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Institute for Palestine Studies

Maxime Rodinson on Zionism and the Palestine Problem Today

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Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring, 1975), pp. 21-45

Published by: University of California Press on behalf of the Institute for Palestine Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2535552>

Accessed: 20/02/2009 10:44

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MAXIME RODINSON
ON
**ZIONISM AND THE PALESTINE
PROBLEM TODAY**

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Maxime Rodinson is the author of several scholarly works on the Middle East, including *Mahomet* (1961), *Islam et Capitalisme* (1966) and *Marxisme et Monde Musulman* (1972). A Frenchman of Jewish origin who has shown great sensitivity to the Arab world, he has analysed the Palestine problem in two books whose English translations attracted considerable attention, *Israel and the Arabs* and *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* The *Journal's* correspondent in Paris recently visited Rodinson, and they discussed Zionism and the challenge which it has presented to the Jews of the world, on the one hand, and the response of the Arabs to it on the other.]

Q. In your study on Zionism published in the "Encyclopaedia Universalis," you wrote that the Zionist movement has compelled "all Jews to define their attitudes to it." You said "the creation of the state of Israel has obliged them, willy nilly, to take sides on problems of Middle East international politics that would normally have been of little interest to them." Do you think that it could be maintained on this hypothesis that Zionism has prevented the integration of Jews in the societies in which they live?

A. Nothing is absolute; but I would say that Zionism has succeeded in placing additional obstacles in the way of the integration of the Jews. This seems to me quite certain.

Q. A few years ago an eminent French Jewish scientist, well known for his anti-Zionist sentiments, decided out of curiosity to go to Israel. When he returned he told of his surprise at his own reactions. Believing himself to be immunized against indoctrination by Zionist propaganda, he confessed that he had felt what he described as a "plucking at the heartstrings" when he stepped out of the plane at Lydda. Later on, to be sure, he was confirmed in his anti-Zionist sentiments, but this emotional reaction is still

surprising. How do you explain it? Does it show how profoundly rooted is the feeling of many French Jews of being “different” or of “belonging somewhere else”?

A. You should not be surprised by his reaction, which is a fairly common one, I think. All the same, it is certainly not the reaction of all Jews, and I don't think it would have been mine. I could have answered you more precisely if I had been to Israel myself. But the last time I went to Palestine (it was still Palestine, administratively) was at Easter 1947.

My reaction would have been very different and I know that it would also have been shared by many Jews I know. But to find out how many, one would have to carry out surveys or make opinion polls. This has been done, but they don't ask exactly the questions I should choose. The statistics are frequently falsified by the fact that those who react like me often do not acknowledge themselves to be Jews, and are thus not included in the survey. In any case, the way I feel would seem to be in a minority at present, at least among those who identify themselves as Jews. But it has not always been so and it could change again.

The trend I belong to feels a certain repulsion, an irritation, a discomfort vis-à-vis an atmosphere that is specifically and exclusively Jewish, and that declares itself to be Jewish and nothing else.

Q. What are the reasons for this?

A. Firstly, we are part of a general trend that has existed ever since Jewish communities were incorporated as minorities in vast societies whose culture and values they shared, apart from only a few strange peculiarities that linked them to a vanished nation. For a very long time a certain number of Jews who were attached to a universal idea of culture and values have felt that their Jewishness was absurd, a mere accident of genealogy. They have felt that it prevented them from fully participating in the culture where they were a minority and, in particular, from being recognized as fully participating in it. Hence, their reactions of impatience, which may even take violent or unjust forms of hostility to their “co-religionists.” Normally, in the past, this led to conversion to Christianity (in a Christian environment) and to Islam (in a Muslim environment) etc., sometimes with later activity to convert Jews to Christianity, Islam, etc. But in the last, irreligious phase of European civilization this may lead simply to detachment from the groups that want to go on calling themselves Jewish, to a change of name to make it easier to conceal Jewish origin, to adherence to a universalist faith (usually some form of revolutionary socialism) or else to an anti-Zionist militantism and finally, in “pathological” cases, to actually “anti-Semitic” behaviour.

Zionists, religious Jews and Jews who want to maintain their Jewish identity say that we are activated by *Selbsthass* — hatred of ourselves. This is only true in extreme cases. What is true is that all people of our kind feel a certain exasperation at being classified by the people who surround them as “Jews,” that is to say, as members of a given group, sharing its habits, values, etc. — whereas in fact we are indifferent or even hostile to them. I think that this explains, partially at least, the attitude to the Jews of Spinoza, Marx, Trotsky and many others throughout the ages.

Q. Has there been hostility to the Jewish religion as such?

A. Yes, the attitude of discomfort or irritation with Judaism also has another root, in my case, for example. In the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the Yiddish-speaking Jews of Russia and Eastern Europe were very strongly influenced by the rationalist, free-thinking, anti-religious European thinking of the so-called Enlightenment. Many Jews, even those who wanted to maintain their Jewish identity, revolted against the Jewish religion. Just as the English and French philosophers of the eighteenth century could see nothing in Christianity but the rottenness and hypocrisy of the monks, the will to power of the Church, the repugnant cult of relics, etc., so the rationalist Jews of the *Haskalah* (Reason) movement, could see nothing in Judaism but absurd and archaic rites, hypocrisy and interested manoeuvres to mislead the simple, etc.

Hostility to the Jewish religion, among the heirs of this tradition, has often taken the form of hostility to Zionism. This is because the Zionists, even though they too were rationalist and anti-religious at the start, were obliged by the logic of their project to tolerate (to say the least) religious Judaism. The Jewish clergy meanwhile has remained in general as narrow-minded and limited as ever, with brilliant but rare exceptions.

Things are rather tending to change now. In spite of everything, the Jewish religion has been recognized pretty well everywhere as simply a religious form, more or less analogous to Catholicism and Protestantism, whose adherents share in the common culture. Everywhere, too, anti-religious militantism is in retreat. Moreover, the Israeli cause, both in Europe and America, has acquired the reputation of being respectable, sound, “bourgeois.” The Jews of today who formerly would have perhaps belonged to the trends I have described, have often switched over to that admiration and support of Israel that is shared by nearly the whole of society and that reflects back on them like a halo.

All the anti-colonialist literature and the literature on ethnic minorities has also, paradoxically, helped to change people’s minds. Assimilation and integration into the dominant culture no longer get a good press. The Bretons,

the Basques and the Occitans¹ in France, the Blacks, the Chicanos, etc., in America, declare themselves proud of their own culture and reject the assimilation for which they were recently so enthusiastic and which had even absorbed them to a great extent. In this atmosphere the Jews also feel encouraged to emphasize their peculiarities, to seek out everything that distinguishes them, even if it has vanished or is in the process of doing so; naturally this gives many people a “plucking at the heartstrings” if they come in contact with a society like that of Israel, where everything specifically Jewish is recognized, promoted and exalted.

