

**“MUCH DELUSION THAT IS IN GOOD WILL”:
AHARON APPELFELD’S AMBIVALENT POSITION ON
ZIONISM—IN HIS NON-FICTION AND IN HIS FICTION**

Shai Rudin

University of Haifa, Israel

Since the appearance of Aharon Appelfeld’s first collection of stories, *Smoke*, in 1962, Appelfeld has conducted a covert and an overt dialogue with the Zionist movement. This exchange finds expression in his fiction and in his published essays and interviews with the press. The concern of this article is to compare Appelfeld’s stance on Zionism as reflected in each of the two forms of textual expression he practices, fiction and journalism/essays. Juxtaposing the two forms reveals not only tension but actual contradiction: Appelfeld’s non-fiction mostly exudes a harshly critical tone from the author, but reading his fiction, one finds something different: the early Appelfeld indeed criticizes Zionism in his books, but the later writer forgoes his critical note and in fact joins in the Zionist discourse, which he undermined in his non-fiction.

Aharon Appelfeld is among the most venerable writers active today in Israel, and his literary success is evident abroad also.¹ His books are indeed not perceived to adopt the Zionist ethos as a super-narrative, but in fact, since the appearance of his first collection of stories, *Smoke*, in March 1962, Appelfeld has conducted a covert and an overt dialogue with the Zionist movement.² This exchange finds expression in his fiction and in his published essays and interviews with the press. The concern of this article is to compare Appelfeld’s stance on Zionism as reflected in each of the two forms of textual expression he practices, fiction and journalism/essays. Juxtaposing

¹ Gershon Shaked (“Requiem for the Jewish People that was Killed,” (in Hebrew) in *Between Frost and Smoke: Studies on the Work of Aharon Appelfeld* [ed. Y. Ben-Mordechai and I. Porush; Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, 1997] pp. 15–57) refers to Appelfeld’s reception and enumerates some of the literature prizes he won that attest to his entry into the canon: the Brenner Prize (1975), the Bialik Prize (1979), and the Israel Prize for Literature (1983). Add to these the Medici Prize, which he won in France in 2003 following his book *A Story of a Life*, the Nelly Sachs Prize bestowed on him in Dortmund in Germany in 2005, and the Italian Grinzyn Prize he won in 2008.

² The publication of the collection cost Appelfeld enormous effort, because the book was unusual on the literary landscape shaped by the literature of the founding generation of the state. Shaked (“Requiem for the Jewish People”) enumerates the difficulties that the publication entailed. Because of them, Appelfeld was obliged to publish his book not with Hakibbutz Hameuchad, which demanded many amendments, but with a private avant-garde publisher centered on the periodical *Achshav* and its first collections were called *Ugdan*. Appelfeld’s obduracy not to emend the text was vindicated, and *Smoke* won favorable reviews from veteran critics and young people alike; see A. Holtzman, “Aharon Appelfeld’s Path to the Collection *Smoke*,” (in Hebrew) in *Between Frost and Smoke: Studies on the Work of Aharon Appelfeld* (ed. Y. Ben-Mordechai and I. Porush; Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, 1997), pp. 83–97.

the two forms reveals not only tension but actual contradiction: Appelfeld's non-fiction mostly exudes a harshly critical tone from the writer, a Holocaust survivor who was obliged to change his name from Arvin to Aharon and has overcome his difficult experiences in the Israeli melting pot, as a youth who arrived as a Holocaust refugee with Youth Aliya. But reading his fiction, one finds something different: the early Appelfeld indeed criticizes Zionism in his books, but the later writer forgoes his critical note and in fact joins in the Zionist discourse, which he undermined in his non-fiction.

1. NON-FICTION

1.1 Interviews with the Press

"Only naïve Zionism thought that when we got here all would be resolved," says Appelfeld in an interview published in 2006.³ This statement may be considered gentle. In an interview in 2004, Appelfeld accentuates the violence embedded in the Zionist project:

There was an aggressive element in Zionism. It fought Yiddish and it fought the Diaspora and it fought Jewish culture. I understand that it was necessary. For a while it was essential. But in the end we are paying a terrible price for it. We are paying for it with the shrinking of the Jewish soul.⁴

Later in the interview, Appelfeld notes the implications of the Zionist view:

There was some sort of move towards a kind of primitivism here. And an attempt here to amputate internal organs of the soul. And this caused crippling. Severe cultural crippling. So I think that today the Jewish people is conducting two existential wars at once. One war for the body, against the Arabs, and another war for the soul, against itself. Identifying Jewishness with religion, from which they try to hold back, creates a very serious vacuum here. So there is a black identity hole here. So there is deep revulsion here against anything Jewish. But without our having some kind of Jewish identity we cannot exist.⁵

Appelfeld dismisses the notion of "Israeliness" and insists that a society of immigrants cannot create monolithic Israeliness or a "new Jew," as the

³ A. Lam, "On the Edge of the Abyss," *Yediot Aharonot* (Nov. 24, 2006): 17–22 (in Hebrew).

⁴ A. Shavit, "Not Good for the Jews: An Interview with Aharon Appelfeld," *Haaretz* (Feb. 13, 2004) (in Hebrew). Cited March 5, 2008. Online: <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=392792&sw=%E0%F4%EC%F4%EC%E3>.

⁵ A. Shavit, "Not Good for the Jews."

Zionist movement wanted. Zionism has not turned the Jew residing in Israel into a "non-migrant."

What is this "Israeliness"? We are a society of migrants, migration is what characterizes us, with all its ills, but also with the richness in it. Hebrew criticism has invented a kind of illusion that there is an "Israeli" being—a person who went to kindergarten, then went to elementary school and secondary school, served in the army's Nahal Brigade, and so on. In my view, this is a very stereotypic Israeliness, with a slightly unrealistic mythological touch, and in the name of this Israeliness they have been brandishing at me all these years.... I grew up as an orphan, and I went through the war, and I wandered with the refugees, and I'm still a migrant. A migrant is a migrant is a migrant.⁶

In an interview with Schneider, Appelfeld comments, "few are the nations that have so fought against themselves, against their culture, against their past."⁷ These words connect the pre-Holocaust assimilating Jewry and the wish to break away from the roots of Judaism to Zionism which in its striving for the melting pot, distanced the Jew, Appelfeld maintains, from the Jewish legacy.

In his interviews, Appelfeld repeatedly levels his dual criticism at Zionism: at first, it yearned to construct a new Jewish image, and denied the Jewish culture that was grasped as Diasporic and feminine, and now, with its "victory," embodied in the rise of Israel, it exacerbates the tension between the Jewish past and the Israeli present. Appelfeld grants partial legitimacy to the first, but is against the cultural basis that Zionism laid down, even when the state of Israel became established, and the sense of nationalism of the Israeli no longer needed the foundational myths. In his view, Israeli culture was supposed to make room for the variegation of the different immigrants and for the cultural polyphony typical of them; but in practice, Israeli culture of our times is superficial, aiming at the lowest common denominators. The search for similarity, according to Appelfeld, has made the Hebrew language shallow and severed it from its roots.

Zionism's consolidation, Appelfeld holds, has not made Israeli society pluralist but the possessor of a limited cultural horizon. It has likewise worsened the alienation of the Israeli from Jewish elements, and in fact has made the Israeli of the early twenty-first century the assimilating Jew of the

⁶ M. Gluzman, "So Far I have Written the First Third: Interview with Aharon Appelfeld," *Mikan* 1 (2000): 150–165 (in Hebrew).

⁷ Sh. Schneider, "Aharon Appelfeld on His Life and His Writings: Interview with the Narrator," *Bitaron* 4 (1982): 5–17 (in Hebrew), quote from pp. 14–15.

early twentieth century—bereft of roots and yearning for make-believe identities.

1.2 Essays

A juxtaposition of Appelfeld's journalistic expressions against the Zionist ethos to his essay writing, the picture becomes more complex, and a process of silencing of Holocaust survivors in Israeli society is exposed. In Appelfeld's opinion, this process stemmed both from society's attitude to the survivors and from the survivors' own choice to suppress and try to forget the horrors they had experienced.

Essays collections allow writers to propagate their political, social, and cultural thinking while conceding the texture of fiction. Appelfeld's collection entitled *First Person Essays* was published in 1979; since then Appelfeld has not published another book of essays in Hebrew.⁸ This move distinguishes him from other central writers in Israeli literature, such as Amos Oz, Avraham B. Yehoshua, and David Grossman. To date, Oz has published five books of essays,⁹ Yehoshua four,¹⁰ and Grossman, who is not among the writers of the state-founding generation but is a dominant literary and political voice, has so far written two books of essays.¹¹

The thread connecting all the essay collections is each writer's position on Zionism. The compositions serve as a literary genre whereby the writer, who in Israel is also considered to speak in a political voice, can criticize and analyze social processes. Criticism of this kind may be present in the writer's fiction, but the essay, being an intellectual genre, has no plot and is located between speculative writing and literature allowing the writer to dispense his or her social doctrine without resorting to fictional materials.

⁸ In 1994, Appelfeld published his book of essays in English: *Beyond Despair* (New York: Croom International). Ezrahi analyzes the discourse that arises in the book; S. Ezrahi, "The Journey of the Jew from Bukovina to Jerusalem—and Back" (in Hebrew), in *Between Frost and Smoke: Studies on the Work of Aharon Appelfeld* (ed. Y. Ben-Mordechai and I. Porush; Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, 1997), pp. 99–107.

⁹ A. Oz, *Under this Blazing Light* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Hapoalim, 1979); A. Oz, *From the Slopes of Lebanon* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1987); A. Oz, *All the Hopes: Thoughts on Israeli Identity* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 1998); A. Oz, *Actually There are Two Wars Here* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 2002); A. Oz, *On the Side of a Volcano* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 2006).

¹⁰ A. B. Yehoshua, *For Normality: Five Essays on Questions of Zionism* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Schocken Books, 1980); A. B. Yehoshua, *On the Wall and the Mountain: The Non-Literary Reality of the Israeli Writer* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1989); A. B. Yehoshua, *The Awful Strength of a Little Guilt: The Moral Context of a Literary Text* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1998); A. B. Yehoshua, *The Grip of the Motherland* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2008).

¹¹ D. Grossman, *Yellow Wind* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1987); D. Grossman, *Lions' Honey: The Story of Samson* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2006).

