

# Introduction

## Revisiting “Canaanism”

This book is a critical examination of a person and an ideology. The person is Adolphe Gourevitch (1907–1972), who mostly wrote under the nom-de-plume Adya Gur Horon (and variations thereof), and the ideology is the strand of mid-twentieth century anti-Zionist Hebrew nationalism popularly known as “Canaanism.” Given the original pejorative meaning of this label afforded it by its Zionist opponents, it may more accurately be called the Young Hebrews’ ideology, a name that preserves the self-designation of the political-artistic movement that propagated an indigenous national Hebrew identity in Mandatory Palestine, and then Israel, from the early 1940s until the late 1970s. Gourevitch-Horon, whose writings influenced a limited but powerful circle of intellectuals and activists united by their critical attitude to the brand of Zionism espoused by the leadership of the Yishuv and, subsequently, of Israel, formulated the intellectual basis of the Young Hebrews’ dogma but left the task of leading the movement to others—most notably the political activist Uriel Shelaḥ, better known as the poet Yonatan Ratosh. The initiation and evolution of the personal and intellectual connection between Horon and Ratosh, the author of a number of poetical classics in modern Hebrew literature as well as of several iconoclastic political treatises, is one of the topics explored in some detail in this book.

I have chosen to focus on Adya Horon’s life and works because the circumstances of his biography and his thought offer themselves to a study of the relationship between an intellectual placed in a position to articulate a worldview and the social processes which, in their turn, this worldview reacts to and participates in shaping.<sup>1</sup> Thus, an individual’s intellectual output, which in the course of events becomes

largely forgotten, when rediscovered provides fresh insights into the ideology it helped to form, and consequently opens new perspectives on an entire mass of issues connected to the dynamics and dialectics of an intellectual debate unfolding within the tumultuous framework of nation formation and state-building. The geographical-historical setting in which this dynamic played itself out in the present case is twentieth-century Palestine/Israel, the history of which is overwhelmingly filtered through the binary perception of a protracted conflict between the Arab Palestinian and the Jewish-Zionist national movements.

My primary aim in this book is to reincorporate Horon's historiographical output into the "Canaanite" ideology's intellectual history. This will then permit me to conduct a deep comparative review of "Canaanism's" and Zionism's nationalist language and values, demonstrating that the former is a fully fledged ideological-political alternative to Zionism, which dissents from it on basic elements of nationalist discourse. The journey I take in analyzing the challenge the Young Hebrews posed to the hegemonic ideology of the Yishuv and Israel leads me ultimately to provide a reassessment of the nature of Zionism and the sociopolitical structures it erected. This I do by addressing the differences in the discursive strategies of "indigenization" between competing Hebrew and Jewish nationalisms in light of scholarly insights from the discipline of postcolonial studies regarding the attempt to construct a "New Jew" in Israel. I ask myself in which ways the vision of the past articulated by Horon determined the differences between the Zionist figure of a "New Jew" and the "Canaanite" figure of the "New Hebrew." And while my research is historical in nature, located as it is in the disciplinary "catchment area" of intellectual history, the lessons I personally draw from this voyage and that are briefly presented at the closing pages of this book pertain above all to the current condition of Israel and its perspectives into the twenty-first century as an entity that shares both definitive settler-colonial and some postcolonial traits.

One of the aims of this book's concluding chapters is to demonstrate that Israel's paradoxical condition as a state whose *raison d'état* mixes structural characteristics of settler colonialism with postcolonial political culture can be efficiently illuminated by the juxtaposition of the "Canaanite" and the Zionist positions on state- and nation-building, which were inspired by their targeted reading of historical evidence drawn from biblical antiquity. Given that it was Horon who made

this reading for the Young Hebrews, his pivotal role in crafting the ideology is thus re-established. My rereading of the “Canaanite” idea is therefore made through the lens of Horon’s specific input into it, unless stated otherwise—in which case I will clarify the differences in the interpretation of Hebrew history and “Canaanite” politics between Horon and his fellow Young Hebrews.

Unlike traditional Judaism, non-Zionist forms of Jewish nationalism (such as Bundism and territorialism), or assimilationism, “Canaanism” was not yet another Jewish rival to Zionism that declared itself relevant to Jewry at large.<sup>2</sup> The challenge posed to Zionism by the Young Hebrews was of an *indigenous* kind: Adya Horon and other “Canaanites” acted in the name of a putative Hebrew-speaking non-Jewish national community native to Palestine that demanded that Zionism withdraw from the land considered the target area for Hebrew self-determination. This would supposedly enable the Hebrew nation to break free from all premodern regressive inhibitions and Jewish particularistic residues—religious, confessional, tribal, and so on—that Zionism had allegedly preserved under the rhetorical cloak of modernizing nationalism. Placing itself on a crash course with what the Young Hebrews took to be rational, secular, and above all republican principles of modern nationhood, Zionism’s “unresolved” nature over what Jewish identity meant in modernity,<sup>3</sup> invited, as it were, a “Canaanite”-type refutation of Jewishness as a defining characteristic of the state and its nation. Directing their critical gaze on what they saw as the greatest vulnerability at the core of the Zionist state- and nation-building project—its ultimate anti-modernism—“the Canaanites represented an existential threat to the ontological security of Jewish identity in its Zionist form.”<sup>4</sup>

