CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Popular fiction has come to occupy a place of profound significance in the domain of literary creation today. It is a matter of necessity for fiction to become a commercial success. Books that become bestsellers are viewed and rated differently by various literary critics and analysts, historians, and students of societal values and behaviour. Though the characters, themes and categories vary, the one thing that these books have in common is a very high sales figure. In a survey of bestsellers from the post-war era, Karen and Barbara Hinckley state that a book is commonly called a best seller if its hardcover sales reach 100,000 copies and paperback sales 1,000,000 (3). Suzanne Ellery Greene and Robert G. Sewell, undertaking an overview of American bestsellers, distinguish the several types of best sellers which include the “fast seller” which has a relatively short but spectacular period of bestsellerdom before it fades from the scene, and the steady seller characterized by continuous popularity but never a very high rate of sales at any particular time (2). However, the true bestseller has the characteristics of both the fast seller and the steady seller. These bestsellers range from serious literature to highly intelligent escape reading, on through the ranks of formula fiction to drivel. The authors include journalists, professors, doctors, celebrities in show business, economists, priests, politicians, and so on. Bestsellers may be grouped by genre, topic, and the appeal they make to readers. Historical novels and sagas of families over several generations remain among the most popular categories. The plots are often simple, telling of a rise from rags to riches or of power struggles within the family or between rival families. Bestsellers dealing with American politics and international intrigue, as
well as those stories set in the period both during the pre-world war and post-war eras, provide the reader with a crash course in history and current affairs. Other categories include tales of horror and the supernatural, and books on Hollywood glamour. Popular literature, above all, is a powerful vehicle for the transmission of ideas, emotions and perspectives. According to Samuel M. Hines, the historical novel remains a vital source of information for contemporary Americans, rivalled only by the evening news and the occasional documentary in the short run, but more enduring and influential in the long run, with regard to the impressions left in the minds of the readers. This influence is further extended through movie adaptations (81).

Books belonging to the class of popular fiction were generally relegated to a category of popular entertainment unworthy of serious study. However, with the growing interest in popular culture, especially since the last decades of the twentieth century, bestsellers have received serious attention. Today there has been a major shift in scholarly response from limiting their scope to appreciating their literary merit, to treating them as powerful materials representative of the trends and ethos of a period as well as moulding and regulating the imaginations of the people and in the process, influencing the course of history. This is well expressed in the opinion of Samuel M. Hines that popular literature is to be understood as both cause and effect of popular attitudes, including political attitudes (83). Suzanne Ellery Greene and Robert G Sewell also note that best-sellers receive wide acceptance because they reflect their times and at the same time influence their readers to espouse new values and undertake new modes of life (1). Bestselling fiction certainly serves as an intellectual barometer for a culture. They reaffirm and often sanctify pre-existing values, and both reflect as well as create popular taste. More than ever before, we have come to recognise the potential of fiction to make thematic
realignments with the same degree of effectiveness as any other kind of imaginative writing or even history.

It is no surprise that history comes in handy to the service of writers of popular fiction. This is either the commonsense understanding of history as the panoramic sequence of events, memories and occurrences of the past, or the systematised writing and study of the above, conceived in the disciplinary sense. Fiction writers make full use of the potential of both the forms in the mental and imaginative realm, and in image-making and representation. As Peter Borsay notes, disciplinary history which was empirical in nature and which was built around the notion of social structure had been staking greater claims on the truth value of the narrative till the 1970s and 1980s. But its persuasive explanatory power in representing the past was questioned right from the moment doubts were raised regarding the status of history as a neutral medium, and so too the capacity of history in capturing public memory (http://www.accessmylibrary.com).

The divergence between history and memory has been raised in recent times by the French historians Pierre Nora and Maurice Halbwachs. The latter argues that every group develops the memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups and that these reconstructed images provide the group with an account of its origin and development and thus allow it to recognize itself through time. Halbwachs sees collective memory as an organic part of social life that is continuously transformed in response to society’s changing needs (see Zerubavel 4). Like Halbwachs, Pierre Nora believes in the spontaneity and fluidity of collective memory, which is “in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being dormant and periodically revived” (qtd in Zerubavel 4). Yael Zerubavel in her study
on Israeli collective memory however notes that history and memory do not operate in totally detached, opposite directions—that collective memory continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas, and that in the process of referring back to these records, it shifts its interpretation, selectively emphasizing, suppressing, and elaborating different aspects of that record (5). Pierre Nora finds a world-wide upsurge in memory and elaborates that over the last quarter century, every country, every social, ethnic or family group, has undergone a profound change in the relationship it traditionally enjoyed with the past. He proceeds to discern several sites of memory such as genealogy, commemorative events, museums, archives, heritage, and so on. The how and why of this “memorialism” has been examined at length by Nora. He elaborates that the change has taken a variety of forms such as the criticism of official versions of history, and recovery of areas of history previously repressed, demands for signs of a past that had been confiscated or suppressed, growing interest in “roots” and genealogical research, all kinds of commemorative events and new museums, renewed sensitivity to the holding and opening of archives for public consultation, and growing attachment to what in the English-speaking world is called “heritage” and in France “*patrimoine.*” Nora feels that these trends together make up a kind of tidal wave of memorial concerns that has broken over the world, everywhere establishing close ties between respect for the past and the sense of belonging, collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity. In short the very notion of the neutrality of ‘memory’ itself stands questioned, and sites of memory are construed as being employed to order, concentrate, and secure notions of the past. (http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html). The art of memory is further held out as a practical technique to aid the rhetorician’s systematic recall. This has been well brought out by Eric Hobsbawm in his
celebrated work, *The Invention of Tradition*, in which he recognizes the scope and intensity of commemorative traditions of the modern age, and in the process tries to distinguish custom from tradition. He characterizes customs as practices bequeathed by the past to which a society naturally has recourse for practical ends. But traditions of the nineteenth century were more artificial. They displaced historical realities with fact-like images that created the illusion of continuity with the past while in reality, such ties were being loosened. Hobsbawm concedes that there may be limits to the use of invented traditions to foster popular attachment to a sentimental past. They must in some measure be attuned to the felt needs of the communities to which they are addressed. The imposition of state-sponsored traditions with which people have no genuine attachment has, by contrast, become blatant in totalitarian politics in the twentieth century. He refers to them as “mass-produced traditions” (see Hutton 5). In short it is easy to find the role of collective memory and the narrativization of these memories as a vibrant mobilizing force. Commemorative narratives and rituals perform a significant role in establishing an overall sense of continuity of collective memory. In short it enables the historian to find memory as a resource in the mobilization of political power. In this case historical narratives can be seen as being imbued with the symbolic power of myth wherein perceptions of the past shape views of the present and visions of the future. This will necessitate the historian to set aside any equation of tradition with truth or historical fact.

The whole range of conceptual considerations discerned above and which are associated with history, memory, customs and traditions are all of crucial importance for the themes dealt with in the present study, for it seeks to explore the ways in which the ramifications of history and memory are contextualised in fictional creativity with a kind of definite purposive rationality. The study delves into the vast realm of imaginative
writings in which Leon Uris makes use of the collective memories of the Jewish community worldwide—of recovered roots, of exile and of suffering—for articulating and assigning to them a new identity and values.

