result was a highly romanticized blend of Oriental symbols and Biblical imagery, which became known as 'Hebrew Eastern.' For millennia, the Jewish imagination had been filled with images of the land. Schatz and his artists tried to use this to create a new combination of icons and symbols. They drew pictures of ancient Hebrews hauling great bunches of grapes over mythical landscapes; Hebrew women drawing water from ancient wells and prophetic figures pointing the way over distant mountains, that would both capture old images and help to create new ones. They used a variety of art forms to do this; for example, their work became extremely important as the basis for the propagandistic posters that served the Zionist movement so well in the early decades of the movement, and the wall tiles that they created to adorn the buildings of early Tel Aviv.

Another significant achievement of early Zionism in this context was the creation of a series of mythic heroes who became the basis for Zionist education and inspiration. These were figures, old and new, out of whose reconstructed stories a model of new Jewish heroism was built. Chief among these were the trilogy of ancient heroes: the Maccabees, the fighters of Masada and Bar Kochba. Each of these figures or groups served as the inspiration for countless poems, stories, plays and visual images.

The mythos of Masada gained widespread popularity after the Zionist poet Yitzhak Lamdan wrote his poem Masada in the wake of the terrible Eastern European pogroms of the early 1920s. From that time onward, it became a fundamental story in early Zionist youth movement culture (see further in this essay). Thousands of youngsters trekked to Masada in tough conditions in order to prove their worthiness to be connected to the Zionist society of the Yishuv, providing an interesting example of art's influence on life. Among the newer legendary figures, Yosef Trumpeldor, Hana Senesh and the fighters of the Warsaw ghetto also provided material for countless dramatic sketches and poems.

In general, Zionism contributed a heroic layer to the developing self-image of the new Jewish society that was building up in Eretz Yisrael. This heroic aspect would affect all forms of artistic expression in the early years of the young society and State. The beginnings of Israeli cinema are often referred to as 'the heroic years'. This epithet is not meant to reflect the hardships faced by the early film-makers, but rather the way in which their films tended to reinforce the Zionist mythos, strengthening the self-image of the Yishuv as participating in an heroic, historic drama.

### **3. The Land**

Zionism turned the Land of Israel into the stage for the great modern drama of Jewish history, giving its physical form a starring role. For thousands of years the land had played a crucial role in the Jewish consciousness; for almost two millennia, however, its image had taken on mythical proportions in the minds of Jews around the world becoming increasingly distanced from the contemporary reality. One of the great contributions of Zionism to the Jewish people was the restoration of the real land to the center of the historical stage and its reclamation as the physical heritage of the nation. When the early Zionists made Aliyah, one of their most important acts was to strengthen their physical connection to the land: they came here inspired by the concept of the land and stayed to embrace its reality.

Throughout the millennia of Diaspora life, Jews had largely become distanced not just from the Land of Israel but also from nature in general. Rabbinic ideology had sought to subordinate nature to the world of the text. Some had considered observation and appreciation of the glories of the natural world as time taken away from Torah study. In a sense, therefore, the early pioneers' embrace of nature upon their return to the Land of Israel was a double revolution. They reclaimed nature as a legitimate human sphere for Jews just as they reclaimed the physical land as part of their heritage.

Early Zionist literature reveled in physical descriptions of the land. Because many of these were written in Europe by people who had never seen the place they were ostensibly describing, they carry the unmistakable aura of an idyll. The romances of Avraham Mapu, considered the first modern novelist of Zion, are influenced as much by the Song of Songs as by contemporary reality. Haim Nahman Bialik's early poetry of Zion (written in Eastern Europe) was much more realistic in its observations of nature, but it was the natural landscapes of Russia that he was describing. Slowly, however, works came to be published by writers with an intimate knowledge of the land that they were describing. Among the writers and poets of Palestine and Israel, a completely different mood was felt: they were now showing the real land, as opposed to the mythical land of the imagination. Writers like Avraham Shlonsky wrote paeans of praise to the Jezre'el valley, which almost took on a life of its own in his capable, imaginative hands. Today, Meir Shalev continues that legacy in a rather more sober vein. S. Yizhar

wrote descriptions of the land with adjectives and adverbs rolling and tumbling breathlessly after each other in long flights of dizzy physical description.

Visual artists were also central in this process. Artists such as Reuven Rubin and Nahum Gutman played a significant part in this process, using different techniques – including combinations of documentary art and playful idealized primitivism – that were, and remain, very popular. As art moved away from primitive forms of realism and tended increasingly towards the more abstract, it may be argued that its ability to convey the emotional power of the land decreased, although many painters continued to use primary land colors as a central element in their work.

Similarly, the sense of place is very strong in Israeli literature and popular music. Many poems and songs celebrate specific locations, as if to strengthen the physical ties with the land that had been lost for so many years. Much poetry captures in great detail a particular view, a perfect example being Rachel's poem *Sham Harei Golan (There Are the Mountains of the Golan)*. It describes a slice of a physical landscape in such detail that it is possible even now – eighty years later – to find the exact spot in which she stood when she wrote the poem.

There were those who moved from idealization of the land to what some perceive as an 'idolatrous' approach. These were the writers and artists of the 'Canaanite movement', which reached its peak in the late 1940s. This movement focused around a group of intellectuals seeking to break away from the country's Diaspora roots and look for connections only in the soil of the land in which they lived. They 'worshipped' the land with the intensity of paganism. Drawing their models from the distant past of the Land of Canaan, they produced some interesting and important artistic statements about their new allegiance. The most famous of these is the work of the sculptor Yitzhak Danziger, and especially his sculpture *Nimrod*, his depiction of the pagan hunter-hero.

Photography also celebrated and strengthened the tie between people and land, in both stills and film. However, this art form developed simultaneously in two directions. Some photographed images develop a mythical picture of the landscape – either deserted and barren or fruitful and renewed. Several of the old semi-documentary films of the 1930s – such as *Zot Hi Haaretz (This Is the Land)* and *Avoda (Labor)* – develop both angles. They show the transition from deserted wilderness to plentiful flowering, overflowing with water, in almost messianic terms, with soundtracks of heavenly choirs in the background. On the other hand, photography – still and in films – showed the physical reality and caught the real flavor of the land and its people.

With the passage of time, there has been a clear trend away from myth-making toward a real appraisal of the land, although some artists occasionally have taken different directions. Probably the most significant of these developments occurred after the Six-Day War in 1967, when Jerusalem and the Biblical heartland of ancient Israel came under Israeli control. As Israeli citizens poured ecstatically into the new areas, an irresistible process of myth-making arose. It

was as if the very names and sites of ancient Israel had the power to unlock the deepest emotional reactions of many Israeli Jews. The effect on Israeli society was deep and widespread. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on religion (Section 10).

One last subject that should be briefly mentioned in this context is the Israeli reaction to archaeology. In the early years of the State, many perceived it with a kind of faith akin to religion. The passion for uncovering the past of the land far transcended the academic interest that archaeological digs usually produce. It was clearly connected to the Israelis' existential need to strengthen their ties to the land and to 'prove' that their roots were really here. In contemporary Israel, this passion has cooled. There is still great interest in archaeology and archaeological sites, and museums continue to attract many domestic visitors; but the modern Israeli's search for roots is weaker than that of the previous generation.

#### **4. Jerusalem**

Jerusalem deserves separate mention for two reasons. Firstly, despite its belonging in a sub-section of the larger subject of land, its position on the scale of myth and reality is different from the rest of the country. Secondly, it has provided a host of artists of different kinds with tremendous inspiration.

It may not be common knowledge today that many of the early pioneers who came to Palestine had distinctly ambivalent feelings about Jerusalem. Many associated it with the old image of the Torah Jew who – as they perceived – wished to continue to weigh down the Jews in mourning for a lost past and praying for a Messianic future. They felt that they should rather try to transform the present, as Zionism demanded. Consequently, many pioneers developed a deep antipathy toward the city, spending many years in the country before visiting it and even then, with some trepidation.

With time, however, a new Jerusalem came into being alongside the old one. This was a new political and cultural center, based in the new suburbs that sprang up from the 1920s on the initiative of the Zionist movement. While the approach to life in the new city was very unlike that of the old town, its rhythm still differed substantially from that of the rest of the country, and especially the newly-developing Tel Aviv. The latter was seen as more lively and dynamic: Jerusalem walked to a slower beat. It was a center of culture in the European sense, however: the establishment there of the Hebrew University in 1925 assured its primacy of place in the country for many years.

Both cities produced a literary geography of their own. It may be claimed that the two great writers who, above all others, celebrated the distinctiveness of Jerusalem were Shai Agnon and Yehuda Amichai, albeit in very different ways. Ostensibly a writer of the 'old school,' Agnon celebrated the older Jewish communities of the city. Steeped in the language of religious tradition, his writing

followed almost completely a line of tension between the shtetl in Europe (represented by his Galician hometown of Buczacz whose community was destroyed in the Holocaust) and his 'new' home of Jerusalem. Although critics perceive clear assessments of the traditional way of life in his writing, on the surface, his treatment of Jerusalem was one of celebration and nostalgia for a way of life that was passing from the world. Amihai, on the other hand, was fiercely secular and critical of the burden of history and myth that Jerusalem carried, even as he wrote passionate love songs about the city and its people.

In 1967, as the Old City came under Israeli control, Amihai was one of the few writers whose poetry spoke of longing for the old Jerusalem, meaning the city before the war. In this, however, he was out of step with his generation: the majority of Israeli Jews and writers spoke with great enthusiasm about the newly-accessible places in Jerusalem. They visited these sectors with intense excitement, Agnon included. Prose, poetry and songs of the most emotional kind were written about the city. Most famous of all the songs was Naomi Shemer's *Yerushalayim shel Zahav (Jerusalem of Gold)*, which drew upon Biblical and Rabbinic imagery and expressed the lure of the old, mythical Jerusalem for the contemporary secular Israeli. At this time, during the late 1960s and early 70s, Jerusalem reached its most consensual position ever in modern Zionist history. Jerusalem became the center of celebration as countless literary and musical works were written in its praise.