Q. *But in 1948 you were a member of the French Communist Party.*

A. Yes.

Q. *And the USSR adopted an attitude favourable to the existence of Israel.*

A. Yes.

Q. *Did you react to this question as a communist, or as a Frenchman of Jewish origin?*

A. Both. I was following the question very closely in Beirut, where I gave the French Communists who were there accounts of it based on my reading of the Beirut press and Palestine newspapers like the *Palestine Post*. I was impressed, like many people, like that Lebanese lawyer, Robert Abdo Ghanem, who wrote a thesis on it in Beirut in 1946, by the fact that the Jewish community in Palestine was assuming the character of a state. This struck me greatly and I said to myself and to my friends: “After all, it is something new. I don’t like it but eventually, one day, this new fact will have to be recognized.” So in 1947, I was not shocked by the attitude of Gromyko on Palestine at the United Nations. The argument he put forward seemed to me valid. It was that he would have preferred to have a binational state, but that, as that was not possible, “things must be shared” — there must be partition. I did not have the same reaction as my friends in the Lebanese and Syrian Communist Party who were very shocked and rallied in their own defence, because all of us communists at that time had been conditioned to throw in our lot, without understanding, with everything Stalin decided because it could only be in the higher interests of the World Revolution. All the same, I did not like it and I remember that when the state of Israel was proclaimed on May 15, 1948 (I was in France at the time) I was faithful to the communist line, but regarded it as a gesture that was necessary for the moment. I do remember that I immediately

¹ Those who speak the “langue d’oc” — members of a separatist movement in southern France — *Ed.*

said that with this name, Israel, people were going to confuse Israelis with Jews,² and so on. It would cause many difficulties. There I was, caught up with and attached to this community, the Jews of Palestine, to which I did not belong, and with respect to whose existence as a state I had felt reservations, and at best resignation. So I did not like it at all. I foresaw, of course, although not very clearly, that it was going to be the source of innumerable problems with the Arabs, but in addition, quite selfishly, I was unhappy about the difficulties this situation held in store for me personally.

Q. Do you think that the realization of the Zionist project has succeeded in liquidating what you have called "certain anxieties, certain complexes of Jews"? Do you think that this is true for the Jews in general throughout the world, or is it a phenomenon that applies exclusively to the Israeli Jews?

A. When I wrote that I was not thinking of the Israeli Jews at all, I was thinking of Jews in general throughout the world, and in particular of the Jews outside Israel. It is true that the Jews had complexes. They suffered from being regarded quite generally as people incapable of physical effort or courage, as hypocrites and cowards, engaged in shady trades, etc. Obviously no one, or hardly anyone, believes this nowadays. I think that it is impossible to deny that this has been a gain for the Jews. But things are very complicated. The superiority complex is quite as dangerous, possibly more so, than the inferiority complex. This image, also, was most true throughout Israel's triumphant period. So it is possible that, during the phase of decline, other complexes will be created. It is possible that the anxieties will return. In January 1974 I read in *Information Juive* (the organ of the Jews of Maghrebi origin) an article in which people as patently Zionist as André Neher and his wife said more or less the following (which is a sign of the times): "We have always believed that the Jewish state was going to liquidate anti-Semitism, but we see that this is not true." Anti-Semitism — that is, the hatred of Jews in their essence — has not been liquidated. They maintain that it has not disappeared as regards Israel (because Arab hostility is stupidly confused with anti-Semitism) or elsewhere (which is a much more justified conclusion). I myself believe that, on the whole, it is true that the image of the puny Jew, destined by nature, by his essence to engage in shady petty commerce or to be the disincarnate intellectual, etc., has been severely shaken by the image of the strapping Israeli

² In French the word for an Israeli is *Israélien*. It is possible to confuse this with the word *israélite*, which can be used in contexts where in English one would say "Jew" or "Jewish" — *Ed.*

Jew cultivating the land, making war. Not that it is any better. I am not trying to vindicate it. I refuse to judge everything exclusively according to Jewish interests and moreover the Zionist project has had pretty disastrous consequences for Jews. Quite simply, there have been effects of all kinds, and this is one of them.

Q. A year after the October War is the Zionist movement, Zionist Israel, in crisis?

A. Yes, I think so, with certain reservations. In all this one must not employ rigid abstract concepts. Abstractions are indispensable, but very dangerous. One must always bear in mind the concrete, real and actual facts which they cover. Otherwise, we argue, we reply, with concepts that do not mean the same thing. This is what happens when the Arabs deny that the Jewish population of Israel constitutes a nation.

There is no fixed definition that allows us to say that such and such a group of people constitutes a nation and such and such another does not. There are very numerous cases of communities with what I would call an ethnic-national character with all sorts of gradations, all sorts of particular cases. So how can one say something is a nation as from such and such a particular moment and not from another moment? The definitions put forward are always more or less arbitrary labels.

There are definitions like that of Stalin which is certainly too rigid, there are others which greatly resemble it elsewhere with greater subtlety. Broadly, most people talk of a nation when confronted with a type of community that is characterized, on the whole, by a common culture, by close economic links and by a common consciousness, a type which has existed above the level of clans and tribes since ancient times. This is why you can, if you like, distinguish between "nationality" and "nation," by using "nationality," for example, when there is no state or when the frontiers are indistinct. In any case, the gradation is infinite. So I think that in the commonest, most usual sense of the word there is something that can be called an Israeli nation, on condition that we mean the Israeli nation constituted by the citizens of Jewish origin, since quite obviously the Arabs of Israel do not form part of it.

This seems to me to be the case, whether one considers the formation of this nation or this ethnico-national group to be a misfortune or a blessing. In any case, they are people who have a culture. I know of course that in Arab circles they are said to be a conglomeration of people from all sorts of countries, completely heterogeneous. This was true at the start, when they lived apart, withdrawn into themselves, seeking to form a new and separate entity. But later there was the introduction of Hebrew as a common language. Those

who arrived were obviously reluctant to talk Hebrew, but gradually they set about it and those born there — who are now very numerous — have no other mother tongue.

