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## Post-Zionism and Israeli Universities: the Academic-Political Nexus

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**KING'S COLLEGE LONDON**  
**FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES**

**Dissertation**

**Post-Zionism and Israeli Universities: the Academic-  
Political Nexus**

**By**

**Dana Barnett**

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

Since the 1990s post-Zionist academics have transformed the anti-Zionist ideology of the fringe political group Matzpen, rooted in pre-1948 ideology of Brit Shalom, the Canaanites, and the Communists, into a mainstream de-legitimizing critique of Israel. Utilizing the tools of the critical, neo-Marxist paradigm depicting Israel as an imperialist, colonialist movement, these scholars have produced a ferocious critique of all facets of Israeli history and society hand-tailored to undermine the Jewish state's legitimacy. 'New historians' have argued that Israel, helped by Western imperialism, overwhelmed the Palestinians and ethnically cleansed them. 'Critical sociologists' have depicted Israeli society as controlled by an Ashkenazi, capitalist elite that has subjugated minorities, women, the working classes. 'Critical political scientists' have produced voluminous research casting Israel as a fascist-like, apartheid state. And revisionist scholars have argued that Israel has turned the Holocaust into a civil religion glorifying power; has used its lessons to oppress the Palestinians; and has fed a collective paranoia that has made Israelis impervious to rational resolution of the conflict.

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## Introduction

This work seeks to analyse the transformation of anti-Zionist tendencies espoused by fringe political groups in Mandate Palestine's Jewish community (or the Yishuv) and Israel's early years into a major academic force that has affected mainstream discourse in contemporary Israeli society and has significantly contributed to eroding Israel's international legitimacy by casting it as a colonialist, apartheid entity.

Excluding the ultra-orthodox opposition, three Jewish groups rejected the idea of creating a Jewish state: *Brit Shalom*, the Canaanites and the Communists. While each espoused a different ideology, all shared a common vision of creating a bi-national state where Jews and Arabs would coexist in harmony. These different strands of anti-Zionism were consolidated and nourished by the fringe Matzpen group after the creation of the State of Israel, only to morph into the more prominent post-Zionism of the 1990s and early 2000s.

Extant studies of anti-Zionist ideology have primarily focused on the pre-1948 era. In spite of its miniscule size, *Brit Shalom* and its political offshoot, *Ihud*, has been the subject of a relatively large number of studies mostly focused on the ideology of bi-nationalism as developed by Hebrew University president Judah L. Magnes and his intellectual mentors Ahad Ha'am (aka Asher Ginsburg) and Martin Buber. While the studies differ in scope and interest, they all highlight the *Brit-Ihud*'s principled rejection of Jewish sovereignty in Palestine in favour of a vaguely defined cultural-political entity. Ahad Ha'am's much invoked 'cultural centre' tasked the Palestinian Jews with creating a cultural and education entity to serve the Diaspora Jews. Buber's 'dialogical community' was derived from the contention that a spiritual

community - ruled by a consensus achieved through discourse - was morally superior to a state based on power. Apprehensive about the Zionist quest for sovereign power, Buber broke with David Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders denouncing them as power-hungry politicians 'who serve Hitler's God after he was given a Hebrew name'.<sup>1</sup> Starting with the classic study by Susan Lee Hattis, *the Bi-national Idea in Palestine during Mandatory Times*, this body of work suggests that Brit Shalom turned the 'dialogue community' into the more serviceable formula of a bi-national state for Arabs and Jews.<sup>2</sup>

A number of biographies of Magnes added a personal dimension to Brit Shalom's bi-national quest. A former congregation rabbi in the US, Magnes was an elitist, a pacifist, and non-conformist with a long history of radical views. Daniel Kotzin, one of his biographers, noted that, in spite of the failure to find Arab partners and hostility from fellow Jews, Magnes showed extreme perseverance. Indeed, even the self-acknowledged 'disconnection' and 'estrangement' from the community did not dissuade him from the bi-national mission. His sense of destiny also included the Hebrew University (founded in 1925), which he viewed not only as a cultural and secular-spiritual centre but also as a buffer against the alleged political abuses of

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<sup>1</sup> Yoram Hazony, *The Jewish State: the Struggle for Israel's Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 244

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Susan Lee Hattis, *The Bi-national Idea in Palestine During Mandatory Times*, (Haifa: Shikmona, 1970); David Goldberg, *To the Promised Land: A History of Zionist Thought* (London: Penguin, 1996); Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1994); Steven J. Zippertstein, *Elusive Prophet. Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 29; Joseph Heller, *From Brit Shalom to Ihud* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2003; Hebrew); Shalom Ratsabi, *Between Zionism and Judaism: The Radical Circle in Brith Shalom, 1925-1933* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

Zionism. As he put it in an address to students, ‘only the Hebrew University can fight the power of totalitarianism’.<sup>3</sup>

Writings on the American Council on Judaism (ACJ), Magnes’ foremost supporter, offer interesting insights into the financial influence of anti-Zionist American Jews. As the Hebrew University’s philanthropists, the AJC exercised an outsized influence on the intellectual discourse in the Yishuv. In a move that would have a huge importance for the continuation of anti-Zionism, Magnes added Buber and many of his academic acolytes from Germany to the small liberal arts faculty, where they came to exert considerable influence well beyond 1948 - even as the state took over financial support of higher education.<sup>4</sup>

The cultural antecedents of the equally tiny Canaanite movement were documented in a number of studies. In addition to James Diamond’s definitive history of the movement, a number of thematic writings have dealt with the linguistic and anthropological underpinning of the group. Yonatan Ratosh, the group’s chief ideologue and proselytizer, was credited with securing a high profile for the Canaanite ideas. Moreover, unlike the foreign pacifist Magnes and the German professors, the ‘Young Hebrews’ - the original name of the Canaanites, were native sons well versed in the vernacular of Zionism. Still, like Brit Shalom, they found it hard to find a credible formula to replace the national sovereignty ethos of Zionism. Switching from a Hebrew nation to a pan-Semitic one they arrived at a bi-national design but

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Kozin, *Judah L. Magnes: An American Jewish Nonconformist* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), pp. 166, 273; Hazony, *The Jewish State*, pp. 244-45.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas A. Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

struggled to find a proper balance between the Jews and the Arabs for the proposed entity, not to mention the total lack of interest on the part of the Arabs.<sup>5</sup>

Compared to the volume and sophistication of the research on Brit Shalom and the Canaanites, the corpus of writings on the Communist Party of Mandate Palestine is relatively small and limited to historical accounts. These writings, however, are unanimous in the conclusion that the party had a hard time with developing a bi-national formula that would satisfy both its Jewish and Arab members. The reality of nationalism trumping Marxist universalism weakened the party and was compounded by the Soviet pressure to accept Jewish sovereignty in 1948.<sup>6</sup>

The post-1948 history of anti-Zionism, as noted above, attracted only scanty scholarly attention, not least because this ideology virtually disappeared from the intellectual and political scene during the new state's first decades. With the exception of Uri Avnery,<sup>7</sup> a journalist and polemicist, and a tiny group of former communists who formed the Israeli Socialist Organization, commonly known as Matzpen, the anti-Zionists languished in seemingly obscurity. The literature on the group suggests a number of reasons for this state of affairs: the triumph of Jewish sovereignty, the implacable enmity of the Arab states and the Palestinians, and the fractious nature of the movement that, despite its minuscule size, produced numerous and difficult to

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<sup>5</sup> James S. Diamond, *Homeland or Holy Land: The 'Canaanite' Critique of Israel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Ron Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism: A Discourse Analytic Cultural Study* (New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 2001); Yaacov Shavit, *The New Hebrew Nation: a Study in Israeli Heresy and Fantasy* (London: Cass, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There? Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel 1948-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Musa Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919-1945: Arab and Jew in the Struggle for Internationalism* (London: Haymarket Books, 2010); Jacob Hen-Tov, *Communism and Zionism in Palestine, the Comintern and the Political Unrest in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> Uri Avnery, *Israel without Zionism: A Plan for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).



follow splits and regroupings. Despairing of the failure of Arabs and Jews to subordinate national differences to socialist ideals, by the early 1970s most of the founding activists had resettled abroad.<sup>8</sup>

But if the socialist revolution eluded Matzpen, the Brit Shalom-Ihud ideology, along with traces of Canaanism, proved more durable. The Hebrew University fought a successful battle to implement a virtually unfettered form of academic freedom, utilizing its strong bonds with the parliamentary opposition to derail the proposal of the Labour government to create a measure of state supervision of higher education. Enshrined in the 1958 Higher Education Act, this virtually unlimited academic freedom was tailor-made to assure Magnes's vision of a professoriate serving as a 'secular priesthood speaking truth to power'. As a result, the faculty could engage in political battles of the day under the guise of academic freedom - an arrangement that had no equivalents in Western public universities.<sup>9</sup>

In a forceful display of this freedom, a group of Hebrew University professors became deeply involved in the so-called Lavon Affair in the 1950s. The scandal originated in a failed attempt of the Israeli intelligence to foment anti-American unrest in Egypt. The-then minister of defence, Pinhas Lavon, was allegedly framed by the

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<sup>8</sup> The most comprehensive study of Matzpen is Nitza Erel's, *Matzpen - Conscience and Fantasy* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2010; Hebrew). See also: Ran Greenstein, 'Class, Nation, and Political Organization: The Anti-Zionist Left in Israel/Palestine', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 75/1 (Spring 2009), pp. 85-108; August Grabski, 'Matzpen and the State of Israel, 1962-1973', in August Grabski (ed.), *Rebels Against Zion* (Warsaw: The Jewish Historical Institute, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Uri Cohen, *The Mountain and the Hill: The Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the Pre-independence Period and the Early Years of the State of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006; Hebrew); Ofira Seliktar, *Academic Freedom in Israel: A Comparative Perspective* (Tel Aviv: Israel Academia Monitor, 2013); Shaul Katz and Michael Heyd, *The History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Origins and Beginnings* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000); Michael Keren, *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983), p. 26; Alek Epstein, 'For the sake of Freedom: The Public Struggle of the Jerusalemite Professoriate after the Creation of the State', *Katedra* 106, Dec. 2002, pp. 139-76 (Hebrew).

IDF's military intelligence directorate and was subsequently fired by David Ben-Gurion from the chairmanship of the Histadrut, the Israeli Trade Union. The professors, including Buber, launched an all-out campaign against the prime minister accusing him of dictatorial tendencies and demanding his resignation. Ostensibly a dispute about good political governance, this exceptionally venomous attack on the prime minister reflected a longstanding conflict between Ben-Gurion and Buber. Though a committed secularist, Ben-Gurion was reluctant to view the foundation of the state in exclusively historical-materialistic terms. To him Zionism was ordained by the messianic vision of a Jewish state - a Biblical tradition deeply rooted in Judaism. To Buber this vision was not only a vulgar misrepresentation of religious tenets but a crass attempt to 'make the political factor supreme'. Charges that Ben-Gurion was a messianic leader on the order of Shabbati Zvi, the seventeenth century false messiah, were, of course, not new. But while Buber was satisfied with decrying the spiritual folly of messianic Zionism, some of the university's professors went much further.<sup>10</sup>

The eminent historian Jacob Talmon, for example, used his acclaimed work on totalitarian democracy to warn about the utopian impulse of Ben-Gurion's Zionism. In this view, utopianism 'postulates a definite goal and a preordained finale to history, for the attainment of which you need to recast and remould all aspects of life and society in accordance with some explicit principle'. In his many public appearances Talmon took to lamenting that utopianism was cursed because it could be perverted into an 'instrument of power and hypocrisy'. Some scholars linked Talmon's dark prophecies on the future of Israeli democracy to the Brit Shalom tradition. According to one account, Talmon was a 'tormented historian', a 'kind of martyr in constant

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<sup>10</sup> Keren, *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals*, pp. 3, 62, 78.

anguish of the martyrdom of Jewish people and secret of Jewish survival'. Though a nominal Zionist, his suspicion of the Zionist leaders was much in line with that of Magnes. Talmon amplified this interposition in a subsequent discussion of the Lavon Affair, recalling that the professors were 'amazed' by the response from the public that wanted them to participate in political affairs and concluding that there was a real 'hunger for leadership' and, moreover, in the 'depth of their hearts, the masses had more respect for learning than for politics'.<sup>11</sup>

In a well-received essay historian Bernard Wasserstein argued that Talmon's vision of utopian ideas going rogue was very close to Hannah Arendt's contention, in her seminal *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, that both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were launched by a messianic-utopian creed. Though Israel was not one of the case studies in Talmon's research, his public attacks on Ben-Gurion alluded to the possibility that he didn't consider Zionism immune to sliding into totalitarianism.<sup>12</sup>

The 1962 trial of Adolf Eichmann gave Arendt another opportunity to link arms with Buber and his followers. Primarily remembered for her controversial depiction of Eichmann as epitomizing the 'banality of evil', Arendt's book on the trial was also in line with Buber's position that Zionism tried to 'nationalize' a universal catastrophe for political gain. In a series of dramatic appeals to Ben-Gurion, Buber argued that since Eichmann committed crimes against humanity he should be tried in an international court of law.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Eli Eyal, 'Jacob Talmon: A Historian Ahead of His Time', *Midstream*, 1 February 2001; David Ohana, *Political Theology in the Holy Land. Israeli Messianism and its Critics* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Wasserstein, 'Blame the Victim - Hannah Arendt among the Nazis: The Historian and Her Sources', *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 October 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Keren, *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals*, p. 92.

Not surprisingly, Matzpen used the Buber-Arendt argument to legitimize its criticism of the alleged political misuse of the Holocaust. But the anti-Zionist climate prevailing among a segment of the Hebrew University - where some Matzpen members studied and did considerable recruitment - did little to move the group out of its marginality. According to Yoram Hazony, author of the foremost study of the post-Zionist phenomenon in the state of Israel, it took a few decades before Matzpen's anti-Zionism penetrated the public discourse under the softer cover of post-Zionism. In his view this transformation was all the more remarkable given that the post-Zionists were a 'minority, even within the Israeli academic and literary circles'. Hazony traces this change to the Buberite tradition, carried on by the 'leading lights' of the Hebrew University and their students who 'continued to refine the very same historical and philosophical theories that had constituted the conceptual undercarriage of Jewish anti-Zionism'.<sup>14</sup>

Hazony came close to positing a formal connection between historic anti-Zionism and the new generation of academic post-Zionists but did not track the dissemination of anti-Zionist values in a systematic way. He argued that 'academics hostile to the [Zionist narrative] are teaching at all of Israel's leading universities' where they were 'conducting a systematic struggle... against the idea of the Jewish state, its historic narrative, institution and symbols'.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, a more comprehensive and methodologically rigorous research is needed to understand the transformation of a marginal academic anti-Zionism into the rather prominent phenomenon of post-Zionism. Value transmission is hardly a black box where inputs are automatically converted into outputs; while some scholars were

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<sup>14</sup> Hazony, *The Jewish State*, pp. xxvi-xxvii, xxix, 10, 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

influenced by the Buberite tradition, others rejected it. Indeed, many distinguished scholars at the Hebrew University and beyond have fought the post-Zionists, a fact that Hazony acknowledged.

There is also a glaring lack of a chronological-contextual analysis of the proliferation of academic post-Zionism. The 1982 Lebanon War is often mentioned as the catalyst for this phenomenon, but other events that served as game changers in the post-Zionist march towards respectability were omitted or used parenthetically out of their time frame. Finally, there seems to be no systematic analysis of the academic fields most affected by the post-Zionists. While the 'New Historiography' is invoked on numerous occasions, little has been said about sociology, political science and the signature post-Zionist critique of the Holocaust - a subject that has attracted less attention overall.

The present study will seek to fill this lacuna in the study of academic post-Zionism by adopting a rigorous approach based on a central thesis. It will argue that the anti-Zionist themes were preserved and nurtured by the Matzpen group and its supporters whose influence increased after several traumatic events: the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the 1982 Lebanon War, and the Palestinian Intifada (1987-92). Yet it was only after these ideas had penetrated the liberal arts faculties that anti-Zionism - reconfigured as post-Zionism - obtained the crucial academic legitimacy required for a respectable presence in the a mainstream discourse.

Because of its stealth and gradualism, I was oblivious to the spread of Matzpen notions. After a professors exposed me to the scope of the movement in social science literature, I used my new awareness to cofound a group that monitored

the writings and activities of faculty members whose affinity to Matzpen ideology was quite remarkable though they self-identified as post-Zionists.

Having collected and analysed a large number of these writings, I realized that post-Zionism was essentially an adaptation of anti-Zionism to a sovereign existence. Clearly, it was impossible to “undo” the Jewish state, but post-Zionism could “prove” the anti-Zionist of old right by rejecting and delegitimizing the foundational claims of the State of Israel.

While a number of former Matzpen members obtained academic posts in Israeli universities, it was clear that their presence was only marginal to the spread of the post-Zionist phenomenon. Rather, it was the growing cadre of critical, neo-Marxist scholars since the early 1980s that made post-Zionism a household name. Indeed, the speedy diffusion of the once marginal ideology is not possible to comprehend without an understanding of the neo-Marxist, critical scholarship paradigm that competed and/or replaced the traditional, positivist scholarship in the humanities and the social sciences in Israeli universities.

To begin with, my original research revealed that academics who defined themselves as post-Zionists were also avid practitioners of the paradigm that originated in liberal arts in Western Europe and the United States. As a matter of fact, many took great pride in rejecting the traditional positivist paradigm that, in their opinion, served the narrative of the “hegemonic Ashkenazi elite” in Israel at the expense of the “oppressed” member of the society – Jews from Arab speaking countries, Palestinians, women and the working class.

The importance of this synergy created by the neo-Marxism, critical scholarship and post-Zionism cannot be overstated. Whereas the positivist paradigm

considered Zionism and its creation, the State of Israel, a legitimate and just solution to the ‘Jewish problem’, the rival paradigm deemed the Zionist enterprise an illegitimate exercise in colonialist imposition and described Israel as a state ‘born in sin’.

Equally important, critical, neo-Marxist scholars have followed in the footsteps of Antonio Gramsci, the Italian communist imprisoned by Benito Mussolini in the mid-1920s. In his famous *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci urged intellectuals and academics to use their work to change societal values in order to create a more progressive society.<sup>16</sup> While positivist faculty is limited by the paradigmatic requirement of objectivity and neutrality, Israeli scholars-activists have used their positions to imbue societal discourse with progressive values a la Gramsci. By creating a seamless transition between research and activism, they have turned the campus into an extension of their political work. In principle, rules and regulations have been put in place to prevent this occurrence, but the expansive definition of academic freedom in Israel has encouraged the proliferation of post-Zionist scholarship. Not surprisingly, activist faculty have led virtually every domain of civil protest, especially in the field of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Concentrating on academic post-Zionism is not meant to negate other political and societal forces that helped to mainstream the anti-Zionist message. As is well known, intellectual discourse is impossible to be neatly divided into an academic component as opposed to the contribution of lay observers, be it writers, poets, public intellectuals and others. Still, given the academics’ prominence in this process, and by

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<sup>16</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notes* (New York: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

way of making the research manageable, this dissertation will include only a few non-academic sources that had a major impact on academics analysed in the study.

The organization of this dissertation reflects the research strategy outlined above. Chapter 1 provides a theoretical discussion of the two competing paradigms in social science - the positivist and the critical, neo-Marxist. The validity claims embedded in the paradigms shape the legitimacy construct in the membership-territory, authority system and distributive justice system domain and explain why Israel, once conceptualized as a Western liberal democracy, has been more recently portrayed as a colonial, apartheid-type state. While the analysis of the two paradigms is necessarily general, every effort was made to emphasize the facets relevant to understanding the post-Zionist phenomena. In particular, the post-Zionists, like their Matzpen predecessors, have focused on the validity claims that underlie membership-territory of various groups. By adopting the neo-Marxist, critical scholarship reading of memberships- territory legitimacy, they could reject the right of Jews to both territory and nationhood.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the three anti-Zionist ideologies in the pre-1948 period and their subsequent consolidation under the umbrella of Matzpen and its supporters. Though post-Zionist ideas infiltrated virtually every liberal arts discipline, their impact is most visible in the four scholarly fields - history, sociology, political science, and Holocaust studies. Accordingly, Chapter 3 analyses the impact of post-Zionist thinking on revisionist Israeli historiography known as 'New Historiography'.

Chapter 4 examines how 'critical sociology' has conceptualized the Israeli society as an oppressive Ashkenazi male hegemony dominating minorities and women.



Chapter 5 describes how critical political scientist defined the authority system as a non-democratic regime at best and an apartheid state at worst.

Chapter 6 looks at how neo-Marxist, critical approaches redefined the meaning of the Holocaust - from a unique evil perpetrated upon the Jews - to a universal proclivity to “superfluous violence” exercised by hegemonic elements against the weak.

Finally, since post-Zionists scholars have embraced the Gramscian mandate of combining scholarship and political activism, it is only fitting that Chapter 7 provides a chronological-thematic analysis of their political work, including a leading role in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction movement.

To further the parsimony achieved by picking four fields, I decided to limit the number of scholars surveyed in each to a handful of undisputable intellectual leaders with broad influence in their discipline and beyond. Methodologically, a systematic analysis of key texts of the scholars is in order rather than the alternative of interviewing them. The concluding chapter summarizes the conclusion derived from the research and offers an impact statement.

## Chapter 1 Israel in the neo-Marxist, Critical Scholarship

Analysing a paradigm requires the uncovering of its underlying meta-assumptions. Because such assumptions are deeply entrenched, the community of scholars often takes them as self-evident. As a result, their underlying frame of reference is rarely revealed, obscuring the great philosophical debates about the nature of social reality that generated the meta-assumptions in the first place.

Arguably, the first step in clarification is to elucidate the three elements that define the study of social reality. The first element is *ontological* in nature, pertaining to the assumptions that concern the essence of the discussed phenomenon. Philosophers and scholars have vied with a basic ontological question of whether 'reality' is objective and imposed on individual consciousness from the outside, or whether it is produced by individual cognition. In other words, the issue is whether reality exists independently in the world or is a product of the mind and cannot be separated from an individual prism.

The second element is *epistemological*, reflecting questions about the nature of knowledge. The contending assumptions here focus on the type of knowledge that social research can uncover; whether it is 'hard' and can be transmitted in a tangible form or 'soft', that is spiritual or transcendental. In a related manner, there is debate about how valid is obtainable knowledge and how to sort 'true' from 'false' knowledge. Epistemological assumptions divide those who think that knowledge can be empirically obtained and those who believe it to be experienced.

The third element touches upon *human nature* as it interacts with the environment. Neither ontological nor epistemic, the question boils down to how human beings interact with the social environment surrounding them. The answer pits those who consider these interactions deterministic, driven mainly by the socio-

economic background of individuals and those who argue for ‘free will’, that is a more flexible and undetermined encounter between people and their environment.

While these debates are essentially philosophical, they have had a profound impact on the methodologies employed in research. If scholars subscribe to the view that reality is external and hard, easily deducible and measured, they would search for regularities in order to form universal laws that explain and govern such reality. For those who subscribe to the view that reality is soft and subjective the social world is relativistic, requiring no application of scientific rigor and universal laws for its understanding.

Since the debates highlight two mutually exclusive perceptions of social reality, they contributed to the evolution of two distinct paradigms in the social sciences and humanities. The first is positivist paradigm (also known as objectivist or traditional), which dominated the social sciences in the first half of the twentieth century. The second is the neo-Marxist, critical paradigm which, unlike its relatively homogeneous positivist counterpart, was made up of a complex and somewhat confusing set of critical approaches.

### **The Positivist Paradigm**

The positivist paradigm requires that theories be based on empirical observations, but there have been disagreements about the nature of verification. David Hume was associated with the scientific induction approach that postulated that empirical observations can be generalized into statements that can be proclaimed true or probably true. Karl Popper rejected this ‘naïve empiricism’ in favour of the concept of falsifiability, stating that verification equals falsifiability. In other words, theories that cannot be falsified should not be considered scientific, a determination that he had extended to Marxism. Kuhn elaborated on both in *The Structure of Scientific*

*Revolution*, arguing that in routine times a set of agreed concepts were used to analyse a situation. They form the entire constellation of beliefs, values, and methodologies shared by the members of a community of practitioners. As long as the paradigm went unchallenged, its normality was widely accepted. In the wake of a severe crisis - that is when anomalous results appeared, the dominant paradigm was subject to questioning and overthrown. With the new paradigm enthroned, its revolutionary character became accepted as normal and routine.<sup>17</sup>

The fortunes of the positivist paradigm in American social sciences were closely linked to the American Social Science Council whose policy goal was to boost behaviourism. The Council offered substantial grants to study numerous aspects of human behaviour in a wide range of disciplines, but it was most interested in analysing political change. As Popper noted, the ultimate dream of the humanities was to emulate the natural sciences: 'If it is possible for astronomy to predict eclipses, why should it not be possible for sociology to predict revolutions?'<sup>18</sup> This was hardly surprising as post-war administrations struggled with their new role of a superpower. To prevent Third World countries from sliding into the Soviet sphere of influence, Washington encouraged social science experts to study the process of political change with a view of staving off communist competition.

This scientific model of change attracted Talcott Parsons, David Easton, Gabriel Almond and other political scientists eager to formulate clearly defined laws of political development. In 1966, in his American Political Science Association

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 48-62; Ofira Seliktar, 'Identifying a Society's Belief System', in Margaret Hermann (ed.), *Political Psychology* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986), pp. 13-18.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1966), p. 3.

presidential address, Almond called such a prospect ‘exhilarating’.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the positivist paradigm seemed to be well suited to formulate universal laws of political change. Emulating Newtonian physics, social scientists claimed that human history had a discernible and predictable way of evolving; the resulting laws of changes were said to develop through a linear progression from a lower to a higher state.<sup>20</sup>

In looking for ways to explain how societies progress from a ‘lower to a higher state’, political scientists had relied on the discursive perspective developed by anthropologists and sociologists. Ralph Linton postulated that in order to survive, a group legitimizes assorted beliefs into a collective belief system that form the parameters of the social order of the group.<sup>21</sup> Borrowing from Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber, among others, Mary Douglas likened this process to a normative debate, or discourse, through which a group worked out the three cardinal axes necessary for collective existence. The discourse generates *normative validity claims* that are ‘reasoned elaborations’ on which the social order rests. The three axes that need to be legitimized by the group are: 1) the principles for granting membership, known as *membership legitimacy*; 2) the principles upon which the authority system rests, known as *authority system legitimacy*; 3) the principles that inform the distribution of resources known as *distributive justice legitimacy*.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to membership legitimacy, Weber postulated that societies evolve from a state *Gemeinschaft* where the ‘admission ticket’ is based on kinship, to the

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<sup>19</sup> Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: Free Press, 1951); David Easton, *The Political System, an Inquiry Into the State of Political Science* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1953); Gabriel Almond, ‘Political Theory and Political Science’, *American Political Science Review*, 60 (1966), pp. 869-79.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), p. 447.

<sup>21</sup> Ralph Linton, *The Cultural Background of Personality* (London: Prentice Hall, 1945).

<sup>22</sup> Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 43, 133-34.

advanced stage of *Gesellschaft* which rests on a complex formula such as ‘feelings of interdependence’ and ‘community of fate’. He pointed out that the *Gesellschaft* legitimacy developed alongside the nation-state where loyalty to the state trumped the more primordial kinship ties. Obviously, *Gesellschaft* legitimacy is easiest to attain when a homogenous ethnic group resides in a well-defined territory; in cases of polycentric nationalism, where disparate ethnic groups reside under one national roof, tensions can complicate the membership discourse. A dominant ethnic group can treat members of other groups as inferior or, conversely, try to homogenize them by suppressing ethnic expressions. Religious divisions have added vast complication to the membership formula: since religion is still the basis of full inclusion, religious minorities are treated as ‘second class citizens’.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding such complications, behaviourists furnished empirical evidence that the process of modernization moves societies along the *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* trajectory. Karl Deutch, a leading expert in political communication, devised a series of quantitative indices of modernization such as levels of literacy, communication and industrialization to demonstrate that in more advanced societies, primordial forms of attachment have been replaced by the more inclusive concept of national identity. A number of behaviourally-oriented scholars of the Middle East suggested that the ‘secularization process... is fundamental’ and irreversible. One leading scholar found evidence of ‘the growing irrelevance of Islamic standards and criteria’.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Seliktar ‘Identifying a Society’s Belief System’, pp. 13-18.

<sup>24</sup> Karl W. Deutch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966); idem, *The Nerves of Government. Models of Political Communication and Control* (New York: Free Press, 1963); K. H. Silvert, (ed.) *Discussion at Bellagio: The Political Alternative of Development* (New York: American Universities Field Staff, 1964); Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics. The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 17.

Weber's concept of the legitimacy of the authority system alluded to a similar linear progression. He identified three pure validity claims:

- Traditional: based on the sanctity of tradition and those who exercise authority in the name of tradition;
- Charismatic: resting on a certain individual and the political order that was revealed to him;
- Legal-rational: derived from the belief in the legality of the process that vests individuals with authority.

Weber's writings generated an enormous critical literature and numerous suggestions for updating his taxonomy. One popular view holds that legal-rational legitimacy can only ensue when it is underpinned by the consent of the governed. Although Weber did not discuss the mechanism for generating such consent, it has been increasingly accepted that the democratic process is the best way to obtain such legitimacy.<sup>25</sup> In turn, the vast literature on democracy indicates that the system is extremely complex; it entails both structural-functional elements as well as the less tangible notions of political culture.

The realm of individual political attitudes that reflect political cultural traits is assumed to be a key to sustaining a successful democratic system; it was in this realm that Weber's progression towards the higher end legal-rational legitimacy apparently played out. In their landmark study, *The Civic Culture*, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba measured political attitudes in five countries, finding ample evidence to suggest that societies move through three states: subject, participatory and civic. The authors

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<sup>25</sup> Seliktar 'Identifying a Society's Belief System', p. 18.

suggested that civic culture, most prevalent in the West, corresponded to Weber's legal-rational legitimacy.<sup>26</sup>

Underpinning the membership and authority system axes is the critical issue of distributive justice - part of the larger question of social justices defined as a series of 'reasons or criteria for assigning particular things to particular individuals'.<sup>27</sup> This politically sensitive issue has been adjudicated in numerous ways, but three pure formulas can be identified: 1) Ascriptive: traditional claims form the base on which a hereditary social class justified its hold on a disproportionately high share of resources. 2) Utilitarian: productive claim whereby economically meritorious individuals can expect to gain a share proportional to their market merits. 3) Egalitarian: principles that mandated an equal distribution of resources.

The prescriptive claims that inform traditional societies' economies result in a large inequality of wealth and status while keeping economic growth at a minimum. As conceptualized by Adam Smith, the transition to market economy was made possible when individuals with market skills replaced the ascriptive heredity class as the agents of wealth production. However, capitalism created its own disparity of wealth in addition to debilitating boom and bust cycles, leading Karl Marx to issue his highly influential critique of capitalism. In his magnum opus, *The Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto*, co-authored with Friedrich Engels, Marx argued that social justice demanded an equal distribution of resources. To force distributive equality, he called the state to seize command of the means of production. Starting with the Bolshevik revolution, an increasing number of countries have boasted some variant of a command economy.

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<sup>26</sup> Gabriel Almond & Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little Brown, 1965).

<sup>27</sup> William Galston, *Justice and the Human Good* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), p. 5.



In the post-WWII world, the Third World could either choose the Western market model or embrace the ostensibly egalitarian system entrenched in the Soviet bloc. In spite of considerable efforts by Washington to block the spread of communism, market economy was not a popular choice in many underdeveloped countries. Still, American positivists believed that the laws of distributive justice were bound to follow the economic trajectory of the West. Walt Rostow, a prominent liberal economist and a harsh critique of Marx, articulated this theory in his influential *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. He postulated that traditional societies were bound to reach a takeoff position that would eventually catapult them into a Western- style high consumption stage.<sup>28</sup>

Rostow's theory became part of the developmental model, the single most popular application of the positivist paradigm in the social sciences. Parsons provided the scaffolding for the model by applying the functional-structural view to the orderly evolution of the social system. He postulated that the four functional parts of the system - pattern maintenance, integration, goal attainment and adaptation - could preserve its homeostasis, making for a relatively smooth transition from one stage to another. Built into the functional-structural model was the assumption that Western polity - built on *Gesellschaft* membership, legal-rational legitimacy and market economy - was universally appealing and worth emulating. In the words of one observer, the modern Western society was 'the pinnacle of human achievement'.<sup>29</sup>

As noted earlier, Washington policy makers overseeing the expanded domain of international relations were eager for theoretical guidance. The developmental

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<sup>28</sup> Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

<sup>29</sup> Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan, *Sociological Paradigms and Organization Analysis* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1985), p. 55.

model was very popular as it promised a road map of orderly change that would avoid the pitfalls of communism in the volatile Third World. However, by the end of the 1960s it had become quite clear that the expectations of political change offered by the positivist paradigm did not come through: tribal and ethnic-based rivalries were tearing societies apart and brutal dictatorships sprouted where democracy was expected to flourish; the economies of many underdeveloped countries were in shambles, leading to social upheaval supported by Moscow. One disillusioned State Department official grumbled that the nation-building vision was nothing less than 'hubris' of those who believed 'that American professors could make bricks without the straw of experience'. Another observer wondered how 'so long as we assumed, a la Hegel, Marx, or W. W. Rostow, that the non-Western world would inevitably follow the same developmental path as the West'.<sup>30</sup> Combined with other factors, the discredited developmental model played a crucial role in opening the entire positivist paradigm to challenges from the neo-Marxist, critical scholarship.

