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Inextricably Bonded

Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers
Re-Visioning Culture

Rachel Feldhay Brenner

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN PRESS

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Bonds of Confession

A. B. Yehoshua’s “Facing the Forests” and Atallah Mansour’s *In a New Light*

The Importance of Telling and Listening

In the previous chapter I focused on the striking absence of interaction between the victors and the defeated in Yizhar’s “Hirbet Hizah” and Habiby’s *Pessoptimist*. As represented in these stories, the Zionist mainstream, locked in its doctrine of exclusion, remained oblivious to the stories of its oppressive rule that the narrators strove to tell. While the telling performs an important role in the narrators’ progress toward self-liberation, the written confessions highlight the complete solitude of each narrator, who fails to find a listener even in his own community. This chapter explores the moment when the stories of Jews and Arabs can no longer evade each other. In their representation of the complex inseparability of the opponents, A. B. Yehoshua’s novella “Facing the Forests” (1963) and Atallah Mansour’s novel *In a New Light* (1966) break down the barriers between victors and victims. The overpowering need to have the adversary listen to the confession both reveals and articulates the indelible bonds between Jews and Arabs. Even if fleeting, this moment of sharing provides a consciousness of connectedness and ties that can no longer be denied.

The stories take place in the aftermath of the 1948 war in the first decade of the state. Yehoshua’s “Facing the Forests,” a third-person stream-of-consciousness narrative, tells the story of an Israeli Jew, an
“eternal” history student. Engaged as a fire watcher in a newly planted forest, the student encounters his helper, an Israeli Arab, a former Palestinian villager. A peculiar relationship develops between them. Seemingly by coincidence, the fire watcher discovers the ruins of the Arab’s village under the trees. The village was ruthlessly destroyed and its inhabitants killed in the 1948 war. With the Jew’s tacit consent, the Arab burns down the forest, exposing the ruins of his destroyed village. The fire watcher implicates the Arab, who is arrested.

Atallah Mansour’s *In a New Light* is a fictional autobiography/confession of Yossi, an Arab who “passes” as a Jew. Yossi’s parents were murdered by unidentified British, Arab, or Jewish killers. Yossi believes in the socialist ideal, as implemented in the Zionist kibbutz movement. In an effort to become a kibbutz member, he renounces his Arab identity, national roots, and ethnic heritage. When the question of Yossi’s Arab identity eventually arises, the kibbutz confronts the issue of whether to accept an Arab as a full member of the community. The membership is approved on condition that Yossi’s Arab identity remain undisclosed.

Both texts position the Jewish and the Arab characters in situations of proximity, where they are no longer separated by geographical distance, political/military hostilities, or emotional obtuseness. Ironically, it is the failure of the nameless Israeli Jew in Yehoshua’s story to adapt to the postwar zeitgeist of Israeli society that places him in the prewar domain of the nameless Arab, literally on top of the Arab’s destroyed village. In Mansour’s novel Yossi’s inability to identify with the defeated Arab community drives him to the kibbutz, which was literally built on the ruins of an Arab village. In either story the protagonist’s quest for self-redefinition vis-à-vis the adversary and his story does not conclude with a definitive resolution of his identity crisis. The stories end on an inconclusive and perhaps even pessimistic note, underscoring the immense difficulties that characterize relationships between Jews and Arabs. Nonetheless, the quite dramatic encounters in the stories demonstrate that, when only for a brief moment the boundaries between the two peoples are removed, the definitions of victor and victim shift and lose their commonly accepted significations.
My discussion of “Hirbet Hizah” and The Pessoptimist has shown Israel’s triumphalist attitude toward the Arab population; the steadfast belief in the supreme righteousness of the cause allowed the Palmach generation to remain impervious to the rare voices of opposition—even those of Jewish objectors, let alone those of the defeated Arab minority. To return briefly to Benjamim, Israeli Jews were capable of writing their history of triumph while remaining oblivious of the subtext of suffering they inflicted on the defeated. While the myths of the “empty land” and the “new” Jew reconstruct the glorious history of the powerful ancient Hebrews and thus dissociate Israeli Jews from the powerless Diaspora, they also suppress the ugly underside of their story of victory. In the texts I discuss in this chapter, the suppressed story returns, reverberating with undeniable and inescapable evidence of committed injustice. While the suppressed story fails to penetrate and transform the consciousness of the Israeli public sphere, it initiates personal relationships between victor and victim. Even though limited and transient, this connection marks a significant change from the narratives of “Hirbet Hizah” and The Pessoptimist, where the confessions of the protagonists-narrators fell on deaf ears. In “Facing the Forests” and In a New Light, each story reaches the opponent, thus transforming the enemy into a confessor.

To appreciate the implications of this transformation, the psychological dynamics of the confession needs to be explored briefly. The phenomenon of telling indicates a delayed impact of trauma, which, when it finally arises in the protagonist’s consciousness, manifests itself in the need to share the fearful story of irretrievable loss. Freud claims that the consciousness of the loss can be repossessed by “developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis.” That is, the individual must reconstruct the event in order to reexperience the emotions blocked at the time of its occurrence and in this way attain a measure of relief from “traumatic neurosis.” For the reconstruction to be effective, it must be articulated. The necessity to articulate indicates that liberation from posttraumatic fear and anxiety requires that the recollection be communicated to a responding other. Recall, in passing, that the confessions in “Hirbet Hizah” and The Pessoptimist did not affect the intended confessor (the Israeli public), leaving the narrators-confessors in the twilight
zone of estrangement, madness, and presumably death. Relief from traumatic syndromes is predicated on telling as well as listening. As students of trauma unanimously agree, the role of the listener, whether in the formal setting of analysis or in an informal interaction, is crucial to the resolution of the posttraumatic syndrome.

Eric Santner, for instance, maintains that the anxiety blocked at the moment of trauma can be recuperated in the presence of an “empathic analyst, who co-constitute[s] the space in which loss may come to be symbolically and affectively mastered.” In his discussion of the trauma of Holocaust survivors, Dominick LaCapra suggests that “the interviewer and the analyst” should present themselves “through a labor of listening and attending that exposes the self to empathetic understanding and hence to at least muted trauma.” Caruth assigns to “the therapeutic listener... the challenge... how to listen to [the victim’s] departure” from the site of the traumatic event. Lifton identifies himself as an empathic listener; although an outsider to the traumatic event, he tries “to take in their stories [of trauma survivors], and to form imagery in [his] own mind about what they’re saying.”

This virtually uniform approach to trauma therapy calls attention to the listener-teller relationships in the narratives. I have already established the fact that the war constituted a traumatic experience for both the winner and the loser. If so, then liberation from the trauma of war signifies for each of the parties a difficult and painful process of telling and listening. Since the themes of “Facing the Forests” and In a New Light focus on the indelible interaction between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs, the search for relief from traumatic memories impels the Jewish and Arab characters to share their stories with each other.

The question that arises at this point concerns the relationships between winners and losers. Why would the victors and the defeated wish to tell each other about their traumas? Why would they expect empathetic understanding, so indispensable to the healing process, in a listener who belongs to the enemy camp? I shall argue that the psychoanalytical concept of transference elucidates the relatedness between the parties, which explains the ineluctable need for interaction between winners and losers.

The fear and anxiety of the posttraumatic syndrome engenders unwillingness and fear to relive the trauma as well as the desire to
share the story with the listener. The latter is invested with both positive and negative attributes that determine the degree of the teller’s resistance to tell the story. As Freud claimed, “positive transference,” characterized by “sympathy, friendship, trust,” is instrumental in helping patients overcome resistance and tell their stories. Consequently, Freud has argued that “an attitude of affectionate and devoted attachment [to the physician] can surmount any difficulty in confession; in analogous situations in real life we say: ‘I don’t feel ashamed with you; I can tell you everything.’” It is important to emphasize that Freud predicated the readiness of the teller to speak upon the readiness of the empathic listener to listen.

Acknowledging his indebtedness to Freud, Jacques Lacan has described the dynamics of transference in terms of the “subject supposed to know [sujet supposé savoir].” Lacan claims that the consciousness of a listener who is supposed to know how to solve the problem is essential to the process of transference: “As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere . . . there is transference.” In other words, for transference to take place, the analysand must attribute to the analyst some vital knowledge that in reality the analyst does not possess. Like Freud, who discerned situations of transference in therapy as well as in “analogous situations in real life,” Lacan identified “the subject supposed to know” as an “individual, whether or not an analyst.” Both thinkers recognize that the dynamics of transference exists in everyday interactions among people and not only in the specific context of therapy.