By adopting the principles and language of nationalism, the Young Hebrews attacked Zionism on its own terms, thereby eroding the latter’s claim to be the sole agent of nationalism in Mandatory Palestine and after 1948 the single custodian of Israel’s national sovereignty. They professed a typical modernist view that the most advanced and suitable social arrangement for the twentieth century was national sovereignty in a secular state, hailed as the guiding principle of universal modernity.<sup>5</sup> What the Young Hebrews perceived in Zionism or, what is equally important, Pan-Arabism was an inclination to the contrary. In brief, “Canaanism” was a rightist form of *Israeli nationalist anti-Zionism*, which introduced a third national factor between Jews and Palestinians with a moral claim to determine the

nature of the sovereignty of Palestine and the *raison d'état* of Israel.

To make this claim intellectually compelling and politically valid, “Canaanism” formulated and operated a fascinating historiosophical conceptual grid, exemplifying the need of a modern political ideology for a myth of origins that would legitimize its contemporary practical pursuits and expose what it considered the ideological and practical bankruptcy of Zionism and Pan-Arabism. My research therefore constitutes an examination of the practical and moral function of a vision of the past in a future-oriented political program; in other words, this book is an essay in nationalism studies focusing on a segment in the intellectual history of the modern Middle East.

The primary tenets of the “Canaanite” ideology were formulated by Adya Horon and Yonatan Ratosh in the late 1930s in Paris, in a direct reaction to the national dynamics of the Hebrew Yishuv in Palestine under the British Mandate. The ideology took on organized shape in 1939 when Ratosh established the Committee for the Consolidation of the Hebrew Youth on his return to Tel Aviv. During the Second World War, the committee issued a number of statements of principle, among them “Epistle to the Hebrew Youth,” “Opening Discourse,” and “Letter to the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel” (directed at the LEHI underground), which were distributed clandestinely. During the 1948 war for Israel’s independence, the Young Hebrews founded the political and literary journal *Alef*. Edited initially by Ratosh, and later by his disciple Aharon Amir, a poet, writer, and prolific translator, in 1951 it attempted unsuccessfully to enter the Israeli political scene by establishing the “Center for the Hebrew Youth.” After *Alef* had ceased publication in 1953, the Young Hebrews largely acted individually. Their only common endeavor afterwards was the reissue of *Alef* in 1967–1972, when it became an exclusively political review, without the participation of Aharon Amir, with whom Ratosh had a falling-out.

Back in 1950, Ratosh’s youngest brother Uzzi Ornan (a prominent Hebrew linguist by profession) cofounded the League against Religious Coercion to protest the tightening symbiosis of religion and state in Israel. However, its narrow and “reformist” focus failed to win it support from other Young Hebrews. Between 1958 and 1976 (and again from 2002 to 2008), Aharon Amir edited the literary-philosophical review *Keshet*, which, by diluting sharp-edged “Canaanism” into a vague but pluralist “Mediterranean” orientation, became in time one of Israel’s leading literary platforms. In the mid-1960s, Amir affiliated *Keshet* with a discussion club named Club for Hebrew Thought, which

accommodated both “Canaanites” and non-“Canaanites” and rivaled Ratosh’s more “orthodox” “Club for Hebrew Guidance.” The final publication under the “Canaanite” logo of a stylized ancient Hebrew grapheme Aleph appeared in 1976 in the form of a thick anthology of “Canaanite” writings primarily from the revived *Alef* and other newspapers. When Ratosh died five years later, he was recognized as a contemporary classic of Hebrew poetry, though his political thinking was held in decidedly lower esteem.<sup>6</sup>

Two impulses gave rise to the Young Hebrews’ ideology in the late 1930s. One was the emergence and dissemination of the sentiment of an autochthonous and distinctive identity within the Yishuv in Palestine, which increasingly came to be placed within the discursive practices of nationalism, thus buttressing the proposal that the label “Hebrew” attached to it was in fact a national signifier separate and distinct from “Jewish.” This in turn triggered reflections concerning the nature of identity and history related to the ongoing social transformation of the Hebrew-speaking society in Mandatory Palestine,<sup>7</sup> undertaken, at first separately and then in tandem, by the historian and philologist Adya Horon and the poet and publicist Yonatan Ratosh. Both men resided then in Paris and initially belonged to the Revisionist rightist wing of Zionism. Hence, their thinking was nourished by post-1789 European liberalism that hinged personal and collective liberty and prosperity on national sovereignty.