Discussion of this point between Europeans and Arabs is always difficult, because the concepts employed do not coincide. When Europeans talk of Jewish, or Zionist, nationalism, before the establishment of the state of Israel, Arabs understand them as meaning a Jewish or Zionist *qawmiyya*. Now the word *qawmiyya* corresponds to two European concepts: both “nationalism” and “nationality.” As it is difficult to talk of a Jewish “nationality” before the creation of the state of Israel, the Arabs say that there was no Jewish *qawmiyya*. It is true in this sense. But there was certainly a Jewish Zionist “nationalism,” that is to say, a will among the Zionists to create a new Jewish nation. This does not imply that they were right or wrong. The will existed and this is what is called “nationalism” in European languages. Now there is a new “Hebrew” or “Israeli” nationality. Certainly a nationality or a nation can make or unmake itself, and the future will show us what is to happen to this one. But still, for the moment there are in Palestinian territory two communities which are ethnico-national in type, each with its own culture, its own traditions and a will to be together. This seems to me to be more or less what is commonly called a nation or a nationality.

Q. Do you not think that the constant influx of people, thanks to the Law of Return, makes the outlines of such a nation difficult and complex and imprecise in the final analysis?

A. Yes, the influx does make them more indistinct. But, among all these immigrants, usually those who have a reaction of rejection go away. Those who stay generally want to adopt the characteristic features of the common culture. There are differences, and these are important, but finally they learn Hebrew, as I said. As for the Yemenis, even they learn to speak it badly so as to be more like the others. So I have the impression that, in spite of all the undoubted difficulties involved in these new multiple integrations, for the moment, in any case, it is something of the type that is commonly called a nation or a nationality.

Q. Do you believe in what some people call the de-Zionization of the state of Israel?

A. Firstly I think that the concept of de-Zionization is given a slightly different meaning by everyone who uses it. I believe that everything depends on the circumstances, on the conditions in which the two populations who at present share the land of Palestine are going to live. What are important are their future relations, the conditions in which a certain degree of stabilization, if

any, is achieved. A great many different things can be called "de-Zionization." One of the things, in my view, that could be covered by this term, is the renunciation of the organic laws that impose the obligatory predominance of the Israeli Jewish element in the new state and then of all the laws of discrimination. One could then talk of de-Zionization in one sense of the word.

Q. Can Zionism survive in a state of Israel at peace with the Arab states? In the event of a peace between Arabs and Israelis how do you see Israeli society evolving?

A. I wanted to put off dealing with this point for a while, because it is a delicate one and I am afraid of being misunderstood yet again. However, we had to come to it some time, so let us start with the definition of Zionism. Ben-Gurion, I think, once said that Zionism was finished, that there was no longer any reason for it to exist, because its goal was the establishment of the state of Israel. The state of Israel exists, so there is no more Zionism. In a sense this is logical. For once I could more or less agree with him on this point.

At the present time, however, a number of rather different things can be called Zionism. The state of Israel exists, for the moment. Is someone who is established there and who would like to go on living in a Jewish state (and here one would have to introduce all sorts of nuances according to how one defined a Jewish state) a Zionist or not? I really don't know. It depends on how one is going to define a Zionist. He can be defined as simply an Israeli patriot. Look at Avnery for example. He wrote this book, *Israel Without Zionists* in one version, and *Israel Without Zionism* in another. What does he mean by Zionism? He uses this word to describe the organic link of the Israeli Jewish community with the Jews of the rest of the world. He says that this link must be cut; there is a new country, a new nation, a new state. Those who think like him in Israel say: "We are Israelis. We are not concerned with the other Jews. Those who want to come are like foreign immigrants. They can be accepted in certain cases, just as there are Italians who come to France and some of them become naturalized as Frenchmen. But we don't want to be bothered any more with all that nonsense about Judaism, Jewishness, etc..." It is a conceivable meaning. But what he calls Zionism, others do not. Everyone talks of something different.

Thus I think that the great mistake of Arab propaganda, and perhaps of certain Arab thinking on the problem, is to lump a whole lot of very different things together under the name of Zionism. Of course, there are common elements, but all the same one must differentiate. Take the example of French Jews (the one I am most familiar with). French Jews often tell you: I am not a Zionist but I defend Israel. It is often a rather hypocritical attitude, but often too, it is sincere; the distinction they make may be partly valid. Some of them

feel a certain Jewish sentimentality but do not want to go to Israel, some of them disapprove of Israeli policy, some, like me, think that the creation of Israel was a historical error. But, given the way in which things are presented to them, they think of the state of Israel as a sort of Jewish community of the kind there used to be in Poland, destined to be butchered by the wicked Arabs, from which fate it must be saved whatever happens. Are they Zionists? Perhaps, perhaps not, it is very vague. Moreover, their attitude to themselves varies. They may sometimes be disgusted by certain Israeli attitudes and then at other times say: "Poor things, we must give them money and help them in a difficult period, or they will perish, and that would be terrible."

I think that it is a mistake to lump all this together under one heading even if, in fact, it is all, so to speak, canalized in the same direction by the Israeli and Zionist information media. When a Jew dreams of a great state of Israel forcibly imposing its domination from the Nile to the Euphrates, there can be no doubt that we are faced with a genuine Zionism, undiluted and unqualified, closely resembling the Zionism of Herzl. But there are many other attitudes with all sorts of nuances. Take Mendès-France³ for example. Obviously he is a man who is not quite sure where he stands as regards this affair, and this seems to annoy him a good deal. He has no real understanding of the way in which things happen historically. He would probably think it cowardly to deny his Jewishness (even though it is really very weak) and to condemn the Jews of Israel. Is he a Zionist? Yes, in one sense, he objectively serves the aims that are those of Zionism — to establish and maintain a Jewish state. On the other hand he doesn't really have the Zionist ideal in his blood and France is his real country. There are lots of people like that. Take Vidal-Naquet⁴ who went very far in 1967, being really afraid, because of Shuqairi's speeches, that the Jews were going to be butchered. He made his auto-critique shortly afterwards and has helped the Palestinians.

To answer your question more directly, let us assume there is peace with the Arabs and that a Jewish state continues to exist. Suppose it is a state in which, in practice, Jews constitute the majority without there being organic laws imposing this predominance for eternity, and that this state exists beside a Palestinian state. There would then be Zionism in the sense that this state would, after all, have been established by the Zionists and that the people living in this state would obviously want it to continue and that, consequently, they would believe in the virtue of the existence of a Jewish state. It is probable

³ Pierre Mendès-France, former Prime Minister of the French Fourth Republic — *Ed.*

⁴ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, French historian — *Ed.*

that they would continue to get subscriptions from various sources by appealing to Jewish sentimentality to get people to help them in one way or another. This would be a kind of Zionism, if you like, but certainly less injurious than that which we have known and still know. All the more so in that peace may, in practice, involve the renunciation of certain Zionist characteristics such as the desire to make the largest possible number of Jews come to this state, or a belief in the legitimacy of expanding within all the territory of the Israel of the time of David and Solomon.

Q. There is increasing talk of "dissensions" between "doves" and "hawks" in Israel and of the existence of differences in the Zionist establishment. Do you think that these contradictions could become so profound as to call in question the Zionist principles on which the state was established?

