The "Mythological Sabra" and Jewish Past: Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identities

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Tʜᴇ Jᴇᴡs' ɪɴᴛᴇɴsᴇ ᴘʀᴇᴏᴄᴄᴜᴘᴀᴛɪᴏɴ ᴡɪᴛʜ the examination of their collective identity was highly pronounced in the early years of Zionist settlement in Palestine. For a society of immigrants in the process of defining its distinct collective identity and national foundations this preoccupation is hardly surprising. Although Israel has since achieved national independence and experienced major demographic, ideological, social, cultural, economic and political transformations, Israelis' passionate interest in re-examining their collective identity has not diminished. As a new series of popular publications on "The Israelis" demonstrates, this topic continues to attract public attention and to be prominently featured in Israeli popular and scholarly forums.[1] Various segments of Israeli society continue to debate the opposing orientations of continuity and change between their pre-Israeli past and their Israeli present. This article sets out to explore one particular aspect of this broad and complex topic.

Following the 19th century tradition of the grand historical narrative, Zionism constructed a sweeping interpretation of Jewish history from Antiquity to the present, marked by its teleological orientation. Advocating continuity and identification with Antiquity and a dissociation from the period of exile, the Zionist narrative constructed historical dichotomies that highlighted the introduction of a radical shift in Jewish history: its *decline narrative* from the "golden age" of Antiquity to Jewish life in exile was to be replaced by *a progress narrative* beginning with the Zionist return to the Land of Israel and leading toward national redemption.[2] The historical juncture of two key events that took place in mid-20th century, the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel, affirmed the semiotic structure of the Zionist narrative. A cataclysmic event of major proportions, the Holocaust culminated and concluded the decline narrative of exile

Stereotyped image of a Sabra; Ram Nitzur loading hay at Kfar Hittim, 1962.
Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office

while the establishment of the state marked Zionism's success in shifting the trajectory of history in line with the progress narrative.

The discussion of the construction of a New Man, typical of a revolutionary discourse, articulated most powerfully Zionism's desire to dissociate from the discredited exilic past. Though Zionism was a Jewish movement steeped in traditional symbols, the figure of the "New Jew of the Land of Israel" manifested its highly critical stance toward the Galut (Jewish life in Exile) and was largely shaped by an opposition to the negative image of the exilic Jew. Influenced also by anti-Semitic depictions of European Jews, the Jew of exile was portrayed as uprooted, cowardly and manipulative, old and sickly, helpless and defenseless in face of persecution, interested in materialistic gains or conversely, excessively immersed in religion and spirituality. In contrast, the New Hebrew, later nicknamed "Sabra," was characterized as young and robust, daring and resourceful, direct and down-to-earth, honest and loyal, ideologically committed and ready to defend his people to the bitter end.[3]

The "Mythological Sabra" clearly serves as an *ideal type*, a fictive hegemonic identity that reflects the cultural background, values, and collective aspirations of the European founders. The image of the Sabra stood detached from the cultural diversity of an immigrant society and

Two young Sabra girls from Tel-Aviv, 1952.
Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office

represented only a minority of the youth who were typically (though not exclusively) the descendants of the European pioneers.[4] Yet it was a powerful cultural construct that served as a self-image and an educational model for the socialization of Israeli youth and new immigrants. This ideological framework gave rise to the *Zionist conversion paradigm* that associated the renewed encounter between exilic Jews and the ancient Jewish homeland with the revival of a native-Hebrew identity that had been suppressed during centuries of exile and the experience of a profound and irreversible identity change. Jews who "return" to their ancient homeland were thus recognized as *Olim,* a concept that distinguished them from other immigrants (*mehagrim*) as well as from Jews who immigrate to other destinations. Considered as reclaiming their native identity, *olim* were entitled to immediate citizenship by Israel's "Law of Return," eliminating the common requirement of a liminal period associated with an immigrant status. This "conversion" was often enacted by shedding off one's exilic foreign name and adapting a new Hebrew name, thereby representing the death of the exilic Jew and the rebirth of a Sabra. The profound symbolic meaning of name changing as an important Zionist ritual that represents the dis-identification with a discredited past becomes evident when compared to name changing as part of the traditional ritual of conversion to Judaism, and

(perhaps even more evocatively) to an old Jewish folk custom of changing the name of the severely sick in order to guarantee their recovery.[5]

The experience of uprooting, which is inherent to the immigration process, clearly added to individuals' sense of rupture between their pre-Israeli past and their Israeli present. Even under more favorable conditions, immigration involves dislocation and loss. In the case of Jewish immigration to Palestine (and later to Israel), major waves were triggered by a "push factor" stemming from the introduction of discriminating measures against Jews, and the outbreak of pogroms or wars in their countries of origin. The new comers' traumatic departure from their exilic homes, followed by the strong and pervasive pressure they met in Israel to relinquish earlier identities, languages, memories, and culture, aggravated that sense of rupture. The expectation that new *olim* would personally embody the profound transformation from exilic Jews to native Israelis was largely accepted during the pre-state and early state periods as necessary for national revival.

The rejection of the exilic past was clearly reflected in the Sabras' attitude toward the Holocaust. The persecution and annihilation of Jews during World War II represented the extreme evil of life in Galut that was associated with the "others," the exilic Jews who did not realize the urgency of the Zionist agenda and stayed behind in Europe. This attitude of psychological distancing was tinged with an air of superiority toward the Holocaust victims who "went like lambs to the slaughter," although the Yishuv and its leadership did express concern for, and identification with fate of the Jews under Nazi-controlled regimes. The ambivalence toward the Holocaust survivors continued after their immigration to Israel, and Israeli public culture was slow in incorporating the commemoration of the Holocaust.[6] The Israeli writer and Holocaust survivor, Aharon Appelfeld, describes his difficulty in holding on to the elusive memories of his prewar childhood and war experiences soon after the war ended. Arriving in Palestine as a young adult, he felt the pressure not only to suppress those remnants of memory but also to change his personality and even his physiognomy in order to accommodate himself to the Mythological Sabra, "to become overnight a tall, blond lad with blue eyes, and, the main thing, sturdy."[7]

The ideology of change, however, presented a more extreme stance than the reality of Israeli life conveyed. In spite of the process of secularization and nationalization, the largely heterogeneous and culturally diverse society still preserved a high degree of cultural continuity with Jewish past and its traditions.[8] Since the 1970s, however, significant changes have challenged the secular national Zionist ethos that was predominant during the pre-state and the early state periods and its representation of the Mythologi-

cal Sabra. Marginal groups such as Sephardi Jews, the Ultra-Orthodox, Israel's Arabs, women, and new immigrant communities have demanded a greater representation in Israeli public and political life. The attitude toward the Holocaust, which began to change in the late 1950s and especially after the Eichmann trial in 1961, went through a major transformation following the collective trauma of the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. Israel's firsthand experience of trauma in the continuing conflict with the Palestinians has heightened the anxiety over issues of death and survival. Israelis have displayed a growing interest in Holocaust history and commemoration and a stronger sympathy for its victims.[9] The Holocaust has gradually emerged as one of the most defining historical events in Israeli collective consciousness, and as a key historical metaphor of Jewish vulnerability.

The present article sets out to explore the tension between continuity and change in the shaping of the Sabra identity by focusing on the ways in which the traumatic response to the Holocaust and to Israel's precarious situation within the continuing Middle Eastern conflict have contributed to Israelis' vacillation between the dissociation from and the embracing of Jewish exilic past. The following discussion addresses the tension between a new Israeli identity and old Jewish roots of a former identity and examines the ways in which individuals' experience of trauma interacts with the Zionist conversion formula in shaping the attempts to resolve this tension.