As time passed, however, the virtual consensus about Jerusalem lessened as it became a subject of contention. Although it generally had been kept out of the political debate that engulfed Israel in discussions of the territories taken over in 1967, the situation was clearly changing. The first indication may have been evident in the new, increasingly vociferous Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) militancy; perhaps the first Intifada of the 1980s indicated the beginning of the change. It is possible that it had already occurred for many people, and it was only now that it began to become obvious. Jerusalem was now perceived increasingly in political terms by many in the center and on the left. They no longer considered it the comforting, inspirational capital city of old: it carried emotional ties with the past, but it was a real city with real political problems. The myth was no longer functioning. The number of celebratory songs written about the city decreased dramatically compared to the trend of some thirty years earlier. For many on the right, however, the inspiration remained. Thus, Jerusalem remains a different city for different people.

## 5. The Bible

The Tanach (Hebrew Bible) has played an integral part in the development of modern Israeli society. Using popular music as a measure of this phenomenon, large numbers of songs were written in the early decades of the country whose lyrics – sung by an eager public – were taken from the Tanach. *Shir HaShirim (The Song of Songs)* was a particular favorite. At first glance this may seem surprising, given that the overwhelming tendency in Israeli cultural creativity has been

secular. Why would so secular a generation turn so enthusiastically to the Tanach?

The answer seems to be that the most new Zionist Jews, who identified themselves as secular, considered the Tanach as a cultural, historical, poetic, even a geographical text – anything, in fact, but a religious one. Thus, while many disassociated themselves from the religious context and philosophy of the text, they identified very strongly with its other aspects. No less than religious Jews, they felt that the text was theirs. They learned it and – for the most part – celebrated it. In a sense, their reaction to such texts was akin to the reaction towards archaeology mentioned above. In fact, text and archaeology were perceived as being aspects of the same thing – the claim to Jewish identity in this land. The walks and hikes through the land that became second nature to the early pioneering generations were seldom undertaken without a Bible stashed in the backpack.

Early Israeli literature carried on the tradition that had been born in the Haskalah. It attempted to expand the Biblical stories in prose and poetry by penetrating to the emotional and psychological aspects of the narratives that had been largely left out of the original. A good example of this tendency is Moshe Shamir's books on King David and Bathsheva, and on the Maccabee kings. Now living back on the soil of the Biblical homeland, writers (including playwrights) were apparently able to connect with these ancient figures and tell their stories in a way which de-mythologized them, made them more real – like the land itself.

Sculpture and art also contributed to the new trends of realism. Freed from religious constraints regarding figurative art, many artists began to depict Biblical figures, often in strange and rather surrealistic surroundings. The work of Ivan Schwebel, who showed King David cavorting down the streets of modern Jerusalem, is a strong example of this phenomenon.

The point being made here is simply that the Bible is a living, approachable text for many Israelis who have broken with the religious tradition and feel free to re-imagine and re-examine its text from a fresh perspective. Living on the land has somehow freed the imagination of many of the country's creative minds, allowing them to mine the depths of the Biblical text for a new generation.

Many have discerned in it a potential for paradigms that express the modern Jewish and Israeli reality. Perhaps the most powerful example of this is the deep relevance that many have found in the story of the *binding of Isaac (Akedah)*. There have been two important modern interpretations of this story in modern Israel, both taking the standpoint of Isaac, the innocent victim. The first one interprets him as a victim of the *Shoah (Holocaust)*; the second shows him as a victim of Israel's wars – the fallen soldier. The element common to these interpretations is identification with the figure of the victim of ideologies be they racial or national. They portray Isaac – the modern Jew or the modern Israeli – as the one who pays the human price of others' ideological fanaticism and blindness.

Some deeply powerful texts have emerged out of this reading of the traditional story. Amihai, for instance, wrote a stunning poem that goes beyond the idea of Isaac as victim. He closes his poem by commenting that the reader of the poem and the audience of the dramatic act tend to go home together with Abraham and Isaac, sighing with relief. He points out, however, that the real victim – the ram, which does not survive the conclusion of the story – is usually forgotten. For Amihai, the ram represents the real hero of the Biblical story as the ultimate victim.

## 6. The Hebrew Language

While the connection between the flowering of the new living language and the growth of Zionism and the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael is too well known to need recounting here, any survey of Zionist and Israeli culture must mention the centrality of Hebrew in the development of a new kind of Jewish life. Its revival came from two different directions. Initiated by the pedantic ideological considerations of a few 'fanatics', and perpetuated by a multitude of linguists and academics, it ultimately developed beyond these limitations. It indeed became a living language, nurtured by the people who used it in their daily lives.

It is a commonplace to speak of Hebrew as a dead language that was in need of revival. It seems, however, that an important meaning of this metaphor is often missed. In order for the language to become a vehicle of everyday communication, a constant evolution of vocabulary and speech patterns was necessary. The language had to become more 'everyday' – more flexible and natural – allowing for the influence of real life. It would be impossible for a society to develop, speaking only with the grandeur and formality of the great classical texts, however rich they may be. It is in this sense that the 'dead' language had to be revived.

It is fascinating to see this process evolving in the development of the literary texts of the modern period. This is exemplified most clearly in poetry. The great poets of the Haskalah and the early Zionist period produced some outstanding poetry. Bialik, Tchernikovsky and Fichman, for example, created powerful and dramatic texts. Despite their greatness as text, however, they sound rather stilted and formal to a modern ear. Although the esthetic experience can be extraordinary, to read these writers the modern Israeli ear has to travel a distance similar to that which an English ear has to travel to read Shakespeare. At first glance, a comparison between the language of Shakespeare and the language of Bialik may seem surprising: Shakespeare lived nearly five hundred years ago while Bialik died only in 1934. Nonetheless, it is apt because the Hebrew language has undergone such revolutionary changes since the period of Bialik's formative years as a poet, as it has evolved into a truly living language, stripped of its stiffness and formality.

Zionist and Israeli poetry has produced a number of generations, each of which has tended to use the language in a different way. The generation after Bialik – the generation of Natan Alterman, Shlonsky and Leah Goldberg – produced a much more flexible mode of poetic language, tending often towards the playful and the humorous. The ‘third generation’ was that of Amichai, Natan Zach and T. Carmi. Their language continued the trend towards naturalism – a far cry from the rhetoric of the ‘first generation.’ Amichai, in particular, used many everyday expressions in his poetry, sometimes creating a surrealistic air through his use of unusual contemporary speech patterns and images. The tone of the poetry of these writers also changed, emphasizing personal rather than the collective experience, and moving away from the subject of the nation. This tendency will be discussed later in Section 13. Although some of this generation is still writing, younger poets have emerged in the last decades who have taken these tendencies further still. The Hebrew language of much of contemporary poetry is almost unrecognizable as the same language in which poets such as Bialik and Tchernikovsky wrote. Nevertheless, it is, indeed, the same language.

The same tendencies are noticeable in prose. This essay will not note the different ‘generations,’ but rather will focus on a few of the top contemporary Israeli prose writers. There are some excellent authors today whose work has been embraced by the international literary world and the general public. Foremost among these are Amos Oz and A.B. Yehoshua, whose works have been in print in many different languages for decades: their style is modern, their language rich and allusive. In contrast, new writers such as Orly Castel Bloom and Etgar Keret use a very different prose whose everyday character and apparent ‘flatness’ of tone produce a strangely surrealistic effect that is at odds with the richer narrative prose of their predecessors. To a large extent, they come very close to writing in contemporary speech patterns. This significant development is very modern in tone. It remains to be seen whether this type of work will stand the test of time and the fickle tastes of the current generation of readers.

## **7. Pioneering Ideology: ‘Halutzit’**

The ideological influence of the pioneering generation – the Halutzim – on the creation of the society, State and way of life of young Israel, cannot be overstated. It was all-encompassing, leaving an imprint on everything it touched. There is room here for only a limited number of observations on its effect on cultural patterns and creative expression in the young society.

It is imperative to note that the Halutzic view of the world was essentially collective. While their ideology spoke of the importance of the individual, this basically lay in his/her relationship to the collective endeavor of the society. An individual was expected to express the interests of that society, and to work for its benefit – part of a number of larger communal units that interacted to form the society as a whole. This collective ideology became the foundation of the most cultural expression of Israeli society in its formative years.

It may also be suggested that, by its very nature, the Halutzic emphasis on physical work as the foundation of their way of life produced a very male culture. Women's struggle to gain equal status was bound to be problematic in a society that measured success and personal standing largely according to an individual's physical contribution in building up the society. While this will be dealt with in Section 12, it is appropriate to mention here that the most personal writing of the pioneering generation was produced by a woman, Rachel Bluwstein. It was she who expressed the pioneering ethos of the society in a way that did not subordinate the individual: her work always presents the particularized voice even as she celebrates her attempted contribution to the collective. Perhaps this is not coincidental. Despite protestations to the contrary, however, the world of the Halutzim was a male world.

In many ways, it was also an Eastern European world. It drew its atmosphere, ideology and many of its symbols and trademarks from the socialist, revolutionary circles in the Eastern European lands from which most of its members came. Perhaps the perfect cultural expression of all of these tendencies – emphasis on the collective, maleness and the Eastern European character – is the emergence of the workers' choirs of the Yishuv that flourished from the 1920s and 30s onwards. The texts of their songs reflect the pioneering ethos, but the melodies – drawn from Eastern Europe – recall nothing so much as the Red Army Choir that was world famous under the Soviet regime.

Undeniably, music provides a fine cultural path for entering the world of the Halutzim. Dozens of songs were written – many on the basis of the works of poets such as Rahel or Bialik – that celebrated the pioneers' ideas and ideals. These songs tend to reflect a strong secular pride in the achievements of the young society: whatever has been achieved has been achieved by the people themselves; God has had no part in building the society. Man (and, to a lesser extent, woman) has been the creator this time.

Indeed, this society made a new religion of physical labor: a priesthood of the Halutzim, a synagogue of the kibbutz and *Avodat Kodesh* (*holy work*) of its members' constructive actions. When Avraham Shlonsky speaks of his work as a road-builder, he equates the newly built houses with the boxes ('houses' – *batim*) of *Tefillin* (*phylacteries*), and the new black roads crossing the land with their straps.

Early cinema also focuses on the pioneers' work. Almost messianic in their associations, the films of the 1930s express great admiration for and delight in the achievements of the pioneers and new kibbutzniks. Life in towns is sometimes shown to be problematic, individualistic and decadent: it is in the collective achievements of the pioneering society that the essence of creativity is found. In one famous scene from this era, the pioneers of Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek are shown singing a Halutzic song. First the camera pans around the kibbutz, showing its members at their different tasks all singing the same song; then the scene switches to the dining hall where all the kibbutzniks are singing the song

collectively. It is a powerful moment, and one that perfectly captures the spirit of the pioneering world.