This kind of an articulation done from the vantage point of the Jews is however conceived by some critics as serving the same function as mythologies, even though one could differentiate between memory and mythology as different categories. For instance, Robert Bowker looks at mythologies as narratives that shape collective consciousness and national-cultural identity, and which seek to anchor the present in the past. It is further construed that since people need images that give meaning to the facts of ordinary life and assist them in organizing experience into social and cultural contexts, mythologies are an integral part of any society. Collective memory however has been described as the type of history carried around in the heads of ordinary people, rather than as recorded history. The former may be shaped or reinforced by deeply meaningful memories of personal or familial experience. When collective memories—real or imagined—and experiences are combined deliberately to mobilize energies in pursuit of particular political agendas, however, the result can be the creation or activation of political mythologies of considerable potency (Bowker 12-14).

The place of collective memory in the Jewish ethos and the shaping of national tradition have been dealt with in detail by Yael Zerubavel in her work Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition. Zerubavel here explores how a society of immigrants, engaged in constructing a distinct national identity and culture, recreated its roots in the past and how these collective memories of recovered roots became a driving force for change and a means of articulating new values and ideas. Drawing on a broad range of official and popular sources and original interviews, Zerubavel shows that the construction of a new
national tradition is not necessarily the product of government policy, but a creative collaboration between politicians, writers and educators. In other words, she finds the selective remembering and forgetting from one generation to another of collective memories to be of considerable effect in reconstructing Israel’s national memories and traditions. She adds that the power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance. That process involved both commemorations, and popular narrative and ceremonial devices, and the interpretation, ordering, and deliberate suppression and elaboration of particular information or themes (see Zerubavel 3-12). The Jews have been found to be making use of collective memory as a site for recalling past injustices perpetrated on them, with the firm resolve of having them rectified, for which the works of Uris provide powerful manifestations.

It is an important consideration in the present study that political mythologies also might reflect ideology and political agendas—especially when used for providing legitimization for existing practices or for serving particular ideological interests. In the case of Israel, mythologies and memories together have been put to wide use as a mobilizing agent to galvanize commitment or identification with the nation-building process, and further, for the creation and expansion of a Greater Jewish State. Zerubavel points out that the Zionist nationalist movement from Herzl onwards would have had little prospect of success, even among Jewry in Europe, without harnessing such powerful myths as the ingathering of the exiled, the up-building of Zion as a model society, the creation of a New Hebrew or Jewish “type” and an overarching vision of national redemption (see Zerubavel 3-31). The deliberate use, perpetuation and manipulation of political mythology by institutions perform political functions, and
collective memory helps to construct a distinct national identity and culture. Mythologies have starting points in real or imagined events. In short it is these imaginings that lend its character to the political configurations and identities. They act as the specific means by which contemporary realities are understood and explained. Political mythologies work well through every literary medium, through religious writings, newspapers and periodicals, works on political philosophy or even on physical geography or academic history. But it is in a perfect mix of hard historical data and bizarre fiction that imaginations are raised to extreme heights. The nation as a political artefact then becomes real in the imaginary experience and the imaginings would as well heighten its reality.

Of the various writers who have successfully employed mnemonic schemes in historical interpretation and engaged the significance of tradition as a foundation of the historian’s curiosity about the past, we find Leon Uris as a prolific fiction writer who uses Jewish collective memory with profound effectiveness for the making of social power towards the cause of a Pan-Jewish Nation. The manner in which Uris appropriates memory and history in depicting such episodes as the making of Jewish settlements in Palestine, their sufferings in the diaspora culminating in the holocaust, the series of Arab-Israeli conflicts over Palestine, etc. is examined in the present study for a critical evaluation of the various levels at which the fictional appropriation of memory and history acted and interacted with popular imaginings in Jewish world—both within the spatial bounds of the State of Israel and without.

In the context of mounting tensions in the Middle East, it was possible for ingenious writers to cash in on the curiosity of even those readers who remained well outside the Jewish/Israeli sphere of influence. But for the Jewish community, the novels of Leon Uris at once served to uphold and legitimise Jewish/Israeli actions and strategies in the backdrop
of the political contingencies, ever since the state formation—both on a
long-term and short-term basis. This makes it imperative to look at two of
the ways in which the historical experiences of the Jews and the
appropriation of history have been carried out. In the first place the
historical background of the Jewish/Israeli experiences centring round the
formation of the state of Israel is a major input in Uris’s novels. These are
incidentally the novels in which the Arab-Israeli conflict and the ‘holocaust
experience’ of the Jews occupy the central stage. It is premised that
questions of Uris’s identity and self-consciousness on the one hand, and the
themes and historical contexts of these novels on the other, cannot be dealt
with in mutual exclusion. Secondly, it is even more necessary to look at the
particular point of time in which events of the past were evoked. It is to be
reiterated that, as important as the things of the past invoked, are the
specific moments in which they are invoked. In other words we may also
examine the compelling circumstances under which the novels taken up for
study in the present endeavour were written. These comprise a wide variety
of complex themes and issues which had significant bearing on
international power relations connected directly or indirectly with the
nation state of Israel. The biographical sketch of the author as well as the
historical and historiographical dimensions of the events depicted in the
novels relevant for the study are drawn below.

Leon Marcus Uris was born on August 3rd 1924 in Baltimore,
Maryland, as the second child of Wolf William and Anna Uris. Both his
parents were Jews of Russian-Polish origin. His mother was a first-
generation American and his father an immigrant from Poland to the
United States after World War I. Uris’ identification with the Jews evolved
very strongly at the end of World War II. According to his own words, the
plight of the Jews is one major injustice that Uris attempts to resolve. “I
realized,” says Uris in his personal interview with Sharon Downey and
Richard A. Kallan, “how isolated and vulnerable we were and how unjust the whole thing was. I was really incensed at the world’s attitude—that the world doesn’t care about genocide…. It seemed to be a terribly evil thing that the Jews after being beaten up and knocked around for two thousand years, were condemned by the world as soon as they took their survival into their own hands” (see Uris interview in Downey and Kallan 194). Thus, addressing what he calls “the great American public,” Uris wrote five novels about the Jewish experience, *Exodus, Mila 18, Armageddon, QB VII* and *The Haj*, besides two works of non-fiction, *Exodus Revisited* and *Jerusalem Song of Songs*.

It is true that of all the works of Uris, those referred to above had wider appeal. This raises some crucial questions. Over and above the common themes connected with the Jewish experience, what were the narrative techniques which captivated the readers? Equally pertinent is the question of the precise timing of the publication of the above novels, for it is found that these novels came out when American public opinion as well as U S policies were not very much in favour of the aggressive Israeli campaigns and assertions against her Arab neighbours. It may be true that West Asia having always remained a hotbed of conflicts and tensions throughout history, themes on such a region naturally evoked public attention. But Palestine was a special case altogether, in that the ‘Holy Land’ occupied a unique place in the life-world of the American Christians. A sequential account of the events which were relevant to the Jewish population and which were associated with the formation of the State of Israel and the nature and stages of its expansion are recounted here for a critical grasp of the political contingencies that impelled the production of Uris’ novels.