At the beginning of Appelfeld's *First Person Essays*, the author declares that his compositions are "subjective studies" and that although he writes "we," this is his personal reaction solely. This opening is critical in light of what is conveyed to the extra-textual addressee in the various essays: Appelfeld points out that he wishes to sound a personal voice even though Israeli society hails the collective. He indeed tells the stories of child Holocaust refugees, yet he does not want things to be taken as a generalization but as a personal story of an individual speaker. In his essay, "Evidence" Appelfeld points out that "the family is Jewish history in minuscule."¹² The family, in Appelfeld's view, stands in contrast to the group, which erases and blurs the boundaries between the individuals. The family allows ideological pluralism—not possible in the Zionist ethos because of its aspiration to make a "new" Jew. Appelfeld writes in closing, "I do not come to judge anyone," but he adds: "Whoever chose to go up to the Land of Israel wished to rehabilitate not only his body."¹³ These words constitute a "J'accuse" leveled at Israeli society of the first three decades of the state's establishment. Appelfeld stresses the position of Israel as a state supposed to serve its citizens not only as a place of refuge after the Holocaust, but also as cultural soil. He indeed declares that he judges no one, but in fact, his words emphasize that the survivors' spiritual rehabilitation could not succeed in social conditions that encouraged silencing and suppression on the one hand and disregard of past culture on the other.

In "Fear and Commitment," Appelfeld describes the discourse of Holocaust survivors as "engaging in apologetics"¹⁴ stemming from an inner feeling of guilt combined with external accusations on the part of Israeli society.¹⁵ Turek-Yablonka¹⁶ characterizes the acceptance of Holocaust survi-

¹² A. Appelfeld, *First Person Essays* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Zionist Library at World Zionist Organization, 1979), p. 9.

¹³ A. Appelfeld, *First Person Essays*, p. 18.

¹⁴ A. Appelfeld, *First Person Essays*, p. 20.

¹⁵ Appelfeld does not mention the issue of reparations, but it reverberates through his writing. Durst exposes the ambivalence between the feeling of the survivors that these monies could restore what they had lost and their wish to receive the reparations because these constituted an admission by Germany of its guilt. The requirement to obtain reparations obliged the survivors to repeat their grim story over and over, and many perceived the process as a second trauma. In parallel, Durst remarks, the survivors expected a display of solidarity and their acceptance into society, and also punitive measures against criminals. None of this occurred. N. Durst, "Mental Injuries without Compensation," *Kivunim Hadashim* 6-7 (2002): 97-106. In this context, note A. Gutfreund, *Our Holocaust* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 2000), which gives a central place both to the story of a Holocaust survivor after being encouraged not to be silent any longer and to the theme of the non-punishment of Nazi war criminals.

¹⁶ H. Turek-Yablonka, "Israelis and Survivors: The Consciousness of the Restoration Against the Consciousness of the Holocaust," *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress on Jewish Studies* 11.212 (1993): 349-356 (in Hebrew).

vors by Israeli society by distinguishing two groups. She asserts that the leaders of the uprising in the ghettos were received with great honor in Israel, and they delivered their testimony in esteemed public forums; but survivors who were not considered partisans or ghetto fighters, and had not served the consciousness of resurrection were pushed aside and silenced. The view of them was stereotypic and they were judged severely. She holds that in the first years of Israeli statehood terms such as "refugees," "outcasts," "uprooted," and "human dust" were mouthed by veteran Israelis to describe Holocaust survivors. Later the image changed, and the survivors were depicted as tragic heroes, haunted by memories of the past, stricken by nightmares, meriting treatment infused with an element of awesome reverence.¹⁷

Appelfeld was well aware of the binary distinction between the "fighting" survivor, who serves the Zionist ethos, and the "weak" survivor, who matches the image of the Diaspora Jew from which Zionism recoiled. In December 2002, a conference on his work was held at York University in Toronto. Appelfeld was asked to explain the ambivalent position he displayed toward his characters. This position encompassed sympathy, but was not free of critique. Appelfeld replied succinctly: "I don't accuse them. I like them because I like weakness. I'm a lover of human weakness."¹⁸ About Holocaust survivors, Appelfeld said, "Not all of them are inspiring. Among them are thieves, smugglers, the weakest of the weak. But if I don't try to understand them, who will understand them?"¹⁹

The aspiration to change the Zionist discourse differentiating the "good" survivor from the "bad" is present in *First Person Essays*, despite the statement that things told in the book are the private account of their teller. Appelfeld constitutes a different voice from the Israeli reality, which strives not only to represent the Holocaust survivors ejected from the Israeli discourse, but also to effectuate their social acceptance in a society that perceives them as a remnant of the Diaspora Jew, who is to be spurned.²⁰

¹⁷ And see H. Yablonka, *Strange Brothers: Holocaust Survivors in the State of Israel 1948–1952* (in Hebrew; Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, 1994), p. 4.

¹⁸ E. Wachtel and A. Appelfeld, "In discussion," in *Encounter with Aharon Appelfeld* (ed. M. Brown and S. R. Horowitz; Toronto: The Center for Jewish Studies, York University, 2003), pp. 43–65.

¹⁹ Sh. Schneider, "Aharon Appelfeld," p. 14.

²⁰ Machman notes that Israel's official position on the Holocaust until the mid-1960s was shaped by the elements of society who were in Palestine before it struck and did not experience it themselves. In his view, "Palestinian 'Zionist' mindsets along with a different world of experiences—and all that went with it—underlay the inability to understand even a small part of the experiences suffered by the Holocaust survivors. The Holocaust itself could be grasped only in notional terms, within paradigms." According to Machman, the attitude to the Holocaust was at first from the position of an outside observer and came to be

Appelfeld responds regarding the alleged passivity of the Holocaust survivor thus:

It is commitment that lifted the Jew out of the passive void into the potential and sometimes actual active. Whoever assumed commitment not only sought to salvage the human image in him but carried with him some mission unknown to man.²¹

Thus Appelfeld points out that the Holocaust survivor who experienced suffering only because of his being a Jew undertook the commitment to be a Jew; and by implication, the survivors could not shed their Jewishness and turn into "Israelis" bereft of Jewishness. Precisely the survivor who was presented as passive becomes, in Appelfeld's essays, a fighter for Jewish culture, objecting fiercely to the leveling of the Jewish soul. In an essay published in the newspaper *Ma'ariv* in 2006, Appelfeld bemoans Israeli culture, which casts off age-old Jewish richness and hallows shallowness:

What cultural richness there is within us, what a variety of cultures, languages, folklore, life experiences, expressions and accents, but instead of this abundance, diversifying and enriching us, it leans to the lowest common denominator, and the common denominator is entertainment and the light refrain. In these precincts the language becomes shallow and the word is cheapened.... Books have disappeared from our language. The Israeli person struts on the crutches of everyday speech, speech without words, the little that reinforces the little.²²

Appelfeld's remarks here are the direct continuation of the central ideas of his book of essays, which warns of loss of Jewish identity. In *First Person Essays*, he criticizes, as stated, not only Israeli society which accuses and silences but also the survivors. In his words, "We have shed, with no regrets, the few words that we brought from home, like one tosses aside an old

an approach as if to a thing constituting part of ancestral collective memory. He points out the difference in attitude to the Holocaust as it arises from the genre of memoirs of survivors and from introducing the Holocaust as a compulsory subject in Jewish History studies in high schools. This includes both works written by survivors (such as Aharon Appelfeld, Ida Fink, K. Tsetnik, Itamar Ya'oz-Kest, and Dan Pagis) and some of Appelfeld's compositions from the collection *Essays in the First Person*, and works written by survivors' children (*sifrut hador hasheni*). D. Machman, "Research of Zionism in Light of the Holocaust: Problems, Polemics, and Basic Terms," (in Hebrew) in *Between Vision and Revision: A Century of Zionist Historiography* (ed. Y. Weitz; Jerusalem: Hebrew University in Jerusalem, 1997), pp. 145–169. And see I. Milner, *Past Lesions: Biography, Identity, and Memory in the Second Generation* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2003).

²¹ A. Appelfeld, *First Person Essays*, p. 25.

²² A. Appelfeld, "Searching for the Right Word: Things Heard at the Ceremony of Conferral of an Honorary Doctorate at the Hebrew University," *Ma'ariv* (June 1, 2006): 28–29 (in Hebrew).

ragged garment." "This violent mindlessness"²³ applies not only to the wish of the survivors to merge with the Israeli discourse and to speak Hebrew but also to the abandonment of past culture for a monolithic and shallow culture.

But not only criticism of the silence and the silencing is voiced in Appelfeld's book of essays. In the one entitled "1946,"²⁴ he writes about the voyage to Palestine, and clarifies for his readers that he does not describe *aliya* replete with pomp and glory but refugees migrating. "And so we reached Palestine. In the month of *Av* we came, with a dreadful feeling that we had got there by chance."²⁵ This was overt subversion against the Zionist discourse that elevated *aliya* and *ha'apala* (illegal immigration of Jews to Palestine) to foundational themes. Not only the refugee condition is emphasized, so is the fortuity. The refugee Holocaust survivors reach Palestine not through Zionist ideology but by chance. This random arrival awakens the maladjustment of the refugees to the locals:

Everything around us spoke confidence, optimism and the freshness of the youth of the *yishuv* which had just escaped the menaces of the War of Independence and their buzz like flowering itself; and within this freshness hesitant on the steps of Terra Sancta, the university then, a few young people, Holocaust refugees, alien, confused, and ashamed.... The academic fortress did not make them welcome. Here with their clamor reigned young people whose faces spoke the confidence of natives of the place, and teachers whose instruction was their pride. And our puny, bitter distress, which had pursued us since the end of the war, was all the more shameful.²⁶

Rejection by the Israeli establishment, represented by the Hebrew University, exacerbates the pain and alienation that became the lot of the survivors. Against the feeling of confidence and freshness stood knowledge of the past bathed in pain and enervating experience. In such conditions, the survivors could not join in Israeli academe. In his autobiographical novel *The Story of a Life*,²⁷ Appelfeld tells of his wish to study agronomy, and how he was turned down because of his lack of adequate education. Appelfeld had managed to complete only first grade before the eruption of World War II, which cut short his schooling; thus the Nazis prevented him from getting

²³ A. Appelfeld, *First Person Essays*, pp. 37, 38.

²⁴ Which was inserted later as chapter 3 of the novel *The Searing Light*. It describes the journey of the youths to Palestine. A. Appelfeld, *The Searing Light* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1980).

²⁵ A. Appelfeld, *First Person Essays*, p. 59.

²⁶ A. Appelfeld, *First Person Essays*, p. 61.

²⁷ This novel is the direct continuation of his book of essays, hence its inclusion in the part on non-fiction. A. Appelfeld, *The Story of a Life* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 1999).

a basic education, and in Israel he could not realize his wish to acquire higher education in the field he desired.