As time progressed, the pioneers' world ceased to be the central expression of the highest values of Israeli society. Society changed – as did the kibbutzim themselves – and other models prevailed. The pioneers and their ideals seemed increasingly at odds with the widespread mores and more individualistic atmosphere of the times. Their way of life became the subject of increasing criticism, and even ridicule. *Night of the Twentieth*, a famous 1970s play by a leading Israeli playwright, Yehoshua Sobol, provided a sharp, iconoclastic critique of some of the outstanding symbols and great individuals of the pioneering movement. Israelis flocked to see the play. In retrospect, this may have been the beginning of the pioneer's dethronement from the central place in the Israeli ideological pantheon.

## 8. The Holocaust

The *Shoah (Holocaust)* is central to the Israeli psyche. Unlike most historical events whose influence gradually recedes, it is fair to say that the influence of this series of events on Israeli society has actually increased with the passage of time. This process is complex and difficult to describe in a few sentences; however, understanding its dynamics is essential in any survey of Israeli culture.

Large sectors of Israeli society – the mainstream, the decision-makers and the cultural icons – were emotionally 'blocked' for decades in their attitude towards the Shoah. The main reason for this is that it was difficult for many Israelis – and for the society as a whole – to face this period in Jewish history without the protective, ideological armor of a Zionist perspective that condemned the victims even as it mourned them. The prevailing activist stream in Zionism perceived them as having ignored the warning signs – of having clung to the relative comfort of the Diaspora, and having ultimately gone to their deaths as the proverbial 'sheep to the slaughter.' In a sense, the Shoah confirmed the Zionists' belief regarding the perils of the Diaspora, the weakness of the unassertive Diaspora Jew and the strength of the proud, upstanding, national Jew that they believed Zionism had produced. "We would have done things differently," they stated. For years, this patronizing attitude prevented many Israelis from understanding the complexities of the true situation that the Jews of Europe had faced.

This subject is finely described and satirized in Shulamit Hareven's superb story, *The Witness*. The story demonstrates the problems encountered by a young Holocaust refugee who arrives at an Israeli boarding-school after his whole family has been murdered. Through the self-righteous tone of the narrator, a teacher at the school, we witness the callousness of the society at that time, and its inability to identify and empathize with the experiences of the victims and survivors.

The Zionists chose to memorialize instead the memory of the proud fighters of Warsaw and other ghettos. These represented the 'positive' side of Jewish behavior as opposed to the faceless millions who had gone shamefully to their deaths according to the prevailing Zionist viewpoint. In such an atmosphere, it is hardly surprising that – apart from those who had had direct contact with the Shoah – the subject was kept at a distance and intellectualized by much of Israeli society. It is safe to say that this stage – which may be called 'Stage One' of Israeli Holocaust memory – lasted until well into the 1970s. Two exceptions should be mentioned here, however, who were not part of the denial that characterized most of Israeli society: Aharon Applefield and Ida Fink, both outstanding in their written evocation of Holocaust Europe, had had personal experience of those events.

However, a number of factors gradually caused an erosion of the usual Israeli distance from the Shoah, allowing a more honest, personal evaluation of the past. At this point, more understanding and empathy began to creep in. Two sets of factors may have caused this transformation: knowledge and emotional responses. The initial step towards a deeper understanding of the recent past began with the Eichman trial in 1961. For the first time, Holocaust survivors were encouraged to come forward as witnesses and retell their experiences openly before the Israeli public. Further revelations concerning the German bureaucracy before and during the war demonstrated clearly that the situation had been far more complex than many had previously realized. At a later stage, increasing knowledge about these events began to permeate the Israeli consciousness. In addition, many groups of young Israelis began serious study of the Shoah that included taking trips to Poland.

The change in emotional responses is far more complex and can be linked partly to a change in the Israelis' self-image as they confronted a hostile world and found themselves existentially threatened by Arab states and terror. They had formerly seen themselves through the prism of ideological Zionism as people who rejected fear and neuroses – the heritage of the Diaspora Jew; now they found themselves in fear for their families and for themselves. The figure of the Jew as victim could no longer be relegated to the outside Jewish world as the exclusive property of the Diaspora Jew: they began to consider themselves victims. In so doing, they began to understand the plight of those co-religionists who see the world standing by passively as the forces of hatred close in on the Jews. As this occurred, they began not only to acknowledge the Shoah in their heads but also to feel it in their hearts. The empathy that previously had been lacking in many Israelis now became evident and the entire subject became acceptable. This is evident in Israeli creative culture. For example, judging by the ideological position represented in some of the early Israeli art on display at Yad vashem, the official national site of Shoah commemoration, Israeli artists and writers have clearly become more empathetic.

This second, empathetic stage of Shoah remembrance is exemplified by more recent group of writers who were not directly involved themselves. Nonetheless, their work demonstrates deep sensitivity particularly with regard to the lives of

survivors in Israel. David Grossman, Shulamit Hareven and Savyon Liebrecht, for example, stress the tragedy of lives forever changed by the events in Europe; Hareven also criticizes the insensitive paternalism of the Yishuv after the World War II.

The Israeli cinema generally has not focused on the Shoah. Two important feature films that tackled the subject of survivors in the early years of statehood, however, should be mentioned. Both were made by Israel's leading film actress, Gila Almagor; drawing on her personal memories as the daughter of a survivor family, she created two truly wonderful, empathetic pictures in the 1980s and 90s. *The Summer of Aviya* (1988) and *Underneath the Domim Tree* (1995) possess deep emotional power and are two of the finest Israeli films. Another, very different, film is the full-length documentary *Because of That War*. This portrays the extraordinary attempt of rock musician Yehuda Poliker and his partner Yaakov Gil'ad, both children of survivors, to write rock songs about the Shoah, chronicling their parents' experiences.

A large number of other documentaries have been made on this subject. With time, however, the emphasis has changed. At first statements were made on a large scale, not only in film and literature, but also in monumental art such as the powerful Scroll of Fire, situated in the Judean hills around Jerusalem. In recent years, however, these have tended to be replaced by smaller, more personal statements. Many documentaries have now been produced in which survivors record the details of their daily lives and recount their personal history.

In some ways, the weight of this memory is becoming heavier with the passage of time. Clearly this subject will be part of the Israeli psyche and its artistic expression for many years to come.

## **9. War and the Army**

Few subjects have affected the Israeli psyche more powerfully than the conflict that has engulfed the country, in different forms, since the very first day of statehood. Zionist theory did not intend this situation to occur: Israel was meant to be the place where the Jews would be finally freed from the specter of anti-Semitism that had haunted them through long centuries of persecution. According to this ideology, the subjects that should have stood at the center of Israeli culture were, for example, the Bible, the Land and the transformation of the 'new' Jew. To a certain extent the illusion continued until the birth of the State in 1948. While the Yishuv had constantly to contend with acts of terror and bloodshed, it was only with the establishment of statehood that the subject finally broke through to the center of the Israeli psyche. It has stayed there ever since, albeit in changing forms.

In 1948 enmity and fighting took the form of outright war for the first time and Israel lost its innocence. The death toll of the War of Independence (6,000: approximately 1% of the population of that time) was a blow that could not be

ignored. Despite the deep sense of achievement at the country's defeat of the surrounding Arab armies and despite the citizens' pride and enthusiasm regarding independence, a cloud hovered over Israeli life from that period on, compounded by recognition of the extent of the Shoah.

However, in those early years of statehood there was an optimism born of the belief that time was working to Israel's advantage and that peace would arrive at some point. Israel represented the force of the future; with its good, moral intentions, the citizens were convinced that right would win out in the end. When it became clear that the War of Independence had not brought peace and that there was likely to be more bloodshed in the future, the population of Israel settled down to wait patiently. Wars came regularly at first, approximately once a decade: after 1948 came 1956 and 1967. Despite the losses incurred, most Israelis remained optimistic. The Six-Day War unleashed the full effect of this phenomenon, later linked with a messianic belief set free by the capturing of what had once been the heartland of ancient Israel.

Many consider the turning point to have been the Yom Kippur War in 1973. After this war, a different note began to be heard. This was caused not only by the high death toll, but also by the way in which victory had finally been attained after appalling losses in the first days. The war had come as a terrible surprise, the result – many believed – of a general Israeli arrogance and sense of invincibility. From that time forward, the atmosphere in the country started to change and a much more pessimistic – some would call it realistic – tone became part of the national discourse.

This tone has increasingly darkened over the past decades, reaching its height at such crises as the early stages of the Lebanese War (early 1980s), the first Intifada (late 1980s), the terror wave of the mid-90s and the second Intifada (late 1990s). These were interrupted by the various peace treaties and other moves towards peace that caused optimism and occasional euphoria. At these periods of hiatus – the Camp David agreement with Egypt, the peace treaty with Jordan and the beginning of the Oslo accords – large sectors of the population found their old enthusiasm and regained the faith that time was working towards peace and a new, more optimistic Middle East. At the present time, however, most optimists are fighting hard to retain any of their former faith. The Middle East looks darker than perhaps it ever has before. While there is hope that, at some point, breakthroughs to peace must occur once again, such faith is more in the line of a prayer than a solid, rational analysis of the current situation.

War has affected Israeli creative culture in no uncertain terms. A parallel change from optimism to pessimism has been evident in the artistic process as well. The heroic, mythical view of the Israeli soldier, fighting a good cause against an evil enemy, has been replaced largely by a more questioning, critical outlook that stresses the complexity of the situation. The traditional ideas of 'good against bad', 'the few against the many' and 'David against Goliath' have been replaced by a less simplistic, much more multi-dimensional attitude.

This transition is very clear in the field of cinema, as demonstrated by the following important markers. The early period of Israeli cinema often featured the soldier-as-hero as one of its central figures. The 1954 feature *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* is typical of this genre. In a particularly famous scene, the Israeli soldier is seen fighting for his life against a prisoner from the southern front, who turns out to be a Nazi S.S. officer. The Israeli is portrayed as humane, generous and merciful (but still a great fighter) while the Nazi is portrayed as treacherous and militaristic, with no moral beliefs. Different versions of this tough but moral figure, reluctant to fight but willing to do so for a just cause, are found in many of the early Israeli films. Since the self-image of the Israeli was happily believed in and accepted by Diaspora Jewry, it is not surprising to find such a figure also appearing in films like *Exodus* and *Cast a Giant Shadow*, as portrayed (respectively) by Paul Newman and Kirk Douglas.