As early as the 19th century, Jews had been making efforts to establish a national state in Palestine. Immigration to Palestine was seen as
the most suitable and natural solution to the problems of the Jews who lay scattered in various countries around the world, and where they invariably remained a minority. The Zionist solution was to end this anomalous existence, and their deprivation and dependence on others, to return to Zion, and to attain majority status there and, ultimately, political independence and statehood. What provided the strongest ground for the establishment of a Jewish state was the most gruelling experience which came to be referred to as the holocaust. By ‘holocaust’, is meant the systematic state-sponsored killing of Jewish men, women and children by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during the Second World War. Hitler’s persecution of Jews in Germany had begun soon after he became Chancellor. Initially the Nazis called for a boycott of Jewish business and Jews were dismissed from the civil service. Later, under the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, Jews lost their citizenship as well. By 1938 they were imprisoned in concentration camps and forced into ghettos. German victories in the early years of the war brought most of European Jewry under the control of the Nazis and their satellites. Jews from all over Occupied Europe were systematically evacuated to concentration and extermination camps, where they were either killed or forced into slave labour. Concentration camp prisoners were even made to serve as the raw material for medical experiments by SS doctors. The holocaust climaxed in the “final solution,” the attempted extermination of European Jewry. By the end of the war, around six million Jews were estimated to have been killed by Nazi Germany and its collaborators (Britannica 53). The commitment to Jewish statehood became deeper or more desperate in the shadow of the holocaust. On the one hand the holocaust confirmed the conviction of the Zionists that they had justice on their side in the struggle for Palestine; on the other it converted international public opinion to the idea of an independent Jewish state.
On 29th November 1947 the General Assembly of the United Nations passed its historic Resolution 181 in favour of the partition of Palestine. The Resolution laid down a timetable for the establishment of a Jewish state and an Arab state linked by economic union, and an international regime for Jerusalem. Exceptionally long and winding borders separated the Jewish state from the Arab one, with vulnerable crossing points to link its isolated areas in the eastern Galilee, the coastal plain, and the Negev (see appended maps 1 and 2). No less anomalous was the demographic structure of the proposed Jewish state, consisting as it did, of roughly 500,000 Jews and 400,000 Arabs.

Despite all its limitations and anomalies, the UN resolution represented a major triumph for Zionist diplomacy. While falling far short of the full-blown Zionist aspiration for a state comprising the whole of Palestine and Jerusalem, it provided an invaluable charter of international legitimacy for the creation of an independent Jewish state. In spite of their grave doubts about the viability of the Jewish state within the UN borders, their dislike of an independent Palestinian state and disappointment over the exclusion of Jerusalem, the Jewish Agency accepted the partition plan.

The Palestinian Arabs, who unlike the Jews had done very little to prepare themselves for statehood, rejected the UN partition plan outright. The Arab Higher Committee, which represented them, denounced the plan as “absurd, impracticable, and unjust” (see Shlaim 27). The Arab states, loosely organized since 1945 in the Arab League, also claimed that the UN plan was illegal and threatened to resist its implementation by force. The UN vote in favour of partition, along with providing international legitimacy for creating Jewish and Arab states, also paved the way for a savage war between the two communities in Palestine (see Shlaim 24-31).

The Dalet Plan, prepared by the Haganah chiefs, was a major landmark in the development of the Jewish offensive strategy to secure all
the areas allocated to the Jewish state under the UN Partition resolution as well as Jewish settlements outside these areas and corridors leading to them, so as to provide a solid and continuous basis for Jewish sovereignty. Palestinian society disintegrated under the impact of the Jewish military offensive, and the exodus of the Palestinian Arabs was set in motion. According to Israeli historian Avi Shlaim, there were many reasons for the Palestinian exodus, including the early departure of the Palestinian leaders when the going got tough, but the most important reason was Jewish military pressure. Shlaim further notes that the Dalet Plan was not merely a political blueprint for the expulsion of Palestine’s Arabs, but a plan with military and territorial objectives, and that by ordering the capture of Arab cities and the destruction of villages it both permitted and justified the forcible expulsion of Arab civilians (31).

On 14th May 1948, the State of Israel was established in Palestine. In the Declaration of Independence, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion chose not to indicate the borders of the new state to leave open the possibility of expansion beyond the UN borders. The state of Israel was born in the midst of a war with the Arabs of Palestine and the neighbouring Arab states. This war, which Israelis call the War of independence and Arabs call al-Nakba, or the disaster, had two phases. The first phase lasted from 29 November 1947, when the UN passed the partition resolution, until 14 May 1948 when the state of Israel was proclaimed. The second phase lasted from 15 May 1948 until the termination of hostilities on 7th January 1949. The first and unofficial phase of the war, between the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine, ended in triumph for the Jews and tragedy for the Palestinians. The second and official phase, involving the regular armies of the neighbouring Arab states, also ended in a Jewish victory and a comprehensive Arab defeat.
Few countries of the world have inspired the amount of political coverage and controversy as Israel. For some, Israel has been an inspirational example of state building, achieving in just half a century, a level of political and economic development well beyond the grasp of other newly independent states. For others it is a far less admirable example of a colonial outpost, constructed at the expense of a dispossessed indigenous population, and maintaining an aggressive posture. The conventional Zionist version of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war is that of a simple, bipolar struggle between a monolithic Arab adversary and a tiny Israel. According to this version, seven Arab armies invaded Palestine upon expiration of the British Mandate, to destroy the Jewish state. This popular heroic-moralistic version depicts the infant Jewish state as fighting a desperate, heroic, and ultimately successful battle for survival against overwhelming odds. The flight of the Palestinians to the neighbouring Arab states is here shown to be in response to the orders given by their leaders. Further, the Zionist version also talks about Arab intransigence in rejecting Israel’s peace overtures which in turn is said to have brought about the political deadlock that has persisted decades after the Arab-Israeli wars. (see for instance, Sachar, Gilbert, Lochery). However, the pro-Zionist account of the birth of the State of Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the first Arab-Israeli war stand contested by Israeli revisionist historians such as Simha Flapan, Ilan Pappe and Avi Shlaim. According to Avi Shlaim, this popular version of the 1948 war, used extensively in Israeli propaganda and taught in Israeli schools, stands as a prime example of the use of a nationalist version of history in the process of nation building (34). It is also pointed out that, contrary to the Zionist version, which depicts the Arab armed forces as having overwhelming numerical superiority in their encounter with Israel during the 1948 war, the Israeli Defence Forces significantly outnumbered all the Arab forces arrayed against it, and that by the final stage of the war
its superiority ratio was nearly two to one (see Shlaim 35). The final outcome of the war was therefore not a miracle but a reflection of the underlying Arab-Israeli military balance where the stronger side ultimately prevailed. In the course of the war Israel had expanded its territory from the 55 percent of mandatory Palestine allocated to it by the United Nations, to 79 percent (see appended map 3). Israel also succeeded in expelling all the Arab forces from Palestine with the exception of the Arab Legion, which remained in control of the West Bank. This sealed the fate of the UN plan for an independent Palestinian state. The Palestinians were left out in the cold and the name Palestine was erased from the map.