Zionist education at the time of the rise of the state was, in Appelfeld's view, education through analogy: "exile–redemption, Zionism versus assimilation; the owing versus the owed, the wise versus the naïve."²⁸ These analogies seeped into the Holocaust survivors' consciousness, and against them Appelfeld took his stand. At the end of his book of essays he writes: "Zionism, for all its practical, dedicated and beautiful manifestations, is nothing but much delusion that is in goodwill."²⁹ These words reveal more than anything regarding Appelfeld's ambivalent attitude to Zionism: with the best will in the world, Zionism is delusion as it is not possible to fashion the image of a new Israel. The point is made more forcefully in the *The Story of a Life*:

"To build and to be built" is interpreted by many of us as eradication of memory, as absolute transformation, and as attachment to this patch of land; in other words, a "normal life," as it is customary to call it... This mechanistic approach, which wanted to tear you out of your world and plant you in a world to which your attachment is weak, this approach, it must be admitted, has triumphed, but alas, at what price has it triumphed: at the price of eradication of memory and leveling of the soul.³⁰

From these statements, it emerges that Zionism failed not only in its attitude to the survivors of the Holocaust, but also in the way it sought to construct a culture bereft of a past, a sparse culture, a culture without culture. "Ideologies cannot bear pluralism,"³¹ Appelfeld explains, so for him Zionist ideology, more than anything else, wiped out the pluralism typical of the "old" Jew, and because of it, the "new Israeliness" was created, which distanced itself from Jewish cultural richness.³² This is the spiritual harm that Zionism caused, and Appelfeld preaches this issue in the belief that with the slackening of the Zionist ethos it might be possible to turn again to "alternative narratives" and to all the Israeli cultural pluralism that does not yet exist, and is supposed to be founded on a society of immigrants.

²⁸ A. Appelfeld, *First Person Essays*, p. 89.

²⁹ A. Appelfeld, *First Person Essays*, p. 104.

³⁰ A. Appelfeld, *The Story of a Life*, p. 107.

³¹ A. Appelfeld, *The Story of a Life*, p. 105.

³² The Jewish richness lost by the state of Israel, in Appelfeld's opinion, is primarily knowledge of the Bible; therefore, many of his writings, especially the last novel he published, *And the Anger Has Not Yet Grown Silent* (2008), portray Bible reading as a step whereby the Jew connects with his cultural roots and not as part of a religious ritual. A. Appelfeld, *And the Anger Has Not Yet Grown Silent* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 2008).

Appelfeld's ambivalence to Zionism is quite evident in the above quotations: he indeed points out that the actions of the Zionist establishment in the beginning were essential, but he criticizes the long-term implications. These, he believes, cause a severe identity crisis and detachment from the roots, just as the assimilating Jews felt at the beginning of the twentieth century. Such an account shows that territory does not bestow identity upon a Jew and leaves him in an existential war—for his life and for his culture. Hence his words to Haddad:

A man who has lost his home will actually be without a home. You can build yourself a villa, but your home, which you lost along with your mother, that is a thing that makes you a wanderer. Here in Israel a kind of illusion has been created that whoever was born in Rishon Le-tziyon and his parents were born in Rishon Le-tziyon, he is done with Jewish wanderings.³³

Interestingly, Appelfeld, unlike writers such as Oz, Yehoshua, and Grossman, does not criticize the Israeli military forces. In an interview with Shavit, Appelfeld asks:

Week after week someone writes in your paper about some Palestinian disaster. It happens without fail. Week after week some Palestinian disaster is presented. And I ask myself, why not give some Jewish disaster occasionally? Is there a shortage of Jewish disasters here? Is there no Jewish pain here? There's pain like that on every street. In every house there's pain like that. Wouldn't it be proper to write one week about a Jewish disaster and one week about a Palestinian disaster? Wouldn't that give matters something of a more correct perspective?³⁴

Coming out against Zionist forcefulness in imposing a uniform cultural discourse, Appelfeld in most of his non-fiction does not address political issues around the Israel-Palestine conflict. When queried about the army in an interview with Schneider, he defined his own military service as "a Cinderella story."³⁵ It transpired that Appelfeld had served from 1950 to 1952. This was after he had arrived in Israel in 1946 with Youth Aliya and had lived at the farm of Rahel Yanait-Ben-Zvi. As noted, the coming of the Holocaust had snatched Appelfeld out of school, so in fact he was conscripted when he had just one year of schooling. His commander assumed the task of completing his education; he made him Education Officer, and

³³ Sh. Haddad, "When was the Last Time...? Aharon Appelfeld," *Yediot Aharonot* (Feb. 11, 2005): 58, (in Hebrew).

³⁴ A. Shavit, "Not Good for the Jews."

³⁵ Sh. Schneider, "Aharon Appelfeld."

within a year Appelfeld took the matriculation exams. This Cinderella story connects the army, the most salient representative of the Zionist ethos, to book-learning, of which Appelfeld had been deprived being a Holocaust child. In fact, in his military service, Appelfeld completed his studies, a circumstance that later gained him entry to the Hebrew University and to make the acquaintance of Dov Sadan, his spiritual mentor.³⁶

Appelfeld approaches the power of Zionism in a spiritual sense alone. He does not concern himself with physical force, so his account from the army is remarkable in showing the military organization through fresh eyes and illustrating its contribution to his merging into society. Appelfeld thereby becomes the representative of what may be called "politics of the soul," unlike other writers who engage particularly in the national political discourse. Appelfeld has this to say about the time of his military service (in an interview with Zander): "For me this was the normalcy I had yearned for, which is not bound up with pain and sorrow. To be a new Jew, strong and heroic, to get out of the ghetto."³⁷ These words were spoken when he received the Nelly Sachs prize in Dortmund, and more than exposing Appelfeld's appreciation of military service, they substantiate his wish to present in Europe the Israel Defense Forces as a moral army with social importance in addition to its military duties. Adoption of the term "new Jew," to which he objects in his essays and fiction, and its application to strengthen the Israel Defense Forces' positive image in the world, accentuates the fact that at the time of his conscription, Appelfeld believed in the honesty of this notion; its rejection occurs in later years.

Despite the publicist critique, Appelfeld points out: "There is only one place for creativity—Israel. From this point of view I am a radical Zionist.... My only optimism is the state of Israel."³⁸ His words above accentuate more than anything else his charged attitude to Zionism, as this is reflected in his non-fiction. This attitude is a mixture of acceptance and criticism, approximation and rejection.

2. LITERARY WORKS

Appelfeld's poetics highlights his "differentness" on the Israeli literary landscape. Various critics point to his drawing on impressionism and de-

³⁶ The essay, "The Teacher," in his collection *First Person Essays* is dedicated to him.

³⁷ A. Zander, "A Weekend with Appelfeld in Dortmund," *Ha'aretz* (Dec. 16, 2005): 36–40 (in Hebrew).

³⁸ Sh. Schneider, "Aharon Appelfeld."

scribe his style as oscillating between lyric prose and impressionist poetry.³⁹ Appelfeld resorts to European modernism⁴⁰ with an evident propensity not to continue the literature of the Palmah generation but to draw a direct line between European culture and Israeli culture. The opponent of the Zionist discourse and of literature *engagé* is aided by literary instruments that suit the message expressed in his writing: his choice of Kafka as literary father⁴¹ redoubles his desire to connect Israeli literature and culture to its Jewish roots. Not by chance does Appelfeld tell of the rejection of his maiden collection *Smoke* by the large publishing houses.⁴² As he saw it, different editors required him to make his first book "educational" through a rewrite of

³⁹ And see G. Shaked, *A New Wave in Hebrew Fiction* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Hapoalim, 1974); H. Barzel, "Double-Vision Novellas of Aharon Appelfeld," *Moznayim* 48 (1979): 296–309 (in Hebrew); Y. Mazar, "The Song of the Writer, or: The Correct Story of Emotion: On the Conscious Orchestration of Language in the Writing of Aharon Appelfeld," *Aley-Siyah* 23 (1985): 183–191 (in Hebrew); B. Fishler, "To Deafen the Sound of the Language: *The Shirt and the Stripe* and *Lost* as Two Language Alternatives" (in Hebrew), in *Between Frost and Smoke: Studies on the Work of Aharon Appelfeld* (ed. Y. Ben-Mordechai and I. Porush; Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, 1997), pp. 213–236; M. Gluzman, "So Far I have Written the First Third."

⁴⁰ Appelfeld's affinity to Kafka has been noted by many scholars (among them H. Barzel, "Double-Vision Novellas"; H. Barzel, "Appelfeld's Affinity to Kafka," *Zehut* 1 [1981]: 112–120 [in Hebrew]; Y. Schwartz, *Individual Lament and Tribal Eternity* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 1996), pp. 43, 98; Y. Schwartz, "Aharon Appelfeld: On Love and Sexuality," *Mikan* [Jan. 5, 2005]: 21–34 [in Hebrew]; E. Schweid, "Religious Ethics in the Stories of Aharon Appelfeld," *Moznayim* 69.5 [1995]: 3–6 [in Hebrew]; A. Holtzman, "Aharon Appelfeld's Path"; G. Shaked, "Requiem for the Jewish People"; S. Shiffman, "One Can't Stare at the Sun or at the Heart of Darkness: Disorientation in Two Stories by Aharon Appelfeld," *Mikan* [Jan. 5, 2005]: 39–46). According to Barzel ("Appelfeld's Affinity to Kafka") there is a personal and poetic connection between the two writers, and his research shows how Appelfeld followed Kafka in questions such as the perception of reality as irrational through hidden spheres that are not under the individual's control, use of the pattern of *The Trial*, an ambivalent attitude to the image of the father, and concern with loss of identity. Schwartz (*Individual Lament*, pp. 53–139) in his analysis of space in Appelfeld's writing points to the clear connections to the Kafka's descriptions of space. Shaked (G. Shaked, *Literature Then and Now* [in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1993], p. 110) draws a distinct line between the Kafkian and the Appelfeldian characters, and maintains that Appelfeld's heroes, like Kafka who tries to reach the castle, seek entry into the village but are not admitted by the lords of the castle. Instead of retreating they persuade their masters to accept them. This persuasion is perceived as sin, and exile and death are its punishment. Shavit sees Appelfeld as "a literary relation" of Marcel Proust. For him, "in the thirty books that he has written since the end of the 1950s he too tries, in his own way, to pursue lost time. To restore the world to the lost yesterday. To take the rigid Hebrew of the Herald of Zion and restrain it and soften it and guide it back to the Carpathians. To that Jewish wealth, to that Jewish pain, the Jewish wholeness" (A. Shavit, "Not Good for the Jews"). The connection between Appelfeld's fiction and generic models of central European literature resting on German culture was examined by Shacham (Ch. Shacham, "Language on the Verge of Death; On Language and Language Criticism in *Badenheim 1939* by Aharon Appelfeld," *Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies* 59.3 [2004]: 188–203) in her comparison of Appelfeld's novella *Badenheim* (A. Appelfeld, *Badenheim* [in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1975]) with Mann's novella *Death in Venice* published in 1912. Shacham discerns a marked connection stylistically and structurally between Appelfeld and Mann, on whom he draws. For her, both writers center on the intelligence of the bourgeoisie set in its strikingly bourgeois environment, and both charge their works with metaphoric meaning though the use of the motif of disease.