It was natural that, with the passage of time, more complex pictures would start to creep in. The fascinating 1986 film *Ricochet (Two Fingers From Sidon* in Hebrew) – made by the army as a training film for introducing soldiers to the complexity of the situation in Lebanon – proved to be a landmark in this regard. It portrays the struggle between the idealistic, moral viewpoint of Gadi, a new officer sent up from training school to Lebanon, and the world-weary Tuvia, his commanding officer, who is cynical and hardened by his experience of a world in which idealism is a weakness. The film does not choose sides between these two viewpoints, but remains ambivalent.

*The Time of the Cherries (The Cherry Season* in Hebrew) was also a product of the Lebanese situation, but was less 'establishment' and much less ambivalent. This scathing, surrealistic 1991 film focused on a group of civilians, called into reserve duty in Lebanon. These figures are a far cry from the heroic soldiers in early Israeli cinema: they are portrayed as victims, concerned only with surviving their service and returning home unharmed, though not unscarred. The film's standpoint is that this is the most sensible thing they can possibly do. In one particularly harsh scene, one of the soldiers screams out an intense accusation against the politicians whom he blames for putting the army in such an absurd situation. It is made clear that there is no glory in this war.

Another film relevant in this regard is the darkly pessimistic – some have called it apocalyptic – view of modern Israeli society portrayed in Assi Dayan's *Life According to Agfa* (1992). This film depicts events one in a seedy Tel Aviv bar. Some soldiers have taken their injured officer out of his hospital bed for a night on the town. As the soldiers steadily become drunker, their behavior becomes increasingly degenerate. Vulgar and immoral, they mock the image of the Israeli soldier as a moral figure, just as the music of an old Zionist song mocks them as it accompanies them out of the bar toward the end of the film.

Also worth mentioning is a very recent film, *Yossi and Jagger* (2002) which focuses on the private relationship between two gay officers. With this film, the image of the macho Israeli officer has finally been overthrown.

We obtain different insights from observing the situation through the prism of music. While it is well known that many Israeli songs commemorate war and soldiers, many people are less aware that the early Israeli wars tended to produce a kind of 'soundtrack' that became part of the public's memory of events. This comprised songs written in the run-up to the war (if there was one), during the war (if it was long enough) or – most often – in its immediate aftermath.. Because they had the power to evoke the time of the war period – for both the general public and the soldiers who had been fighting – recordings of such songs were very popular.

It is interesting to note that, while the wars of 1948, 1967 and 1973 inspired an abundance of songs, the Lebanese War failed to produce even one song. It seems that the experience in Lebanon was both too depressing and too divisive to evince a creative response.

The content of war and army songs in the early days tended to revolve around three main subjects: the commemoration of specific battles and military engagements; memories – often affectionate or amusing – of different sides of army life, and eulogies for the fallen. Over the years, the latter has become dominant, while the other genres have almost completely ceased. During the past decade, however, a new kind of song has become prominent: laments for the peace that has not yet come.

Apart from the humorous army song, all these different kinds of song are broadcast over the radio on the two annual days of remembrance, Holocaust Memorial Day and Memorial Day (the latter, in honor of fallen soldiers). Thus these songs have become an ever-evolving soundtrack for the Israeli public: rather than being connected to a specific war, they are simply associated with the very subject of war.

Just as individual songs have resulted from the country's experience of war, they have – in turn – contributed to the national consciousness of war. Anyone who wants to understand something about Israel and war should listen to these songs: it will soon become clear that the country's war experience has not been a happy one. There are neither jingoistic songs of national arrogance nor songs of praise to glorious victory. The overwhelming majority of these songs are laments. In truth, while they have been produced by war, they are not war songs: in the deepest sense, they are songs of peace.

The same applies to Israeli prose and poetry. Many of Israel's (male) writers have participated in wars, so it is hardly surprising that their writing reflects their experience. Israeli poetry, in particular, is mainly tragic in feeling, the poets yearning for their lost fathers, sons and comrades, and for their lost innocence. When Amihai writes a series of poems about a friend of his who died in the sands of Ashkelon in 1948, he sounds totally authentic. This is not a poetry of detachment but a poetry of the deepest involvement.

In wider literary terms, a similar process occurred in cinema. The writing of the early generation of post-1948 writers, often referred to as 'the Palmah generation' because of the participation of many of them in that elite corps – is largely iconic. Heroic scenes and figures fill their pages. For several, the morally pure soldier merges with the Sabra, the heroic native-born man of the land.

One voice in the Palmah generation went in a different direction, however: S. Yizhar. From the outset, he stressed the tragedy of war and conflict, and suggested the complex, muddy morality that affects and sullies all those involved in the business of war. His early books and stories, set in the 1948 war, portray the Israeli soldier as morally ambiguous. He is capable of petty acts of cruelty and vindictiveness. This is clearly seen in his famous, much anthologized story, *The Prisoner of 1949*. He was evidently at odds with most writers of his generation; reading it outside of its historical context, readers could easily receive the impression that it was written after the conflict in Lebanon.

Even before the Lebanon situation arose, many other authors were beginning to write more critically about the experience of army life, although this was not necessarily identical with the experience of war. The drab reality of normal life now undermined the mythical dimension that informed much of the early work of the pre-State and early State writers. Yitzchak Ben Ner, for example, writes convincingly and depressingly in his story *The Tower* about life in an army camp during peacetime. Everyday routine leaves no space for heroics. The subject of this particular story is the misfit, the most un-heroic character who generally can be found in most army units. Ben Ner's protagonist is the thirty-first soldier in a unit meant for thirty.

All of the media mentioned so far – film, music and literature – have related to the situation of the Israeli soldier in the territories, and usually from a critical point of view. Taking an example from popular music, the first Intifada produced only a few songs, but of a bitter, scathing type previously unknown in Israel. The main ones produced by the first Intifada on the Israeli side were both extremely political and critical of the actions of the Israeli army. Si Heiman's *We Shoot and We Cry* asked when "we" learned to bury people alive, referring to a particularly ugly incident of cruelty on the part of some Israeli soldiers. Hava Alberstein's updated version of the classic Pesach song *Had Gadya* equated Israel with the devouring animal of the song. On the other hand, Etgar Keret's story *Cocked and Locked* explored the difficulties of the Israeli soldier who is ordered to restrain himself against Palestinian provocation. It is an excellent allegory regarding the benefits of strength and weakness in the current conflict.

The fact remains that the experience of war and army life has deeply affected Israeli culture in both broad and narrower aspects. This explains the extraordinary popularity and influence of the army entertainment groups who dominated the entertainment market into the 1970s. These were units of up-coming artists, who were able to advance their careers within a military framework. The perfect cultural symbol of this very Israeli phenomenon was the Nahal Entertainment Group – the best-known of all such units – who entertained the combat troops

with *Shir Lashalom (Song for Peace)* – the best-known song from such a unit, which song stresses the need to attain peace and the importance of not glorifying war.

## 10. Immigration

It is a commonplace that Israel is a country of immigrants: this is the only way in which the country's Jewish population could increase from some 25,000 to around 5.25 million in only 120 years.

Zionism was based almost completely on an ideology of immigration. The simultaneous emptying of the Diaspora and the 'filling up' of the old/new homeland was a brave, unique idea that almost everyone thought doomed to failure from the outset. The truth is, however, that Zionism – in this first phase – succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of its founding fathers. Israel now boasts the second largest Jewish population in the world (after the United States); according to demographic projections, it will not be many years until it becomes the largest center for Jewry. It is estimated that Jews from over a hundred different countries have made their home in modern Israel. This extraordinary success has come at a high price, however, as this essay will now show.

Zionism was a product of 19th and early 20th-century Europe: only the ideological ferment produced by the strange confluence of nationalistic and socialistic forces could have produced a movement so driven by idealism. Its earliest followers fervently believed that they possessed the blueprint for a better world for the Jews – in fact, for all humankind. The early generations of Zionists brought a passionate zealotry to the pursuit of their ideal – underpinned by a secularized version of Isaiah's "light unto the nations" – and to the attempt to turn an abstract set of principles into a real way of life. Without such fervor, such an impossible enterprise would undoubtedly have ground to a halt. It was the enthusiasm – indeed, the fanaticism – of the Zionist faithful that enabled the young society to grow and develop. It was inevitable, however, that a society born of such passion should have an Achilles heel.

Together with this enthusiasm and drive came a narrowness of vision that was acceptable as long the vast majority of the population of the Yishuv shared the same ideals. There was an inner contradiction in Zionism, however. This modern, nationalist ideology had developed entirely out of a confluence of forces that existed only in Europe. At its heart lay the idea that Jews from all over the world must come to people the new society or State. When that began to happen, after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the stage was set for deep conflict.

One of the first decisions of the young State was to open the doors to all Jewish immigration. The Jewish population doubled in the first four years of the country's existence, but most of the newcomers did not share the ideological assumptions upon which the State had been founded. The new immigrants of these early

years came from two main sources. Many were Holocaust survivors, most of whom were broken and passive, with few demands on the State. They wanted a shelter and were generally grateful for whatever they found. Most of the other immigrants were very different, however. They came from the Arab world – North Africa and the Middle East; while they made few demands on the new society they were migrating to, they certainly had expectations. These Jews were predominantly religious, holding conservative ideas regarding the character of a Jewish State; their family structure and way of life were traditional. Their migration to the new State was mainly motivated by Messianism.

Given the passion and uncompromising certainty of the secular, European, Ashkenazi Zionist establishment regarding the character of the country that they intended to build, their clash with the traditional Jews from the Eastern countries was inevitable. The full force of the backlash was not felt for a full generation, but when it did come, the Zionist establishment felt insulted: they considered the Eastern Jews ungrateful for the efforts that had been made to help them. They did not understand that their paternalistic outlook had itself insulted many of the immigrants and their children. The stage was set for confrontation.

This is not the place to detail the story of that confrontation, although it still fuels the political and social arena of Israel in some very deep-rooted ways. Suffice it to say that almost every substantial wave of immigration has suffered many of the same tensions, despite its unquestioned centrality in Zionist ideology. This conflict has arisen out of the feeling that the needs of each group were neither sufficiently understood and nor adequately attended to. The other main Aliyah – that of the Russian-speaking immigrants in the 1980s and 90s, (in addition to the smaller, but important, earlier Soviet immigration of the early 70s) caused further tensions. Many of the members of the earlier mass immigration wave of the 1950s felt resentment toward the newcomers for being offered benefits that had not been available to them at the time of their arrival.

