

1949: Spring

# In the darkness, the biplane plunged through

heavy clouds and faltered between violent gusts of wind. About 40 of us Iraqi refugees were crammed into the narrow fuselage, as confused and exhausted as people are on the point of vomiting their guts out. For all of us it was the first time in an aeroplane. A few hours ago we had taken off from mother earth in Iran, having arrived there as exiles from Iraq after a brief sojourn of 2,500 years. Iran, intent on revenge for the defeat in Israel, made it clear we were unwelcome as soon as we arrived. There were no elderly people on the plane, but we felt the disillusionment of old men faced with understanding that the pillars of human existence are frail as matchsticks.

The flight's legal status was dubious, and for the sake of secrecy we were told, as were the Iranian authorities, that it was headed for Paris. Mentally speaking, Israel was never far from me when I lived in Baghdad, just another ward in a mental asylum for incurables. I thought that those who nurtured a dream of building a secure, lasting home on this insane strip of land resembled birds who insist on building their nest on the back of a deranged shark. I believed that the Middle East was the birthplace of lies and illusions. And so the plane made me feel I was being hauled on a gurney from one ward, where people were merely scheming to murder me, to another, where every slice of bread would be drenched in blood.

I held a small bundle of clothes near my belly, above the fancy winter coat that protected me from the Persian chill, and tried to avoid listening to the grunting sounds of vomiting all around. I closed my eyes, seeking refuge from the monotony of walls of cloud with the plane fumbling its way between them. I was 22, an age when one is not deterred by adventure, but I knew the flight was no mere adventure. With every mile the plane progressed, a one-way tunnel

was dug for me. The flight was a difficult separation from a painful love.

When I opened my eyes I thought I was hallucinating, a vision alien to anything I had known in the past, even to my sense of betrayal. Framed by the window, the rays of the rising sun passed over us, sweeping the sky until it broke through like an immaculate blue crystal. Below us white houses, like a flock of herons, perched on a mountain slope, its top covered with green thickets and its feet immersed in shining water. An enchanted city, like an innocent maiden sleeping naked on the bosom of a monster.

Happy is the man, I said in my heart, who makes his home in this miraculous, unreal city. Like an invocation, the plane circled over the trembling sea before landing at Haifa's small airport. Paris has evaporated, I told myself, and, in the same breath, this is impossible! Tough discipline learned in the underground movement and a strict education had taught me to control my feelings and not get carried away, but northern Israel at the beginning of April is a king-sized sable bedspread with hundreds of hues, an azure sky at one with caressing winds. The earth breathes with a thousand curves, emanating perfumed fragrances. I felt a dizziness that came from deep within. I was a virgin at the time, but I assured myself that this was exactly how the first girl I would see in her gentle nudity would look. I grew up in history-laden Iraq, lived for a time in history-riddled Iran, and had thought I would arrive in an Israel equally bound by historical shackles. But behold, the first piece of land I set foot on was fresh and pure, young and free.

I loved Haifa then, and more than half a century later I'm still faithful. But the beginning of my first day in Israel was no time for love and happiness. Like a herd dazed from a long cattle drive, we were ushered, my fellow travellers and I, to the back of a filthy lorry and thence to a new immigrant barracks in the northern suburbs. It was a deserted British army camp, filled to capacity with a multitude of creatures who had all lost their sense of direction. For the first time in my life, I found myself in a closed area surrounded by barbed wire fences. Holocaust survivors moved about like shadows of burnt paper, their identities engraved on their foreheads but their mouths shut tight. Babies screamed – this was the one language universally understood by all the inhabitants – and old people got older, still shamelessly demanding food and a place to rest. Young boys and girls, full of sizzling hormones, let barriers of shame fall, while shocked fathers whipped them with their tongues within an inch of their life.

I felt as if I had parachuted into a suffocating, noisy crater where humans were reduced to their basic needs. The sky was still crystal clear above us, but the spring perfume evaporated in this giant human vortex that shrieked and yelled and ran around and wept or retreated to dark corners with the frozen glare of the survivors. Haifa hovered on the southern horizon, pure, clear, and unreachable.

Like a drowning man I struggled to get out of this cauldron. I moved towards the open gate and clung to the barbed wire. I knew no Hebrew, and was a lonely pauper, so there was no point in passing through the gate, out to the pretty flowers, the hunger, and poverty. Behind me, in the former military camp, my privacy was lost. I had become a name with an ID number. The simplest physical acts turned obscene and bestial. When I went to the lavatories, I found a carousel of holes and above each hole a half-naked figure discharging the remnants of its shame.