As a direct consequence of the displacement and dispossession of around 700,000 Palestinians in the course of the 1948 war, came the infiltration of Arab civilians across the armistice lines drawn in the summer of 1949. The motives behind it were largely social and economic rather than political or military. According to Cheryl A. Rubenberg, as the war ended, many Palestinian refugees tried to return to their original homes and villages to retrieve movable property or find lost relatives. To cope with this threat, Israel established new settlements along the borders, razed abandoned Arab villages, and gave Arab homes in towns like Jaffa and Haifa to new immigrants from Europe. Israeli units began patrolling the borders, laying ambushes, placing land mines, and setting booby traps. A “free fire” policy towards infiltrators was adopted. Rubenberg also notes that Israel was not content with stopping infiltrations through killing individual infiltrators. Instead it adopted a policy of massive retaliation that involved striking at the villages and areas from which Israel claimed the infiltrators had come—places that lay inside the boundaries of neighbouring states. These forays across the armistice lines were carried out by Israeli Defence Forces units against Arab villages suspected of helping infiltrators. In effect they were a form of collective punishment
against whole villages, the victims often being innocent civilians. The raids were conducted at night, were aimed at civilian targets, and violated the sovereignty of the Arab states (The Palestinians 15). However, the official Israeli line was that Palestinian infiltration into Israel was aided and abetted by the Arab governments following the defeat of their regular armies on the battlefield; that it was a form of undeclared guerrilla warfare designed to weaken and destroy the infant Jewish state; that Israel was thus the innocent victim of Arab provocation and aggression, and that its military reprisals were a legitimate form of self-defence (see Shlaim 84).

The Sinai War of 1956 is often viewed as proof of the expansionist character of the Zionist Movement. The IDF achieved a complete victory within a few days, capturing Gaza and the whole of the Sinai Peninsula. In his victory speech at the Knesset on 7th November, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion announced triumphantly that Israel would not hand over Sinai to foreign forces and even hinted that Israel planned to annex the Straits of Tiran as well. Ben-Gurion’s grand design included Israeli expansion to the Suez canal and Sharm el-Sheikh in the south, to the Jordan river in the east, and to the Litani river in the north (see Shlaim 184). The arrogant tone of the speech caused much anger and antipathy outside Israel, not least among American Jews. Israel’s reputation was seriously tarnished. Israel’s euphoria over the speed and scope of her military victory was short lived. No sooner had the campaign ended than Israel was subjected to heavy pressure from both the United States and the Soviet Union to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip which it had occupied. The Soviet Union warned that it was prepared to use force to restore peace in the Middle East. Further, President Eisenhower, in a personal note to Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion, expressed U.S concern over Israeli actions and warned that Israeli rejection of the United Nations appeal to withdraw their forces from Egyptian
Territory would impair friendly co-operation between the two countries (Middle East 157).

Israel feared international isolation in the aftermath of the Sinai Campaign, especially in the face of the growing danger represented by the Soviet Union. It was feared that the Soviet Union would try to extend its influence in the region by supporting and arming the radical Arab regimes most hostile to Israel. Against this danger there was a limit to what Israel could do on its own. Israel was up against a world power and therefore had to have a world power on its side. From the US, Israel hoped to obtain arms, political backing and a security guarantee. However, American policy was to keep the military balance of power from being upset, and they declined to become its chief arms supplier. According to historian Avi Shlaim, this was necessitated by the following factors. The United States wanted Arab support for their global policy of containment against the Soviet Union and thought they had a better chance of achieving this on their own than in alliance with Israel. Oil was another factor. The Americans kept Israel at arm’s length in order to ensure easy access to Arab oil. Thus thanks to the Cold war and their oil, the bargaining power of the Arabs was going up while that of Israel was going down. The Western powers were courting the Arabs rather than Israel (see Shlaim 186-91).

What is to be inferred from the above account is that this was a stage when United States public opinion was definitely not weighed in favour of Israel. The writing of Leon Uris’ Exodus and Mila 18 are to be viewed in the backdrop of the historical context discussed above.

The Six-Day War of 1967—the most spectacular military victory in Israel’s history—ended with Israel in occupation of the entire Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The victory reopened the old question about the territorial aims of Zionism. This question had been settled by the 1949 armistice agreements, and the armistice lines were
reconfirmed in the aftermath of the Sinai Campaign. By 1967 it had become clear that the Zionist Movement could realise all its essential aims within the 1949 borders. Now, following a war seen by the overwhelming majority of Israelis as a defensive war, as a war of no choice, they were in control of Sinai, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank. The annexation of East Jerusalem was the first and most dramatic assertion of Israel’s claim to sovereignty over its ancient homeland (see appended map 4). Zion, one of the ancient names for Jerusalem, was at the heart of the Zionist dream for the restoration of a Jewish kingdom in Palestine. The members of the Knesset who voted for the annexation of East Jerusalem had no doubt about Israel’s moral claim to the whole of Jerusalem. As for peace, they believed that it could be attained only from a position of strength—by demonstrating to the Arabs that Israel could not be defeated (see Hirst 218-25).

In October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a combined military attack on Israel. The day chosen for the attack was the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Despite early Arab success the conflict ended inconclusively.

Two strands in Israeli policy led to the full-scale invasion of Lebanon in June 1982: the alliance with the Lebanese Christians and a desire to destroy the Palestine Liberation Organization by destroying its guerrilla bases in southern Lebanon and driving the guerrillas to the north of the country, as far away as possible from Israel’s own border. However, Israel’s steady intensification of the siege of Beirut and the artillery, aerial, and naval bombardment of Beirut provoked unrest within the army, political protest at home, and mounting international criticism culminating in the United States’ demand for an immediate halt to the shelling of Beirut. After seventy five days of heavy fighting, the PLO was banished from its stronghold in Lebanon to the periphery of the Arab world. However, President Ronald Reagan unveiled a new peace plan for the
Middle East which would provide a solution to the problem of Palestinian homelessness. His plan was for self-government by the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan. Additional Israeli settlements in the territories would be an obstacle to peace, said Reagan, and the status of Jerusalem had still to be decided (Shlaim 415). The message was clear: the United States had rejected the Israeli claim for permanent control over the West Bank and Gaza. The United States acknowledged that Israel was entitled to security along its northern border, but not that it had a right to territorial expansion at the expense of the Palestinians.