Trauma (from the Greek "wound") complicates the individual's grasp of the past and its continuity with the present. The traumatic event assaults the psyche by excessive stimuli that cannot be assimilated into familiar cognitive schemas, and causes its memory to remain fragmented, incomprehensible, and resisting integration into consciousness.[10] Nonetheless, the repressed memory of the past invades the present as it asserts itself through uncontrollable flashbacks, nightmares, and unconscious repetition of behavior patterns. Highly disjointed and lacking coherence, these fragments of traumatic memory manifest the opposing pulls to suppress the past and the compulsion to re-experience it. While trauma survivors suffer from varying degrees of acuteness of the post-traumatic syndrome, they often report a feeling of being "frozen" outside of time and experiencing the doubling or splitting of the self.[11]

The literary works discussed in this essay revolve around individuals whose traumatic response to the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict evokes a struggle between the conflicting drives to forget and to remember and leads them to the suppression, invention or transformation of identity. In describing these processes, these works portray the different strategies pursued, whether deliberately or unconsciously, by individual

Israelis, in an effort to deal with their personal and collective traumas. Through this focus, the discussion reveals a growing recognition of the problematic relation between the Zionist and the Jewish pasts and the urgency to resolve it. Clearly, the four novels selected for this study do not represent the entire scope of possible strategies of coping with the ambivalence toward the past and its impact on the Sabra identity. Furthermore, the experience of ruptures is shared by various segments of Israeli society that hold competing ideologies and advocate different responses to the challenge of integrating their pre-Israeli past and the present. This essay does not represent this diversity, as it focuses on Israelis of European descent who were part of the earlier conception of the "Mythological Sabra" but challenge this ideological framework as they experiment with their own otherness. The analysis presented in this essay is part of a broader study of models of identity change in this and other groups within Israeli society.

In Israeli society, writers have played an important role in the construction of the national Hebrew culture and continue to be involved in Israeli public and political life to date.[12] This tradition of direct involvement in issues that confront Israelis personally and collectively is further enhanced by the writers' artistic sensibilities and ability to identify undercurrents that have not yet captured public attention. Hebrew literature, therefore, offers a more complex and nuanced picture of both familiar and subterranean trends that make up Israeli life. The study of the literary exploration of Israeli identity through the focus on the individual's perspective can thus serve as a rich resource for gaining insights into these processes and a deeper understanding of the changes and challenges that the society faces.

The novels discussed here include Hanoch Bartov's *The Fabricator* (1975), Amnon Jackont's *Borrowed Time* (1981), Yoram Kaniuk's *The Last Jew* (1981) and Michal Govrin's *The Name* (1995).[13] The writers of these novels belong to two different generations: the older generation of Hebrew youth that grew up during the Yishuv years and reached adulthood in the late 1940s (Bartov and Kaniuk), and a younger generation born around the foundation of the state (Jackont and Govrin). The article first examines Bartov's and Jackont's works which are concerned more directly with the image of the Mythological Sabra and the experience of ruptures with the past. Though both works are constructed as mysteries that revolve around the uncovering of identities, the differences they present in the choice of historical settings, emplotment and ideological positions are significant and may reflect, at least in part, their respective generational affiliations. Kaniuk's and Govrin's novels highlight the hold the past has over the present. While both novels present intricate plot structures and a complex

exploration of their protagonists' response to trauma, Kaniuk's tendency to portray individuals as collective representations contrasts sharply with Govrin's more individualistic and self-reflexive voice, and may similarly be linked to generational differences. Last but not least, while the first three novels are written by male writers and focus on male characters, in line with the gender-based image of the Sabra, Govrin's novel represents a female character and reflects the recent rise of literature by and about Israeli women.[14] I hope that the following discussion of these works will contribute to the broader challenge of exploring the transformation of the Sabra identity into a growing range of emergent identities, as Israelis continue to reconfigure their place within the collective drama of Jewish history, as well as their local roots in the Middle East.

TRAUMA AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF IDENTITY

Hanoch Bartov's novel, *The Fabricator*, revolves around the enigmatic identity of a person found in a coma following a car accident that occurred on his way to London airport. A number of intelligence services, including the German, the French, and the Israeli, get involved in the investigation of what appears to be a clear case of espionage by a double agent. As information is pieced together by the various intelligence services, they learn that the unconscious man is a Holocaust survivor whose various identities correspond to different periods of his past: A German Jewish child who fled to France with his parents, he survived the war by virtue of his remarkable ability to speak various languages without a trace of a foreign accent and to assume a new name and biography as required by the situation. A member of the French Resistance during the war, he later joins a Zionist group and is smuggled to British-controlled Palestine. Under the borrowed identity of a native Israeli, he goes on to fabricate a new Israeli biography that firmly establishes his family's roots in the land and conceals his earlier life in Europe. A decade following his immigration, however, he resumes his old contacts in the French Resistance and obtains a French passport under his old French *nom de guerre,* Henri Montreland. At the same time he requests a German passport under his birth name, Hans Bergsohn, and recreates a complete biography as a German citizen. With a family, home, and business base in Israel, he develops an intricate web of intersecting identities, biographies, and business contacts that requires superb control of information to avoid "leaks" about his fragmented life and self.[15] As he shifts between his various identities and their corresponding geographical, social, cultural,

and economic environments, his business travels account for the time gaps in each capacity, without arousing others people's suspicions.

The Fabricator opens at the moment of an acute crisis, when the protagonist loses consciousness and falls into a coma, unable to safely recover the most appropriate identity. The British psychiatrist whose help is enlisted connects the unconscious man with what he believes to be his stronger identity—the Israeli business and family man—at the price of suppressing his other identities. The protagonist's equilibrium appears to be restored and his life in Israel blossoms until the shocking outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Re-traumatized by the war and in an acute state of agitation, the protagonist drives his car toward the front, loses control on the road, and encounters his death in yet another automobile accident.

The novel thus revolves around the impact of trauma and immigration on identity formation. Earlier in his life, the Holocaust survivor's chameleon ability serves as his survival strategy. The same strategy also appears to serve him well in erasing his Jewish past and constructing a new Israeli identity, in conformity with the Zionist conversion formula. Bartov's hero had to borrow the identity of a native Israeli in order to gain entry into Palestine in light of the British prohibitions on Jewish immigration, but in assuming the identity of an authentic Sabra whose roots in the land reach beyond Zionist history, he goes beyond what the political circumstances required. The Israeli intelligence agent thus notes: "As Avishalom Hevroni, he assured himself not only a future separate from his earlier identities, real or fictive, but also a new past, better rooted and more impressive than the man with whose documents he arrived in the country" [156]. Furthermore, Avishalom Hevroni conforms to the Sabra archetype by casting himself in the role of the orphaned Sabra,[16] and incorporates in his biography other important themes of the national Hebrew culture, such as the secularization of religious Jews and the Zionist fascination with Eastern European peasants.[17] His success in projecting the Sabra image amazes the Israeli intelligence agent: "He is one of us, the purest of the pure, [. . .] one whom you would never ask to see his identity card" [207]. Yet the novel shows that in spite of this remarkably solid Sabra appearance, the native Israeli identity is only one of the protagonist's several identities and is no more authentic than the others, nor does it offer him a better chance of healing from what appears as an acute dissociative disorder. Thus, the protagonist's state at the opening of this investigation—a body without consciousness, a man who cannot tell his own identity—serves as a symbolic representation of his post-traumatic condition. *The Fabricator* demonstrates that the protagonist's defense mechanism cannot withstand the pressure of *re-*trau-

matization by the outbreak of wars in Israel, leading him to recreate his wartime experience of shifting between constructed identities. When this survival strategy is denied by the suppression of his alternative memories, the re-traumatized Hevroni finds himself in 1973 with no recourse other than death. In contrast to the Zionist narrative, the exilic Jew's conversion to a native Israeli ultimately fails to bring a personal redemption. When the vulnerable exilic Jew resurfaces from underneath the acquired mask of a confident Israeli, the illusion of redemption is shattered.

Bartov's work follows the post-independence period, when the Mythological Sabras appeared to be firmly established in their culture and land. Bartov belongs to the generation of writers who came of age during World War II. In his earlier novel, *The Brigade* (1965), he provides an intriguing account of the Sabras' intense ambivalence toward Holocaust survivors when they encounter them in Europe in the immediate aftermath of the war. Published two years after the Yom Kippur War, *The Fabricator* reflects a stronger interest in the Holocaust and growing compassion for the survivors. The author's sympathetic attitude toward the Holocaust survivor is revealed through the intelligence agent's compassionate account, but *The Fabricator* continues the earlier attitude of relating to the Holocaust survivor as the "other." Moreover, Hevroni is ultimately denied both agency and self-awareness in comprehending and in documenting his own (hi)story. Throughout the novel, he remains the object of the native Israeli's gaze, a subject of his study.