A. I think that in the majority of cases these dissensions do not go so far as to call into question the principle of a Jewish state. People are in Israel for one of two reasons: some of them (probably the majority) are there for practical reasons without bothering about questions of ideology and they have become accustomed to being in a Jewish state. These people are afraid of becoming a minority with only verbal guarantees in an Arab or multi-national state. I think that they are now attached to their state. But there are others who went there because, deliberately and in advance, they wanted to be in a Jewish state. *A fortiori* they too are attached to their state. So I doubt that the dissensions will go so far as to call in question the principle of a Jewish state. Of course, you find indications to the contrary in Matzpen, but I think that this is a question of a tiny minority with little chance of growing. You see, to understand anything about these problems you have either to eliminate the words "Zionism" or "Zionists," which are an impediment to thinking, or else define what you mean by them in concrete terms every time you use them.

Q. There are anti-Zionist groups in Israel which claim to be non-Zionist or a-Zionist.

A. What exactly do they mean by that? I really don't know. I suppose that they challenge Zionism because of its rapturous and hysterical appeal to all the Jews in the world and its desire to impose itself by force. But the fundamental problem in discussing Zionism is the following: if there are no organic provisions which, so to speak, make Zionism imperative by guaranteeing the persistence of the Jewish character of the state in all circumstances, will a Jewish state exist by force of circumstance? Note that the problem is not unique. The English man in the street is obviously apprehensive when he sees Jamaicans

or Indians expelled by General Idi Amin Dada arriving in floods; he says: "We're going to be invaded! In my nice quiet street, where we all have tea at five o'clock in the afternoon, we're going to have chaps singing, playing music, eating and cooking sheep at two o'clock in the morning." This is how racism is born, not by starting from a theory.

The correspondence columns of the *Nouvel Observateur*, for example, publish letters from ordinary people saying: "It's all very well for you leftist intellectuals to condemn racism; you live in the better quarters. I live in such and such a place in a popular quarter, and I can't sleep at night because of the noise made by the Algerians or the Blacks. I should like to see *you* living here." Indeed, one would like to see them living there!

So the question is: to what extent, if there are no constraining provisions, can a cultural community continue to live as it wishes, assimilating others without being assimilated by others? These are very serious problems which arise not only in Israel, but do arise in a particularly acute form in Israel. I myself hope that these organic laws will be abandoned. Do a-Zionists or non-Zionists accept all the implications of their being abandoned?

Q. Certain Israeli Zionists, to bring their attachment to Zionist principles in line with their desire to make peace with the Arabs, maintain that they are still attached to the principles of a Jewish idealism which they call Zionism, and refuse to admit that political Zionism has been and still is a colonialist-type enterprise which has been accomplished by plundering the Palestinian people of their land. What do you think of their distinction between the Zionist ideal and the enterprise of colonizing Palestine?

A. There are two things here. This distinction between, let us say, an idealistic Zionism and a colonialist militarist Zionism is completely invalid because in both cases it is a matter of creating a Jewish state in Palestine. If it is a question of anything else, one should indeed make a distinction. But if you want a Jewish state, that inevitably involves consequences that are far from ideal. As I have often said, a plan for a Jewish state in Palestine, drawn up in 1880-1900, could only be realized in one of two ways. Palestine being incontestably an Arab country at that time, there were only two ways of turning it into a Jewish country: either expelling or subjugating the natives. This is not a moral judgement, it is simple logic. Moreover, the dynamic of things was such that, in fact, some of them were expelled and some of them subjugated. I do not see how a Jewish state could have been created in any other way. This seems to me quite obvious. But ideology played its habitual role of mystifying and blinding. The Zionists were largely unaware of this consequence of their project, obvious though it was. They closed their eyes in such a way that, in

fact, it was possible for them to have very idealistic ideas on the internal structure of their future society, the society they wanted to build.

Q. Among the leaders themselves?

A. Among the political leaders, of course not. They were quite ready to colonize. The way people saw things at the time, colonization did not have the disagreeable overtones it has acquired today. At that time colonizing meant bringing civilization, progress. So the attitude to the natives was more or less that of the French in Algeria, Madagascar, or elsewhere. There was a vague idea, at least among those “idealists,” that thanks to the progress, the civilization they would bring, the natives would evolve and in time become people just like us. This attitude must not be confused with the attitude of those who wanted a “spiritual” Zionism — in inverted commas — that is to say, the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish religious or cultural centre that they vaguely saw as being a group of universities, of centres of prayer or studies.

Q. A spiritual Judaism?

A. If you like. It was generally called Zionism because it was the return to Zion, or rather the centering on Zion. I think that some of these “spiritual” Zionists were very well aware that there was an indigenous population and that, if political Zionism was to be established, it could not be done painlessly, without infringing the rights of others.

Q. Some Israelis, in extreme left-wing anti-Zionist circles, say that political Zionism, the Zionist enterprise, the state of Israel with its Zionist structures, can only be conquered by force of arms. Do you agree?

A. As you know, force of arms has already been used and has, in fact, already played a part in making Zionism in practice reconsider a certain number of its ambitions. I really don't know if it is possible to go further other than by force of arms. Force of arms is really of two kinds: the dissuasive force of stockpiled arms and the force of arms that are actually used. For the present we must take into consideration the dissuasive force of the arms of the Arabs, the potential force of the arms of the Americans, the Russians, etc. Now I believe that it is in fact impossible to defeat the Zionist enterprise in its most virulent form exclusively by diplomacy, by speeches, but it is not certain that it will be necessary to resort exclusively to force of arms that are actually used. Perhaps not. We have seen many examples in the past of the results obtained by the force of arms that are not used, by the dissuasive force of arms that might possibly be used and thus constitute a threat.

Q. *Do you think that Israel can break with the Law of Return?*

A. Once again, the underlying question is to know what one means by Israel: a Zionist Israel or a de-Zionized Israel, and in what sense. If we are talking of an Israel wanting to expand, wanting to employ the methods of the past, I doubt if it can exist for long. It was possible to believe that it might some years ago. I know an Israeli writer to whom I said before 1967, or around 1967, I think: "But, after all, surely the present situation can't last forever? You are 2 million, 2 million and a half, you have 100 million Arabs around you, it can't last forever." He answered me, in so many words: "That's what I believed too, until quite recently. But I noticed that the technically advanced countries were becoming more and more advanced, and the underdeveloped countries more and more underdeveloped. So why shouldn't this situation last forever?" Note that this was a statement of fact: the man in question had very creditably campaigned against the plundering of Arab lands, the annexations, etc. So Israel as it is now, strong and dominating — it is easy to see now, in the light of the oil affair, the arms the Arabs can obtain, the demonstration they provided in October 1973 of their fighting potential — it is easy to see that it will not be possible for Israel to last long without very considerable aid from a powerful Western protector (I don't see where else it can come from for the moment).