These social tensions have found expression in Israeli creative culture. For decades, Israeli culture was a product of the Ashkenazi European society: most of the literature, music and art was created by Europeans. It is possible to point to a number of Eastern motifs in the early art of the country but generally it reflected the European idea of the East rather than a living acquaintance with the Jewish products of that region.

Early art and architecture in the country certainly represented 'the Orient'. Eastern-style arches and cupolas can still be seen adorning some of the early houses in modern Tel Aviv. In those places where early Bezalel tiles continue to decorate the exteriors and interiors of the early houses, the so-called 'Hebrew Eastern' style still dominates, replete with palm trees and other symbols of the region. Much early Israeli painting exhibits the same influences.

An exception to this trend is evident in early Israeli music, both classical and popular. While a number of composers were influenced by their encounter with Yemenite Jewish culture in Palestine, incorporating rhythms and melodies from

that culture into their music, this was not the general tendency. The Yemenites of the Yishuv were themselves an atypical story of Eastern immigration. There were Yemenite waves of Aliyah at the end of the 19th century and then again in the early 20th century. These early Eastern immigrants held an exotic attraction for some musicians and artists of the Yishuv.

Once the mass immigration of the post-State period began, however, attitudes began to change. Presented with the harsh, much less attractive reality of the misery of mass immigration, the exotic attraction tended to decrease. The European Jewish establishment looked down on the new immigrants and their culture. They believed that the Eastern culture of the East was backward and that the immigrants should relinquish it.

They did not expect the immigrants to replace their way of life and culture with those of Europe, but rather that they should transmogrify into model citizens of the new Hebrew nation and that their culture should be Hebrew culture. The reasoning was clear. The earlier Zionist immigrants had done just this: they spoke Hebrew rather than Yiddish and their way of life – far from being a copy of European Jewish life – was instead a rebellion against it. If they could thus transform themselves, so should the new Oriental immigrants, dropping in the process all vestiges of the 'Arabic' lifestyle that they had brought with them.

In many ways, this was an unfair expectation – even in theory. While it is true that the Ashkenazi immigrants generally had transformed themselves into a new type of Jew, they had done so voluntarily, in keeping with their ideology. Moreover, the Hebrew culture that they had created was still a variation of European culture. (This idea will be enlarged upon in Section 13.) Such demands on the new Eastern immigrants were thus doubly harsh, and the resentful immigrants were in no hurry to comply.

It was with the second generation that the cultural backlash began. Buoyed by the new ethnic pride that followed the temporary success of the Black Panther protest movement of the early 1970s, a number of poets, writers and musicians began to express a positive consciousness of their background. Rather than 'apologizing' for it, they began to proudly call themselves *Mizrahim* ('Easterners' or '*Oriental*s'). This process has continued until the present day; indeed, the last thirty years have witnessed the coming-of-age of Oriental culture in Israel.

Some of the more significant names and developments of this period can be mentioned here. The first noteworthy voice was Erez Biton in the 1970s. With his poems of praise for the North African Jewish past and his sharp presentations of the alienation of the Oriental Jew in Israel, he foreshadowed a wave of later poets such as Roni Someck, Bracha Seri and Tikva Levi. In prose, Eli Amir, Sami Michael and Dan Bania Seri have enjoyed great success; a younger generation that includes such names as Ronit Matalon and Dorit Rabinyan is enjoying widespread popularity.

Rabinyan is a particularly interesting case. Along with Avi Shmuellian, she is a leading representative of a new kind of Israeli novelist: both have published novels presenting the mystery of Jewish life in Arab lands – in these cases, Persia/Iran – in a fresh manner. Both of these writers have used a semi-surrealistic style in a way that elevates the subjects delightfully. Whether this will become a strong new trend in Israeli literature remains to be seen.

A.B. Yehoshua, who has been counted among the first rank of Israeli writers for decades, occupies a unique place in his representations of Sephardi culture. Coming out of the Zionist mainstream, he has taken a different path. Although his work is not built entirely around Sephardi or Eastern characters, his recent novel *Journey to the End of the Millennium* is a proud, fascinating look at the Sephardi past.

There has been a parallel tendency in music. Riding the wave of ethnic pride of the mid-1970s, a wave of musicians developed – e.g., Zohar Argov and Haim Moshe of the first generation – who created a genre of Oriental/Hebrew popular music that comprised a mix of Arabic and Greek musical motifs. While the critics initially looked down on this phenomenon, it proved extremely popular with the listening public. Others would follow, with singers like Zehava Ben and Eyal Golan at the forefront. Ofra Haza and Boaz Sharabi sang more mainstream, less overtly Oriental music to reach their audiences. Groups such as Ethnix and Tippex garnered great popularity with their mix of Oriental motifs, rhythms and instrumental sounds and Western musical styles. The extraordinarily talented group HaBreira HaTiv'it brought together musicians from widely differing musical backgrounds who produced a type of Eastern music that celebrated the experience of the North African Jews.

Then there was the phenomenon of a generation of musicians and singers (whatever their own ethnic backgrounds) who had grown up playing Israeli music with Western influence: regardless of each individual's ethnic background, these artists began to produce music that fused Eastern and Western motifs. Perhaps this was the most interesting of all the trends in Israeli music, in terms of its social commentary. Musicians such as Yehuda Poliker, Meir and Ehud Banai, Alon Olearchik and Etti Ankari produced authentically Israeli music in the sense that they drew their inspiration from Israeli society as a cultural meeting-point.

Dance and cinema should also be mentioned. The Inbal dance company may be the best-known 'ethnic' dance company in Israel. Over the years, their repertoire has expanded from folkloristic motifs to free interpretations of ethnic motifs. They are not the only company, however, that now unashamedly draws on the East for artistic inspiration.

The Israeli cinema has not produced a large number of serious films on ethnic issues. On the other hand, several light comedies and dramas with an ethnic slant have proved popular with some sectors of the public. In recent years, a few films such as *Schur* have started to explore issues of Eastern ethnicity although this can hardly be called a trend. The best drama so far about the ethnic tensions

within Israel is the excellent TV film from 1986, *Lehem (Bread)*, which explores social conflict in a southern development town during a period of economic hardship.

The widespread popularity of all these forms combined truly can be called a cultural revolution. Like all real cultural revolutions, it has been underpinned by a number of socio-political changes, without which the innovations in cultural expression would not have occurred.

So far, this essay has only discussed cultural expressions relating to the Oriental immigration of the fifties. The influx of Russians and Ethiopians is still too recent for its cultural impact to be judged fairly. Based on the experience of the Aliyah of the 1950s, it may be a considerable time before the fruits of these waves of immigration become evident in the Hebrew-speaking population. However, it may be presumed that, because the Russian immigrants comprise a population who are used to expressing themselves in modern cultural media, their impact will be felt more quickly. At the moment, though, their main cultural expression remains in the Russian language, causing this vibrant culture to be consumed by Russians alone. A few Hebrew language films – e.g., *Coffee with Lemon* (1994) and *Yanna's Friends* (1999) – have explored aspects of the Russian Aliyah, but these are not large-scale productions.

The most prominent and important Hebrew-language expression of the mass Aliyah from the former Soviet Union is undoubtedly the Gesher theater company. Originally composed entirely of Russian immigrants, the company has recently accepted Israeli actors into its ranks. It has been very widely praised for its work over the last few years, some perceiving it as Israel's most innovative theater company. At the moment, however, this seems to be the only such group.

## 11. Judaism

In this survey of Israeli culture, the section on Judaism will be brief. This may seem surprising as the influence of the Jewish religion on the life of the State should be considerable. However, few subjects are more problematic in the story of the State of Israel – and in Zionism generally – than the relationship between religion and the State. One result is that, upon examining the various genres that constitute mainstream creative culture in Israel, it is difficult to pinpoint any significant impact that Judaism has made upon it. This is not due to any inherent hostility on the part of the Jewish religion to cultural media as such, but rather the constant awkwardness between Judaism and mainstream Israeli society.

This awkwardness existed from the beginning of Zionism. Many Orthodox Jews considered Zionists to be usurping the place of God in deciding the fate of the Jewish people. Consequently, the new movement underwent a deep struggle to be accepted as legitimate by this sector of the Jewish population. Although the great Rabbi Kook and others perceived Zionism as constituting a stage in the Messianic process and, therefore, an essential step in Jewish history, this

theological position was not accepted by many. Those Orthodox Jews who accepted this stance and became Zionists, always faced difficulties. On the one hand, they had to defend their position against the majority of Orthodox Jews; on the other, they had to hold their own against the predominant secularity of the majority of Zionists who were hostile to Judaism because of its allegedly passive attitude toward the active forging of the Jewish fate.

Thus religious Zionism was always a weaker partner in the Zionist movement. It tended to limit itself to attempting to safeguard the religious interests of Orthodox Jews rather than trying to influence the entire Zionist movement world and participate in all areas of activity. This trend continued even after the declaration of statehood. Until 1967, the representatives of Religious Zionism were active in all the governments, but tried only to attend to issues of interest to the Orthodox sector.

The 1967 war changed this situation with the capture of Judea and Samaria, the very heartland of Biblical Israel. The latent religious Messianism that was unleashed was of unprecedented proportions in the history of Zionism. Religious Zionism became increasingly assertive and active. Despite its more open approach, however, it still took stands that were accepted by only a minority of non-Orthodox Jews. Thus it essentially reinforced its alienation from mainstream, non-Orthodox society in Israel. Despite the increasing prominence of religious Jews in many spheres of Israeli life (including the army, academic life and commercial life), most non-Orthodox Jews in Israel still do not regard Orthodoxy as part of their world.

Furthermore, because of the growing power, visibility and assertiveness of Ultra Orthodox – Haredi – Jewry in Israel, antagonism towards Judaism and its official representatives – and downright hostility toward religion in general – has increased to unprecedented proportions among large sectors of the Israeli public.

This accounts, in large measure, for the small part that Judaism has generally played in Israeli creative culture. The vast majority of those involved in the arts consider themselves non-Orthodox or secular. The few who deal with Jewish themes have tended to toward approaches that are either folkloristic, cynical and mocking, or deeply iconoclastic.