The protagonist's difficulty in processing the experience of trauma undermines the attempt to produce an authoritative and coherent narrative about his past. Lawrence Langer who studied Holocaust testimonies offers the following observation: "As we listen to the shifting idioms of the multiple voices emerging from the same person, we are present at the birth of a self made permanently provisional as a result of fragmentary excavations that never coalesce into a single, recognizable monument to the past."[18] As Bartov shows, even the powerful Israeli intelligence service and the masterful psychiatrist who commonly engage in uncovering hidden pasts are constrained by the impact of trauma. Ironically, the detective-narrator, too, is bound to construct a fictionalized biography as he pieces together the fragments of information available, thereby echoing the fabricator's act.

Bartov's novel reveals the frailty of an identity that is based on the suppression of memory even when a seemingly coherent narrative conceals these gaps. To the extent that all Israelis are Holocaust survivors, Hevroni may be seen as a collective representation of the Mythological Sabra who suffers from the postwar effects of "violent forgetfulness,"[19] whether hidden

or visible. We will return to the possibility of reading *The Fabricator* as an allegorical representation of Israeli society in the following discussion.

WAR, VIOLENCE,
AND THE ALLURE OF HISTORICAL REGRESSION

Like Bartov's novel, Amnon Jackont's *Borrowed Time* focuses on an Israeli man's transformed identity, which presents a mystery to the Israeli intelligence service. Its protagonist, Arik Ben-Dor, comes as close as possible to the Mythological Sabra: The son of a famous European-born, Socialist-Zionist politician, Arik is, quite symbolically, the First Son of his kibbutz. A leader among his peers, he is ranked as outstanding among his fellow combat pilots, the cream of the Israeli army elite. Following an extended period of military service, he joins the Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, and continues to work in the service of his country. At the prime of his life, Arik Ben-Dor represents the fulfillment of the Sabra image.

During his stay abroad, however, Arik Ben-Dor falls in love with a Palestinian woman, moves in with her, and cuts off his ties with the Mossad. Both he and his lover assume new identities in an attempt to begin a new life. Arik discards his native Hebrew name, assumes a foreign first name and reclaims his father's old European last name, and reinvents himself as Albert Bodinger. Living under the cover of his new exilic identity, he earns a living as a hired pilot transporting smuggled goods, which turns him into a double fugitive from the law. When a friend is sent by the Mossad to track him down, he finds that the once youthful and confident Sabra has been subject to sickness and sudden aging, a change that conforms to the stereotypical Zionist view of the exilic Jew. Arik's "regressive conversion" poses an enigma and a challenge to the Israeli intelligence service, leading them to send, Shemesh, his childhood friend after him, to explore the grounds for this change and to persuade Arik to return to Israel of his own free will.

Toward the end of the novel, Arik explains to Shemesh the hidden reasons for his symbolic conversion as stemming from his growing disillusionment with the Zionist historiography and its view of Israel as a safe haven for Jews. Arik describes his changed outlook: ". . . you go out to the world and discover that they deceived you. [. . .] You discover that [out there] there is a big, huge world and people live in it without boundaries, without wars . . ." [266]. Witnessing the sweeping power of the Islamic revolution that toppled the Shah in Iran, his conviction grew that Israeli

Jews are trapped within an endless cycle of wars that offers no way out: "We live in borrowed time of grace," he explains to his friend, "[. . .] but time is running out. [. . .]. I am afraid, Shemesh. [. . .] How many borrowed decades of wars from within and from without, and at the end, what? Destruction. You win one battle, two, dozen, a hundred and a dozen—and the war is still lost" [270–71].

The regressive conversion is thus rooted in a profound ideological change that leads the protagonist to choose life in exile over death in the homeland. In making this preference, Arik regards himself as following the footsteps of the Jewish historian, Josephus Flavius, who decided to surrender to the Romans instead of killing himself when the Jewish revolt in the Galilee was defeated in the first century c.e. Arik's choice of a historical model stands in contrast to the Israeli national tendency to glorify those who sacrifice themselves for the homeland, much like his own father who, according to Arik, "saw himself as a Bar Kokhba," the ancient leader of another Jewish revolt against Rome [273].[20] The symbolism of those ancient models echoes in a lament by Kugel, Arik's handler at the Mossad, over his agent's choices: "Ah, Ben-Dor, Ben-Dor. Had you not decided to act like Josephus Flavious—what a Judah the Maccabbee you could have been, or even a Bar Kokhba . . ." [177].

Like *The Fabricator*, *Borrowed Time* revolves around the protagonist's identity change from a Sabra to an exilic Jew, but in spite of their shared interest in this regressive historical trajectory there is a critical difference in their respective accounts. *The Fabricator* implies that the protagonist's identity changes are psychological in nature and stem from a Holocaust survivor's pathological response to his traumatic experiences. *Borrowed Time* provides a political framework to explain Arik Ben-Dor's identity change, and empowers him with a deliberate decision and full awareness of its political ramifications and the personal risks involved. This difference may reflect the generational gap between the two writers as well as the dramatic changes that took place in the second half of the 1970s, in the years separating the publications of these works. Arik's views reflect the emergence of a more critical approach to Zionist history and Israeli national myths in the late 1970s, which was to intensify in later decades. In 1980, his views and personal choices were more extreme than they would appear to today's reader. By focusing on the political and ideological dimensions of his hero's identity reversal rather than on its individual psychological grounds, Jackont implies that this dramatic change is rooted in a broader social and political change.

Once Arik assumes the role of an exilic Jew, his degree of freedom

is increasingly diminished. His attempt to escape from his country's fate and live peacefully with his Palestinian lover is doomed to fail within the harsh reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the end, the Palestinian lover is inadvertently responsible for Arik's death when the Palestinian gunman she sends after Shemesh mistakenly kills Arik who is trying to escape from the Mossad. Arik's regression from an active Israeli agent to a persecuted Jew ends when he is caught between the Israeli Mossad and the Palestinians. Although his character is granted agency in making his earlier choices, the constraints of his situation are expressed textually by his absence as the narrator of his own story, and others are left to report on his life and his views.

Though they focus on personal stories, *The Fabricator* and *Borrowed Time* nonetheless suggest that the source of the problem is located beyond the particular individuals or their specific circumstances in creating analogies between the investigators and those whom they investigate. The Israeli intelligence officer who investigates Hevroni—a native Israeli named Avner Ben-Barak—changes his identities and creates biographies for professional reasons. In so doing he too becomes "the fabricator" to whom the novel title alludes: "In that second half of my life, when I remained in Europe for years," he notes, "I did not sit still in one place but kept moving in a continuous circular motion, each time as a somewhat different character, every time with a different passport, while my cover stories continued to be replaced . . ." [206]. Reflecting on these changes, he further comments that "[o]f all the masks he has replaced, his favorite was that of Chaim Berkovitch, which would have been his name had his father not changed his name to Ben-Barak and imagined his son as King Saul's chief officer" [202].

In *Borrowed Time*, Shemesh is positioned as the immigrant "other" in comparison to Arik's status of a Mythological Sabra. Born in Germany as Leopold Gold, he arrives in Palestine as a child refugee and goes through the conventional Zionist conversion, assuming a Hebrew name and identity. When, equipped with a German passport bearing his old, pre-Israeli name and identity, he is sent to hostile Iran to look for Arik, he goes further than his official cover requires in re-embracing his discarded exilic identity. Shemesh thus continues to follow Arik's example in undergoing "the Josephus process" [190], and likewise shifts from the role of the pursuer on behalf of the Mossad to being pursued by them. The process of identification is further revealed in these novels when Avner Ben-Barak and Shemesh are attracted to the lovers of the men they were following and enter brief relationships with them. *Borrowed Time* ends with another

ironic twist when Kugel, the Mossad's old guard who pursues Arik, suffers a stroke in Europe and, on his deathbed, hears voices speaking in Yiddish, the discredited exilic language of his youth. This symbolic regression to an exilic Jew is further enhanced by its juxtaposition to the hymn of the Palmah underground, a canonic expression of the Sabra culture of Arik's and Shemesh's generation.