### **The Neo-Marxist, Critical Scholarship Paradigm**

By far, the most important variant of this paradigm was associated with the Frankfurt School of Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin, joined later by Jurgen Habermas. Upon relocating to the United States, Frankfurt School scholars revived interest in Georg Lukacs and Antonio Gramsci who strove to provide a more subjective rendition of Marxist view of the process of political change. Lukacs sought to bring out the more humanist and softer side of Marx, stressing the role of cultural factors such as consciousness, ideas, art and literature in promoting change. Likewise, Gramsci, an Italian communist, criticized

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<sup>30</sup> George Ball, *The Past has Another Pattern* (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 183; Howard Wiarda, *Ethnocentrism in Foreign Policy. Can We Understand the Third World ?* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1985), p. 11.

rigid Marxist structural determinism; he contended that a softer, subjective approach to human consciousness can produce changes in material conditions without the high cost of a revolution as per the Soviet example. Gramsci believed that capitalist regimes control peoples' consciousness through 'hegemonic ideology' whereby the ruling classes seek to perpetuate their hegemony by creating 'a belief system which stresses the need for order, authority and discipline'.<sup>31</sup>

Using the New School of Social Research in New York as a base, Frankfurt School scholars determined to promote their ideas in the United States. Starting in the 1950s they produced a series of provocative studies that became de rigueur in critical circles. In his *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Adorno casts doubt on the notion of reason and science, not least because 'the impartiality of scientific language' deprived the powerless from the ability to make themselves heard and masked the power of the existing order with 'a neutrality sign'.<sup>32</sup> For his part Marcuse unveiled the much discussed condemnation of the capitalist-driven, technological and materialist Western society in his *One Dimensional Man*.<sup>33</sup>

This early critique of capitalism and modernism was bolstered by a trend of literary criticism known under its umbrella term of post-modernism. In the early 1960s literary critics introduced tools like phenomenology and hermeneutics to deconstruct the 'true' meaning of texts, but the real political colouration came from a trio of French neo-Marxists - Michele Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. They argued that texts concealed power relations in society and needed to be deconstructed and critiqued, notably because power elites who authored official

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<sup>31</sup> Gibson Morgan and Gareth Burrell, *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis* (Portsmouth: N.H., 1985), p. 289.

<sup>32</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1964).

narratives suppressed the voices of minorities and other powerless segments of society. In this view, deconstructing their hidden voices was an important step towards empowerment and, over the long term, a change in the legitimacy norms of society.

Jurgen Habermas, a student of Adorno and a rising neo-Marxist star in Germany, helped to bridge the gap between the Frankfurt School and the French critical scholars. Abandoning the classic attention to the material base of capitalism, he focused entirely on communication in post-capitalist society, which he termed communication society (*Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*). The key to success in such society is linguistic competence, which, in his opinion, correlates with power and class. To Habermas this unequal distribution of power created the ‘communicative distortion’ thus preventing the achievement of an ‘ideal speech situation’, a condition where parties to communication arrive at a genuine consensus not affected by material ‘give outs’. Much as Marcuse, Habermas achieved iconic status with his book *Legitimation Crisis* where he predicted that capitalism would face a crisis of legitimacy because its ability to produce ‘material bribery’ would wane.<sup>34</sup>

The third group that contributed to the new paradigm was comprised of Marxist economists - Raul Prebisch, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Enzo Falleto, Samir Amin, Andre Gunder Frank and Emanuel Wallerstein - who were highly critical of the developmental model, especially as it applied to Latin America. They launched the dependency movement (*dependencia*) that blamed Western capitalism and imperialism for leaving much of the underdeveloped world in a state of economic dependency. The *dependencistas* worked hard to reverse the developmental equation: not only did they refuse to consider Western-style democracies and their market

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<sup>34</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (London: Heinemann, 1976).

economies a model worth emulating but they blamed capitalist countries for keeping the Third World periphery in a state economic dependency and backwardness. Wallerstein, in particular, achieved prominence with his one-world system analysis - described as 'knowledge movement' to alter the nineteenth century positivist methods of conceptualizing economic development that legitimized capitalism as the highest stage of human achievement resulting in large inequalities. One-world system theory was adopted by Peter Taylor to create the highly influential field of political geography.<sup>35</sup>

While the different strands of the paradigm made for a certain lack of coherence, they all shared common core assumptions. Ontologically, the new paradigm opted for nominalism, i.e. the notion that there is no concrete social reality but rather a stream of concepts, names and labels. For the nominalists, the external world does not exist beyond such cognitive conventions that serve as organizing and descriptive tools. Epistemologically, the paradigm was based on anti-positivism in the sense that it denied the possibility of finding and formulating laws of human behaviour. To the contrary, neo-Marxist, critical scholars posited that the social world was relativist, as it could only be understood from the point of view of individual perceptions. As a result, social science was deemed to be subjective to the point that no objective knowledge of any validity could be expected. In a corollary of this view, the paradigm founders considered human nature to be voluntaristic and free-willed rather than deterministic in its interaction with the environment.

Methodologically, these core assumptions led to the rejection of empirical observations and rigorous statistical analysis. Frankfurt School scholars led the attack

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<sup>35</sup> Robert A. Packenham, *The Developmental Movement. Scholarship and Politics in Development Studies*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

on positivist philosophy in the United States, describing American social sciences in general and behaviourism in particular as ‘naïve, pedestrian, hypnotized by fact and intellectually lazy’. Moreover, ‘they mocked the idea that data is “out there” ready for “immediate interpretation” and ridiculed the “myth” of scientific objectivity’. Other neo-Marxists called social scientists ‘butterfly collectors’ who set up categories, laws and generalization and chastised them for rigid adherence to methodology.<sup>36</sup>

Imre Lacatos, a Hungarian communist who studied under Georg Lukacs and a contemporary of Popper at the London School of Economics, added to the anti-positivist momentum. He attacked Popper for his notion that empirically-based falsification was possible and was also involved in a bitter debate with Kuhn. Lacatos had ideological reasons for trying to discredit Popper, a former communist-turned-liberal whose book *Open Society and its Enemies* made him a hero in liberal circles. Lacatos was particularly unhappy with Popper’s determination that Marxism could not qualify as scientific theory but his own theory that allegedly made it possible to make a distinction between science and pseudo-science took aim at market economy. Lacatos and his students used the theory to determine that the work of Milton Friedman was pseudo-science because, in their view, it could not predict a testable novel phenomenon. Several years later, Friedman received the Nobel Prize in Economics for original theory, but in spite of the fiasco, Lacatos has remained very popular in neo-Marxist, critical circles. Paul Feyerabend, whose collaboration with Lacatos accelerated his already considerable disenchantment with empirical science,

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<sup>36</sup> John P. Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 347; H. Stuart Hughes, ‘Social Theory in a New Context’, in Jarrell Jackman and Carla Borden, (eds.) *The Muses Flee Hitler: Cultural Transfer and Adaptation* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983); Ofira Seliktar, *Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran*. (Westport: Praeger, 2000), p. 30.

legitimized the 'rebellion against method' often described as 'scientific anarchism' or 'anything goes'.<sup>37</sup>

With objectivism and empiricism discredited, the practitioners of the new paradigm developed an alternative research and validation regimen. Some of the methodology was ideographic, embracing soft techniques that emphasized life history and subjective accounts as a primary source of knowledge. Researchers were encouraged to get 'inside the situation' of using impressionist accounts in the form of oral history, diaries and other subjective records. In the words of one observer, 'the ideographic method stresses the importance of letting one's subject unfold its nature and characteristics during the process of investigation'. Stretching the ideographic method even further, academics who hailed those from a particular social background, ethnic group, or geographic region, were said to have a 'privileged knowledge' of the topic under consideration. Gendering was also highly important as women were considered most capable of researching 'women issues'.<sup>38</sup>

Not unrelated to ideography was the notion that human experience could only be understood in terms of identity categories such as white males, African-American females, and gay persons of colour and so on. The group's characteristics were assumed to give individuals a distinctive identity, making probing individual opinions redundant. A companion idea known as essentialism minimizes the differences within the identity group while maximizing them among the categories. Because the neo-Marxist, critical paradigm aimed at reversing historical power relations, 'white men' were castigated for being dominant whereas former victims of domination including women were considered in a sympathetic way. While this classification created two

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: New Left Books, 1975).

<sup>38</sup> Burrell and Morgan, *Sociological Paradigms*, p. 6.

main categories - oppressors and victims - the complex consideration of power triggered a fierce inter-paradigmatic struggle for victim status, and perhaps more to the point, for the 'compensatory preferential treatment' that victim groups expected.<sup>39</sup>

Additional assumptions that made it easy to forgo rigorous empirical verification were built into the paradigm. One was 'presentism,' which is a 'belief in the primacy of the present and refusal to be guided by a vision either of the past or the future. Of course, this was a repudiation of positivist historical research on the ground that the past was not knowable and thus all of its versions should be considered equally valid. Still, because of the activist agenda of the paradigm practitioners, the version likely to be accepted was naturally determined by political conditions of the moment.

Presentism went hand in hand with the 'postness', that is, postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism along with feminism, which were different forms of a critique of scientific positivism. Finally, there was the assumption that reality could be understood through its representation, making texts the primary target of research. However, since texts were considered with great suspicion because of their assumed role in perpetuating elite dominance, they needed to be deconstructed in ways that uncovered the true reality. Such 'hermeneutics of suspicion' gave critical scholars extraordinary leeway in deciding what reality was, without the need to check facts. With so much emphasis on text, neo-Marxist, critical scholarship developed a style of research where citing of received authorities in the field, most notably Foucault, were most important, while empirical inquiry and verification were given a low priority.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Graham Good, *Betrayal of Humanities. Theory, Ideology, and Culture in the Contemporary University* (Ottawa: McGill-Queen's University, 2001), p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 63, 65.



The attack on positivism went hand in hand with disdain for the norms of academic neutrality and objectivity that was built into the traditional paradigm. Keenly aware of the normative base of all social theory, Weber warned scholars to stay above the political fray and adhere to a scrupulous professional objectivity. But neo-Marxist academics declared their fealty to radical humanism, defined as an effort to develop a radical social theory of change from a subjective perspective, as intermediate step towards societal change. Indeed, they promised to liberate humans from the 'predicament of constraints which existing social arrangements place upon human development' and transcend 'spiritual bonds and fetters which tie them to existing social patterns and release their full potential'.<sup>41</sup> To achieve that, they pledged to fight what Marx called 'false consciousness' - the mistaken perception of reality that the proletariat allegedly harboured because of the ideological manipulation of elites. Significantly, the new paradigm allowed its adherents to write off individual beliefs as 'false consciousness' because they did not consider the collective belief system to be made up of individual preference, a major requirement of behaviourally-oriented positivism. To the contrary, considering groups to be social constructs, critical scholars could claim to be spokespersons for assorted identity group. As a self-appointed revolutionary vanguard, the new academic cadres felt entitled to lead society by dint of their moral mandate. In the words of one practitioner, the 'moralist needs no evidence other than his senses to judge something right or wrong, and no elaborate scientific calculus to ascertain what the proper course of action should be'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the call for action came from Gramsci who

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<sup>41</sup> Burrell and Morgan *Sociological Paradigms*, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Kadushin, *The American Intellectual Elite* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974), p. 163.

urged academics to use their work to expedite political change and undermine the legitimacy of the existing status quo.<sup>43</sup>

## **The Rise of Radical Professoriate**

The political turmoil in the 1960s gave faculty imbued with a Gramscian-like mission of changing society a competitive edge. The behavioural tradition of value-free inquiry was put on the defensive and social advocacy took over. In a programmatic article in the *American Political Science Review*, Christian Bay urged his colleagues to take up social concerns. David Easton called to make the discipline more relevant to 'real' political needs and pleaded for a post-behavioural revolution; for Easton, one of the 'founding fathers' of behaviourism, this was an extraordinary about-face.<sup>44</sup>

The rapid expansion of the university system in the 1970s offered a large cadre of New Left and Vietnam-era activists an unprecedented job market; with a steady source of employment and the legitimacy that came from joining the professoriate, the new faculty could combine teaching and research with Gramsci's mandate of changing society. The neo-Marxist sociologist and a Gramsci disciple, Alvin Gouldner, developed a new blueprint to expedite societal transformation. In a 1970 work, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, he suggested that sociologists turn away from seeking empirical truth and engage in generating progressive values, expecting academics - in conjunction with other intellectuals - dubbed the New Class, to use their professional advantage to challenge societal norms and values and

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<sup>43</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notes*, p. 433.

<sup>44</sup> Christian Bay, 'Politics and Pseudopolitics. A Critical Evaluation of Some Behavioral Literature', *American Political Science Review*, 59 (1965), pp. 39-51; David Easton, 'The New Revolution in Political Science', *American Political Science Review*, 63 (1969), pp. 1051-61.

replace them with new ones.<sup>45</sup> Arnold Kaufman, a UCLA professor and an architect of the Vietnam era teach-ins, was a close second, urging his colleagues to embrace radical liberalism and challenge the old legitimacy norms, which, in his view represented the money elites. Kaufman's teach-ins became an important vehicle for delegitimizing the Vietnam War, first on the campuses and then among the general public.<sup>46</sup>

Empirical evidence supported the expectations of Gouldner and Kaufman. Starting in the 1970s, a series of surveys of liberal arts faculty revealed a very high percentage of Democratic-voting professors whose political opinion tended to gravitate to left and radical left. A 1984 study of the Carnegie Foundation revealed that only five percent of social science faculty described themselves as conservatives. Radicalism was especially strong in departments of philosophy, sociology and anthropology but also affected political science and history. Seymour Martin Lipset, the author of many of the surveys of college faculty, began an article by stating that 'almost all the Western writers who have identified the emergence of the New Class - a socially liberal or radical, highly critical intelligentsia - locate its principal base in the academy'.<sup>47</sup>

Taken together, these methodological and applied imperatives produced a serious challenge to the legitimacy parameters derived from the positivist paradigm. To neo-Marxist academics the idea that at some historical end-point the Western model of nation-state, liberal democracy and a market economy would be universally

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<sup>45</sup> Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

<sup>46</sup> Arnold Kaufman, *Radical Liberal: The New Politics, Theory and Practice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), pp. 126-28.

<sup>47</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset 'The New Class and the Professoriate', in B. Bruce-Briggs (ed.) *The New Class?* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1979), p. 67.

accepted was anathema. Weber's membership legitimacy claims spanning the Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft trajectory was distasteful to the academic disciples, who like Marx considered them a form of 'false consciousness' inflicted on the masses by their bourgeois masters. The updated version held that nations were actually invented by a cadre of intellectuals and nation-building entrepreneurs who fabricated history and manipulated cultural symbols to create the myth of a national origin and 'interdependence of faith'. Eric Hobsbawm, a Marxist professor at Birkbeck College, University of London, had first articulated the idea of nationalism as an 'invented tradition' in the late 1940s but it took him a few more decades to co-edit a highly influential book by the same name.<sup>48</sup> Hobsbawm, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, was naturally perturbed by Hitler's use of hyper-nationalism, but as a life-long anti-Zionist, he also sought to inculcate himself from the 'temptations of Jewish nationalism'. Hobsbawm's view was made even more popular because critical scholars found it perfectly suited to their needs to deconstruct the official narrative on the issue. Benedict Anderson span off the theme of invented tradition into a hugely successful book, *Imagined Communities*, which, together with Ernest Gellner's work on *Nations and Nationalism* challenged Weber's national legitimacy formula. The paradigm was able to present nationalism and nation-building as a contrived or even falsified belief system with dubious legitimacy claims.<sup>49</sup>

In yet another update to Marx's thesis of nationalism-as-false-consciousness, neo-Marxist scholars claimed that a critical mass of lower class and dispossessed people would be able to liberate themselves from nationalism and patriotism,

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<sup>48</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>49</sup> Benedict B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

described as constructs of ‘particularism’, and move on to a universal, one-world community.<sup>50</sup>

Weber’s authority system legitimacy in general and the liberal democratic model in particular, fared even less well in the opinions of neo-Marxist scholars. As noted earlier, the new paradigm rejected the idea that a collective belief was an equivalent to the sum-total of individual beliefs. Gouldner, who had previously disputed Weber’s plea for value-free inquiry, implied that a ‘totalized’ belief system could be best represented by an intellectual vanguard. Thus empowered, critical scholars rejected the legitimacy of the Western model of liberal democracy and its participatory progression as documented by Almond and Verba. Without the need to produce empirical proof they could argue, as Michael Parenti did, that such a model was a sham that covered up the real inequalities in power and economic status.<sup>51</sup>

Such a rephrasing of what constituted a legitimate authority system was clearly related to the issues of distributive justice. To recall, the positivist paradigm accepted the legitimacy of utilitarian-meritorious claims that underpin market economy, but neo-Marxist considered capitalism to be of questionable legitimacy because it failed to address issues of equality. As a matter of fact, by the 1960s, neo-Marxist scholars had developed an advanced version of principles of distributive justices based on the highly influential work of John Rawls. Rawls argued that economic growth should be regulated in such a way as to advance the wellbeing of the poorest members of a given society thus imposing a normative limit on what could be a morally acceptable limit of inequality in an economic system. Humanistic economy pioneered by Johan Galtung and John Burton added moral requirements

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein with Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Andre, Gunder Frank, *Dynamics of Global Crisis* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

<sup>51</sup> Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983).

that went well beyond egalitarianism; in this view, any economic system should be responsive to human needs, including human dignity and human rights.<sup>52</sup> In a measure of its success the Galtung-Burton formula inspired the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1976.

With neo-Marxist critical scholarship making strides in social sciences departments, it was only a question of time before Middle East studies - a bastion of traditionalist historians known as Orientalists, incorporated much of the same thinking.

### **Middle East Studies and the Neo-Marxist Paradigm**

Talal Asad, a Hull University anthropologist, used the genealogical method pioneered by Michele Foucault to conclude in the early 1970s that the anthropological study of the Middle East was influenced by the colonially-driven construct of Western scholars and colonial functionaries. He was particularly interested in the way Europeans had defined their colonial subjects as 'non-Westerns', notably with regard to customs and behaviour labelled as 'cruel'. Asad concluded that 'it was not the concern with the indigenous suffering that dominated their thinking, but the desire to impose what they considered civilized standards of justice and humanity on a subject population - that is the desire to create new human subjects'.<sup>53</sup>

Asad and his colleagues, Roger Owen from Oxford University (currently at Harvard University) and Sami Zubaida from the University of London, began holding

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<sup>52</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Johan Galtung, 'Towards New Indicators of Development', *Futures*, 8 (1976), pp. 261-65; John Burton, 'World Society and Human Needs', in Margot Light and A.J.R. Groom (eds.), *International Relations: A Handbook on Current Theory* (Boulder: Rienner, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> Talal Asad, *The Kababish Arab: Power, Authority and Consent in a Nomadic Tribe* (London: Hurst, 1970); idem (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1975); David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (eds.), *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 110.

seminars on critical approaches to Middle East studies. Like Asad, Zubaida upheld that Western culture was pervaded by racism towards non-Western people because of the colonial history of encounters with the 'natives'. The Hull group, which sought 'to expose some of its basic preconceptions, particularly as they related to the use made of its authority to support certain colonialist, imperialist, and Zionist enterprises', began publishing papers on the subject and in 1975 launched the *Review of Middle East Studies*, a journal dedicated to offering 'a critical appreciation of the Middle East and its history'. Asad's critical approach attracted limited attention and an occasional rebuke; the prominent anthropologist Clifford Geertz dismissed him as a 'Marxist' who switched from 'material-reductionism' to 'power-reductionism' - his name for critical scholarship.<sup>54</sup>

Yet it was only in 1978, when Edward Said, a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University published his celebrated *Orientalism*, that Asad's critique, renamed the postcolonial perspective received a broad exposure. In the introduction to the book Said thanked Michele Foucault and Samir Amin, an Egyptian radical, for inspiring him to adopt the critical approach but relegated Asad to a footnote. Said's forceful claim that European colonialism distorted Western perception of the Middle East made the book an academic bestseller, propelled by Foucault's popularity in the United States.<sup>55</sup> While traditional historians like Bernard Lewis criticized Said's post-colonialism as misguided scholarship at best and a political exercise at worse, the fortunes of positivist scholars declined with the

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<sup>54</sup> Sami Zubaida (ed.), *Race and Racialism* (New York: Tavistock, 1970), p. 4; *Review of Middle East Studies* 1 (1975); Arun Micheelsen, 'I don't Do Systems', interview with Clifford Geertz, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 14/1 (2002), pp. 2-20.

<sup>55</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Said amplified his argument in several books, including: *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); and *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Knopf, 1993).

collapse of the developmental model. To make matters worse, the Iranian revolution discredited many of the experts who vouched for the stability of the shah's regime. For Said and his followers this was a prime example of how, bereft of 'privileged knowledge' of the region and misled by developmentalism, traditionalist scholars missed the precipitous decline of the shah's legitimacy. Worse, they attributed the regime's fall to U.S. pressure for a Western-style political system and market economy.

With the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) increasingly dominated by scholars from the region itself, Said's post-colonialist perspective was disseminated in record time. This trend was very much in line with his reasoning that 'privileged understanding' comes from 'indigenous experience'; he welcomed this 'nativist' generation, urging them to provide an antidote to 'cultural Western domination' and predicting that the new MESA would provide a more accurate view of the region. The large network of MESA-sponsored conferences, journals and centres - many supported by Arab money - spread the paradigm, leading one observer to boast that the new epistemic community made serious inroads into the study of the Middle East. Said himself regarded the change as a triumph of his vision, writing that 'the formerly conservative Middle East Studies association underwent an important ideological transformation'. But as one critic stated, 'indigenization has changed MESA from an American organization interested in the Middle East to a Middle Eastern one that happens to meet in the United States'. Another critic accused MESA professors of being short on research and long on polemics and argued that Arab money behind many of the Middle East centres had prejudiced their findings.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism* pp. xxvii, 314; Muqtader Khan, 'Policy Entrepreneurs: The Third Dimension in American Foreign Policy Culture', *Middle East Policy*, September 1997; Neville B. DeAtkin, 'Middle East Scholars Strike Out



Implementing Gramsci's imperative, MESA became highly politicized and activist with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict leading the agenda. A 1990 survey of Middle East studies found that some 70 per cent of the courses touched on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the number of books and articles on the issue skyrocketed in the 1990s.<sup>57</sup> Said, of course, framed the Palestinian question in the broader context of the post-colonialist theory; but he was also a member of the Palestinian National Council, the PLO's 'parliament'. Other prominent MESA members - Rashid Khalidi and Hisham Sharabi - were also actively associated with the PLO.

### **Reversal of Fortunes: Israel in the Post-colonialist Perspective**

Under the positivist paradigm Israel enjoyed good scholarly reviews, not least because it was considered a successful example of the developmental model. Israel's political system - considered on par with Western democracies - was often favourably compared to the authoritarian regimes of its Arab neighbours. Although the economy was heavily socialist, Israel was never grouped with socialist Third World countries.

Positivism also benefited Israel's international legitimacy in the sense that the paradigm was closely linked to realism and neo-realism, schools of thought that considered the sovereign state the major international actor and deemed power and self-interest the guiding force in the international system with international institutions, non-government organizations, non-sovereign groups and other sub-state actors given lesser weight. Seen through this perspective, Israel was the winner of the 1948 war and the Palestinians, who defied the UN Partition Resolution 1947, were a losing belligerent. In the upheaval that followed WWII, the Palestinian refugees were

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in Washington', *Middle East Quarterly*, 1(1994), pp. 9-10; Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand. The Failure of Middle East Studies in America* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Studies, 2001), pp. 44-60, 117.

<sup>57</sup> Lorie Anne Selem, 'The DAN TES Survey of Courses in the Middle East', *MESA Bulletin*, December 1992, pp. 162-77.

only one of the many populations that were moved around, eliciting no immediate demand for action on their behalf from the international community.

Unsurprisingly, neo-Marxist, critical scholars had a very different assessment of Israel's legitimacy, especially with regard to its international standing. United against realism and neo-realism, they rejected power relations; standing somewhere between realism and idealism, the paradigm's interpretation of international reality became known as neo-Gramscianism with scholars like Robert Cox and Stephen Gill rejecting realism for postulating the existence of an 'anarchic' world that propelled powerful states into a hegemonic position and embraced a 'problem-solving' approach. Most important, this approach denied the ontological centrality of states, opting instead for a formula derived from historical materialism that 'identifies state formation and interstate politics as moments of the transnational dynamics of capital accumulation and class formation'. As opposed to positivism, it rejected the 'separation between subject and object... and the adoption of a dialectic understanding of reality as a dynamic totality and as a unity of opposites'. As a result, the neo-Gramscian view posited that hegemony was not a projection of the power of state (or group of states) but rather a class relationship; a class that managed to legitimize its interests through international institutions was considered hegemonic. As the globalization process legitimized a neoliberal historic class bloc, the only way to ensure working class interests was to create a counter-hegemonic working class bloc and international institutions that would ensure its interests.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium* 10/2 (1981); idem, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method', *Millennium* 12/2 (1983); Henk Overbeek, *Transnational Historical Materialism in Global Political Economy: Contemporary Theories* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 168-69.

The post-colonialist perspective in *Orientalism* was quintessentially neo-Gramscian with Zionism viewed as an integral part of the ‘colonialist-imperialist’ expansionism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, a few years before the book’s publication Galtung derided the Balfour Declaration and the UN partition resolution as belonging ‘to the more tragic mistakes of recent history’, blaming the continuation of the conflict on Israel which, in his words, ‘was conceived in sin, was born in sin, and grew up in sin’. George Haddad was equally scathing. ‘The Jewish problem could have been solved by other means’, he wrote. ‘The claim to Palestine was eventually decided not by notions of legitimacy and obvious rights, but by power politics in which colonial interests and the capitulation of the big powers to Zionist manipulation and Jewish pressure played a decisive role’. Small wonder that he blamed the British, the Zionists, and the international community as culpable for the tragedy of Palestine, whose ‘Arab inhabitants... were not in any way responsible for starting the conflict’.<sup>59</sup>

If one corollary of neo-Gramscianism was the branding of Israel as a colonialist aggressor, another was to portray Palestinians as the ultimate victim of colonialism. The attention given to non-state actors, combined with emphasis on Non-Government Organization (NGOs) and rapid expansion of Humanitarian International Law (HIL) made it easy for the paradigm practitioners to describe Israel as an imperialist creation that has kept the Palestinians in a state of colonial servitude.

As long as the charges against Israel were levelled mostly by Palestinian scholars, they were largely ignored by the Israeli liberal arts community. Things

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<sup>59</sup> Johan Galtung, ‘The Middle East and the Theory of Conflict’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 8/3-4 (1971), p. 176; George Haddad, ‘Arab Peace Efforts and the Solution of the Arab-Israeli Problem’, in Malcolm H. Kerr, (ed.) *The Elusive Peace in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 168.

changed when Israeli academics were increasingly swayed by the new thinking, gradually inculcating the new paradigm into Israeli academic institutions.

## Chapter 2 Squaring the Circle: A Non-Jewish State for the Jews?

The rise of the modern Zionist movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the wave of immigration it spawned were firmly rooted in the national awakenings in Europe. Watching from the sidelines, Jews wondered whether they could re-establish sovereignty in the Land of Israel, then part of the Ottoman Empire, where a Jewish community had maintained an uninterrupted existence since biblical times.

It was Theodor Herzl, a journalist and playwright from Vienna, who put political Zionism on a broader footing. In his 1896 small tract, *The Jewish State (Der Judenstaat)*, which attracted considerable attention in the Jewish world, Herzl argued that Jews were one people deserving a state of their own in their ancestral homeland that would redress their anomalous exilic position and gain them legitimacy in the world; indeed, a reborn Jewish state would benefit not only the Jews but also humankind. Not content to leave the matter to the realm of literary endeavour, in 1897 Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress, which led to the foundation of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and later, the Jewish Agency.

Despite his passionate national advocacy Herzl's notions about the identity of the proposed state were, ironically, devoid of a Jewish cultural or religious context. Indeed, in a novel *Altneuland (New Old Land)*, published in 1902, he described the state as multilingual, pluralistic, technologically advanced and European in nature. The ancient Temple would be rebuilt in Jerusalem according to modern principles, along a Palace of Peace that would serve as an international tribunal. *Altneuland* was designed to be a home of both Jews and Arabs who would interact on equal footing.

Rashid Bey, representing the Arabs, expresses joy at Palestine's economic progress and sees no reason for conflict between the two groups.<sup>60</sup>

While *Altneuland* might have looked like a good way to solve the problems of Jewish-Arab coexistence, it was essentially utopia. The socialist Zionists arriving in Palestine at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shared few of the Western-cosmopolitan characteristics of Herzl's ideal Jew, were eager to embrace Hebrew, and gravitated towards agrarian socialism. These early pioneers assumed that this new identity was in harmony with the Biblical-Hebraic origins of the ancient Hebrews and would pave a path to coexistence with the Arab population in the prospective Jewish homeland, or state.

### **Brit Shalom and the Bi-National Idea**

Much to the dismay of mainstream Zionism, German Jews proved reluctant Zionists. This highly assimilated community eagerly embraced the 'Jewish Reformation', a movement to modernize traditional orthodoxy and place the Jewish faith within the bounds of German cultural enlightenment. Only a small circle of German Jews felt the need to acknowledge the national distinction of the Jews and even a smaller number followed Herzl to the World Zionist Organization. One of them was Martin Buber, a scholar and philosopher who became the first editor of the Zionist publication *Die Welt*. According to a noted scholar of the subject, it was Buber who imbued German Zionism with a unique blend of 'Western ideas with radical Palestino-centrism'.<sup>61</sup> In other words, Buber wanted to create a Semitic - Jewish-Arab nation - that would serve as an exemplary humanistic society where both peoples

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<sup>60</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland* (Haifa: Haifa Publishers, 1960; Hebrew), pp. 69-74.

<sup>61</sup> Hagit Lavsky, *Before the Catastrophe: The Distinctive Path of German Zionism* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1996), pp. 148, 259, 263.

would have the freedom to coexist in peace and harmony. Clearly, Zionism that he once denounced as ‘power hysteria’ did not fit the bill of ‘Zion of the soul’.

A number of Buber biographers and his own writings illustrate the diverse and often contradictory intellectual traditions that brought him to view Jewish settlement in Palestine in such a way. Buber was brought up in a traditional religious Jewish family but early on in life suffered a crisis of faith that apparently brought him to the study of Kant, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche during his stay in Vienna in 1896. Under their influence, Buber developed the notion of religion as an existential encounter with God, a theme central to his famous 1923 essay *I and Thou*. By definition, this existential-universalistic reading of religion freed Buber from the nationalist definition that inspired his Zionist peers.<sup>62</sup>

If religion was an existential relationship between an individual and God, its spiritual nature was best illustrated, in Buber’s view, by the existence of spiritual communities such as the Hassidic communities in Eastern Europe. In fact, his fascination with Hassidism as a mystical-spiritual community predated his *I and Thou* evolution but did not negate it, as some critics would later claim. According to Gershom Scholem, an associate of Buber and a foremost authority on Hassidism, Buber saw in the admonition to experience joy in the world as it is an expression of the existential imperative of being in touch with the Here and Now.<sup>63</sup>

Buber’s admiration for the Hassidic community had more than a passing influence on shaping his views on the political structure of the Land of Israel, or Palestine as it was named by the Romans, and renamed by the British, who occupied the country towards the end of the First World War. Hassidism prompted Buber to

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<sup>62</sup>Hazon, *The Jewish State*, pp. 181, 184, 193; Asher D. Biemann, *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 63.

<sup>63</sup> Gershom Scholem, ‘Martin Buber’s Hasidism’, *Commentary*, October 1961.

immerse himself in the study of some Christian communities and Christian mystics whose insights he taught in the 'New Community' - a Berlin-based utopian society. Drawing on this experience, Buber developed the notion of a 'dialogue community', based on interpersonal 'dialogical relations', a sort of communitarian-socialist-pacifist utopia. While he only formalized his idea in *Paths in Utopia* in 1946, there were indications that Buber considered such a relationship to be of great importance to Arab-Jewish interaction as early as the 1920s.<sup>64</sup>

More to the point, Buber's unique understanding of Judaism led him to inquire into the proper relations between religion and politics. Like many philosophers and theologians before him he wrestled with the issue of what should be the proper boundary between religion and politics.<sup>65</sup> His answer was a non-dogmatic 'religious humanism' in the Jewish prophetic tradition that, in his view, judged politics by religious-transcendental criteria rather than political expediency.<sup>66</sup>

Applied to issues of a sovereign Jewish existence in Palestine, Buber's theory raised two issues. The first pertained to the moral grounds that Jews used to justify arriving in a place largely settled by Arabs; the second raised the question of whether the use of force to control them was permissible. While Buber decreed that Jews have a legitimate right to live in Palestine, he ruled out the use of force as antithetical to prophetic Judaism. Instead, he proposed a 'dialogue bi-national community', a form of voluntary Jewish-Arab coexistence along the lines suggested in his writings on voluntary communal living. Later on, Scholem, by then a prominent Buberite,

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1949), p. 135; Jon Woocher, 'The Politics of Dialogue Community', *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas*, 8 (April 1978), pp. 97-101.