So I stood in my tailored suit near the gate, suddenly realising I had lost my fancy winter coat. I had also forgotten the number of my barracks for the night, though I had put the mattress and blankets assigned to me on one of the beds. With horror I remembered that my expensive Parker pen was also in the pocket of the lost coat. Before boarding the plane I had been requested to tear up and burn everything I had written in Iran. After all, it was a clandestine flight. The Parker pen was, for me, the strongest remaining link to spirituality, to the capacity to rise above the stench of those carousels.

A tall sabra, half child, half woman, and yet with a prominent pregnant tummy, came through the gate. She approached me in a barrage of Hebrew. I nodded sadly, for she was very beautiful. She carried with her some of the freshness of the spring outside the fences.

“Newcomer?”

I nodded silently, wishing to guard my dignity in the eyes of the lovely girl. Silence is better than stuttering. I told her we could speak English. Her English was very poor, but she wasn't shy. She told me she had heard about the surprise “shipment,” that she was married to a man born in Iraq who remained a mystery to her. Like most men, he was serving in the army in the aftermath of the war just recently ended, and she had come to the camp out of sheer curiosity to see and talk to the newcomers from Iraq.

I told her I was one of them and her eyes shone. She probably felt that her tummy would prevent any misunderstandings,

and touched the material of my suit. "Where are you going?" she asked, and seemed satisfied with what her fingers had touched.

I looked back at the human medley, all expressing misery in dozens of languages, at the men and women walking around, reduced to creatures dependent on the words of impatient clerks. I felt like a glob of pus emerging from an infected wound. I told her I had nowhere to go and that I had lost an expensive coat in the airport along with a Parker pen that was extremely important to me. I didn't tell her all I had in my pocket was two Israeli pounds in cash and nine cigarettes, which I desperately was defending against passion fueled by desperation.

"I'll take you to the airport."

I looked at her suspiciously. I had come from the Third World, where when you lose a coat in a public place all you can do is mourn for it. There was no "lost and found" department between Turkey and China.

She didn't like my half smile. "We'll find your coat!" Her self-assurance annoyed me. She was at least four years younger than I but treated me like a kindergartener. When she learned I had no family, no friends, and that I was as lonely and alien in this country as a fallen leaf, she took my arm in hers and dragged me to the main road. Only in films had I seen men and women walk arm in arm, and here I was, publicly being led by a handsome woman. I wriggled, blushed, and sweated. I gently took my arm from hers as we neared the bus station.

The coat awaited me in all its magnificent glory at the airport. I looked at the beautiful woman in utter amazement, as if she had created this miracle herself. My fingers rummaged through the pockets with longing, only to return defeated.

"Someone stole your Parker," she whispered.

I don't know whether she understood the depth of my disappointment. There was something symbolic about the pen. It was as if an empty void had been created in my brain, and nothing I knew could fill it. I had lost the written word with which every artist builds his spiritual world.

"Are you going back to the camp?" Her voice had loathing in it, as if she were talking about some unpleasant habit of mine.

I kept my silence. We walked, arm in arm again, on the asphalt, because spring had conquered the sides of the road with its flowers and juice. She told me her name was Geula, and for a long time tried to explain in her inarticulate English the meaning of the name ("salvation"). I didn't understand. I just looked from above at her

firm, pert tummy that somehow recalled the spring vegetation that was trying to envelop the road.

"And laundry?" she inquired. "Do you have a change of clothes?"

I did not know how to rebuff her overflowing kindness that threatened to swallow me like the human crater of the camp. I knew no women at the time, so I imagined each of her pure intentions to be a perverse hint. I rejected her invitation to come and shower in her house. I also told her I would wash my clothes myself. When night came, I crawled to my designated bed in one of the barracks. I couldn't sleep. In the darkness, the silent Holocaust survivors came to life. The minute they fell asleep, the chimneys of their nightmares opened. Nothing harrows more deeply than the sound of adults crying in their sleep.

I was immensely happy to see Geula's tummy coming through the gate the next morning. She immediately located the nightmare dormitory that had been the goal of my timid flight the night before.