The prevalence of transference in everyday telling-listening situations illuminates the dual telling-listening interaction between the Jewish and Arab characters in these two texts. The stories present us with a complex configuration of double roles, whereby each character is the teller of his own story as well as the listener to the story of the other. In a way similar to that in which the patient sees the therapist as the “subject who is supposed to know” how to resolve the problem, each character, in his capacity as a teller, sees in the other the hope of liberation from the delayed posttraumatic effects. Conversely, as a listener each character is considered instrumental in healing traumatic injuries.

As I will show in the following discussion of “Facing the Forests” and In a New Light, the particular configuration of the Jewish
victorious majority and the Arab defeated minority has created a particular expectation of each side from the other. As a teller, the defeated Arab expects the Jew to enable him to restore his self-respect and dignity, whereas by telling his story the victorious Jew hopes to attain his moral rehabilitation from committed atrocities through the Arab. Arabs and Jews alternately become the object of each other’s desire; they are possessors of the coveted means to reconstitute that which the other has lost and is compelled to retrieve at any cost. Note that the interchangeability of the roles refutes the canonical interpretation of the auxiliary role of the Arab as a symbolic representation of the Jewish existentialist angst. In contrast to the approach that hopes to neutralize the signification of the Arab presence, I intend to show that the alternating roles of each character point to the mutual recognition of Jews and Arabs, and that the mutual recognition presupposes equal status for both parties.

The perspective of the double transference sheds light on the relations between Arab and Jewish characters in Yehoshua’s and Mansour’s fiction. While in “Hirbet Hizah” and The Pessoptimist the traumatic story of the victim was aimed at self-recognition, in “Facing the Forests” and In a New Light one notes a desire to regain the sense of self through mutual recognition. As we shall see, the transferential interaction is complex and does not necessarily guarantee a hopeful closure. Indeed, these texts portray not only the complexity but also the evanescence of such a meeting between adversaries. While a permanent resolution seems out of reach, the reading of the texts in terms of transferential interaction communicates a concrete possibility of rapprochement.

The Power of Destroyed History

In the closing pages of “Facing the Forests” the forest burns down. Both the nameless, taciturn Israeli Jew, referred to as “the fire watcher” (ba-tsofe), and the nameless, mute Israeli Arab, referred to as “the Arab” (ba’aravi) undergo an intense police interrogation. At the same time as the police officers are questioning the fire watcher, “inside the building they are conducting a simultaneous interrogation of the Arab, in Arabic eked out with gestures. Only the questions are audible.” A few hours later, discomfort and exhaustion break the fire
watcher’s resolve and he “is prepared to suggest the Arab as a possible clue.” The Arab is immediately “bundled in a police car.” Even though he is being arrested and his distraught young daughter “clings to him desperately . . . there is a gratified expression in his eyes now, a sense of achievement.” At that moment the fire watcher “suddenly . . . walks over to the forest manager and boldly demands a solution for the child.” The forest manager, a staunch, old-line Zionist, stares at the fire watcher “with vacant eyes as though he, too, has lost the words, as though he understood nothing.” The fire watcher “repeats his demand in a loud voice.” Enraged by the fire watcher’s demand, the old forest manager “attacks him with shriveled fists, hits out at him.”

The episode engages the three parties—the Arab, the Jew, and the forest manager—in incongruous, somewhat absurd behavior. The Arab, who is being taken into custody, projects a sense of triumphant self-fulfillment. The fire watcher, who betrayed the Arab, turns into an outspoken advocate for the daughter’s welfare. The previously arrogant, self-confident forest manager succumbs to impotent rage, losing control over his speech and actions; he, who has been zealously fulfilling the Zionist ideal of the revival of the land, and who has boasted of having “harnessed” nature to “our [Zionist] enterprise” (FF 103) of forest planting, is witnessing his raison d’être literally go up in smoke. The fire watcher’s bold request on behalf of the child and his careless attitude toward the forest (he coolly and cynically expresses his certainty that the forest was insured) trigger the old man’s wrath. He indignantly blames the intellectual with “the dim glasses,” the “one with his books” (FF 116) for having brought on the disaster. Significantly, the manager directs his aggression at the Jew rather than the Arab. Recall the soldiers in “Hirbet Hizah,” whose firm adherence to the Zionist claim to the land allowed them to disregard not only the Arab victims but also their dissenting comrade. In the postwar reality of “Facing the Forests,” the despairing forest manager sees in the hapless scholar the cause of the disaster. The destruction of the forest symbolizes the collapse of Zionist idealism. A Jew who dares to express an opinion that does not conform to the Zionist cause of reviving the land is a dissenter and therefore the real enemy.

Ironically, it was the manager’s impatience with the previous fire watchers—“the diverse social cases, the invalids, the cripples, the
cranks” (FF 87)—that prompted him to employ the bookish student as a fire watcher. At the time the manager could not have guessed that the scholarly applicant was more of a misfit than those he rejected. The truth is that this “eternal” student turned out to be an unfortunate “social case” in his own circle of friends, considered a “lost case” among his former fellow students. He remains unmotivated by the professional and economic success of his friends, who “may be seen carrying bulging briefcases, on their way to work every morning” (FF 85). In the expedient environment of dedicated functionaries and ambitious academics, the student’s interminably carefree, goal-free, lethargic lifestyle is perceived as an intolerable aberration.

The extent to which the student’s indolence has alarmed and threatened his friends manifests itself in their determination to change him. Drawing upon their organizational skills, they efficiently set out to reform him. In no time they find him a position as a fire watcher, personally pack his books in a suitcase, and even decide on the topic for the research he will be conducting in the woods. Scholarly research of the Crusades is bound to turn him into a respectable, socially adjusted historian. The reintegration of the student into the establishment is predicated upon his academic achievement in his forest exile. The scholarly “conquest” of the Holy Land will liberate him from inertia, somnolence, and aimless drifting.

At first the student truly feels that study of the Crusades might be the right path back to society. The mystery of the Latin quotations seems to hold the promise of making him an active and alert participant in the world. Thus, “he feels certain that there is some dark issue buried within the subject . . . [and] it will be just out of this drowsiness that envelopes his mind like a permanent cloud that the matter will be revealed to him” (FF 93). For a brief moment, therefore, the history of the Crusades has become the locus of transference, an object of desire that holds the key to his social redemption. He feels that the secret knowledge contained in these books provides a new scientific understanding of a distant event, one that will restore him to the mainstream. Indeed, the directive from his friends that he “ought to bring some startling scientific theory [about the Crusades] back from the forests” (FF 89) reinforces the notion that the discov-
to employ the bookish student manager could not have guessed more of a misfit than those he referred to as "real" students. The man circle of friends, considered a few students. He remains unmonetary success of his friends, briefcases, on their way to work. In the environment of dedicated students, the student’s interminably is perceived as an intolerable attorney's indolence has alarmed and determined to change his professional skills, they efficiently set up him a position as a fire watcher, case, and even decide on the topic of the woods. Scholarly return him into a respectable, so- integration of the student into the academic achievement in his for- mation of the Holy Land will liberate aimless drifting.

The study of the Crusades might the mystery of the Latin quotations bring him an active and alert partici- certain that there is some dark [and] it will be just out of this like a permanent cloud that the (93). For a brief moment, there- become the locus of transference, key to his social redemption. He sustained in these books provides a stant event, one that will restore directive from his friends that he scific theory [about the Crusades] forces the notion that the discov- ery of this secret knowledge lies in a rational, methodical interpretation of a historical event.

The spell of a scientific discovery, however, is soon broken. By the time his mistress—the wife of a friend back in the city—comes to visit him several weeks later, both the objective and the method of his study of the Crusades has shifted. To her mocking inquiries about the new ideas for his “brilliant research” among the trees he responds: “Novel ideas? . . . Maybe, though not what they [the friends] imagine . . . not exactly scientific . . . Rather, human” (FF 107).

Instead of the scientific approach to the history of the Crusades, the student has discovered the human idea that underlies history. He discovers the human aspect of history when, undisciplined as always, he procrastinates, allowing himself to be distracted from the abstract hard road of the scientific method to marginal matters in the texts. Thus he pores over illustrations of “monks, cardinals; a few blurred kings, thin knights, tiny villainous Jews,” as well as the “prefaces, various acknowledgments, publication data” (FF 93) that he finds in the books. These findings expose the human subtext of the abstract treatise as well as the personal aspect of the book itself. The illustrations that accompany the Latin documents render concrete the people whose religious fanaticism, hatred of the Jews, and violent instincts resulted in the creation of a casus belli that sent them on the disastrous adventure of the Crusades. The seemingly irrelevant acknowledgments and dates of publication are evidence of humanity’s continuing search for knowledge; they also attest to the personal imprint of those who preceded and inspired the search.