<sup>65</sup> Ehud Luz, *Wrestling with an Angel: Power, Morality, and Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 167-76.

<sup>66</sup> Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, *On Intersubjectivity and Cultural Creativity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 159-60.



suggested that by teaching Arab children to read and write and by 'educating the population,' Jews could establish communication with the local Arabs.<sup>67</sup>

Arguing that Jews and Arabs should lead a bi-national existence was one thing. Persuading the Palestinian Arabs that there was a common basis for such a union was quite another. It was here that Buber could draw upon the circle of his academic friends and followers, including noted Orientalists like Shlomo Goitein, Ludwig Mayer and Joseph Horowitz to propagate the idea that Jews in Palestine were an integral part of the Orient. As Hazony pointed out, Buber was most anxious to distance himself from Herzl's vision of the Jewish state as an 'alien outpost' of Western culture. Horowitz, a prominent Orientalist and a colleague of Buber at the University of Frankfurt who travelled to the region, became well aware of the growing Arab opposition to the Balfour Declaration. By fusing the Jewish community to the Orient, Buber and his friends hoped to make it more 'palatable' to the Arabs.<sup>68</sup>

Even before fully articulating his views on the legitimacy of the Zionist endeavour, Buber felt compelled to confront Herzl. Following a bitter dispute, he resigned from *Die Welt* in 1904 to become editor of *The Jude*, a platform for many of his ideas. His followers who migrated to Palestine - including Arthur Ruppin, Hugo Bergman, Ernst Simon - subsequently formed Brit Shalom (Covenant of Peace) in 1925 to implement the bi-national community project. From their vantage point on the ground they realized that the Arabs would never accept a Jewish state - and, in their opinion, without Arab consent all Zionist activity would be futile. Echoing Buber, Brit Shalom members felt that the Jews in Palestine did not need to create a Jewish

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<sup>67</sup> Gershom Scholem, 'To the Image of Martin Buber', in Abraham Shapira, (ed.) *Explication and implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapoalim, 1975; Hebrew), pp. 455-62.

<sup>68</sup> Hazony, *The Jewish State*, p. 197.

state per se; instead, together with the Arabs, they would create a cultural centre in the Middle East based on the principles of social justice and ‘the teachings of the prophets and Jesus’.

Apart from implementing the principles of a spiritual-contractual community that Buber greatly admired, the framework proposed by Brit Shalom offered two additional attractions. First, it superseded the nation state, which gave one people, the so-called ‘people of the land’ primary rights as opposed to the minority - considered ‘guests’ of sorts. Bergman asserted that prophetic justice demanded that in a country occupied by two peoples there should be no privileged group. Indeed, Buber, Bergman and others felt that the new entity in Palestine - by eliminating the ills of a national state - would serve as a stellar example of a new of international morality and remove the need for force attending a national state. In their view, creating a sovereign state to protect the rights of the dominant group was immoral and illegitimate.<sup>69</sup>

The first experience of the Palestine-based members of Brit Shalom with the growing violence between Arabs and Jews made, in their mind, this imperative even more significant. By the early 1920s Arab attacks on Jews had ensued, though they were of a limited scope and directed from above.<sup>70</sup> Brit Shalom disciples were especially worried that a violent conflict would delegitimize the Zionist project, a view that received reinforcement from the veteran Jewish thinker Ahad Ha’am. A passionate advocate of Hebrew culture and literature, Ahad Ha’am broke with Herzl over the issue of Jewish sovereignty, advocating the creation of a Jewish cultural centre in Palestine that would usher in a Hebrew cultural renaissance in the Diaspora.

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<sup>69</sup> Hazony, *The Jewish State*, 196-98.

<sup>70</sup> Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 19-20, 30.

In his critique of *Altneuland*, Ahad Ha'am chastised Herzl for downplaying the role of Hebrew. He was even more unsettled by Herzl's call for mass migration of Jews because, as an intellectual elitist, he considered large masses detrimental to his vision of an exclusive cultural centre.

Although Ahad Ha'am did not share Buber's hope of bi-national coexistence becoming an epitome of international morality and justice, he was taken aback by the 'colonial' relations that had developed between the Jewish pioneers and the native population. On an early visit to Ottoman Palestine he noted that some Jews treated Arabs with contempt. 'We are used to thinking of the Arabs as primitive men of the desert, as a donkey-like nation that neither sees nor understands what is going around it', he wrote. 'But this is a great error. The Arab, like all sons of Sham, has sharp and crafty mind... Should time come when life of our people in Palestine imposes to a smaller or greater extent on the natives, they will not easily step aside'.<sup>71</sup>

On that and other occasions, Ahad Ha'am warned about the abuse of power that went against the teaching of the prophets:

However, a political idea alien to the national culture can turn the people's heart away from spiritual power and produce a tendency to achieve its 'honours' by achieving physical power and political independence, thus severing the thread linking it with its past and losing the base which sustained it throughout history.

Ahad Ha'am, who settled in Palestine in the 1920s, was quick to imply that Arab violence against the Jews was a product of the colonization project. At the same time, he chastised the Jews for using force in their own defence, reinforcing Buber's

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<sup>71</sup> Tom Segev, *One Palestine Complete* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2001), p. 104; Ahad Ha'am, 'Emet Me'ereztz Israel' (Truth from the Land of Israel), in *Crossroads* (first published in Berlin by Judischer verlag in 1921; Hebrew) <http://www.benyehuda.org/ginzberg/Gnz019.html>.

prediction that Zionism required too much military power to serve a cultural-spiritual foundation for the Jewish renaissance.<sup>72</sup>

While Ahad Ha'am had little impact on the political scene in Palestine, Brit Shalom - numbering some two hundred activists - gained a high profile due to dynamic leadership of Judah Magnes who emigrated from the United States to Palestine in 1921. A Reform rabbi and an active pacifist during WWI, Magnes was connected to the affluent and powerful anti-Zionist German Jewish community in New York. The Reform movement's Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, which defined Judaism as a religion with a universal message unfettered by parochial tribalism and nationalism, provided the group with a rationale. The Platform essentially reflected the German-Jewish 'Classic Reform' faith that, as noted above, modernized and acculturated Jewish orthodoxy. The association of Reform Rabbis was unnerved by the nationalism embedded in Zionism and gave the World Zionist Organization a cold shoulder.

More important, prominent anti-Zionist Jews opposed the Balfour Declaration. Henry Morgenthau Sr., a former ambassador to Istanbul, called Zionism 'the most stupendous fallacy in Jewish history'. Julius Rosenwald, a leading philanthropist whose family founded Sears Roebuck, and Felix Warburg, an equally wealthy banker and philanthropist, were resolved to fight Zionism in Washington. They were part of a group of prominent Jews who signed a petition to President Woodrow Wilson protesting his intention to support the Balfour Declaration. The petition raised a number of concerns about settling Jews in Palestine, including the resistance of the

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<sup>72</sup> Ahad Ha'am, *Selected Essays by Ahad Ha'am*, (Philadelphia: Kessinger Publishing, 2005); Martin Buber, *On Zion: the History of an Idea*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), pp. 143-46; Ratsabi *Between Zionism and Judaism*, pp. 188-203; George R. Wilkes, 'Jewish Renewal', in Nicholas de Lange and Miri Freud Kandel (eds.), *Modern Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 116.

Arabs who already lived there. The signatories warned the president that siding with the Jews would jeopardize Washington's relation with the Arab world.<sup>73</sup>

The activity of the anti-Zionist group reached a peak during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, where it joined State Department officials to lobby against Wilson's plan to support the declaration. When the president overruled his own bureaucrats and put American support behind the Jewish Homeland in Palestine, the anti-Zionists redoubled their disruptive efforts. Magnes, newly arrived in Palestine, became instrumental in this effort.

Having persuaded Warburg to become the chief financial supporter of the Hebrew University he used this connection to have himself instated as the new institution's president and chancellor, driving the irritated Albert Einstein to comment that 'the good Felix Warburg, thanks to his financial authority ensured that the incapable Magnes was made director of the Institute'.<sup>74</sup>

Whatever Einstein's misgivings, Magnes's control gave Brit Shalom a clear intellectual and political edge. Even before the official opening in 1925, Magnes declared that the university would serve to promote the idea of Jewish-Arab coexistence. Making good his word, academic staff in a number of departments reflected this mission. In short order, the School of Oriental Studies hired Goitein and other orientalist to teach and research subjects that, in Buber's words, would bring a 'sympathetic knowledge of our neighbours'. While Buber sincerely hoped that the newly discovered 'shared past' would provide a solid underpinning for Jewish-Arab coexistence, some observers were less charitable accusing the School of inventing a new Semitic Jewish history.

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<sup>73</sup> Thomas Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism, American Council for Judaism* (Philadelphia; Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 4-10.

<sup>74</sup> Albrecht Folsing, *Albert Einstein: A Biography* (Harnomdworth: Penguin, 1998), pp. 494-95.

Magnes used his own high-profile position to further the political cause of bi-nationalism, mainly through a public relations effort and the Jewish Agency where he was a member. Faithful to the premise that the local Arabs would never accept a recognized and institutionalized national Jewish presence, he warned about an impending clash where Jews would have to take up arms: 'The question is, do we want to conquer Palestine now as Joshua... with fire and sword? Or do we want to take cognizance of Jewish religious developments since Joshua - our Prophets... and repeat the words, not by might, and not by violence, but by my spirit, saith the Lord'.<sup>75</sup>

The 1929 pogroms in Palestine in general, and the Hebron massacre - where local Arabs murdered 67 Jews and wounded scores of others - in particular, gave the anti-Zionists an opening. While the Jewish Agency appealed to prominent European figures to safeguard both Jewish religious rights of access to the Western Wall and immigration quotas to meet the needs of eastern and central European Jewry, Magnes demanded an immediate renunciation of the Balfour Declaration, writing that 'we must once and for all give up the idea of a Jewish Palestine'. Reiterating Buber's position that only total parity and equality could assure a peaceful existence for both communities, he chastised the World Zionist Organization for pursuing a 'militarist, imperialist, political Zionism' and urged a policy of pacifism, internationalism and Spiritual Zionism. Moreover, he tried to persuade his patron, Warburg, to threaten the withdrawal of funding for the Zionist enterprise, a suggestion that wealthy American anti-Zionists were quite amenable to. Although nothing came out of this plan, the *New York Times*, under the ownership of the staunchly anti-Zionist Sulzberger family, launched its own campaign to undermine the Zionists. Sulzberger sent Joseph Levy,

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<sup>75</sup> Hazony, *The Jewish State*, pp. 197, 206, 386.

his Palestine correspond, to approach the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the effective leader of the Palestinian Arabs. Levy arranged a meeting between Magnes and Harry St. John Philby, a British adventurer and explorer who converted to Islam with alleged connections to al-Husseini, who in turn drafted a memorandum of understanding with Magnes that renounced the Balfour Declaration and gave up any special rights for the Jews in exchange of a Palestinian government where Jews would be a minority.<sup>76</sup>

In spite of its roster of leading academics and the institutional base provided by the Hebrew University, Brit Shalom declined in the 1930s. Ignoring the Philby-Magnes proposal altogether, the mufti drove his constituents to ever growing militancy, culminating in the 1936-39 'revolt' that made it eminently clear that the al-Husseini circles would settle for nothing less than total sovereignty over Palestine and the expulsion of its Jewish community. So much so that even the indefatigable Magnes seemed to have his moments of doubt, noting that 'the Palestinian Arabs are still half savage, and their leaders almost all small men'.<sup>77</sup>

There were other Jewish movements opposing Zionism too. The ultra-orthodox Neturei-Karta was founded in Jerusalem in 1938, splitting off from Agudat Israel, which had been established in 1912 for the purpose of fighting Zionism but stopped negating it after some time. Over the years, a number of Neturei Karta activists and followers settled outside Palestine, leaving the country in which they and their families had lived for many generations.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 213; Joseph Heller, *The Birth of Israel, 1945-1949: Ben-Gurion and His Critic* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), p. 161.

<sup>77</sup> Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon, (eds.) *Wrestling with Zion. Progressive Jewish American Response to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Grove, 2002); Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed*, pp. 31-38.

<sup>78</sup> Neturei Karta website <http://www.nkusa.org/aboutus/index.cfm>.

As the situation in Europe darkened, the Yishuv became less and less responsive to Brit Shalom's vision of peaceful coexistence. In May 1939 Arab violence reaped its most significant fruit in the form of a British White Paper that reduced Jewish immigration to Palestine to a trickle, and imposed draconian restrictions on Jewish land purchase, thus causing extreme anxiety and bitterness in both the Yishuv and world Jewry. The outbreak of the Second World War, followed by growing evidence of mass extermination of European Jews forced Brit Shalom leaders to revisit their tactics, without abandoning their overall cause.

### **The Holocaust Crucible: A New and Improved Bi-Nationalism?**

After years of cautious practical Zionism that saw Jewish settlement as a key to future sovereignty, socialist Zionism articulated a bold vision of a Jewish state. Prodded by the situation in Europe and sensing a historical opportunity to seize the initiative, Ben-Gurion gathered some six hundred Zionist leaders in the Biltmore Hotel in New York in 1942 where they declared that Palestine should be established as a Jewish Commonwealth.

The declaration ignited a storm of protest from American anti-Zionists that culminated in the creation of the American Council on Judaism (ACJ). Among the founders were Louis Wolsey, Morris Lazon, Abraham Cronbach, David Philipson, and Henry Cohen. Elmer Berger became chief executive and its most vocal spokesman while Lessing Rosenwald, a heir to the Sears Roebuck fortune, accepted the presidency. Eugene Meyer Jr., owner of the *Washington Post*, and Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times*, supported the ACJ, with Sulzberger being behind the wording of the founding declaration though failing to sign it.

The declaration opposed 'all philosophies that stress the racialism, the nationalism and the homelessness of the Jews, as injurious to their interests'. The



'Digest of Principles' rejected the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, but was kept mostly private. However, in 1943, Rosenwald went public with an article in *Life* magazine that created enormous controversy. At the same month, a CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis) meeting denounced the ACJ, leading to tremendous bitterness between the Zionists and the anti-Zionists. Between 1943 and 1948 the ACJ conducted a 'fierce public campaign against Zionism' with its spokesmen emphasizing the 'purely religious nature of Judaism' and accusing the Zionists of manipulating Jews and using the Holocaust to advance a Jewish state.<sup>79</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic, the response of the anti-Zionists was equally fierce. Working closely with the ACJ, Magnes, together with Henrietta Szold, the leader of Hadassah, reconstituted Brit Shalom under the banner of Ihud (Unity) in August 1942. Many of the original members were present among the hundred odd new cofounders; the group could also rely on Buber who arrived in Palestine in 1938 and obtained a position at the Hebrew University, teaching anthropology and sociology. Buber, widely considered the Ihud ideologue, took a lead in attacking the socialist Zionists in general and Ben-Gurion in particular, charging him with relying 'on imaginary prospects which have no reality' and conducting foreign policy not based on the 'real interests of the people'. Scorning the Biltmore Program, he called it '*fata morgana*' (mirage) as well as a contradiction of the moral principles of the Jewish people, as 'it is impossible for any length of time to build with one hand while holding a weapon with the other'. Moshe Smilansky, a ranking Ihud member, objected to a Jewish state as part of his general rejection of small states which he

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism: American Council for Judaism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 4.

considered inferior to a large federation, or confederation, such as the United States or the British Commonwealth.<sup>80</sup>

But it was Magnes who gave Ihud a high profile abroad. In an article in *Foreign Affairs* he called for a U.S.-British initiative to prevent the partition of mandatory Palestine.<sup>81</sup> To this effect, Magnes testified no fewer than eleven times before the 1947 United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) in an attempt to sway it against partition. Equally important, the ACJ used his writings to lobby the State Department and the Truman administration against a Jewish state. In a conversation with Secretary of State George Marshall on 4 May 1948, ten days before the proclamation of the state Israel, Magnes told the Secretary who bitterly fought Truman on the issue, that Israel was ‘an artificial community’ and suggested imposing economic sanctions that, in his opinion, would halt the ‘Jewish war machine’.<sup>82</sup>

The full revelation of the Holocaust did not alter Ihud’s fidelity to the bi-national ideal. In its only concession, the group agreed to Truman’s 1946 suggestion that 100,000 Jewish refugees be admitted to Palestine. It also argued for 50-50 parity between Jews and Arabs, as compared to its earlier insistence on Arab majority. In the opinion of one historian, Magnes ‘did not retreat one iota from the idea of bi-nationalism’.<sup>83</sup> Such a stand outraged many: the Zionist Organization of America demanded that Magnes be fired as president of the Hebrew University. Szold, an icon among Jewish American women, was subject to barrage of protest from her own organization.

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<sup>80</sup> Heller, *The Birth of Israel*, pp. 163-64

<sup>81</sup> Judah Magnes ‘Toward Peace in Palestine’, *Foreign Affairs*, 21/2 (January 1943).

<sup>82</sup> Joan Dash, ‘Doing Good in Palestine: Magnes and Henrietta Szold’, in William Brinner and Moses Rischin (eds.) *Like All Other Nations? The Life and Legacy of Judah L. Magnes* (New York: State University of New York, 1987), pp. 109-12; Justus D. Doencke, ‘Principle and Expediency: The State Department and Palestine’, *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 2/4 (1978), p. 5; Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism*, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Heller, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 166

Faced with ferocious opposition, Magnes fled to the United States early in 1948, where, on behalf of the American Council for Judaism, he continued to lobby against a Jewish state, meeting with representatives from the United Nations, Britain, France, and the United States; during a meeting with Secretary Marshall, he pleaded for American military intervention to stop the newly declared state of Israel from defending itself from the invading Arab armies.

Magnes died on 27 October 1948 but Buber and Arendt, who was fast becoming the new face of anti-Zionism, filled in the void. Writing in *Commentary*, Arendt denounced the ‘fanaticism and hysteria that had brought almost all of Jewry to demand a Jewish state and urged the United Nations to negotiate with Ihud and non-Zionist Jews willing to reach an immediate settlement with ‘moderate Arabs’.<sup>84</sup>

### **The Canaanite Movement: Ancient Royalists in the Orient**

Though mainstream Zionism maintained that compromise with the local Arab population was possible, a smaller group led by Vladimir Jabotinsky challenged the view that the local Arabs could be induced to a compromise with the Jews:

The Arabs loved their country as much as the Jews did. Instinctively, they understood Zionist aspirations very well, and their decision to resist them was only natural... There was no misunderstanding between Jew and Arab, but a natural conflict... No Agreement was possible with the Palestinian Arab; they would accept Zionism only when they found themselves up against an ‘iron

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<sup>84</sup> Brinner and Rischin, *Like All Other Nations?* pp. 109-112; Hazony, *The Jewish State*, p. 262; Hannah Arendt, ‘To Save the Jewish Homeland: There is Still Time’, *Commentary*, May 1948.

wall', when they realize they had no alternative but to accept Jewish settlement.<sup>85</sup>

In 1923 Jabotinsky broke with Weizmann when the World Zionist Organization rejected the goal of creating a Jewish state on both banks for the Jordan River. He formed the Alliance of Revisionist Zionists and a youth movement, Beitar. Despite the nationalist tenor of the Revisionists Jabotinsky had mixed feelings about traditional Jewish identity. Reflecting his personal distance from the culture of the *Ostjude* (East European Jew), he criticized his brethren for lack of physical stamina, discipline and military prowess bordering on cowardice.<sup>86</sup> To remedy these allegedly Diaspora-bred attitudes, articulated the philosophy of *Hadar*, his term for a number of characteristics and qualities such as respect, politeness, loyalty, physical fitness, proper social manners and self-esteem. As befitting a secularist, Jabotinsky made few references to Jewish religion, though the Jewish connection to the biblical Land of Israel was an integral part of the Beitar training.<sup>87</sup> Taking military valour one step further, the Revisionists created their underground movement *Irgun Zvai Leumi* (National Military Organization), commonly referred to as the Irgun.

By the mid-1920s, Beitar had attracted a large following among the nationalist segment of the Yishuv. Among them was Uriel Heilperin who changed his name first to Halperin and then Shelah (later he used the pen-name Yonatan Ratosh). His father Yehiel, a Hebrew educator in Warsaw, brought up the family speaking Hebrew rather than the customary Yiddish. Together with his two brothers - who later renamed

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<sup>85</sup> Vladimir Jabotinsky *The Iron Wall*, first published in Russian under the title *O Zheleznoi Stene* in *Rassvyet*, 4 November 1923. [http://www.jabotinsky.org/multimedia/upl\\_doc/doc\\_191207\\_49117.pdf](http://www.jabotinsky.org/multimedia/upl_doc/doc_191207_49117.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> Amnon Rubinstein, *The Zionist dream revisited: from Herzl to Gush Emunim and Back* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Ofira Seliktar, *New Zionism and the Foreign Policy System of Israel* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 77-78.

themselves Uzzi Ornan and Zvi Rin - Ratosh joined the Irgun where he became close to Avraham 'Yair' Stern - the charismatic figure who would subsequently establish the ultra-radical Lehi group. Ratosh, a gifted writer and poet served as editor of the Irgun publication, *Ba-Herev*, (By the Sword). However, by the end of the 1930s Jabotinsky had demoted Ratosh because of his 'radical tendencies', that is, a demand to immediately create a Jewish state and an affinity with Lehi, a splinter from the Irgun that embraced terrorism in an effort to eject the British. Embittered and disillusioned, Ratosh moved to Paris in 1938 where he met Adyah Gurevitch, a historian, known under his Hebrew name as Adyah Gor Horon, or A.G. Horon. According to historian Yaakov Shavit, author of a comprehensive study of the Canaanite movement, during his stay in Paris Horon was exposed to a flourishing school of historical-linguistic-anthropological Orientalism founded by Silverstre de Sacy. Coinciding with French colonial interest in the Orient, de Sacy disseminated the notion of an ancient Canaanite (Phoenician)-Semitic civilization. Victor Berard, the author of works on the Phoenician-Canaanite civilization, had also appealed to Horon, who studied Semitic languages and history. Ernest Renan, a leading 19<sup>th</sup> century literary figure, was a major influence as well, especially his claim that Jews were not a unified racial group in a biological sense.<sup>88</sup>

In 1928 archaeologists digging in Syria discovered tablets bearing the Ugaritic script, a language that had once flourished in Mesopotamia in 1500-1300 BCE and bore a remarkable resemblance to Hebrew. Umberto Cassuto, a professor at the Hebrew University, was among a number of scholars who claimed that Ugaritic texts

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<sup>88</sup> Shavit, *The New Hebrew Nation*, pp. 23-24.

informed the Bible. To Horon, the tablets were proof of the Hebrew link to the ancient Semitic civilizations and its lost glory.<sup>89</sup>

Historical interest aside, Horon was also an active member of the Revisionist movement and head of the Beitar office in Paris. Using his position as an insider, in 1931-32 he published a series of nine articles in Revisionist papers expanding on the theory that the Hebrew nation was rooted in Canaanite civilization. An opportunity to persuade his colleagues to adopt the Canaanite theory presented itself in September 1935 when, following their final break from the World Zionist Organization, the Revisionists convened in Vienna to establish the New Zionist Organization (NZO, better known as the Revisionist Zionist Organization). Leading a group of radical atheists, Horon unsuccessfully fought Jabotinsky's proposal to include a religious plank that called to 'inculcating deeply the holy heritage among the Jewish society in the future Jewish state'. Upsetting the delegates by urging to separate Zionism from Judaism, Horon derided religion as a reactionary force on top of being anti-national and anti-territorial and urged the delegates to adopt his Canaanite theory. Jabotinsky, by then more open to the religious feelings of his followers, admitted to being deeply hurt by Horon and proclaimed that linking the Canaanites and the Bible was 'mixing apples and oranges'.<sup>90</sup>

Undaunted by the rebuke, Horon worked hard to publicize his views. In 1938 he gave a series of lectures in the Renaissance Club in Paris, subsequently published in a pamphlet titled *Canaan et les Hebreux*, which asserted that the ancient Hebrews derived from the Canaanite civilization and that this record was lost when the monotheist scribes in the Temple altered or expunged the Canaanite foundational

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<sup>89</sup> John Grey, *The legacy of Canaan: the Ras Shamra Texts and their Relevance to the Old Testament*, (Leiden: Brill, 1957), p. 116.

<sup>90</sup> Shavit, *The New Hebrew Nation*, pp. 23-30.

stories in the Bible. Worse, the rabbinical tradition had corrupted the Hebrew civilization and turned it into a Jewish one. This alarmed Jabotinsky and in December 1938 he warned Horon not to ‘degrade Israel in order to glorify the Hebrews or denigrating Monotheism in order to exalt idol worship’.

Arguably, the timely arrival of Ratosh in Paris saved Horon’s Canaanite vision. Greatly impressed by *Canaan et les Hebreux*, Ratosh embarked upon his return to Palestine on an effort to re-educate his people on their true origin, alleged to be in the *Land of Kedem*, an area of the Fertile Crescent inhabited by Canaanites. Urging the Yishuv to embrace a Hebrew rather than Jewish identity and to sever all ties to the Jewish past, he derided Judaism as ‘an ill culture’, a culture of an ‘immigrant society’, a ‘spiritual leprosy’. Clearly, the Canaanites, or the New Hebrews as they preferred to be known, found the ancient sea-faring civilization of the Canaanite-Phoenicians to be a cure for Jewish ‘leprosy’.<sup>91</sup> In a 1943 manifesto, Ratosh urged the Yishuv youth to reject affiliation with the ‘Shtetl and history of the Diaspora’ that he compared to ‘borrowed cloth, faded and tattered and too-tight’ and to embrace the Canaanite past.<sup>92</sup>

His demand from the Palestinian Arabs was even harsher. Since the Canaanite program spoke of ‘a stimulation of the culture of the homeland based on the national Hebrew revival, drawing on the values intrinsic to this land, and transmitting them to all its inhabitants’, they were urged to discard their Islamic-Arab identity and be incorporated into a ‘uniform educational and cultural system based on the Hebrew culture’. As one scholar put it, ‘the Canaanite concept of Hebrew domination

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<sup>91</sup> Ron Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism: A Discourse Analytic Cultural Study* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 12-13, 107, 197; Shavit, *The New Hebrew Nation*, pp. 29, 40, 45, 114.

<sup>92</sup> Yonatan Ratosh, *Ktav el Hanoar Haivri*, (1943; Hebrew).

amounted to the elimination of the Arab cultural presence'.<sup>93</sup> With his customary attention to details and a flair for the dramatic, Ratosh even designed a flag for *Eretz ha-Kadem*. In the words of James Diamond, author of the definitive study on the Canaanites: 'Instead of the Zionist tallit... Ratosh prefers the letter alef, written in its ancient Hebrew or Canaanite form, emblazoned in gold on a field of blue and purplish-scarlet (tehelet v'argaman). These colors affirm for Ratosh the royal glory of the ancient Hebrew past... the *alef*, which originally denoted a bull, is a 'primeval symbol of strength and majesty'.<sup>94</sup>

Bold vision of a resurrected an ancient royal past aside, the New Hebrews attracted virtually no political following. Ratosh's group numbered some twelve members, including his brothers, as well as a few writers, artists and poets: Benjamin Tamuz, Aharon Amir, Moshe Giora, Yitzhak Danziger, Ezra Zohar, Dani Herman, and Avraham Rimon. Drawing on his Irgun connections, Ratosh tried to convince Stern to adopt the Canaanite precepts, to no avail. In any event, the British killed Stern in 1942 severing Ratosh's most important link to the Revisionist underground.<sup>95</sup>

The literary establishment of the Yishuv was even more hostile. Nathan Alterman, the reigning poet of the day and leader of the literary circle *Turim*, attacked Ratosh for his fanciful interpretation of the Jewish past. Avraham Shlonsky, the influential poet and literary editor actually coined the term Canaanite in effort to disparage the group. That Ratosh and his friends continued their brutal critique of Jewish culture in the midst of the Holocaust struck many as insensitive at best and callous at worse. The call to create a pan-Semitic entity in Greater Palestine sounded hollow in the face of Arab rejectionism. Unlike Brit Shalom though, the Canaanites,

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<sup>93</sup> Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Re-Visioning Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 70.

<sup>94</sup> Diamond, *Homeland or Holy Land?* p. 62.

<sup>95</sup> Shavit, *The New Hebrew Nation*, pp. 52-53.



with a strong grounding in literature and visual arts, survived as a cultural movement that was to gain traction over time.<sup>96</sup>

## **The Communist Version of Bi-nationalism**

Much as the Zionist movement appealed to nationally-oriented Jews it left the sizeable socialist and communist segments unmoved or even hostile. The Bund Party - organized at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Tsarist Russia as an ethnic section of the Communist Party - rejected the idea of Jewish statehood and responded to the Balfour Declaration with the slogan of *do-igkeit* (here-ness), meaning that Jews should develop their own culture in the countries of their existence. When Jabotinsky initiated the evacuation of large number of European Jews to Palestine in the face of the growing Nazi threat he was rebuked by a Bund leader: 'The Zionists are unable and unwilling to understand that we Bundists cannot accept, even for a moment, the trappings of a capitalist society. They, on the other hand, wish to remain within these trappings. Because they adapt themselves to the existing capitalist society, they cannot understand the urgency of our struggle in Poland'.<sup>97</sup>

Hard-core Jewish communists went further in their rejection of Zionism. Rosa Luxemburg, a prominent German Jewish communist leader, viewed herself as free from national feelings: 'I feel equally close to the wretched victims of the rubber plantations in Putumayo or to the Negroes in Africa... I have no separate corner in my heart for the ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world'.<sup>98</sup> Such declarations were part of the communist ideology that rejected national sentiment as a basis for human organization and expected class interests to trump bonds of ethnicity and nationality -

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<sup>96</sup> Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 133.

<sup>97</sup> Ami Isseroff, 'The anti-Zionism of the Jewish Workers Bund', *The Hidden History of anti-Zionism*, 2005. [http://www.zionism-israel.com/his/The\\_Jewish\\_Bund.htm](http://www.zionism-israel.com/his/The_Jewish_Bund.htm).

<sup>98</sup> James Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 54.

a line that the Palestine Communist Party (PCP), formed in 1923, eagerly adopted. Although mostly Jewish, the party denounced as ‘a movement of the Jewish bourgeoisie allied to British imperialism’ and took the Arab side whenever it resorted to anti-Jewish violence and terror. This created much tension between its Jewish and Arab members, though, ironically, the pro-Arab policy failed to attract more Arabs to the party.<sup>99</sup>

Both communists and the socialists of the Mapam and Hashomer Hatzair movements participated in the League for Arab-Jewish Rapprochement, an organization founded in 1938 by Haim Kalvarisky, a Jewish farmer and peace activist. The League believed that capitalism and imperialism stood in the way of good relations between the Arab and Jewish working classes, advocated Arab-Jewish cooperation and opposed the creation of a Jewish state. Writing on the ‘Arab Terror’ of 1936- 39, Smilansky emphasized the role of foreign imperialist forces: ‘The hostile relations stemmed from foreign influence. Today we witness Arab-Jewish rapprochement taking place naturally, almost spontaneously’.<sup>100</sup>

The outbreak of World War II and the Holocaust threw the party’s Jewish members into turmoil, raising doubts about its rigid, doctrinaire anti-Zionism and culminating (in 1943) in a split into Jewish and Arab groups with the latter forming (in 1944) the National Liberation League (NLL). Both the PCP and NLL opposed the November 1947 partition resolution, holding out for a bi-national state, but the surprising Soviet decision to endorse the resolution and recognize the state of Israel forced them to follow suit. The PCP which subsequently became the Communist Party of Eretz Israel (MAKEI), along with the NLL, bowed to reality and welcomed

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<sup>99</sup> Joel Beinin, ‘The Palestine Communist Party, 1919-1948’, *MERIP Reports*, March 1977, pp. 3-17.

<sup>100</sup> Robert F. Barsky, *Noam Chomsky: A Life of Dissent* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997). p. 75.

the new state. After the 1948 war MAKEI and NLL merged adopting the name the Communist Party of Israel (MAKI).<sup>101</sup>

## **The Marginalization of the Bi-national Opposition**

Even the highly idealistic and motivated advocates of bi-nationalism could hardly ignore the fact that the creation of Israel was a huge triumph for Zionism. That both the United States and the Soviet Union recognized the new state was probably even more disheartening for them. International goodwill towards Israel was only part of their problem, however. The mass immigration of Holocaust survivors and Jews from the Arab states changed the country's demographic balance in ways that made its Jewish nature much more pronounced. In order to survive, each of the three groups had to make a serious adjustment in its philosophy and modus operandi.

To remain relevant, Ihud reinvented itself as somewhat of a pacifist organization dedicated to promoting peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This transition was made easier because Buber, by then a renowned world philosopher, had replaced Magnes as the group's public face. Though devoting an increasing share of his time to philosophy, Buber was active in Arab-Israeli reconciliation. The American Friends of Ihud, an organization chaired by Maurice Friedman, attracted its share of vocal anti-Zionists, something that Buber seemed to have tolerated.<sup>102</sup>

In his new role as peacemaker, Ihud was quite outspoken on the need to find an accommodation with the Arab states. Ignoring years of Egypt-originated terror attacks on Israeli civilians, and President Gamal Abdel Nasser's increasingly belligerent policy, Buber scolded Ben-Gurion for the attack on Egypt in 1956, known

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<sup>101</sup> Musa Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919-1948: Arabs and Jews in the Struggle for Internationalism* (London: Ithaca Press, 1979), pp. 5-7; Emile F. Sahliyeh, *In Search of Leadership: West Bank Politics since 1967* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1988).