But if it is a matter of an Israel that has been "de-Zionized" in one way or another, in one of the ways we were discussing just now — in that case, perhaps, if it is possible to establish a *modus vivendi* with the neighbouring Arab countries, you might have a normal country in the middle of a group of normal countries. And why not, indeed? Israel has very considerable human and technical resources. The Palestinians and the Arabs have others, though of course the Arab potential is different; the difference will decrease. They can be of mutual service to each other. I sometimes dream of a return to the situation reflected in the works of Josephus in the first century A.D. There were Judaea and "Arabia," which was the Kingdom of the Nabataean Arabs. Jews and Nabataeans did not always agree. They did not always like each other very much. But all the same they were often allies, even if on other occasions they were enemies, as is always the case with peoples who are neighbours. The oldest mention of the Arabs is in 853 B.C., on the occasion of the battle of Qarqar. It concerns a desert sheikh with a thousand camels. He was part of a coalition against the Assyrians along with the kings of Damascus and Hama, the king of the Ammonites, Ahab, the king of Israel, certain Cilician chiefs, etc. After all, if circumstances were favourable, this is a situation that could arise again.

Q. Could the United States “drop” Israel today, if they realized that it is an obstacle to their economic and, in particular, oil interests, if it continues to block the American peace initiatives?

A. To answer you, one would have to know more about the internal complexities of American politics, exactly how strong the American Jewish lobby is as compared with other pressure groups, and what its activities are. It appears that in 1956 the President of the United States acted contrary to the urging of the Jewish lobby and took sides against Israel. It is true that the existence of Israel was not in danger, and it would probably be much more difficult if the decision that had to be taken called the existence of Israel in question.

In any case I think that the Americans have a very strong temptation to drop Israel in certain circumstances. Israel has obvious advantages for them and equally obvious disadvantages. Once the pros and cons have been weighed the decision will depend on the politicians, on circumstances, on their foreign policy projects, etc. I think that it is a law of history that the foreign policy of a country depends to a great extent on its domestic policy. You know Truman’s reply, at the moment of the creation of the state of Israel, to the American ambassadors in the Arab countries who had begged him not to adopt an attitude so disastrous for American positions in the Arab countries. Truman said “Gentlemen, you have to do with Arabs, but I do not know any Arabs in my constituency, I know only Jews.” It was a very “realistic” view for an American politician. The same situation could arise again. So far the Arab lobby in the United States does not appear to be very strong; I don’t know whether it is capable of becoming so.

Q. What do you think of French Middle East policy since M. Giscard d’Estaing became President of the Republic?

A. Well, I am like everyone else, I don’t know any more about it than they do. I observe that formerly pro-Israeli politicians, Lecanuet and Poniowski in particular, are now pursuing a policy that does not seem to be very different from the one they condemned not so long ago. This leads me to think that there are profound underlying reasons for every possible French policy in the period we are living in, which push us in this direction. Giscard d’Estaing is obviously aware of this, whatever his sympathies or antipathies at the start. I believe that in politics there is always a margin, a zone of indetermination, where individual reactions play their part. Perhaps a fanatically pro-Israeli President of the Republic might adopt ultra-pro-Israeli attitudes, in spite of France’s interests. But I do not think that such a man is likely to appear at present.

On the other hand, I must repeat what we were saying just now. There are two quite different problems: the policy that a French, American or other government would pursue in a situation where the existence of Israel was not at stake and, secondly, the policy that the same government might pursue in the event of the existence of Israel being at stake. I do not think that governments will react in the same way in both cases.

Q. For some time it has been apparent that in the final analysis, the Jewish immigrant to Israel has been inspired by the desire for a modern, Western-style, comfortable life rather than by any attachment to the "land of his ancestors," as the leaders of the Zionist movement throughout the world claim. In this connection it is significant that as soon as they are confronted with the hard life in the country, especially since the October War, the new immigrants think of leaving and returning to their countries of origin. Is this an admission of the failure of the Zionist movement, a breach in its strategy that could be widened?

A. First, from a purely logical point of view, there is no contradiction between these two attitudes. After all, one can be attached to the land of one's ancestors and still want a comfortable life. But I think that in fact there have always been two tendencies among Jews immigrating to Israel. There has always been the trend of those who were in a sense "idealists." Of course, we have to be clear about the sense in which we use the term. It does not mean that they were full of love and understanding for people who were not Jews. It means that they went there with a disinterested aim, from the point of view of their own material interests. This is usually the case with militants who sacrifice themselves for a political project. It is the case with the communists, for example. There have always been people ready to sacrifice their comfort and even to undergo imprisonment, tortures, with great sacrifice, even to risk their lives for a cause which we may regard as not deserving so much devotion. It is the law of history. In this sense there were (deplorably) "idealists" who sacrificed themselves for Hitler, even though Hitler's projects had nothing idealistic about them.

Let us say that, in the case of Jewish immigrants to Palestine or to Israel, there have always been "idealists" and others who went there for practical reasons of some kind. They could not live anywhere else, they thought they could live better there, that's all there was to it. Subsequently the usual evolution has taken place. In all militant movements, of whatever kind, there have been people who were devoted, who have sacrificed themselves in certain conditions and who later became *arrivistes*, careerists, cynics who thought of nothing but their own personal interests. This is something deplorable for

human nature, but it is a fact. There have always been some individuals who resist this evolution and they are to be admired, but statistically the others are much more numerous.

We must also think of Israeli patriotism. There can be no doubt about this, whatever you think about the legality of the creation of Israel. The proportions of "idealists" and others will vary with different periods. There is probably a certain proportion of Israelis who are ready to sacrifice everything, others who will sacrifice something but not everything and, finally, a considerable proportion who say that, if they can live better elsewhere they had better go there and drop Israel. I don't know what these proportions are. But Israeli newspapers all say that categories 2 and 3 are increasing considerably. Consequently there is in fact a breach in loyalty to Zionism, a breach that must always have existed, but which is now growing deeper. The movement perhaps now has proportionately less of the militant sort integrated in a state, a nation, militants so devoted that they are ready to give even their lives. Certainly, the movement is in a bad condition. But, in spite of everything, I think that there must be quite a lot of Israeli patriots and people who are ready to slacken off at present but who, if the state of Israel was really threatened, would recover their potential for sacrifice. It would be wilful blindness on the part of the Palestinians not to see this.

Q. It has often been maintained that the main reason why Jews leave Israel is the fact that Israeli society has reached saturation point, so that it can no longer absorb new arrivals or adapt itself to their requirements.

