

PROLOGUE

I left my job as editor of *Al Yawm*, a semiofficial Arabic daily owned jointly by the government and the Histadrut (General Federation of Jewish Labor), toward the end of 1966. I had worked there since 1959, and my departure, or rather my ouster, from the job found me in the same fighting mood that I had had throughout the previous several years, asking the same questions that extremely few seemed to dare ask or answer in earnest, questions having to do with the nature of the new state and the way it was run. Was Israel a Jewish state, a Jewish *and* democratic state, and what did these terms mean in actual practice? Were the non-Jewish citizens of the country being treated as equals and getting their due share of the national pie? Why did immigrants from the countries of the Middle East and North Africa fail to cope, and why were they subjected to a process of cultural cleansing? Why was there an almost obsessive preoccupation with the question “Who is a Jew?” — a question the authoritative answer to which takes less than a dozen words and is known to everyone with even an elementary knowledge of Judaism?

On the personal and social levels the situation began to deteriorate, and shortly after I left my job it began to dawn on me that I was left completely alone. All those who had professed concern — and at times even gave expression in public to that concern — over the state of things in the interethnic sphere deserted me one after the other as soon as they began to realize the extent of my isolation. Some of them were also deterred by the nature of my dissent and the direction it was taking. One Eliahu Aghasi, an Iraqi-born Histadrut functionary disappointed by his failure to get the directorship of their Arab department — and whom I had helped with his newspaper writings on the subject of ethnic discrimination — was especially full of malice. As administrative manager of the paper, he actually presided over the proceedings of my ouster and made things as unpleasant and as ugly as it was at all possible for them to be.

The situation was by no means better where my personal friends and

acquaintances were concerned. Aliza Levenberg, who throughout the years had been in full agreement with my position and a great admirer, threatened me one evening with “telling the *Shin Bet* [the all-powerful secret services],” after writing a vicious attack in a letter to the editor of *Ma'ariv* in reply to an article I wrote for the paper. Miriam Mechner, another of those who had been inciting me constantly against the Ministry of Education, was now in hysterics about my befriending the late Israeli Arab poet Rashid Hussein, whom she had met in our flat in my absence in London and in whose eyes she thought she detected “fire” when he referred to Israel and Israelis. Worst of all, my various Iraqi friends, who had been encouraging me to keep writing about the ethnic problem, and some of whom seemed far more extreme in their pronouncements on the subject in private—all these friends and “fellow sufferers” suddenly either fell silent or turned openly against me. Survival, it transpired, was what mattered most—and I cannot in honesty blame them, considering my own experience with the powers that be.

Privately, things were not much brighter. Jon Kimche, for whom I wrote scores of articles both on Arab affairs and on the ethnic problem, sent me a letter saying he had to cut on expenses and would therefore have to publish less of my work in the *Jewish Observer*. Walter Laqueur, whom I had known back in the 1950s when he worked as regular columnist for the *Jerusalem Post*, and who had promised to help me with a scholarship or grant from his newly acquired Wiener Library for a book on the history of Iraqi Jewry, backed out, and directed me to the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in New York, which had little to offer. People at the Arabic service of Israel radio, where I had worked before taking my job at *Al Yawm*, refused flatly, though deviously, to let me do a weekly survey of the Arab press for them at the ridiculous fee of 100 Israeli pounds apiece; *Midstream's* editor, Shlomo Katz, was offended by some remark I made in one of my letters and decided to stop my bimonthly “Letter from the Middle East”; my articles were rejected one after the other by periodicals such as *Commentary*, *Judaism*, *Congress Bi-Weekly*, and other American and British Jewish periodicals; and Rachel, with three children aged eight, seven, and three to feed, was showing signs of impatience, telling me one day she was determined to “draw the line,” since even our grocery bill and modest living conditions were being seriously affected.

Amidst all this pain and confusion and disappointment, and with my income now limited to the meager 700 pounds a month I was drawing from the Sephardi Community Council in Jerusalem for doing a biweekly broadsheet called *Israel's Oriental Problem*, I decided to enroll at Tel Aviv

University, choosing sociology and the modern Middle East as my two main subjects. My choice of sociology and anthropology was of course connected with my current near obsession with the problems of culture, ethnic prejudices, and acculturation in Israel, problems which I was determined to grapple with, expound on, and perhaps even “settle.” This was why I decided to enroll as a freshman at the ripe age of forty-two—and I chose Middle Eastern studies as a second subject only because one had to take two main subjects to work for a first degree.