⁴¹ And see the interview with Gluzman (M. Gluzman, "So Far I have Written," p. 154).

⁴² And see Sh. Schneider, "Aharon Appelfeld."

his stories, until Baruch Hafetz of "Achshav" publishers agreed to issue the book without amendments. The difficulty in publishing the first collection apparently stemmed from Appelfeld's choosing to focus on Holocaust survivors on the one hand and his contrary attitude to Zionism on the other.

An analysis of Appelfeld's position on Zionism in his fiction will consider several key writings: *Smoke* (1962), *1946* (1975), *The Searing Light* (1980), *The Immortal Bartfuss* (1983), and *Night after Night* (2001), which describe the post-Holocaust period and trace the world of the Holocaust survivors;⁴³ *Tongue of Fire* (1988)⁴⁴ as representative of the group of his writings on the period before the Holocaust; and *An Entire Life* (2007),⁴⁵ which shows the character of a young girl who has survived the Holocaust and in fact combines three phases together: pre-Holocaust, Holocaust, and post-Holocaust. That way, the three historical periods on which Appelfeld writes through the years of his literary activity will be represented. His main literary division is between the pre- and post-Holocaust periods; the time of the Holocaust itself features an account of the survival of Jews, be it inside the annihilation system (e.g., *The Ice Mine*, 1997)⁴⁶ or as those who flee (e.g., *The Shirt and the Stripe*, 1983).⁴⁷ A chronological analysis makes it possible to follow the development of the writer's approach to Zionism over the years.

2.1 Smoke (1962)

The collection *Smoke* won rave reviews by critics, united in their view that this was not an unripe work but mature, and an important milestone in young Hebrew prose.⁴⁸ Shaked notes that the periodical *Al Hamishmar* refused to publish a story by Appelfeld in the years preceding the appearance of this collection, and his tales wandered among the various editorial boards.

⁴³ A. Appelfeld, *Smoke* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Achshav, 1962); *1946* appears in the collection A. Appelfeld, *Years and Hours* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1978); A. Appelfeld, *The Searing Light* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1980); *The Immortal Bartfuss* appears in the collection A. Appelfeld, *The Shirt and the Stripe* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1983); A. Appelfeld, *Night After Night* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 2001).

⁴⁴ A. Appelfeld, *Tongue of Fire* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 1988).

⁴⁵ A. Appelfeld, *An Entire Life* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 2007).

⁴⁶ A. Appelfeld, *The Ice Mine* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 1997).

⁴⁷ Barzel (H. Barzel, *Authors in Their Uniqueness* [in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Yahdav, 1981], pp. 93–115) classifies Appelfeld's (early) fiction according to period and arena: the Holocaust is the measure for the classification, which is divided into six parts: pre-Holocaust, scenes of the Holocaust, immediately after the Holocaust, after the Holocaust, at a distance from the Holocaust (Diaspora), at a distance from the Holocaust (Israel).

⁴⁸ And see A. Holtzman, "Aharon Appelfeld's Path," and G. Shaked, "Requiem for the Jewish People."

The publisher Hakibbutz Hameuchad, which in later years published this writer's stories, refused to issue the collection as it was and tried to correct its style. In a letter to Alexander Zand, an editor at Hakibbutz Hameuchad, dated March 5, 1961, Appelfeld wrote: "I have decided to hand over the publication of my book to a Jerusalem publisher's, which is willing to publish my book without any corrections. I see no point in courting editors, and generally I don't believe in editorial touching up of a literary text."⁴⁹ In the end, Appelfeld published his first book through "Achshav."

The collection appeared a year after the Eichmann trial, which gave extra-literary legitimization to fictional writing on the Holocaust.⁵⁰ Still, the rejection of Appelfeld's stories by various periodicals, and the demand that they be rewritten and changed, arose in the first place from his concentration on Holocaust survivors who had reached Israel and were attempting to make a life. If the Israeli public of the time maintained that whoever came out of the Holocaust alive would find succor in Israel, Appelfeld's guiding theme in *Smoke* is that the survivor who reaches Israel is obliged to survive anew the arrival, in which there is no "salvation," and to steer between a traumatic past and an alienated present. True, Appelfeld creates anti-heroes in *Smoke*, yet this is not to respond to the stereotypes that paint the survivor as weak or mentally harmed but to express the writer's new view of the survival as an active deed in itself, which requires no external legitimization.

Smoke infringed two elemental conventions that dominated Israeli-Zionist culture of the 1960s: the first was the Israeli taboo against representing Jews who were not heroes,⁵¹ the second was the myth that saw the Land of Israel as the only home of the Jewish people, a place whither the Jew "ascends" and which he never leaves. In "Compensation," a story in the collection, Appelfeld sends the woman survivor-protagonist Irena Traum on a journey back to Germany, justifiably according to the logic of the plot—together with Dr. Fromm to give evidence in litigation for reparations. This going back "there" intensifies the crisis of this survivor, who lives in Israel alone, without her husband and son who were murdered, and her being drawn to their old home, out of the belief that she would be able to reunite

⁴⁹ G. Shaked, "Requiem for the Jewish People," p. 19.

⁵⁰ In writings on the Holocaust, major importance must also be attributed to the play *The Chatelaine* by Leah Goldberg, under whom Appelfeld studied literature at the Hebrew University. Goldberg completed the play in 1951, but it was performed only in 1955, which attests to the difficulty of those years in staging a play associated with the Holocaust, in a reality in which theatre was enlisted to serve the theme of the "new Jew."

⁵¹ S. Ezrahi ("The Journey of the Jew") remarks that the group of writers who broke this taboo are Aharon Appelfeld, Dan Pagis, Yoram Kaniuk, and David Grossman.

with her spouse, the circumstances of whose disappearance are clouded in mystery.

The hard-nosed Israeli doctor wants to enlarge the amount of reparations, and thus begins a cynical commerce in bereavement:

"And children," he asked suddenly, as if trying another tack.

"Yes", Mrs. Traum replied. "Died on the way, in Trieste, before we could board the ship. Pneumonia. He was only two."

"Important," he said, and began to list on the right-hand side of the questionnaire subheadings, and ring them with a circle.⁵²

Arrival in Germany blurs reality and imagination. Mrs. Traum believes that she will succeed in getting not money, but her husband who was torn from her and murdered. Clutching past memories as giving hope and reality to an empty life in the present is what drives her. In her wardrobe, folded next to each other, are the clothes of her dead husband, the clothes of her two-year-old infant, whom she almost succeeded in saving, and her own clothes too. Can she be defined as mad? Is the narrator right in suggesting that she be sent to a convent for deranged people by focusing on Dr. Fromm, who does not understand the spiritual hardship of returning to the house she left behind?

The story and repositions redefine the view of the survivor's trauma in the years before the notion of "post-trauma" had become current.⁵³ The difficulty of contending with the "there" involved the inability to contend with the memories of the pre-Holocaust, the old home from which she was turned out. Severance from her roots, separation from family and townspeople, and ignorance of what had become of her loved ones—these are what make it hard for Mrs. Traum to fall asleep at night, and on account of which, she takes tranquilizers. She lacks mental calm not because of her fleeing or terror of the Nazis but because of the private pain of a woman with a name who was separated from her husband and does not know what happened to him, without grave, witness, or sign.

The return to Germany pulls the ground from under her feet, and attests to the delicate mental balance that may be easily broken. Like Irena Traum are the other protagonists of the stories in *Smoke*—disconnected, alone, wary

⁵² A. Appelfeld, *Smoke*, p. 20.

⁵³ N. Durst ("Mental Injuries") notes that in the 1950s and 1960s a new definition was suggested for the outlook that describes the unique complexity of the distress and symptoms of Holocaust survivors: "the concentration camp syndrome." The Germans, who offered to pay reparations, objected fiercely to recognizing the fact that the survivors suffered mental distress as a result of what they had experienced during the Holocaust; accordingly, reparations were paid for physical, but not mental harm.

of their surroundings, and characterized by a semantics of avoidance.⁵⁴ The survivor portrayed in *Smoke* is an oxymoron of within and without. He is obsessed with repelling threatening memories because at that time, silence was preferable to private memories, but outwardly he functions: starts a family, works, and grows accustomed to the new space. Only the Israeli heat bothers him. He still awaits a real winter, and he cannot get used to the Israeli climate. This climate leaps from describing the hot surroundings to representing the Israeli culture, which the survivor cannot get used to. Following the appearance of *Smoke*, Appelfeld was the target of criticism of the seeming passivity of his characters: he does not write about the ghetto fighters or about the partisans, but about people who do not boast heroic tales. In response he states: "Survival in great historic torrents is a little more than passivity. One does not survive with passivity. And another thing: the moment you search, you have parted from passivity."⁵⁵

Every character described in *Smoke* holds a complex dialogue within: to tell, not to tell; to allow memory to surface, to suppress it; to be Israel, to be of the Diaspora. What unites these laborious quests is Appelfeld's attitude to the matter of survival. Survival is what makes the Appelfeldian narrator shudder. Appelfeld throws off the silencing and the covering up. He grants the private story freedom to be told. His story is without numbers, facts, and ideologies. Mrs. Traum, who lost her husband and son and can fall asleep only with the help of sleeping pills, cannot decide which dress to wear. The humdrum quandary strips her of the hallowed image of the survivor and makes her again a woman of flesh and blood, concerned with the niceties even after the catastrophes that have befallen her life. The survivors change from "dust" into "human being" in his stories, and this perception slowly seeps into Israeli society, which modified its attitude to the survivors.

⁵⁴ If we adopt Schwartz's typology of Appelfeld's characters. See Y. Schwartz, "Unobserved, the Changes Will Come: The Story 'In the Fullness of Autumn' as an Early Version of *As the Apple of the Eye* and of *The Age of Wonder*: Remarks on the Structure of Internal Development in the Prose of Aharon Appelfeld," *Aley-Siyah* 23 (1985): 175–181 (in Hebrew).