Thus, as objects of desire the books do indeed reveal a secret knowledge, albeit not, as expected, in the sphere of scientific theory. Rather, they reveal to the student a hitherto unrecognized knowledge of himself. Instead of converting into a conforming social being, he discovers that he has become an empathic human being. This newly discovered aspect of his personality is literally tested by fire. When the burning forest threatens the observation post, the fire watcher knows that “he ought to take his two suitcases and disappear. But he only takes the child. . . . He seizes the trembling child by the hand, goes down and begins his retreat. . . . He arrives at the yellow waste,
the wadi, his dream. . . . He sits the barefoot girl on the ground, slumps beside her. His exhaustion erupts within him and covers them both” (FF 112–13).

One of two suitcases is full of books on the Crusades. In the other are his city clothes. The contents of the suitcases that he leaves to burn hold the ticket, so to speak, of the student’s return to the conformist task-and-achievement community back in the city. The decision to save the girl rather than his belongings signifies the failure of the watcher’s reintegration into the mainstream. At the same time, however, the decision to protect the girl, which demonstrates his capacity to act out of a concern for another, signals a hitherto unsuspected inner strength. Subsequently this new sense of empowerment manifests itself in the bold and loud demand to find a solution for the Arab girl. As we have seen, he repeatedly and provocatively addresses this demand to the distraught forest manager. This behavior reflects the student’s complete indifference to the manager’s personal agony over the collapse of the Zionist enterprise of afforestation of the “empty land,” and it doesn’t reveal any concern about the forest.

This boldly expressed obstreperousness draws attention to yet another, more significant, aspect of the student’s transformation. As the narrative repeatedly insists, the student has somehow lost the ability to express himself. “Words,” we are told in the very beginning, “weary him. . . . . He plainly needs to renew his acquaintance with words. . . . Even with himself he hardly manages to exchange a word” (FF 85, 86, 93). He hesitates, mumbles, and stutters, revealing his uncertainty, social maladjustment, and sense of misplacement. Thus, the unusual eloquence of his outburst to the forest manager is the only other instance of the student’s eloquent and lucid articulation. The first clearly enunciated expression of his thoughts occurs in a climactic encounter with the Arab.

With his contract as fire watcher ending, the student fears that “he [the Arab] too [like the books] will fail to convey anything and it will all remain dark.” Afraid that the Arab will not communicate some crucial knowledge in his possession, the Jew initiates the interaction by telling the Arab the story of the Crusades. The Jew is cogent and articulate as he talks “quietly, reasonably, in a positively didactic manner.” He tells the Arab about “the fervor, about the cruelty,
about the Jews committing suicide, about the Children’s Crusade; things he has picked from the books, the unfounded theories he has framed himself.” As he talks, his voice grows “warm, alive with imagination.” The Arab, who knows no Hebrew, at first listens to the “alien words as one absorbing melody”; then, his “tension [mounting],” he “is filled with hate” (FF 110).

The student’s narration of the Crusades is followed by the Arab’s narration. The Arab, whose “tongue was cut out during the war” (FF 92), communicates with hurried, confused gestures and with a “squirming severed tongue.” The student deduces from the Arab’s contorted body language “that this is his house and that there used to be a village here as well and that they had simply hidden it all, buried in the big forest... Apparently his wives have been murdered here as well.” Despite the fact that he clearly understands the Arab’s story, the student assumes a noncommittal attitude, telling himself that this is “a dark affair, no doubt” and “moves away, pretending not to understand.” The Arab nonetheless continues to pursue him; he seems to believe that “only he, the fire watcher, can understand him” (FF 110–11). The protagonists exchange stories in languages incomprehensible to one another. While the Arab does not understand Hebrew, the comprehension of his pantomime depends a lot upon the Jew’s imagination. In each case comprehension is not predicated upon verbal communication. Rather, to a large extent communication between the characters arises through intuitive and associative inferences.

While the juxtaposed stories reveal disparities both in content and form, their reception demonstrates the uniformity of mutual rejection. The student delivers a didactic lecture based on “unfounded theories” about the cruelty and suffering of the Jews at the time of the Crusades. The Arab reciprocates with a factual story of destruction in a passionate, frenzied “pantomime” (FF 110). The factuality of the story imprinted in the Arab’s muteness underscores the fictional aspect of the Crusades story as authored by the Jew. Whereas the dramatic testimony of the witness/victim reenacts the trauma of the destruction on the site of the destroyed village, the story of the Crusades evolves in the student’s imagination. It is interesting to note the unanimity of the negative reception of the stories. The Arab is filled with
hate at the Crusades story, whereas the Jew tries to distance himself from evidence of the Israeli conquest, murder, and destruction of Arab lives and culture.

One aspect in particular of the psychoanalytical concept of transference helps to explain these negative responses. Each protagonist-as-listener is "supposed to know," to possess a secret knowledge that he is supposed to impart to the teller and thus resolve the latter’s problem. Neither seems to have gained this secret knowledge from the other, and their reactions communicate each protagonist’s disappointment in this respect. Yet the question of the mutual desire for each other’s knowledge persists. Why would the adversaries wish to obtain knowledge from the other? What is each of them “supposed to know”? Do they really “know” how to redeem each other from posttraumatic anxieties? I here wish to suggest that the key to understanding the knowledge each of the characters seeks in the other may be found in two preceding episodes. I shall call the first “The Whispered Name” and the second “The Map.”

From the hikers in the forest, who appear to him “like a procession of Crusaders” (FF 100), the student learns about the destroyed Arab village underneath the forest. Observe, in passing, the dual historical irony in this comparison of the Israeli hikers to Crusaders. The Crusaders were the persecutors of Jews; they were also the conquerors of the Holy Land. In a further ironic twist, these Israelis who look like Crusaders impart knowledge that affects the student in a most dramatic way. This information brings home to him the reality of the war and the destruction that it caused, an awareness that, as we shall see, alerts the student to his responsibility as a member of society.

It is not simply that until his meeting with the Israeli “Crusaders” the student had not known about the war and the destruction it produced. Rather, it is the suppression of an empathic understanding of the terrible effects of war that now produces a delayed traumatic effect. The realization of actually being on the site of the destruction shakes the student out of his lethargic state of mind. The depth of the shock is evinced in the episode I have called “The Whispered Name,” where, in the middle of the night, the name of the village “floats back into his mind . . . [seizing] him with restlessness.” Deeply disturbed, the student is now caught up in the desire to return to the
the Jew tries to distance himself from the crime, murder, and destruction of the psychoanalytical concept of transference responses. Each protagonist possesses a secret knowledge that triggers and thus resolve the latter’s dilemma. This secret knowledge from each protagonist’s disappoints the question of the mutual desire for why would the adversaries wish to be present? What is each of them “supposed to suggest that the key to understanding seeks in the other may be a Map.”

I shall call the first “The Whispered Map.” who appear to him “like a process student learns about the destroyed Observe, in passing, the dual history of the Israeli hikers to Crusaders. Those of Jews; these Israelis who ironic twist, these Israelis who knowledge that affects the student in a way brings home to him the reality it caused, an awareness that, as his responsibility as a member of meeting with the Israeli “Crusaders” the war and the destruction it produces a delayed traumatic effect on the site of the destruction that engenders rage. The depth of the crime I have called “The Whispered the night, the name of the village calling] him with restlessness.” Deeply rooted in the desire to return to the event of destruction he has managed to ignore all along. To recall Freud, he is now “developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis.” Unable to control his anxiety, in the middle of the night he “roughly wakes [the Arab] and whispers the name of the village” (FF 101).

It is, of course, not merely scientific curiosity about the history of the place that motivates the student of history. His anxiety to have the name of the village reconfirmed proves that he has already intuitively made the connection between the destroyed village and the Arab. The whispered name is meant not only as factual verification but also as a confession of a secret knowledge that the Jew possesses. It is a sign that encourages the Arab because it implies the recognition of his story. Indeed, the response of the Arab—whose “expression of surprise, wonder and eagerness suffuses all his wrinkles” and who “jumps up . . . pointing fervently, hopefully, at the forest” (FF 101)—initiates the process of transference. The insight into the Arab’s past turns the student into the object of the Arab’s desire. Through an acknowledgment of the Arab’s losses, the student holds the power to restore dignity and self-respect to the defeated. The scene that follows the whispering episode reinforces the Arab’s hope.