The number of Orthodox Jews who are actively engaged in creative expression – whatever the medium – is very small. It is interesting to note, however, that this group is growing and has caused increased exposure on the part of the Israeli public to Judaism in the arts. This is evident, for example, in literature. Thirty years ago, few Israeli writers identified themselves as Orthodox Jews. Many came from observant families and were familiar with the vocabulary of the Beit Midrash, often harboring a strong nostalgia for that world. Bialik is perhaps the most prominent case in point. However, with rare exceptions such as Agnon and the poet Zelda, the literary world was secular.

In recent years, however, a number of serious Orthodox writers have emerged, creating interesting work that provides insights into different aspects of their world. Haim Sabbato, Yehudit Rotem, Yochi Brandes and Hanna Bat Shahaar, for example, write about Orthodoxy from the inside, while others have left that milieu. The knowledge of Orthodox life that they all possess, however, has produced a fascinating new trend in Israeli literature.

Several musical trends are also noteworthy. An increasing amount of Haredi music has been influenced by modern popular music. Traditional Judaism has always been musical, but in this case the novelty is the willingness of Haredim to use the musical language of the outside world. Haredi rock concerts sound unlikely but they have become increasingly popular in recent years. Singers such as Mordehai Ben David and Aharon Fried draw tens of thousands to their concerts. This development can mainly be attributed to the influence of the newly-religious 'Hozrim Betshuva', many of whom listened to popular music previously and have woven it into their new life.

A related, but not necessarily identical, development comes with the increasing popularity of Klezmer music in large parts of general society. The annual Klezmer festival in Safed draws thousands, many of whom are not religious at all. One especially interesting aspect of this phenomenon is the range of new influences that can be heard in contemporary Israeli Klezmer music. In addition to jazz, which affects American Klezmer music as well, the impact of different ethnic musical traditions is also evident. Chief among these is Oriental (i.e. North African and Middle Eastern) music, whose addition to Klezmer makes for innovative, fascinating results.

Another trend stems from a different impulse: the new spiritual search that many young Israelis are undertaking. This is producing a very eclectic cultural outlook in which one of the ingredients – but not necessarily the main one – is traditional Judaism. As a result, a number of 'New Age' Jewish communities have emerged in Israel – some of them now permanent – that have created different frameworks for creative expression. It is as yet unclear whether this phenomenon can be called a movement. A number of festivals/happenings take place at different times of the year in various locations, with music, inevitably, predominating. Several musical ensembles have resulted, the most noteworthy being Gaya and Sheva. The influence of traditional Judaism on their music can also be heard.

An additional phenomenon is the increasing prevalence of local radio stations, many of which are religious and even Haredi. Many appear to have a sizeable following, their invariable mix of music and religious discussion being very popular in certain sectors.

These various elements add up to the increasing exposure of the Israeli public to religious music of one kind or another, including sectors of the secular population who previously would have had little or no contact with it.

Other media such as cinema and theater, traditionally viewed with considerable suspicion by the Orthodox, are also beginning to develop. Until very recently, little drama or cinema dealt with the Orthodox world. Most of the films produced on the subject in the past few years were made by secular film-makers apparently to satisfy the curiosity of the non-Orthodox public. The situation may change, however, as schools of cinema and drama have now opened exclusively for Orthodox students. While the results are, as yet, marginal, within a few years serious films and drama may well be produced within these circles.

## 12. The Israeli Arab and the Arab in General

The Arabs are Jewish Israel's 'others.' This was not what the early Zionists envisaged. They tended to ignore this part of the population, relegating them to a colorful but insignificant place in the background of the Israeli landscape in which extraordinary events were taking place. Those who, like Herzl, did think about the Arabs in the early days of the movement were convinced that the advantages of civilization that Zionism would offer this 'backward' region – as many Jews already perceived them to be – would be embraced gratefully by the local inhabitants. The Arabs would then happily march forwards, hand-in-hand with the Jews, into a Zionist sunset.

Some certainly had a different vision. Ahad Ha'am recognized the difficulties ahead and criticized the optimism of his opponents in the Zionist world, but he could be dismissed as a permanent pessimist. In a later generation, Ze'ev Jabotinsky refused to bow to the prevailing vision of a happy ending; he too was dismissed by many because of his militaristic opinions – so out of touch with the majority opinion – and his admiration for certain aspects of Italian fascism. Zionists continued to think optimistically, confident that – in time – they would overcome opposition and peace would unite the struggling sides.

There is an interesting scene in the 1960 film *There Were Ten* that is relevant to this discussion. Tracing the fortunes of a group of Halutzim in the late 19th century, the film dwells on the problems that the new settlers experience with the local Arabs. In buying the land, they have also acquired the legal right to use the water of a local well that is situated in an Arab village nearby. The Arabs do not want the settlers there and make it impossible for them to obtain the water. The Jews have to resort to drawing it by night. Finally, after a confrontation with local shepherds who are driving their flocks deliberately over the settlers' newly-ploughed land, an argument breaks out among the Jews regarding the correct policy to pursue. Some believe in appeasement and are content, for the meantime, to continue to draw their water at night. Others argue that the only response is to use force against the Arabs. The argument they use is: "They only understand force." The dispute leads to a discussion of the need to create a new sort of Jew in Eretz Yisrael: one who is not afraid of his own shadow and who is prepared to fight back, not because he likes fighting but because he is not afraid to stand up for his rights.

This is a very telling scene because it raises, in a microcosm, the argument that had already existed for decades before the film was made. Today, more than forty years after its release, the scene is a fascinating entry point into an argument that has become perhaps the main issue in contemporary Israeli society: what to do about the Arabs. Israel today is a far less optimistic place than when the film was made; it also is incomparably less naive than the period in which its plot was set. Viewing the film today is an extraordinary experience because it brings into the focus the interaction between these three different periods, each with their own view of the issue, and each less optimistic than the one before.

Far from fading into the background, the Arabs are an ever-present reality in modern Israel. It is important to stress that, despite this discussion about Israel as a Zionist State, some 20% of the country's population are Israeli Arabs. (This does not include the Palestinians in the territories captured in the 1967 war).

The Arabs are Israel's 'others' not only in demographic terms; they are also a significant factor in that they have become the country's ever-present obsession, a source of simultaneous fear and fascination. One of the first to notice this and explore it in his work was the young Amos Oz. Arabs took a central place in the fantasies of his Israeli protagonists, in his first book of stories published in Israel in the 1960s (and later translated as *When the Jackals Howl*). The story *Nomad and Viper*, for example, portrays the Arab imagined as dangerous, threatening and yet seductively attractive. His early novel *My Michael* explores the same theme: here the heroine, trapped in a mediocre marriage, longs for depth and excitement that only the Arabs of her fantasies can provide. A more recent story, the wonderful, much anthologized *Room on the Roof* by Savyon Liebrecht, delivers a similar message in a language alert to the slightest nuances of the problematic interaction between Jew and Arab in Israel.

The early writers who wrote about the Arabs tended to romanticize them. They perceived them, and the Bedouin in particular, as exotic models for the new Jew to which Zionism aspired. Writers such as Moshe Smilansky and Yitzhak Shemi wrote modern fantasies about the Arab inhabitants of the region that were influenced by The Arabian Nights. They often portrayed them as people of honor, at home in nature, with none of the faults with which city life corrupts its dwellers. These stories in Hebrew sometimes contain not a single Jewish character; nonetheless, but it is not difficult to discern beneath the surface the Jews about whom they were so concerned.

In order to understand this, one only has to look at pictures of the early guards of the Shomer movement, the first Zionist self-defense organization in the country. Sitting on horseback, or standing, the really interesting element in these pictures is the clothes they have chosen: a mixture of the Cossack and the Bedouin. They look so proud and, in retrospect, so naive. The exoticism of the Arab, at home on the land and at one with nature – a person who has never been spoiled by 'civilization' – was a deeply attractive image for those who supported the idea

of the new Jew. This was a central image in the writings of Zionist writers in the early 20th century.

Time and conflict would soon overlay that image with different significance, however. The image of the Arab as a cruel, unscrupulous enemy developed in the late 1920s and 30s as the Yishuv came into contact with Arab terrorism for the first time. The image of the Arab as a victim to be pitied was developed in the ground-breaking work of S.Yizhar, e.g. in the 1949 story, *The Prisoner*, mentioned above, but only really became accepted by a wider public in the 60s, 70s and 80s. The image of the Arab as a harsh, ruthless potential murderer is more recent. The brilliance of Savyon Liebricht's story, *Room on the Roof*, is that she manages to combine all of these layers in a subtle parable of the extremely complex relationship between Jew and Arab.

The theme of the Arab as victim has dominated Israeli cinema since the 1980s, as presented by the mainly left-leaning film industry. *Hamsin* (1982) shows the tension that develops between Galilean Arabs and Jews when the army decides to requisition Arab land. *Nadia* (1986) portrays the struggle of a young Arab girl from a village in the Galilee, who attends a Jewish boarding school in an attempt to obtain a better education. Several of the Israeli figures in the film are depicted as callous; even the better ones are insensitive and unaware of the plight of Arabs in Israel. *Behind the Walls* (1986) is a prize-winning political film that portrays Israelis and Palestinian Arabs as victims of a manipulative establishment that prefers to perpetuate the difficult situation through a policy of 'divide and rule'. *Smile of the Lamb* (1986), an adaptation of David Grossman's novel, evinces great sympathy for the native Palestinian position and calls into question the whole idea of enlightened Israeli rule in the territories captured in 1967.

*Fictitious Marriage* (1988) is a rather implausible film about an Israeli business-man who decides to step away from his life and, through a series of coincidences, adopts a new identity as a deaf-and-dumb Palestinian construction worker. In its heavy-handed way, it portrays the Arab as a victim of Israeli suspicions and stereotypes, on the one hand, and the Jew as a victim of an impossible situation, on the other. Another interesting, prize winning film, *Avanti Popolo* (1986) uses these images very cleverly. When Shylock's famous speech "I am a Jew: Hath not a Jew eyes..." is put into the mouth of an Egyptian soldier who is a Shakespearean actor in his native Cairo, the film becomes a parable: the Arab has now replaced the Jew as victim.

In recent years, as a result of the confusion wrought by the murderous terrorism unleashed by Palestinian fundamentalism and the legacy of the two Intifadas, Israeli cinema has tended to step away from Arab-Jewish tensions and politics in general.