#### **1950: SPRING**

Unique figures who affected the course of my life: my father, who passed away at an advanced age; the friend of my youth, Sasson Dalal, executed on the gallows; the writer and journalist Emile Habibi whose articles I read in the Haifa newspaper *Al-Ittihad* which I used to buy at a kiosk in front of *Al-Murjan* mosque in Baghdad. I admired the Palestinian journalist's sharp style, but never imagined that destiny would enable us to work together.

In 1950 I left behind me an army camp, a former Israeli soldier with release papers and a meager payment in my pocket, and settled in Ajami, a mixed section of Jaffa. I had arrived in Israel with my eyes open and knew from experience the destiny of minorities in the harsh Middle East. With that in mind, I wrote an article in Arabic about shattered dreams under the pen name "Samir Mared" and sent it to *Al-Ittihad*. After it was published, Emile Habibi came to Jaffa and approached me in his direct way: "You are moving to Haifa and joining the editorial staff."

The next day I sat in a crowded bus and headed for the only open city in the Middle East: Haifa. First I slept on a bench at the culture club, later in a basement apartment in the Arab quarter of Wadi Nisnas.

We were five on the editorial board, including two Christians. One was Jabra Nicola, a very talented linguist married to a Jewish woman. In any other country, he would have flourished and achieved a reputation. In Israel, he was a brilliant but frustrated intellectual. The other, Emile Habibi, was the enthusiastic motor behind the board, running the paper fiercely and with smiling amiability. He immediately took me under his wing, explaining to the others that an immigrant artist is like a stricken bird with plucked feathers and requires time to find his place in society. The two Muslims were the quiet and pleasant Muhammad Haas, who moved to Gaza after the Six Day War, and the young poet Issam Abbasi, a sensitive man with a constantly childish smile on his face. I was the only Jew, but I don't remember any religious or national tension. I was familiar with camaraderie from the Iraqi Communist underground, but the seething and scorching of creative jealousy here was new to me. There were screams and shouts, heated tempers, books slammed on the table.

My Arab colleagues were the spiritual leaders of a small minority persecuted by a humiliating military government and malevolent censorship. They fought fearlessly for their dignity as human beings and as Arabs. They were forbidden to move freely in a country where, until only recently, they had been a majority. They now needed official permits to visit siblings or parents in another city. They had a sense of spiritual asphyxiation, felt trapped in a bubble and surrounded by swaggering hostility.

Sitting on the editorial board was an unusual experience. I had belonged to a minority in Iraq, suffering under the harsh hand of the government, and overnight I had become here a member of the ruling majority in the Jewish state. My four colleagues, by contrast, had lost their former well-being. As they walked the streets of Haifa, they pointed out houses where family members had lived who were now refugees, miserable strangers in foreign lands following the establishment of the state of Israel.

I regularly covered the Arab communities and the situations of discrimination. I also roamed the transit camps of immigrants, reporting on Jews overwhelmed in a sea of frustration and hardship. The 1950s were the school that formed my thoughts and sharpened my ability to describe 'the other' in my future works.

Once I had set foot in Israel, I became a putative enemy of my former homeland. My colleagues there had become alien. I still do not know which is worse – being exiled from your home, or becoming a stranger in it.

**2003: AUTUMN**

The malicious hand has once more hit Haifa. It is the last mixed city in Israel, where Jews and Arabs don't look over their shoulders nervously when they enter each other's turf. Co-existence is no mere cliché; this city has a tradition of warm neighbourliness. This is my third apartment in Haifa, with Arabs upstairs. My ceiling is their floor, yet we never have feared one of us might lose his mind and seek to harm the other.

But madness came yesterday to Maxim, a restaurant close to the beach. Islamic Jihad sent a human bomb to end the lives of Jews and Arabs, and indeed both Jews and Arabs were hit. Their crime was their determination to set a positive example, something almost unknown in the Middle East. Islamic Jihad loathes good neighbours. In fact, it despises life itself. One of its *fatwas* had already clarified the status of the Arab victims: Any Muslim killed alongside Jews in a suicide operation is considered a *shahid*, a martyr.

Neither I nor the Arabs of Haifa wish to become martyrs by decree. We visit restaurants to enjoy a good meal, part of the large majority known as "innocent bystanders." At the moment of the bombing, Maxim was full of old men and young children, boys and girls, Jewish and Arab employees, all wishing to enjoy the sea, the company and the food. They were normal people in a normal city.