<sup>102</sup> Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), p. 236.

as the Sinai Campaign or Suez Campaign, which the *Ihud* publication *Ner* considered an unjustified expression of militarism. Buber also worked to solve the problem of the 1948 Palestinian refugees in ways that were bound to clash with the Israeli government. In a 1961 conversation with Joseph Johnson, President of the Carnegie Endowment for international Peace and an American representative on the refugee problem, Buber transmitted an *Ihud* proposal to allow the refugees to choose whether to settle in the Arab countries and receive compensation or to return to Israel as full citizens. This stand contradicted Israel's adamant opposition to the wholesale repatriation of refugees and its insistence that the refugee issue would have to be resolved as part of a comprehensive peace settlement.

Much as Buber went against core government positions on the refugee issue, his most high profile disagreement with the Labour government occurred during the 1962 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. *Ihud* and his leaders launched a protest against Eichmann's death sentence, provoking a public outcry from Holocaust survivors and their families. Residing then in Germany, Buber let it be known that he was 'disgusted with the whole process'. His friend Ernst Simon at the Hebrew University pleaded with Israel's president to commute Eichmann's sentence. Few applauded Buber's stand, but most of Israeli citizens were outraged. One of them sarcastically wrote to express 'condolences to Professor Martin Buber on the hanging of Adolph Eichmann'.<sup>103</sup> Clearly, the divide between *Ihud* and popular sentiment on this and other issues was too wide to breach. When Buber died in 1965, *Ihud* seemed like a forgotten chapter in Israeli politics, despite Arendt lending her seal of approval to many of its ideas.

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 349, 355.

Greatly as Brit Shalom ideals suffered from Israel's changing demography, the Canaanites vision of a Semitic empire fared even less well. The Canaanites found that the Yiddish or Arabic speaking Jews had no desire to turn into 'New Hebrews' preferring instead to become 'Israeli Jews'. Perhaps most shocking to the Canaanites, the Mizrahim, as Jews of Middle Eastern descent are commonly known, harboured a particular hostility towards Arabs, making them unlikely recruits for a bi-national state. As Diamond succinctly noted, the Canaanites 'were demographically overwhelmed' and relegated to 'coffee shops in northern Tel Aviv', a pejorative reference to the affluent Ashkenazi neighbourhoods in the city.<sup>104</sup>

Still Ratosh and his small circle, based largely at the Hebrew University, continued the uphill struggle to promote the Semitic theme. Culturally, it was centred on the *Alef* magazine that first appeared in 1948; the movement was credited with many literary innovations and its impact on visual arts was undeniable.<sup>105</sup> Politically, though, the adjustment to the new reality was more difficult, causing the group to split in 1953. In 1956 a number of former Canaanites and Irgun and Lehi members created the Semitic Action (*Hapeula Hashemit*). Among its founders were Uri Avnery, Boaz Evron, Nathan Yellin-Mor, Amos Kenan, Shalom Cohen, and Maxim Ghilan. The group's 1958 manifesto made some concessions to Judaism, acknowledging that the New Hebrew nation in Israel had some connection to the Diaspora, yet urged it to move beyond the 'outmoded' framework of Zionism by adopting complete secularism, total equality for Jews and Arabs and support for anti-colonial movements. The manifesto urged Israel to join a Palestinian-Jordanian federation, a smaller version of the original Canaanite-Phoenician empire. Between April 1960

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<sup>104</sup> Selwyn Ilan Troen and Noah Lucas, *Israel: The First Decade of Independence*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 186; James Diamond, 'We Are Not One: A Post-Zionist Perspective', *Tikkun*, 5/2 (1990), p. 107.

<sup>105</sup> Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism*, p. 224.

and March 1967, the Semitic Action published a biweekly paper *Etgar* (Challenge) edited by Yellin-Mor.

However, it was the charismatic Avnery who contributed most to publicizing the Canaanite agenda. A former Irgun member, the German-born Avnery used his sensationalist weekly *Haolam Haze* (This World) to push pan-Hebrew ideas based on a pamphlet he had penned in 1947 that called for the Hebrew and Arab nations to liberate the common 'Semitic Region' from colonialist rule. Indeed, in its new reincarnation, the political wing of the Canaanites took up the banner of anti-colonialist struggle in the Middle East. Avnery chastised Ben-Gurion for teaming up with 'colonialist' France and Britain to attack Egypt in 1956. In December 1960, prompted by Henri Curiel, a Jewish-Egyptian Communist and anti-colonialist activist, Avnery and some of his Semitic Action colleagues created the Israeli Committee for a Free Algeria. Curiel argued that, once liberated from French rule, Algeria would ally itself with Israel to form an anti-colonialist regional movement.<sup>106</sup>

### **The Birth of Matzpen**

While the Semitic Action was the first to take up the anti-colonialist theme to create a common Arab-Israeli front, it was a splinter group from MAKI that popularized the colonialist narrative in Israel. As noted earlier, under Moscow's direction the Israeli communists were driven to accept the reality of a Jewish state. Yet tensions within the party simmered over this and other issues and a small group of young Trotskyites - Moshe Machover, Akiva (Aki) Orr, Oded Pilavsky and Jeremy Kaplan - began criticizing the Soviet line as oppressive. On 28 September 1962 MAKI paper *Kol Haam* announced their expulsion from the party and soon afterwards

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<sup>106</sup> Beinlin, 'Was the Red Flag', p. 151.

they created a splinter group, the Israeli Socialist Organization, better known by the name of its organ *Matzpen* (Compass).

David Ehrenfeld, a diamond company owner and staunch supporter of Arab-Jewish reconciliation, undertook to bankroll the new group. Though tiny, *Matzpen* could count on a cadre of talented and energetic activists. Machover - a Hebrew University mathematics student - attracted fellow students, including would be mathematicians Haim Hanegbi and Meir Smorodinsky - later Hebrew University professors (Machover himself would become professor at King's College London). In 1964 a number of Arab members who had split from the Haifa branch of MAKI signed up; among them were the prolific journalists and polemicists Jabra Nicola and Daoud Turki who joined on the basis of a few principles: rejection of Zionism; rejection of Soviet dominance and the Stalinist cult of personality; support for international solidarity and for Israel's integration into a socialist Arab union. In the words of Hangebi, *Matzpen* was established 'in opposition to the Communist lie' and 'in opposition to the Zionist lie'.<sup>107</sup>

While *Matzpen* was involved with the Trotskyite International, the fight against Stalinism, a signature Trotskyite battle, took a back seat to the more pressing problem of fighting the 'Zionist state'. It was around this issue that *Matzpen* reached out to the Semitic Action where Hanegbi worked for *Etgar*. Some Semitic Action activists joined outright, including Aharon Bachar and Gabriel Lahman; even more important, writing in *Etgar* in January 1962, Amos Kenan, a prominent journalist and charter member of the Canaanites, expressed admiration for the revolutions in Cuba and Algeria. He also claimed that the left-leaning intelligentsia in the Middle East and Africa had a vital role in spreading socialist revolutions and hoped that a similar

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<sup>107</sup> Erel, *Matzpen*, p. 29.

group could rise up in Israel. Based on this article, the Semitic Action was the first to congratulate Matzpen and broached the idea of a formal collaboration based on a desire to create a common front against Zionism. Nothing came of these plans, but in 1966 Matzpen joined Avnery in his Haolam Haze-Koah Hadash parliamentary run, netting him a seat in the Sixth Knesset.<sup>108</sup>

Though electorally insignificant, the Matzpen-Semitic Action collaboration was much more fruitful in the realms of ideas. Keenly aware of the need to change ‘public consciousness’ through public discourse, Matzpen activists were effectively going in the footsteps of Gramsci, a popular figure among the Trotskyite and New Left groups who could not trigger a full scale revolution in Europe and elsewhere. Turning necessity into virtue, they dedicated themselves to impacting the public discourse.<sup>109</sup>

Indeed, even before the official launch of Matzpen, its two cofounders, Machover and Orr, had tried altering public consciousness. In 1961 they published a book, *Shalom, Shalom Vein Shalom (Peace, Peace When There is No Peace)* criticizing Israel’s alignment with Britain and France in the 1956 Sinai campaign as collaboration with world imperialism. The two also provided a novel interpretation of the 1948 war, viewing it as a corollary of British colonialist interests and claiming that the Arabs’ real target were the British rather than the Jews. Most important, *Shalom, Shalom Vein Shalom* stated for the first time that the Palestinian problem was at the core of Arab-Israeli relations. Machover and Orr blamed the British, their ‘Arab

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<sup>108</sup> Erel, *Matzpen*, 37.

<sup>109</sup> James Joll, *Antonio Gramsci* (New York: Viking Press, 1977).



agents', and Israel for creating the refugee problem and warned that, absent a political (rather than a humanitarian) solution, no peace was feasible.<sup>110</sup>

Other activists pushed the Palestinian issue to the forefront of the Middle East conflict as well. At the end of 1964, Meir Smorodinsky wrote in the *Matzpen* magazine that Zionism was a special variety of colonialism and denounced Israel as a colonialist state. Smorodinsky and his colleagues were careful to draw a distinction between European colonialism (aimed at exploiting the native population) and the supposed Zionist colonial enterprise built on the expropriation of the land. To prove the case, *Matzpen* published references to the multi-volume study of the *Nakba* (the catastrophe), as Palestinians and Arabs call their 1948 defeat, by Aref al-Aref, the renowned Palestinian journalist, historian and politician, which provided detailed statistics about some four hundred Arab villages that existed before the war. Israel Shahak, a Hebrew University chemistry lecturer and a frequent collaborator with *Matzpen*, adopted Aref's statistics in his own reports about the expropriation of the Palestinian land.<sup>111</sup>

In 1964 Orr left for London where he cofounded the Israeli Revolutionary Action Committee Abroad (ISRACA), an anti-Zionist publication devoted to a critique of political, cultural and psychological aspects of Zionism. He also befriended a number of prominent New Left revolutionaries and anti-colonialist advocates. One of them, Cyril Lionel Robert James, a Trinidadian Marxist and a leading voice on decolonization, became a close friend. James believed that decolonization should become the most important goal of international revolutionaries.

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<sup>110</sup> N. Israeli, *Peace, Peace When there is No Peace (Shalom, Shalom Vein Shalom)* (Jerusalem: Bokhan, 1961); Erel, *Matzpen*, p. 31.

<sup>111</sup> Hunaida Ghanim, 'The Nakba', *Jadal*, May 2009, pp. 41-47.

Adopting the colonialist perspective enabled *Matzpen* to broaden its critique of Zionism. The magazine was one of the first to claim that Palestinians, as opposed to Arabs, had a separate identity and that they were the primary victims of the 'Zionist Project'. The October-November 1965 issue attacked Zionism as a racist ideology, listing the alleged racist characteristics of Judaism such as exclusion and domination. The themes of colonialism and domination were prominently displayed in the 1964 proclamation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); at least one historian claimed that the prodigious literary output of *Matzpen* had impacted the thinking of the groups that coalesced under the PLO umbrella. In this view, the intellectual infrastructure for the subsequent cooperation between *Matzpen* and the PLO was created.<sup>112</sup>

Extending the Zionism-as-racism paradigm to the Mizrahim was, from the perspective of *Matzpen* members, the next logical step. Though predominantly Ashkenazi, the group attracted a number of Mizrahim, including Alan Albert (later Ilan Halevi, a PLO representative in Europe and a former PLO vice minister), a French-born son of a Yemenite Jew who moved to Israel in 1965 after a detour in the United States. In America Halevi met Malcolm X and, by his own account, acquired an insight into the black struggle. Moving on to Algeria, Halevi was exposed to the anti-colonialist struggle; he subsequently explained that his experiences made him understand the plight of the Palestinians. *Matzpen* thus published a number of articles claiming that Zionism discriminated against the Mizrahim. One of these stated that the 'dark-skinned [Jews] increasingly feel the sting of racist discrimination'.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Erel, *Matzpen*, pp.111-13; Nira Yuval Davis, *Matzpen: The Israeli Socialist Organization* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1977).

<sup>113</sup> Erel, *Matzpen*, p. 58; Arie Bober, 'Introduction', in idem (ed.), *The Other Israel: The Radical Case against Zionism* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

Notwithstanding the creative energy of Matzpen and the Semitic Action, and Avnery's public notoriety, initially the small group of activists made little impact on the public discourse in Israel. Much to their dismay, Gramsci's formula of avant-garde-triggered change of consciousness seemed as elusive as the efforts of their anti-Zionist predecessors. Like Brit Shalom, Matzpen members were publicly attacked as 'traitors'. It was thus hugely ironic that they would profit from another Zionist triumph, the June 1967 war.

### **The 1967 War and its Discontents: Prelude to Post-Zionism**

Few could foresee at the end of the war, which put Israel in control of vast Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian territories, its far-reaching implications. Since Egyptian President Nasser precipitated the war by blockading the Straits of Tiran, expelling the UN forces from the Sinai Peninsula and proclaiming Israel's imminent destruction, the astounding victory was seen by Israelis as a divine miracle and, in a more secular view, a testament to the resilience and valour of the Jewish state. Israel garnered considerable legitimacy in the West that had been embarrassed by its failed diplomatic effort to dissuade Nasser from persisting in his aggressive course. Western audiences also took note of the fact that, in response to a June 1967 offer by the Israeli government to trade almost all the territories gained for peace, Arab representatives at the Khartoum conference in August responded with the so-called three no's: no negotiations, no recognition, no peace.

Helping Israel to rule the territories, especially the densely populated West Bank, was the 'low-cost' model conceived by Minister of Defence Moshe Dayan and his advisers, entailing the retention of most of the Jordanian administrative framework

and the 'open bridges' policy that gave Palestinians access to Israel's and Jordan's labour markets and quickly raised the standard of living of in the territories.<sup>114</sup>

While the majority of Israelis prided themselves on an enlightened occupation policy, Matzpen was one of the few dissenting voices. Ironically, the war provided some new recruits. The radical political activist Ehud Adiv, who would be convicted of espionage for Syria, recalled that it was clear to him that 'I was losing my life in a war I did not believe in. The Palestinians don't hate us... they didn't step on us, we stepped on them. We came to Jerusalem to take their Wailing Wall'. Traumatized by his war experience, he joined Matzpen soon after. Shlomo Sand, a member of the Communist Youth Alliance and later a history professor at Tel-Aviv University, was equally upset. He contemplated leaving the country but Mahmoud Darwish, the noted Israeli Arab poet, persuaded him to stay; the Israeli author Dan Omer introduced him to Matzpen where he became a member in good standing.<sup>115</sup>

Other activists arrived through Matzpen's social network. Michel Warschawski studied philosophy at the Hebrew University where, shortly after the war, he encountered a group of Matzpen activists handing out the pamphlet *Enough is Enough*. Warschawski, who by his own admission was 'passionate about injustice', read the pamphlet that compared the occupation to the situation in Algeria and South Africa. After extensive talks with Machover and Arie Bober, a Semitic Action-

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<sup>114</sup> Ofira Seliktar, *Doomed to Failure: the Politics and Intelligence of the Oslo Peace Process* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), 10; Amnon Cohen, 'Changing Patterns of West Bank Politics', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Fall 1977, 112

<sup>115</sup> Erel, *Matzpen*, 48, 54; Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, (London: Verso, 2009), 6-9

Matzpen freelancer, whom he considered a guru, Warschawski, commonly known as Mikado, joined Matzpen.<sup>116</sup>

Energized by the new recruits, the group set out to fight the ‘ills of Israeli occupation’. The August 1967 issue of the journal featured a picture of a town in the West Bank under curfew and a caption ‘Old Story - Revolt against a Foreign Occupation’.<sup>117</sup> On 22 September 1967 Matzpen published a petition in the daily *Yediot Aharonot* paid for by Ehrenfeld, calling Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories and insisting that oppression of another people was morally wrong. As the PLO’s growing terror attacks, waged first from Jordan then from Lebanon, triggered Israeli reprisals, the group repeated its dire warnings about the moral wrongs of Zionism. In March 1968 Matzpen organized a petition signed by eighty-eight public figures against collective punishment, administrative detentions, and forced deportations of terrorist suspects. When the petition was subsequently published in other papers, one Israeli official considered it ‘a stab in the back’.

After allegations surfaced that Matzpen had links to Palestinian terror groups, more public outrage followed. On 9 January 1968 *Le Monde* carried an article in which Machover was said to have praised ‘Palestinian resistance’, his term for acts of terrorism. On 17 March 1968 a member of Fatah, the largest group in the PLO, revealed that Matzpen members were among the few Israelis to support it, praising some of them ‘real fedayeen’.<sup>118</sup> A few days later, Matzpen took a public stand on the issue: it noted that ‘it is both the right and duty of every conquered and subjugated people to resist and to struggle for its freedom. The ways, means, and methods

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<sup>116</sup> Michel Warschawski, *On the Border* (London: Pluto Books, 2005), p. 26; Erel, *Matzpen*, p. 41; Yossi Melman and Eitan Haber, *The Spies* (Tel Aviv: Hemed, 2002; Hebrew), pp. 166-90.

<sup>117</sup> Warschawski, *On the Border*, p. 26.

<sup>118</sup> Erel, *Matzpen*, pp. 46, 12.

necessary and appropriate for such a struggle must be determined by the people itself'.<sup>119</sup>

If support for 'resistance' by whatever means proved a hard sell, Matzpen's depiction of the conditions of Palestinians was more successful. Actually, even before the 1967 war the group used the alleged exploitation of Israeli Arabs as a major selling point. In early 1966 a short documentary financed by Ehrenfeld, *I Am Ahmad*, showed the plight of Arab workers in Israel. The film was based on the memories of Ahmad Masarwa and his friends looking for work, allegedly suffering in the process racist taunts, discrimination and other indignities. Although the authorities approved the screening, the documentary upsets the Labour government; one minister wrote that 'it was a harsh film, telling the "truth but not all the truth"'.<sup>120</sup> With the massive influx of Palestinians in the aftermath of the war, Matzpen could amp up the theme of exploitation and what it saw as the corrupting influence of occupation.

Paradoxically, as Matzpen's predictions about the moral dangers of occupation took tentative root, the organization was falling apart. First, the arrival of new members created tensions that, as in the case of other Marxist groups, resulted in multiple cleavages. The major one pitted those who wanted Matzpen to spend most of its effort on class struggle as opposed to devotees of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Adding to ideological issues were personality clashes and competition between the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem branches, taking the tiny movement through a titillating series of secessions and regroupings, accompanied by an acrimonious fight over who was entitled to the Matzpen brand name. Disclosure that some group members conspired

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<sup>119</sup> Arie Bober, 'General Declaration by the ISO, 22 March 1968', *The Other Israel*, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/mideast/toi/doc3.html>

<sup>120</sup> Tom Segev *1967: Israel, the War and the Year that Transformed the Middle East* (London: Little, Brown, 2007), o. 70; Dani Rosenberg, 'Red Cloth', *Maarvon: New Magazine for Cinema*, vol. 7 (2011), pp. 23-30 (Hebrew).

to commit espionage proved more devastating challenge. In 1973 Adiv and colleagues were tried and sentenced to long prison terms for spying for Syria. The sensational 'Red Trial' almost derailed Matzpen and many of its members followed Machover and Orr into self-imposed exile in Europe.

But relocating to Europe benefited the organization in many ways. Their move coincided with the New Left student upheaval that seized France, Germany and, to a lesser extent, Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Matzpen leaders befriended leading student activists, including Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Rudi Dutschke (the former visited Israel as their guest in 1969). Matzpen was also attractive to a group that followed Rosa Luxemburg, finding her call for a spontaneous 'people revolution' highly inspiring.<sup>121</sup>

The relations between the European New Left and Matzpen were mutually beneficial. For the former, the plight of the Palestinians added credibility to their Third World credentials as the liberation struggles in North Africa were coming to an end. For Matzpen, the extensive publication and propaganda network of the New Left was a major boon. From their London residence Machover and Orr attracted the attention of Jean Paul Sartre and his publication, *Modern Times*, and could also rely on Eric Rouleau, the reigning power in *Le Monde*. They also had access to Bertrand Russell and his organization, the Bertrand Russell Foundation, which issued a number of statements against Israel's occupation. In fact, shortly before he died, on 31 January 1970, Russell urged Israel to withdraw from territories occupied in 1967.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> 'The Left in Israel', 'The Nature of Israel', 'The Other Israel', *Matzpen*, 10 February 1972 <http://www.matzpen.org/english/1972-02-10/the-left-in-israel/>; Erel, *Matzpen*, p. 92.

<sup>122</sup> Erel, *Matzpen*, p. 151; 'Bertrand Russell's Last Message', *Connections Library*, <http://www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/Docs/CX5576-RussellMidEast.htm> .

In the spring and summer of 1970, Arie Bober, representing Matzpen, made a speaking tour of the US sponsored by the Committee on New Alternatives in the Middle East (CONAME). Among CONAME's sponsors were Arthur Miller, Noam Chomsky and Pete Seeger; its main activists included Berta Green Langston, Robert Langston and Emmanuel Dror Farjoun - a Matzpen member doing postgraduate work at MIT and later a Mathematics professor at the Hebrew University. In connection with this tour, the Langstons arranged with the leading publisher Doubleday to issue a book titled *The Other Israel: The Radical Case against Zionism*. The book - consisting entirely of *Matzpen* material - came out in 1972 under Bober's nominal editorship - though Farjoun with Langston's help did the actual editing.<sup>123</sup>

To appeal to the European market, in 1975 Matzpen launched a publication called *Khamsin* in Paris, where the first four issues were published in French; when the office moved to London it switched to English. Machover and Avishai Ehrlich - later a political sociology professor at the Academic College of Tel Aviv-Jaffa - joined the editorial board in 1978 alongside a number of Matzpen members who served in some capacity until the magazine folded in 1989. *Khamsin* billed itself as a 'committed journal' that not merely expressed opinions but was also 'part of the struggles for social liberation and against nationalists and religious mystifications'. The magazine listed the struggle against Zionism and its 'power structure' and the plight of the Palestinians - described as 'the most direct victims of Zionism' among its top goals, but also highlighted the problem of Oriental Jews and women. Some of the *Khamsin* articles were first published in the *Matzpen* journal and later translated to garner a wider audience abroad.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Arie Bober, (ed.) *The Other Israel: The Radical Case Against Zionism*, <http://98.130.214.177/index.asp?p=other#na>

<sup>124</sup> *Khamsin*, on the Matzpen website <http://98.130.214.177/index.asp?p=130>



By the end of the 1970s, working both at home and abroad, Matzpen, with some help from the Semitic Action, developed a comprehensive critique of Zionism. As a matter of fact, sometimes during this period they described themselves as ‘post-Zionists’, though the authorship of the new label is not entirely clear.<sup>125</sup> Whatever its provenance, the rebranding was a clever ploy to adjust the antiquated-sounding anti-Zionist label to new opportunities created by the 1967 war. Avnery, widely credited with coining the term, recognized the historic service of Zionism in creating the state, but deemed it necessary to rethink all aspects of Israel’s identity, including its ‘foundational myths’.<sup>126</sup> As an indefatigable journalist and government critic he also encouraged new historical disclosures and the questioning of normative historical truths, an imperative that blended well with New Left and post-modern assumptions that ruling societal groups produce ‘hegemonic narratives’ of events.

## **Post-Zionism**

To infuse post-Zionism with contemporary relevance, its intellectual architects advocated the rethinking of a variety of subjects ranging from the circumstances of Israel’s creation to its ethnic and gender structure. In launching the revisionist project, Matzpen borrowed widely from historical anti-Zionists, including Brit Shalom, the Canaanites and the communists as well as contemporary movements such as post-modernism. Such liberal blending of perspectives made a binding definition of post-Zionism difficult. The respected Israeli scholar Eliezer Schweid identified three different strands of post-Zionism: colonialism/post-colonialism, post-nationalism, and post-modernism, but others added post-Jewish tribalism and even ‘spiritual renewal’

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<sup>125</sup> Dan Michman (ed.), *Post-Zionism and the Holocaust: The role of the Holocaust in the Israeli public debate on Post-Zionism, 1993-1996* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1997; Hebrew), pp. 11-26.

<sup>126</sup> Avnery, *Israel without Zionists*, pp. 18-33.

of Judaism, to the mix.<sup>127</sup> For the purposes of this study, the domains earmarked by Avnery and Matzpen for revision will be considered post-Zionism.

Allowing for some overlaps, post-Zionists discussed four issues. First, they urged to apply the colonialist theory to Israel's foundation, producing an alternative narrative to the one attributed to the 'hegemonic Zionist majority'. Their narrative claimed that Israel was a colonialist creation, albeit with a twist in the sense that the metropolitan 'mother country' was Britain, a surrogate parent - as opposed to a real 'mother country' relation as in the case of Australia or Canada. Even so, the consequences of Israel's birth were the same as they led to the dispossession of the indigenous Palestinian population. During the 1970s, *Matzpen* and *Khamsin* carried a number of articles based on the colonialist perspective. In July 1975 Ehud Ein-Gil (later an editor in Haaretz newspaper) endeavoured to prove that Tel Aviv was not built on sand, as the Zionist narrative would have it, but on the lands of a number of Arab villages. The May 1976 issue listed Jewish villages erected on top of derelict Arab localities within the Green Line and the last publication, in the summer of 1983, included a long article about Ben-Gurion's plans to expel the Arabs in 1948.<sup>128</sup>

Second, Avnery and his peers accused Zionism of discrimination and racism towards the Israeli Arabs and the Palestinians. As they saw it, the nationalist Israeli state relegated its own Arab population to second class status through a mixture of institutional discrimination and personal racism. The military administration imposed

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<sup>127</sup> Eliezer Schweid, 'Beyond All - Modernity, Zionism, Judaism', in Pinhas Ginossar and Avi Barely (eds.), *Zionism: A Contemporary Controversy: Research Trends and Ideological Approaches* (Sede Boqer: Ben-Gurion Research Center, 1996; Hebrew), pp. 99-115.

<sup>128</sup> Erel, *Matzpen*, p. 109; Bober, 'Conclusion', in idem, *The Radical Case; Matzpen*, 72 <http://98.130.214.177/index.asp?p=chap4-conc&u=101>; Ehud Ein Gil 'Was Tel Aviv Built on Sand?' *Matzpen*, 74, July 1975 [http://98.130.214.177/index.asp?p=articles\\_telaviv](http://98.130.214.177/index.asp?p=articles_telaviv); 'One Hundred and Fifty One Stories by Refugees and Settlers', *Matzpen*, 77, May 1976; A. Bentov (Ehud Ein Gil), 'The War of Myths', *Matzpen*, 90, July 1983.

on the Arab population in the wake of the 1948 war for security reasons was a prime exhibit. Though the military administration was lifted in 1962, the Israeli government restricted the activities of certain nationalist Arab parties, prompting *Matzpen* to protest.<sup>129</sup> Institutional discrimination aside, Avnery and the post-Zionists argued that, imbued with ‘colonialist spirit’ and Western ideology, Zionist Jews looked down upon Arabs and Palestinians as culturally and socially inferior. Indeed, using the same logic, the post-Zionists argued that Zionism had pushed Israel into the Western hegemonic orbit and away from the culture of the Middle East, a claim not dissimilar to Canaanism.

Third, post-Zionists accused Zionism of racism towards the Mizrahim, or Oriental Jews. *Matzpen* struck up close relations with the Black Panthers, a movement of mainly Moroccan Jews modelled on the American Black Panthers. Ilan Halevi served as a liaison to the Black Panthers but others provided much of the theorizing on the ‘dialectical contradictions’ in the relationship between Zionism and the Mizrahim. For instance, a *Khamsin* article maintained that Zionism was an Ashkenazi movement that invented ‘Jewish unity’ to get the largest possible number of immigrants - that is ‘human raw material for the Zionist enterprise’. Once in Israel, the Mizrahim were considered inferior and often referred to as ‘black’; the state reinforced such perceptions by adopting a paternalistic attitude towards these immigrants. In addition, Machover and Orr argued that ‘in the context of the colonial society in Israel’ class and ethnicity overlapped as ‘the majority of the most exploited strata within the working class are immigrants from Africa and Asia’ prevented from social mobility by the dominant Ashkenazi elite which needed workers for menial

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<sup>129</sup> Emmanuel Dror Farjoun, ‘The Nature of Israel: The Emergency Regulations’, in *The Radical Case Against Zionism*, Chapter 8.

jobs. Politically, the lower-class Mizrahim provided ‘reactionary’ Arab-hating voters that bolstered right wing parties.<sup>130</sup>

In a rather unorthodox use of the racist label, the post-Zionists even accused Israeli Jews of behaving cruelly towards East European Jews during the Holocaust. The charge was apparently based on a loose interpretation of accusations made by the American Council of Judaism and Ihud to the effect that Zionists refused offers of resettling Jewish refugees outside Palestine. According to the Matzpen version, Zionists, like anti-Semites, called on Jews to leave Europe and ‘go to Palestine’, but did not take part in saving them unless they could be directed there. To prove the so-called ‘cruel Zionism’ theory, Matzpen revealed a ‘hidden truth’ about alleged Zionist machination. Machover and Orr quoted from a 1938 letter where Ben-Gurion allegedly stated: ‘If Jews will have to choose between the refugees and [contributing to the Yishuv], mercy would have the upper hand and the whole energy of the [Jewish] people would be channelled into saving Jews... Zionism will be struck from the agenda’. Machover and Orr implied that Zionists opposed offers from the United States to rescue Jews and transfer them to other countries. To Machover and his colleagues the treatment of Holocaust victims, like that of the Mizrahim, was a prime example of Zionist willingness to manipulate vulnerable populations for the sake of hegemonic goals.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Raphael Shapiro, ‘Zionism and its Oriental subjects: the Oriental Jews in Zionism’s dialectical contradictions’, *Khamsin* no. 5 (1978) [http://98.130.214.177/index.asp?p=english\\_khamsim5-oriental](http://98.130.214.177/index.asp?p=english_khamsim5-oriental); Machover and Mario Offenber, ‘Zionism and its Scarecrow’, *Khamsin* no. 6, (1978), <http://www.matzpen.org/english/1978-10-10/zionism-and-its-scarecrows-moshe-machover-and-mario-offenberg/> ; Machover and Akiva Orr, ‘The Nature of Israel: The Class Character of Israel’, in *The Other Israel*, Chapter 5.

<sup>131</sup> Erel, *Matzpen*, p. 110; Machover and Orr, ‘A Critique of Zionist Ideology: Zionism and Anti-Semitism’, in *The Other Israel*, Chapter 11.

Fourth, the post-Zionists charged that Zionism reproduced the 'bourgeois' gender role models and that, because of Israel's militarization, women could not aspire to genuine equality. Nira Yuval-Davis - an early Matzpen member and later a sociology professor at the University of East London - claimed that Jewish women in Israel were following the 'false consciousness' imposed by society and could not aspire to true liberation and freedom in a Zionist imposed nationalism.<sup>132</sup>

Linking women's issues to a call to settle the conflict by creating a Jewish-Palestinian federation - a standard Matzpen prescription - carried risks. Some of nascent women groups in Israel balked at an association with post-Zionists for fear of hurting their public standing. The first feminist conference in 1972 reflected these tensions and, by way of avoiding a split, adopted a somewhat vague manifesto that called to fight oppression and abuse of women. In practical terms, Matzpen made only limited inroads into the feminist movement, which preferred concentrating on building shelters for abused women. Those truly faithful to a post-Zionist version of feminism were either members of Matzpen, such as Yuval-Davis, Amira Gelblum - later a history lecturer at Israel's Open University - and wives and girlfriends of Matzpen members, such as Leah Tzemel, Aviva Ein-Gil, Sylvia Kleingberg, and Ilana Hanegbi. Even so, allegations that Matzpen 'did not care about women's issues' dogged the group. In 1982, Gelblum left the group to concentrate fully on feminism.

Devising a more sophisticated and coherent perspective was a significant step towards gaining a wider audience. Yet despite the considerable support abroad, at the beginning of 1980s the post-Zionists were still a tiny movement, more likely to be known because of the flamboyant Avnery. As a reviewer of a recent Avnery biography noted, the journalist and 'other talented members of his generation' who

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<sup>132</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis and Dina Hecht, 'Ideology without Revolution: Jewish Women in Israel', *Khamsin*, No. 6 (1978).

dreamed about discarding ‘the traditional foundations of Judaism’ and turning Israel into a ‘progressive Hebrew-speaking nation’ rode on the notoriety of his weekly tabloid, a studious mix of intellectual fare, sensationalist scoops and semi-nude women who appeared on the last page’.<sup>133</sup> Clearly, more was needed to mainstream post-Zionist ideas in the public discourse of Israel. As before, a number of factors seemed to give credence to Mazpen’s ideas.