The assassination of Bashir Gemayel, the newly elected President of Lebanon after the war, upset Israel’s plan for a new political order, that is, the prospect of a stable pro-Israeli regime in Lebanon. The assassination was used as a pretext for sending Israeli forces into West Beirut the following day to take up the areas formerly held by the PLO. Ariel Sharon, the then Minister of Defence, ordered the IDF commanders to allow the Phalangists to enter the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila on the south side of Beirut in order to “clean out” the terrorists who he claimed were lurking there. Inside the camps the Christian militia men perpetrated a terrible massacre, killing hundreds of men, women and children. While Israel estimated the number of dead at seven to eight hundred, the Palestinian Red Crescent put the number at over two thousand. The carnage went on for four days. Although Israeli soldiers had got wind of the massacre not long after dropping their Phalangist allies outside the camps, they did nothing to stop the carnage. Israeli leaders including Prime Minister Menachem Begin hoped that by dealing a mortal blow to the PLO in Lebanon all effective Palestinian resistance to the imposition of permanent Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza would come to an end. But far from relegating the Palestinian problem to the side
lines, the war in Lebanon, and especially the massacre in Sabra and Shatila, served to focus international attention on the need to find a solution to this problem. The war triggered a shift in American policy from acceptance of autonomy for the Palestinians in accordance with the Camp David Accords to the Reagan plan, which called for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, to make way for a Palestinian homeland in association with Jordan (see Shlaim 407-18).

It is to be noted that public support for Israel in the United States has remained fairly constant over time, although there was an increase during and immediately after the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. But the massacre of Palestinian refugees at Sabra and Shatila seemed to have brought about a significant change in American attitudes towards Israel. This was reflected in a poll conducted by Gallup and reported in Newsweek on October 4, 1982 (see Reich 188). It showed that US sympathies were about evenly divided between Israel and the Arab states. This was the first time that Israel was not heavily favoured, and much of the change seemed to be related to the massacres. Elements in US opinion seemed to hold Israel accountable for the policies of Begin and Sharon in Lebanon. Americans were chagrined by the casualties and losses resulting from the war and the aggressiveness of Israeli actions, as well as the massacres at Sabra and Shatila. Extensive media coverage, particularly on network television, of the Israeli actions in Beirut affected Israel’s standing in US eyes. Support for Israel was now down and sympathy for the Arabs was up (see Reich 187-89).

The publication of Uris’ The Haj in 1984 is to be viewed in the context of Israel’s brutal and eventually self-defeating occupation of Lebanon when even staunch supporters of the Jewish state seriously questioned the legitimacy of its policies and its continued harassment of Palestinians. The book apparently had tremendous influence on the
American public, if the popularity of the book is any indication of the same. The book remained on the bestseller list for many weeks, was selected by literary guilds across the country, and was reprinted in paperback form in 1985 (see Manganaro 11). Uris himself makes the explicit claim that his intention in writing the book was to warn the Western world of the potential dangers that could emanate from the Islamic world, which could eventually turn out to be as disastrous as a nuclear holocaust (see Fuller 7).

It is not simply the regard for the newly formed Jewish State of Israel that captured the imagination of Uris’ readers, but certain questions of contemporary relevance for US foreign policy. For a citizenry that was riding on the crest of jubilant waves in the Cold World War Era, these were questions at once baffling and urgent to the American citizenry and the author alike. It was quite explicable that the unique relationship between Israel and the United States came in handy as a double-edged weapon. While the American reading public would make his novels great successes, the novels presented in palatable and irresistible eloquence would make thematic realignments in American minds in favour of the Jews and work towards garnering diplomatic, economic, military, emotional and ideological support from the United States, for the Jewish State.

For an appreciation of the various ways in which history and memory are contextualised in Uris’ novels it is also necessary to look at the trajectory of the special/unique relationship between Israel and the United States. This would also serve to highlight the role of Uris’ novels in making the image of a heroic Jewish Israel crystallize in the popular mind. It is the image of the Jewish state struggling to maintain its territorial integrity and sovereignty against an aggressive Arab world. It is no surprise that the books could influence American public opinion as well as manipulate foreign policy decisions in the United States.
The United States and Israel have been linked in a special relationship that existed even prior to the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. According to Nadav Safran, American-Israeli relations have gone through three phases connected with American strategic interests in the Middle East as a whole, and the Arab countries in particular. The first phase, extending from the end of 1947 to about the end of 1951, was marked by American support of Israel on practically all the vital issues affecting that country, including the partition resolution, recognition of the Jewish state, condemnation of Arab aggression, opposition to plans aimed at reducing the territory allocated to Israel by the partition resolution, support for Israel’s claims to territories acquired beyond the partition boundaries, a security guarantee covering the territory occupied by Israel, and a promise to provide her with arms on an equal footing with the Arab states given in conjunction with the British and the French.

The second phase was marked by a mounting strain in American-Israeli relations as the United States assumed an active role alongside Britain in trying to secure the Middle East for the Western camp. Israeli pleas against specific American measures deemed harmful, such as granting military aid to Arab states and seeking military alliances with them, or for specific American measures to reinforce Israel’s threatened security such as signing an alliance with her or selling her arms to counter massive Egyptian rearmament, foundered repeatedly against the determination of the American government to draw the Arab countries into a regional alliance under the aegis of the West, and to avoid anything that might hamper the attainment of this goal.

The third phase in American-Israeli relations saw increasing American support for the Jewish state (see Safran 283-85). Though American backing for Israel’s war effort in 1967 was not public and forthright, it was nevertheless very strong. According to Cheryl A.
Rubenberg, the most important outcome of the June War was that Israel’s military victory validated the thesis that Israel could function as a strategic asset to the United States in the Middle East. The belief about Israel’s strategic utility was expressed in US policy through the provision of virtually unlimited quantities of economic assistance and military equipment, and in American support for virtually every Israeli foreign policy objective. A second major outcome of the war was the rapidly increasing activism of American-Jews on behalf of Israel. Pro-Israeli forces acquired power and influence within the American political system. The pro-Israeli effort was directed at generating economic and military assistance for Israel, and creating and maintaining an image of Israel as a struggling, democratic little country—America’s only friend in the Middle East—facing nearly insurmountable odds against aggressive, warlike Arabs, ever poised to bring about its destruction (Israel and American National Interest 126-27). Examining the role of pro-Israeli groups in the formation of American Middle East policy, Rubenberg also notes that the existence of an intensely emotionally committed and active group of pro-Israeli individuals in the United States has given Israel a tremendous advantage in the effort to win the hearts and minds of Americans. Their effort has been assisted by the reservoir of American guilt and obligation that has existed in the wake of the holocaust and the concomitant lack of understanding Americans have had for Arabs, due partly to the ineffectiveness of Arab efforts at communicating their perspective, but also to traditional American ignorance of, and hostility toward, the Arab world, Islam, and the Orient in general. The pro-Israeli sympathy of Americans and the favourable images of Israel in the country have been carefully cultivated by pro-Israeli groups in a myriad of ways, the most successful being the constant invocation of the holocaust and the spectre of anti-Semitism whenever criticism of Israel came up. The efforts of pro-Israeli
groups in propagating a positive image of Israel and the Jews, while running
down the Arabs and Islam has been particularly apparent in the media which
have consistently accorded Israel favourable treatment. The media have
especially functioned to transmit and buttress official policies on US-Israeli
relations, to reinforce commonly held American stereotypes of the Arab
world, and to idealize Israel and exempt it from criticism (335-37).