Madness is afraid of normality, a mortal fear.

My phone was unplugged when the explosion took place, but some Jewish fellow left me a voice mail: "I wish your corpse were lying in Maxim now!" It was a distinct possibility. But such a blessing from one Jew to another on the eve of Yom Kippur made me shiver, and I realised that madness is an infectious disease.

I admit that earlier that week I had taken part in an appeal to the Supreme Court against harming innocent civilians in Gaza. I am proud of my defiant stance against an inflamed atmosphere. At the same time, I ask and expect sane voices on the other side to be given a hearing. They should speak louder than the muezzins. Israel, too, has its innocents, entitled to peaceful existence and to finish meals alive. It's their absolute right, just as it is the absolute right of the innocents of Gaza. I feel I speak for every Jew, Muslim, Christian, or Druze in Haifa, a city that consistently refuses to join the circle of madmen.

## **2005: WINTER**

My life is divided into two periods: the smoking period, and what came after. I procrastinated about quitting because I feared my fountain of creativity would dry up. But my fears dissipated after my novel *Victoria* was completed without a single cigarette. Writing beforehand materialised only with the help of thick cigarette smoke, but the book that followed flowed to me on a dense black liquid – coffee. Daily writing is a complex process that begins with gradual emotional, mental, and even physical detachment from one's surroundings. The summit of the process is a strange type of arousal, unfamiliar to those unaccustomed to walking on embers, internal trances or creative writing. The thrill most resembling this arousal is that of dreams which shake the unconscious and cause intense pleasure or nightmares. The transition always comes as a surprise, and even though you are prepared, you are not sure where it comes from. Anyway, in my case, without a cigarette, the transition occurs after closing the door of my study behind me and allowing my body to absorb a sizeable dose of strong black coffee. Many artists need alcohol. Others achieve their mystical transformation through drugs. For me, it's black coffee that fosters the minor miracle of passing from material to fictional reality.

I have always loved black coffee. In the spacious traditional tea houses of Baghdad, they usually served tea; occasionally, a pleasant waiter would offer free water in ringing metal bowls and sometimes bitter coffee in tiny cups that held no more than a few small sips. From the age of seven, when I accompanied my father or grandfather, I longed for that bitterly magical taste. The waiters usually passed me by, due to my tender age, but often enough one of them would catch the deep craving reflected in my eyes, stoop, and present the fragrant cup. He did it with a certain embarrassment, as if handing me a shot of whisky.

Since that distant childhood time, black coffee is linked in my mind to giving without expecting anything in return. Serving coffee in eastern cultures is different from western customs; in the west, coffee is often served to visitors as a hint that it's time to get up and take leave. In the east, the making and serving of coffee is a lubricant to conversation and the opening of hearts. In the late 1950s, some Bedouins responded with anger to the spread of cooking gas to their communal tents. They argued, and rightly so, that in the past they had sufficient time to enjoy a conversation while the coffee



was slowly warming on the fire. The efficiency of gas sabotaged the pleasure of the gradual slide into cordial conversation.

As I write these lines, the taste of black coffee is in my mouth. In the last decades, now that coffee is associated in my mind with creation, I always buy it from one specific source. When I lived in the Jordan valley, I could find our local coffee roaster in an alley off the main street with my eyes closed. When I lived in Maalot, my Fiat would almost automatically lead me to a shop in Tarshiha. In Haifa, I go down to Wadi Nisnas. There I'm greeted by Mustafa with a thermos of coffee for tasting that is always on his table, with an amusing story and a smile that reminds me of the moon: sometimes a broad crescent, sometimes a thin sliver, in accordance with the news that describes our shared Israeli existence on that day.

I was glad that Beit Hagefen, the Arab-Jewish cultural centre in Haifa, decided to devote this year's annual art trail, part of the Holiday of Holidays Festival, to the theme of "black coffee." I think it is a brilliant idea, for if there is anything that is shared by most of the population, it is coffee. Veterans and newcomers, westerners and easterners, all drinking coffee in all shapes and forms.