Like *The Fabricator, Borrowed Time* attracts attention to the fragile or illusory character of the regressive conversion from a Sabra to an exilic Jew. The protagonist's identity change can endure for a limited time only, but it ends with a violent death. The rupture between the Jewish past and the Israeli present cannot offer a solution, but neither can the opposite movement of recapturing an earlier exilic identity. Whether these identity changes stem from a conscious or unconscious response to personal and collective traumas of war, neither route offers the comfort of resolution or the promise of redemption.

HISTORY IMPRISONED BY MYTH: CYCLICAL TIME AND MIRRORED IDENTITIES

The Last Jew, Yoram Kaniuk's 1981 epic novel, spans several centuries and three continents. The novel portrays a vast array of characters from different historical times and locales, with a web of connecting threads between them. The earliest figure depicted in the novel is Yosef della Reina, a 15th century kabalist, who became the subject of legendary tales of magical practices,[21] but the key character that propels the plot is a late 19th century wandering poet and womanizer, Yosef Reina, named after him. *The Last Jew* revolves around several of Yosef Reina's numerous offspring, who are often oblivious to their hidden biological ties. The novel's two main historical foci are the Holocaust and the Yishuv/Israel. The figure of the "Last Jew" personifies the link between them.

The Last Jew is an inmate in a Nazi death camp who manages to survive thanks to his superb talent as a woodcarver. Believing that he will remain the last Jew to survive the Holocaust, he takes upon himself the task of rescuing Jewish knowledge from extinction. The Last Jew thus develops a phenomenal ability to memorize all that he hears and reads and to recite it verbatim. During his stay in the camp, he meets a young intern, Shmuel Lipkin, whose street-smart survival skills help him survive. After the war, the two wander around together, living off the shows that the young man organizes for the Last Jew in which he performs his remarkable recitations.

Lipkin eventually leaves Europe for America, whereas the Last Jew immigrates to Israel with his wife who, like him, is a Holocaust survivor.

The Last Jew's determination to memorize all Jewish texts constitutes a form of resistance to the Nazi plan to annihilate Jewish memory. In so doing, he embodies and affirms the significance attributed by Jewish tradition to collective memory encoded in texts. But in embracing the role of a living monument, he loses touch with historical time, and begins to feel as if he is "living always at one point in an eternal and unchanging present" [255]. This sense of being frozen—often experienced by survivors of trauma[22]—is also evident in his loss of personal memory and identity that causes him to become a "generic" exilic Jew. Moreover, his mechanical recording is indiscriminate with regard to the value or appropriateness of the memorized texts, and his repertoire therefore blends history with fiction, scientific study with trivial conversation, Jewish and non-Jewish texts. The rather grotesque outcome of this process becomes a parody of "Jewish memory" that is exacerbated when performed as cheap entertainment, featuring the Last Jew as a curiosity or a "freak."

The subversion of historical time is manifested symbolically in the setting of the clock backward, an act that becomes the key to the Last Jew's memory and which Shmuel Lipkin learned from his own experience in the Holocaust: "Once I invented the turning of the clock backward, afterward I lived in reverse time and that's how the amnesia was born and lasted four years" [430]. Similarly, an Israeli educator who writes the Last Jew's biography reveals that his story is constructed from the end to the beginning [27]. The idea of time flowing backward is repeated elsewhere in the novel. The turning of the clock backward becomes more loaded when we learn that the Last Jew is none other than Evenezer Shneorson, the First Son to be born on a Zionist agricultural settlement founded by his parents. Following his young wife's death, Evenezer leaves his infant son and goes to Europe to search for his origins. Believed dead by his mother, Rivka, she raises her grandson Boaz as her own son. Boaz, a major figure in this novel, suffers his own trauma during Israel's War of Independence and that is followed by a lengthy period of disorientation when the war ends.

The Last Jew creates a mythical framework by introducing a cyclical repetition of biographical patterns, by mirroring and doubling identities and symbolic images.[23] The defiance of the linear historical temporal order is expressed by the Last Jew's observation that "that which was finished long ago, is bound to begin again" [105], a view that is reaffirmed toward the end of the novel: "Someone invents now not only the past but also the present in which these things are actually taking place, and what is

happening is a prophecy that goes both forward and backward, like the history that is disappearing from the world" [463]. The comparison of Kaniuk's *The Last Jew* and A. B. Yehushua's later novel, *Mr. Mani*,[24] may be particularly instructive: both novels are family sagas that encompass several generations of Jews (the Mani family is Sephardi) and emphasize continuity within the Jewish experience; both use mythical patterns and the doubling and mirroring of identities; and both are deliberately constructed against the redemptive thrust of the Zionist narrative. Unlike *The Last Jew*, however, *Mr. Mani* preserves a sequential, if counter-historical, order that proceeds in a reverse chronology from the present to the past. This structure incorporates the possibility of a "counter-counter-reading" (from the last chapter to the beginning), which offers a more comforting potential of restoring historical time.[25]

The Last Jew implies that mythical structures may be far more significant than "historical truth," and that history is inherently suspect. The novel portrays an array of characters whose pedigree is obscured, who have conflicting biographies, and whose identity remains fluid and ambiguous. The novel articulates the demise of the social and moral order through the collapse of historical time and genealogical structures: sons who search for the identity of their biological fathers; husbands who are unsure of their parenthood on the one hand, or unaware that they are not the biological fathers of "their" children, on the other; persons who look alike yet their relationship to each other remains unclear; a wife who finds out that her husband is also her father; and parents who are siblings or uncles of their own children.

The collapse of historical time and the moral order challenges the ideological premises and teleological orientation of the Zionist narrative and the historical dichotomies of Israeli/Jew, homeland/exile. The exilic Jewish past cannot be told apart from the Zionist present and vice-versa, the Zionist present carries the same structures and motifs as the exilic past. The Israeli characters are portrayed as part of an entire gallery of Jewish characters who are the manifestations of Jewish archetypes. The First Son of a Zionist settlement is transformed from a New Hebrew into an exilic Jew *par excellence*. With further irony, Evenezer's departure from Palestine to Europe—representing the opposite direction to the historical model of the Exodus from Egypt toward the Promised Land—occurs in the spring, the season traditionally associated with Passover and the commemoration of the Exodus.

The mirroring images of Boaz Shneorson, the Last Jew's biological son, and Shmuel Lipkin, his adopted as son from the concentration

camp, similarly defy the Zionist dichotomies. Boaz is a Sabra, born and raised on a farm, a soldier who fights in Israel's War of Independence and subsequent wars, and becomes involved in the commemoration of fallen soldiers. Shmuel, on the other hand, follows the negative stereotype of the exilic Jew, a man who is rootless, yet a ruthless survivor. In spite of these stark differences, the novel suggests that the two share significant biographical patterns: born on the same day, though in different parts of the world, both are orphaned as children and adopted by others, and both exploit war situation and live off the memory of the dead. The doubling of Shmuel/Boaz suggests that the two are the Janus face of the same persona and hence are ultimately interchangeable. This point is further manifested in Shmuel's biography, which is also split into alternative versions: In the dominant version, he goes to America and, adopted by his half brother, he becomes a famous theater director. In the other version, he leaves Europe for Israel, where he joins the army fighting in the War of Independence, and is mistakenly identified as dead. Lipkin uses this opportunity to recreate himself as a native Sabra, much like *The Fabricator's* hero, and adopts the name of Yosef Renan (i.e., the modern Hebrew version of his biological father, Yosef Reina).