We may now proceed to focus on the general themes of the novels
of Uris, with special emphasis on the five novels related to the Jewish
experience. From the first printing of *Battle Cry*—Uris’ first novel based on
his experiences in the US Marine Corps—the author has never looked back.
Each successive novel has achieved some measure of popular success, with
a few becoming blockbusters. In spite of the partisan politics that
dominates his tales, Uris’ ability to incorporate history into a fictional tale
and to keep the action moving throughout his sprawling commentary
covering enormous territory accounts for his popular appeal. Uris started
research for his *Exodus* as a new project with single-minded devotion and
resoluteness, to novelize the establishment of Israel as a nation. The project
was clearly new to Uris, who wrote that his “first awakening to a Jewish
conscience came… during the Arab-Israel war” (qtd. in Lovett-Graff 440).
Uris makes no secret of his intentions. He admits that although he was
strange to Jewish life, he wanted to be proud of his people and that he
wanted to write a book about Jews and be able to face a Jewish audience
afterwards. Because he lacked a formal Jewish education or a speaking
knowledge of Hebrew, the obstacles set before him were formidable. Uris
set himself to the task of researching his topic for the next two years,
reading over three hundred books on Israel and the Middle East, travelling
around twelve thousand miles inside Israel alone, going through Arab and
Jewish towns, over a hundred frontier farms and many co-operative
settlements, taking more than a thousand photographs and conducting
hundreds of interviews (see Lovett-Graff 440). Exodus, published in 1958, shortly after Israel’s Sinai Campaign, has as its central theme the struggle for the creation of the state of Israel. Uris here attempts to put this struggle in historical perspective by linking it with the persecution of the Jews through history and most particularly with the Nazi onslaught on the Jewish people. Exodus deals with the struggles of the Jews towards the establishment and defence of the state of Israel. The birth of the new nation is depicted through several characters, but the story of Kitty Fremont, an American nurse, and Ari Ben Canaan, an Israeli freedom fighter, forms the nucleus of the story. The novel also includes several historical sections where the author discusses such issues as the origins of the Zionist Movement, European anti-Semitism down the ages—from the Middle Ages to the Nazi extermination of the Jews in Europe—Jewish immigration to Palestine from the 19th century onwards, the establishment of kibbutzim and moshavim across the land, the UN Partition Vote and Israel’s declaration of statehood, as well as Israel’s war against the Arab states, and the Palestinian refugee crisis. Exodus sold millions of copies around the world after its publication by Doubleday in 1958 and is counted among the major publishing successes of all time. Exodus ranked first on the New York Times best seller list for nineteen straight weeks, remained near the top of the list for over a year, and has gone into several reprints. The novel was immediately translated into some fifty languages including a Russian samizdat version. Stephen J. Whitfield notes that Exodus was published in an era when American-Jewish interest in Israel was slight and when ethnicity was muted or disdained as an embarrassing vestige of the receding immigrant past, and that there has been no precedent—for an American novelist to produce a Zionist epic that would create a publishing sensation. The year Doubleday released Exodus, former Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion himself asserted: “As a piece of
propaganda, it’s the greatest thing ever written about Israel” (qtd in Whitfield 666). In spite of the chauvinistic mood of the novel, its melodramatic plot, stock characters and low literary value, the social significance of the novel cannot be dismissed. According to Louis Harap, it reinforced a lively awareness of the depth of Nazi criminality among both Jews and non-Jews, and helped arouse in the younger generation which had not lived through the Nazi period, a lively sense of the bestiality of Nazism (40). Regarding its propaganda value, Darren Garnick notes that even Uris’ harshest critics begrudgingly acknowledge the impact of his unapologetic advocacy of Israel (50). Jack G. Shaheen sees *Exodus* as the turning point for ‘apathetic’ Americans later embracing the Israeli cause—that it did more to popularize Israel with the American public than any other single presentation through the media. Uris, he writes, solidified America’s impressions of Israelis as heroes, and of Arabs as villains (qtd. in Garnick 50).

Though the novel’s representation of the complex conflict between Arabs and Israelis seems too simplistic, *Exodus* remains a good example of the argument that it is works of popular literature, with all their shortcomings, that influence history far more than do more highly regarded works of literary fiction. The work’s real impact lay beyond mere literature. According to Charles Paul Freund, the plot of the novel and its movie adaptation became for a great many people the popular template for understanding the Middle East, especially issues involving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Uris popularized Israel as a place of righteous refuge, solidifying a link between the holocaust and Israel. Freund adds further that no one, neither Palestinians nor other Arabs, nor any of their allies elsewhere in the world, had managed to generate a narrative myth powerful enough to counter the one that Uris had helped generate (http://www.reason.com/news/show/33645.html).
The various translations of *Exodus* attracted a large readership in Israel. The specific model which Uris chose, “American-style melodrama,” was very popular in Israel, as evidenced by the lists of offerings from the local publishing houses and from surveys conducted at that time (see Weissbrod 142). Uris took advantage of the trademark characteristics of the melodrama—with its focus on external rather than internal conflict, hyperbolically drawn black-and-white characters, and allegiance to accepted tenets—to paint a glowing portrait of the Zionist enterprise. Regarding the reception of the novel in Israel, Rachel Weissbrod notes thus:

> When *Exodus* was published, Israel was celebrating the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the State in the shadow of severe social problems. The novel bolstered Israeli national pride at a time when the nation apparently was in need of just this, and it joined the ranks of original Israeli works that …trumpeted the achievements of the young State. (142-43)

The following instance would further suffice to illustrate the tremendous impact of Uris’ work on the Jewish collective imagination. As Israel celebrated its sixtieth anniversary, the country’s journalists, pundits and bloggers amused themselves by nominating individuals for the title of the quintessential *sabra*. Former Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon and Yitzhak Rabin were in the running, as was Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli in space. However, several leading cultural critics named Ari Ben Canaan, the hero of Leon Uris’ novel *Exodus* — immortalized on screen by Paul Newman—as Israel’s most representative son. The adoration of Ben Canaan culminated in a fiftieth anniversary celebration of *Exodus* held in June 2008 at Jerusalem’s prestigious Cinematheque. That a fictional character should exercise such a strong grasp on the collective imagination of a country speaks volumes regarding the tremendous social impact of the...
novel. For years, *Exodus* was screened on Israeli television each Passover as well as on the eve of the nation’s celebration of freedom (Leibovitz, (http://www.nextbook.org/cultural/feature>).

For the plot of the novel, Uris has drawn heavily from historical events and personalities. As William Darby observes,

*Exodus* contains so much historical and political data that it becomes a chronicle of contemporary Judaism rather than a mere fiction….All of this background and reports of the events of 1946-1948 that concern the settlement of Palestine make *Exodus* a means by which the casual reader can assimilate major contemporary world affairs, an everyman’s guide to the Arab-Israeli struggle as it were (94).