Examining the historical development of ancient Hebrew culture and Judaism and the prevailing political conditions in the Middle East and Palestine, Horon and Ratosh concluded that the Zionist idea in both its socialist and Revisionist iterations was inadequate to meet the cultural and political realities of the day. Starting with a political critique of Zionism, the two eventually ceased to identify with the ideology by coming to reject the intellectual foundations of Jewish nationalism. This struck at Zionism’s very core, since a sine qua non of ideological adherence to Zionism is the acceptance of the national character of the Jews, notwithstanding their deterritorialization and ethnoreligious bonds.

The “Canaanite” movement that Horon and Ratosh went on to establish reformulated the difference between a Hebrew and a Jew as the difference between membership in a modern nation and membership in a premodern ethnoreligious community, respectively. They considered these two forms of social organization to be mutually exclusive and identified in the Zionist idea of ethnic communalism a denial of

the liberal norms of what constitutes a nation. The Young Hebrews' concept of ethnogenesis (nation formation) was premised on the conflation between people, territory, language, and consciousness,<sup>8</sup> as opposed to Zionism's fusion of religion and biology as nation-shaping criteria. Since Jews the world over did not share the four traits listed above, Zionism's claim to speak in the name of a nation was deemed a priori fraudulent, as was Pan-Arabism's claim to speak in the name of a fictitious "Arab nation," whose only common trait was the literary Arabic language. A Jewish "false consciousness" derived from, and inspired by, a Diaspora denominational socioeconomic lifestyle served in the sovereign state of Israel, in the Young Hebrews' eyes, to blur the differences between a nation and a community, between participatory citizenship and patronage, and between geographically delimited nationality and a nonterritorial ethnoreligious identity.

The methodological starting point for this book is that since the Young Hebrews self-identified as nationalists, they ought to be analyzed as such. It is but intellectually honest to base the analysis of any phenomenon upon the terms it sets for itself, checking its claims against the relevant theoretical frame of reference and remaining wary of methodological frameworks that contradict (either implicitly or explicitly) the phenomenon's declared essentials. At the same time, these essentials should not be taken at face value to the detriment of a sound critical judgment.

And so, is the "Canaanite" idea a case of genuine nationalism? I accept that it is, not simply because the Young Hebrews claimed that it was, but because their ideology and activity fit the generic framework outlined by the academic literature on nationalism.<sup>9</sup> They possessed a robust and intricate nationalist doctrine, which they prioritized above their artistic and literary activity (despite being better known for the latter). The image and purpose of the Hebrew nation articulated by them contradicted Jewish and Pan-Arabist nationalist imagery and teleology. "Canaanite" writings repeatedly emphasized the urgency of defeating Zionism and Pan-Arabism if the Hebrews were to become sovereign. Never constituting a mass movement, "Canaanism" functioned largely as a circle of radical intellectuals and artists who came to occupy, sometimes posthumously, a prominent place in Israeli culture, and whose ideology was seen as an inspiration by a wider circle of supporters and as a menace by the mainstream Israeli intelligentsia and political establishment. Last, the Young Hebrews possessed a detailed political plan for the future, a searching sociopolitical and

cultural analysis of the present, and a highly developed vision of the past, both recent and ancient.

The observation that “Canaanism” was a genuine national ideology carries a number of theoretical and methodological implications. First, it questions the teleological thrust of Zionism by which Jewish historical experience ineluctably leads to a Jewish political sovereignty. In consequence, the only available option to Israelis for political and cultural self-expression is in a “Jewish state,” which means that an Israeli identity, insofar as such exists, is interpreted as just a modern variation of the historical premodern Jewish identity. Careful attention to the guiding principles of the critique of Zionism enunciated by the Young Hebrews leads me to an attempt to adopt a “neutral” position with respect to Zionist and “Canaanite” teleologies, as both are ideologically contingent. This book therefore rests on the premise that the “Canaanite” observation that a Hebrew national identity was in existence in the late years of the British Mandate in Palestine is essentially correct, but that this does not automatically validate any other proposals put forward by the Young Hebrews regarding the “contents” of the Hebrew identity or the paths that should determine its relationship to Jews and Arabs. This entails, of course, the problematization not only of Zionist teleology, which can no longer be taken for granted, but also of “Canaanite” teleology, which has its own innate biases and weaknesses that are explored in further detail in the conclusion.