### **Mainstreaming Post-Zionism**

With its arduous fighting and high number of casualties the October 1973 war undermined much of the euphoria of the previous war. Though ultimately victorious, many Israelis, notably the better educated, came to reflect upon the Zionist concept - long taken for granted - that military power was needed to protect the Jews. Peace Now was formed in 1978 when some 350 officers and soldiers from combat units sent a letter to the Prime Minister Menachem Begin contending that Israel could not retain its democratic nature while occupying a large number of Palestinians and that its only hope was to reach a peace agreement with its Arab neighbours.<sup>134</sup>

It was also around the time of the 1973 war that the Israeli leadership concluded, albeit privately, that Dayan’s ‘low cost occupation’ had become ineffectual. The PLO was gaining dominance in the West Bank and Gaza by undermining the traditional clan-based elite loyal to the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan. In 1974 the PLO was recognized by the Arab League as ‘the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people’, a claim that was effectively accepted by the United Nations. After King Hussein expelled the PLO from Jordan during the ‘Black

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<sup>133</sup> Aryeh Tepper, ‘Who is Uri Avnery and why does he matter?’ *Jewish Ideas Daily*, 4 February 2011.

<sup>134</sup> ‘The Officers’ Letter - March 1978’, <http://peacenow.org.il/eng/content/officers-letter-march-1978>.

September' of 1970, it moved to Lebanon, where it established a state within a state in the south of the country.

The Israeli-Egyptian Camp David Accords of September 1978 and the peace treaty of March 1979 made little change in the increasing difficulty of controlling the territories. The accords stipulated that, during an unspecified transition period, the Palestinians would receive limited autonomy, but when Israel created the civilian administration as part of the process in 1980, it made matters worse. Fiercely opposed to the Israeli-Egyptian deal, the PLO and its public front in the territories, the National Guidance Committee, warned the population not to comply. In what proved to be a vicious circle, the increasingly harsh Israeli reprisals gave the PLO more legitimacy to intensify its attacks on Israel's civilian population. After a series of failed Israeli efforts to prevent Palestinian attacks from Lebanon, the Begin government ordered the military into Lebanon in June 1982. Much to the surprise of almost everyone, the IDF extended its operation to Beirut where the PLO sheltered among the population. While the operation was successful in forcing the PLO to relocate to Tunisia, its cost was high both to Israeli forces and to Lebanese civilians. When the Christian Phalanges allied to Israel massacred hundreds of Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in September in retaliation for the murder of its leader and Lebanon's President Bashir Gemayel, the war turned into a huge public relations debacle for Israel at home and abroad. Its architect, Defence Minister Sharon, was directly blamed for the massacre and forced to resign, while Begin, unable to deal with the fallout, went into a slow psychological decline.

The Lebanon war proved a boon for the post-Zionists who hoped to work with new groups that found the Peace Now too timid. Among them was the influential *Yesh Gvul* - variously translated as 'there is a limit' or 'enough is enough' - a group of

combat soldiers who refused to serve in Lebanon and then expanded its negation of service to the West Bank and Gaza. The *Twenty One Year* and *Dai Lakibush* (Enough to Occupation) presented Matzpen themes to younger audiences, including the crucial high school seniors who contemplated service refusal. Speaking for the Zionist left, Amos Oz, a leading literary figure, echoed post-Zionist themes when he lamented the transformation of Israel from an exemplary, egalitarians, cultured, and peace-loving society to one permeated with nationalism, chauvinisms, clericalism and primitive to boot. Oz blamed East European Holocaust survivors for an undue reliance on military power, and anti-socialist immigrants for creating 'pocket of capitalism'. Others were blunter, charging the Mizrahim who contributed to the victory of Likud and 'messianic zealots' - their euphemism for the National Religious Party (NRP) settlers and a critical partner in the Likud coalition - for corrupting the founding vision of Zionism.<sup>135</sup>

In a parallel development the American Jewish community found the Likud coalition in general and the Lebanon war in particular upsetting. The community had greeted Begin's election in 1977 with apprehension bordering on dismay. To many the new leader 'with his Polish accent' and 'formal manners' looked like an Old World uncle who had suddenly emerged from the shadows of the Diaspora. His political vision of 'Greater Israel' was even more alarming to many of them. Likud supporters - Mizrahim and Orthodox Jews - did not sit well with a community steeped in secular and liberal values. Soon after, a number of groups sprang up to protest Israel's policies of occupation and the war in Lebanon. *Breira* and its successor, the New Israel Agenda, as well as American Friends of Peace Now were among the first

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<sup>135</sup> Mordechai Bar On, 'Israeli Reactions to the Uprising', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17/4 (Summer 1988), pp. 46-65; Amos Oz, *A Journey In Israel* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1983), pp. 55-60.



to organize. The New Israel Fund, which provided funding for post-Zionist-leaning projects, had an important impact. *Tikkun*, a publication of the architect of Jewish spiritual renewal, the leftist Rabbi Michael Lerner, was equally important as it became a chief forum for post-Zionist writing in America, many by Israeli post-Zionists. Not surprisingly, much of the new protest borrowed themes from the all but forgotten American Council for Judaism, reviving interest in Buber's ideology.<sup>136</sup>

The turmoil engendered by the Lebanon war and the increasingly explosive situation in the territories gave the post-Zionists a wider exposure and, indeed, political respectability. Even before the outbreak of the Intifada in December 1987, the notion that there was no such thing as a 'benevolent occupation' seemed to be getting a wider hearing. The sense of vindication that *Mazpen's* warnings about the 'evils of occupation' were coming true, was an important asset in changing the public discourse. Still, as per Gramsci's observations, changing public beliefs could not be accomplished without penetrating the institutions of higher learning. As noted above, Magnes understood full well that a real change of opinion could only come from a cadre of scholars financially secured and intellectually legitimized by academic appointments. In fact, his foresight bore fruit as a relative large number of *Brit Shalom* professors came of age at the Hebrew University. Some of *Matzpen's* own members joined the faculties of the newer universities, Tel Aviv, Haifa and Ben-Gurion respectively. In addition, many students who became radicalized in the aftermath of the Lebanon war went on to obtain graduate academic degrees. Tracing these developments from a vantage point of time, Hazony commented that, although

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<sup>136</sup> Ofira Seliktar, *Divided We Stand* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), pp. 44, 52-54.

Brit Shalom was virtually written off in the 1950s, its enduring impact became clear in the faculty-based burgeoning post-Zionist movement.<sup>137</sup>

In what was another fortuitous twist for post-Zionism, the new academic cohorts, a majority of whom studied in the United States or Britain, arrived at the time of a sea change in the humanities and social sciences. As shown in the previous chapter, the new development combined the neo-Marxist, critical scholarship paradigm with Gramsci's call to turn academic pursuit into political advocacy. Starting with post-Zionist history, in due course the Matzpen themes penetrated virtually all of the liberal arts.

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<sup>137</sup> Hazony, *The Jewish State*, 362.

### Chapter 3 From Rewriting to Inventing History

Surveying the field of critical scholarship and its associated disciplines in the early 1970s, few would have predicted its dramatic impact on the academic depiction of Israel. As we have seen, Galtung was one of the first to apply critical principles to the circumstances of Israel's founding and the influential neo-Marxist scholars viewed international relations as an asymmetrical 'top-dog-underdog' structure where the powerful Western actors subjugated weak indigenous populations. The Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), a radical leftist group founded in 1963, took Galtung's arguments one step further. In 1971 IPS launched its Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) and the Transnational Institute under the Chilean communist Orlando Letelier. Four years later MERIP created something of a firestorm with a report titled 'Middle East Studies in the United States', suggesting that Middle East scholars were part of the apparatus of subjugation, 'an instrument of control over the peoples of the Middle East'. Indeed, the report denounced the leading experts of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), known as 'Orientalists' for practicing 'imperialist science'. The journal *Race and Class* provided accounts of imperialist and colonialist practices in the Middle East, notably against the Palestinian people.<sup>138</sup>

Under normal circumstances the challenge to the 'orientalists' would have been more difficult. However, in 1978, under pressure from the Carter administration,

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<sup>138</sup> Peter Johnson and Judith Tucker, 'Middle East Studies Network in the United States', MERIP Reports 38, 1975, p. 20; Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand*, p. 20; Stuart Schaar, 'Orientalism at the Service of Imperialism', *Race & Class*, 21/1 (1979), pp. 67-80.

the Shah of Iran decided to liberalize his regime triggering a full-scale revolution, which discredited many MESA leaders such as Leonard Binder and George Lenczowski who vouched for the resilience of the regime even as the Shah was losing control. A special issue of *Race and Class* chastised ‘Orientalists’ for ignoring the fragility of the Pahlavi regime because of their service to ‘imperialism’. Other critics pointed out that the European or American trained scholars were incapable of understanding the realities of the Middle East.<sup>139</sup> But it was Edward Said who, as we have seen, cemented the view that Middle East scholarship in the West was an intellectual construct aimed at legitimizing imperialism and colonialism. As one critic put it, ‘*Orientalism* made it acceptable, even expected, for scholars to spell out their own political commitments as a preface to anything they wrote or did. More than that, it also enshrined an acceptable hierarchy of political commitments, with Palestine at the top... [as] they were the long-suffering victims of Western racism, American imperialism, and Israeli Zionism’.<sup>140</sup>

While the main brunt of the anti-Orientalist assault took place in the United States, it had its counterparts elsewhere. Roger Owen, then head of the Middle East Centre at St. Antony’s College, Oxford University, called Orientalism ‘politically charged obscurantism’ and praised Said for doing ‘such a good job of undermining the authority of the old guard’.<sup>141</sup> Small wonder that those Matzpen members who had moved to Britain understood that in the climate of shifting academic identity politics the new narrative would be served well if written by Jews, or, even better, by Israeli

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<sup>139</sup> Ofira Seliktar, *The Politics of Intelligence and American Wars with Iraq* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 16.

<sup>140</sup> Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand*, p. 37.

<sup>141</sup> Roger Owen, ‘Conversation with Edward Said’, *Critical Inquiry*, 31/2 (Winter 2005); Edmund Burke III and David Prochaska, *Genealogies of Orientalism: History, Theory, Politics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), p. 13; idem, ‘Rethinking the Historical Genealogy of Orientalism’, *History and Anthropology*, 18 (June 2007), pp. 135-51.

Jews, who could enhance the legitimacy of the Palestinian narrative and relieve the burden of anti-Semitism: ‘Western liberals previously too frightened to speak out for fear of being called anti-Semitic’.<sup>142</sup> Arguably, Owen’s decision to groom three Israeli academics at St. Antony’s was a step in this direction.

Benny Morris was the first of the trio. Having written his doctorate in Cambridge on Anglo-German relations, Morris became, by his own admission, highly disenchanted with Begin’s right wing government and the Lebanon war. In the 1980s, he spent some time at St. Antony’s College working on his influential *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*. In the forward to the book he acknowledged his ‘large debt’ to Owen for facilitating the research.<sup>143</sup>

Ilan Pappé was equally well suited for the task. As a student of Middle East history at the Hebrew University, Pappé was, in his own words, exposed to ‘the plight of the Palestinians’. Motivated to produce a pro-Palestinian narrative, he rejected the traditional regard for ‘truth’ because he viewed ‘any such construction as vain and presumptuous’ and in the way of his ‘compassion for the colonized not the colonizer’. Working under Owen on a doctoral dissertation about the 1948 war enabled him to take a decisive step towards challenging the ‘pro-Israel narrative’. As Pappé put it, Owen ‘had strong ties to the British left and the pro-Palestinian scholarly world’. He noted that his second adviser, Albert Hourani, who had testified in the 1946 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on behalf of the Arab cause ‘was well acquainted with the ‘Palestinian narrative’.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, in the words of one observer, Hourani’s

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<sup>142</sup> Jeremy Salt, ‘The Slanderer as Historian, *Palestine Chronicles*, 20 April 2011.

<sup>143</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. vi.

<sup>144</sup> Ilan Pappé, *History of Modern Palestine, One Land two People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 11; ‘Power and History in the Middle East: Conversation with Ilan Pappé’, *Logos Journal*, 3/1 (Winter 2004), <http://www.logosjournal.com/pappe.htm> ; Pappé, ‘Humanizing the Text: New History

testimony ‘remains to this day a powerfully argued statement of Arab opposition to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine’.<sup>145</sup>

Avi Shlaim, an ex-Israeli scholar, taught at Reading University for almost two decades where he specialized in European issues. Asked to serve as an external reader for Pappé’s doctoral dissertation, Shlaim gradually switched his attention to the history of the 1948 war. The career change paid off handsomely; despite a scant publishing record on the Middle East at the time, Shlaim became a reader at St. Antony’s College in 1987 and later a professor of International Relations.<sup>146</sup>

Owen’s protégées surpassed all expectations by producing a revolution in Israeli historiography that sent shockwaves through the political community in Israel and created a stir abroad.

### **The ‘New Historians’: 1948 as a tool of de-legitimization**

When Morris, Shlaim and Pappé published their books - *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, *Collusion Across the Jordan* and *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* in 1987-88, the initial reaction was minimal. To provide the group with a wider exposure, Michael Lerner, who, as noted in Chapter 2, drew inspiration from the American Council on Judaism, convened a ‘mini-conference’ at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem in 1988. His magazine *Tikkun* published an article by Morris under the rather sensationalist title ‘The New Historiography: Israel Confronts

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and the Trajectory of the 1948 Historiography’, *Radical History Review* 86 (Spring 2003), pp. 102-22.

<sup>145</sup> Walid Khalidi, ‘On Albert Hourani, the Arab Office and Anglo-American Committee of 1946’, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25 (Autumn 2005), p. 62.

<sup>146</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Israel/Palestine Question: Rewriting Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 189-90; Larry Hart, A Critique on Avi Shlaim’s ‘the debate about 1948’, part 1, <http://www.examiner.com/article/a-critique-on-avi-shlaim-s-the-debate-about-1948-part-1>.

Its Past', thus coining the group's collective name - 'New Historians'.<sup>147</sup> According to Pappé, the trio adopted the New History label because the alternative revisionist history was associated with Jabotinsky's Revisionist movement, parent of today's Likud party.<sup>148</sup>

Taking a page from the 'anti-orientalist' playbook, the 'new historians' claimed to be free of the alleged political and personal biases of their 'old' predecessors, who 'were unable to separate their lives from this historical event [the creation of the State], unable to regard impartially and objectively the facts and processes that they later wrote about'. Morris found the New Historians 'to be more impartial', a view shared by Shlaim who claimed that the 'old guards' could not be trusted to deliver an objective account as they were not professional historians or worse, hagiographers comporting to a 'popular-heroic-moralistic' version of 1948.<sup>149</sup>

Attacking traditional Israeli history as a 'popular-heroic-moralistic' narrative was at the heart of the 'new historiography' project. By proving that Israel's beginnings were anything but heroic or moral, the New Historians hoped to delegitimize the State of Israel in the international arena. In Morris's words:

If Israel, the haven of a much-persecuted people, was born pure and innocent, then it was worthy of the grace, material assistance and political support showered upon it by the West... If, on the other hand, Israel was born tarnished, besmirched by original sin, then it was no more deserving of that grace and assistance than were its neighbours.

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<sup>147</sup> Benny Morris, 'The New Historiography: Israel Confronts its Past', *Tikkun* 3, (Nov-Dec 1988).

<sup>148</sup> Pappé, 'Humanizing the Text', p. 105.

<sup>149</sup> Morris, 'The New Historiography', p. 15; Avi Shlaim, 'The Debate about 1948', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27 (August 1995), pp. 287-304.

Shlaim was equally explicit, accusing one traditional critic of clinging 'to the doctrine of Israel's immaculate conception'.<sup>150</sup>

Broadly based on the Galtung-Said topology, the three new historians offered a view of the 1948 war hand-tailored to prove that Israel had inflicted an injustice on the Palestinian Arabs and - far from being a valiant underdog - was actually a top dog abetted by imperialist Britain. To justify the novel take on the events, all three claimed that the newly released Israeli documents made their research possible.

Morris offered a high profile critique of the traditional view that the majority of the Palestinians fled on their own or on orders from local leaders. Though admitting that 'what happened in Palestine/Israel over 1947-9 was so complex and varied... that a single-cause explanation of the exodus from most sites is untenable', his analysis put most of the blame on Israel. Indeed, Morris quoted extensively from the diaries of Joseph Weitz, an official in charge of land settlement, to demonstrate that Israel expelled the Palestinian Arabs to seize their lands. To add historical context, Morris explained that the Peel Commission first suggested population exchange in conjunction with its partition proposal in 1937; the Palestinian Arabs rejected partition out of hand, but, according to Morris, Ben-Gurion and other Jewish leaders mulled over the population exchange, or 'transfer' as it came to be known, in private. He described Plan D, developed by the Hagana, the forerunner of the Israel Defence Force (IDF) in March 1948 as a military roadmap for rebuffing the anticipated pan-Arab attack; and while he did not feel that the plan was primarily geared to expelling the Palestinian Arabs, he was clear that Israel dragged its feet

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<sup>150</sup> Morris, 'The New Historiography', p. 21; Shlaim, 'The Debate about 1948', p. 289.



during the 1949 Lausanne conference that dealt with the refugees issue and, practically prevented their return.<sup>151</sup>

While Morris concentrated on the dynamics of expulsion he paid considerable attention to the balance of power between Israel and the Palestinians. In an expanded edition of his book, he alluded to the need to debunk the ‘David and Goliath’ depictions of traditional historiography.<sup>152</sup> In Morris’s version, far from being the ‘little David’ facing the Arab Goliath, the Jewish community was actually superior in ‘traditional indices of strength’ such as ‘command and control, manpower and weaponry’ and good intelligence.<sup>153</sup> By contrast, the ‘Palestinian Arabs were backward, disunited and often apathetic’, they ‘failed completely to organize itself into a statehood and [when the British left] they slid into chaos’. In the ensuing ‘confusion and anarchy’ armed bands roamed the neighbourhoods and police abandoned their weapons.<sup>154</sup>

Though Shlaim claimed to provide a ‘novel and undoubtedly controversial interpretation’ of the Palestinian tragedy, his book essentially followed the ‘Arab narrative’ on the issue. He asserted that the Jewish leaders and King Abdullah of Transjordan reached an agreement ‘to carve up the British mandate’, dividing the territory allotted to the Palestinians by the UN partition resolution. This ‘unholy alliance between Abdullah and the Zionists’ was allegedly based on their fear of a common enemy, the Palestinian leader Hajj Amin Husseini. Moreover, in Shlaim’s view Britain, eager to assure its colonial interest in the Middle East, was an active

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<sup>151</sup> Morris, *The Birth*, pp. 25-27, 294.

<sup>152</sup> Benny Morris, *1948 and After: Israel and Palestinians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 13.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34; Morris, *The Birth*, chapter 1.

<sup>154</sup> Morris, *1948 and After*, p. 34; Morris, *The Birth*, pp. 17, 19.

partner in the collusion scheme. In his words, Sir John Glubb, the English commander of the Transjordanian army known as the Arab Legion, was a 'British proconsul' implementing London's directives in Amman. Contrary to the traditional view that Bevin was a 'callous, brutal enemy of the Jewish state', determined to 'cut the Jewish state to size', Shlaim found the British government pragmatic enough to realize that Israel was important to the wellbeing of Transjordan. No less important was the support of Israel's new friend, the president of the United States. As Shlaim put it, Harry Truman 'played a lamentable or duplicitous role' by assuring the Jewish leaders of his support behind the back of the State Department.<sup>155</sup>

Not incidentally, Shlaim used the collusion theory to debunk some of Israel's foundational 'myths', including the idea that the Jews fought a 'war of survival in 1948'. He explained that this perception was coloured by the destruction of European Jewry rather than the real balance of power between the parties. But, in his opinion, the agreement kept the Arab Legion, by far the strongest military force, away from an all out engagement with the Israeli forces. As Shlaim saw it, combined with the poor performance of the other Arab armies and the virtual disintegration of the Palestinians, the collusion gambit gave Israel a substantial military advantage. Like Morris, he also attributed some of the Israeli success to an 'effective intelligence gathering service', especially an 'outstanding Arab section' in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. Taken together, Shlaim felt that his research undermined 'the war of survival myth but also the legend of a monolithic Arab attitude toward Israel'.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. viii, 1, 19, 162, 224.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 143, 211, 437.

Compared to Shlaim's expansive treatment, Pappé's contribution was relatively modest and, ironically, differed on key issues. He described British policy in Palestine as 'ad hoc' with 'scarcely any planning' yet opposed to the creation of a Jewish state because of a potential communist connection. As for the collusion thesis, Pappé felt that, at best, it was partial, noting that in Gush Etzion (the site of an early Arab League operation), 'there was an agreement, but it was neither written nor binding'. In Jerusalem, the difference between Abdullah and the Jews was so great that it had to be settled on the battlefield. Pappé's portrayal of Abdullah was less than flattering; he was said to be susceptible to pressure from Arab states and at least on one occasion, when cornered, was caught lying about a map delineating a border with Israel.<sup>157</sup>

In subsequent version, Pappé provided a more radical account of events. He agreed with Shlaim that the division of Palestine between Jews and Transjordan was 'the only peace plan considered' during the war. Pappé's stand on the refugees was particularly blunt. Though allowing that some Palestinians left before they were expelled, he claimed that 'Plan D was an important factor accounting for the exodus of so great a number of Palestinians'. As for the balance of power, Pappé was emphatic that the Jews did not face the 'Holocaust or Masada'. Repeating the Morris-Shlaim argument, he asserted that the well-organized Jews were ahead of the game whereas the 'Palestinian elite had abandoned responsibility when it was most needed'. The Arab armies did not change the balance, in his view, because they had no combat experience and could not match the organizational and intelligence skills of the IDF.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ilan Pappé, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1948-51* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. x, 7, 19, 32, 74

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 45, 67, 91, 94, 108, 272

Scholars that embraced the Middle East Studies Association paradigm received the New Historians with enthusiasm, though some felt that Morris and his colleagues did not state clearly enough that the 'Palestine Arabs were expelled systematically and with premeditations'.<sup>159</sup> Much of the commentary lauded Morris, Shlaim and Pappé for proving that Israel was born in 'original sin'. As Zachary Lockman noted, 'Zionism's victims must be made to disappear or, if that fails, to bear the blame for their situation'.<sup>160</sup>

Conversely, the New Historians were harshly criticized by those whom they labelled 'old historians' (though some of them were actually younger than the New Historians). Leading the way was Shabtai Teveth, a Ben-Gurion biographer who accused Morris and his colleagues of considerable bias and failure to use Arab sources. Reflecting on the larger discursive context, Teveth argued that the New Historiography mustered sources sympathetic to the Arab narrative while accusing Israel of 'original sin'.<sup>161</sup>

The New Historians forcefully denied besmirching the image of Israel. Morris wrote that the 'possibility that [his work] might be subsequently used by propagandists and...politicians is of no concern of the historian,' adding it was his duty to 'penetrate the murk of the past' regardless of the contemporary politics.<sup>162</sup> Shlaim stated that 'to me the historical truth is more important than the contemporary image or interests of one of the parties'. He accused Teveth of reflecting 'the

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<sup>159</sup> Norman Finkelstein, 'Rejoinder to Benny Morris', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 21 (Winter 1992), p. 61.

<sup>160</sup> Zachary Lockman, 'Original Sin', *Middle East Report*, no. 152 (May-June, 1988); Lockman and Joel Beinin (eds.), *Intifada. The Palestinian Uprising Against the Israeli Occupation* (London: Tauris, 1989).

<sup>161</sup> Shabtai Teveth, 'Charging Israel with Original Sin', *Commentary*, March, 1989.

<sup>162</sup> Morris, *1948 and After*, pp. 27, 29; Morris, 'The Eel and History: A Replay to Shabtai Tevet', *Tikkun*, vol. 5, 1990.

hypocrisy that is so characteristic of the Labour establishment’, that he ‘insists on claiming for Israel not just the twenty pieces of silver but also the crown of thorns’.<sup>163</sup>

Under normal circumstance, Morris’s reference to ‘original sin’ and Shlaim’s comment on Jesus and Judas Iscariot should have been puzzling, especially as the decidedly secular theme of the 1948 war did not require Christian imagery to analyse. A number of critics argued that the New Historians were aware that such ‘highly charged language’ was instrumental in delegitimizing Israel in the eye of a Western, Christian audience. One went so far as to suggest that there was a sinister anti-Semitic quality to such usage.<sup>164</sup> Manipulation of Christian symbols aside, a number of scholars offered an in-depth critique of New History project.

Efraim Karsh, a professor of Middle East and Mediterranean Studies at King’s College London, provided arguably the most comprehensive critique of the New History. Karsh’s major reservation pertained to the misuse of sources by the New Historians. By comparing original documents with the versions presented in their writings, he determined that the New Historians ‘rewrote’, ‘fabricated’ or otherwise distorted certain accounts to suit the conclusions. For instance, he found no evidence that Ben-Gurion condoned or authorized the transfer of the Palestinian Arab population as alleged by Morris and Pappé, and that Shlaim’s ‘collusion that never was’ was lifted from Arab anti-Hashemite historiography that sought to paint Abdullah as a tool of Zionism. Karsh considered the claim that the British were party to the collusion particularly ridiculous, writing that ‘for contemporary Jewish leaders Bevin and his advisers were implacable enemies, and vice versa; to Shlaim and Pappé

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<sup>163</sup> Avi Shlaim, ‘The Founding of Israel’, *Commentary*, February, 1990.

<sup>164</sup> Aliza Cramer, ‘Objectivity and Neutrality in the Israeli Historiographical Debate, about 1948: The Case of the New Historians’, MA Dissertation, St. Antony’s College, Oxford University, 2004; Emanuel Ottolenghi, ‘Paradise Lost: A Review of Laurence Silberstein’s *The Post-Zionism Debate: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture*’, *Israel Studies*, 8/2 (2003), pp. 139-49.

they were all bosom friends without their own knowledge' and the 'guardian angel of the Jewish state'.<sup>165</sup>

Karsh reserved some of his most penetrating analysis to the empirical contradictions and logical lapses in the books. He pointed out that, in his haste to discredit the notion that Jews waged a 'heroic struggle' Pappé proclaimed that the outcome 'had been predetermined in the political and diplomatic corridors of power long before even one shot had been fired'. Karsh asked how was it that the Jews, despite the alleged benefit of an international collusion and battlefield superiority, suffered 6000 fatalities – a full one per cent of the population - in addition to the loss of half of Jerusalem and the destruction of numerous settlements. As for the morale issue, Karsh pointed out that Morris did not mention that the Jews, facing equally severe obstacles and a higher relative casualty rate than the Palestinian Arabs, did not take to the road.<sup>166</sup>

All in all, Karsh asserted that there was nothing new in the New Historiography, which effectively recycled old, partisan accounts so as to give them 'a scholarly seal of approval'. To Karsh, the distortions of Morris and his peers were not a fluke but 'a modus operandi of a sizeable group of academics, journalists, and commentators, who had predicted their professional careers on rewriting Israel's history' at a time when the scholarly community was extremely welcoming to this approach, in the process violating any and all tenets of scholarly research and integrity.<sup>167</sup>

### **Oslo and Beyond: Whose New History Is It?**

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<sup>165</sup> Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History: The 'New Historians'* (London: Cass, 1997), pp. 19, 39, 43, 69-70, 143, 145.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 22, 25.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 195, Karsh *Fabricating Israeli History: The 'New Historians'* (London: Cass, 2000, second, revised edition), pp. xviii, xxiii.

When Roger Owen groomed the New Historians in their early steps, the prospects of Arab-Israeli peace process were grim despite numerous peace efforts by Washington and the Europeans. The PLO remained as opposed as ever to recognizing Israel and give up terrorism while Jerusalem felt no compulsion to negotiate with the organization despite international pressure. Yet the intifada had increased the cost of 'business as usual' for Israel. Much to the frustration of the IDF, the popular uprising proved difficult to suppress, generating growing unease in Israel with the unsettled situation with many prominent leftwing intellectuals complaining of the occupation's growing moral toll on society. David Grossman's *Yellow Wind*, portraying in stark colours the reality of Palestinian life under occupation became a bestseller. Opinion polls in the late 1980s and early 1990s showed Israelis to be physically exhausted and morally confused by the intifada.<sup>168</sup>

Desperate to settle the Palestinian issue, in late 1992 the newly formed Labour government headed by Yitzhak Rabin authorized secret informal talks with a PLO delegation in Oslo. The culmination of the talks in the PLO-Israel Declaration of Principles (DOP, or Oslo I as it was known), signed on the White House lawn on 13 September 1993, greatly excited the New Historians. Pappé, in particular, felt that the 'reconstruction of the past was now clearly connected to contemporary efforts to reach a political settlement' and that this 'constituted the most valuable aspect of the new history'. In his account, Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, who initiated and steered the secret negotiations, had 'produced the new history books' to convince the Palestinians that their narrative was accepted.<sup>169</sup>

For Pappé, by then an established activist in the communist Hadash Party, the new agreement offered a golden opportunity for delegitimizing the birth of Israel.

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<sup>168</sup> Seliktar, *Doomed to Failure*, p. 17.

<sup>169</sup> Pappé, 'Humanizing the Text', p. 106.

Though somewhat of a late comer to the field of critical studies - he recalled being both intimidated and sometimes bored by 'the postmodernist and neo-Marxist arguments' - he quickly got involved in *Theory and Criticism (Teoria ve Bikoret)*, a neo-Marxist journal sponsored by the Van Leer Institute. The journal, which specialized in deconstructing Zionism as a colonialist movement, inspired Pappé to view his historical work in the broader 'anti-colonialist struggle' of the Palestinian people. Around that time Pappé met Said who left a lasting impression: 'Ever since then I have felt that his dual involvement in both human sciences and the concrete Palestine case study turned his comments into the best guidelines for future academic involvement in the conflict'.<sup>170</sup>

Pappé put his academic-political activism to work by cofounding, in the summer of 1997, the Palestinian Israeli Academic Dialogue (Palisad), a group of twenty Israeli and Palestinian historians to provide 'bridging narratives' between the two people that, by his account, 'worked almost frantically, motivated by a sense of urgency in the wake of the deadlock and dissatisfaction with the Oslo peace process'. The 'bridging narrative', among other things, was meant to help the Israeli participants to accept the Palestinian perspective on 1948 war. Somewhat to their surprise, they learned that the revelations of the New Historiography, notably the 'ethnic cleansing of Palestine' (to borrow the title of Pappé's later book) was already part of the Palestinian narrative.

Pappé's immersion in critical scholarship and academic activism bore fruit. He renounced the positivist methodology and diplomatic history that had guided his earlier books to accommodate the Palestinian argument that positivism could not convey their part of the story. As he put it, 'From a positivist point of view, there was

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, p. 108-10.



no clear evidence for some of the major claims made by the Palestinian narrative, such as the existence of a master plan for the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 or the forty massacres alleged to have occurred during the conflict'. Instead, he decided to write in ways 'connecting my research on Palestine to the present Palestinian predicament and the contemporary attempt to reach a solution'.<sup>171</sup>

Overcoming some 'epistemological and methodological challenges', Pappé was able to frame his research within the 'post-colonialist perspective' claiming that from the outset the Zionist project was aimed at expelling the Palestinians to create an ethnically pure Jewish state. Reiterating that in 1948 the Jews faced no threat of annihilation, he suggested that the military parity on the ground was bolstered by American and British support for the Jews. Departing from his earlier writing and following in Shlaim's footsteps he argued that, despite his 'domination' by Israeli historiography, Bevin supported the idea of a Jewish state, not the least because of the guilt over the Holocaust. Finally, Pappé suggested that, despite the 'myth of Arab intransigence', the Arabs were willing to compromise; the failure to prevent the war or to resolve the conflict, in his opinion, laid with the Jews. Expanding further on the theme of 'Zionism and Colonialism' he concluded that the Zionist project was comparable to other 'mixed' colonialist projects in Asia and Africa.<sup>172</sup>

In yet another effort to make historical research favourable to the Palestinian cause Pappé concentrated on what he would ultimately describe as 'ethnic cleansing' of the Palestinians. In a lengthy chapter titled 'Were They Expelled? The History, Historiography and Relevance of the Refugee Problem' he rejected the argument that

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Ilan Pappé, 'Critique and Agenda: The Post-Zionist Scholarship in Israel', *History and Memory* 7/1 (1995), pp. 66-91; Pappé, 'Zionism as Colonialism - A Comparative View of Mixed Colonialism in Asia and Africa', in Yechiam Weitz (ed.), *From Vision to Revision: A Hundred Years of Zionism of Historiography of Zionism* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Centre, 1997; Hebrew), pp. 311-44.

the Palestinians fled either on their own or at the urging of their leadership claiming that even the limited call of the Mufti for women and children to leave was ignored by the Palestinians: 'Before women and children could be evacuated, they were expelled with the men from their homes'. Forgoing his customary use of Morris's book, he took to citing Walid Khalidi, a Palestinian scholar who was an early exponent of the expulsion theory, stating: 'So, Plan D was, in many ways, just what Khalidi claims it was - a master plan for the expulsion of as many Palestinians as possible'.<sup>173</sup>

Pappe's newly-found conviction that Israel was exclusively responsible for the refugee problem was closely related to the peace negotiations. The DOP was sketchy enough to allow an interim confidence-building period before the settlement of such explosive issues as the partition of Jerusalem and the fate of the 1948 refugees. In preparation for the final agreement Palestinian academic-activists launched a major effort to highlight the 'right of return' of Palestinians to their former homes in Israel, the standard Arab/Palestinian euphemism for Israel's demographic subversion. Salim Tamari, coordinator of the Project for Palestinian Refugees Rights & Residency at the Alternative Information Centre run by former Matzpen activist Michel 'Mikado' Warschawski, and a participant in the Work Group on Refugees (WGR) created at the 1991 Madrid Conference, asserted that 'the right of return' should not be to a Palestinian state only.<sup>174</sup> By proving beyond 'reasonable doubt' that the refugees were expelled, Pappé hoped to lend legitimacy to a broader definition of 'the right of return', admitting that 'The demand for associating the Palestinian narrative with the contemporary peace process was made throughout the Palestinian world'.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ilan Pappé, 'Were they Expelled? The History, Historiography and Relevance of the Refugee Problem', in Ghada Karmi and Eugen Cortran (eds.), *The Palestinian Exodus* (Reading: Garnet, 1999), p. 44.