A mutual understanding that the forest needs to be burned down creates a moment of communion in which “the fire watcher spreads his palms over the flame and the Arab does likewise [and] their bodies press in on the fire” (FF 109).

Now it is possible to understand the Arab’s angry response to the student’s story of the Crusades. The focus of mutual understanding is the name of his village, for which he is listening so intently. The absence of the name in the student’s lecture is significant in more than one sense. On one level it communicates to the Arab that the student’s story does not relate to his story; the anxiety of betrayal and abandonment engenders resentment. In this respect the Arab’s subsequent reenactment of his tragic story is meant to impress the memory of his trauma in the Jew’s consciousness. On a deeper level, however, the absence of the name signifies the Jew’s two-tiered ambivalence, to which the Arab responds intuitively. In one sense the story of the Crusades that he tells the Arab represents the student’s desperate, rather naive attempt to deny the failure of his scholarly undertaking. In another, more complex way, however, the narrative of the
Crusades represents an equally naïve attempt to displace another history he has just learned about, namely, the tragic history of this afforested place, which has shaken the student out of his usual equanimity.

The earlier pronouncement of the village’s name created an affinity between the Jew and the Arab that the student would rather forget. While the whispered name of the village marked the student as possessor of the key to the restoration of the Arab’s self-dignity, the Arab’s confirmation of the name turned him into the holder of the key to the Jew’s liberation from his lethargy, indifference, and passivity. The interdependence of the Arab and the Jew has been established. Paradoxically, the student’s subsequent disingenuous disassociation from the Arab’s story demonstrates the impossibility to undo this interdependence. His reluctance—or, more precisely, his apprehension—to recognize the bond attests to the inescapable realization of the responsibility for the destruction that, as an Israeli Jew, he shares with Israeli society.

The map that the student draws in the wake of the scene of “The Whispered Name” evinces recognition of the delayed traumatic knowledge, a recognition that subsequently requires a far-reaching transformation. On a historical level, the map that meticulously records the traces of the ruins of the village that he painstakingly located under the forest testifies to the committed atrocity. In a painstaking search of the area lasting several weeks, he produces a visual report of his findings: ruins, traces left by humans, and outlines of buildings intertwining with the trees. Ironically, it is not an innovative scientific study of the Crusades that allows the student to prove his mettle as a historian. Rather, by documenting concrete evidence of the Zionist conquest, he demonstrates his talents as a historian-cum-archaeologist. On a personal level the episode of “The Map” signifies the student’s self-reaffirmation. His new sense of self-importance is signaled in the decision to leave the map behind: “He will display it on this wall here for the benefit of his successors, that they may remember him. Look, he has signed his name already, signed it to begin with, lest he forget” (FF 104). With uncharacteristic decisiveness and earnestness, the student defines his intentions. This episode testifies to a twofold transformation, namely, that of the place and that of his sense of self. As his signature suggests, he takes full responsibility for the authenticity of both.
of Bonding

Bonds of Confession  

The Map” episode presents a quite evident political-moral message. It provides evidence of behavior that proves—contrary to the official position espousing the humanity of the Israeli Jewish soldiers—the atrocities committed during the war. While the forest writes the triumphalist history of the victors, the mapped out underside of the forest discloses the history of the defeated, which, as the characterization of the student demonstrates, has been completely suppressed. The covered traces of the destruction illustrate yet another of Benjamín’s previously mentioned views, namely, that the history of victory would wipe out “even the dead,” that is, even the ancestral history of the defeated. The production of the map has turned the student of history into the historian of the victims. In this sense “Facing the Forests” corroborates the accounts of destruction, torture, and subjugation in “Hirbet Hizah” and The Pessoptimist. Recall the prediction of Yizhar’s narrator concerning the haunting shadows and silent cries of the dispossessed. To a remarkable extent “Facing the Forests” has fulfilled this prophesy of the silent cries emitted by the mutilated Arab, whereas the map attests to the history of the destruction.

Unlike the narrator in “Hirbet Hizah,” however, the student does not stop at accusatory complaints and powerless exhortations. His drawing defies the Zionist doctrine of Jewish rebirth in the “empty land.” It makes visually clear the extent to which the present of Israeli Jews is, in the literal sense of the word, grounded in the history of the Palestinian people. Despite its definitive military victory, the Zionist enterprise cannot extricate itself from the Arab history of the place. The forest draws it nourishment from the destroyed life of the Arab village, whereas the traces of the village stubbornly delimit the Arab territory among the trees. The site of the forest unequivocally belies the exclusivity of the Zionist claim to the land. Consequently, the student’s field study produces an ironic commentary on the Zionist enterprise, which, having uprooted itself from the Diaspora, has rooted itself in the Arab history in the land. In a sense the map visually represents the two-tiered consciousness of the Israeli Jew. As allegorically represented by the forest, the outer tier embodies the faith and adherence to the Zionist dogma of Jewish renewal. The partially hidden remnants of the destroyed village, whose name remains hauntingly real, represent the inner tier of the repressed, which sporadically pierces through ideological defenses.
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On a psychoanalytical level, therefore, the Arab’s plan to burn down the forest transforms him into the object of the student’s desire. As a representative of the suppressed, “forgotten” history that needs to be remembered, the Arab is capable of liberating the Jew from the limbo-like unself-conscious existence that turned him into the “eternal” student of a “wrong” history.

The fire that eliminates the forest reveals a complete picture of the “other” history that the student could only partially divine through his map work. The forest now gone, “the ruined village appears before his eyes, born anew in its basic outlines as an abstract drawing, as all things past and buried” (FF 114). The past cannot be undone; yet even though the village remains lifeless in its abstraction, the emerging consciousness dissolves the student’s lethargic, sterile existence. His transformation into a concerned and caring individual, as evidenced by his protective attitude toward the Arab girl, attests to the student’s inner liberation. The story provides an allegorical representation of this transformation. His recurring dream “of a few dry, twisted, or stunted trees, desert trees, alien and salty” that haunted him all along turn into a dream of “green forests [that] spring before his troubled eyes” (FF 116–17).

The psychological recuperation, however, does not bring forth social recognition. Like the proverbial prophet who is ignored in his own town, the message that the student brings from the wilderness to the city commands no attention. The enraged response of the forest manager to his loud and boldly expressed concern for the Arab child foretells the rejection of society at large. Thus, the police who investigate the fire “treat him toughly, [as if] something of the old man’s hostility has stuck to them” (FF 116). The attitude of the city seems even more punitive. The old friends deny him reentry into their social circle. Disappointed with the failure of their reform scheme, the friends do not welcome the student who “drops in on them, on winter nights shivering with cold, begging for fire and light” (FF 116). Maliciously they chase him away with the disgruntled question “Well, what now?” (FF 117).

Interestingly, though uniformly treated as a failure, the student has a different opinion. He believes that “the solitude has proved a success. True, his notes have been burned along with the books, but
therefore, the Arab's plan to burn to the object of the student's desire. Indeed, "forgotten" history that needs capable of liberating the Jew from the service that turned him into the "eternal servant."

The forest reveals a complete picture of the student could only partially divine now gone, "the ruined village appears in its basic outlines as an abstract "fairy tale" (FF 114). The past cannot be remains lifeless in its abstraction, closes the student's lethargic, sterile a concerned and caring individual, attitude toward the Arab girl, attests to the story provides an allegorical vision. His recurring dream "of a few desert trees, alien and salty" that dream of "green forests [that] spring (5-17).

On, however, does not bring forth an archetypal prophet who is ignored in his student brings from the wilderness. The enraged response of the forest expressed concern for the Arab child large. Thus, the police who investigate as if something of the old man's (116). The attitude of the city seems to deny him reentry into their social failure of their reform scheme, the student who "drops in on them, on winter looking for fire and light" (FF 116). Malicously, the disgruntled question "Well,

if anyone thinks that he does not remember—he does" (FF 117). Remember what? Among all the other recollections, is it not the final triumphant countenance of the arrested Arab that seems most intriguingly memorable? Recall that during the investigation the student broke down, suggesting the Arab as "a possible clue." At that moment the Arab is handcuffed, arrested, and taken away in a police car. When the student last sees him, the Arab has a "gratified expression in his eyes, a sense of achievement, "a heroic feeling [regesh g'vurah]" (FF 116).