Second, as indicated above, in order to properly assess the real meaning and significance of the “Canaanite” nationalist challenge to Zionism and Pan-Arabism, a shift in focus away from the towering figure of the Young Hebrews movement, its founder, leader, and most articulate public speaker and advocate, Yonatan Ratosh, to that of Adya Horon is in order. Horon, who was born in Kiev in 1907 as Adolphe Gourevitch and died in Tel Aviv in 1972 as Adya Gur, was neither a man of letters nor an artist: he thus stands out among the “Canaanites” as the only non-“bohemian” within the group that created and gave the movement its direction. Horon was a scholar of the ancient Middle East by education and training, and his participation in the deciphering of the Canaanite literary epics of Ugarit early in his career had a formative impact on his conceptualization of the long-term cultural-historical processes in the ancient Levant. He was, in addition, a versatile writer who moved between several genres: academic scholarship, popular scholarly essays, and political journalism,

sometimes blurring the borders between them. Starting with a series of articles in the early 1930s published in the Russian-language Zionist Revisionist press—a seemingly innocuous excursion into ancient Hebrew history that, read with hindsight, can now be identified as the first exposure of a historiographical approach shortly afterwards to become “Canaanite”—and ending with his posthumous publications, Horon’s entire adult life was dedicated to the construction of a narrative that would refute the Jewish-Zionist vision of history and offer a positive alternative to what he considered Zionism’s suicidal course. His subversive secular reading of the Bible and other works of ancient Eastern Mediterranean literature, which absorbed many insights of biblical criticism and *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, ran counter to the most essential premises of both Jewish and Zionist historiographies. It thus formed the basis for the “Canaanite” vision of the ancient Hebrew past, creating, in the words of Yael Zerubavel, an alternative “master commemorative narrative,” which is “a broader view of history, a basic ‘story line’ that is culturally constructed and provides the group members with a general notion of their shared past.” By “focus[ing] on the group’s distinct social identity and highlight[ing] its historical development . . . ,” Zerubavel explains, “[the master narrative] contributes to the formation of the nation, portraying it as a unified group moving through history.”<sup>10</sup> In this way, national narratives provide a sense of long-term continuity and purpose that help allay contemporary social, cultural, or political anxieties.<sup>11</sup> They also determine what Ana María Alonso calls “national chronologies,” which “establish both a historical right to a specific territory and a territorial right to a particular history.”<sup>12</sup>

By producing a foundational myth for anti-Zionist Hebrew nationalism, Horon became, to use a Gramscian metaphor, “Canaanism’s” organic intellectual. This book therefore asserts that due to his formative intellectual contribution to the “Canaanite” movement (as opposed to his practical participation, which was quite limited), Horon ought to be recognized as its central figure; otherwise the exact nature of the differences between “Canaanism,” Zionism, and Pan-Arabism will remain beyond grasp. It is this book’s contention that if one chooses to concentrate on the heated political disputes between the Young Hebrews and Zionists at the expense of Horon’s discussions of ancient Hebrew history, difficult as they are to the layperson—thereby ignoring the political conclusions that arise from them—the only plausible but deficient conclusion would be that the Young Hebrews



did nothing but develop the secularist and anti-Diaspora tenets of Zionism to their logical extreme.

This study asserts that the fundamental difference between Zionism, Pan-Arabism, and “Canaanism” lies in the *basically divergent commemorative narratives of the past* promulgated by the three ideologies, a divergence that transitions into political disagreements regarding the present and the future. To rephrase it in a formulaic form: if a disagreement obtains with respect to a society’s past, a similar disagreement will most probably obtain with respect to that society’s present and the future. Certainly, such core disagreements do not nullify per se any overlaps that may exist between the different ideologies vying for dominance in the same temporal or geographical space. Rather, these overlaps, however crucial they may be, must not obfuscate the fact that the intellectual roots of the contending ideologies are essentially distinct. In the present context, the clear intellectual, political, and even personal affinities between “Canaanites” and Zionists this book recognizes must not mislead to the conclusion that the ideologies they subscribed to sprang from the same source and thus constituted two variations of the same basic principle. On the contrary, the core principles underpinning Zionism, Pan-Arabism, and “Canaanism” are different because their respective approaches to the usefulness of history in modern politics are incompatible.

Given Horon’s repeated admissions that the purpose of his studies of ancient Hebrew history was to advance the Hebrew national cause,<sup>13</sup> we need to briefly consider to what degree they can be considered academically legitimate. The question whether the scholarly findings of an anti-Zionist nationalist public intellectual can be judged on their own merits has indeed been raised more than once: expert commentators on “Canaanism” like Ron Kuzar<sup>14</sup> and Yehoshu’a Porat<sup>15</sup> argued that, ultimately, the historiography underpinning the Young Hebrews’ ideology was solidly based. Some Israeli scholars of antiquity, like Haim Rabin<sup>16</sup> and Ísrael Ef’al,<sup>17</sup> also agreed that Horon’s scholarship was sound in its own right, though Ef’al warned against drawing “too far-reaching political conclusions” from ancient history. The archaeologist Hanan Eshel asserted in the preface to Horon’s most comprehensive posthumous publication that discoveries made since his death had positively verified Horon’s findings.<sup>18</sup>

Horon himself obviously never doubted his professional integrity as a historian, but what is crucial for our purposes is the societal function of the Hebrew commemorative narrative rather than

its level of conformity with standard scholarly methods. To follow Asher Kaufman's directive, "[t]he main thrust here is to analyze how a community imagined itself and not whether this imagining was historically conceivable."<sup>19</sup> It is therefore not my intent to pass any judgment on the scholarly soundness of Horon's findings in the field of ancient Hebrew history. Not only do I lack the professional competence to do so, but also the establishment of his studies' "truth value" is beside my point of examining his oeuvre's function as the Hebrew national foundational myth.