A. One would have to have a better knowledge of the present situation in Israel to answer you properly. It does in fact seem fairly probable that Israeli society is much less elastic than before, that its structures are more rigid and congealed, so to speak, by several decades of existence, so that it is less easy to fit in, to find one's place, to experiment, to strike out new lines.

Q. In an Israeli daily, Yediot Aharonot, on April 4, 1974, a commentary on emigration says that this phenomenon is not unknown among the "sabras." Although this phenomenon is easy to explain in the case of new Jewish immigrants in Israel, how do you explain the fact that even a considerable number of Jews born in the country are leaving it today?

A. Even the sabras know that there has not always been a Jewish state. Even they have learned at school or from newspapers that there are Jews pretty much everywhere, that they must have relations pretty well everywhere, they know that there has been and still is a Jewish existence outside Israel. So, unlike

other peoples, they always have before them the image of an option other than that of life in Israel. So if they do not like it, they leave. Elsewhere also, of course, you can leave, you can emigrate, but in Israel there is a stronger incentive towards the option of leaving.

Q. In your view is there really a specific "Jewish problem" in the USSR, different from problems of the same kind posed by the other nationalities in the country?

A. Yes, in fact I do think that there is a specific problem. You know, it is practically the only country (along with Bulgaria, I think), where there is a Jewish nationality outside Israel.

Q. But Stalin established this?

A. Yes. It was understandable, perhaps, in the special situation of the Jews in Russia because, in fact, it was the only place (along with Eastern Europe as a whole) where the Jews had a culture so clearly different from that of the other people in the environment in which they lived. In this connection we must return to what we were saying about the difficulty of defining what is a nation and what is not. Here, for once, I am in agreement with Robert Misrahi who, in an article published in *Temps Modernes*, called this a "dialectical nationality." He has a craze for philosophical vocabulary, but what he meant was simply that in Eastern Europe, in certain circumstances, the Jews formed a sort of nationality apart, and that in other circumstances this nationality collapsed and these same Jews regarded themselves as Poles, Russians, etc. It is true enough. The Jews were not completely isolated from Russian, Polish, etc., culture — far from it, especially in the last period. But there were elements of a culture common to the Jews and different from that of the host peoples, a culture marked as different by the fact that there was a special language, Yiddish, which was no one else's language.

Q. Is the problem of the Jews as a nationality in the USSR different from the problem of the Soviet Muslims?

A. There are points in common, but there are also a good many points on which the problems differ. First, there are very clear signs of Judaeophobia (to avoid the equivocal term anti-Semitism). This has either survived or else it was revived at a certain moment. It is a fact that in the eyes of a fair number of the Soviet masses the Jews are a people apart, a people who are less to be trusted. All sorts of stories were told during the war. "Do you know that the Jews have stormed a city? It's Tashkent (right in the rear)." If Jewish soldiers were cowardly, this was said to be normal because they were Jews. If they were brave, people said it was because they wanted to avenge their own dead, it

wasn't pure Soviet patriotism. To avenge themselves they behaved with excessive rashness and endangered their non-Jewish Soviet comrades. There is also the fact that they have not really any territory of their own. There is, of course, the autonomous territory of Birobidzhan, which is described as an "autonomous Jewish territory." But this has obviously been a failure for all sorts of reasons. In this territory, on the borders of Mongolia, there is only a tiny minority of Jews. Then later, the existence of Israel and of Soviet policy to it made life extremely difficult for Jews in the USSR, Poland and some other countries. Circumstances have thus brought it about that Jews are discriminated against. Yiddish literature has been suppressed, religious Jews cannot get prayer books, only a very little unleavened bread is made for the feasts. The complaints made about all this are justified on the whole.

On the other hand, the Jews are privileged inasmuch as they are the only people allowed to emigrate. This is why I never sign petitions on their behalf. I am myself in favour of freedom of movement and religious belief for everyone. There are still moments when I am tempted to sign some protest on behalf of the Soviet Jews, but then I say it isn't right, because they are privileged from another point of view. Many other Soviet citizens would like to emigrate too. The proof of this is that recently, people coming from the USSR have been telling us that there are many women of Russian or other origin who try to marry Jews so as to be able to get out. In connection with the negotiations on the most favoured nation clause, the American Congress demands freedom of emigration for the Jews but says very little about the other nationalities. This is rather unfortunate and liable to provoke anti-Semitism, or rather Judaeophobia.

Q. Professor, you are known in Palestinian resistance circles for having supported the cause of the Palestinian people and their struggle for some years. Can you tell us how you came to give this support and when?

A. You know that my support has always been critical, I must emphasize this. But still, if there has been support, I think it is due in the first place to the fact that I am anti-Zionist on principle, and that this was my position long before I understood much about the Palestinian question. It was the position of my family, of the circles they lived in, which consisted of Jewish immigrants to France, communists, fellow-travellers or left-wingers. Another of the roots was my membership of the Communist Party. I followed its options, which exactly suited this state of mind. Thirdly, from the moment I started to learn Arabic, it was possible for me to understand a little better than others the point of view of the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular.

Later, when I went to Syria and Lebanon from 1940 onwards, I became even more conscious. You know that in 1940-41 I taught in Sidon, in the Muslim College, and I had pupils who were sometimes comparatively old. (I taught the upper high school classes.) Some of my pupils told me (or it may have been people outside the college) that there were some of them who had fought in Palestine in 1936-1939. Thinking it over I told myself that I ought to understand, that I should not absolutely condemn them in accordance with my own principles, and should examine things from the other man's point of view. A little later when I had been in Palestine several times in the period 1941-47, I got in contact with Arab communists (I remember visiting Fuad Nassar in Jaffa in 1947 in the *Ittihad* office, I think) and also, in Jerusalem, with Jews who belonged to the Ihud group. These Jews who were struggling for a binational state took me to Beit Jala where they had contacts with the Arabs of the village.

Back in France, as I said, along with the Party, I accepted recognition of an Israeli state, even though I could already see that it involved a considerable number of disadvantages. On the other hand, it was the Party's position, and there was no reason to abandon this attitude. Rather I regretted not having more opportunities to express my reservations in the Party where I was regarded as a specialist on Arab affairs. But the Party was not very keen on one expressing one's views on this question, for fear of the reactions of members. Here too, it was a question of internal politics before anything else. One might shock the Jews, etc. The problem was remote. Unfortunately, when it was raised it was at the worst moment, in 1953, at the time of Stalin's anti-Semitic mania. At that time I myself, Francis Crémieux and some others, mostly Jews, were asked to write articles for *La Nouvelle Critique*. The Zionists still bring up against me some sentences in my article on "Zionism and socialism" — and it is true that some of them are quite intolerable — about the alleged crimes of Jewish doctors who wanted to kill Stalin and so on.