A further element that must not be overlooked is the significant input of Arab artists in creative expression in Israel. This essentially occurs in three spheres. A number of Israeli Arabs have contributed individually within Israeli Jewish frameworks in the context of the wider cultural scene. This is particularly evident

with regard to actors in both theater and film. For example, Salim Dau, Muhammed Bakri, Salma Nakara and Makram Khouri are serious actors who are well known to the wider Israeli public. Interestingly, they are not confined to Arab roles. This works in both directions: Israeli Jewish actors have effectively played roles as Israeli Arabs. For example, Khouri portrays an Israeli military governor in the film *Smile of the Lamb*, while Hannah Azoulai-Hasfari played the title role in *Nadia*.

Arab actors have a difficult time within Israeli cinema and – most particularly – in the theater. An Arab theater actor who must appear nightly before Israeli – predominantly Jewish – audiences can sometimes feel contradictions, given the problematic relations between the Arab community and the larger unit of the Zionist State. Dau recently confessed that, in the middle of the second Intifada it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to do his job; Bakri has intimated the same.

Many Arab artists have also participated in some form of cultural dialogue and common expression with Israeli Jewish artists. One example is the recent adornment of the Wadi Nisnas area of Haifa. Paintings and murals of Mediterranean scenes and sculptures of stone and iron were prepared through the co-operation of some 100 Jewish and Arab artists.

Some Israeli Arabs have introduced the Arab perspective into their work, working as individuals within Israeli culture to express their points of view. Particularly important in this connection are the writers Anton Shammas and the late Emil Habibi. Their works in Hebrew express the experience of the Arabs of Israel yet have been widely read by the Israeli Jewish public. Such writers have created their own artistic expression while using the tools of Israeli culture. Their contribution thus differs from the Arab actors mentioned earlier who are involved in cultural projects created by Jews. There are exceptional cases, however, in which Arab actors have created their own one-person shows in order to express their individual viewpoint.

An interesting phenomenon has developed in recent decades in Israeli music. With internal ethnic realignments between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews (see Section 10), local musicians have stopped relying almost exclusively on Western models. As a result, Middle Eastern (i.e. Arabic) motifs are increasingly heard in the local popular music. These musical influences first penetrated the Israeli music scene through the filter of the early Mizrahi singers. Wishing to be accepted by the Israeli mainstream, they sang in Hebrew and included some Western and Mediterranean popular styles.

In the early to mid-1990s, however, some musicians began to shift into Arabic musical styles as the Arabic language became increasingly acceptable. Some Israeli musicians began to work within the classical Arab tradition itself, a key example being Zehava Ben. After considerable success with her Turkish-influenced Hebrew-language popular music, she proceeded to present a series of critically-acclaimed concerts in Arabic, singing the work of the great Egyptian

singer Um Kulthoum. Interestingly enough, this was very well received by the Arab population of the region. In a parallel trend, a number of popular Mizrahi singers released disks of dance music in Arabic.

A totally different manifestation of this trend in music began to develop in the mid-1990s. Buoyed by the new optimistic atmosphere of co-existence in the years immediately following the Oslo agreements, a number of groups formed that included both Jewish and Israeli-Arab musicians. They started to play a completely new kind of Israeli music, a fusion of Western and Arabic musical influences. When the atmosphere of optimism began to fade, most of the groups fell apart. However one group survived that has garnered considerable critical acclaim – both in Israel and in Europe. *Bustan Avraham* (Abraham's Garden) has produced some intriguing instrumental music, introducing sectors of the Israeli public to the potential in Arabic music.

Jewish Israel's problematic relationship with the Arabs in general – and with the Arab Israeli population in particular – will continue in the future. Whether the subject of the Arabs appears at the forefront of Israeli creative culture will depend, among other things, on the degrees of optimism and/or pessimism that it arouses in Israeli society. The directions that creative expression takes will largely depend on the directions that the general relationship takes.

### **13. Gender Roles: The Changing Role of Women**

It may seem obvious that women's roles in Israeli society have changed greatly in recent decades. The patriarchal nature of traditional Jewish culture could have dictated a domestic and publicly secondary role for women in the new society and State. On the other hand, the shift in the West toward acceptance of feminist ideology could have pushed them into different, more public functions. However, the true picture is considerably more complex than this.

Zionism was not a continuation of the traditional Jewish way of life: on the contrary, it considered itself a reaction to it.. Consequently, many of the assumptions underpinning that life – including women's role – did not pass into the various streams of Zionism that created the basis of the new society. Religious Zionism also rejected the traditional role, creating a much more active, assertive role for women in the community. This is best exemplified by women in the religious kibbutzim.

In theory, therefore, Israel should have aligned itself clearly with other socialist and revolutionary societies around the world, which attempted to define a new role for women in the economic, social and political spheres of public life.

It is possible to analyze the character of pre-State society more deeply, however, and to demonstrate that, in fact, there was always a gap between the ideology of the Zionist movement and reality – even in the kibbutzim. Despite a notable change in women's roles in Yishuv society and the contributions of some

remarkable women in public life, the years following the establishment of the State witnessed a general retreat from the advances of that earlier period.

In practical terms, this has meant that the major change developing in recent years is, indeed, due to the rise of feminism and feminist consciousness. This phenomenon will be dealt with in a separate framework. Only a number of the significant aspects relating to women's place in Israeli culture will be mentioned here.

In the years preceding and immediately following the establishment of the State of Israel, feminine voices were lacking in various creative fields. A few played a minor role – and often a respected one – but the men remained the central figures.

This is evident in the world of literature. Rachel, Dvora Baron and Elisheva were all considered significant – to different degrees – in the early literary life of the Yishuv. All three were part of the Zionist milieu of the early decades of the 20th century and made particular contributions. Indeed, it is possible to use their work to argue for a specifically feminine voice in literature: quieter, smaller, more questioning and less confident than most of their more famous male counterparts. The women's work dealt with more intimate, personal canvasses. They wrote no epics and commented less on the great national movement that was developing around them and in which they nonetheless played a part. Even Rachel – in many ways the one among the three whose work most reflected the larger issues of Halutzit and nation-building – always reflected on these subjects from an autobiographical viewpoint. *"I only know how to tell of myself"* she begins one famous poem, and this is largely true. She made no attempt to disguise the intensely personal nature of her poetry. The men did so very well.

There were few women writers, either, in the early years of the State. Amelia Kahane Carmon was a significant voice but she stood almost alone among the profusion of talented male writers and poets who filled the literary press. It seems that society was not encouraging its potential women writers. The trend has only begun to be reversed in the recent decades: a large group of extremely successful, talented women have come to the fore in different literary genres. Most of the novels now published in Israel are by women. Shulamit Hareven, Savyon Liebrecht, Orly Castel Bloom and Yehudit Katzir are just some of the names that have gained popularity not only in Israel, but also internationally (in translation). They and the other women who have come to the center of Israel's literary scene, are both the product and the cause of a social revolution that has been taking place in recent years. Women have now claimed center-stage unapologetically in an arena that was formerly mainly reserved for men.

A particularly significant aspect of this phenomenon is the work of women writers who express the agenda or worldview of specific sectors of Israeli society. This was related to above regarding both the new Mizrahi voices' expression of a sectoral outlook influenced by their ethnic background and those that have begun to depict religious Orthodoxy to the outside world. These two trends have

produced significant women writers. In fact, the latter – relating to Orthodoxy – is largely spearheaded by women. Apart from the fact that they are opening up aspects of the world of Orthodoxy and ultra-Orthodoxy to the general public, the very appearance of these writers demonstrates a significant change within Orthodox society. It is likely that other sectors of the population will also start to develop their own literary voices, and that women will be a part of it.

This trend is far less pronounced in other spheres. For example, women's voices have always been part of the popular music field, as in many Western-oriented practices. Until recently, however, most of them were part of a product created by a male-dominated music industry. Women were important as singers and performers, but generally were interpreting songs that had been written by men; furthermore, their music was arranged and produced by men.

In the popular music scene of today, while most of the production, arrangement and actual playing of instruments are still being done by men, the number of women who write many or even most of their own songs has increased significantly over the last twenty-odd years. Using very different styles, women such as Yehudit Ravitz, Si Heiman and Ahinoam Nini have taken a large degree of control over what they produce and have much more of a say as to what musical sound they produce. This important new direction is likely to grow much stronger in the future.

The trends discussed here in relation to literature and popular music are beginning to appear in almost all spheres of cultural creativity. Women artists and sculptors, theater directors and playwrights, architects and photographers are increasingly influencing the fields in which they work. Even the field of film direction – which is notoriously difficult for women to break into in many parts of the world – now includes a number of women. They have produced only a small number of 'women's films.' One example was Idit Shehori's *Circles* (1980), a celebration of the intimate, intense and sometimes complicated interaction between a group of women. While not a great film, it was still an interesting example of a woman director's treatment of the subject of women's lives. It was not immediately followed up, but the time may well come when it will be.

#### **14. Westernization and the Decline of Collective Culture**

'Westernization' is a complex term whose precise meaning changes with location. For an American, the words 'Oriental' or 'Eastern' may conjure up images of Japanese and Koreans; to an Israeli, however, it is likely to mean Moroccans, Yemenites or Iraqis. Israel has known two meanings of the word 'West'; increasingly, however, they are narrowing down to one.

For Israel, whose main dividing line is ethnic, a large part of the relevance of the word 'west' relates to Eastern Europe – the Ashkenazi 'homeland' – as the Western part of the line. The 'West' meant the beginnings of Zionism, the Eastern European center and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe, the center of Herzlian

Zionism and daily Zionist politics. As the Yishuv assumed an identity that was defined against both the Arab East and the Jews who came from there, the Eastern European character of the society was utterly clear. It has already been mentioned that the early waves of Zionist Aliyah, dominated totally by the Eastern and East-Central European background of the Olim, defined their way of life as a revolt against that of Eastern European Jewry. Nevertheless, such an influence could not be dismissed so easily.

The foods that the newcomers liked derived from there, as did the melodies that they loved, and the writers who influenced them were European. The society that developed in the Yishuv was indeed different from the life that they had known, but it remained European: an orchestral concert featured Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, and never the classic songs of Um Kulthoum. An early feature of the cultural life of Tel Aviv was the opera house. The Hebrew University, so proudly opened in 1925, was built according to a Western program of study. The same phenomenon applied to many different spheres. 'Western' meant Eastern European or simply, European.

The situation has changed, however. Despite the demographic reinforcement of many hundreds of thousands from Eastern Europe in the last decades, the word 'Western' is perceived very differently today: it now denotes America and the English-speaking world. The word 'America' retains the same quasi-magical attraction for many Israelis as it had for those millions of emigrants from Tsarist Russia who spurned Zionism and chose a different direction. It is ironic that, for many Israelis, the word 'Western' now conjures up the same geographical reality as it did for their great grandparents, despite the intervening period of Eastern European 'Westernization.'