With all the problematic attendant on entanglements of positionality and knowledge that tap into a much broader debate about the relations between knowledge, power, and sociopolitical standpoint,<sup>20</sup> most relevant debates conclude that sociopolitical biases driven by the researchers' biographical context do not of themselves nullify any merits their academic work might possess, and sometimes even enhance it.<sup>21</sup> Students of nationalism agree that foundational myth is effective as a motivator for collective action only insofar as it is perceived and acted upon as genuine representation of bygone reality. "Identity," writes Walker Connor, "does not draw its sustenance from facts but from perceptions; not from chronological/factual history but from sentient/felt history,"<sup>22</sup> hence "from an anthropological perspective, *myths that are believed become social facts.*"<sup>23</sup> The myth of the Hebrew "golden age" developed by Horon pursues a number of objectives meant to answer contemporary rather than historical questions: uncovering the nation's "spirit," "essence," and corresponding "destiny" (to use a mix of Hegelian and Herderian terms, both of whom played a very significant role in the formation of modern nationalism<sup>24</sup>); formulating the language by which the national idea would be elaborated, represented, and reproduced; mobilizing the people to the national idea; and reinforcing the national intellectuals' authority in society.<sup>25</sup> The golden age, which, as observed by John Coakley, if dated at all, is located in a very distant past (in Horon's case, in the prebiblical period), consists of three basic components, not all of which have equal weight in every national commemorative narrative: political and/or military greatness; cultural or social greatness; literary greatness, evidenced by the rediscovery (or, sometimes, fabrication) of ancient epics.<sup>26</sup> Mary Matossian comments that a golden age does not always entail an imperial potency and grandeur; it can also be imagined as a "pristine" agrarian past when the nation's immaculate essence was supposedly expressed to its fullest.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, in all

variations, foundational myths of a golden age “provide a people that may be suffering from socio-economic and cultural deprivation with a self-validating image of former greatness . . . [and] imply a political project for the future.”<sup>28</sup> As synthesized by Kaori O’Connor, these myths “reaffirm cultural values and assumptions, consolidate identity, create community, mobilize sentiments, validate social exclusions and inclusions and endorse a society’s self-image—all with reference to a past which is presented as historic, but which is invariably largely or wholly mythic.”<sup>29</sup>

Foundational myths are divided into two broad types that share basic structural characteristics such as an origin in a particular time and place, a lost golden age, and a teleology of its recreation. The first type stipulates an organic connection between the members of the nation and their presumed ancestors who lived during the golden age; this is therefore a myth of descent and the acquisition of certain collective faculties and desires through a blood link. The second type emphasizes a spiritual connection between the “ancestors” and the “heirs,” drawing inspiration from past examples with no ascertainable biological connections between the “fathers” and their “sons.” Anthony Smith<sup>30</sup> calls the first type *biological* and the second type *ideological*, paralleling Steven Knapp’s dichotomy of myths of *continuity* as opposed to myths of *analogy*,<sup>31</sup> and John Coakley’s myths of *biological descent* versus myths of *cultural affinity*.<sup>32</sup> It will be argued in this book that the Zionist myth of origins corresponds to the biological type, whereas the “Canaanite” myth of origins bears the characteristics of the ideological type. How these differences expressed themselves in the two ideologies’ actual political platforms will be exposed below.

The central points of disparity between “Canaanism” and Zionism, understanding of which ensures a methodologically sound analysis of the Young Hebrews’ ideology, can be summed up thus. First, the two ideologies’ *visions of the past* were fundamentally irreconcilable, and so, in consequence, were their standpoints regarding Israel’s present and future. Second, there was an essential disagreement regarding the *exact identity* of the nation to which the two ideologies directed their appeal: as this book will show, the Hebrew nation of the “Canaanites” only partly overlapped with the Jewish nation of the Zionists. Third, and perhaps most important, the ideologies’ respective *concepts of a national identity and nation formation* were deeply incompatible: the “Canaanite” concept of national identity was civic and territorialist, whereas the Zionist concept of national identity remains ethnoreligious

and primordialist. The true proportions of these differences cannot be appreciated unless Horon's historiography is re-appraised as the key element that made the Young Hebrews' ideology *nationalistically anti-Zionist*.