When considered in light of the interdependence that evolved between the two, this puzzling response to betrayal and arrest makes sense. From this perspective the sense of victory signifies the fulfillment of desire. Paradoxical as it may seem, in order for the Arab to regain self-dignity his act of rebellion must be recognized by the enemy. Because the Arab is mute, he has been unable to communicate with his interrogators. The student is the only one who knows and can tell the story. In view of this realization, the Arab's triumphant expression elucidates the student's "betrayal." In the context of their relations of transference, the student's incrimination of the Arab constitutes submission to the desire of the Arab: he releases the information that makes the Arab feel like a hero. As we have seen, the student had earlier refused to acknowledge the story of the Arab. One should note here that he refused to acknowledge the story for the second time when the forest was burning and the Arab "[was speaking] to him out of the fire, [wishing] to say everything, everything at once" (FF 112). Ironically, the interrogation conducted by the representatives of the Jewish state finally compels the student to grant the Arab the desired understanding and attention. Precisely at the moment when the Arab demonstrates his triumph, the student regains his confidence and boldly approaches the authorities in the interest of the child. Paradoxically, the empowerment of the Arab empowers the student as well, making him recognize and actively respond to his moral obligation.

The name of the village had initiated the student's encounter with the buried history, and his naming of the Arab in the police interrogation finalized the process of recognition of this history. The transferential relations between Jew and Arab brought a measure of
redemption for both. The secret knowledge of the destruction that the Arab imparted to the Jew infused the latter with a sense of responsibility for the committed injustice. Ironically, the sense of humane concern for the other that the student finally gains results from his acknowledgment of culpability he shares with the Israeli mainstream. This new consciousness turns him into an exile in his own community, one that refuses to acknowledge the story he carries with him from the forest.

**The Price of Suppressed Histories**

Despite its dissenting theme, which elicited ingenious canonizing strategies on the part of critics, “Facing the Forests” carefully limits its vision of Jewish-Arab relations to personal interactions remote from the larger social scene. The limits are set by the secluded location of the forest, the eventual arrest of the Arab, and the final social exclusion of the student. In addition, both protagonists’ verbal impediments limit the possibility of social interaction at large. Thus, the equal *subject-to-subject* relationship of transference between Jew and Arab is never allowed to enter the public arena. Because of its private confines, Yehoshua’s story focuses on the psychological stratum of this one-to-one relationship. In contrast, Mansour’s novel *In a New Light* stages the relations between Arabs and Jews in the public sphere of the kibbutz. The context of the collective affects the individual characters and the relations between them. To better understand the interaction between the Arab protagonist-narrator-confessor and the kibbutz community, I briefly wish to consider the dynamics of subject formation in a social setting.

The issue of subjectivity has been widely discussed for several decades, especially in the areas of philosophy, ethics, and critical theory. One major area of investigation concerns the decentered subject of the post-*cogito* era. This discussion of the subject focuses on the extent to which we are conscious of that which remains unconscious, of our “internal other.” In other words, this type of investigation examines the nature of the relations of the individual to the self in view of the fact that the unconscious—a part of the self—always escapes full knowledge. Another principal question involving the subject concerns the relations between the individual and the world. To
what extent is our self shaped by our relationships with the world? This question relates to the problem of the subject’s identification with and disassociation from the “external other,” that is, its social environment. It is, of course, impossible to separate these two approaches on the issue of subjectivity. Both the “internal other” of the unconscious and the “external other” of the social setting indelibly affect the formation of the subject. However, in the following discussion of Yossi’s interaction with Israeli society, as represented by the kibbutz, it is the social component of subjectivity that remains my main concern.

It is always useful to begin with Freud’s observation of the effect of the social setting on the individual psychological makeup: “In the individual’s mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology, in this extended but entirely justifiable sense of the words, is at the same time social psychology as well.” As Freud sees it, ineluctably the external world is part and parcel of the formation of the individual subjectivity. Although, as Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen informs us, Freud did not develop much further the notion that “[inscribes] the [social] other in the ego,” others did. In his assessment of postmodern existentialist thought, Davis affirms the powerful impact of social influence. In fact, social context negates the uniqueness of the subject by divesting it of its freedom. Davis claims that “subjectivity is intersubjective: in reflecting on myself the first thing I confront is the massive presence of the other. We live in the midst of others with their beliefs and values, fears and conflicts . . . deeply embedded in us.” Referring to Heidegger’s concept of the “death of the subject,” Davis claims that in this sense “individuality is a fallacy . . . beneath which lurks the generalized other of consensual validations . . . that keep ‘other people’ firmly in charge as the sovereign authors of our being.” From this perspective the dominating presence of others leads to loss of subjectivity even before subjectivity can be shaped. Subjectivity thus must be forged through the conscious effort to overcome the influence of the other. The primary, overwhelming, inauthentic desire to be like everybody else must be constantly surmounted and opposed so that our authenticity may prevail.

Derrida, on the other hand, emphasizes the positive aspect of the
other, whose presence constitutes a primary and integral component of the subject. In a revealing interview Derrida affirmed the ahistorical, ethical values of the subject:

I would add something that remains required by both the definition of the classical subject and by these latter nonclassical motifs, namely, a certain responsibility. The singularity of the ‘who’ is not the individuality of a thing that would be identical to itself. . . . It is a singularity that dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other, whose call somehow precedes its own identification with itself, for to this call I can only answer, have already answered. . . . Here, no doubt, begins the link with the larger questions of ethical, juridical, and political responsibility around which the metaphysics of the subjectivity is constituted.14

This approach, which Derrida clearly inherited from Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of ethics,15 contends that preceding all ego interests and desires there is the presence of the other. This presence does not dominate but rather inscribes the value of caring responsibility for the other. In contrast to the above notion of the “death of the subject,” Derrida maintains that empathic recognition of and involvement with the other shapes our authentic subjectivity. According to Derrida, this position of the subject vis-à-vis the other determines all aspects of social intercourse.

Though briefly sketched, the above models of subjectivity in relation to social environment help to define the limits imposed on the subject in “Facing the Forests” and the expansion of these limits in In a New Light. In one sense, the relations of transference that evolve between the adversarial protagonists in “Facing the Forests” widen the perspective of “Hirbet Hizah,” where one noted the conspicuous absence of contact between the dissenting Jewish narrator and the Arab victims of the conquest. Yet I also noted that, though in “Facing the Forests” the rediscovered history initiates a new chapter in the history of Arab-Jewish relations, its lessons cannot be applied to the social scene. In the end, the memory of the decimated forest is reduced to contemptuous, mocking remarks that the community directs at the student. The evidence uncovered in the forest leaves no noticeable impact on the city, which resolutely ostracizes the bearer of the unwelcome truth. As represented in Yehoshua's story, Israeli society insists on its uniform, monolithic subjectivity, categorically rejecting
its identification as a conqueror who effectively erased the past and the present of the conquered.

The avoidance of the public sphere in “Facing the Forests” sets into sharp relief the signification of the kibbutz, the meeting place of Arabs and Jews in In a New Light. Mansour placed his characters in the framework of the quintessential Zionist institution commonly perceived as a model Israeli society. The irony of this proposition is evident in the very location of the kibbutz. Unlike the concealed ruins of the Arab village in “Facing the Forests,” here the past history of the land is by no means hidden; on the contrary, it is visible to all since the kibbutz is built on Arab ruins. Moreover, the kibbutz borders an Arab settlement of makeshift tents and huts, a miserable locus of the evicted and dispossessed inhabitants of the destroyed village. This geographic, historical, and sociological configuration locates the interaction between Arabs and Jews in the realm of the post-1948 war.

In “Facing the Forests” the subjectivity of both Jew and Arab is informed by the Jew’s twofold emerging, hitherto suppressed consciousness, namely, that of the Arab history in the “empty land” and that of its destruction by the Israelis. In a New Light proceeds in the opposite direction. In Mansour’s fiction Arab and Jewish characters attempt to construct their subjectivity on the basis of a deliberate, joint decision to suppress memory. Thus, Mansour’s story line signals a movement neither toward a rediscovery of the forgotten nor toward a remembrance of the erased past. Unlike Yehoshua’s story, which is predicated upon liberation from trauma and moral rehabilitation as a consequence of rediscovering history, Mansour’s novel ironically suggests that social coexistence is conditioned upon a mutual consent to “forget.” That is to say, the novel proposes that relations between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs are predicated upon a conscious deletion of national identities. Whereas the membership of Yossi is predicated upon suppression of his Arab identity, the membership of the “new” Jews in the Zionist movement is conditioned by the repudiation of the Diaspora Jews. As I will show in greater detail, the peaceful coexistence of Arab and Jew on the kibbutz is possible only so long as both parties consciously estrange themselves from their religious and cultural pasts.