There is another irony. While the early Zionist immigrants lived a life influenced by the West (Europe), they would have resisted the lure of Westernization. Their ideological concern was to create their own, authentic, native Hebrew culture, rather than copy that of other places. Thus they would certainly have rejected the idea of the West (Europe) as a cultural model for emulation, although this is precisely what they did do to a large extent. In contrast, today the attitude of a sizeable part of the Israeli population is that America is the model to emulate and that, the more this happens, the better off Israel will be.

A closely-connected development relates to the decline of the predominantly collective culture associated with early Zionism. The highest goal was the good of society, the State and the collective. People were meant to work for the good of the collective and individual goals were perceived as somehow tainted. It was considered decadent to seek individual comfort or to praise individual aesthetic values. Any ambition had to be couched in terms of the collective good, so politicians seeking office out of personal ambition were regarded in a negative light: like Moses, they were meant to be pushed into power by a higher force – the needs of the collective.

A wonderful film that projects this tension in terms of Israeli society in the early 1950s was *Noa at 17* (1981). Its plot unfolds against the background of the ideological changes of the 1950s and the disillusionment of the pioneering generation with some of the principles that had guided them for decades. The film's central character, Noa, is the daughter of a family caught up in this process. She is an individualist at heart who challenges the entire collective ethos of the society as represented by her comrades in the Socialist Zionist youth movement. They talk of "we": she talks of "I." They talk of "duty;" she talks of "beauty." They talk of "love of country;" she talks of personal love. The idea of this excellent film – praising individualism rather than collectivism, but examining its limits – is clear. The question that remains is what time period it really reflects: is it a film about the early 1950s, in which the story was set, or about the early 1980s, when the film was made?

Another film that does the same thing but differently is the fine, award-winning film *Late Summer Blues* (1987). It tells the story of a group of Israeli teenagers finishing high school in the shadow of the 1970 war of attrition with Egypt, which claimed several hundred lives at the Suez Canal. Each of teenager deals differently with society's expectations and their own personal needs. The film explores the interaction between the personal and the national, and the way in which each individual tries to deal with potential and real contradictions between the two. Also clearly depicted are both the pull towards individualism and the Americanization of Israeli society in the post-1967 years.

Such changes in Israeli culture have been substantial. How did these changes occur? How did America replace Europe (Eastern Europe) as the Israeli concept of 'West', for much of the population? How did the West (America) become an idealized model for 'Westernization'? Furthermore, how did the passage from the ethos of the collective to that of the individual occur?

It is always difficult and, indeed, risky to try to anchor long, complex processes of social change to key dates. Nevertheless, it is possible to posit that the most significant moment of change in Israeli culture was almost certainly 1967. At that point, more than at any previous time, the country opened up to both the ideal and the reality of America. The process had begun earlier: documentary films clearly show discotheques and dance clubs in the main cities before the war. However, the war caused a variety of changes.

Firstly, the resulting period of economic growth fostered a developing consumer culture: there was more to buy and more money with which to purchase it. Moreover, the value of consumerism was increasingly legitimized. This was important in a society where a rather Spartan attitude had formerly been common in large sectors. Money had been spent on national tasks rather than personal comfort. Not only were many of the new goods that fuelled the consumers' hunger American, but the very culture of consumerism was largely associated with America and the West.

A significant parallel occurred in the development of a youth culture that strongly differed from the pioneering youth culture dominated by socialist, collective values that formerly had prevailed. A trend toward individualism developed among the youth and became increasingly legitimized by general society, even while it was decried as decadent by the leaders and 'moral compasses' of the country. As in the West, boys' hair began to lengthen and a new narcissism became evident in the clothes worn by youth of both sexes. Rock music took large sections of the youth by storm. A mild drug culture began to develop. Once again, these elements of youth culture were associated with the West and, above all, America.

Perhaps these changes would have occurred anyway, but there were important 'agents of change' at work within Israel society that cleared a path for them. One was the large group of Jewish volunteers, largely from the English-speaking world, that flooded the country in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, particularly those who worked on the kibbutzim and moshavim. The impact of this group was felt far and wide. They were an interesting mixture of elements old and new: on the one hand they were aware of their Jewish identity and were strongly Zionist: they came to the country because of the pull of the collective society. However, they were also individuals, many of whom had been strongly influenced by the youth culture of the West. They looked and dressed Western: they were a living representation of the West.

The older generations were happy to accept them. They came from the Diaspora but did not represent the old idea of the Galut that Zionism had rejected. These were not the Eastern European Jews that Bialik and others had condemned so eloquently: these were young, free Jews who lived in the Diaspora and who could feel at home there, but who were also connected with Israel, Zionism and idealism. Their ways might be strange to many of the older generation, but they were seen as positive nonetheless. The younger generations were happy to accept them, partly for the opposite reasons: they were 'cool,' had long hair and listened to rock music. In these very different ways, the fact that several thousand young people were considered positive role models caused them to become important agents of change.

Their influence – and that of the world from which they came – was deep. They represented an idea of 'freedom from' and 'freedom to' that had long been ready to burst to the surface. Many young Israelis were happy to break through the limitations of a Puritanical establishment whose vocabulary stressed such words as 'duty' and 'obligation.' A large number of the young had become aware of the gap between the high ideals of their society and the behavior of some individuals who used such language as a mask for individual greed and ambition. It would take a full decade until this tension exploded and the old Labor Party establishment was kicked out of office after two generations of domination and rule. In many ways, however, the seeds were sown in this period.

Another crucial agent of change was the advent of television, which began to be broadcast in Israel in 1968. This gradually opened a window to the wider

world, supplying visual information about the West. The cinema had long played a part in shaping the collective imagination of the secular population, but the impact of television went deeper still: here was something that could be watched on a nightly basis; this was where one's fantasies could be nurtured in private.

It took decades for television to begin to free itself of the influences of the establishment that had brought it to life. Nonetheless, this did occur gradually: first black and white, then color; first one channel, then two, and then cable television. Glimpses of the West had become full exposure: the America that featured daily in Israeli living-rooms was slickly attractive compared with the routine of life in the Jewish State. With the multiplication of channels, Israelis became increasingly exposed to commercial advertising that was ever more seductive in its visual sophistication.

The trend towards individualism that is connected very strongly with the influence of American culture is so pervasive that, predictably, it is impossible to single out the most significant individual cultural figures who represent it. Any attempt to be representative would involve mentioning long lists of creative people in many disciplines. Nevertheless, there is space here to note one film, one song and one writer.

The writer is Etgar Keret, a superb interpreter of the small, quirky corners of Israeli life and the Israeli psyche. In a series of very short stories, idiosyncratic and sometimes approaching the level of parable, he depicts scenes from the Israeli reality that are in fact also universal.

The song is Si Heiman's extraordinarily moving mid-90s version of her father Nahum's wonderful song, *Kmo Tzemah Bar*. Decades earlier, Hava Alberstein had given this song, one of Israel's most beautiful, a straight, touching treatment, but when Si Heiman performed it – a representative of a new generation – she invested the beautiful melody with a soulful, bluesy character that the original had not possessed. The distance between the two versions says something about the distance traveled by Israel in the course of a generation.

The film is the recent, award-winning *Broken Wings*, one of the most beautiful Israeli films to have been produced in years. It depicts a family that is struggling to recover after the death of its father and husband. Significantly, this man does not die in a heroic war accident or as the result of some other 'national' cause; his death has a more mundane cause – a bee-sting. The film deals with real people living in the alienating routine of an anonymous big city: in this case, Haifa. It is both intensely Israeli and yet hauntingly universal, treating as it does relationships, the need for love and the struggle to live a normal life in a harsh social reality.

These three symbolize the new Israel. In large sectors of society, earlier models and values have been replaced, respectively, by America and individualism.

## 15. Summary: Israel and its Culture

Israeli society in the early 21st century is struggling toward a collective identity, caught in a web of internal tensions and contradictions. Individualism may have replaced many of the collective ideals of earlier generations but idealism – although it sometimes becomes muddled with patriotism – has not disappeared entirely. Individual love songs have long displaced the older form of love song – those to the country, the land, the people, the State and its ideals; nonetheless, people still gather to sing those earlier songs in communal settings. Individual or couple dancing have long supplanted the place of group folk dancing (except in large parts of the religious world, which is another story); in recent years, however, attendance has significantly increased of regular evenings of folk dancing, updated and adapted for the present day.

Israel's narrative is very complex: this essay has focused on thirteen subjects and the ways in which they are reflected in creative culture. Together, they have helped to create Israeli culture. Each has evinced a strong influence on the country's way of life, yet perhaps the better phrase would be 'ways of life.' In metaphorical terms, Israeli society can be viewed as a knot at the center of many tangled ropes: each rope attempts to pull the knot (and all the other ropes) in some direction, causing all the others to move from side to side. Such is Israeli society: constantly moving, changing and developing. Those holding the ropes are all the different groups connected with the subjects surveyed in this essay. Due to the tangle, however, the knot is growing increasingly taut and confused by its internal contradictions.

It is not easy to understand Israel. Maybe it is harder still to live here. Nevertheless, its culture is one of the most interesting in our world, as reading this essay should have made clear.

## 16. Bibliographical Note

An essay that touches all aspects of Israeli life and creative culture can only suggest directions for searching out resources. Essentially, any books on Israeli society are a potential resource. Each of the subjects discussed here will feature in any good introduction to Israeli society.

Regarding literature, any book in English translation by any of the writers mentioned here is a potential resource. Many good anthologies have been published in recent years. Try entering 'modern Israeli stories', 'Hebrew literature anthologies' or 'Israeli literature or stories anthologies' – or any combination of these – into a search machine on such Internet sites as Amazon.com, and see what comes up. One anthology that is easily missed -- and thus needs to be mentioned here – is the superb anthology of Sephardi/Mizrahi writing *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing* edited by Ammiel Alcalay.

On the subject of cinema, start by checking on the Internet the catalogue of Ergo Films, the best resource for subtitled Israeli films. They have many titles.

For music, scout the music section in any Jewish or Israeli shop. Around 1998, a number of very good collections were put together to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the State. These are worth searching out.

There is a very good introduction to Israeli art by Gideon Ofrat ***One Hundred Years of Art in Israel*** and a number of books on aspects of other media such as architecture, sculpture, photography and so on.