In fact, some of these sentences were added by Kanapa, who was then the editor-in-chief of this communist review. He made me agree to these additions by the usual tricks practised by the editors of militant reviews: "I have brought some things up to date a bit; if you like you can see the final proofs. Only you will have to go to the press before this evening, and it's a long way from Paris, etc." I was wrong to agree to these methods and to sign these insanities. On the other hand, I still agree with the greater part of that article. There is also a passage in which, after certain negative remarks, I say, in accordance with the attitude of the Party: "Then is the state of Israel to be destroyed? What stu-

pidity." Later, even after my expulsion from the Party, I continued to maintain the same views on the whole, but eventually I became pretty disgusted by this unhappy experience of the 1953 article. I returned to the problem at the request of the Arab students in Paris and the Union of Jewish Students, in the following circumstances. In 1964 they wanted to arrange a public debate on the question. The Jewish students had come to an understanding with the Arab students in principle, but the Arab students did not want to speak on the same platform as the Zionists. So both sides asked me (my position was known, after all) to present the problem from the Arab point of view. My contribution was, moreover, published in *l'Observateur* under the title "If I were an Arab." Note that the Arabs did not want to speak on the platform, but at the end of the meeting at least fifteen Arabs queued up below the platform and were handed a microphone. They agreed to speak in this manner, sometimes to criticize me because, according to them, I was not radical enough. In any case, this brought me in touch with this problem again. I met such Palestinians as Daud Talhami. I once more became a specialist on the problem.

Q. You said just now that your support was critical. Of what?

A. It was not always really critical. There was a period, moreover, when the Palestinians did not have a very clear programme. No one really knew what they wanted. No one was authorized to define the "true Palestinian programme." In a sense this gave me greater freedom to support them. Certainly after my expulsion from the Party in 1958 I could have reconsidered my position vis-à-vis the state of Israel. But I maintained more or less the position I had had when I was in the Party because I thought that it was right, in present circumstances at least.

My position is that the state of Israel has a certain legality within the framework of frontiers that have still to be defined. For the Russians these frontiers were those of the 1947 Partition adopted by the United Nations. These theoretical frontiers always appear in their atlases as the legal frontiers of Israel. Soviet gazetteers of the countries of the world give the area and population of legitimate Israel as they should be, after which they say that it has extended illegally to take in so many square kilometres and a population of so many. It is nevertheless true that I hesitated to express any idea on what the future of Palestine might be like. I preferred to remain vague, especially as the Palestinians' position had not been very clearly expressed. Needless to say I was not enthusiastic for Shuqairi's programme. However precisely because this programme was not always clearly presented, it could be argued that he was just

an enthusiast who did not represent the Palestinians as a whole, far less the Arabs. In my book *Israël et le refus arabe*, that I wrote in the autumn of 1967, I again presented the plans for the future in a fairly vague way that could be more or less legitimately interpreted as being analogous to the current programme of the Palestinians. In January 1968 I went to the Congress of Intellectuals in Cuba. There was a major discussion with the Arabs and also the Palestinians, represented (unofficially) by Naji Allush. In the course of the discussions there I began to think rather more, and I told myself that it was difficult to believe in the binational state. I was much criticized by the Zionists of course, but also by people who were puzzled. Some of the criticism I rejected out of hand, but some of it made me think. Many people said to me: "How can you conceive of a state in which Jews and Arabs (and like all Europeans I understood the Israeli Jews as constituting a new nationality, not merely a religious confession) could coexist? We all know what is going on in Ireland, in Cyprus, in India, etc., wherever two nationalities coexist within a unitary state. They fight each other." I thought about this as I did about all the criticism levelled against me, and the argument seemed to be valid. In the atmosphere of the twentieth century wherever there are groups of an ethnic or national type, they must be given some political power, some collective representation, some political structure through which they can defend themselves as a group, their interests and their aspirations. The only real political progress achieved in twenty centuries is that it is now recognized, in theory at least, that every group must have a structure capable of defending it, that the good will, the promises, etc., of the sovereign, the majority, are not sufficient. No one now believes that they are.

It was at this very curious Havana Congress that I was asked to make peace in the case of a man whom the Arabs were denouncing as a Zionist, although he was hardly a Zionist at all, but indeed anti-Zionist most of the time. This was Arturo Schwarz, an Italian Jew, a former Egyptian communist, about whom the Arabs got very worked up. The non-Arabs were rather irritated by this attack which was based on some fragments of the speech that Schwarz intended to make and that had been accidentally discovered while in the hands of the typists. The Cubans asked me to calm things down. I made a short speech explaining the respective positions, where the Arabs were right, where they were exaggerating, where they seemed to me to misunderstand Schwarz's intentions, and where he was wrong in some of his attacks on certain Arab rulers, from his desire to show that the Arabs were not always right either. He was right on some points, but wrong to set these Arab attitudes on the same level as Zionist colonization. Eventually I came to the

conclusion that, even if you are influenced by a false ideology like Zionism, that does not stop you being an honest man.

Schwarz left the hall in tears under the attacks of the Arabs, which had become personal. As I said, Schwarz was an Italian Jew who at first lived in Egypt and who was a militant anti-Zionist. He went and settled in Milan and became rich thanks to an art gallery specializing in ultra-modern painting. He later edited a little anti-Zionist review in Milan. He is a very sensitive man, as I observed on other occasions. He was in Cuba; he was really haunted by the Israeli-Palestinian problem: revolted by militant Zionism, he also saw the dangers that seemed to him to threaten the Jews from the attitude of the Arabs at the time. He had prepared something that was really pretty moderate. His text was being typed at the Congress, and certain Arabs got to know about it before he spoke (in the end he did not speak at all). There was a Ba'ath enthusiast who shouted, "To think that at this Congress there should be Zionists saying such horrible things." Surprised, Schwarz defended himself excitedly and suddenly started going too far. The Arabs started getting excited. This was when I intervened to quiet things down, and I was more or less successful. The Arabs were practically the only ones who did not applaud me, but in fact they were pleased that I had intervened. Schwarz passed me a piece of paper with "thank you" written on it, and Naji Allush also sent me a piece of paper on which he had written "thank you." In my speech I also said, in so many words: "Yes, the ideal would be a binational state, but because the breach made between the two communities by Zionist policy is so wide, one should envisage at least a temporary phase in which each population would be represented by its own political structure, if only to deal with the problem of their fusion." Naji Allush and another Arab told me that it was a good thing that I had said that this structure should be temporary. Later I thought about it rather more profoundly.

Q. What do you think of the Palestine resistance movement's proposal for the establishment in the whole of the territory of Palestine of a democratic state in which the Palestinian people and the Israeli Jews could live together in peace?