Yablonka (H. Yablonka, *Strange Brothers: Holocaust Survivors in the State of Israel 1948–1952* [in Hebrew; Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, 1994], pp. 10–17) notes that between 1946 and 1956 there was emigration from Israel of Holocaust survivors, namely a movement of departure from the country. Among the reasons for it, their social isolation is noted. This constitutes a unifying theme through the stories in *Smoke* and explains the emigration without interpreting it. In parallel, the collection contains criticism of the receiving society, which did not reach out to the survivors. In the story "A Serious Attempt," the survivor's isolation is stressed, with highlighting of the alienation and cynicism that is his lot from his surroundings. The ending of the story in a road accident, in which the protagonist's death is hinted at, emphasizes how his surroundings have rejected the survivor, denied his pain, and taken pleasure in his weakness.

⁵⁵ M. Gluzman, "So Far I have Written," pp. 156–157.

Terms such as *aliyah* ("ascent," migration to Israel) and "salvation" assume an aspect of irony and ridicule in *Smoke*. Appelfeld drives the point home that trauma so deep cannot be cured by adoption of an optimistic discourse. His focus is on the survivors and their individual story, displacing the Israeli-Zionist narrative. Ezrahi formulates it thus: "In all Appelfeld's writing, starting with *Smoke*, Israel remains a wanderer among the nations—even though it is present in the very heart of Jerusalem itself."⁵⁶ The perpetual mobility that Appelfeld generates in *Smoke* between past and present, between European space and Israeli space, and between culture of the past and culture of the present, undermines the exclusivity of the Zionist discourse, and especially sharpens the Appelfeldian theme of resistance to the ethos of negating the Diaspora.

Negation of the Diaspora is one of the central tenets of all currents of Zionist ideology.⁵⁷ The most extreme version of Diaspora denial, which dominated secular Zionist education in Palestine before the establishment of the state, is represented in the literary and publicist writings of Berdichevsky and Brenner. If the Diaspora is the negative marker, its negation is realized in the Diaspora Jew. In *Smoke*, the characters indeed move in the Israeli space and do not work at "Diaspora"-type occupations, but they retain a clear connection to the Diaspora, which they carry with them and have not left behind. The vague ending of "Compensation," and the extra-textual addressee's ignorance whether Irena Traum returns to Israel or stays in Europe because of loss of separateness of the periods, proves above all that the Diaspora is part of the survivor, and territory will not cause his detachment from it, namely from his past containing family culture and history. Rejection of Diaspora negation, added to the presentation of protagonists from "there" who have not Hebraized their names—a sign of their attachment to the past, partly explains the difficulty that Appelfeld faced when he wanted to publish a subversive work like *Smoke* and presages the dominant themes in his future writings.

2.2 1946 (1978) and *Searing Light* (1980)

The myth of the illegal immigration (of Jews to Mandatory Palestine) and also Zionist education stand at the center of the discussion on these two writings. Common to them is ridicule of the Zionist myth to the point of

⁵⁶ S. Ezrahi, "The Journey of the Jew," p. 103.

⁵⁷ E. Schweid, "Two Approaches to the Idea of 'Negation of the Diaspora' in Zionist Ideology," *Hatziyonut* 9 (1984): 21–44 (in Hebrew).

parody. In those years, Appelfeld clearly raises his criticism of Zionism to new heights, and to that end he fashions a special poetics and thematics.

The novella *1946* portrays Jews who survived the Holocaust at a displaced persons camp in Italy stretching along the seashore. The plot does not weave around the life of one central character⁵⁸ but describes the existence of the survivor-refugees who try to rebuild their lives and overcome psychological, religious, and social problems. In their struggle to find a language for their pain, such as contending with their past, the refugees bring up a cluster of phrases whose very use after the Holocaust is laughable and undermines their truth:

Lump would tremble with rage, said he couldn't stand the stupid and meaningless words. What is "a chosen people?" What is *tikkun* [making right]? What is Palestine... People kept clear of him as if from a sick man. And in his drunkenness he would shout: "The ship's sinking but we won't fool ourselves or the others."⁵⁹

Lump, who seems to have recovered from his illness and in the summer shows "signs for the better," is sick with two illnesses: typhus—a physical disease; and sobering up—a mental disease caused by the knowledge that after the Holocaust terms such as "salvation" are not only impossible but also just clichés. The high point of the undercutting of Jewish thinking is reached when Rosa says, "There aren't any more Jews. There are only good people and bad people."⁶⁰ The statement, which divests Jews of their Jewishness, because of which they suffered the Holocaust, is also supposed to be struck out with the arrival of the illegal immigrant ship that will carry the refugees to Palestine. The ship's advent is devoid of pathos and grandeur and is constructed grotesquely. The ship is described as "a boat on whose bows are two searchlights. A monster,"⁶¹ and in response to its arrival, we are informed that "no one went out."⁶² The vet who does go out towards the ship shouts, "We're here" in German, and the use of that language sharpens more than anything the crisis that the survivors experience after the Holocaust: Jews who have lost their families because of the Nazi tyrant

⁵⁸ In contrast, A. Appelfeld, *Katerina* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 1989); A. Appelfeld, *The Conversion* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 1993); A. Appelfeld, *Laish* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 1994); A. Appelfeld, *Until the Dawn's Light* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 1995); A. Appelfeld, *Journey to the Winter* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 2000); and A. Appelfeld, *Poland, a Green Land* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 2005).

⁵⁹ A. Appelfeld, *1946*, p. 171.

⁶⁰ A. Appelfeld, *1946*, p. 174.

⁶¹ A. Appelfeld, *1946*, p. 175.

⁶² A. Appelfeld, *1946*, p. 175.

continue to speak the language of the murderers—a paradox that cannot be equaled.

Getting the thirty-two refugees on board the ship, which is supposed to be a "happy ending" to the story of the refugee life described in the novella and to life in the deserted sheds, in fact becomes unwanted. The refugees are angry about the blinding searchlights, which look "a clown's turn," Rita refuses to get out of bed, Fridl's wife remembers that her son has not been circumcised, and the shout, "What's the rush? We've been promised the Garden of Eden"⁶³ illustrate the idea that the voyage to Palestine is another stage in the wanderings, and not the gateway to a settled life that will put an end to the refugee condition. If we expected a feeling of celebration, excitement about what lay ahead and motifs in accord with the ethos of the illegal immigration that produced Jewish heroism that helped the refugees to make their way to Palestine—we were misled. The boarding affair turns into a circus act, in which is embedded mistrust about a better future. This mistrust is realized in *The Searing Light* (1980).

The novel *The Searing Light* constitutes the peak of poetic critique displayed by Appelfeld in his fiction. The novel follows young refugees, children who survived the Holocaust and were youths on their arrival in Palestine. They have no use for ideology, they yearn for their mothers. On the farm, they find instead a house-mother, a single woman who spouts Zionist phrases which for the extra-textual addressee bring to mind Nazi slogans: "We heard only that. You have to change, young men. And change doesn't happen except through hard work. Labor is good. Labor cleanses."⁶⁴

In this novel, Appelfeld produces a grotesque oxymoron. He describes "salvation" through pictures and ideas taken from its opposite: destruction and Holocaust. The novel makes use of coded language,⁶⁵ but it applies the codes not to the "there" but to the "here." The boys who stank at the youth farm wait for the "transport" that will come and take them. In the boys account, the farm becomes a camp. Thus the entire story is a parody of Zionist education.⁶⁶ The leaders are hostile to the youths because in their view only

⁶³ A. Appelfeld, 1946, p. 177.

⁶⁴ A. Appelfeld, *The Searing Light*, p. 43.

⁶⁵ Ya'oz notes that the term "codes" defines symbols, metaphors, and images, which constitute linguistic pictures that mediate between the "other planet" and the reader. While Ya'oz holds that coded language assists the intellectual and allusive design, Appelfeld seems to use this language to draw a clear and meaningful line between the Holocaust and the survivor's Israeli experience. See H. Ya'oz, *Hebrew Holocaust Fiction as Historical and Trans-Historical Fiction* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Akad, 1980), p. 145.

⁶⁶ Gertz notes that "*The Searing Light* does to the Zionist story what this story has done, for years, to the survivor's life-story. It presents him in the eyes of someone who doesn't understand him.... The parodic nature of large parts of the novel is the outcome of this lack of understanding: the narrator and his friends

crooks could have survived the Holocaust. The youth-survivors see themselves as prisoners, while the educators are envisaged in their eyes as preachers and jailers.

Whoever expected light in Israel gets burns, searing light; that is, the Land of Israel becomes another way-station in a world of transfers.⁶⁷ What was supposed to redeem and save takes shape as an enemy, a critic, and an accuser, and if one does not accept the morality he seeks to impart, one is taken to another camp as punishment. Zionist education appears not only as inimical and accusatory, but as an impossible vision; this is shown through the metaphor of dentistry. The dentist who treats the young boys' teeth said, "We'll extract the bad teeth and we'll give them false teeth."⁶⁸ The dentist's wish to replace the "bad" teeth is parallel to the educators' wish to replace the "bad" habits and to fashion new Jews. "If we extract the fear there is no pain either,"⁶⁹ the dentist maintains, but pain has ways of its own to forge its path into consciousness. Unlike a tooth, which is extractable, memories cannot be pushed out, and they rise up in the nightmare permanently buried deep in the youths. About Louise, the Gentile serving-girl of the narrator in Europe, he says, "I don't think, and still I see her clearly,"⁷⁰ and he makes the point that the past is not a garment that can be cast off but is embedded in the consciousness, and is present especially when an attempt is made to push it aside.

In the discussion between Druk and Laufer, consequent to the fear of Druk's being expelled, Laufer suggests to Druk that he imagine that he is in the camp. "If you were in seven, you can also be in the eighth."⁷¹ When the edict of expulsion is delivered, Druk says, "I weep because this hurts me. They are turning me out again. Why?"⁷² The novel describes the youths'

have not understood the Zionist frame story. Therefore they engage in distorted mimicry, like a parody of the original story.... In sum, it is not concerned with the collapse of the frame stories in themselves" (N. Gertz, "The Birth of the Hebrew from within the Jew: The Zionist Frame Story in *Searing Light*" [in Hebrew], in *Between Frost and Smoke: Studies on the Work of Aharon Appelfeld* [ed. Y. Ben-Mordechai and I. Porush; Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, 1997], p. 141). This important interpretation softens the criticism that emerges from the novel and promotes the view that both sides—Zionism and the survivors—should look at the "other" in an attempt to understand it, an understanding originating in an anti-stereotypic view.

⁶⁷ The harsh criticism leveled by Appelfeld at Zionism in this novel, is perhaps, what made him insist that it not be translated into foreign languages, in contrast to most of his writings, which have been translated. And see on this M. A. Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1994), p. 157.

⁶⁸ A. Appelfeld, *The Searing Light*, p. 45.

⁶⁹ A. Appelfeld, *The Searing Light*, p. 46.

⁷⁰ A. Appelfeld, *The Searing Light*, p. 59.

⁷¹ A. Appelfeld, *The Searing Light*, p. 73.