The novel thus demonstrates that the fluidity of identity is intimately linked to the fluidity of the past. It problematizes the notions of "evidence," "testimony," "biography" and "history" and questions the possibility of establishing an authoritative version of the past. Boaz's commemoration of fallen soldiers begins by his invention of a testimony on the death of his friend Menahem and by attributing to him heroic deeds and poetic ventures to satisfy the bereaved father's emotional needs. Faced with similar demands by other bereaved parents, Boaz goes on to develop an entire industry for memorializing fallen soldiers, and calls himself "the vulture."[26] The novel offers a harsh critique of the exploitation of death and the commodification of memory, but it also demonstrates that these tendencies are not unique to Israeli society.[27]

The Last Jew illuminates the ways in which individual and group memories, recorded biographies, and "documentary literature" are socially constructed. The novel itself (possibly constructed in its entirety from the tapes of Evenezer's recitations) includes reports, diary entries, letters, memoirs, testimonies, legends, and dialogues. The literary devices employed in this work—the diversity of material and points of views, the fragmentation of narrative, the intersection of multiple subplots, the recurrence of themes, and the doubling of identities—undermine its authority as a record and the singularity of historical events. The mythical cyclical rhythm it introduces

highlights a recurrent pattern of Jewish fate, and suggests the possibility of seeing the Zionist project as a direct continuation of the exilic Jewish past.[28]

The Last Jew shows that history is besieged by myth and ideology. Yet the novel also alludes to the possibility of change that may free Israelis from the grip of the past. Toward its end, the novel depicts the Last Jew's death-and-rebirth experience, in which he forgets his acquired memories and recovers his identity and memory as Evenezer Schneorson. "There was a time, he says, that I forgot Hebrew; Hebrew vanished and was no longer there, and I spoke in so many voices which I forgot, and I used to recite words in other languages and inverted letters" [467]. The challenge he faces now is "to become again, after fifty years, what I had been, for better or worse" [449]. By losing his "monumental stature" as the Last Jew, he is now able to re-enter historical time, to re-connect with his former native Israeli past and identity, and to observe, for the first time, the effects of the passage of time on himself and on his surrounding.[29]

The potential return from myth to history is also alluded to in the symbolic juxtaposition of two female characters, Rivka the Matriarch (Evenezer's aging mother) and Noga, her grandchild's companion. The elderly woman presents an apocalyptic view: "The First Jew says to the Last Jew: This is a lost story. There was chaos in the beginning and there will be chaos at the end" [409]. But Noga de-legitimizes her view as expressing a desire to avenge and rejects its validity: "I do not believe in circles that offer no way out" [414]. Noga, (i.e. "morning star"), who carries a baby in her womb, represents the potentiality of liberation from the grip of trauma and the return to history, ultimately reaffirming the Zionist ideology and the possibility of creating a different future.

POSTMEMORY, CONTESTED IDENTITIES, AND THE SEARCH FOR REDEMPTION

Twenty years after *The Fabricator* was published, Michal Govrin's novel *The Name* explores the impact of the Holocaust on the identity formation of a young Israeli woman who is a second-generation survivor. Born and raised in Israel, she struggles with the shadows of the past that intrude on her life and sense of self. As a young girl of four, Amalia finds out from her aunt that she is named after her father's first wife, Mala, who died during the Holocaust. The aunt introduces the dead woman as a legendary figure: "She was our angel. Our angel. [. . .] You can't imagine how fantastic she

was!" [E18, H22–23].[30] A beautiful woman and an aspiring concert pianist whom Amalia's father had adored , Mala committed suicide when taken by the Nazis and died a proud Jew.

The aunt's revelation about her father's unknown past is triggered by his outburst at the child for failing to realize the superb music talent she shares with her namesake. This incident imprints Mala's presence on Amalia's consciousness, and from this point on she becomes her secret but constant companion . Amalia internalizes the fragmented memories inadvertently transmitted to her by her parents, and more directly by her aunt, in a process that is typical of second-generation Holocaust survivors, and which Marianne Hirsch identifies as *postmemory*. According to Hirsch, the second generation's "own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that they can neither understand nor recreate."[31]

Overwhelmed by her role as a living monument to the dead, Amalia attempts to escape the oppressive burden of the past. As a young adult, she screams at her father, "I told you. I don't want any contact with your past, no contact, you understand?" [E54/H57]. Struggling to suppress her postmemory and separate herself from Mala, she undergoes successive identity changes: Amalia, the daughter of European Holocaust survivors, becomes Amy, a singer who performs in the free-spirited, Americanized clubs on Tel Aviv beach; later, she leaves Israel for New York, where she lives in Greenwich Village and works as a photographer, and eventually adopts the name Emily.

Name changing serves as a ritual marker of dissociation with the past, yet the protagonist fails in her attempts to break away from her former identities. Haunted by the past, Amalia experiments with the opposite strategy of totally submerging herself in it. Accepting a commission to document Mala's life, she hopes that by creating this photo memorial she would eventually be free to live her own life. Stein, a wealthy Holocaust survivor and a former admirer of Mala's, who commissions the project, represents the traditional Jewish command to remember (*zakhor*): "You are our second Malinka, you will be the one to bring back [our] Mala, you!" [E58, H61]. "You, our second Malinka, you will bring Mala back to us, you!" [E58, H61], he begs Amalia. "It can't be that she won't be anymore, do you understand? Can't be [. . .] they must not succeed in killing her memory, you understand!" [E58/H60] The act of remembering presents a moral victory over the Nazis, a responsibility that is personal as well as collective.

Made desperate by the failure of her attempts to submerge herself in Mala's life, Amalia tries unsuccessfully to commit suicide. Once again, she seeks to redefine her identity, this time by adopting an Orthodox lifestyle and becoming a "repentant," a *ba'alat tshuva.* The religious paradigm that the rabbi who serves as her spiritual guide teaches her colludes with Amalia's own wish to suppress the past. "Remember that repentance is like death and rebirth," the rabbi explains, "[. . .] One should not only keep away from sin but forget it completely, erase from memory the acts of the past" [E34/H37]. Amalia often revisits this religious formula representing a total break with the past: "I am a different person [now], and I am not the same person who sinned" [E12/H13].

After two years of Yeshiva study, she moves to the outskirts of Jerusalem and dedicates herself to the sacred craft of weaving prayer shawls (*talitot*) and a Torah curtain (*parochet*). On the verge of accepting the rabbi's idea that the completion of her repentance must lead to marriage and in spite of her budding love for the young man chosen to be her husband, Amalia's doubts about the possibility of breaking away from the past intensify. At first she blames Mala for undermining her efforts: "It's not me, its not me, Rabbi, it's her!" she cries out to her spiritual guide. "I tried, I tried to escape, to hide, I tried everything, even the name, her name, I changed once, twice, but she pursued me, Rabbi, even here! [. . .] It's she who gets in the way of repentance, she won't let me live in her death, she won't ever forgive me . . ." [E42; 44H]. Memories of Mala's life and her earlier experiences become increasingly invasive. The narrative reflects her growing agitation in abrupt transitions, broken phrases, gaps and dividing lines. Sudden shifts between the first, second, and third singular pronouns further articulate the growing fragmentation of her identity: "But now, how shall *I* claim to confess with clean hands about *you,* about the fear that impelled *you* to start stretching the warp of the prayer shawls despite what happened last night? [. . .] and from the blur, once again *she* bursts onto the hotel roof with *her* crazy singing, and flounces out to the path going down from the walls. *You* turned *your* head away in pain; hadn't *you* done everything to wipe those hours out of *yourself,* as Rabbi Israel Gothelf instructed, and here *she,* the impure one, the errant one, stirs in *you* again [. . .]"

[E21–22/H26, emphasis added]. Elsewhere, her use of the plural pronoun reflects the co-consciousness of Mala/Amalia, and at one point Mala takes over the narrator's role as she addresses Amalia in the second person.[32]

The heroine's doubts about the validity of rupture that the rabbi advocates grow: "How is it possible to forget, even if the memory is awful,

even if it is a memory of sin? How is it possible to say: Be different, I am a different person and not the same one who sinned. These are just words, Rabbi, empty sophistry!" [E196/ H186]. As the pressure of the past increases, Amalia gains insight into the repeated behavior patterns that pervade her life and realizes that underneath her various identities, she is one and the same person: "No more division. One and your name is one" [H167].[33] Amalia expresses this realization by deliberately subverting the religious conversion formula and by reciting the prayer emphasizing the unity of God's name as an alternative paradigm: "For I am the same person who sinned, I did not travel into exile from my home, and I did not change my name again, Amalia. That is the secret of the name woven into us, for *You are One and Your Name is One*" [E166/ H159]. Convinced that, in spite of its oppressive presence, denial of the past is also an act of betrayal, she objects to the deliberate obliteration of Mala's memory as a viable route to redemption.