A. I have already talked about it. If I stress this point it is because I think that the Arabs' major mistake is a sociologically understandable one in Middle Eastern society: to represent the Jewish community in the territory of Palestine as being a religious community. It is this concept, which I believe to be false, that explains the Palestinian programme, the whole of Palestinian policy. In fact, if it is a matter of a purely religious community, the way to solve conflicts of this kind without (as in Lebanon) fragmentation and the different

clergies enjoying excessive influence, is through secularization, the separation of Church and State, as in France. But this will not be the case in Palestine. I once saw an interview with Arafat in a Cuban periodical (*Tricontinental*) and was struck by it. In it Arafat said (paraphrased): "We Palestinians have always believed that there were two national communities in the land of Palestine, the Jews and the Arabs. But now we see that there are really three: the Western Jews, the Oriental Jews and the Arabs." All the same, not long afterwards he said: "The solution is a secular, democratic state, etc." In short, he was proposing a solution based on the religious problem for a problem which, as he said himself, was a national one.

I know very well that the definition of this Israeli nationality (as I call it) is based on religious criteria, even if it is a question of the religion of the mother or the ancestor of the Israeli concerned. The point is that there has to be a criterion to decide who has the right to form the new nation and who has not, and the only criterion they have been able to find is the (religious) Jewishness of an ancestor. Hence all the fuss about the definition of a Jew, that they have not been able to settle. But this does not mean at all that it is not a question of a new nationality.

Q. Do you think that there is a Jewish people?

A. It is always the same thing. Everything depends on definitions: what do we mean by a people? I have aroused howls of protest from Zionists in meeting halls when I have maintained that there is no such thing as a Jewish people. I now employ the term *ensemble juif*, which is fairly neutral, because in practice what one needs is a term to indicate all those whom the anti-Semites have persecuted and think of persecuting and all those whom the Zionists claim are qualified to benefit from the Law of Return and have the duty of supporting Israel. Broadly, it is a question of all those whose ancestors were of the Jewish religion without the memory of this origin being forgotten, because this ensemble is by no means restricted to those who adhere to the Jewish religion. In Europe it is not like the East, you are not obliged to adhere to a religious community if you do not believe its dogma. Nobody asks you what your religion is and many have none. But we have been forced to be Jews (in a sense) for some time and I think I was a little late. I had not advanced from the pre-1967 situation, and not even from the pre-1939 situation. At that time people who wanted to leave the "Jewish people" did so without any difficulty. They were no longer Jews from the moment they no longer had any connection with the Jewish religion, etc.

This started to change in France in 1940, with the Vichy discrimination laws. More or less the same thing happened elsewhere (not to mention the countries where, as in the East, the confessional system has been maintained). This changed still more with the birth of the state of Israel. Henceforward, much to my annoyance, people of Jewish origin are classified in various ways as Jews and they can no longer be uninterested in Jewish problems. I myself, for example, regarded my Jewish descent as no more than an accident of genealogy. But given that my parents were killed for being regarded as Jews, although they were neither religious nor Zionists nor affiliated with any Jewish society; seeing that there are still very many people who regard me as Jewish no matter what I say and do; given that the state of Israel claims to represent me, even if I go out of my way to deny that it represents me; given all this I have a responsibility thrust upon me inasmuch as I am regarded as a Jew, and I have a duty of solidarity to those who are in the same situation. For example, I cannot be uninterested in the difficulties experienced by Jews in certain countries, like Poland, nor in what the state of Israel does — allegedly in my name. So I am a Jew in spite of myself, against my will. The *ensemble juif* can be called the “Jewish people” if you define a people as a group of persons whom others describe in the same way by virtue of their supposed common origin. If not, another word must be found. In any case there are now responsibilities and solidarities common to all the members of this ensemble.

Q. Insofar as Israel has built its existence on denying the rights of the Palestinian people, can it today recognize the Palestinian national fact along with the historical wrong it has done to the Arab people of Palestine, without thereby calling in question its own legality?

A. Yes, I think so. It can do so precisely because I think that this is a tendency that comes quite naturally to people like Avnery. They have an attitude that seems to me very reasonable. It consists of saying, in so many words: “Don’t let’s bother about the way we got here, that’s over and done, don’t let’s talk about historical rights based on the Kingdom of David and Solomon. Let’s simply say that in one way or another we are here, we have done so and so, we have cultivated the land and built factories.... We form a new community. From this point of view and this point of view only we have a certain legality.”

If they restrict the basis of their legality to this, I do not see why the Israelis should not recognize the Palestinian national fact and the historical wrong done to the Arabs of Palestine. I have been saying and writing for a long time that the minimum that could be asked of the Jews of Israel

was that they should recognize the historical wrong and renounce this idea of the eternal rights of the supposed descendants of the Israelites of antiquity to the land of Palestine. The moment they did this, dialogue with the Arabs would at least be possible, mutual concessions could be discussed, but this renunciation was essential. Usually this has seemed rather unrealistic to those with whom I have discussed it. They have doubted whether socio-historical and moral judgements are a sufficient basis for dialogue. But I think that they are, because from then on the Israelis could say: "We are here, it is not our fault, it is the fault of our parents, our grandparents. In any case, we are here now, what are we going to do? Can't we come to an agreement?" From then on everything will still be difficult, but at least everything becomes possible.

Q. The French title of your book published in 1969 was "Israel and the Arab Refusal." Do you still like it? Or would you rather reverse it and say: "The Arabs and Israel's Refusal"?

A. The title was chosen more or less at random. It was a question of finding a title that would be rather more striking, less flat than something like "The Arabs and Israel." I was thinking on the lines of the title of a book called *Paris et le désert français*. At the time certain Arabs reproached me for the title, much to my surprise. I had never thought they would see so many things behind this title. Firstly, Israel came first. Then, they said, from the start the question is badly put, contrary to the facts. It is not we who are refusing, but they. In fact, however, in the first place the term "refusal" is not pejorative. You are right if you refuse anything bad. Then there are refusals on both sides. The Arabs up to now have refused a Jewish state; this is a fact, whether they are right or wrong. On the other hand, the Israelis have also refused to integrate. This is firstly as a religious community among other religious communities (whether they have been right or wrong, once again I am sticking to the facts). Secondly, at another level, they have in practice refused to make Israel a normal Near Eastern state like the rest. So it seems to me that there are refusals on both sides. Moreover, the title was striking, which was all that was intended, because the expression is often used, even by Arabs. One could imagine another title which would please the Arabs, like "The Arabs and the Israeli Refusal." I don't know if I should call it that all the same. The most accurate would be "The Arabs, Israel, and the Double Refusal."