I cannot say I regret the experience. I learned a great deal about sociology and anthropology, always going beyond the reading list recommended by the department and delving into subjects and disciplines neither required by the lecturers nor necessarily relevant to the subject at hand. I read Robert Merton’s works and found his exposition of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” theorem fascinating as well as extremely useful. I was also duly drawn by the school in social psychology known as “culture and personality”; Georg Simmel’s sociology of conflict impressed me greatly, since I found it relevant to my other leading occupation, the Arab-Israeli mess; and cultural anthropology as presented by Ralph Linton and others was something of a revelation and helped me greatly in formulating my “final” verdicts on the state of things in Israeli society and culture, as well as in my research work on Middle Eastern subjects. Most of all, perhaps, I was deeply influenced by the classic, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki—and especially by Thomas’s dictum that “if men judged a situation as real then it would be real in its consequences.”

All this, of course, meant that I was neglecting my lessons, failing to do my homework. The real difficulty, however, was the subject of statistics, which was obligatory for sociology students and from which I failed to be exempted, though I tried. In the end—and in a typical attempt at rationalization—I formulated a pet theory about university studies. This says that, as a student, you can do either of two things: learn about the subjects and widen your horizons or get a degree—you cannot do both! To my surprise, I found I was able to “sell” this theory to a number of perfectly sane and unprejudiced friends and acquaintances.

The academic year—the first in this my third futile attempt at a university degree—started in October 1966. By the spring of 1967 I found I was already wondering what on earth to do with the problem of statistics. The difficulty was real: even elementary statistics turned out to rely on a minimum knowledge of some branch of mathematics or other that I either had never encountered in my secondary schools in Baghdad or had

forgotten all about. But I did not give up — not quite. What finally tipped the scales was the Six-Day War. That famous Israeli victory and its aftermath proved to be such a crushing blow to what I had been saying and advocating, and ultimately to me personally, that I found myself unable to act in any direction other than to make my lame attempts to save whatever could be saved from the salvage left by the war. I therefore refused to listen to the pleas, made by a classmate as well as by the sociology lecturer, just to go to the university and show my army reserve card. Apparently they were being extremely generous with students, distributing good marks and degrees as though they were part of the trophies of that war.

SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

The jubilation and the festivities that followed Israel's spectacular victory in the Six-Day War seemed to me to border on the obscene. No one in my immediate circle of friends and acquaintances, admirers and adversaries — with the possible exception of Shimon Ballas — would see what had happened in the way I tended to see it, namely, as a further step toward deepening rather than healing Arab-Israeli and Muslim-Jewish rifts, and therefore ultimately a bad thing. No Israeli, of course, wanted an Arab victory or an Israeli defeat, however partial, and once the first shot had been fired, Israel had no alternative but to win the war. What I regretted, and lamented, was the sheer *size* of the victory, the humiliation it brought on the Arab world, and the certain knowledge that the Arabs would never, ever contemplate peace and reconciliation with Israel from a position of such crippling weakness. It was only six years later, in the Yom Kippur War, that this was to become clear to the Israelis and to the world as a whole.

At the university my actual performance in class was not so good, to say the least, since I failed to follow the lecturers' instructions, let alone scribble what they said in their lectures word for word. But I did well on the papers I submitted, invariably getting an AA for them. Many of these had to do, directly or indirectly, with the subjects that had been exercising me for some years — culture, acculturation, in-groups and out-groups, sociological theory. The titles I chose for these papers speak for themselves: "Cultural Stagnation and the Working of the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," "Accent on Groups," "Erving Goffman's Contribution to Sociological Theory," "Role-Status Contradictions."

There was one quite heated discussion with the teacher: I think it was about this last-mentioned paper, in which the works of three lead-

ing American sociologists—Mirra Komarovsky, Everett C. Hughes, and Gerhard Lenski—were discussed. I don't recall the details, but I give here extracts from the paper. Citing Shakespeare's immortal lines, "All the world's a stage . . .," I go on to comment on the works of these three luminaries. Lenski, I wrote toward the end, in a way develops Hughes's thesis and brings it a step further—namely, to the sphere of political behavior and ultimately to the fields of social conflict and social change. Showing that the degree of stability in people's voting habits goes hand in hand with the degree of status crystallization they enjoy, Lenski reaches a number of highly significant conclusions:

1. The individual with a poorly crystallized status "is a particular type of 'marginal man,'" and a society with a relatively large proportion of such individuals "is a society which is in an unstable condition."
2. The more frequently that acute status inconsistencies occur within a population, "the greater would be the proportion of that population willing to support programmes of social change."
3. Persons of poorly crystallized status are to be found in all social strata, and—since leadership of successful revolutionary movements usually comes from the higher strata—such persons "may be an important source from which such leadership is recruited."