Another historical event, on which the plot of *Exodus* is loosely based, includes the sensational confrontation at Haifa, between Jewish immigrants from post-war Europe seeking to enter Palestine illegally on the ship Exodus, and British soldiers forcefully removing them from the ship. Sue Cameron, in “Cowboy Zionist who led the Exodus,” relates how nearing Haifa, the ship loaded with more than 4500 Jewish refugees—many of them holocaust survivors—was pursued by British warships mounting a blockade to stop the refugees from landing. Yossi Harel, the commander of the ship, raised the blue and white Star of David, soon to be Israel’s national flag, while loudspeakers played the *Hatikvah*. When the British shot across the ship’s bows and sent troops to board, it was Harel who led the fierce resistance by the unarmed passengers and crew. When the British took the wheelhouse Harel surrendered—against the wishes of the ship’s captain Yehiel Aranowicz—so as to save lives. However, the impact on public opinion was even greater than Harel might have hoped. Media coverage picturing brutish British soldiers manhandling weak, helpless, bedraggled Jews helped win unprecedented sympathy for the
Zionist cause at a time when the United Nations was deciding whether to partition Palestine between the Arabs and Jews (www.freerepublic.com/tag/exodus/index). According to Donald Neff, reverberations of the Exodus episode did not stop here. In the early 1950’s, Edward Gottlieb, an American public relations man, hit upon the idea of hiring a writer to go to Israel and write a heroic novel about the new country with a view to improving the image of the newly created state, in the United States. The writer chosen was Leon Uris, and the novel, *Exodus* (46). Uris has also drawn heavily on the exploits of Yehuda Arazi, a *Mossad* agent who had operated illegal Zionist ships in the Mediterranean under the British Mandate and who had drawn considerable press attention to the plight of Jewish refugees (see Whitfield 669).

A highly successful film version of *Exodus*, starring Paul Newman and Eva-Marie Saint, was produced in 1960. The film directed by Otto Preminger, presents the Arabs and the British in a less negative light and highlights the message of peace and brotherhood by toning down the hostility between the Jews and the two enemy groups, the British and the Arabs. Preminger spoke openly of this departure from the novel during the film’s public relations campaign (see Weissbrod 139). Preminger’s movie version, the script of which was written by Dalton Trumbo, highlights the plight of Jewish refugees from post-war Europe interned by the British on the island of Cyprus and denied entry into Palestine. The movie version highlights the need for a Jewish homeland and the efforts of the Jews towards the establishment of an independent self-sufficient state, and avoids much of the anti-Arab propaganda discerned in Uris’ novel.

After *Exodus*, Uris travelled throughout Eastern Europe and produced a book of photographs in collaboration with Dimitrios Harissiadis, entitled *Exodus Revisited*, a documentary of places mentioned in his bestseller. For his next novel *Mila 18*, set against the background of
the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising against the Nazis, Uris collected material from the Memorial Archives in Warsaw and interviewed several survivors of the Holocaust (Shine Cain 3). In Mila 18 Uris tells the story of the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto and the final liquidation of the ghetto during World War II. Details regarding the plight of the thousands of Jews herded into the overcrowded, walled areas without adequate sanitation facilities, food or clothing, and suffering from malnutrition, disease and Nazi brutality, are drawn with intense vividness in the novel, in the form of Journal entries by Alexander Brandel, a philosopher-Zionist. As in Exodus, the initial chapters of the novel contain historical accounts of Jewish settlement in East Europe, anti-Semitism in Poland, and the rise of the Zionist Movement. The story of the German Occupation of Poland, Nazi efforts towards the extermination of the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Jewish resistance to it, which according to Uris lasted for forty two days, are all told through the viewpoints of the major characters Andrei Androfsky, Paul and Deborah Bronsky, Christopher de Monti, Alexander Brandel and Gabriela Rak. Mila 18 further enhanced Uris’ stature among popular American novelists. According to Midge Decter, Uris had become “the master chronicler and ambassador of Jewish aspiration not only to the Gentiles but to Jews themselves,” and that it was unlikely that more than a handful of literate Americans had not either read one of his Jewish novels or been engaged in at least one passionate discussion about him with someone who had. Decter further notes that “for his readers, particularly his Jewish readers, he has created the possibility of seeing Jews not as the troublesome and incomprehensible heroes that decent social conscience has always demanded, but as the kind of heroes that middle-class dream life has conditioned us all to make our most immediate responses to” (358).

Armageddon, published in 1964, deals mainly with the rebuilding of post-war Germany and the Berlin airlift. Though the major theme of the
book is the emerging Soviet “threat” and the resultant Cold War, Uris also focuses on Nazi atrocities in World War II. As in the other novels Uris acquaints the readers with the horrors of the concentration camps and also speculates on the German quest to establish a master race. *QB VII*, Uris’ 1970 novel is based on a libel suit filed against Uris himself by Dr. Władisław Dering who had been mentioned in *Exodus* as having performed seventeen thousand experiments in surgery without anaesthetic. Dering technically “won” because Uris had overstated the number of operations performed by the former. However, in spite of being technically guilty of libel, Uris felt himself vindicated because Dering was awarded ‘contemptuous damages’ of only a half-penny and was obliged to pay court costs. *QB VII*, as well as its television mini-series adaptation, received remarkably high ratings (see Lovett-Graff 440). The horrors of the Nazi concentration camps where sexual sterilization experiments were performed on helpless Jewish victims form the central concern of this novel. Here the author focuses on ‘gentile’ collaboration in the Nazi death camps, and the capacity for evil in ordinary citizens placed under trying conditions. Uris tells the story of Adam Kelno, a Polish surgeon and survivor of the Jadwiga concentration camp, who returns to London after working among primitive people in Borneo for fifteen years after World War II, and finds himself labelled as a war criminal in a book called *The Holocaust*, by American novelist Abe Cady. Using the narrative mode of court room testimonies modelled on the historical Nuremberg trials, Uris brings in graphic descriptions of brutal experimental surgery performed on Jewish victims without the use of proper anaesthetics, as the testimonies of Kelno’s victims are related. Abraham Cady emerges as the avenger of Jewish wrongs, despite the fact that he is technically guilty of libel, since the number of Kelno’s experimental surgeries did not approach the stated number. As in the libel suit brought against Uris himself, the writer- hero
of *QB VII* Abe Cady, emerges triumphant as the court, though ruling in favour of the plaintiff Adam Kelno, awards him a paltry “one half-penny” as ‘damages’.