<sup>174</sup> Seliktar, *Doomed to Failure*, 53.

<sup>175</sup> Pappé, 'Humanizing the Text', p. 110.

While Pappé celebrated the post-positivist, critical studies approach, Morris, fearing that political activism could damage his self-proclaimed image of academic objectivity, tried to distance himself from his colleague. To recall, Karsh noted that ‘Morris came to regard Pappé as a “fly in the ointment”, a discordant note when Morris’ sings the praise of “objective” history writing’.<sup>176</sup> Things came to a head during a symposium on the history of 1948 sponsored by the Paris-based *Le Monde Diplomatique* in 1998 where Pappé censured Morris for failing to provide empirical evidence to support the Palestinian position that Zionism was a colonialist movement bent on cleansing the indigenous population. This, in turn, prompted the Palestinian participants to question the competence of Israeli academics to investigate their ‘cultural holocaust’.<sup>177</sup>

Based on contextual analysis of some of Morris’s writings, Aliza Cramer, an Oxford University researcher, demonstrated his growing ‘idealization of neutrality and objectivity’ in the 1990s. In the early work, Morris maintained that his research ‘may also in some obscure way serve the purpose of peace and reconciliation between the warring tribes of this land’; oddly enough, as the Oslo process got underway, Morris adopted the posture of a historical purist ‘indicative of his rejection of judgment, blame along with apologies’. Cramer observed that Morris insisted that ‘it was possible for an historian to discover objective truth wherever the truth may lead’, but there was a certain sense of defensiveness in the assurance that ‘he did not try or aim to delegitimize Zionism’.<sup>178</sup>

Karsh provided a possible motive for Morris’s growing unease with Pappé’s political use of the New Historiography, surmising that Morris, the chief architect of

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<sup>176</sup> Karsh, *Fabricating* (1997), p. 196.

<sup>177</sup> Pappé, ‘Humanizing the Text’, p. 110.

<sup>178</sup> Cramer, ‘Objectivity’, p. 35; Morris, *1948 and After*, pp. 29, 38.

the 'assiduously cultivated heroic image of a small and courageous minority, persecuted by Israel's academic and intellectual establishment for its uncompromising quest for truth and justice', was most likely to lose his lustre as a serious scholar.<sup>179</sup> Craimer hypothesized that Morris was stung by the critics on the left who, as noted, accused him of not going enough in damning Israel. Pointing out that he chided them, as well as Teveth, for applying a 'simple-cause explanation of the Palestinian exodus' appropriate for propaganda more than scholarship, she noted an increase in the frequency of such terms like complexity and nuance in Morris's vocabulary.<sup>180</sup> Whatever the motives, there is little doubt that, by documenting instances of fabrication, Karsh forced Morris onto the defensive. The *Economist* and the *Times Literary Supplement* (London) carried several examples of documented falsification prompting Morris to concede that 'Karsh had a point'.<sup>181</sup>

Apparently affected by the turn of events Morris seemed to have become more subdued when he 'revisited the Palestinian exodus'. He made a point of emphasizing that 'transfer thinking' was spurred by the Peel Committee, but 'how exactly this thinking affected Zionist policy and actions in the course of the 1948 war remains more complicated than some Arab researchers have suggested'. This was also an apparent rebuke to Pappé, who had meanwhile adopted the Palestinian narrative of expulsion.<sup>182</sup>

With Pappé and Morris pulling in different directions, Shlaim was left to chart his own way. Given his previous efforts to create an image of academic objectivity, he could have been expected to continue on this path. Indeed, due to harsh criticism

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<sup>179</sup> Karsh, *Fabricating* (2000), p. xix.

<sup>180</sup> Craimer, 'Objectivity', p. 39.

<sup>181</sup> Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating* (2000), p. xxvii.

<sup>182</sup> Benny Morris, 'Revisiting the Palestinian Exodus of 1948', in Avi Shlaim and Eugene Rogan (eds.), *The War for Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 40-41.

of his collusion theory he changed the title of the second edition of his book to *Politics of Partition*, acknowledging in the preface that his previous terminology was ‘polemical, loaded and pejorative’. Shlaim also reiterated his denials of politically motivated research and professed dedication to objectivity and neutrality.<sup>183</sup>

A closer look at some of these statements, however, reveals a number of ambiguities and contradictions. In 1996 Shlaim expressed regret at dropping ‘collusion’ from the second edition of the book; according to Cramer he subsequently ‘worked in’ the concept of collusion through a variety of means, including such loaded phrases as ‘underhand schemes’ between Abdullah and the Zionists and ‘unholy alliance’ between Transjordan and Israel.<sup>184</sup> Evoking political objectivity enabled Shlaim to denounce Karsh for harbouring a political agenda and for advocating a ‘totalitarian conception of history’.<sup>185</sup>

Yet Shlaim’s admission that he did not shy from passing judgment and took ‘a certain pleasure from targeting of sacred cows of Zionist history’ was telling. In another somehow sarcastic statement he attributed his ‘two decades of further research and reflection in the relative tranquillity offered by British universities’ to his ‘heretical views’.<sup>186</sup> Cramer speculated that Shlaim was still eager to convey the image of a detached and objective academic afforded by Reading and Oxford Universities. But Karsh, who deconstructed such professions of objectivity pointed out that not only did Shlaim enjoy growing media attention for his Israel indictment, but he was ‘the chief academic adviser to a six part BBC series coinciding with

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<sup>183</sup> Avi Shlaim, *The Politics of Partition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xiv; idem, ‘A Totalitarian Concept of History’, *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1996, pp. 52-55.

<sup>184</sup> Aliza Cramer, ‘Objectivity’, p. 77.

<sup>185</sup> Shlaim ‘A Totalitarian Concept’.

<sup>186</sup> Shlaim, *The Politics of Partition*, P. vii.

Israel's 50<sup>th</sup> Independence Day in 1998' which, in his view, made the Jewish state look like the 'regional villain'.<sup>187</sup>

Not surprising, Morris was increasingly displeased with his fellow New Historians. He would later admit that Pappé's penchant for fronting political motivations created a 'methodological discord' between them, lamenting that Shlaim showed lack of prudence by admitting during a Hebrew University conference that 'he willingly took up the office of both "judge and hangman".' Morris cautioned Shlaim that such self-revelations undermine the credibility of an objective historian.<sup>188</sup>

Yet for all the talk on methodology, it was a political event that brought these simmering tensions into the open. By the end of the 1990s it had become increasingly clear that the peace process was stuck. When lunched in May 1994, the Palestinian Authority was hoped to be a model of democratic development in the Middle East. Instead, Yasser Arafat's leadership it became a mismanaged, corrupt, and oppressive political entity. So much so that Edward Said and other champions of the Palestinian cause felt compelled to denounce Arafat and urge him to step down. Arafat's failure to generate legitimacy played into the hands of the Islamist Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups that constantly sought to undermine the peace process. Unwilling or unable to confront the Islamists, Arafat would not deliver the security-for-territory agreement implicit in the peace process.

Things came to a head at the Camp David summit of July 2000 where Arafat rejected Prime Minister Ehud Barak's proposal of a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and some 95 per cent of the West Bank, with east Jerusalem at its capital. Much to their surprise, the Israelis and the Americans realized that Arafat would not reach an

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<sup>187</sup> Cramer, 'Objectivity', p. 47; Karsh, *Fabricating History* (2000), p. xxvii.

<sup>188</sup> Morris, *1948 and After*, p. 45.

agreement without ‘the right of return’ for Palestinians - a deal breaker on the Israeli side. For Morris, already harbouring doubts about the PLO’s commitment to peace, the failed summit proved a tipping point. Surprising many fellow travellers on the Left, he went public with his disillusionment in an interview in the daily *Yediot Aharonot* which he summarized in a *Guardian* article. Denying having ‘undergone a brain transplant’ Morris explained that his ‘conversion’ was prompted by Arafat’s failure to respond to Barak, a ‘sincere and courageous’ leader. He contended that the ‘root problem’ was Palestinian denial - driven by the vision of a Greater Palestine - of the Jewish right to statehood and that the Palestinians were ill served by Arafat, whom he called a ‘worthy successor’ to Hajj Amin al-Husseini, a ‘trickster and liar’ and a Nazi collaborator to boot. With the centrality of ‘the right of return’ established by Camp David, Morris felt compelled to revisit his own contribution to enhancing the profile of the refugee problem. He pointed out that ‘critics of Israel subsequently latched on to those findings that highlighted Israeli responsibility while ignoring the fact that the problem was a direct consequence of the war that the Palestinians - and, in their wake, the surrounding Arab states - had launched’. As for the new demands for repatriation into Israel Morris was adamant: ‘[I]f the refugees are allowed back, there will be god-awful chaos and, in the end, no Israel’.<sup>189</sup>

Shlaim responded the next day with a blistering attack titled ‘Betrayal of History’. Lamenting the defection of the ‘trailblazer of new history’ he charged Morris’s reading of event as being ‘more in common with propaganda than with genuine history. Like most nationalist versions of history, it is simplistic, selective and self-serving’. Decrying the article as ‘a rambling and self-pitying monologue, seething with contempt and hatred for the Arabs in general and Palestinians in

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<sup>189</sup> Benny Morris, ‘Peace? No Chance’, *Guardian*, 21 February 2002.

particular’, he suggested that Morris’s inability to see the truth was due to ‘his deficient and defective’ view of recent history that led him to blame ‘the victims for their misfortunes’ and to join ‘the Israeli national sport’ of ‘Arafat bashing’. Shlaim further chastised Morris for having ignored the account of Robert Malley, a former State Department official, whereby it was ‘Barak who mishandled’ the summit, and claimed that Morris ‘can no longer tell the difference between genuine history and fiction or fabrication along the lines of the Protocol of the Elders of Zion. At this rate Benny is in danger of becoming what Isaiah Berlin once described as “a very rare thing - a genuine charlatan”’. Needless to say, Shlaim blamed Israel’s expansionist policies and insatiable appetite for ‘Palestinian’ territory for the Camp David fiasco.<sup>190</sup>

Undeterred, Morris published an interview with Barak in the *New York Review of Books* to rebut the ‘revisionist’ account of the summit based on Malley’s version of events (which he articulated together with Palestinian activist Hussein Agha). The Morris piece most memorable line pertained to Palestinian and Arab behaviour whereby he quoted Barak describing it as a ‘product of a culture in which to tell a lie... creates no dissonance. They don’t suffer from the problem of telling lies that exists in Judeo-Christian culture. Truth is seen as an irrelevant category’. In a separate article, Morris assailed Arafat whom he accused of failing to negotiate and instead ‘just saying no’. Following a reaction from Malley and Agha, Morris responded with an attack on what he described as the ‘shopsoiled Palestinian *Weltanschauung*, that someone else, always, is to blame for their misfortunes - Ottoman Turks, British Mandate officials, Zionists, Americans, anyone but themselves’.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Avi Shlaim, ‘A Betrayal of History’, *Guardian*, 22 February 2002.

<sup>191</sup> Benny Morris and Ehud Barak, ‘Camp David and After: An Exchange’, *New York Review of Books*, 13 June 2002; Benny Morris and Ehud Barak, ‘Camp David and



Replete with name calling and accusations of betrayal, the breakup of the New Historians made for an interesting public spectacle and much commentary at the popular level. But, as Karsh hypothesized, changing political circumstances were likely to prompt the trio to alter yet again their accounts of the 1948 war, especially on the three key issues: culpability for the refugee problem, the balance of forces, and Zionism as colonialism. In the 2004 revised edition of *The Birth*, Morris disassociated himself further from the notion that Zionist thinking on transfer was implemented in 1948. Though he was loath to disown his earlier assertions, he seemed to emphasize the ambiguity of the situation and the difficulty of making assessments as to who was responsible for what. Apparently hoping to lessen the impact of his 1987 book, Morris forcefully concluded: 'But there was no pre-war Zionist plan to expel "the Arabs" from Palestine or the areas of the emergent Jewish state; and the Yishuv did not enter the war with a plan or a policy of expulsion'.<sup>192</sup>

If Morris's academic prose was quite circumspect, his lengthy interview in *Haaretz* on 9 January 2004 revealed a profound disenchantment with the Palestinians. He explained that the bombing of Israeli buses and restaurants full of civilians had 'shocked him' because they exposed the true depth of Arab hatred. Juxtaposed with the 9/11 attacks, Morris viewed such strategy as a war between 'civilization and barbarity' fuelled by an Islamic religion that did not value human life and an 'Arab tribal culture' in which 'revenge plays a central part'. Most astoundingly, current Palestinian behaviour led Morris to radically alter his view of the past. In the interview, he faulted Ben-Gurion for not expelling all of the Palestinians and justified ethnic cleansing on the grounds of self-defence: 'A society that aims to kill you forces

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After-Continued', *New York Review of Books*, 27 June, 2002; Benny Morris, 'Arafat Didn't Negotiate - He Just Kept Saying No', *Guardian*, 23 May 2002.

<sup>192</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 6, 588.

you to destroy it. When the choice is between destroying or being destroyed, it's better to destroy'.<sup>193</sup>

Back to scholarly language, Morris's self-revisionism was evident in yet another retelling of the 1948 story. In this new version the Palestinian exodus was viewed more as a flight than a planned Israeli expulsion-operation. He explained that the Palestinian society was 'backward, largely illiterate, disorganized'; never robust, it 'fell apart' and the 'flight was the earliest and most concrete expression of Palestinian demoralization'. One factor that contributed, in this view, to the crumbling was the early defection of the elites: nurses and doctors fled, followed by functionaries at all levels, including medical drivers who fled with their families in their ambulances.<sup>194</sup>

Morris's new found appreciation for sociological factors led him to conclude that 'an honest appraisal of balance of strength in war' should necessarily extend the discussion beyond the parameters of military manpower and weapons roster to include a society's strength and weakness. He found Jewish society far superior to the Palestinian Arabs 'with [their] well established tradition of disunity, corruption, and organizational incompetence'. Also, Palestinian Arabs were dependent on outside intervention, displaying 'a knee-jerk penchant to always blame others' and relying 'on the Arab States to pull their chestnuts out of the fire'. Most important in this respect was the contrast in leadership; whereas the Jews were led by seasoned men of stature, the Palestinian Arabs had to contend with the likes of Hussein and his ineffectual acolytes.

In the end, though, it was the total Arab rejection of the Zionist movement and the partition proposal that presaged the war: 'Western Jews failed to appreciate the

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<sup>193</sup> Ari Shavit, 'The Survival of the Fittest', *CounterPunch*, 16 January 2004 (reprint of the *Haaretz* interview).

<sup>194</sup> Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 82, 94, 150.

depths of Arabs' abhorrence of the Zionist-Jewish presence in Palestine, an abhorrence anchored in centuries of Islamic Judeophobia' where 'Jews were seen as unclean'. In the face of religious edicts from Cairo's al-Azhar institute and religious authorities against Israel even King Abdullah did not dare signing a peace treaty. As for the others, negotiating with Israel 'undermined the legitimacy of Arab leaders'. In any event, most of them tended to sound like Jamal Husseini, the Mufti's deputy, who promised that Jewish 'blood will flow like rivers in the Middle East'. Morris pointed out that this was not an idle threat: 'when opportunity arouse, the call *Idbah al Yahud* (slaughter the Jews) was carried out'. Indeed, 'the Jews felt that the Arabs aimed to re-enact the Holocaust and that they faced certain personal and collective slaughter should they lose'.<sup>195</sup>

Compared to a genocidal threat posed by a winning Palestinian Arab side, the Israelis, in Morris's opinion were greatly circumscribed; some expulsions notwithstanding, Plan D was never a blueprint for ethnic cleansing as argued by Khalidi and Pappé, not the least because Ben-Gurion was careful not to upset the Western powers anxious to preserve Arab goodwill. External pressure aside, Morris now implied that the low number of Palestinian civilian casualties was related to the moral code of the Hagana fighters known as '*tohar haneshek*', or purity of arms. He also praised the Jews who did not take to the road despite tremendous difficulties.<sup>196</sup>

By moving closer to what Shlaim pejoratively described as the 'orthodox Zionist' narrative, Morris not only contradicted his early writings but put distance between himself and his former colleagues. For his part Shlaim, even before the *Guardian* exchange, escalated his anti-Israel rhetoric in order to keep up with the deteriorating Israeli-Palestinian situation. Writing in an introduction to a coedited

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<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 50, 198, 393-94, 398-99, 408; 417-18.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 48-49, 120, 405.

book, he proclaimed that it took a 'generation of critical scholars' to unravel the 'fabric of myth' spun by Zionist history that tried 'to reaffirm a sort of Zionist manifest destiny while diminishing responsibility for the negative consequences of the war'. It was this changed consciousness that, in his opinion, contributed to the Oslo peace process.<sup>197</sup>

But after these self-congratulatory words, Shlaim described his own trajectory deflated by 'the three dark and terrible years during which Israel had been led by the unreconstructed proponents of the Iron Wall' - his allusion to Likud's rule of 1996-99. As noted earlier, it was Jabotinsky who had coined the term 'Iron Wall' to describe the grim nature of the Arab-Jewish confrontation. By using the term as a title for his new book, Shlaim sought to indicate that Zionism had always been driven by military force - ignoring altogether the complex and nuanced nature of Jabotinsky's 'iron wall' concept, which comprised economic strength, social and national cohesion, justness of cause, and other elements of 'soft power' on top of military strength. He conceded that 'the moral case for the establishment of an independent Jewish State was strong, especially in the aftermath of the Holocaust', but argued that it 'involved a massive injustice to the Palestinians'. In his opinion, Israel 'still had to arrive at the reckoning of its own sins against the Palestinians'. In the conclusion, written after Barak's 1999 victory over Netanyahu, Shlaim seemed to recover some of his optimism, comparing the election to a 'political earthquake' and 'a sunrise' after Likud's dark reign, only to unleash on Barak (and Israel) with great ferocity once Arafat declined his far-reaching Camp David concessions.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Avi Shlaim, 'Introduction', in Shlaim & Rogan, in *The War for Palestine*.

<sup>198</sup> Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World* (New York: Norton, 2000), pp. 31, 34, 49-50, 598, 609.

Trying to change current events by producing yet another version of the 1948 war was equally high on Pappé's agenda. As a self-confessed critical scholar, he now urged Israel to 'perform this liberation act... to rewrite, indeed salvage, a history that was erased and forgotten'. The erased chapter in his view pertained to the catastrophe that had befallen the Palestinians: Palestine was not partitioned in 1948; it was destroyed with most of its people expelled. Pappé warned that as long as Israel refused to assume responsibility for its ethnic cleansing, no 'liberation' and reconciliation would be possible. To make the liberation and reconciliation real, rather than an empty gesture, Israel should agree to the Palestinian 'right of return'.<sup>199</sup>

To make the case for this 'right' Pappé published his own version of the 1948 war. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* promised to replace 'the paradigm of war with the paradigm of ethnic cleansing' and 'war crime'. In this perspective, 'the Zionist movement did not wage a war that "tragically but inevitably" led to the expulsion of parts of the indigenous population, but the other way around: the main goal was the ethnic cleansing'. As a result, 'the ethnic cleansing of Palestine must become rooted in our memory and consciousness as a crime against humanity'.

Pappé repeated his claim that Plan D represented a blueprint for wholesale expulsion of the native population that, in his opinion, was expedited by a considerable number of deliberate massacres. In addition to the well known 9 April 1948 Deir Yasin tragedy, when 100 people (including women and children) were killed in the fighting for the village,<sup>200</sup> Pappé dwelt on a supposed massacre in the coastal village of Tantura. The subject of a graduate dissertation by Teddy Katz at the

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<sup>199</sup> Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. xx, 208, 422.

<sup>200</sup> Thus according to a Hagana report issued a day after the battle, which made no reference to a 'massacre'. The renowned Palestinian Arab historian Aref al-Aref put the number at 110 rather than 250 as has been claimed for decades. Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed*, Chapter 5.

University of Haifa, where Pappé taught at the time, the supposed massacre - glaringly missing from contemporary Palestinian Arab historiography of the war - was allegedly committed by soldiers of the Alexandroni brigade in the course of the battle for the village. Katz was sued by brigade fighters and agreed an out-of-court settlement whereby he would issue a public apology disowning his massacre claim. He then tried to retract his retraction only to be rebuffed by the presiding judge who declared the settlement a legally binding agreement, forcing him to proceed with the public apology. His subsequent appeal to the Supreme Court was similarly rejected, leading the university to appoint a re-examination committee that disqualified his thesis.<sup>201</sup> Ignoring these facts altogether, Pappé quickly transformed Katz into a victim of the oppressive Israeli system, adding the hitherto unclaimed Tantura 'massacre' to the roster of supposed Jewish atrocities. In one of them, in the village of *Mi'ar*, Pappé had the 'Israeli troops shooting indiscriminately at the villages...When they got tired of the killing spree, the soldiers then began destroying the houses'.<sup>202</sup>

Pappé's new narrative presented the balance of forces as overwhelmingly favouring the Jews; contemporary fears of extermination, just a few years after the Holocaust, were dismissed as a myth because the 'reality on the ground was, of course, almost the opposite'. He noted that in 'public, the leaders of the Jewish community portrayed doomsday scenarios... In private, however, they never used this discourse. They were fully aware that the Arab war rhetoric was in no way matched by any serious preparation on the ground'. Indeed, in making fantastic claims of crimes allegedly committed by the Jews - from rape, to murder, to labour camps, to

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<sup>201</sup> Vered Lovitch, 'Historian Katz to apologize to Alexandroni fighters', *Ynet*, 21 December 2000; Moshe Reinfeld, 'Supreme Court rejected historian Teddy Katz's appeal on the Tantura massacre episode', *Haaretz*, 6 November 2001.

<sup>202</sup> Ilan Pappé, 'The Tantura Case in Israel: the Katz Research and Trial', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring 2001, pp. 19-39; *idem*, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: One World Press, 2006), pp. xvi, 2, 5, 133-7; 143, 150.

massacres, to biological warfare by poisoning of water supplies - Pappe clearly insinuated to Nazi-like behaviour, not to mention harping on longstanding anti-Semitic libels.<sup>203</sup>

To cover all the bases of Israel's immoral origins Pappe placed Zionism within the parameters of the 'colonialist project', praising Israeli sociologists Baruch Kimmerling and Gershon Shafir as pioneers of the theory that equated Zionism with colonialism. Drawing on their and other insights of colonialist theory, Pappe contended that, like the early colonialist outposts in Africa, Australia and North and South America, the Zionist enclave 'was constructed around 1922 by a group of Jewish colonialists from Eastern Europe with considerable help and assistance from the British empire'. As such, Zionism was constructed to defend a 'white' (Western) fortress in a 'black' (Arab world). And by way of ensuring the country's Jewish and European character, the Palestinian Arabs had to be cleansed. This is why, in Pappe's estimate, the Zionists rejected all appeals from Arabs and the Palestinians to resolve the conflict.<sup>204</sup>

As much as he tried to paint Jews and Israelis as irredeemable rejectionists, Pappe was well aware that this depiction was at odds with the role played by the Palestinian Arab leadership in general and Haj Amin al-Husseini, in particular. With his relentless extremism and long history of anti-Semitism, subversive activities, and Nazi collaboration, Pappe understood that the Mufti was in need of image rehabilitation (not least since many of his contemporaries viewed him as culpable for the Nakba). Reflecting on the issue in 1997 he warned that 'when discussing the Husaynis' attitude toward Zionism one should be wary of the pitfalls of retrospective analysis'. A few years later he mentioned working on the Husseini family project,

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<sup>203</sup> Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing*, pp. 46, 100-01, 122, 204.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 8, 225, 227, 253.

first published in a Hebrew edition. In the back cover of the book Pappé explained that by focusing on the Husseini family he wanted to convey to the Israelis that Palestine was a thriving community led by seasoned notables like the Husseinis.<sup>205</sup>

Predictably, Pappé's portrayal of Hajj Amin was different from the ruthless, rabble-rousing manipulator blamed for leading the Palestinians astray. Downplaying several well documented instances of the Mufti's incitement to violence, he stated that Husseini 'did not consciously turn a minor incident into a violent clash' and made the incredible claim - against all available evidence - that the Mufti did not support the 1936-37 'revolt' (which he actually instigated). When faced with explaining some of Husseini's more egregious misdeeds, Pappé seems to contradict himself. Forced to concede that 'Haj Amin gave the green light to eliminate several of his opponents', he concluded that 'this chapter of Haj Amin biography marred much what he had done before'. The Mufti's notorious corruption prompted Pappé to admit that 'suspicion about how Amin used the fund of the Muslim Council has never been dispelled', only to try to soften the assertion by making the contradictory claim that 'there is no doubt that Haj Amin enjoyed a personal reputation of decency and probity - amid the endemic corruption in Arab politics'.<sup>206</sup>

The Mufti's high profile advocacy of the Final Solution and his personal contribution to Nazi war efforts got Pappé into more contradictions.<sup>207</sup> When discussing the Mufti's initial contacts with Nazi officials in Palestine, Pappé complained that 'Israeli historiography would claim, with very little evidence, that by

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<sup>205</sup> Ilan Pappé and Moshe Maoz (eds.), *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within* (London: Tauris, 1997), p. 199; Pappé, *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty. The Husaynis 1700-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>206</sup> Pappé, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 236, 277-78, 281, 304.

<sup>207</sup> For the Mufti's Nazi collaboration see, for example, Klaus Gensicke, *The Mufti and the Nazis: the Berlin Years* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2011); Barry Rubin and Wolfgang Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).



this time the Mufti endorsed the Nazi ideology'. But later on he admits that 'Palestinian historiography was long uncomfortable' with discussing 'his ill-fated liaison [with Nazi Germany]'. Pappé's solution was to explain that by then the Mufti and his pro-Nazi associates were but 'a few individuals who were detached from Palestine and its politics', emphasizing that the Mufti's 'identification with the Nazi death machine made it difficult for him to reintegrate into Palestinians politics'. At the same time Pappé lamented that 'many historians in the world, especially in Israel, have depicted him as a mini Hitler, unjustifiably and inaccurately'.<sup>208</sup>

Pappé's books triggered a huge, but politically predictable reaction. Observers on the left embraced his findings but many critics denounced it in the strongest language possible. Not surprising, Morris, by now totally alienated from his former fellow traveller, led the chorus of protest, taking the opportunity to reflect on the broader issue of historical revisionism. Concluding that revisionism 'became too much of a good thing', he compared it to a 'veritable tsunami, taking that revisionism to shores and provinces that go far beyond what the available documentation indicates or allows, creating a destructive current that is underpinned by invented and spurious narratives and non-facts presented as truth'.<sup>209</sup>

Morris saved most of his scorn for a review titled 'The Liar as a Hero'. He described Pappé as 'at best sloppiest, at worse one of the most dishonest' scholars who maliciously distorted research to appeal to Western audiences, as when he allegedly mistranslated a comment by Ben-Gurion condoning blinding of dogs in a chemical experiment. Morris noted that both Shlaim and Pappé hardly mentioned ethnic cleansing in their earlier books suggesting that Pappé - 'a retroactive poseur' in his words - became radicalized only after getting tenure. In other words, not only was

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<sup>208</sup> Pappé, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 280, 315, 317.

<sup>209</sup> Benny Morris, 'Fallible Memory', *New Republic*, 3 February 2011.

Pappe a 'poseur' but lacked the moral courage to stand up for his convictions before receiving job security. Morris lamented that Pappé was riding the crest of critical scholarship that made its home in departments of political science, sociology, and cultural studies in some universities that 'had become bulwarks of anti-Zionism, in which professing Zionists can barely achieve a toehold'. As for his portrayal of the Husseini family Morris wrote: 'The Palestinian national movement, since its inception in the 1920s, has sought to establish a unitary Arab state in all of Palestine...This state was to contain only a small Jewish minority - as defined by the first leader of the movement, the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Muhammad Amin al-Husseini, restricted to the Jews who lived in Palestine prior to World War I'. In his own exercise of linking the present to the past, Morris argued that nothing had changed in the 'basic Palestinian rejectionism, amounting to a *Weltanschauung*, is routinely ignored or denied by most Western commentators and officials'.<sup>210</sup>

Even though Morris was apparently unaware of the irony, his denunciation of revisionism gone wild and its exaggeration and fabrication of facts, sounded not much different than Karsh's original critique of the New Historiography. In what could be described as a remarkable coincidence, Morris seconded many of the assertions in *Palestine Betrayed*, Karsh's new study about the 1948 war where he chided the Israeli "new historians" - younger, politically engaged academics and journalists who claim to have discovered archival evidence substantiating the anti-Israel case' for turning the 'saga of Israel's birth upside down', notably by ignoring the 'Arab commitment to destroy Israel'. In this politicized version, Karsh argued, 'Zionism emerged, as a colonizing and expansionist ideology and movement, an offshoot of European imperialism at its most rapacious'. Karsh blamed the Mufti for a good share of the

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<sup>210</sup> Benny Morris, 'The Liar as Hero', *New Republic*, 6 April 2011; idem, 'Bleak House', *Tablet*, 2 December 2010.

problems; among others, he was loathed by his peers who considered him a ‘menace to the general Arab interests’ and ‘a schemer seeking his own personal interests’, who became ‘the most important Arab Quisling in German hands’.<sup>211</sup>

All in all, the New Historians have worked within the relatively well-established Galtung-Said paradigm which, as indicated, portrayed the Jews as Western, white, colonialist top dogs who arrived in Palestine with the blessing of an imperialist power to dispossess an indigenous, downtrodden population. More to the point, most of them presented the Zionist model as anachronistic and harmful to the Jewish people and Israel, a position exacerbated by Pappe and Shlaim after the collapse of the Oslo process. Yet while the colonialist perspective contended that the Jews had no legitimate right to Palestine it did not deny their collective identity. It was left to another historian to take this denigration a step forward by denying the Jewish people’s very existence.

### **Neo-Canaanism and the ‘Invention of the Jewish People’**

As we have seen, in the 1960s the remnants of the Canaanite movement assimilated into Matzpen where, together with other radical-leftists, they challenged the ‘colonialist-Zionist’ system. With hostility between the Arabs and Jews showing no sign of abating, the old paradigm of a common Canaanite origin as a base for future coexistence fell out of favour. Even Boaz Evron, one of the original Canaanites still active in the 1980s, felt compelled to adjust, paving the way for a neo-Canaanite version of Jewish history. In his book *A National Reckoning*, Evron revisited the old Canaanite thesis but also discussed at some length the ‘artificial Zionist creation’ of a Jewish nation out of disparate exiles and conversion. Published in 1988, the book

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<sup>211</sup> Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed*, pp. 4-5, 67, 81.

received virtually no public attention but a number of scholars at Tel Aviv University elaborated upon his ideas, giving it a higher profile.<sup>212</sup>

Joseph Agassi, a philosophy professor, had devoted considerable thought to the link between faith and nationality in Israel, finding the ‘ghetto culture’ of Eastern Europe to be detrimental to the formation of national identity.<sup>213</sup> The so-called Tel Aviv School of Archaeology - Nadav Naaman, Israel Finkelstein and Zeev Herzog - vigorously attacked traditional Israeli archaeology. Their approach was closely patterned on the radical Copenhagen-Sheffield School whose leaders sought to delegitimize the ‘biblical narrative’ of modern archaeology on the ground that such ‘scholars have created a false Ancient Israel’. While Naaman excavated Canaanite sites, Herzog attracted public attention in writing in *Haaretz* that the biblical narrative of the early Israelites had no support in reality, adding that the Israelites adopted monotheism late in the monarchy period.<sup>214</sup>

By comparison, the theoretical challenge to the conception of a Jewish nation was much less public. Uri Ram, a critical sociologist using neo-Marxist methodology, was the first to determine that modern Jewish nationhood was ‘imagined, invented and narrated’. He blamed ‘Zionist historiography’ in the ‘service of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel’ for this invention. Ram noted that in order to legitimize their claim to Palestine, the Zionists had to prove the ‘unity and continuity of the ostensible nation’. In other words, ‘spatial concentration and temporal endurance’ had to be presented as ‘backbone of Jewish existence’ and a matching narrative created which included an Origin in the Land, Exile, Diaspora and

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<sup>212</sup> Boaz Evron, *A National Reckoning* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1988; Hebrew).

<sup>213</sup> Joseph Agassi, *Between Faith and Nationality* (Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1984).

<sup>214</sup> Roland Croucher and others, ‘Minimalism: The Copenhagen School of Thought’, *John Marks Ministries*, 5 January 2003 <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/9246.htm>; Zeev Herzog, ‘Deconstructing the Walls of Jericho’, *Haaretz*, 29 October 1999.