⁷² A. Appelfeld, *The Searing Light*, p. 75.

schooling on their arrival in Palestine, exposes their non-acceptance, their foreignness, and their rejection. Zionist education is portrayed as violent and predatory, and their entry into the land becomes a further trauma in the memory of the Holocaust survivor.⁷³ In this reality of violence and trying to force the youths to change, the narrator finds escape in art. Drawing helps him overcome the transition from Europe to Israel, a traumatic move that highlights his physical and conscious difference from the environment, and that is what ties him to a past that Zionist education tries to eradicate. Besides the mockery of the Zionist phrases, Appelfeld offers a solution in the novel: art as a means of connecting the traumatic past to the present, artistic feeling as opposed to Zionist forcefulness. Drawing, in which "every line is a shout,"⁷⁴ allows the narrator to shout without making a sound, to remember without causing his hostile environment to rise up against him. The silent lines that produce the noise of a shout are also a poetic characteristic of Appelfeld's fiction, which indeed is graced with poetic restraint and distancing from pathos, but whose message is not muted.

2.3 *The Immortal Bartfuss* (1983)

The novella describes a Holocaust-survivor couple who met at a displaced persons camp after the Holocaust. Both go to Israel, but their migration there has no "Zionist halo," and it is even presented as a mistake: about Bartfuss it is written, "First he thought of escaping to Brazil but at that time no ships sailed to Brazil. For lack of alternative he joined the illegal immigrants."⁷⁵ And elsewhere: "But for that mistake he would now be settled on St. George Islands, those marvelous islands empty of people and providing silence and water night and day. A mistake is always a mistake, and that is what trundled them around from place to place."⁷⁶ This is what is written about his wife Rosa: "She didn't want to go to Palestine. Once she had said to herself: Again we'll be among Jews."⁷⁷ Going to Israel is perceived as a mistake that pursues Bartfuss, and thoughts of leaving never leave him. He

⁷³ Barzel points out that Appelfeld's historiosophy does not perceive the state of Israel as compensation for the Holocaust. For him, "it even despises the perception that sees the Holocaust as 'crucifixion' for the sake of 'resurrection.'" He argues that in Appelfeld's fiction fall and rise are not separate stages but stages that clasp and adhere to each other. H. Barzel, "Aharon Appelfeld: Historiosophy and Poetics," *Aley-Siyah* 23 (1985): 155 (in Hebrew).

⁷⁴ A. Appelfeld, *The Searing Light*, p. 56.

⁷⁵ A. Appelfeld, *The Immortal Bartfuss*, p. 99.

⁷⁶ A. Appelfeld, *The Immortal Bartfuss*, p. 89.

⁷⁷ A. Appelfeld, *The Immortal Bartfuss*, p. 98.

settles in Jaffa⁷⁸ and lives with his wife and his two daughters, and maintains an alienated relationship with the Kafkian space, which takes shape in the novel, and with the members of his family.

The social dislocation is linked to the revulsion at the space, which appears threatening, strange, and detached from the character. The transient shelter is won only facing the sea. The sea constitutes the spiritual and geographic link between the "here" and the "there." The lure of the sea is the lure of the life of the past, and also of dreams dislodged with arrival in Palestine. Bartfuss's loneliness arises not only from the description of the spatial strangeness but also from the description of his attitude to his wife. The contrast between the male camp survivor and the female, the manner of whose survival is not clear to the reader, weighs heavily on their married life, and exposes the within-group blaming among the survivors. Bartfuss is a kind of legend among the traders, who do not know the story of how he came through, but echoes of his heroism have reached their ears. As distinct from Bartfuss, Rosa found a hiding place with farmers, and Bartfuss suspects that her salvation was possible through her granting sexual favors. Rosa refuses to tell the tale of how she was saved, and her survival and Bartfuss's suspicions distance him from her and teach us that the odor of suspicion towards the survivors was not on the part of Israeli society alone, but was primarily within their closed circle.

The aura around Bartfuss builds up despite his revealing nothing of life in the camp, and due to the fact of his remaining alive in that camp. The novella's title is the nickname given to Bartfuss by the Holocaust survivors: "the immortal Bartfuss." They relate that although he was shot, Bartfuss remained alive. For them, Bartfuss is a mythic entity symbolizing Jewish strength which withstood the Nazis. Barzel even addresses the ironic connection between Bartfuss—man of beard and feet—and Oedipus, crippled in his foot.⁷⁹ Bartfuss for his part not only shrinks from the stories told about him, he even threatens the survivors that if they do not desist from them, he will beat them. He is unwilling to tell of his experiences, and does not see

⁷⁸ Yablonka notes that Holocaust survivors were settled in mixed towns and in abandoned Arab towns, such as Jaffa, Acco, Lydda and Ramleh, towns with no infrastructures, and also in abandoned Arab villages—the idea of Ben-Gurion and Levi Eshkol (H. Yablonka, *Strange Brothers*, pp. 18–32). The *moshav* movement, which organized the process of agricultural settlement, saw the survivor immigrants as an outcast, miserable, and hopeless community. The spatial alienation is a central theme in the novella, and leads to a sense of cultural alienation. In retrospect, it seems that the settlement of the Holocaust survivors in these areas, as emerges from the novella, accentuated their foreignness and their detachment from the Israeli social surroundings.

⁷⁹ H. Barzel, "Aharon Appelfeld."

his survival as heroic. For him, after the Holocaust, silence should come, not stories, not analyses, and certainly not myths of derring-do. He does not tell even his imploring wife what happened to him.

At first glance, Bartfuss promotes the Zionist myth of "Holocaust and Heroism," but his unwillingness to label himself "hero" and his choice of the mode of silence rather than that of heroism is the author's implied criticism of the attempt to harness the Holocaust to the Zionist ethos of heroism, which seeks to present the new, fighting Jew. Bartfuss, like Rosa, survived the Holocaust and both reach Palestine and maintain themselves under one roof. Despite the fighting image by which Bartfuss is characterized by those around him, Appelfeld chooses to stress the ironic continuity that exists in his life, that is, his being a Diaspora Jew in Israel. The man who engaged in smuggling in Europe comes to Israel and becomes a trader. He has no intention of renewing himself in the spirit of Zionist innovation or turning into a "new Jew" but to continue to do what he excels in—money—and without any overtone of apology. Appelfeld brings home the point that a particular occupation does not attest to the mental structure of the one who engages in it. The trader with acute senses is not the "timid" or the "effeminate" Jew whom Zionism abhorred, and whom it wished to change, as presented by the characterization of Zionist education in *The Searing Light*. The design of the character shows up a range of qualities operating in Bartfuss, and undermines the labeling Zionist discourse. The hero is both sensitive and cunning, and accordingly, the novella accentuates the difference between one survivor and another, and thus erases the descriptive stereotyping of Holocaust survivors in the Zionist discourse.

2.4 *Night After Night* (2001)

Among Appelfeld's various writings, two stand out for their titles, which sound a note of accusation against Zionism: *The Searing Light* and *Night After Night*. The title *The Searing Light* intimates the Israeli light that causes physical and spiritual burns in the young refugees of the Holocaust. Appelfeld embeds in the infrastructural layer of the novel the diseases of leprosy on which the book of Leviticus dilates (Lev 13:25, 28, etc.—"it is leprosy; it has broken out of the burn"), and for him, the feeling of persecution and hatred indeed do not fade with the arrival in Israel but grow worse. Disgrace clings to the youths like leprosy—it cannot be shaken off even in the Land of Israel. The choice of the title contrasts the Zionist vision of creating a new Jew with the reality of the perception of Holocaust survivors

in Israel of the 1950s and 1960s as untouchable Jews. The title *Night After Night* continues this tendency, and the night that fell on the Jewish world through the acts of the Nazis continues to be their lot in Israel and turns into one more night—they are not absorbed and experience a further identity crisis while desiring to counter the cultural patterns that typify Israel and preserve their own.

The novella *Night After Night* relates a group of Holocaust survivors who live in a Jerusalem boarding house. Besides the individual stories of the survivors, the theme of saving Yiddish as a joint project uniting them all is stressed. In the section above on Appelfeld's non-fiction, he was cited as one who objected to the cruel rending espoused by Zionism of the "new" Jew from the Diaspora Jew. He presents this tearing apart through the disappearance of Yiddish, and he makes this the central theme of the book. The Holocaust survivors are trying to revive their past culture, to establish a Yiddish library and live a cultural life in Yiddish, but they do not succeed. Manfred, the narrator, pronounces the connection between the language and the world he left behind:

It is my duty to help the language of the tormented. The tormented are no more. My mother and my father are no more, nor my sister Leah nor my brother Leibl, nor my little sister Sarah. I can't restore them to life, but their language, the words they used in their lives, I have to preserve.⁸⁰

The wish to preserve Yiddish does not weaken the exigency of Hebrew as the language of the Jewish people dwelling in Israel. Manfred declares:

I love Hebrew, but it cannot fill the place of a mother. Hebrew is not a language that you can hug. God forgive me, it is as cold as ice. What devil tricked us into replacing the mother tongue with a language of stone?⁸¹

Who is the devil that has caused abandonment of Yiddish? This devil reverberates through the book and Appelfeld evidently chooses to conduct a personification of the notions mentioned in it, as in a discourse: Zionism becomes a devil, Hebrew is likened to a cold woman, while Yiddish turns into the central and doomed heroine, who must be saved:

Detestation of Yiddish did not begin today. It was born with the assimilationists. The assimilationists feared Yiddish no less than they feared the synagogue.⁸²

⁸⁰ A. Appelfeld, *Night after Night*, p. 67.

⁸¹ A. Appelfeld, *Night after Night*, p. 120.

The disappearance of Yiddish, according to Appelfeld, is the product of two forces that united against it: assimilationist Jewry in Europe and Zionism in Palestine. Appelfeld does not blame Zionism alone for the loss of Yiddish and the disowning of the culture of the forefathers in the striving for a uniform common denominator. Zionism continues social processes originating in the Jews of Europe who wished to assimilate, and the product is loss of identity, whose direct embodiment is the erasure of Yiddish.

The loss of identity is represented in the character of Christina, a Jewess who survived the Holocaust through finding a hiding place in a convent. Christina constantly wonders "what am I doing here"⁸³ and in the end leaves the boarding house and returns to Poland. She leaves behind Zeidl and their son David, and she quits Israel. At first glance, her going back signifies the failure of the Zionist project to provide a home for the Holocaust survivors, but in contrast to Christina, who returns to Europe, Manfred is presented at the ending of the novel leaving Jerusalem and moving to live in Tel Aviv, close to his daughter, Clara, who suffers from mental retardation. The survivor generation indeed experience a severe identity crisis, represented in the language war and the attempt to hold onto Yiddish, which symbolizes the culture of the forebears and the roots of the Jewish culture; still, the desire to preserve the culture of the past does not replace thoughts of the future of the nation, and of the parental role of the survivor in the Land of Israel. The fathers who feel they have failed in their duty as saviors of Yiddish resolve to concentrate their resources on raising their children; they try to save at least them from one more night, after the night.