It is, in fact, the moral issue of his estrangement from his national heritage that motivates Yossi to write his story. “My heart,” he
admits, “cries when I recall my lie. It’s terrible, it’s shameful, but am I wholly to blame? . . . No, the world must be at fault, too.” Recall Freccero’s codification of the autobiography as a story of conversion from character into author. Indeed, at the opening of the novel Yossi admits that his decision to become the author of his life story is the result of “having undergone a complete, irrevocable change.” The consciousness of the change is echoed in the sentence that opens and closes the narrative: “I saw everything in a new light” (INL 176; emphasis in English trans.), an amplification of the novel’s title.

In one respect Yossi’s conversion is signaled in the confession of his “terrible” and “shameful” lie. At the same time, the question “But am I wholly to blame?” as well as the generalization “I saw everything in a new light” indicate a conversion not only of his self-perception but also of his perception of the social environment. Yossi’s rationalizations not only attest to self-justification but, more significantly, point to the mutual shaping of individual and society. Indeed, in Yossi’s autobiographical, confessional account the kibbutz community plays a crucial role. In its critical depiction of the kibbutz, Yossi’s story examines his own integrity in the context of his relationships with the kibbutz members, as well as the integrity of the members in the event of an encounter with an Arab.

The kibbutz, however, is represented not solely through the eyes of the Israeli Arab. As we shall see, Yossi’s autobiographical narrative also includes an episode of another confessional narrative, that of an Israeli Jew. The following juxtaposition of these episodes, which I have called “The Bulldozer Scene” and “The Mosque Story,” sheds light on the dynamic of the relations grounded in the suppression of the past.

Turning first to Yossi’s internal monologue:

A bulldozer rakes up and clears away the ruins of the abandoned Arab village. Such was my village, or rather my father’s. My own [the kibbutz] is quite different. Its houses are built far apart, meticulously planned. My father’s village did not even have a master plan; people just built their houses to suit their needs. They wanted to live close to one another because they were afraid of drifting apart. My father, too, was afraid . . . but all his precautions were useless: he bled to death and his blood was red like the bulldozer which cleared the debris in the abandoned village. . . . Why did I have to remember all this? I had no right to remember. My father’s blood
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stood for war and destruction, whereas the bulldozer was a vehicle of peace
and construction... I was beset with longings for my mother, just as the
bulldozer's operation reminded me, for no apparent reason, of father's blood
squirting out of his shirt. (INL 40; emphasis added)

Yossi's stream of consciousness represents an almost classic case of
traumatic fixation. The concreteness of the disposal of the Arab
past—the bulldozer actually transforms the history of the Arab
presence in the land into rubble—triggers an inner upheaval of conscious
struggle against the involuntary surge of traumatic reminiscences.
The return of haunting, anxiety-provoking memories reinforces
the desire to replace the old self, as defined by the paternal village,
with a new self, as circumscribed by the kibbutz and its socialist ideology.
In this double-bind situation, the fearful memories intensify the
wish for a new self while simultaneously precluding its actualization.
The naive, self-berating comment "I have no right to remember" un-
dercores the ironic futility of Yossi's struggle to erase the terrible
memory of his father's death. As Yossi's stream of consciousness
proves, this memory is far from erased; in fact, it is hardly
pressed.

Yossi's response to the red color of the bulldozer, which he associa-
tes with his father's blood, illustrates with great accuracy the
omenon of posttraumatic stress disorder. Caruth maintains that
osttraumatic stress disorder "is not so much a symptom of the un-
scious as it is a symptom of... an impossible history within [the
atramatized]."17 Caruth's observation draws attention to the histori-
ical significance of the task that the bulldozer is performing: it con-
cretely eliminates the history of the defeated. What Yossi is wit-
nessing when the unwanted memories of terror return is the ultimate
mination of a village "such as his." On the one hand, this instinctive
recognition points to Yossi's persistent, though unwanted, associa-
tion with his paternal community ("my village"). On the other
hand, the immediate retraction—the village is not his but rather "my
father's"—signals Yossi's conscious desire to detach himself from the
community he considers vastly inferior to the community of the kib-
butz. This interpenetration of involuntary memories and the desire
to eliminate these memories demonstrates that, despite the adoption
of a new home on the kibbutz, the continuing trauma of Yossi's or-
phanhood has not abated.
The association of the bulldozer with the “impossible history” of loss proves exceedingly menacing. It is precisely the resurgence of the terrible memories that drives Yossi away from his people to the society of victors. The fear of the past prevents Yossi from identifying the bulldozer for what it really is, namely, a tool for the ruthless Israeli dispossession of the Arabs. Yossi prefers to rationalize the scene of destruction by resorting to the truisms of the “bulldozer [as] a vehicle of peace and construction” (INL 40) and the kibbutz as the standard-bearer of the socialist future for humanity. The bulldozer scene conflates the traumatic underpinnings of Yossi’s twofold losses—that of his murdered family and that of his nation’s defeat.

In “The Mosque Story,” by contrast, we are told about the Zionist intended suppression of Diaspora history. It is important to note that it is only after Yossi’s Arab identity has become common knowledge that Shlomo, a leading kibbutz member and the epitome of the “new” Jew, addresses him with the following confession:

Look, it’s all very distressing, but three years ago we arrived in Israel and were sent here to establish a settlement. You probably know there was a deserted Arab village here. We were told to demolish it but some of the boys said it wasn’t fair to destroy the mosque. So I went ahead and blew up the mosque. I told them this sanctimonious attitude didn’t become a people who wanted to build their own country. We had to build our State on lands that had already been settled by another nation. We had no alternative whatsoever, except to live out rotten lives in Brooklyn. . . . until the Americans decided to drown us in a sea of blood, the way it happened in Germany, Poland, Russia. . . . They demolished the Arabs’ houses and built their own on the ruins, but they wanted to preserve the mosque. What for? (INL 123; emphasis added)

Despite its entirely different historical context, Shlomo’s confession of the deliberate rejection of his Diaspora heritage corresponds with Yossi’s confession of the deliberate refutation of his ancestral past. Recall that Yossi’s forced justification of the bulldozer’s destruction of the remnants of the Arab village reflects the fear of his people’s suffering. In a similar way, Shlomo’s justification of his destruction of the mosque reflects the fear of the persecutions of the Diaspora Jews. This terrible history, Shlomo claims, has created a potential danger for Jews everywhere, justifying the existence of a Jewish state.
with the “impossible history” of the Diaspora shows the resurgence of the old way from his people to the society that vent Yossi from identifying the ruthlessly, a tool for the ruthless Israeli refers to rationalize the scene of bulldozers, the kibbutz as the standard-nation. The bulldozer scene confirms Yossi’s twofold losses—that of nation’s defeat.

Last, we are told about the Zionists history. It is important to note how has become common knowledge and the epitome of the following confession:

years ago we arrived in Israel and... You probably know there was a plan to demolish it but some of the boys... So I went ahead and blew up the building didn’t become a people who had to build our State on lands that were ours. We had no alternative whatsoever. We were forced to leave our homes and our property. It was hard to leave our mosques. What for? (INL 123; 125)

In a historical context, Shlomo’s confession regarding his Diaspora heritage corresponds to an incredible refutation of his ancestral claim. The destruction of the bulldozer’s destruction reflects the fear of his people’s destruction. The justification of his destruction by the persecutions of the Diaspora claims, has created a potential for the existence of a Jewish state.

As Shlomo sees it, the need to avoid further persecutions has given the Zionists the license to reject the option of living “rotten lives” as Jews in Brooklyn. It should be mentioned in passing—a point to which I shall return—that the particular semantic message of “rotten lives” with reference to the Jews living in Brooklyn—the location of many, mainly Orthodox, Jewish communities—communicates Shlomo’s vehement rejection of the Jewish religion.

In a very real sense Shlomo’s confession illustrates my earlier discussion in the first part of this study, which established the indelible connection between the deliberate Zionist erasure both of the Diaspora memory and of the presence of the Arab in the land. The destruction of the mosque reconfirms not only the tenet of “the empty land” but also signals a rejection of all religious faiths. Shlomo’s destruction of the Arab house of prayer represents the elimination of Arab life in the land while at the same time representing the “birth” of the “new” Jew, who is strong, ruthless, and devoid of compassion, as well as unfettered by all religious bonds. In view of Shlomo’s ideological convictions, it is possible to see how his contemptuous repudiation of the “rotten lives” of Orthodox Jews legitimizes his refusal to preserve the symbol of Arab religious life.