Return/Zionist Redemption. Ram urged the deconstruction of the Zionist ‘story’ and its replacement by a different ‘story’, one that would mould a new national identity in line with a post-Zionist concept of a multicultural, communitarian state.<sup>215</sup>

Prima facie, Shlomo Sand, a professor of French culture, history and cinema at Tel Aviv University with a modest publishing record, was an unlikely candidate to answer Ram’s call to undermine the ‘unity and continuity of the ostensible nation’. But Sand’s long association with Matzpen, his knowledge of Evron’s work, and an appreciation for neo-Marxist interpretation of a national identity gave him the necessary motivation. He credited the ‘challenging work of Evron and Ram’ and ‘non-Israeli scholars of nationalism such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson’ for questioning anew ‘the root of his identity’.<sup>216</sup>

Indeed, the latter two were essential to Sand’s rewrite of Jewish history because they introduced a neo-Marxist sensibility into the commonly used anthropological conceptualization of national identity. In anthropology, national beliefs, like other elements of a collective belief system are viewed from a micro-sociological perspective positing that individual members of a collective engage in a constant discourse to conceptualize notions crucial to their existence. Following Max Weber, it is understood that national identity evolved from the *Gemeinschaft* community where group belonging is based on kinship to *Gesellschaft* association where members are tied by a ‘feeling of interdependent’ and a ‘community of fate’.<sup>217</sup>

Anthony Smith, perhaps the best known student of nationalism, used the anthropological, micro-sociological approach, arguing that members of an ethno-

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<sup>215</sup> Uri Ram, ‘Zionist History and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood’, *History and Memory*, 7 (Spring-Summer 1995), pp. 91-124.

<sup>216</sup> Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 19.

<sup>217</sup> Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992); Ofira Seliktar, ‘Identifying a Society’s Belief Systems’, in Margaret G. Hermann (ed.), *Political Psychology* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986), pp. 320-54.

national group share a unique sense of group origin, and harbour knowledge of a unique group history, among others.<sup>218</sup>

Neo-Marxists have preferred the ‘holistic’ position - that emerging group properties are not reducible to the sum proprieties of individuals - associated with Marx and Louis Althusser. Suspicious of collective beliefs considered a form of ‘false consciousness’ they rejected any notion of a discursive democratic process. In a somewhat contradictory fashion, Sand quotes Ernest Renan to the effect that ‘a nation’s existence is, if you will pardon the metaphor, a daily plebiscite’ but has little use for Smith after conceding that the latter’s definition actually fits the Zionist historical narrative. He clearly preferred the more radical premise of Anderson’s imagined community and Gellner’s assertion that nationalism was not possible before the formation of a ‘consolidated culture’ coinciding with the rise of an industrial society.<sup>219</sup>

To his credit Sand informed readers that Gellner’s ‘theoretical landmine’ - the idea of ‘nationalism engendering nations and not the other way round’ - shook most scholars. Yet he offered only an indirect defence of such ‘theoretical audacity’ by referring to Eric Hobsbawm, a British Marxist historian who wrote ‘that nations are a dual phenomenon, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood also analyses from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, need, longing and interest of ordinary people’. Even that was qualified because, as Sand saw it, it was not easy to discover what ‘ordinary people’ had thought.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> See, for example, Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); idem, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000).

<sup>219</sup> Sand, *The Invention*, pp. 34, 37.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

Liberated from the effort of finding out empirically what ‘ordinary [Jewish] people’ think, Sand proceeded to invoke yet another theoretician of nationalism, Carlton Hays, who suggested that ‘the national theology of intellectuals becomes a national mythology for the masses’. By adding Gramsci to the equation, Sand was able to argue that the intellectual class, the historians, journalists and even civil servants have become the nation’s ‘prince’, a ‘collective corps of intellectuals who control the apparatus of the nation-state’. Even without accepting all of Gramsci’s theory, Sand argued, it was possible to prove that some of these intellectual ‘princes’, notably historians, are truly the ones that create national identity for disparate individuals: ‘With the help of the historians, nationalism became an “optimistic ideology” where the heroism of the receding world prophesized a brilliant future’.<sup>221</sup>

For those adept at deciphering the somewhat obtuse critical theory, Sand’s methodology was hand-tailored for a critique of the Zionist historians, the intellectual ‘princes’ in charge of producing the ‘spatial concentration and temporal endurance’ of the ‘alleged’ Jewish nation.<sup>222</sup> He identified a number of historians who qualified for the title of ‘high priest of national memory’ due to their alleged contribution to the myth of the Jewish nation. First on his list was Heinrich Graetz (1817-91) who, while not a ‘complete Zionist’, was said to form the national mould for the writing of Jewish history: ‘he created a unified narrative... an unbroken history, branching but always singular’. Next in line was Simon Dubnow (1860-1941), to whom Sand attributed the ‘the fostering the national consciousness through the study of history’. He charged Dubnow with initiating ‘a lasting tradition in Jewish nationalism’ of creating the ‘proprietary claim of “People of Israel and Land of Israel”’. Last but not least on

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 54, 62-63.

<sup>222</sup> Anita Shapira, ‘Jewish People Denier’, *Journal of Israeli History*, 28/1 (2009), pp. 63-72.

Sand's list was Ben-Zion Dinur, whom Ram already fingered as the chief architect of the 'false' Jewish national narrative in his capacity as both a Hebrew University history professor and Israel's minister of education (1951-55). Sand accused Dinur of 'rewriting history' to create a connection to the Land of Israel as part of the Zionist 'holy trinity' of Bible-Land-People, pointing out that Dinur was a guest at the regular Bible circle that met Ben-Gurion's home in the 1950s, a presumed workshop of Zionist 'national memory merchants'.<sup>223</sup>

After deconstructing the Zionist 'nation-and-identity building' project, Sand offered his own version of history that, not surprisingly, tried to undermine the 'false' space-time continuity. First, he dismissed the Old Testament as 'mythistory' to denote the contention, based partially on the Tel Aviv archaeologists, that Judaism did not take root until of late in the monarchy period. For good measure, Sand also cited the Copenhagen-Sheffield School that described the Bible as a 'grand library that was written, revised and adapted' between the late sixth and early second century BCE. The implication was clear: the Jews were imposters who brought monotheism from Babylon and fraudulently turned it into a divine mandate and a title deed to the Land.<sup>224</sup>

Exposing the 'myth' of forced exile was Sand's second goal in the effort to disprove what Ram defined as the Zionist creation of 'temporal endurance'. With no statistical data, the question of how many Jews were forcibly deported, how many freely migrated and how many stayed before and after the destruction of the Second Temple has been a fertile ground for historical speculation. Sand mentioned a number of historians who tackled the issue but seemed to be intent on highlighting only one category - the 'exile without-expulsion,' which, in his opinion, was extremely

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<sup>223</sup> Sand, *The Invention*, pp. 73, 90, 91-92, 106-07.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 125-26.



problematic for Zionist scholars. Sand explained that Dinur and others considered the issue of exile through a Zionist prism: 'If exile was undertaken voluntarily - God forbid' it would 'have undermined their [Jewish] renewed claim' to the Land. In lieu of statistical evidence to support his own conclusion that exile was almost always voluntary, Sand claimed that, starting with Yitzhak Baer (1888-1980), Zionist historians adopted the Christian myth of the Wandering Jew - Jews punished by exile for rejecting the Messiah. More to the point, once in exile, with small exceptions, Jews were most reluctant to return to their Land: 'The Jews were not forcibly deported from their "homeland", and there was no voluntary "return" to it'.<sup>225</sup>

For all his emphasis on voluntary exile to delegitimize Zionist claims, Sand needed to provide more dramatic proof that Diaspora Jews were not linked to the ancient Jewish Kingdom, let alone descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His solution was to focus on the role of proselytizing and conversion throughout Jewish history, a subject with no statistical grounding. Starting with the forced conversions of the Edomites by the Hasmoneans Sand scoured Jewish and general history for more examples of what he claimed to be mass conversions, albeit voluntary ones, during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, going so far as to argue that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, was a prelude to Jewish proselytizing. Stretching the argument further, Sand concluded that rabbinical authorities - normally known as opponents of proselytizing - were either tolerant or encouraged mass conversions.<sup>226</sup>

Further down the line, Sand found evidence of mass conversions in Arabia and among the Phoenicians and Berbers.<sup>227</sup> But it was the story of the Khazars that formed

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<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 136, 139, 141.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 155, 162, 161-73, 174-75.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 192-210.

the core of the book's argument that the vast majority of Jews were never linked to biblical Israel. As related by Sand, the Khazars - a nomadic tribe of Turkic and Hunnic-Bulgar clans interspersed with Scythians who created an empire between the Black and the Caspian Seas - converted to Judaism in the eighth century. After the decline of the empire in the thirteenth century, the Jewish Khazars were dispersed but survived as an ethnic group.

Sand was by no means the first to bring attention to the Jewish Khazars. Medieval Arab, Christian and Jewish sources provided fragments of information on their Judaization, a fact that Sand prominently showcased. He also listed a number of nineteenth century Jewish laymen who investigated the Khazars' Jewishness to prove this thesis as well as Arthur Koestler, the Jewish-Hungarian Marxist author, whose 1976 book, *The Thirteenth Tribe*, created a stir in the West. Missing from Sand's inventory is the multitude of writings and websites that make ideological use of the Khazars-as-Jews theory. A minority is philo-Semitic or evangelical Christians trying to reclaim these long 'lost Jews' for Christianity. The bulk of the literature, however, is highly anti-Semitic, propagated by such disparate sources as Henry Ford, Christian identity movement in the United States and assorted British anti-Semites.

After his forced retirement from command of Jordan's Arab Legion, the notoriously anti-Semitic John Bagot Glubb (better known as Glubb Pasha)<sup>228</sup> devoted a great deal of time to tracing the 'true' origins of East European Jews. In a 1967 lecture, 'The Problem of Jewish Noses', he asserted that, with their fair hair and blue eyes, East European Jews were descents of pagan Slav proselytes and the Khazars, whereas the Arabs of Palestine were closely linked to the Judeans. The anti-Zionist implication of this alleged racial makeup did not escape Glubb who concluded that

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<sup>228</sup> See, for example, Benny Morris, *The Road to Jerusalem: Glubb Pasha, Palestine, and the Jews* (London: Tauris, 2003).

the Palestinians had more right to Israel than the Jews.<sup>229</sup> In the early 1950s Douglas Reed, a famous British journalist, author and playwright published *The Controversy of Zion* in which he ‘proved’ that Jewish ‘bloodlines’ did not run to the Holy Land. He mentioned the forced conversions of the Edomites but his key proof were the Khazar Jews, whose East European Jewish decedents allegedly applied the ‘Khazar warrior acumen’ to seek world dominance.

The collapse of the Soviet Union generated more anti-Semitic use of the Khazar-Jewish theory. Lev Gumilev, the son of the famed poet Anna Ahmatova and a student and protégé Mikhail Artamonov, a Soviet historian and archaeologist who pioneered the study of Khazaria in the 1930s, sought to scientifically prove that the Jewish descendants of the Khazars were parasites feeding off the Russian Slav society. A number of strange bedfellows picked up Gumilev’s theory. On the one hand there was the Russian Orthodox Church that posited that Jewish Khazaria was locked in an epic struggle with Russian Christianity. Russian pagans, on the other hand, accused the Khazar Jews of bringing Christianity to Russia. In a report by the Vidal Sassoon International Centre at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Victor Shnirelman demonstrated how these and other anti-Semitic groups used Gumilev’s ‘scientific theory’ of Jewish Khazars to portray Jews as a group of alien parasites on the Slavic super-ethnicity. Reviewing Shnirelman’s report, London University Professor John Klier, a leading expert on East European Jewry, pointed out that the Jewish Khazars have proved a mother lode for all kinds of ideologically motivated writing.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Benny Morris, *The Road to Jerusalem: Glubb Pasha, Palestine and the Jews*, (London: IB Tauris, 2002), 22

<sup>230</sup> Victor Shnirelman, ‘The Myths of the Khazars and Intellectual Anti-Semitism in Russia, 1970-1990s’ (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2002); John Klier’s review of Shnirelman’s report, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 83/4 (2005), pp. 779-80.

It was ironic, but probably inevitable that the anti-Zionist American Council of Judaism joined the long list of consumers of the Jewish Khazaria lore. Alfred Lilienthal, a prolific writer who emerged as the Council's most eloquent spokesman, maintained that Americans had no religious obligation to support Zionism because most of the Jews were decedents of the medieval Khazars. Small wonder that Lilienthal's writings were featured in a multitude of anti-Semitic, Islamist, and pro-Palestinian websites.<sup>231</sup>

While it is not difficult to surmise why Sand failed to mention these questionable fellow travellers, Tel Aviv University historian Anita Shapira, who labelled Sand the 'Jewish people denier', was willing to give him the benefit of doubt as being unaware 'of the suspect company that he keeps'.<sup>232</sup> A more plausible explanation, however, is that Sand was anxious to dissociate himself from rampant anti-Semites, conspiracy theory buffs and assorted crackpots who championed the Jewish Khazaria theory. Indeed, he was at pains to emphasize the academic nature of his work by quoting from the limited but respectable pool of scholars like Douglas Morton Dunlop, an authority on the Khazars at Columbia University in the 1990s, and Peter Golden, a Rutgers University professor. He also mentioned Abraham Polak, a Polish Jewish historian who taught at Tel Aviv University in the 1950s and even Dinur and other 'Zionist historians'.

In spite of Sand's efforts to establish scientific credibility, his work was met with withering criticism, something that he expected and apparently welcomed. Like the New Historians, Sand could portray himself as a courageous 'speaker of truth to power' in the quest for 'a new Jewish history' not obscured by the 'dense prism of Zionism' or hindered by 'stubborn refusal' of Jewish history departments 'to open up

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<sup>231</sup> Alfred Lilienthal, *What Price Israel?* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953).

<sup>232</sup> Shapira, 'Jewish People Denier', pp. 63-72.

to new historiography'. As for his critics, they were the 'old guard' Zionist and nationalist historians unwilling to appreciate the new methodologies that made the book possible.<sup>233</sup>

Much as Sand presented himself as a victim of ideological attacks, his work raised a number of valid concerns. One pertains to his rejection of established scholarship and the privileging of 'alternative narratives' of questionable academic legitimacy. As noted, Sand dismissed Smith and his views of national identity formation because it did not fit the neo-Marxist notions of Anderson, Gellner, Hobsbawm and Gramsci. As a neo-Marxist he was apparently not comfortable with the democratic idea of discourse, let alone with the possibility that 'yearnings for Zion' and the temporariness of the Exile could have had some popular resonance in Jewish history - a sentiment that would have been at odds with his theory of Zionist-'manufactured' peoplehood. Much in the same way, Sand elevated the marginal Copenhagen-Sheffield School and its Israeli clone, the Tel Aviv Archaeology School, while dismissing virtually all mainstream biblical archaeologists.

Yet another problem is concerning Sand's lack of expertise necessary to write a study of this kind. Indeed, by his own admission, his research would have been better served by a team of scholars. The treatment of the complex issue of conversions in the late pagan-early Christian period was a case in point. Sand stated that masses of Gentiles flocked to Judaism without specifying that most of them were arguably followers of the new Christian faith preached by Paul to Jews and Gentiles alike. Even a cursory reading of the history of the Church would indicate that the fluidity of faith came to an end under Constantine and his fellow Christian emperors. At times, Sand's understanding of Judaism is not much better. For example, Shapira noted that

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<sup>233</sup> Sand, *The Invention*, pp. 18, 22.

the idea that Jews were punished by exile was firmly anchored in the Talmud, more than a millennium before the advent of Zionism.<sup>234</sup>

But it is Sand's eagerness to prove that the Khazars morphed into the Yiddish civilization of Eastern Europe that is most troubling. While there is enough evidence to indicate that the Khazar aristocracy accepted Judaism, there is virtually no proof that they were followed by the entire population as Sand asserted. His argument that after the collapse of their empire the Khazars-turned-Jews moved westward creating the ethno-demographic base of the Ashkenazi population is even more problematic. There are no records to indicate what happened to the Khazars who disappeared from the annals of history. Based on available sources, most scholars have suggested that many of the Khazar Jewish nobility were killed while others converted to Christianity or Islam and some, retaining their Judaism, established a small settlement in Crimea and as far as Kiev. Dunlop described the alleged mass migration westward as an 'assumption'. There is also nothing in Golden's doctoral dissertation to support Sand's theory that the descents of the Khazars formed what he calls 'the Yiddishland' of Eastern Europe.<sup>235</sup>

Sand skated on thin scientific ice when trying to prove that the Yiddish language is of Slavic rather than Germanic in origin. Paul Wexler seems to be the best known defender of this theory, but neither he nor Polak, who surmised that Jews were linguistically influenced by German traders who travelled to the East are mainstream scholars. Sand's use of demographic data is equally questionable. He argued that the small Jewish communities in medieval Germany could not have resulted in the large

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<sup>234</sup> Shapira, 'Jewish People Denier'.

<sup>235</sup> Douglas M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (New York: Schocken, 1967), p. 261; Peter B. Golden *The Qazars: Their History and Language as Reflected in the Islamic, Byzantine, Caucasian, Hebrew and Old Russian Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

population of Yiddishland. But, as Shapira pointed out, census data from Poland indicates that up to the nineteenth century Jews numbered in the ten thousands, not millions: ‘one way or another, these figures match both the migration rates of Jews from the west and the natural increase without having to resort to masses of Khazars to balance the account’.<sup>236</sup>

Posing even a greater challenge to Sand’s theory has been the new genetic data indicating a similarity among the disparate Jewish communities. Genome surveys carried out by Gil Atzmon and Harry Ostrer (United States) and Doron Behar and Richard Willems (Israel and Estonia) showed the closeness of the European Jews and their Middle Eastern counterparts. Atzmon noted that ‘members of any Jewish community are related to each other as close as fourths of fifth cousins in a larger population’, about ten times as high as a random sample from New York City. This genetic closeness surprised the researchers given that the communities have been separated for so long. One commentator observed that the results refute Sand’s contention ‘that Jews have no common origin but are a miscellany of people in Europe and Central Asia who converted to Judaism at various times’.<sup>237</sup>

Sand’s response to genetic research seemed odd. Evidently he took little time to study the subject and dismissed the older studies as inclusive or contradictory. He failed to understand that the prevalence of some Jewish specific mutations such as Tau-Sachs and the more recently discovered BRCA1 and BRCA2 that make Jewish

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<sup>236</sup> Shapira, ‘Jewish People Denier’, p. 70.

<sup>237</sup> Harry Ostrer, *Legacy: A Genetic History of the Jewish People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Harry Ostrer & Karl Skorecki, “[The Population Genetics of the Jewish People](#),” *Human Genetics*, 132/2, February 2013, pp. 119-27; M.F. Hammer, et. al., “[Jewish and Middle Eastern non-Jewish populations share a common pool of Y-chromosome biallelic haplotypes](#),” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* (PNAC), 97/12 (2000), pp. 6769-74; Gil Atzmon, et. al., “[Abraham’s Children in the Genome Era: Major Jewish Diaspora Populations Comprise Distinct Genetic Clusters with Shared Middle Eastern Ancestry](#),” *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 86/6 (2000), pp. 850-59.

women of Ashkenazi origin highly susceptible to breast and ovarian cancer are related to the so-called 'founders gene', a mutation created by a 'genetic bottleneck' originating in small population with a history of endogenous marriages. The extremely high frequency of breast cancer in Israel has prompted the authorities to consider genetic testing for women of Ashkenazi origin, the strongest acceptance yet of the genetically-based theory.<sup>238</sup>

As for the cutting edge new studies - published in the prestigious *American Journal of Genetics* and *Nature* - his response bordered on the bizarre. He dismissed Behar as part of a group of 'Zionist' geneticists lead by Karl Skorecki, an Orthodox Jew, bent on proving the existence of a Jewish gene. In the afterword to the 2010 paperback edition, Sand noted that 'it is a bitter irony to see the descendants of Holocaust survivors set out to find a biological Jewish identity: Hitler would certainly have been very pleased! And it is all the more repulsive that this kind of research should be conducted in a state that has waged for years a declared policy of 'Judaization of the country'.<sup>239</sup>

Sand's theory took another hit when Martin Richards, an English archgenecist and a team of scientists conducted a study indicating that the conversion among women in the Mediterranean and further north in Europe were part of the Jewish maternal lineage of the Ashkenazi branch. Osterer considered the findings plausible, noting their correspondence to the outline Jewish migration - as it pushed north from the Mediterranean. Skorecki and Behar were somewhat more sceptical,

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<sup>238</sup> Roni Caryn Rabin, 'In Israel, a Push to Screen for Cancer Gene Leaves Many Conflicted', *New York Times*, 26 November 2013; Nicholas Wade, 'Studies Show Jews' Genetic Similarity', *New York Times*, 9 June 2010.

<sup>239</sup> Sand, *The Invention*, p. 277, afterword.



but there was an agreement that the Richards research - like its predecessors - found no support for the Khazar theory.<sup>240</sup>

In the end though, Sand's book was more about current politics than scientific research. By denying a distinctive Jewish identity he tried not only to delegitimize Zionism but to help the formation of a non-Jewish bi-national state – Matzpen's 'Holy Grail'. He asserted that the 'Jewish nationalism that dominates Israeli society is not an open, inclusive identity' but an exclusive one 'that segregates the majority from the minority', denying 'active and harmonious participation in the sovereignty and practices of democracy'.<sup>241</sup>

Personally, Sand, even more than the New Historians, profited from the unprecedented success of his book. He boasted that much claiming that 'the "authorized" body of historians fell on the book with academic fury' yet 'the book stayed on the [Israeli] bestseller list for nineteen weeks'. The English edition created even more of sensation, catapulting Sand to 'stardom' in Western anti-Israel circles. Most dubiously, Sand legitimized the anti-Semitic Khazar websites which could now claim academic pedigree.

With the addition of Sand, post-Zionist historians achieved a high profile role among Israel's international critics. Close behind them were radical sociologists whose research strove to portray the Jewish state as a racist-apartheid state.

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<sup>240</sup> Kate Yandel, 'Genetic Roots of Ashkenzi Jews', *The Scientist*, 8 October 2013.

<sup>241</sup> Sand, *The Invention*, pp. ix, 305.

## Chapter 4 The ‘Critical Sociological’ Indictment

Compared to the much publicized debate of the New Historians, let alone the spectacular exposure of Sand’s book, the changes in Israeli sociology were low key and initially not well understood. Yet the diffusion of the neo-Marxist, critical paradigm did not fail to affect this discipline. Not only did truth and knowledge come to be seen as relative but, more importantly, they were viewed as a creation of the ‘hegemonic classes’. Hence the efforts to change Israeli society had to go hand in hand with destroying the ‘hegemony’ of the discipline’s founding generation.

### Launching the Challenge: The Haifa University Marxist Group

In the first two decades after independence, Israeli sociology followed closely the positivist paradigm. Shmuel Eisenstadt, ‘father’ of Israeli sociology, a professor at the Hebrew University and a leading adviser to the government, was inspired by Weber and Parsons. He embraced the developmental model to guide Israel’s nation-building effort, a decision prominently reflected in his magnum opus, *Israeli Society*, where he asserted that Jews had transited from *Gemeinschaft* to a *Gesellschaft*, albeit with a detour in the Diaspora.<sup>242</sup>

Still, according to Eisenstadt and his students, some of whom doubled as government consultants, the arrival of a large number of Jews from Arabic-speaking countries, known as Mizrahim, had created unique challenges to nation-building. In their view, the Mizrahim were a ‘traditional’ group lacking education and skills to compete in a modern society. To deal with the potential tensions stemming from unequal development Eisenstadt suggested a speedy process of education and modernization, something that was part of the developmental playbook, only to realize the inadequacy of this theory.

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<sup>242</sup> Shmuel Eisenstadt, *Israeli Society* (New York: Free Press, 1978).

Starting with the Wadi Salib riots in 1959, dubbed by the press as a ‘Moroccan rebellion’, the Mizrahim showed increasing frustration with the lack of economic progress and absence of political clout in a system dominated by veteran Ashkenazim entrenched in the Labour party. In 1971, a group of Moroccan-born activists in Jerusalem created the Israeli Black Panthers movement modelled on its American prototype. For a nation-building model that prided itself on national solidarity the symbolic alienation of the Panthers was disconcerting.

Despite the cracks in the absorption process, there was virtually no challenge to Eisenstadt’s sociology. As noted in Chapter 2, Mazpen harnessed ethnic discontent to bolster its portrayal of Zionism as a colonialist ideology that dispossessed the Palestinians and exploited the Mizrahim, known at the time as ‘Second Israel’ or ‘the other Israel’. Arie Bober, one of Mazpen’s leaders, made the case in his edited volume *The Other Israel: The Radical Case Against Zionism* that accused the ‘colonial Ashkenazi settlers’ of exploiting the Mizrahim in ways that left them in a peripheral, depended position.

Without academic credentials, Matzpen intellectuals could do little to undermine the sociological orthodoxy and, equally important, the group, dogged by accusation of treason following the Adiv spy-trial, operated on the margins of the public discourse. It took almost a decade for their ideas to be picked up by sociologists, notably a group of self-described Marxists from Haifa University - Henry Rosenfeld, Shlomit Carmi, Shlomo Swirski and Deborah Bernstein, among others. In 1978 they founded a mimeographed journal *Mahbarot Lemehkar Uvikoret* (Notes on Research and Criticism) under the leadership of Swirski who excoriated positivist sociology for its ‘fetishization of quantitative methods’ at the expense of normatively-driven analysis. Swirski billed the journal as offering a ‘new trend which

opposes the positivist method and neutral attitudes which prevail in the social science' adding that the 'view from below' will expose 'institutions of oppression, discrimination, alienation and backwardness'. Well acquainted with Gramsci's writings, he hoped to turn this academic vanguard into an agent of societal change, a theme he discussed at length in his book, *Campus, Society and State*.<sup>243</sup>

Freed from constraints of rigorous methodology, Swirski and his collaborator Deborah Bernstein proceeded to demolish the two pillars of traditional sociology that accepted Jewish legitimacy in Palestine and the Zionist mission of ingathering of the exiles. The Haifa University scholars embraced the Matzpen argument that Jews were not a national community returning to their ancestral homeland but European colonial settlers. Worse, in this view, the much-lauded 'gathering of exiles' was nothing more than an exercise in class exploitation. Swirski mentioned Bober's book but also borrowed from dependency theory, claiming that the Ashkenazi capitalist class in the Yishuv exploited the Mizrahim so as to keep them in a dependent and marginalized position.<sup>244</sup>

The Haifa group reserved its harshest criticism for the Eisenstadt's positivist sociology. In a scathing article titled 'Sociology is Absorbing Immigration', Bernstein took issue with the developmental trajectory according to which the Mizrahim were expected to move from a traditional to a modern stage, suggesting that instead of

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<sup>243</sup> Shlomo Swirski, *Campus, Society and State* (Tel Aviv: Mifras, 1982; Hebrew); Uri Ram, *The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology, Theory, Ideology and Identity* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 123-25.

<sup>244</sup> Shlomo Swirski and Deborah Bernstein, 'Who Worked at What, For Whom and For How Much: The Economic Development of Israel and Creation of Ethnic Labour Division', *Mahbarot Lemehkar Uvikoret*, 4 (1980), pp. 5-63 <http://www.amalnet.k12.il/meida/history2/hisi3055.htm>; Shlomo Swirski and Sara Katzir, 'Ashkenazim and Mizrahim: Dependency Relations in the Making in the Dependency Theory', *ibid*, 1 (October 1978), pp. 21-59; Henry Rosenfeld, 'The Class Situation of the Arab Minority in Israel', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (July 1978), pp. 374-407.

dividing Israel to immigrants and regular society, sociologists needed to place the issue within the framework of class relations in a capitalist system. Only by addressing class and political inequalities could the Mizrahim assume their proper place in society. Swirski added that the government could play a role in levelling the playing field by promoting corporate ventures.<sup>245</sup>

For the Haifa University Marxists, interest in the Mizrahim went well beyond scholarship. As Matzpen before them, they expected to recruit the Arabic-speaking immigrants to a broader movement for peace. To their dismay, the Mizrahim preferred to rally en masse behind the Likud, playing a major role in its historic 1977 electoral victory that ended Labour's decades-long domination of the Yishuv's and Israel's political scene. Faced with a discrepancy between reality and theory, Swirski resorted to a variant of 'false consciousness' claiming that supporting Likud was an 'overnight shelter', a 'temporary refugee' that the allegedly misguided Mizrahim had used. Once they formed their own channels for political expression they were expected to realize that they were victims of a class division and vote accordingly.<sup>246</sup>

Though the Haifa group hoped to call the foundation of traditional sociology into question, their academic impact was actually limited. Most were junior faculty in a new university that could hardly compete with the prestigious sociology department at the Hebrew University. In fact, Swirski was denied tenure and left the university soon after the journal folded. It took another decade to advance the neo-Marxist, critical ideas that privileged Matzpen.

### **From Marxist to Critical, Neo-Marxist Scholarship**

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<sup>245</sup> Deborah Bernstein 'Sociology is absorbing immigration: critical debate on the dominant school of the Israeli sociology', *Mahbarot Lemehkar Uvikoret*, 1 (1978), pp. 5-19.

<sup>246</sup> Ram, *The Changing Agenda*, p. 146.

The 1982 invasion of Lebanon was Israel's first 'war of choice' and public support began to decline as casualties mounted. As noted earlier, the disenchantment helped Matzpen to move out of the margins, and as some of its members joined the faculty ranks they found like-minded scholars to undermine Eisenstadt's sociology.

Uri Ram, a student of Swirski who did his graduate work at NYC's New School of Social Research, the 'intellectual Mecca' of the new paradigm, explained the process. Arguably the most articulate among the new breed of critical sociologists, Ram posited that positivist sociological tradition reached a Kuhnian-like crisis and needed to be replaced. Invoking Parsons critics Alvin Gouldner and Louis Coser he faulted Eisenstadt and his students of overemphasizing the property-maintenance features of functionalism-structuralism while downplaying the role of conflict. He was optimistic that the 'post-Kuhnian trajectory' in Israeli sociology would be chartered by 'a generation of critical intellectuals' already 'established in the corridors of academe' as well as in the media. This new cohort was, in his opinion, behind the process that 'Israeli sociology is beginning to awaken from its own Parsonian slumber' and implementing a radical political agenda in the spirit of 'post' that is post-Zionism.<sup>247</sup>

Ram considered the ontology and epistemology of the new paradigm to be paramount in challenging positivist sociology in general and its reading of history in particular. As he saw it, the difference between objectivist history and the relativist-critical version was key; the former was 'ostensibly analytical' in the sense that a 'historical text is either true or false', but for 'relativists a historical text must be

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<sup>247</sup> Uri Ram, 'Civic Discourse in Israeli Sociological Thought', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 3 (Winter, 1989), pp. 255-72; idem, 'The Future of the Past in Israel: A Sociology of Knowledge Approach', in Benny Morris (ed.) *The Making of Israel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), pp. 203, 206, 207; idem, 'Memory and Identity: The Sociology of the Debate of the New Historians', *Teoria Uvikoret*, 8 (Summer 1996), pp. 9-33.

understood in its context'. Moreover, 'history should be understood in its broadest sense as collective memory rather than in its strict academic sense'. As a result, 'historical narrative is not an inventory of data or a timetable but rather the rendering of the past in a manner meaningful to the present'. In other words, history is not 'what it is about but what it is for', which means 'what it signifies in the present'. With this mandate in mind, Ram proceeded to stake a bold position on the meaning of history: 'History is not merely the provenance of academe, it is a dimension of... national culture... when nationhood changes so must history'. He hoped that, liberated from the 'hegemonic narrative truth', different groups would join the discourse and bring their own 'truth' to the narrative.<sup>248</sup>

To accomplish a radical transformation, Ram spurned positivist methodology decrying the 'tendency of academic sociology to descend into arid scientism, ornamented with fig leaves of technique and professional decorum'.<sup>249</sup> The methodologically 'soft tools' discussed in Chapter 1 were, in this view, much more suitable to affect societal change. Among them was critical ethnography - used to broaden the field of inquiry beyond the 'hegemonic-sanctioned' topics to include accounts of minorities, women and working classes. While positivist ethnography stressed objectivity and counsels scientific detachment on the part of the interviewer-observer, critical ethnography took the opposite stand; researchers were urged to become intrinsically involved with the subjects of their studies, as well as articulate their own ideological position.

Critical ethnography became popular with politically active academics during the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s. According to a leader in

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<sup>248</sup> Uri Ram, *Israeli Society: Critical Perspectives* (Tel Aviv: Breirot, 1993; Hebrew), pp. 7-39.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

the field, 'critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice... the researcher feels a moral obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equality... disrupts the *status quo*...the critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves on from 'what is' to 'what could be'. In critical parlance, 'what could be' was a society where dominance and inequalities would no longer exist.<sup>250</sup>

To recall, in his crusade to change the 'oriental narrative' Edward Said often lamented the 'crisis of representation' - his name for the alleged persistence of 'colonial forms of knowledge'. He suggested that critical ethnography should be used as an antidote to the 'official narrative' and, in an effort to spread the message, even pleaded the case to a meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 1987. But his real goal was to rewrite the Palestinian narrative using the tool of 'memory' to which historians, sociologists and anthropologists were invited to tap.<sup>251</sup>

Said's call struck a responsive chord among Israeli critical sociologists and anthropologists, among them Dan Rabinowitz, a Tel Aviv University academic who was inspired by Foucault's 'critique of modern reason' to resurrect and legitimize Palestinian historical narrative while demystifying and delegitimizing the narrative of the 'hegemonic Israeli group'. By opening a 'new discursive space for the Palestinians', Rabinowitz and his colleagues could call attention to the concept of

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<sup>250</sup> Ram, *The Changing Agenda*, p. 148; D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics and Performance* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 5.