The established, old-time Israeli culture was one of tea. In the corridors of the Histadrut labour federation and in government offices they used to sip lemon tea, in sickness and in health. There were times when several writers/paupers would share one cup of tea in a coffee shop. Iraq had its tea houses – *chaihana* – and a very few coffee shops for snobs. The majority there were hooked on tea. The first three cups of tea for my grandmother were merely a preface. We once counted 14 cups at a sitting. Perhaps those thick rivers of *chai* are what made the Iraqis a nation of hotheads. Indeed, some people claim *chai* opens the mind, that it provokes thoughts, but I observed that excessive amounts also awakened sleeping demons. Among the Palestinians, especially the villagers, and the Bedouins, *shai* had been the most common drink, but gradually, eastern European tea, Iraqi *chai* and Palestinian *shai* lost their aura of greatness and coffee came to rule.

Pre-Islamic Arab literature tradition bestows a glowing halo on the works of several tribal poets of the Arabian peninsula. Their poems were called *Mu'allaqat*, meaning hangings; tradition has it that their poems were hung on walls, and no one touched them until they crumbled. While the tribes spent time killing each other, those creations remained a common source of pride. At the initiative of Rivka Bialik, Beit Hagefen in Wadi Nisnas has organised something

similar for 12 years now. Trails of co-existence and tolerance via literature, prose and poetry, and art – sculpture, painting, photography and installations by dozens of artists, Jews and Arabs, adorning the Wadi's picturesque walls and its alleys, all under the heading "black coffee." To me, a coffeepot is a symbol as powerful as the dove of peace.

The Festival opening is planned for December 3, a Saturday, and will be presented by Rafik Halabi. The speakers and orchestras will appear on the porches and rooftops of the *wadi*, a valley lined with houses that snakes downhill towards the harbour. Visitors will not only see the artwork of some of the best sculptors and painters in Israel, both Arab and Jewish; not only walk the trails following authors and poets, which, in the best tradition of the *mu'allaqat*, present the works of writers and poets in Arabic and Hebrew translated into the other language on the *wadi*'s walls; they will also be able to smell Mustafa's fragrant coffee, taste the falafel at "Zkenim" (Old Men), try the selection of piquant olives of Hasan, sample Palestinian home cooking at Nadima's and bask in her lovely smile, be met by the welcoming face of Naim at his pita bakery, and be greeted by the open arms of fisherman Victor Hajjar, born and bred in the wadi, and enjoy an arts and crafts fair.

Life in Wadi Nisnas is as vibrant as anywhere in the world, and its friendly smiles are pleasant and sincere. The walls reflect brotherhood. If Haifa is a model for tolerant coexistence in a Middle East hot with hatred, then Wadi Nisnas, encouraged and nurtured by Beit Hagefen, is its beating heart, its guiding hand, its good intentions that lead to the ambience that typifies Haifa, capital of peace in Israel. There are certainly malevolent hands lurking not far off, but this is one of the few places in the Middle East where you can sip your black coffee in peace. When you walk you don't look backward for fear of a treacherous knife or deadly bomb. Noise, any noise, strikes me like a hammer. But I welcome even the noise of the *wadi* when a great crowd floods it on Saturdays, since it's the sound of tolerance and hope.

## **2006: MIDSUMMER**

As I prepare myself and my coffee to write, my city's air has already been shattered three times by alarm sirens. On the couch to my left lie my trousers and shirt, sweaty and covered in tiny shards of glass, from a short visit to Wadi Nisnas, which yesterday evening



**K. BROWN.** *Perfume shop in Wadi Nisnas.*

during a beautiful sunset was the target of two deadly missiles. The barrage killed two Arab men and a Jew.

When my novel *Trumpet in the Wadi* was published, about 20 years ago, one critic complained about the dramatic end I had chosen by killing off the hero. Under the scorching sun I climbed today to the focal point of the strike, where two residents of the *wadi* lost their lives. It felt as if I were approaching a crime scene where one of my most important characters both in fiction and real life had been violated. The alleys were empty, the lively shops closed as if willing themselves to fall into a sleep of despair. In front of the ruins, local and foreign TV and radio reporters gathered, swooping like vultures on anyone willing to speak, professional or amateur.

I have never seen such a loquacious war, and I have seen both war and violent coups in the last 70 years. If I forget for a minute the dead and the burnt and those torn and dissected, it seems I have stumbled upon a brawl of loud, moronic idiots, all threatening each other and planning their revenge.