### The "Canaanites" in a Zionist Mirror

Although the Young Hebrews stated their principles and objectives quite openly and repeatedly, many researchers remain perplexed by the question of what exactly the "Canaanite" ideology was. The cause of the glaring discrepancy between "Canaanism's" avowed goals and principles, and its image in the scholarly literature, seems to me the lingering (and, as will be shown immediately, highly detrimental) influence of the Israeli literary critic Baruch Kurzweil's interpretation of Hebrew nationalism. Kurzweil engaged for the first time with "Canaanism" (the idea rather than the movement per se) in 1947,<sup>33</sup> but it was his seminal essay on the Young Hebrews, first published in 1952, that set the tone of the debate for many years.<sup>34</sup>

Kurzweil, who had both traditional Jewish upbringing and modern academic education, placed "Canaanism" within the larger framework of a process that Jewish thought and letters had been undergoing since the age of the Haskalah (eighteenth to nineteenth centuries) and that resulted in the emergence of what he called "the antivocational" current in Jewish letters. This current expressed, according to Kurzweil, the rejection of Judaism's innate spiritual vocation by secularized Jewish intelligentsia, which had struggled to adapt to modern values ever since premodern values and religious outlook had ceased supplying it with existential certainty. Kurzweil's approach to Jewish history was highly pessimistic: while acknowledging that Enlightenment, nationalism, secularization, and Zionism were historically inevitable (and possibly even desirable), he regarded them as highly injurious to traditional Jewish culture, which could not survive the onslaught of modernity. The place Judaism occupied in the Jewish spiritual world was usurped, Kurzweil writes, by the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, which heralded a scholastic-secular approach to issues that had previously functioned within, and were inseparable from, the sacral-moral sphere. For Kurzweil, the "scientificization" of Judaism meant that its spiritual heritage was now being studied in the same manner as an anatomist dissects a cadaver, except that the anatomist

does not pretend to resurrect the corpse, while the “science” of Judaism spuriously ascribed to itself the role of a direct and legitimate continuator of Jewish heritage. Kurzweil, who regarded biblical philology and Jewish studies as bogus substitutes for traditional Jewish values and fiercely opposed their claim to take over from Judaism, concluded that Jewish culture was seized by a suicide urge. In a way, he considered Zionism, one of the outcomes of traditional Judaism’s collapse, a tormented attempt to simultaneously *destroy* Judaism and to *preserve* it in a transformed shape. “If one plays the game of secular nationalism, one must not be affrighted by its consequences,” he noted melancholically.<sup>35</sup>

The Young Hebrews’ ideology was for Kurzweil but a radical expression of the Haskalah antivocational tendency; thus, only historical ignorance precluded the “Canaanites” from realizing that they were mere epigones of Jewish Enlightenment. “The ‘Young Hebrews,’” Kurzweil claimed, “in their attempt to establish a ‘Hebrew Ideology,’ are involved, to a degree they hardly suspect, in a complex of phenomena characteristic of Jewish thought in modern times; . . . from an ideological viewpoint, the ‘Canaanites’ constitute an Israeli variation of a well known Jewish *Galuth* phenomenon.”<sup>36</sup> He derived their outspoken secularism from the Nietzschean concept of a “nation’s spirit,” whereby every nation possesses a collective desire to survive expressed in a unique cultural or social structure of values, norms, and behaviors. Jewish secularists simply regarded traditional Judaism as a premodern manifestation of their “nation’s spirit.” However, with the advent of modernity, this tool could be replaced by a new one—a secular ideology of national revival that would treat Judaism as “a supporting cloaking device for the real reason.”<sup>37</sup> Kurzweil devoted a series of essays to the refutation of this idea, pointing to the Zionist thinker Aḥad-Ha’am as the main exponent of the concept that Jewish religion was secondary to the Jewish organic “survival drive”; in a dialectical feat he managed to link “Canaanite” anti-Zionism with the ideas of the founder of spiritual Zionism. Thus, in Kurzweil’s reasoning, the Young Hebrews were Jewish culture’s unacknowledged executioners in the name of an ideology wearing a nativist robe, though inspired by the Haskalah, that is, by purely Jewish Diaspora values. Their success and advance correlated to Jewish culture’s agony; Kurzweil, by assuming Cassandra’s role and blowing “Canaanism” out of all proportions, believed that the Young Hebrews charted the direction to which the entire Israeli secular culture was heading unless a mean-

ingful dialogue with Jewish heritage is initiated within the framework of Jewish sovereignty.

The main fault in Kurzweil's otherwise penetrating analysis is, however, easily perceivable—namely, that Kurzweil contrasted Haskalah-age Jewish intellectuals, for whom secularized Jewish identity was only one option among several pathways offered by Jewish modernity and who were educated enough to make their choice, to the Young Hebrews, who never had to face such a dilemma. He admitted that the ascending generation of young Hebrew writers in Israel was born into a reality devoid of sanctity and never needed to tackle the preceding generations' existential impasse. In fact, they were quite ignorant of it; a secular-territorial identity was a natural and secure frame of identification for them: "The present generation . . . is far removed both by education and experience from that full-bodied Jewish life . . . Products of an environment, radically different in both a positive and negative sense, the 'Young Hebrews' transform the theoretical negation of *Galuth* Judaism into living reality."<sup>38</sup>