It is true that the content of Shlomo’s confession sounds belligerent; however, both his choice of listener and the manner in which he ends his confession reveal an underlying vulnerability. Incongruously, Shlomo has chosen to confess to Yossi, who, prior to the disclosure of his Arab identity, he had mocked for his fear of blood and to whom he had admitted his dislike for the Arabs (INL 83). Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that Shlomo sincerely expects Yossi to respond to his story. When Yossi remains silent, Shlomo insists on getting his opinion. As Yossi notices, Shlomo speaks with “a strange, suppressed laugh . . . without merriment.” Tormented by uncertainties about himself and his future, Yossi recognizes with some satisfaction that “at least he, too, was suffering.” Yet he limits his response to telling Shlomo to drink his coffee, whereupon “it was difficult not to notice that [Shlomo] sounded relieved” (INL 123–24). It is obvious that Yossi’s evasive response to the confession dispelled Shlomo’s apprehension and eased his mind.

Shlomo’s insistence on having Yossi hear his story as well as his need to have him react to his terrible deed indicates a relationship of
transference. The Jew clearly searches out the Arab as listener, while eagerly assuming the part of teller. Curiously, the revelation of Yossi’s true identity transformed him into Shlomo’s “object of desire.” In an ironic reversal, the Arab now appears to the intrepid “new” Jew as the possessor of “secret knowledge” capable of easing his mind and relieving him of the haunting memory of his unconscionable deed. Clearly, Shlomo’s deferential attitude toward Yossi in the mosque scene highlights the importance that the Jew attributes to the Arab as the judge of his wrongdoings.

Shlomo’s need to confess and his choice of Yossi as his confessor raises several questions. Why does the destruction of the mosque become for Shlomo, the “new” Jew par excellence, a traumatic experience that demands confession? Why does he wish to confess to Yossi, who is hardly an objective listener? Finally, why does he assume that Yossi’s response might eliminate his traumatic memories?

In order to demonstrate the affinity with Yossi that Shlomo unconsciously senses, one must recall Yossi’s torment in the bulldozer scene. It seems that Yossi’s traumatic past and his ambivalence over his identity have positioned him as, in the words of Freud, a “positive transference” of a friendly, even empathically disposed, listener. In a paradoxical way, to become a Zionist kibbutz member exacted for the Arab the same price as it did for the Jew. Their new identities dispossessed both Arab and Jew of their national, cultural, and religious filiations. Motivated by fear of suffering and persecution, both Shlomo and Yossi have reneged on their historical roots. In this sense their conscious dissociation from their past has entailed the traumatic loss of parental history, while their rejection of identity has deprived them of their national traditions. The two characters interrelate through negation. It is therefore possible to view this situation as one of transference between Arab and Jew, each of whom possesses a personal history he expects the other to understand and condone.

This affinity between Arab and Jew is reinforced in the final scene involving the kibbutz assembly meeting. Ostensibly the assembly was organized to make “a historic decision” (INL 169) with respect to granting a kibbutz membership to an Arab. As things turned out, the meeting also represented a moment of self-reckoning for the kibbutz community. At one point some members claim that Yossi’s birth places him with “his people,” that is, the Arabs. Shlomo rises in
Yossi’s defense, poignantly driving home the issue by confronting his friends with the question of their own identity: “Yossi is not an Arab. Perhaps he is not a Jew either, but then what kind of Jews are we? Does [sic] any of you, Comrades, know that tonight is the eve of the Ninth of Ab?... Are we Jews? Well, I’ll leave it at that. But you all know it isn’t exactly true, and it’s certainly even less true that Yossi is an Arab. . . . If we don’t [admit him as a member] we shall not be able to go out of this room and look people in the eye” (INL 172).

It is worth noting that Shlomo does not choose to defend Yossi by means of an argument of socialist ideology stressing equality for all. What he implicitly refers to is his own rejection of the “rotten lives” of Jews in Brooklyn as well as Yossi’s absence of condemnation of the destruction of the mosque. Both Yossi and the kibbutz members, Shlomo insists, are equally detached from their religious heritage. Thus, as Shlomo deduces, the refusal of Yossi’s candidacy on the grounds that he should be with “his people” would undercut the raison d’être of the Zionists in severing their ties with “their people” in the Diaspora. The Zionists have adopted a new identity to escape persecution and subjugation. That is why, as bona fide Zionists, they cannot reject an Israeli Arab, who rejected his heritage for the same reason; like them he abandoned his people out of fear of suffering and subjugation, which, ironically, the “new” Jews inflicted upon the Arabs.

The kibbutz decides to accept Yossi as “one more member, neither Jew nor Arab” and “to keep the whole discussion confidential” (INL 175). This decision makes Yossi see everything in a new light. “I had won my fight,” he realizes, “but this kind of victory left a bitter taste in my mouth.” As he sees it, he will be “allowed to stay but only stealthily, like a thief in the night” (INL 176). And while everybody is praising the kibbutz secretary for having found the “Golden Path,” a compromise acceptable to all, Yossi weeps at what he perceives not only as humiliation but also as a hypocritical departure from the socialist ideals that the kibbutz had thus far professed to implement. Indeed, the determination to avoid bad publicity before forthcoming elections underscores the hypocrisy of the kibbutz members’ decision. However, a closer inspection of the resolution—which does not send Yossi back to “his people” and at the same time strips
him of any national-ethnic identity by declaring him “neither Jew nor Arab”—points to the deeper signification of this decision.

What would it have meant to identify Yossi publicly as either an Arab or a Jew? In fact, the story elucidates the signification of each option in terms of the reality of the Zionist state. To begin with the first option, why not identify Yossi as an Arab and send him back to “his people”? Indeed, the nearby village of Nur-Allah provides concrete implications of this option. The parodic depiction of the relations between the kibbutz and the village collapses the socialist facade of the kibbutz. The kibbutz members are consistently represented as oppressors and exploiters of the Arab minority. Economically destitute, the inhabitants of the village are completely dependent on temporary construction jobs on the kibbutz. Deprived of political freedom, these Israeli citizens have become pawns in the corrupt political games of Israel’s political parties.

Mahmud, a young, educated Arab, represents what life with his people would have been like for Yossi. Mahmud works as a driver for Ben-Tsedek (literally “Son of Justice”), a highly positioned bureaucrat in the Arabic department of the Israeli government. Ben-Tsedek’s main function is to solicit Arab votes with empty promises. Mahmud, who also serves as Ben-Tsedek’s translator, misrepresents the Arabs’ pleas for employment by attenuating their complaints and embellishing the translation with constant flattery of his boss. While Mahmud dutifully repeats Ben-Tsedek’s catchphrase—“It’s an Arab’s duty to stay with his people and help them” (INL 166)—it is clear that Mahmud sees his duty as one of pleasing his employer in order to retain his job. To a remarkable extent Mahmud’s characterization reminds us of Saeed, the narrator-protagonist in Habiby’s novel The Pessoptimist, especially Saeed’s obsequious behavior toward his Israeli bosses. Recall that, traumatized by the war, Saeed became an informer for the Israeli Secret Service. Not unlike Saeed, Mahmud has lost his freedom in the service of his master; in a sense he follows Saeed, who, suspended on a stake, belongs neither to his ruthless masters nor to his oppressed people. Would it therefore be possible to claim that had Yossi disclosed his Arab identity, he might have become another Mahmud or, worse, another Saeed, whose double life drove him to distraction and death?
These representations of Israeli Arabs as servants of Israeli Jews return us to Hegel’s concept of the self-negation of the bondsman vis-à-vis the lord. The bondsman, fearful of his lord, effaces himself as a subject; his servitude has made him an object devoid of consciousness. Hegel sees the hope of inner liberation in the relationship that the bondsman creates with his work. “Through work the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is. . . . [W]hat he does and how he does it are actual individual factors in the formation of his true self.” In Mansour’s representation, however, neither the villagers, who ingratiate themselves with a ruler who wields the power to employ them, nor Mahmud, who compromises his values to remain employed, are permitted such a redemptive attitude toward their work, which would restore their dignity. Like their masters they lead a life of deceit and corruption under the guise of the socialist ideal.

Thus, the decision not to send Yossi back to “his people” serves the interests of the kibbutz members. The scheme to ignore Yossi’s Arab identity enables them to perpetuate their own identity as socialists. Sending a devoted comrade back to the Arab village would have presented the kibbutz members with an unacceptable self-image as colonizing exploiters. Even though Yossi may not register the irony of the situation, the erasure of his Arab identity indicates his official enlistment in a political and economic system built upon cheap Arab labor.