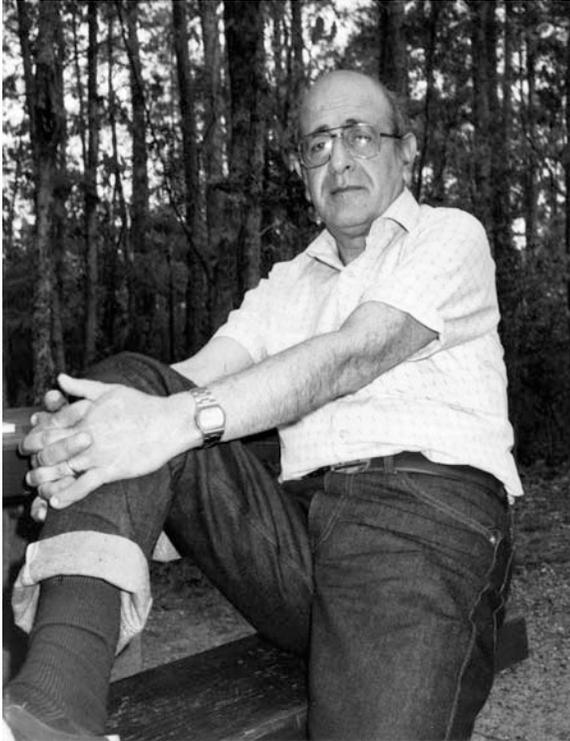
"In conclusion," I wrote,

one cannot help wondering how, things being the way they are, people at all manage to make ends meet socially in modern industrial society. Shakespeare's light-sounding solution ("They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts") no longer seems to apply here. Still, people do seem to manage. Komarovsky's college girls, especially those with 'the middle-of-the-road personality,' are now no doubt mothers of yet another generation of college girls—who now quite possibly suffer less from the specific type of conflict which beset their mothers. Hughes's non-white professionals and Lenski's intellectuals with their low degree of status crystallisation now no doubt supply leadership for the so-called Black Power movement, at last realising that their problems, being group problems, demand *group* solutions. Unfortunately, however, the chances are that once a certain set of role conflicts and contradictions is resolved, it very likely gives rise to other, possibly even more perplexing sets of conflicts. In other words, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—at least for the sociologists!

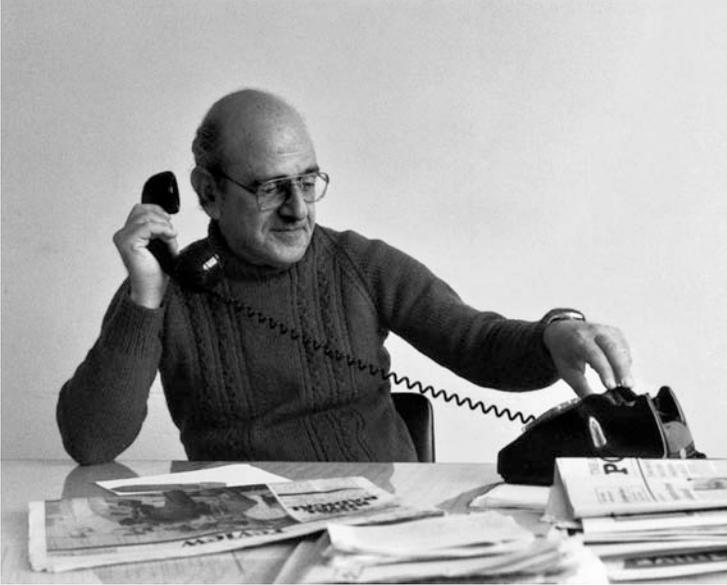
Study was not the only link I was to have with Tel Aviv University. One day, not long after leaving *Al Yawm*, Professor Shimon Shamir of Tel Aviv University called asking to see me. I met him over a cup of coffee, and after the usual chat about things in general, he offered me a temporary appointment as “senior research associate” at the Shiloah Institute for Middle Eastern and African Studies, which he headed. I said I would think about it, and eventually accepted the offer, deciding that combining studying for a degree with research would be a good idea, and the proximity to my home and family, quite convenient.



The author and his wife, Rachel, at the entrance of the residence of some friends in East Jerusalem, 1973.



The author relaxing in a forest near Houston, Texas, summer 1981.



The author at a desk in the offices of Deutsche Welle (the international broadcaster), Cologne, March 1982.



The author dining at the home of friends, Cologne, Easter 1982.



The author and Rachel with their son Rony and his bride, Annie, on the night of their wedding, July 1987.



The author and Rachel aboard ship for a Mediterranean cruise, September 1988.

**ISRAEL'S YEARS
OF BOGUS GRANDEUR**

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