This means that the antivocational current in contemporary Hebrew letters was no longer a matter of intellectual exercise, but an expression of received reality. In effect, Kurzweil admitted that the post-Jewish identity, whose evolvment he so intensely deplored, was nonetheless authentic, its authenticity, moreover, pinned upon a fundamental ignorance of the Jewish tradition. An "aggressive confrontation with Jewish tradition," observes Yaacov Yadgar concerning the Zionist rejection of Jewish Diaspora heritage, "manifests a certain type of conversation with tradition, which is based on a familiarity with it."<sup>39</sup> This, however, was not the case with native Hebrew youth, who were brought up in a sentiment of disdain toward the Diaspora without any profound awareness of its spiritual life and legacy.<sup>40</sup> The endgame is a glaring internal inconsistency, since a confident and natural native Hebrew identity, which it indeed was by Kurzweil's own admission, cannot express at the same time a tormented Diaspora identity of an enlightened Jew struggling to release himself from their "vocation": the two are simply not one.

This major interpretative failure seems to have occurred when Kurzweil substituted his own interpretation for understanding, that is, committed a "category error," which happens when "[people] place their own interpretative constructions upon other people's experiences and [. . .] confuse the two."<sup>41</sup> Kurzweil, who had personally experienced the full tragedy of the Jewish fate under the Nazi occupation of

Czechoslovakia (he fled in time to survive) and was consequently, in the words of Aharon Amir, “tormented by the decline of some Jewish historical existence,”<sup>42</sup> was simply not able to fathom how Hebrew people of letters could preoccupy themselves with something other than the question of the survival of the Jewish spiritual legacy and values—a question he made the centerpiece of his own intellectual pursuits.

A possible source, or inspiration, for this category error (aside from Kurzweil’s personal grief over the hypothetical obliteration of Jewish heritage by modernity) is the philosophy of history developed by the prominent Jewish-Zionist thinker Gerschom Scholem. It was Scholem who coined the antinomic phrase “the violation of the Torah is its fulfilment” to describe the pseudomessianic drive of seventeenth-century Sabbateanism, inherited first by eighteenth-century Hasidism and then by late nineteenth-century Zionism, as a justification of their annulment of certain Jewish legal principles and regulations seen as Judaism’s “outer shell” obscuring its innate essence these movements were supposedly reaching to.<sup>43</sup> It appears that Kurzweil’s observation that “Canaanism” constitutes the extreme form of Haskalah-driven Jewish secular nationalism rises from a similar logic, as if “the violation of Zionism” (discarding the ideology’s “Jewish” shell) was its “true fulfilment” (reaching the “Hebrew” essence). The unfortunate upshot is that the more insistent the “violators” are on their non-Jewishness, the more “Jewish” *eo ipso* they are—regardless of their own declared principles. Such logic is inherently foreign to the Young Hebrews, and it is ironic that Kurzweil, who attacked Gerschom Scholem especially savagely for his complicity as a senior Jewish scholar in burying the living Jewish heritage,<sup>44</sup> resorted to Scholem’s line of reasoning when dealing with the “Canaanites.”<sup>45</sup>

The most faithful exponent of Kurzweil’s paradigm is Yaacov Shavit, who describes the ideology of Hebrew nationalism as “a heresy [vis-à-vis Zionism] and fantasy.”<sup>46</sup> It is limited in his eyes to an intellectual game played by two Jewish right-wing intellectuals, Adya Horon and Yonatan Ratosh, in late 1930s’ France, when fascination with ancient history allegedly implied fascistic sympathies. Shavit concentrates on the intellectual-theoretical aspect of the “Canaanite” idea and is certainly correct in observing that a historical vision of the past as a cultural text prefigures the emergence of a political vision for the present and the future.<sup>47</sup> At the same time Shavit dismisses Horon’s historiography as “false” and “speculative,” and the entire

"Canaanite" *vision de monde* as a priori artificial and imitative of Jewish secular discourse,<sup>48</sup> without applying equally strict critique to Zionist historiography, which developed, according to Shavit's own method, from the same source: modern historiographical interpretation of Jewish antiquity.<sup>49</sup>

James Diamond's *Homeland or Holy Land?* is premised on the perceptive observation that "Canaanism" was above all "a political and social ideology" rather than "a literary-cultural phenomenon."<sup>50</sup> Yet since Diamond's study of the Young Hebrews grew directly from his earlier work on Baruch Kurzweil,<sup>51</sup> he follows the latter's erroneous dictum that "Canaanite" historiography was "a quasi-historical view based on the absolutization of the present"<sup>52</sup> and suggests that "Canaanite" politics need to be considered separately from the "window-dressing" of historiography.<sup>53</sup> Kurzweil's paradigm is strongly present in Diamond's book, which opens with a discussion of Zionism's most acute dilemma—whether it was a continuation of historical Judaism or a revolt against it<sup>54</sup>—implying that the emergence of the Young Hebrews' ideology was just another attempt at resolving this dialectic. At a certain place, Diamond makes the Kurzweilian argument that "Ratosh bears more than a superficial resemblance to Berditchevsky and perhaps even to Ahad Ha'am,"<sup>55</sup> and elsewhere, he locates him at the end-point of an intellectual-biographical chain stretching all the way back to Spinoza. The two figures, Diamond opines, open and close "a clear and respectable line of Jewish nonbelievers, who thought themselves out of the Jewish religion,"<sup>56</sup> a judgment that implicitly evokes the words of the Babylonian Talmud: "Even though Israel [in this case—Ratosh] hath sinned, they are still called Israel."