2.5 *Tongue of Fire* (1988)

The novella *Tongue of Fire* heralds a change in Appelfeld's attitude to Zionism. Unlike the novellas such as *Badenheim* (1975), in which the victims do not foresee the Holocaust, here the protagonist Rita Braun is presented as envisaging the future of the Jewish people and is drawn to Palestine where she sees a solution to her problems. For her, Palestine signifies a place that will lead to her personal redemption, hence her resolve to leave Europe. The striving for territory does not stem from innate Zionist ideology but from the aspiration for a new future in the private sense, one that will bring about her finding spiritual quiet, personal safety, and even a

⁸² A. Appelfeld, *Night after Night*, p. 129.

⁸³ A. Appelfeld, *Night after Night*, p. 129.

partner. Interestingly, the change in Appelfeld's attitude finds thematic expression in a book that describes the time before the Holocaust. In the writings analyzed above and by his attitude to the post-Holocaust time, Appelfeld points an accusing finger at the Zionist establishment; but in *Tongue of Fire*, a conciliatory note is sounded towards Zionism, together with the joining in the utopian and naïve discourse of promoters of the Zionist ethos.

Rita Braun's dreams transmit to her harrowing apocalyptic messages from the subconscious. Awake, her anxieties are kindled by the "innocent" scenes of pastoral European nature: she observes the rough peasants, and in seeing them she anticipates the indifference of the "goyim" to what is all around them at the time of the Holocaust and arouses in her inexplicable agitation. Asleep she dreams about Wassil, the barman at the boarding-house where she lodges, wearing uniform and hissing anti-Semitic slogans. The nightmare never recedes from Rita, and she can barely suppress it. At the first stage, she looks for an available solution, and the resilience of the peasant women she meets on the highway seems to her to hold out an answer to her troubles: she is drawn to their rough-and-readiness, to the simplicity typical of their lives, and is aware of their difference from her. She too sees herself as a person who is unhealthy, and locates the spring that will lead to her cure: fearlessness, tranquility, patience, and the joy of a simple life. After their encounter with the peasant women, Benno, her friend, raises the idea of going to Palestine for the first time. He sets forth this possibility as flight from a reality in which he is controlled by his mother. But Rita answers, "Palestine has always enthralled me."⁸⁴ She envisages marvelous beaches and an alluring sun, and these beckon her. This is the distant solution to her problems, and it gradually flowers within her for several years.

Rita's attraction to Palestine pinpoints the existence of two circles of leaving in her life: in her younger years she wanted to leave the provinces and go to the city to study painting. Now she wants to leave Europe and go to Palestine. Her first dream did not come true. She stayed where she was, married, and was dominated by her parents, her husband, and her son. Her second dream is the opposite of the first because Rita is aware of the simplicity of Palestine, where she would not work at a creative craft but would work the land. The intervening years since her girlhood and the pain that has accumulated in her life are what have changed the dream. Rita's wish is to

⁸⁴ A. Appelfeld, *Tongue of Fire*, p. 51.

connect to simplicity, hence her rush to Palestine, which is entirely unknown to her.

Rita's dream of escaping to Palestine is apparently not a momentary whim. She thinks about it long, but does not dare take the significant step because the objection of her sixteen-year-old son, Johann, to the move is clear to her. For a number of years she suppresses this wish, tells only Maria (the boarding-house "mother") of the plan, and it is clear that two factors in parallel encouraged her taking the decision to leave her son and travel alone to Palestine: her feeling that the world is in danger of collapse, which is manifested as mounting neurotic anxieties and her alienation from her son.

Johann observes Rita's unconsidered steps in respect of money and men. He realizes that she is striving to lose all her property and fears that she will leave him after squandering all her money, and he foresees the end of her ties with the two men to whom she became betrothed after the defection of the father. A paradox exists in their relationship, in that the son admonishes the mother and observes her errors, while she is concerned to reject her son's discernment and fears his look and his statements. The people around Rita do not understand how she can stand the labor of raising Johann considering his bad attitude, and Zusi, her friend, states that he should be locked up in the cellar, while Seltzer advises her to send him off to a military boarding school, where he will learn respect. Johann does not agree to be dispatched to a military boarding school. He does not like the attempts to tame him, but this does not stop him from trying to tame his mother. He scorns her fears, and repels her attempts to get closer. Not only does Rita fail to communicate with him, she is afraid of him and feels that any contact between them is noxious and violent.

The twist in the plot that causes implementation of the idea of migration to Palestine and abandoning her son is Benno's suicide in the river. After that, Rita no longer serves as a "surrogate mother" for the vulnerable Benno, whose mother perpetually criticized his life; from here, the course to conceding her identity as a mother is open before her. Her conversation with Zusi illumines this very well. She says, "I have nothing here, my dear. I have sold one house, and I am about to sell the other. What have I here? I have nothing here. Johann is sucking my blood."⁸⁵ Zosi tries to deter her, and tells her of the newspaper reports she has read about the swamps and the hardships and is puzzled by Rita's wish to leave Europe, the cradle of civiliza-

⁸⁵ A. Appelfeld, *Tongue of Fire*, p. 88.

tion. Zusi's partner, Van, also reminds Rita that she is not young, but she retorts that she is thirty-five and her will is strong.

Rita describes the Land of Palestine with marked recourse to the motif of light:

I have to get rid of excess fat, to soak in the sun and forget the hideous nightmares.... In Palestine the sun is full and strong. I need a full sun, an open shore, fine sand, good water, and fruit with juice in them.... It is taking shape within me quite clearly, without ghosts and without devils.... This time I see everything clearly.⁸⁶

The light contrasts her fears, and Johann's look, which blinds her eyes and wants to block the light from her, is metaphoric for the libido she desires to satisfy.

Rita's descriptions do not contradict to the Palestine reality. The situation is clear to her, and she is aware that her life will change totally. She does not regard working the land as hard labor, as Zusi does, and in her opinion, life in thrall to her parents, her former husband, and Johann is hard labor. She is done with money and investments and is concerned with simplicity. For her, Europe is not the cradle of civilization but the domicile of the hated fears and distress.

The people around Rita do not understand her wish to go to Palestine. The use of the name "Palestine" and not Land of Israel, was consistent in the speech of the inhabitants of Europe at that time. Nevertheless, this technique of naming is also characteristic of Appelfeld in his writings on the periods around the time of the establishment of the state, an intra-textual motif which gives rise to a certain mockery of the Zionist ethos.⁸⁷ Rita wishes to go to Palestine, yet she does not do so to build a new state for the Jewish people but for her own salvation alone.⁸⁸ The journey is portrayed as a redeeming journey, which will put an end to her fears and to the memories of her private past which haunt her. She does not want her parents' bequest because it is only material, and she does not allot any role in her life to Europe. Her desire is to win tranquility, a simple life, and this makes her leave the boarding-house and begin the journey which is signified as the transition from closure to openness; hence the motif of light, already noted:

⁸⁶ A. Appelfeld, *Tongue of Fire*, pp. 87–88.

⁸⁷ Appelfeld demonstratively portrays his characters as if reaching Israel by chance and not as immigrants, as emerged from our discussion of 1946 and of *The Immortal Bartfuss* (and see Z. Tsameret, "In Remembrance: The Secret of Redemption," *Amudim* 42.11 [1994]: 346–347 [in Hebrew]).

⁸⁸ Ratok notes that Appelfeld's dubiousness about Zionism is what led to the fashioning of Rita as the character who voices worthless slogans that cover her ignorance about Palestine. L. Ratok, *A House on a Void: The Art of the Story of A. Appelfeld* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Heker, 1989), pp. 150–159.

So, in truth, the entire life, from a closed house to a closed house. At first Isidor looked after her, and then Johann. The parents lived long and tormented her even in their old age. But for Seltzer's boarding-house, but for this temporary shelter, her life would be like a wheelbarrow pulled over a track, sunk in the mud. Wherever she might turn, horrors, unpleasant faces and bad taste.... Afterwards she went up to her room and abstractly packed the suitcase.⁸⁹

Rita departs from the boarding-house, not even leaving a letter for Johann. With her going, the narrator also quits the boarding-house, and does not report to the reader how her leaving was interpreted. Rita meets a Jew at the railroad station and tells him of her planned journey. For the first time, and closely connected to the taunts of the innkeeper and of the owner of the café near the railroad station, Rita weaves her journey in with the Zionist ethos: "It's right that the Jews too should have a bit of land of their own."⁹⁰ Rita uses a semantics that glorifies the notion of work, and makes a conscious indirect connection between the Nazi discourse with the concept *Arbeit macht frei* and the Zionist ideal of the laboring Jew. In thinking "work will purify me,"⁹¹ she repeats her wish to work and enjoy a simple life, but she also illustrates the Appelfeldian theme concerning the Zionist ethos, which has internalized anti-Semitic stereotypes, hence the problem that it raises. At this point, Appelfeld comes out against the Palestine-centric perception prevalent in the first two decades of the existence of the state of Israel, which belittled "Diaspora passivity" and deemed it worthless, in contrast to the activism of the Land of Israel.⁹²

As noted, in *First Person Essays* (1979) and in *The Story of a Life* (1999), Appelfeld comes out against the desire of Zionism to dismiss the immigrants' past, their previous language, and their previous culture, and of course, the memories they brought with them. The peak of his critique appears in the novella *Love, All of a Sudden* (2003), in which Appelfeld censures also the Israeli ways of remembering the Holocaust: "All the texts on Holocaust Remembrance Day, seemed to him ponderous, devoid of significance, worse still, grotesque: a collection of functionaries and politicians spouting platitudes, carrying torches and glorifying the partisans."⁹³ Rita's flight to Palestine demonstrates that Appelfeld does not negate Zionism, but he objects to manifestations of auto-anti-Semitism and to the forms of collective memory that dull the memory of the individual. Rita's journey is

⁸⁹ A. Appelfeld, *Tongue of Fire*, p. 98.

⁹⁰ A. Appelfeld, *Tongue of Fire*, p. 108.

⁹¹ A. Appelfeld, *Tongue of Fire*, p. 109.

⁹² And see D. Machman, "Research of Zionism," p. 149.

⁹³ A. Appelfeld, *Love, All of a Sudden* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Keter, 2003), p. 92.

portrayed as salvation not only on the personal level of her life but also as that which will save her from the anticipated annihilation of her people.