Her fiancé's mystical rabbi presents to her yet another religious venue to restore unity by means of a sacrificial act of atonement and martyrdom. Death would bring a personal salvation and a collective redemption (*tikkun olam*) that would allow the total merging of past and present, of her and Mala, of history and memory, of Man and God. In contrast to her earlier "anomic suicide" attempts, this act of self-sacrifice represents an "altruistic suicide," committed for society's benefit.[34] The writing of her confession is thus a part of the process of repentance, that leads to the fulfillment of this mission.

Toward the end of the novel, Amalia completes the tasks that she has set out to do before her final act—weaving the Torah curtain and writing a confession. But at the same time she also realizes the impossibility of total perfection—of faith, self-sacrifice, and even of God. The novel ends enigmatically with the entrance of the Sabbath, leaving open the possibility that she might pursue her plan to throw herself off a cliff, wrapped in her finished Torah curtain, or alternatively, that she may emerge reaffirmed in her quest for an integrated life and self. Amalia's written confession is the product of a religious act of repentance and purification before death, but the writing, also serves as a therapeutic process and as an act of defiance against the silence imposed on her by her rabbi and her fiancé who refused to learn about her past. Like St. Augustine's *Confessions,* this text is at once an autobiography, a religious testimony, a personal diary, a form of prayer, and a work of literature.

Written over the forty days within the *sefirah* period (i.e. the fifty days "counted" between the Passover and Shavu'ot), Amalia's confession rep-

resents a double movement in time: a linear movement manifested in the progression of historical time and a circular movement of re-examining the various layers of her past. This duality is inherent to the period of the *sefirah* itself, which encompasses the linear counting of the days and the annual cyclical return to the mythical national past, of the Exodus from Egypt and its aftermath. Amalia's task of preparing herself for her sacrificial act adds another temporal dimension that subverts the linear thrust forward, namely, her countdown toward the date of her sacrificial death.

The heroine-narrator simultaneous engagement in weaving and in writing, provides an iconic representation of this double movement in time, as well as of her efforts to tie together the loose, torn threads of her fragmented life and consciousness. Further, by grounding the narrative in the *Sefirah* period the author provides an evocative subtext that links Amalia's private journey with a centuries-old Jewish memory of a similar collective search for redemption, that of the Exodus from Egypt, the trials of wandering in the desert, and the handing down of the Torah at Mount Sinai. By limiting the writing to a forty-day period, Govrin creates an analogy between it and the forty days and nights, which Moses spent on Mount Sinai in preparation for the giving of the Torah [Exodus 34:28].[35] The grounding of her confession in this highly charged mythical formula of death and rebirth, slavery and redemption, resists the closure of suicide and may support the possibility of "alternative redemption,"[36] though Govrin leaves the ending deliberately ambiguous.

Amalia's search demonstrates the rejection of both the Zionist and the religious conversion formulae that construct a redemptive narrative based on severed continuity with the past. Govrin's heroine of the 1990s is far removed from the image of the Mythological Sabra of the 1940s and 1950s, yet she continues to struggle with a deep-seated ambivalence toward the Jewish past. Swaying between the battle to fend off the invasive character of traumatic memory and the desire to suppress or erase the past, and a sense of personal and moral obligation to it, her personal odyssey is clearly linked to the quest for a balance between the past and the present, her Jewish roots and her Israeli present. Like David Grossman's *See: Under Love*,[37] *The Name* highlights the impact of postmemory on those native Israelis, the second generation of Holocaust survivors, for whom the trauma of the Holocaust is no longer the experience of the "other," the exilic Jew, but part of Israel's collective heritage and consciousness.

BETWEEN AN ISRAELI AND A JEW

The construction of symbolic continuities and discontinuities between the Jew and the Israeli has always been a central theme in the formation of Hebrew national culture and continues to this day. An analysis of the four literary works discussed in this article points out the discrepancy between the earlier dichotomies constructed by the Zionist narrative and a social reality that has become increasingly fluid, complex, and heterogeneous.[38] Challenging the idea of a homogenous and uniform Israeli identity, these works defy the notion that the return to the ancient homeland revived a "buried" native identity, or that the construction of a native identity became a profoundly transformative, redeeming, and irreversible process. Instead, they reveal the proliferation of different, and at times conflicting, configurations of the Jewish-Israeli identity, and as such, they are part of a much broader trend in contemporary Israeli literature that reflects the dynamic and pluralistic character of Israeli society.

The continuing effects of trauma contribute to the challenge of the Mythological Sara, the improbability of bracketing off the past, and the experience of a reality that is fluid, fluctuating, and resists closure. Much has been written about the crisis of representation and the crisis of testimony after Auschwitz, and the ways in which the past has continued to haunt its survivors.[39] The recent proliferation of historical studies, memoirs, fiction, films, plays, and art works on the Holocaust reveals the post-traumatic need to keep returning to these issues in spite of—or because of—the inability to find appropriate representations, answers, or construct a closure.[40] The works discussed in this essay show that the post-traumatic situation undermines the possibility of establishing clear and stable identities as well as coherent and authoritative narratives about the past. This tension produces ironies within these literary texts: Evishalom Hevroni is depicted as a publisher who is unaware of his own life story. Amalia/Emily, by profession a documentary photographer, is unable to produce the photo album of Mala's life, and struggles to document her own life. Arik identifies with Josephus' will to live, yet disregards his major accomplishment of producing a monumental historical record. Evenezer's total devotion to his self-imposed mission to create a record of the past is undermined by his own limitations as a witness; his son cynically profits from the fabrication of testimonies and memorials for fallen soldiers.

The analysis of these works also suggests that social reality is much less uniformly directed than any overarching narrative would have it, thereby

affirming Lyotard's dictum regarding the death of grand narratives in the postmodern age.[41] The novels stand in marked contrast to the uniform and linear structure of the Zionist narrative as well as its teleological direction. The identity change prescribed by the Zionist conversion paradigm is thus subverted by the representation of alternative transformations: an identity reversal, the emergence of co-existing Jewish and Israeli identities, and the portrayal of mirroring identities across time and space within an a-historical framework. These themes demonstrate the failure of the Zionist narrative to provide an appropriate representation of an Israeli reality that is more diverse and rapidly transforming.

And yet the novels also reveal that the reversal of the Zionist conversion paradigm does not offer an alternative redemption. *The Fabricator* and *Borrowed Time* relate to the regression from a Sabra to an exilic Jewish identity as illusory and bound to a limited "time out" (as the original Hebrew title of Jackont's novel, *Pesek Zeman*, implies). The subversion of the temporal structure of the Zionist narrative serves to highlight the critique of its dichotomized constructs, but the process of historical regression fails to provide a viable solution in the current state of crisis.

In contrast, *The Last Jew* and *The Name* hint at the possibility of integrating the past with the present and hence at an alternative route of survival, even though they stop short of delivering a promise of redemption. Ultimately, the figure of the Last Jew regains his native identity and memory and is re-integrated into the Israeli present. Similarly, the potential interchangeability of his two sons—the adopted exilic Jew and the biological Sabra—diminishes the gaps between these two symbolic representations of Jewish continuity, and imply that both may continue to offer similarly viable options. In *The Name*, Amalia's ability to become conscious of the unity of her self diverts her from searching for wholeness in death. The new possibility of integration allows her to reject the alternatives of a total submission to the past, its complete disowning, or self-annihilation.