Two fundamental factors are arguably answerable for the lasting influence of Kurzweil's Judeo-centric analysis of "Canaanism." First, by engaging above all with the ideology's aesthetic and literary aspects, Kurzweil was able to frame it as mostly a cultural phenomenon, avoiding tackling its politics in earnest. It is safe to say that beyond Diamond and Shavit the vast majority of scholarship devoted to the Young Hebrews concerns itself with the literary qualities of the poetry and prose of Yonatan Ratosh, Aharon Amir, Benyamin Tammuz, and 'Amos Kenan (or with tracing the connections between their literature and politics)<sup>57</sup>, notwithstanding Ratosh's own declaration that he considered poetry writing merely a "hobby" that stood in the shadow of his political activism.<sup>58</sup> Second, as just pointed out, Kurzweil's paradox-play, encapsulated in his formula of "a literature that furi-



ously negates what it seeks to renew in another form,"<sup>59</sup> legitimized the thesis that those pretending to be Hebrews were actually Jews, whether they liked it or not. Its eager acceptance by many commentators on "Canaanism"<sup>60</sup> manifests, in my opinion, a suppressed anxiety that a thorough engagement with the Young Hebrews' politics would inexorably bring to the surface painful questions regarding Israeli identity, its relationship with the Jewish Diaspora, and consequently the teleological justification of Zionism.

In this way the privileging of literary analysis in the study of "Canaanism" makes it a convenient measure for the deep and sometimes unconscious entrenchment of Zionism's principles in the Israeli scholarly community. These principles can be summarized as follows: a) Jewish identity is inviolable and inherited throughout the ages, which means that b) national identity is (at least for Jews) a matter of fate rather than of choice. Since most Young Hebrews were born to Jewish parents in the Diaspora and professed Zionism in their youth, it was inconceivable that they could no longer identify as Jews, ergo "Hebrew nation" was just a fabrication—while "Jewish nation," by implication, was somehow not. This way, any discussion of the burning issues of Israeli sociopolitical agenda takes the national character of the Jews for granted.<sup>61</sup> This book, contrariwise, refuses to entertain the proposal that any one of these identities is less "authentic" than the other, or a derivative thereof, since the central point to be made here, without venturing any advocacy on behalf of the "Canaanites," is that the Hebrew national identity is neither more nor less "constructed," "fabricated," or "imaginary" than the Jewish or the Arab national identity.

With this in mind, this book hopes to take the first step in an intellectually captivating voyage to uncover the intellectual sources of Israeli indigenous opposition to Zionism by meticulously tracing the transitions in Horon's historical and political thinking and how those were incorporated into the Hebrew national ideology. Chapter 1 is wholly devoted to Horon's biography, which took him from pre-revolutionary Ukraine to Italy, France, the United States, and finally to Israel. This chapter highlights not only his lifetime achievement as the ideologue of "Canaanism" but also Horon's other endeavors, such as his quest to establish a Hebrew maritime force in the 1930s, his impact on Jewish anti-Nazi resistance in France and on the emergence of post-Zionist thinking during the 1940s, and his attempts to forge a "minorities union" across the Middle East to resist what in his eyes was a Pan-Arabist onslaught during the 1950s and 1960s.

The following two chapters contain an extensive discussion of Horon's own oeuvre. The analysis of his historical studies in chapter 2 precedes the examination of his political outlook in chapter 3, so as to identify the parallels between Horon's historiography and his political opinions, even when no such connection is made explicit by him. Chapter 4 makes a number of comparative inquiries, discussing at length the similarities and dissimilarities between "Canaanism," reconceptualized as nationalism in light of Horon's contribution to its theoretical structure, and Zionism; between "Canaanism" and post-Zionism, both the 1940s and the 1990s varieties; finally, between "Canaanism" and other national-territorial ideologies in the twentieth-century Middle East, mainly "Pharaonism" in Egypt and "Phoenicianism" in Lebanon, in order to locate Horon's thought in a wider regional perspective. The conclusion attempts to assess the reasons for "Canaanism's" ultimate failure to secure a mass following in Israel. It argues that Horon's deterministic approach and the Young Hebrews' lack of sensitivity to the intricacies of the emergent Hebrew-Israeli identity were accountable for the growing discrepancy between their worldview and the values of the national society they preached to. Finally, the appendices let Horon speak in his own voice by reproducing a number of original documents from the various stages of his life that are especially representative of his evolving yet at the same time remarkably stable outlook.