אם אשכחך ירושלים  
והיה כעץ שחול  
על פלגי מים  
אשר פרוו וכן בעטו  
ועלדו לא יבול  
וכל אשר יעשה יצליח

בנות  
איכות

The innocent citizen – in whose name and for whose safety, allegedly, this murderous war is waged – sits, his lips quivering, behind shuttered windows. He stinks of sweat and horror in the shelters. From lively Beirut to beautiful, peaceful Haifa, he looks at the sky, worried, and realises that the sirens and explosions are stronger than both God and his chosen leadership.

I'm very conscious of the fact I live in a democratic state. After the last election there was optimism in the air. Like most residents of the *wadi*, I felt that neighbourliness and sanity between Jews and Arabs had spread their wings and the good news had arrived in Beirut and Jerusalem as well. The disappointment and distress are now reflected in the eyes of the old or handicapped, everyone unable to run for the protecting wall or the reeking shelter. Suddenly, between the thunder of cannons and the funeral marches, we see that we have elected a new leadership that follows the old battered way. The only people who stand tall and speak confidently are the vengeful extremists on both sides.

The alleys of Wadi Nisnas are like any popular street in Jewish cities. They are bustling with children. Children who go to school, hopping like birds and laughing. Today the silence of old men broods over the streets, just as in the streets of Kiryat Shmona and certainly Beirut. The children have disappeared from view. Like pets, they hide, clinging to their mothers' legs and trembling in fear.

There is no place where an atmosphere of peaceful sanity prevails without a relentless group of men and women who toil all year round to nurture it like gardeners nurturing their little Edens. At the centre of the *wadi* stands Beit Hagefen, an institution wiser than any government I've ever known. There are a multitude of wizards of hatred and separation, as many as there are shards of shrapnel in a bomb, while seekers of friendship remain few. They work in Beit Hagefen, and in an atmosphere of suspicion and resentment they present an example of a different way of thinking, a different life style. I have seen them on the fringes of those groups of strutting roosters facing the TV cameras. God, I said to myself, those preaching quarrel and hate are heroes of the media both in days of peace and days of plague. Even on asphalt covered with broken glass and pieces of missiles, the heroes of peace walk like shadows.

I came back from the *wadi* sad and disillusioned. I missed the cheerful children's cries, the light of hope in the eyes, the silenced trumpets.

## **2008: LATE WINTER WITH SPRING IN THE AIR**

The founding fathers of Haifa, throughout the generations, have sinned against this city that smiles upon the marvelous sea, lying on the slopes and summits of a mountain green all through the year; a city of Muslims, Jews and Christians who do not riot and plunder each other; a city which each rain cleanses, scrubbing its streets, leaving it clean and shiny. What have they done to this pearl? The southern entrance is riddled with cemeteries of all faiths. The northern exit is governed by factories spitting poisonous vapours from their stacks. The Kishon River has become a cancerous metastasis. The breathtaking, historic Bat Galim promenade is obscured under garbage and dust.

And I sit in my apartment on the Carmel looking at the ships that sail away to sea like arms stretched out to the world, yearning for prosperity and peace. For almost 60 years I have lived in Haifa, and I find that the human facet retains its joyful coloring. Haifa has aged and lost much of its glamour, but its residents are still good neighbours, and every Saturday tourists from all over the country flock to Wadi Nisnas to witness the miracle of peaceful co-existence. The ultra-orthodox Jewish neighbourhood houses recent Russian immigrants, but no one here spits at women in short skirts; in Hadar, Jews who vote for the extreme right share houses with Arabs dedicated to the extreme left.

It still might be possible to renew the city's glamorous youth, to give to it the future of our dreams: Haifa, corner of a rectangle linking Amman, Damascus, and Beirut. Trucks loaded with goods already run from the port of Haifa to Jordan. It's a start.

**SAMI MICHAEL** was born in Baghdad in 1926. In 1948, he had to flee to Israel after he was exposed as an active member of a left-wing illegal group. He studied literature and psychology at the University of Haifa. His first novel was published in 1973 and he has continued as a prominent novelist and journalist since then.

**AVNER SHATS** is an Israeli novelist and poet. Born in Kiryat Yam (1959), he now lives in Haifa. His first publication in 1990, a short story (*Figs*), had the judges of the Haaretz short story competition convinced that its author was a young Palestinian woman. A collection of stories (*Printed Circuits*) and a novel, *Sailing towards the Sunset*, followed (1997).

**NELL ZINK** is an instructor in European Ethnology at the University of Tübingen, Germany.