We do not know if Rita succeeded in reaching Palestine, just as we do not see Laish and the convoy of wanderers (the characters in *Laish*, 1994) stepping onto the soil of the land. Appelfeld is careful to keep the arrival in the Land of Israel out of the plot development, but still, Rita's resolve to turn her back on the culture whence she comes, and to journey to an unknown place whose culture is different from that she is acquainted with, is a decision that attests to courage, and the ending of the novella, in which Rita runs to the train from the drunk who is harassing her, and sees the journey as her salvation, belongs to those rare closures of Appelfeld that implant in us the feeling that a woman who has been able to overcome so many obstacles will find her way to Palestine.

Rita, knowing that her son's sorrow at her leaving will not be overwhelming, because he sees her as "a weird woman, an unstable woman,"⁹⁴ is certain that he will get by after her departure. The years in which she was dominated by an abusive husband and a son who reenacted the father's criticism are stamped upon her, hence her leaving. For years, Rita wanted to escape but did not. She waited for her son to be grown-up enough, and in parallel, the fears she felt presaged for her that there was no other way but to leave Europe. The storm that flattens the boarding-house yard symbolizes for her the impending destruction. She is not interested in belonging to European Jewish society, an assimilating society that is trying in vain to sink into the absorbing society. Rita has become disenchanted of her dream of merging in Vienna; she realizes that her place is in Palestine, even though her feelings are not supported by real knowledge. And still, her feelings as perceived by the extra-textual addressee, and her observing which internalizes the apocalyptic visions—these are what cause her departure, a departure which contains redemption, of her self, repressed for years, and of European Jewry, most of whom did not survive the annihilation, except for those who fled, hid, or survived the camps—Appelfeld's characters. To resort to psychoanalytical semantics, Rita's survival becomes possible only through her desertion of her son, namely desertion of her motherhood. Freudian "female masochism" breaks down when the mother is no longer ready to suffer pain for her child, and connects to her narcissistic wishes, which motherhood is supposed to suppress.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ A. Appelfeld, *Tongue of Fire*, p. 110.

⁹⁵ And see A. Palgi-Hacker, *From Non-Quality to Motherhood: A Feminist Psychoanalytic Search for the Mother as Subject* (in Hebrew; Psychoanalysis Series; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2005), pp. 102–129.

Tongue of Fire is a novella that describes a woman who chooses to turn her back on her fate and thus to be saved. Her salvation is not a product of ideological insights, but is due to her decision not to be stopped by external factors, and to go after her feelings, for the home of the Jews of Europe is erected on a void.⁹⁶ To gain freedom and to escape a collective and personal crisis, Rita takes a series of steps unacceptable to the society in which she lives: a gamble on her property, thus displaying mistrust of her parents' capitalistic legacy, neglect of her son, who sees her as an object devoid of the power of thinking and has continued the harsh, overweening attitude of his father who left, the choice of life alone without attaching herself to a man, and giving up the Europe that existed before the annihilation. Despite her weakness and the threats that stood in her way, and despite the slap in the face from the soldier who mistook her for a whore, she boards the train and begins the journey to save her soul and to win a new life. The extra-textual addressee is aware of the ironic function of the train, the central means in the Final Solution, taking the Jews of Europe to the extermination camps, but because of the choice to describe the pre-Holocaust period, this train is associated with Rita's desire to live a life in which she navigates her course; she chooses the space of her life and the manner in which it is to proceed—a courageous choice, contrary to what takes place around her as well as to the historic event. In this book, for the first time since Appelfeld began his unique artistic project, the journey to Israel comes to hold a reviving, redeeming, and changing potential; hence, before us is the beginning of an ideological change in the writer, which finds expression in his later literature.

2.6 *A Whole Life* (2007)

In the initiation novel *A Whole Life*, we make the acquaintance of Helga, a girl of thirteen who has undergone an accelerated adolescence because of the rise of the Nazis. Helga is separated from her Jewish mother and remains in the village with her Christian father. Her mother has been sent to a labor camp for "mixed" women, and she has gone to her aunt for her protection. Because of the poisonous words of the anti-Semitic aunt, Helga decides not to opt for denial of her identity but to come to terms with it. Helga runs away, and begins a journey whose purpose is to find her mother. The high

⁹⁶ Schwartz (*Individual Lament*, pp. 67–68) describes Rita as a "contrary assimilating Jewess" who has two clashing place-hallucinations: "longing for the enticing big city and the dream of Palestine, the simple land that brings oblivion to her misery."

point of the novel, which constitutes a barely conceivable twist in the plot, unreal combined with a realistic text, is Helga's arrival at the labor camp in which her mother is held, and her request to the guard to enter. "Are you mad?" asks the guard, who does not understand how a girl is willing to sentence herself to incarceration in the camp; but Helga walks in fearlessly.

This is a ritual of acceptance that Helga imposes on herself: to assume the identity of the mother, and to be willing to pay the grave price demanded. Helga gives up a life of hiding with the aunt and chooses a life in the camp—a life in the light, despite the hardship and the humiliation. A whole life, considering what is depicted in the novel, is a life that begins the moment when it is understood that identity is not a garment that one puts on and takes off. Identity is not subject to concealment, and above all, identity is not subject to destruction. Helga who hears the Allied aircraft circling above the camps, but refusing to bomb them, understands that all that is left to her in the world, is her identity and her people.

Appelfeld, whose writings are not typified by a "happy ending" structure, slightly alters it here, forgoing the kind of ending characteristic of him. He describes the process of acceptance of identity as part of the girl's adolescence, synecdoche for an entire nation. The sustenance that Helga takes with her are fear arising from the difficult journey that she must undergo, as a child in a strange and threatening space, together with a mass of anti-Semitic slogans reviling Jews. The turning point is reflected in a dream, in which she explains to Karl, a youth on the farm where she grew up, that Judaism is a dangerous disease passed on from generation to generation, and its punishment is imprisonment. Helga internalizes the speech of the people around her in the dream, but this is an internalization for the purpose of denunciation. She rejects the anti-Semitic teaching and does not wish to be part of a society whose basis is hatred. Before us is a rebellious induction novel, in which the inductee refuses to join the society to which she belongs, hence her striving after a different society.

After the first dream, another dream appears. In this one, a reversal occurs, and Helga declares: "I hate the expression 'What can be done?'"⁹⁷ Hesitations are replaced by feelings of control and a desire to fight for her principles and for her identity. She is determined to save her mother from the camp and to live a whole life, in contrast to her mother who has lived a divided life. The mother, who converted to Christianity and conceded her own religion, culture, and the urban space in which she had lived before her

⁹⁷ A. Appelfeld, *A Whole Life*, p. 133.

marriage, serves as a model for the life that Helga turns her back on. The insights she reaches allow her to separate her love for her mother from the hidden criticism of the way in which the mother cast off her identity and in fact yielded it. On her journey to her mother, Helga resolves to give up the observing⁷ that characterized her mother and to choose action.

Situated among Jews at the end of the war, Helga becomes aware of Jewish collectivism, which replaces the intimacy that was her lot on the journey:

That evening I felt with great force that we are a new tribe. There are things within us and outside us that amaze me and sometimes arouse disquiet in me, but when we are together looking at each other we feel much closeness.⁹⁸

The disquiet aroused by Zionism in Appelfeld turns into acceptance, in the manner of the Brennerian "And despite all." Acceptance, coming closer, and coming to terms conclude the novel.

The initiation is complete, and the young girl who seeks nourishment in various places on her journey becomes the caregiver and the nourisher for the needy and aids the survivors. Her sound identity helps her to support those whose identity is bruised. We part company with Helga on the way to Jerusalem. Jerusalem remains outside the story, so the ending of the book may be open to two contradictory interpretations: one that denotes approaching salvation as closing the age of exile and the refugee condition, and one that denotes disruption of the teleological journey.⁹⁹ Be that as it may, the novel ends when the group get ready for the journey to Jerusalem, and Charlotte declares, "We are going in a yearning spirit."¹⁰⁰ This ending heralds a genuine desire to begin life in the Land of Israel, despite knowledge of the hardships, and is also a contrary analogy to the grotesque episode of the illegal immigration depicted by Appelfeld in the earlier novella *1946*.

3. CONCLUSION

This article set out to reveal Appelfeld's complex attitude to the Zionist movement through collating his appearances in the press with his non-fiction and his fiction. Beside the recurrent criticism in his publicist and essay

⁹⁸ A. Appelfeld, *A Whole Life*, p. 235.

⁹⁹ Ezrahi indicates this ending structure; S. Ezrahi, "The Journey of the Jew."

¹⁰⁰ A. Appelfeld, *A Whole Life*, p. 253.

writing of Zionism's attitude to past Jewish culture and its effort to repel and erase the Jewish legacy, this writing takes an evidently critical view of the Holocaust survivors also. The silencing could not have happened, in Appelfeld's opinion, without the survivors collaborating and themselves wanting to rid themselves of their story after the terrible trauma they suffered. The mechanism that Appelfeld designs is two-directional, and indicates inner frustration, not pointing an accusatory finger at Zionism alone.

The ambivalence in respect of Zionism appears more tellingly in Appelfeld's fiction, in which he subverts the Zionist discourse and throws into relief the image of the human survivor. He thus ignores the myth of the "fighting" survivor, nurtured by Zionist leaders in Israel in the first decades of the state's existence in order to fuse the survivors who fought in the ghettos and as partisans with the Zionist ethos. Together with dismantling of terms such as "*aliyah*," "illegal immigration" (*ha'apala*), and "redemption," (*ge'ula*) which for the survivor are vacuous phrases, Appelfeld's fiction maintains the eastward direction and Israel becomes the only option—both in light of retrospective knowledge of the Holocaust and through identification of the link between territory and the Hebrew work.

True, Appelfeld is considered the "other" in Israeli literature, but a thematic study, as presented here, which traces the dialogue he holds in his writings with Zionism, exposes more than anything Appelfeld's "Israeliness." Not only does he provide a real voice for the Holocaust survivor and weave him into the fabric of life in Israel, but he also strives to bridge the gap between Israeliness and Jewishness, an effort that makes him an Israeli writer despite the fact that nowhere in his work is any plot to be found that is connected to the wars of Israel, to pioneering, and to Israeli tales of heroism. An examination of Appelfeld's complicated position on the Zionist movement and the Zionist discourse substantiates the Gordian knot binding Appelfeld and the Israeli reader, who tries, today as in the past, to find the balance between ideologies, utopias, and reality. To conclude with the words of Zander, Appelfeld "seems like a stranger, as if he doesn't belong to the Levant with Yekke mannerisms and courtesy, but more than anything else he symbolizes Zionist Israel."¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ A. Zander, "A Weekend with Appelfeld," p. 38.