More than offering clear-cut solutions for the contemporary descendants of the Mythological Sabras, these novels reflect a state of crisis and point out an urgent need to overcome the ruptures introduced by Zionist ideology and the collective heritage of trauma. By symbolically returning to the past in their search for continuity, these novels reflect a broader cultural trend of growing interest in the pre-Israeli past that has become increasingly visible since the late 1970s. The desire to reconnect with the history, culture, and traditions of exile is evident in the emergence of such phenomena as the revival of religious and communal "exilic" customs and celebrations; individuals' choice of exilic names to create a symbolic continuity with that

past; the popularity of trips to the family's country of origins or to significant places in Jewish exilic history; the upsurge of literary and scholarly works relating to individual and communal pre-Israeli past; secular Israelis' study of religious texts in formal and informal settings and the public discussion on the nature of "the Jewish literary canon" (i.e. *aron ha-sefarim ha-yehudi*); the establishment of museums relating to the exilic past and the continuing existence of immigrant associations; and the establishment of political parties based on an exclusive, pre-Israeli identity.

These phenomena articulate Israelis' growing identification with the exilic Jewish roots of their current Israeli identities that stands in sharp contrast to the earlier attitude of psychological distancing. The desire to create monuments for the exilic past may also stem from the greater historical distance that creates an urgent desire to document that past. The nostalgic longing that often accompanies this desire may also be engendered by the acute sense of crisis in the present,[42] which stems from the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This situation contributes to the function of the Holocaust as a powerful historical metaphor that represents the continuing pattern of threat to Jewish survival that was previously associated with life in exile. The collapse of historical time into a mythical temporal framework nonetheless poses its own danger of obscuring historical distinctions and the need for a more critical attitude toward the examination of current historical developments. Israel's future may depend on its ability to find the balance between the two extremes of creating a rupture with the Jewish past and flooding the present with memories that might hold Israel in the grip of the past.

NOTES

A note on translation and bibliography: The translations of quotes from Hebrew sources are mine unless otherwise noted. I have used the English titles of works published in Hebrew and added the transliteration of the original title in those cases where the translation might obscure the identification of these sources.

1. It is impossible to encompass here the vast literature on the subject of Israeli identity. Among relatively more recent scholarly and popular works on this subject are Anita Shapira, *New Jews, Old Jews*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1997 (H); Yair Auron, *Jewish-Israeli Identity*. Tel-Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1993 (H); Charles S. Liebman and Elihue Katz, eds. *The Jewishness of Israelis*. Albany: SUNY, 1997; Azmi Bishara, ed. *Between "I" and "We": The Construction of Identities and Israeli Identity*. Jerusalem: Van Leer & Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999 (H). The new series entitled "The Israelis" includes, among others, Tom Segev, *The New Zionists*. Jerusalem: Keter, 2000 (H), and Baruch Kimmerling, *The End of Ashkenazi Hegemony*. Jerusalem: Keter, 2001 (H).

2. For a further discussion of the Zionist construction of the past, see Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. On the different structures of historical narratives, see Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. On the concepts of *progress narratives* and *decline narratives*, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: The Social Typology of the Past*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming, 2003.

3. The new native was called the "New Jew," "New Hebrew," "*Eretz Yisraeli*," and "Sabra" (*Tsabar*). In referring to the ideal image of the new native, I am using the term "Mythological Sabra" which was coined by Amnon Rubenstein, *To be a Free People*. Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 1977, 101–39 (H). On the early construction of the New Hebrew, see Rachel Elboim-Dror, "He is Emerging from Within Us, the New Hebrew: On the Subculture of Youth of the First Aliyot," *Alpayim* 12 (1969): 104–35 (H). See also Avraham Shapira, "On the Spiritual Rootlessness and Circumscription to the 'Here and Now' in the Sabra World View," in Dan Urian and Ephraim Karsh, eds. *In Search of Identity: Jewish Aspects in Israeli Culture*, London: Frank Cass, 1999, 103–31. For an extensive sociological study of the Sabra, see Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1997; English translation, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

4. See also Anita Shapira's observation that the image of the "Palmachnik," the Mythological Sabra *par excellence*, represented only a minority of Hebrew youth and was anachronistic by the time it was fully formed, in "From the Palmach Generation to the Candle Children: Changing Patterns in Israeli Identity," *Partisan Review* 4 (2000): 623). For an earlier critique of the Sabra as a collective representation, see Rubinstein, *To be a Free People*, 101–39. See also Yitzhak Laor, *Narratives With No Natives* [Anu Kotvim Otach Moledet]. Tel-Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 1995, 50–114 (H).

5. On the social and psychological significance of name changing, see Erving Goffman. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall, 1963, 92. Paul Antze, "Telling Stories, Making Selves: Memory and Identity in Multiple Personality Disorder," in his and Michael Lambek, eds. *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*. New York: Routledge, 1996, 15.

On name changing as a Zionist ritual of rebirth, see also Amos Elon, *The Israelis: Founders and Sons.* Jerusalem: Schocken, 1971, 124–28 (H.). Changing the name of the severely sick is attributed to the belief that the assignment of a new name would confuse the angel of death. See Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion.* NY: Altheneum, 1970, 203–206.

6. Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, 100–107; Ruth Firer, *The Agents of Zionist Education.* Haifa and Tel-Aviv: Haifa University Press, Hakkibutz Hameuchad and Sifriyat Hapoalim, 1985, 65–78 (H); Yael Zerubavel, "The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death: Masada and the Holocaust as Historical Metaphors," in *Representations* 45 (Winter 1994): 72–100 and Hebrew translation, *Alpayim* 10 (1994): 42–67; for a more recent study of the complexity of the Israeli attitude toward Holocaust survivors and their absorption in Israel see Hanna Yablonka, *Foreign Brethren: Holocaust Survivors in the State of Israel.* Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi Press, 1994 (H); English Translation, *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel After the War.* London: MacMillan Press, 1999.

7. Quoted in Yigal Schwartz. *Aharon Appelfeld: From Individual Lament to Tribal Eternity.* Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2001, 6; see also Appelfeld's description of self-loathing and desire to be reborn in "The Awakening," in Geoffrey H. Hartman, ed. *Holocaust remembrance: The Shapes of Memory.* Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell, 1994, 149–52. Two notable autobiographical accounts by Israelis on remembering and forgetting in relation to the Holocaust are Saul Friedlander's *When Memory Comes* (originally published in French by Edition du Seuil, 1978), Hebrew translation, Jerusalem: Adam, 1980; and Shlomo Breznitz's *Memory Fields,* Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1993 (H).

8. Continuity with Jewish tradition was clearly preserved in the symbolic domains, as the choice of Hebrew as national language, the preservation of the Jewish calendar of holidays, and the creation of national myths and state symbols demonstrate. Although some of their forms and their interpretation were modified, this is quite different than generating totally new, secular symbolic system that has no relations to Jewish tradition. For the analysis of the dialectic between new and old, see Liebman & Don Yehiya, *Civil Religion,* Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots;* Alek Mishori, *Lo and Behold: Zionist Icons and Visual Symbols in Israeli Culture.* Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2000 (H).

9. Liebman and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel,* 137–53; Yair Auron, *Jewish-Israeli Identity.* Tel- Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1993, 70–77 (H); Avner Ben-Amos and Ilana Bet-El, "Holocaust Day and Memorial Day in Israeli Schools: Ceremonies, Education, and History," *Israel Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 258–84. On the use of the Holocaust as a historical metaphor, see Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: Israelis and the Holocaust.* Jerusalem: Keter/ Domino, 1991 (H); Zerubavel, "The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death"; Nurith Gertz, *Myths in Israeli Culture: Captives of a Dream.* Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1988 (H); English translation, London: Valentine Mitchell, 2000.

10. Trauma is described as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena." Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 91; Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1961, 9–10, 33–39; on Pierre Janet's concepts, "traumatic memory" and "narrative memory," see Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*. NY: Basic Books, 1992, 34–35, 37; Van der Kolk, A. Bessel and Onno van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," in Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 159–60, and Ruth Reys, *Trauma: A Geneology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 83–119.

11. As Robert Jay Lifton observes, ". . . in the case of severe trauma, we can say that there has been an important break in the life line that can leave one permanently engaged in either repair or the acquisition of a new twine." *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life*. NY: Simon & Schuter, 1979, 176. Lawrence L. Langer quotes Charlotte Delbo's testimony that "Auschwitz is there, fixed and unchangeable, but wrapped in the impervious skin of memory that segregates itself from the present 'me'," and a similar description by another survivor, Sally H.: "I'm thinking of it now how I split myself. That it wasn't *me* there. It just wasn't me. I was somebody else." *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, 48, 5 respectively; see also his discussion on 48–57; Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 103–10; and Lifton's interview with Caruth in her *Trauma*, 137.