This realization leads to the second option, namely, that of Yossi as a Jew. Why not declare Yossi a Jew? Indeed, Yossi’s efforts become assimilated into Jewish society are so successful that—to recall Bhabha’s notion of the colonized as a “mimic”—he is able to “pass” for a Jew or a “colonizer” for quite a long time. To escape the fate of the oppressed Arab minority, Yossi has chosen to become a member of the Zionist collective. Recall Davis’s discussion of the loss of subjectivity as a result of conforming to social “consensual validation.” Clearly, Yossi’s lifelong desire has been to become “consensually validated.” His former participation in Hevrat Noar and the hakhsharah and his present self-dedication to the kibbutz (INL 99) have shown, beyond any doubt, the extraordinary extent of his motivation to integrate himself into the dominant society.
Furthermore, the extent to which he succeeds in obliterating his cultural origins underscores his desire to become another. Not only has he forgotten his mother tongue but he has also erased the earliest and most basic socialization lessons in Arab life. When a young Arab boy corrects Yossi, who has confused the appellations *Effendi* and *Hawadjia*, Yossi realizes the enormous distance between himself and his native community: “I remembered now... *Hawadjia* was reserved for Jews and Christians. *Hawadjia* and *Effendi* were two different things, just as a Jew and a goy were different. From early childhood we learned to be different, and everybody repeated this fact to us a thousand times” (INL 106). Yossi’s mistaken appellation reveals the extent of his cultural detachment; he has forgotten or, rather, deeply repressed the semantic markers of Arab social structure that had been inculcated in him since childhood.

Despite all his efforts to integrate himself into Zionist society, Yossi cannot become a bona fide “new” Jew. Indeed, Yossi admits to himself that the identity of the “new” Jew is beyond his reach. Interestingly, it is not religion that prevents him from achieving a complete sense of belonging. In the socialist setting of the kibbutz religious differentiation does not—or, at least, should not—present a problem. Thus, it is not conversion to the Jewish faith that precludes full integration into Jewish society but rather his failed transformation into an intrepid fighter: “If only I could take part in a war... Perhaps I would still be somebody, would have some rights on my own... [N]obody believed that I spent the war in the cookhouse. Perhaps it was better that way—somebody might still believe I was a fighter. But in my heart of hearts I knew the truth and it wasn’t pleasant. As a matter of fact it hurt and rankled” (INL 69).

In this sense it is possible to understand Yossi’s desire to integrate himself into the kibbutz as a projection of his yearning for “secret knowledge”—a phrase that was used earlier in my discussion of transference—that the male kibbutz members seem to possess, namely, how to become a fighter. From this perspective one may see Yossi’s love affair with Rivka, a kibbutz member, as a displacement of this desire rather than a representation of the optimistic and naive adage “amor vincit omnia.” The characterization of Rivka’s husband, Yehuda, a former U.S. marine now in charge of the kibbutz armory, whose name is associated with the fearless lion of Judah,
which he succeeds in obliterating his desire to become another. Not only is he but he has also erased the earliest lessons in Arab life. When a young Arab fused the appellations Effendi andEffendi and Effendi were two different words different. From early childhood everybody repeated this fact to us a s. Yossi’s mistaken appellation reveals the he has forgotten or, rather, deeply buried Arab social structure that had been igate himself into Zionist society, “new” Jew. Indeed, Yossi admits “new” Jew is beyond his reach. that prevents him from achieving a socialist setting of the kibbutz -or, at least, should not—present sion to the Jewish faith that precludes it but rather his failed transformationally I could take part in a war... try, would have some rights on my part, spent the war in the cookhouse. Somebody might still believe I was as I knew the truth and it wasn’t right and rankled” (INL 69).

To understand Yossi’s desire to integrate his yearning for “secret was used earlier in my discussion of kibbutz members seem to possess, from this perspective one may see kibbutz member, as a displacement situation of the optimistic and naive characterization of Rivka’s hus- ould be, ‘the fearless lion of Judah,’ with the fearless lion of Judah, illuminates the psychological significance of Yossi’s sexual “conquest.” To replace Yehuda as Rivka’s husband would transfer the battlefield into the sexual arena, where Yossi has a better chance to restore his sense of potency. Such a victory would imply a vicariously obtained self-identification as a fighter. Despite his disappointment and bitterness, Yossi describes the debate over his kibbutz membership in military terms: it was a “fight” that he had won; it was his “victory.” His acceptance into the kibbutz community makes him feel victorious. Indeed, while being embraced by Rivka Yossi takes a final look at the defeated husband and observes that Yehuda “stood by the door, silent and lonely” (INL 176).

This reading of In a New Light suggests mutual transference, which tends to deny rather than confront the repressed past. Yossi’s noncommittal response to Shlomo’s confession of his destruction of the mosque sanctions the Zionist “new” Jewish identity. At the same time, Yossi’s conscious denial of his Arab identity and his desire to become a fighter attest to his compliance with the consensual norms determined by the dominant society. Thus, the function of the membership that the kibbutz extends to Yossi is twofold: not only does it erase Yossi’s lies and deception but it also allows the kibbutz members to persist without qualms, to see themselves as a group of virtuous and noble individuals who represent the merits of Zionist socialism.

It is true that Yossi’s autobiographical confession recounts the “conversion” that made him see everything in a new light, that is, through the lens of hypocrisy and deceit. Yet the fact that he remains on the kibbutz attests to his compliance rather than rebellion. By accepting the compromise, Yossi de facto conforms to the Zionist enterprise. Despite his disenchantment with the kibbutz and its distortion of the socialist idea, his decision to stay is at least partly due to his numerous ties to the kibbutz. It is not only his love affair with Rivka, which confirms his acceptance in a personal sense. I have already mentioned the extent of commonality in the transferential relationship between Shlomo and Yossi. This relationship emerges from the painful denial of parental legacy and—which even more—from the painful tacit agreement to perpetuate this denial.

A response to traumatic events through denial rather than confrontaion presents us with a case of what Eric Santner calls
“narrative fetishism,” which he defines as “the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative in the first place.”23 The Candesque aspect of the narrative in The Pessoptimist may be seen as a similar attempt to suppress the trauma of defeat through irony and laughter. As Saeed’s letters show, this attempt failed. Saeed must tell the traumatic story even at the price of madness and death. The circumstances of memory suppression in Mansour’s novel differ considerably. Here the compromise is predicated upon a common denial of the past, agreed upon by both winners and losers. As Dominick LaCapra explains, such an expedient denial of traumatic experiences indicates “a redemptive, fetishistic narrative that excludes or marginalizes trauma through a teleological story.”24 While Mansour’s narrative ends on a note of an achieved status quo, his protagonist’s bitterness, which permeates the entire story, underscores the sense of “unfinished business” that such a “fetishic,” partial solution has engendered.

In In a New Light Mansour is conscious of the shortcomings of the solution he offers, yet the story does not altogether disqualify relationships grounded in the conscious suppression of truth. The child that is to be born of Arab-Jew loving relationships seems to imply some hope for a purer future, less tainted by ideologies and political interests. In the meantime the transference that recognizes the need of both sides for each other—even if it is in the problematic context of “fetishistic” national/religious/ethnic identity suppression—suggests the possibility of an imperfect coexistence.

Amos Oz’s story “Nomad and Viper” (1963) dispels all hope for coexistence between Arabs and Jews and paints a horrific vision of the moral disintegration of Israeli society. The visceral hatred of the Arab, which supersedes all moral considerations, manifests itself in terrible acts of indiscriminate violence. Whereas in Mansour’s novel one observed how the kibbutz members reveal some self-awareness of their hypocritical use or, rather, abuse of the Zionist socialist ideal, in “Nomad and Viper” there is a complete lack of self-awareness of the cynical abuse of the Zionist socialist ideal for the sake of aggressive domination. While “Facing the Forests” and In a New Light examine various possibilities of dialogic interaction—the former on
Forbes as “the construction and de-
struc-
tion of a personal level in the seclusion of the forest and the latter in the public sphere of the kibbutz—“Nomad and Viper” demonstrates the impossibility of such a dialogue. The story examines the psychological mind-set of the “new” Jew, which precludes constructive relations with the Arab minority. The horrifying scene of barbaric violence at the conclusion of the story implies an unsparing self-examination as a precondition for any possible future interaction.