In his work of non-fiction, *Jerusalem Song of Songs*, written in collaboration with his wife Jill, and published in 1981, Uris takes the reader through the history of Jerusalem from the biblical times to the Six Day War of 1967. In Uris’ history/story of Jerusalem, especially of the last one hundred years, one finds a repetition of several of the major themes of his Middle Eastern novels, related with the same intensity of emotion. In 1984 Uris produced his next novel *The Haj*. Returning to the scene of his 1958 bestseller *Exodus*, Uris here explores the history of Jewish settlement in Palestine and the eventual displacement of the Palestinian Arabs as a result of Jewish statehood. The dominant theme in the novel is the “destructive power” of Islamic/Arabic tradition—a tradition which, according to Uris, consists of fatalism, subjugation of women, treachery, distrust, and hatred especially towards Jews. Though presented mainly from the Arab perspective, the picture of the Arab that emerges from *The Haj* is no more flattering than that of *Exodus*. Arabs are here depicted as a thoroughly degenerate, despicable people, and held solely responsible for the problems related to the Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine. As Evan Hunter notes,

...Uris attempts here to explore a Palestine in tumultuous upheaval between 1944 and 1956, hoping to shed light on what still remains a bewildering political and religious impasse. The illumination he provides, however, is so thoroughly dimmed by a severely biased viewpoint that the book loses all power as a work of fiction and all credibility as an objective study of that depressing and continuing deadlock. (7)
Although *The Haj* received severe criticism for its portrayal of Arabs as thoroughly despicable villains, the novel remained on the best seller list in the United States for many weeks. Edward Said in his review of *The Haj* comments that the book is a best seller that makes the worst anti-Semitism seem restrained. Said notes that the premises of Uris’ novel, intended as a “fiction,” offering to place before a wide audience the reality of Arab Palestinian life, Islamic religion, contemporary Middle Eastern history and politics, are simple: “The Arab is a lecherous, deceitful, murderous, irrational, larcenous, and utterly reprehensible subhuman, whereas the Jew is noble, intelligent, understanding, courageous, and, above all, deserving of Palestine.” Said concludes that the novel expresses the horror and loathing of someone so gorged on strength and contempt for what he has been attempting to destroy that he can suspend even the elementary protocols writing about another group of people (*Politics of Dispossession* 97-98).

*Mitla Pass*, published in 1988, is seen as the most autobiographical of Uris’ novels, and the central character Gideon Zadok is by far the character who most closely resembles the author. Listing the similarities between the author and his hero, Kathleen Shine Cain concludes that reading Uris’ *Mitla Pass* is like reading a thinly veiled biography of the writer’s early life (see Cain 5-6). Though set against the background of the Sinai War of 1956 and taking its title from a disastrous battle of the Sinai Campaign, the book focuses on the personal life of the hero Gideon Zadok and his development as a writer, rather than on the historical events themselves.

Besides these works dealing with issues related to the holocaust and the Arab-Israeli conflict, Uris’ works also include novels discussing the power struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War era and its implications for the world. Uris touches on issues related to
the origins of the Cold War following World War II, in his *Armageddon* as well as *Topaz*. The latter novel, published in 1967, is an espionage thriller that deals with the Cuban missile crisis and Soviet infiltration of NATO through French sources. *The Angry Hills*, Uris’ second novel, is a spy tale with plenty of briskly paced action, and placed against the backdrop of wartime Greece.

In April 1972, Uris went to Ireland and spent a year there along with his wife Jill Uris, a photographer. Together they travelled throughout the country, and while his wife took photographs, Uris acted as her assistant and gathered information about the land and its people. Their joint efforts produced *Ireland: A Terrible Beauty*, a book of Jill Uris’ highly praised photographs for which Leon Uris wrote the text, published by Doubleday in 1975. His research on the history, politics, religion and culture of the country became the foundation for his next two novels, *Trinity* and *Redemption*. The former throws light on the crises in Ireland by tracing the inter-related lives of members of three representative families from the Northern Irish Protestants, the Irish Catholics, and their English masters, from the 1840’s to the Easter Rising of 1916. Although *Redemption* covers much of the same ground as *Trinity*, it expands the scope of the latter to explore further the issues raised therein.

After a prolific career, Uris died of renal failure on the 21st of June, 2003 at his home on Shelter Island New York. Uris’ panoramic historical fiction has undoubtedly earned him a dedicated readership. Webster Scott in his assessment of Uris’ work in *The Washington Post Book World*, compares the novelist to such popular writers as James A Michener and James Clavell. Scott goes on to comment thus:

“Such writers...may tell us relatively little about our inner weather, but they report on storms and setting suns outside. They read the environment we must function in. Occasionally they replicate our social structures. They sift the history that brought us to the present. They give us the briefing papers necessary to convert news stories into human stories. (http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet).

Recalling Uris’ body of work, Guardian writer Eric Homberger noted of the novelist’s passing: “He was, in truth, an educator of the American public in the Zionist interpretation of the modern Jewish history. The deep tradition of non-violence in Jewish tradition was swept aside in his muscular reinterpretation of the modern Jewish identity” (http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet).

In the present study, the insights from New Historicist formulations are being selectively used for examining the different ways in which Uris conjures up visions of characters and instances in the backdrop of historical setting, facilitating the ‘imaginary construction’ adhering to the metaphysical unity and fixity of a Jewish community envisioning ultimate success or victory. The past of the Jews is thus re-interrogated and re-written from the vantage point of the present. Endowed with all the laudable attributes, they are shown as having fallen on evil days, from which a return to glory was an inevitable presupposition. Once imagined
into existence as a Jewish collectivity, as an invincible and chosen breed, their actions and aspirations are beyond question.

Some of the major concerns and premises of New Historicism that are relevant for venturing into an analysis of Uris’ narrative strategies are discerned here. New Historicism is increasingly being viewed today as a trend in literary criticism, a method for cultural studies, and a practice in historical analysis. It claims to have given scholars opportunities to cut across the disciplinary enclaves of History, Sociology, Anthropology, Politics and so on, erasing the false boundaries which seemingly separate these disciplines. It brings historical considerations to the forefront in the sense that it makes it imperative to lay emphasis on the precise historical context in which a literary composition is made. According to Louis Montrose, “Representations of the world in written discourse are engaged in constructing the world, in shaping the modalities of social reality and in accommodating their writers, performers, readers and audiences to multiple and shifting subject positions within the world they both constitute and inhabit” (New Historicisms 396). Montrose explains that his invocation of the term “subject” is meant to suggest,

…an equivocal process of subjectification on the one hand, shaping individuals as loci of consciousness and initiators of action—endowing them with subjectivity and with the capacity for agency; and on the other hand, positioning, motivating, and constraining them within—subjecting them to—social networks and cultural codes that ultimately exceed their comprehension or control. (“Professing the Renaissance” 21)

For all its heterogeneity certain key assumptions bind together the practitioners of New-Historicism. This has been well listed by Aram Veeser: (1) that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices, (2) that literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably, (3)
that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths, nor expresses inalterable human nature, (4) that every act of unmasking, critique and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes (xi).

It is along the same lines that Edward Said develops his arguments with regard to a nexus between the production of knowledge, and interpretation:

All knowledge that is about human society… is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgement and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are non-existent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation…. Interpretations depend very much on who the interpreter is, who he or she is addressing, what his or her purpose is in interpreting, at what historical moment the interpretation takes place. In this sense all interpretations are what might be called situational: they always occur in a situation whose bearing on the interpretation is affiliative. (Covering Islam 154)

It appears strange that Uris has eluded exhaustive studies while the novel is dealt with in the academia as an ambivalent cultural artefact that is to be appreciated with the use of theoretical tools. Leon Uris: A Critical Companion, by Kathleen Shine Cain is hitherto the only existing study which offers a full-length examination of the works of Leon Uris. However this work provides only a review of each novel for its plot structure, characterization and thematic elements. Otherwise much of the secondary sources on the works of Leon Uris exists in the form of book reviews, journal articles or isolated chapters in books on American popular fiction. The present study as a full-length examination of the works of Uris based on the Jewish experience is thus deemed significant in its own right.