12. Pinhas Ginosar, *Hebrew Literature and the Labor Movement*. Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 1989 (H). On writers' contribution to the construction of Israeli national myths, see Zeruabvel, *Recovered Roots*, 79–119. Some of Israeli major writers of the 1948–generation, such as S. Yizhar, Hanoch Bartov, Aharon Megged and Amos Kenan, have published, in addition to their literary works, newspaper articles or books of essays on current political and social issues. Prominent writers of the following generations, including Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, Yitzhak Laor and David Grossman, have followed this tradition.

13. Hanoch Bartov, *The Fabricator* [*Ha-Badai*]. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1975; Amnon Jackont's *Borrowed Time* [*Pesek Zeman;*]. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved in 1982; Yoram Kaniuk's *The Last Jew*. Tel-Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad & Sifriat Poalim, 1981; and Michal Govrin, *The Name* [Ha-Shem]. Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995. English translation by Barbara Harshav, NY: Riverhead Books, 1998.

14. On the issue of gender and the Sabra image and on women's writing in Israel see Yael S. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own: Israeli Women's Fiction*. NY: Columbia University Press, 1999.

15. On the challenge of modifying one's life story and "passing" in a new identity and on the danger of "leaks," see Goffman, *Stigma*, 41–104.

16. On the parentless Sabra, see also Rubinstein, *To be a Free People,* 101–11. Avishalom Hevroni resembles Moshe Shamir's famous literary hero, Elik, "who was born out of the sea." See Shamir, *With His Own Hands.* Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, [1951], new edition, 1971, 9 (H).

17. Avishalom's biography presents him as the son of a religious Jew who came to Hebron to study in a Yeshiva and married a Russian woman who had converted to Judaism. A couple of years after his birth, his father was murdered by Arabs and his mother lost her sanity. Practically orphaned and without a family, Avishalom was on his own, became a secular Sabra, and changed his name from the Eastern European "Havoinik" to the Hebrew name "Hevroni," after the city of Hebron.

18. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies,* 161.

19. The term "violent forgetfulness," is clearly linked to the suppression of memory as a result of trauma, and was coined by Aharon Appelfeld. See Schwartz, *Aharon Appelfeld,* 6.

20. For a more extensive discussion of the search for national models from Antiquity and the development of Masada and the Bar Kokhba revolt as heroic national myths, see Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots.*

21. On Yosef della Reina, see *Encyclopeadia Judaica,* Jerusalem: Keter, 1974, 10: 240–41.

22. Trauma survivors report on a similar experience of living outside of time, fixed in the immediate present. See Langer's discussion of "wounded time" in *Holocaust Testimonies,* 75; S.J. Brison, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," in Bal Mieke, Joanthan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, eds. *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present.* Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999, 39–54, esp. 43–44; Earnest van Alphen, "Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, Trauma," *Ibid,* 33–35.

23. On the cyclical structure of mythical time, see Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality.* New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

24. A.B. Yehushua, *Mr. Mani.* Tel-Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 1989 (H). English translation, NY: Doubleday, 1992.

25. Yael Feldman, "Back to Genesis: Toward the Repressed and Beyond in Israeli Identity," in Nitza Ben Dov, ed. *In the Opposite Direction: Critical Essays on Mr. Mani.* Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995, 204–22 (H).

26. In 1981, the same year that *The Last Jew* was published, an Israeli film entitled "The vulture" was made on the basis of this novel, yet limited to the subplot dealing with Boaz' industry of memorialization of soldiers.

27. The commercialization of memory reappears in the description of another, secondary character, The American Mr. Brooks, an industrialist whose daughter died as a young girl and who develops a highly successful line of products devoted to her memory. Similarly, the fluidity of biography is also attributed to a German mother and father who believe in different versions of their son's suicide and create two burial places for him, not unlike the old teacher and his wife. As the Israeli teacher notes, "With Menahem who died twice and Frederik who died in a gas

and an electric oven at the same time, it suddenly became clear that every son dies more than once," 73.

28. On this point, see also Gershon Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction, 1880–1980*, Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1998, vol. 5, 201 (H).

29. It is interesting to note that Jacques Derrida, the Algerian born French Jewish philosopher, refers to himself as the "last Jew" in a text in which he explores the autobiographical as well as the philosophical-theological meaning of circumcision [*Circonfession*, Jacques Derrida par Geoffrey Benninton, Paris: Seuil, 1991]. As Gideon Ofrat argues, this ambiguous self-labeling may be open to contradictory interpretations (*Jewish Derrida*. Jerusalem: Academia, 1998, 21–22, H). The same ambiguity may be attributed to Evenezer who embodies both the image of the Sabra as the inarticulate nature-child, and the image of the exilic Jew whose life is devoted to the preservation of words.

30. Quotes from Govrin's text are based on Harshav's English translation. Page references relate to both the Hebrew and the English editions.

31. Marianne Hirsch. "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Person and Public Fantasy," in Mieke, Crewe, and Spitzer, *Acts of Memory*, 8. Postmemory is further reinforced by the custom of naming children after relatives who perished in the war. For an extensive discussion of the syndrome of second-generation from a psychological perspective, see Dina Wardi. *Memorial Candles: Dialogue with Second Generation Holocaust Survivors*. Jersusalem: Keter, [year missing] (H).

32. "And how close *we* are now, *Amalia*, how dear to *me* is the light of the bonfire catching fire in *your* hair [. . .] *as if I and not you* will go tonight like last year into the crowd . . ." [E139/134H, emphases added].

33. I deviated in this case from Harshav's translation of this phrase as "no more distinction" since the translation of the Hebrew word that Govrin uses, *hiluk*, as "division" serves better to connote the splitting of her self.

34. On anomic and altruistic suicides, see Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. NY: Free Press, 1951.

35. The national subtext becomes more explicit when her fiancé explains his refusal to look at her photographs of Mala by making an allusion to the story of Exodus: "Each of us, it seems, has to leave his dead in the desert, Amalia", to which she whispers in reply: "I'll stay behind with the dead in the desert" [E239/H226]. Her answer articulates her belief at that point that she will not be able to leave behind the past in order to share a future life with him.

36. For an interesting discussion of the notion of alternative redemption in Govrin's and Grossman's works, see Rachel Feldhay Brenner, "On Two Options of Redemption: *See: Under Love* and *The Name*," *Alpayim* 20 (2000): 149–68 (H).

37. David Grossman, *See: Under Love*. Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1986. English translation, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1989.

38. See Judith Butler's critique of the dichotomized view of gender identities and her emphasis on the proliferation of alternative gender constructions along similar lines in *Gender Trouble*. NY: Routledge, 1990, in particular, 163–90.

39. Shoshana Feldman and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History.* New York: Routledge, 1992, 1. Aharon Appelfeld describes the feeling of being defeated by words when he wanted to tell the story of his past: "Every time you talk about those days, you feel that that this is incredible. You tell and you don't believe that this happened to you. This is one of the most humiliating feelings that I've experienced." Appelfeld, *The Story of a Life,* 164. Following Adorno's famous statement of 1949, "after Auschwitz, it is no longer possible to write poems" (*Negative Dialectics,* NY: Continuum, 1973, 362), the crisis of representation is often discussed in literature about art and the Holocaust. For a critical assessment of this position, see Geoffrey Hartman's and Berel Lang's articles in Saul Friedlander, ed. *Probing the Limits of Representation.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992. Feldman notes that Adorno modified his earlier statement, pointing out that nonetheless "literature must resist this verdict" (Feldman and Laub, *Testimony,* 34). For the turn to the fantastic as a response to this problem, see Gilead Morahg, "Breaking Silence: Israel's Fantastic Fiction of the Holocaust," in Alan Mintz, ed. *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction.* Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1997, 143–83.

40. See Lori Laub, "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony, and Survival," in Feldman and Laub, *Testimony,* 75–92.

41. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984. See also Gary K. Browning, *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives.* Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000.

42. Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia.* NY: Free Press, 1979.