<sup>251</sup> Nicholas B. Dicks, 'Edward Said and Anthropology', in Adel Iskander and Hakem Rustom (eds.), *Edward Said. A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Mustafa Kabha, 'A Palestinian Look at the New Historians and the Post Zionism in Israel', in Morris, (ed.), *Making Israel*, p. 303.



Palestinian ‘*sumud*’ whereby ‘attachment to place is paramount in the articulation of right, is self-evident’.<sup>252</sup>

To gain a broader audience for the post-colonialist paradigm, critical scholars launched a project to translate Said’s writings to Hebrew in the early 1990s. After some setbacks, Gabriel Piterberg, then at Ben-Gurion University, with assistance from the university’s Chaim Herzog Centre for Middle East Studies and Diplomacy, facilitated the publication of *Orientalism* through the leading publisher Am Oved. Said had an opportunity to advocate in person for critical methodology as a keynote speaker at the Israeli Anthropological Association meeting in 1998 that Rabinowitz helped to organize. Even when Said’s biographical fabrications came to light, Rabinowitz and his peers defended him on the grounds that critical ethnography allowed a certain biographical license.<sup>253</sup>

Translating Said to Hebrew represented the first phase of a broader project to build a publishing infrastructure for the new paradigm. Ram, whose stay in the New School taught him the value of networking through critical journals and presses, acknowledged as much in a book discussing the politics of knowledge in challenging Israeli nationalism. He listed the Hebrew language journal *Teoria Uvikoret* (Theory and Criticism), a critical journal underwritten by the Van Leer Institute and the

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<sup>252</sup> Khalid Furani and Dan Rabinowitz, ‘The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011), 475-491, 483

<sup>253</sup> For the exposure of Said’s biographical fabrications see: Justus Weiner, “‘My Beautiful Old House’ and Other Fabrications by Edward Said”, *Commentary*, September 1999; Efrain Karsh and Rory Miller, ‘Did Edward Said Speak Truth to Power?’, *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2008, pp. 13-21. For Israeli defence of these fabrications see, for example: Ella Shohat, ‘The Postcolonial in Translation’, in Silvia Nagy-Zekmi (ed.), *Paradoxical Citizenship: Edward Said* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2006), p. 42; Dan Rabinowitz, ‘Politically Contested Childhood’, *Haaretz*, 26 August 1999; Rabinowitz, ‘Writing Against the State: Transnationalism and the Epistemology of Minority Studies’, in Adriana Kemp, David Newman, Uri Ram, and Oren Yiftachel (eds.), *Israelis in Conflict: Hegemonies, Identities and Challenges* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), pp. 81-100.

Hakibutz Hameuhad Press, as well as a number of Hebrew language presses or critical projects within mainstream presses. Among them was Resling, the 'Dark Red' series of Hakibutz Hameuhad (e.g., translations of Jurgen Habermas) and the 'French Series' of Sifriat Hapolaim (guided by Ariella Azoulay, the press translated Michele Foucault and other critical French philosophers). In due course, the cadre of activist-scholars expanded their domain. Oren Yiftachel, a critical political geographer from Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba took over as editor of the quarterly *Israeli Social Science Review*, renaming it *Hagar: International Social Science Review* and opening it to critical scholarship. Of course, Ram and other Israeli critical scholars could always rely on the New School's critical journals *Constellation*, *International Journal of Politics*, and *Culture and Society* among many other publication outlets.<sup>254</sup>

Laying the foundation for the new paradigm was a crucial step in rewriting the narrative of the Zionist project in ways that would undermine Israel's legitimacy. With Said's post-colonialist perspective translated to Hebrew it was only a matter of time before Israeli university students would be acquainted with his devastating criticism of their country's legitimacy, presented by their teachers as a fresh, rigorous, corrective narrative.

### **Colonial Settlers and Invented Nationalism**

Beginning in the late 1980s, three Israeli scholars have advanced the notion that Zionism was a colonialist venture on a par with the British one. Avishai Ehrlich, a Maztpen activist and former editor of *Khamsin* who obtained a doctorate at the London School of Economics and returned to teach at the Tel Aviv-Jaffa Academic College, criticized mainstream sociology for separating the Jewish and the Arab realms thus ignoring the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict on Israeli society. His own

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<sup>254</sup> Uri Ram, *Israeli Nationalism. Social Conflict and the Politics of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 81.

preference was for integrating Israeli-Jewish society and Israel's Arab citizens into 'one analytical framework, namely: the settler colonial model'.<sup>255</sup>

Gershon Shafir, a Tel Aviv University sociology professor (who would later move to University of California San Diego), used Marxist perspectives to claim that Jewish immigrants to Palestine were colonialist settlers who in many respects behaved like their counterparts in the United States or South Africa. To prove his point, Shafir presented Arab-Jewish relations in mandatory Palestine as a class struggle in which non-capitalist settlers (Jewish workers) sought to dissuade capitalist settlers (Jewish landowners) from employing cheap non-settler workers (indigenous Arabs) by camouflaging their competition with nationalist phraseology and slogans. He conceded that this contrived explanation violated the classic colonialist rationale of exploiting cheap native labour but explained that 'during most of its history, Israeli society is best understood... in terms of the broader context of Israeli-Palestinian relations. Nor was Israel completely different from some of the other European overseas societies that were also shaped in the process of settlement and conflict with already existing societies... and of various European models of colonization'.<sup>256</sup>

Clearly aware of the difficulties of 'knowledge formation' (that is creating a new narrative), Ram predicted a long struggle between mainstream sociology and the colonialist perspectives as the latter's potential to delegitimize Zionism was already manifest in the writings of Said and his followers. He noted that colonialism was still an 'outcast in mainstream academia' because it threatened to bestow an academic credibility on arguments used by Arabs and Palestinians to dispute Israel's legitimacy: 'the colonial perspective entails a drastic shift in the conceptual and comparative

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<sup>255</sup> Avishai Ehrlich, 'Israel: Conflict, War and Social Change', in C. Crighton and M. Shaw (eds.) *The Sociology of War and Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 121.

<sup>256</sup> Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 1882-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. ix.

analytical framework... Instead of being compared to the western democracies as is usually preferred by mainstream, especially functional sociology, it is now compared to South Africa'. Aware that such a shift may be too much to require, Ram took care to assure that 'recognition of colonial origin of Israel does not entail a wholesale delegitimation of the State of Israel'.<sup>257</sup>

It was at this juncture that the still little-known critical sociology school received a boost from unexpected quarters. On its face, Baruch Kimmerling, a Hebrew University sociologist was a surprise convert to the new paradigm. Ram described him as a 'Weberian' (a reference to a positivist sociologist) and his initial treatment of Zionism deviated only modestly from the traditional version of Eisenstadt. At the same time Kimmerling took a more comparative perspective by using the work of Ferdinand Tonnies that had influenced Weber's work on the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* membership. He constructed a taxonomy of validity claims that ranged from the very instrumental - an approach found in colonial settler societies - to the highly symbolic-religious, where land was viewed as the centre of the religious-moral universe. While Kimmerling conceded that the latter category could fit the concept of the Holy Land in Jewish religion he chose to follow Frederick Turner, another disciple of Tonnies, who classified the United States as an immigrant settler society. The decision to describe Israel as an immigrant settler society was significant.<sup>258</sup>

For those familiar with Tonnies's highly nuanced study, Kimmerling's taxonomic choice signalled a rejection of the *Gemeinschaft*-derived Jewish connection to the Holy Land. At the same time he was not ready to embrace the post-

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<sup>257</sup> Uri Ram, 'The Colonization Perspective in Israeli Sociology: Internal and External Comparisons', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 6 (September 1993), pp. 327-350.

<sup>258</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-Territorial Dimension of Zionist Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 212-16.

colonial approach, which would have delegitimized Israel's foundational claim. Significantly, Kimmerling did not use the term 'colonial' when discussing the same issue a few years later but acknowledged that since 1967 Israel created a 'control system' in the 'occupied territories'.<sup>259</sup>

By 1992 Kimmerling seemed to have progressed towards the neo-Marxist, critical view that equated Zionist immigration with colonialism. After citing Gouldner and Gramsci, he admitted that sociologists make 'framework decisions' - his term for paradigms - that affect topics that each society has to study and, ultimately, society's identity. He credited the Marxist scholars at Haifa University with offering an alternative to the dominant Zionist political-intellectual worldview and mentioned the Matzpen intellectuals, whom he defined as 'radical non-Zionist left'. Though Kimmerling was still reluctant to link Israel's origin to the colonial machinations of European powers he conceded that under certain circumstances 'the dominance of a paradigm can be contested by other approaches'.<sup>260</sup>

But it took the failure of the Oslo peace process to fully push Kimmerling into the critical, neo-Marxist camp. In a revealing article, he linked his 'conversion' to the political needs of the hour, explaining that in order to produce political change an 'alternative ideational' framework was needed. For Kimmerling, the colonialist label was important since the 'Zionist movement has tried to shake all the dust of colonialism because it did not want to lose legitimacy'. Indeed, in his new version of

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<sup>259</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, 'Boundaries and Frontiers of the Israeli Control Systems', in idem (ed.), *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), pp. 265-84.

<sup>260</sup> Idem, 'Sociology, Ideology and National Building: The Palestinians and their Meaning in Israeli Sociology', *American Sociological Review*, 57 (August, 1992), pp. 446-60; idem, 'Academic History Caught in the Cross-Fire', *History and Memory*, 7 (1995), p. 47.

the 1882-1948 period he claimed that Zionist displayed ‘some colonizing features’ and that the ‘era of colonization ended with ethnic cleansing’ of Palestinians.<sup>261</sup>

Kimmerling’s intellectual metamorphosis was a huge boost for the fraternity of critical scholars still struggling to make the ‘Zionism-as-colonialism’ a household theme in the Israeli academic milieu. That a Hebrew University sociologist would lend a hand to claims that Zionist intellectuals invented the Jewish nation was especially significant. Indeed, Kimmerling, well-versed in the importance of the sociology of knowledge, embraced Hobsbawm’s claim that ‘nationalist’ historians could not be trusted with writing their country’s history, repeating his assertion that scholars needed to check in their ideology before entering their office. To him, the wrongdoers who created the ‘Zionist historical narrative’ were to be found among unnamed Hebrew University historians who understood that the ‘Jewish past and history were perceived as a major source of legitimacy for the Zionists’ claim for title over the land in opposition to the local Arab population's counterclaim to be the exclusive legitimate owner of the land’. This national mission was overriding to the point of allegedly undermining their objectivity: ‘when ideological commitments collide with standards of objectivity and impartiality, usually the “Zionist orientations” receive primacy’.<sup>262</sup>

Kimmerling further claimed that this past narrative had contributed to ‘a common perception of Jewish history as an internally coherent unit extending beyond the particularities of place and time’. He explained that these historians generated the myth that the Jewish ‘national organism’ survived for so long because of its focus on

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<sup>261</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, ‘The Decline of Colonialism’, in Adi Ophir (ed.), *Al-Aqsa Intifada and the Israeli Left* (Tel-Aviv: Keter, 2001; Hebrew), p. 131; idem, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society and the Military* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>262</sup> Idem, ‘Academic History Caught’, p. 47.

the Land of Israel, its vitality and the 'acute historical consciousness'. Worse, in his opinion, the historians created a view that Jewish history was *sui generis*, that it was unique to the point of being mythical. Aggravating as this was from a comparative perspective, Kimmerling hinted that there was a darker motive to the *sui generis* thesis: a comparative perspective would have forced Israel to face its colonialist legacy, something that was 'taboo in both Israeli society and Israeli historiography'.<sup>263</sup>

If Kimmerling was still somewhat ambivalent about calling the Zionist narrative an outright fabrication, Ram had few such reservations. He put his New School training to good use, accusing Zionist historians, notably Dinur, of inventing the Jewish nation. Armed with a long list of references to Hobsbawm, Anderson, Gellner and other enthusiasts of 'imagined communities', Ram charged that Dinur and his colleagues invented 'the modern Jewish nationhood in the service of the Zionist movement and, later, the state of Israel'. Chastising Dinur for being a Weberian-type 'organicist' (a reference to the *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* transition), he took particular exception to the notion that Jewish identity was linked to the Land of Israel: 'Even though the assumed nation has lived outside of Eretz Israel for almost two millennia, this land has continued to form the axis of its national identity'. Ram evoked Ruth Firer, another critic of traditional sociology, to charge that Zionist historians invented the Law of Zionist Redemption: 'the teleological depiction of Jewish history, i.e., its rendition as leading toward a specific goal - the return of the people to its motherland'.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Kimmerling, 'Academic History', pp. 42, 45, 53; idem, *The Invention and Decline*, pp. 115, 111.

<sup>264</sup> Uri Ram, 'Zionist Historiography and the Invention of the Modern Jewish History: The Case of Ben Zion Dinur', *History and Memory*, 7 (Spring-Summer 1995), pp. 91-124.

For Ram the Zionist historiography was a source of intense irritation. He lamented the fact that it created ‘a nation in the modern state’ and dismissed the notion that ‘Jews were in essence a political nation, i.e. a consolidated spatio-temporal collective subject’ said to be ‘inherently connected to Zion, and in temporal terms to be a perennially continuous entity’. Ram was adamant that this type of nationalism did not comport with the neo-Marxist ‘post-conventional identity’ - a reference to Habermas’s theory that in the age of post-nationalism identity would be derived from universal rather than particularistic values. Indeed, he complained that the ‘conventional identity’ of Zionist historiography created a ‘Procrustean bed’ that prevented the expression of a ‘pluralistic conception of Israeli identity’.<sup>265</sup>

If Ram was irritated by ‘Zionist historians’, he seemed to be greatly encouraged by the New Historians, whose work he considered to be a model for future historiography. He must have also been gratified when, in a little noticed 2002 essay, ‘The Post Zionist as an Agent of Unauthorized Memory: On the Structure of the Production of the Past in Israel’, Sand admitted being inspired by Ram’s critical sociology, which provided a ‘universal legitimacy’ to the negation of the ‘uniqueness tradition’ used by Israeli historiography to justify Zionist claims to Palestine. To recall, Sand devoted an entire chapter to the literature on the ‘invented communities’, an idea borrowed from Ram’s article.<sup>266</sup>

Upending traditional understanding of Jewish history was only one of the items on Ram’s agenda. Another task involved ‘updating’ Weber’s categories for the age of globalization. Like his neo-Marxist teachers in the New School, Ram followed the process of globalization with great interest. By the early years of the twenty-first

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<sup>265</sup> Ram, *The Changing Agenda*, pp. 116, 118.

<sup>266</sup> Shlomo Sand, ‘The Post-Zionist as an Agent of Unauthorized Memory: On the Structure of the Production of the Past in Israel’, *Alpayim*, 24 (2002), pp. 224-25 (Hebrew).



century it was quite evident that a one-world community was taking shape, albeit not in the socialist form predicted by Wallerstein or Habermas.

Though clearly frustrated by the fact that globalization was spreading the American 'McDonald ethos' of capitalism, consumerism and liberal individualism, Ram saw a silver lining in the capitalist cloud proving his own theory of Israel. Repeating Tom Friedman's observation in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* that globalization created a class of global citizens (Lexus people) alongside entrenched traditionalists (olive tree people), he suggested that Israeli society was divided into two sharply contrasting groups. The former was said to embrace post-*Gesellschaft* globalist identity whereas the latter allegedly followed neo-nationalism described by Ram as 'an old or invented *Gemeinschaft*'. By redefining post-*Gesellschaft* as secularism and the neo-*Gemeinschaft* as religious tribalism, Ram could claim that both posed a challenge to traditional Zionism, the nemesis of critical sociology. Much as he disliked the latter, there was more than a hint of satisfaction in pronouncing the Zionist-Israeli identity crumbling. Kimmerling went even further, proclaiming the 'invention and decline of Israeliness'.<sup>267</sup>

In fact, Ram had much to be satisfied with since his plea for an equal playing field with the positivists. A study published in the early 2000s found that critical sociology, measured by the number of advanced degrees and topics, became 'hegemonic' in Israeli universities, effectively ending 'genuine pluralism in Israeli sociology'. Apparently in recognition of this fact the New School of Social Research honoured Ram in 2011 as an outstanding alumnus.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Uri Ram, 'The Big M: McDonald and the Globalization of the Homeland', *Teoria Uvikoret*, 23 (Fall 2003), pp. 179-212; idem, 'The State of the Nation', in Kemp et al, *Israelis in Conflicts*, pp. 305-20.

<sup>268</sup> Alek D. Epstein, 'The Decline of Israeli Sociology', *Azure*, 16 (Winter 2004), pp. 78-108; 'Israeli Sociologist Uri Ram Awarded NSSR Distinguished Alumni Prize',

When rewriting the ‘Zionist narrative’ critical sociologists had major advantages over their positivist counterparts. As Karl Popper determined, Marxist and neo-Marxist theories were formulated in a way that made empirical falsification impossible. The paradigmatic term ‘post’ essentially gave its practitioners a license to offer an alternative narrative, no matter how different from reality. Positivist scholars trying to dispute critical narratives were accused of being agents of the national status quo or worse, the same charge that was levelled against Karsh and other critics of the New Historians. Alternatively, positivists were dismissed as lacking in intellectual sophistication since they did not catch up with what Ram called ‘the time of the post’. In an exchange with traditional sociologists who blamed him and his colleagues for the ‘lost years of Israeli sociology’ Ram listed five ‘posts’ that allegedly made for a more sophisticated reading of reality. Indeed, on one occasion he suggested that, after some years of ‘infiltration’, critical sociology ‘became a bon-ton at least in some circles in the social sciences’. He was even more encouraged by the broader context in which Israeli critical scholars operated, writing that ‘the last vestiges of positivistic philosophy of science are disappearing from the philosophical landscape’.<sup>269</sup>

Judging from the response of leading positivists such as Moshe Lissak, Ram had a point. Lissak, the reigning heir to Eisenstadt, stated that the ‘engaged scholars’ made a mockery of the scientific research protocol to support an ideological position. Worse, critical, neo-Marxist scholars were said to totally ‘invalidate the paradigm of the established sociology’. Eliezer Ben-Rafeal, a fellow positivist, complained about the aggressive methods that critical sociologists used to delegitimize their opponents;

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*The New School for Social Research*, 17 May 2011  
<http://www.newschool.edu/nssr/newsList.aspx?id=68287>.

<sup>269</sup> Uri Ram, ‘The Time of the Post: Comments on Israeli Sociology Since the 1990s’, *Teoria Uvikoret*, 26 (Spring 2005), pp. 241- 44; idem, *Israeli Nationalism*, p. 81; idem, ‘The Future of the Past’, p. 216.

the latter were said to create ‘holy history of sociology’ in which ‘the villains’ (non-critical sociologists) ‘are “unveiled” as accomplices of the “ruling Ashkenazim”’. But it was the increasing imbalance between the older and even retired positivists and the growing ranks of critical scholars - augmented by the assiduous effort to co-opt likeminded colleagues - that worked in favour of the latter. As Hazony put it bluntly, the former were ‘heavily outgunned’.<sup>270</sup>

With the post-colonialist perspective firmly attached to the Zionist project, critical academics were eager to take on the ‘ingathering-of-exiles’ phase of nation-building. As noted earlier, the Zionists had argued that without a homeland of their own Jews were likely to fall victim to anti-Semitism or even face considerable physical danger, a prediction that was most horrifically vindicated during the Holocaust. Critical sociologists had to reverse the equation and prove that it was Zionism that actually victimized Jews, or, at the very least, some categories of Jews; the Mizrahim became exhibit one for this theory.

### **Israel as a Post-Colonialist Society: Mizrahim as Victims of Zionism**

As noted above, the Haifa University group was the first to place the alleged mistreatment of the Mizrahim in an academic context. Critical sociologists accepted Bernstein’s diagnosis that Ashkenazi capitalists used the Mizrahim as a steady supply of cheap labour, but the issue received a post-colonialist makeover by Ella Shohat whose ‘Mizrahim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims’ was a replay of Said’s ‘Zionism from the Perspective of its Victims’. According to Shohat, the Mizrahim, like the Palestinians, were victims of white Ashkenazi colonialists. To

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<sup>270</sup> Moshe Lissak, ‘Critical Sociology and Established Sociology in the Israeli Academic Community: Ideological Struggle or Academic Discourse’, *Israel Studies*, 1 (1996), pp. 247-94; Eliezer Ben-Rafael, ‘Critical Versus Non-critical Sociology: An Evaluation’, *Israel Studies*, 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 174-93; Hazony, *The Jewish State*, p. 14.

make the parallel stick she placed the Mizrahim within the cultural sphere of the region and in opposition to European Jews, charging the Ashkenazi Zionist ideology with alienating the immigrants from their cultural kin, the Arab, and with ‘de-Orientalizing’ them to fit the Western image of the State of Israel.<sup>271</sup>

Shohat’s ideas found a fertile ground in the identity movement of Mizrahi intellectuals who subsequently created the *Hakeshet Hademocratit Hamizrahit* (The Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow). Yehouda Shenahv, a sociology professor from Tel Aviv University and a leading activist in this circle, was an unlikely candidate to take up Shohat’s ideas. Born to a middle class family of Iraqi immigrants as Yehouda Shahrabani, he worked for the Israeli Military Industry that sponsored his PhD studies in the United States. Upon his return in 1986 he secured a position teaching and researching the sociology of management, but his research interests shifted to the Mizrahim. In a testimony to the Gramscian-like mixing of critical scholarship and political activism, Shenahv described the impact of *Hakeshet* on his research as ‘remarkable’.<sup>272</sup>

Borrowing another Saidian phrase, Shenahv proclaimed the functional-structural representation of the Mizrahim in traditional sociology to be part of the ‘fertile imagination of the West’. But he had more than theory on his mind when accusing the sociological establishment of turning the Mizrahim into political hardliners. Stating that the Mizrahim were no more ‘naturally’ hawkish than other Israeli groups, he explained their voting behaviour as ‘compensatory’: since they were forced to deny their Arab background they compensated by adopting a hard line attitude towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. As Shenahv saw it, Ashkenazi Zionists had

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<sup>271</sup> Ella Shohat, ‘Mizrahim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims’, *Social Text*, Fall 1988, pp. 1-35.

<sup>272</sup> Yehouda Shenahv, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. xiii.

a manifest political interest in alienating the Mizrahim from their cultural roots, thus thwarting their natural bonds to the Palestinians and creating a pool of voters for Likud.<sup>273</sup>

Moving on to consider the Mizrahim from a post-colonialist perspective, Shenhav drew on his own family background - as well as a study of Zionist emissaries in Iraq in the 1940s - to suggest that as early as 1941 Ben-Gurion considered the Mizrahim a 'demographic replacement' for those who would perish in the Holocaust. To persuade Iraqi Jews to immigrate the emissaries, who operated as colonial British agents, spoke the 'colonial language', commenting on the 'Arabness of the locals' (including the Jews) while simultaneously insisting that the Jews were different. When this colonial 'marker' did not generate enough immigrants in the early 1950s, Shenhav argued, the Mossad resorted to bombing attacks on Jewish targets in Baghdad. In Shenhav's view, Israeli efforts to encourage immigration went so far as to collude with the Iraqi authorities in confiscating the property of the Jews. In March 1951 the Iraqi parliament passed a bill to expropriate Jewish property; soon after Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett declared that the property forfeited by the Palestinians would be considered a compensation for the ones confiscated from Iraqi Jews.<sup>274</sup>

To attract attention to his provocative ideas Shenhav published a number of articles in the 1990s, but it was his 2003 book, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (an English version was published

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<sup>273</sup> Yehouda Shenhav and Gideon Kunda, 'The Fertile Imagination of the West: How Israel's Ethnic Problem is Represented', *Teoria Uvikoret*, Summer 1992, pp. 137-46; Shenhav, 'What is there Between the Mizrahi Issue and Palestinian Nationalism', [http://www.ha-keshet.org.il/english/what\\_between.htm](http://www.ha-keshet.org.il/english/what_between.htm).

<sup>274</sup> Yehouda Shenhav, 'The Phenomenology of Colonization and the Politics of 'Difference;' European Zionist Emissaries and the Arab-Jews in Colonial Abadan', *Social Identities* 8/4 (2002), 521-544.

three years later), that created a stir, not least because of the label ‘Arab Jews’. Shenhav explained that renaming the Mizrahim was part of a new sociological theory that, unlike Said’s dichotomy between East and West, questioned the traditional view of nations. Authored by Roger Brubaker, the theory used critical concepts to advance the neo-Gramscian view of international relations. Echoing Brubaker Shenhav proclaimed that ‘the understanding of nations as real groups contradicts recent developments in sociological theory such as network theory, ethnomethodology, postmodernism, and feminism’. Indeed, there was ‘a growing interest in network forms rather than in fixed entities’. Following Brubaker’s suggestion to study ‘nations as events that emerge through situated networks’ he decided to embrace the ‘fluctuating rather than fixed entities in fragmentary, ephemeral, and elusive boundaries rather than in static categories’. In other words, the label Arab Jews was logical because of the ‘ephemeral and elusive boundaries’ pioneered by Brubaker, even if it negated customary use (and for that matter reality).<sup>275</sup>

Turning the Mizrahim to Arab Jews was essential to Shenhav’s political activism. He was fully aware that the foreign ministry supported advocacy groups like Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC) that demanded compensation for the property of the 850,000 Mizrahim forced to flee following the 1948 war. A sharp critic of the JJAC, Shenhav admitted that his book aimed at denying the Israeli government the use of the ‘Mizrahi asset’. But he also hoped that the post-colonialist narrative would convince the Mizrahim that their true identity required a political alliance with the Palestinians, a project that the *Keshet* group worked very hard to accomplish. The book was received with great enthusiasm by critical scholars, applauded by one critic as a ‘brave, fascinating, excellent book that will mark an

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<sup>275</sup> Shenhav, *The Arab Jews*, p. 21.

important turning point in the study of Jews from Arab and Islamic countries and their relationship to the Jewish state'.<sup>276</sup>

Positivist sociologists were highly critical of Shenhav's work. In a 1991/92 exchange with Shenhav, Shlomo Fischer argued that there was plenty of empirical evidence to suggest that the Ashkenazim and Mizrahim were actually in the process of developing a new identity that transcended the old categories, making Shenhav's argument obsolete. Accusing Shenhav and other critical intellectuals of ignoring such findings to protect their agenda, he argued that 'it gives them the political and moral capital by connecting them to the discourse of the Third World and making them spokesman for the oppressed'.<sup>277</sup> Other analysts focused specifically on *The Arab Jews* where, they pointed out, three of the emissaries to Baghdad were mistakenly classified as Ashkenazim. They concluded that Shenhav's attempt to analyse the situation 'via the prism of colonial theory's tortured conceptualizations' might have led to the error.

Shenhav's fidelity to facts was taken to task in the case of the alleged Mossad's bombings in Baghdad.<sup>278</sup> Critics insisted that the three sources on which Shenhav relied for the Mossad story were either unreliable or hostile; one of them, a self-proclaimed anti-Zionist Iraqi-Jew who lived in the United States, mentioned it in a self-published book. The Israeli authorities vehemently denied the charges and a number of independent studies could not find any corroborating evidence either. But, in the manner of the neo-Marxist, critical paradigm, Shenhav claimed that his

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<sup>276</sup> Ian S. Lustick, 'Review', *Middle East Journal*, 61(Winter 2007), pp. 165-66.

<sup>277</sup> Shlomo Fischer, 'Two Patterns of Modernization: On Analyzing Israel's Ethnic Problem', *Teoria Uvikoret*, Summer 1991, pp. 1-22; Shenhav and Kunda, 'The Fertile Western Imagination'; Fischer, 'Response to Shenhav and Kunda', *ibid*, Summer 1992, pp. 147-54.

<sup>278</sup> See, for example, Moshe Gat, 'Between Terror and Emigration: The case of Iraqi Jewry', *Israel Affairs*, 7/1 (Autumn 2000).

narrative was valid and that those who criticized him represented the 'Zionist narrative'.<sup>279</sup>

Shenhav was likewise unperturbed by empirical data that led sociologist Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, a renowned expert on ethnic relations, to question critical sociologists who, in his opinion, prematurely declared the death of the melting pot idea. Yuchtman-Yaar, who designed and directed some of the most important empirical research projects in Israel, noted that the idea that the melting-pot 'deserves a 'failing' grade was apparently too hastily reached and that the degree of its success - and some would say 'too much success' - was most impressive by any standard. Shenhav's refusal to be bothered with facts was vividly illustrated when a critic of *The Arab Jews* pointed out that, contrary to the book's assertions, a study found that some 88 per cent of Mizrahim reported no experience of ethnic discrimination. Invoking a variant of Marx's 'false consciousness', Shenhav declared the results a form of 'self-denial'.<sup>280</sup>

Ignoring criticism from other academics was one thing; overlooking the phenomenal rise of the Shas Party was quite another. Founded in 1984 by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Shas combined a return to traditional Mizrahi culture with the most stringent dictates of the Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox world where Yosef had studied. Upset by the small representation of the Mizrahim in the ultra-orthodox Agudat Israel Party, Yosef conceived of a separate political movement that would combine two functions: 'restoration of the crown to its old glory', his name for reuniting the

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<sup>279</sup> Harvey Goldberg and Chen Bram, 'Sephardi/Mizrahi/Arab Jews: Reflections on Critical Sociology and the Study of Middle Eastern Jewries within the Context of Israeli Society', *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 22 (2007), p. 240.

<sup>280</sup> Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, 'Continuity and Change in Israeli Society: The Test of the Melting Pot', *Israel Studies* 10/2, 2007, p. 92; Yehouda Shenhav, 'Modernity and the Hybridization of Nationalism and Religion: Zionism and the Jews of the Middle East', *Theory and Society*, 36/1 (2007), p. 8.



Mizrhaïm with their alleged ultra-orthodox roots and improving their economic situation, mostly through a communal social network. Shas initially took a moderate position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but turned hawkish, partnering with Likud in a number of right wing coalitions.

It is more than a passing irony that Shenhav, whose outspoken positions on ethnicity made news, had little to say about the Shas phenomenon. Indirectly though, his complex views on the issue offer an interesting clue. Like his Keshet colleagues Shenhav initially complained about the forced ‘westernization’ of the Mizrahim that had deprived them of their ‘authentic’ Arab cultural identity, but was reluctant to discuss the well-known religious-folkloristic elements in their cultural fabric. The category of *masorti* (traditional religiosity) to describe the Mizrahim was indeed recognition of this non-halachic but deeply felt religious beliefs. Much in the spirit of critiquing the positivists he asserted that the *masorti* label was a social construct from the Eisenstadt’s school of sociology, claiming that the Mizrahim were essentially secular. In his view the Zionist emissaries to Iraq (and other Middle East Jewish communities) found them not religious enough to sustain the Zionist project and consequently attempted to stir up their religious feelings: ‘In order to return the Arab-Jews to history, the emissaries of the secular movement needed to find in them - perhaps even forge in them - religious fervour’.<sup>281</sup>

When criticized for negating the reality of Mizrahi religiosity, Shenhav drew on the theory of modernization of the controversial French philosopher Bruno Latour, explaining that the concept of ‘modern’ contained two contradictory principles within it: ‘hybridization’ that mixed ‘non-homological’ and distinct elements and

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<sup>281</sup> Yehouda Shenahv, ‘The Cloak, the Cage, and the Fog of Sanctity: The Zionist Mission and the Role of Religion in the Middle East’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 9/4 (2003), p. 525.

‘purification’ that created separate ontological zones with no continuation between them. Applying the process to Israel, Shenhav argued that Zionism ‘hybridized the secular with the religious, while at the same time it obscured these hybridization practices, thus purifying nationalism (the very product of hybridization) and treating nationalism and religion as two separate spheres of action’. Thus Zionism ‘religionized’ the Mizrahi Jews in order to mobilize them to the modern secular national project.<sup>282</sup>

More forthcoming than Shenhav, Yaacov Yadgar, another critical sociologist, was ready to admit that the Shas phenomenon ‘left students of Israeli politics perplexed, seeking suitable theoretical and discursive frameworks’. He blamed mono-casual theories for this failure of understanding and suggested that Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory could shed more light on the ‘enigmatic’ Shas movement. This enormously complex and somewhat contradictory theory asserted that ‘a field is an arena of relationships that is both structured and at the same time a dynamic competitive sphere. This arena is the locus of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, knowledge, or status and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize these different kinds of capital’. At the heart of the field is human agency, meaning the behaviour of individuals as they strive to accommodate themselves to the special rules of the game of each field, its capital and other positions. Yadgar identified several hieratically-stacked fields topped by the economic and political fields where, in his view, the Mizrahi Shas players have been engaged. In other words, Shas was a product of competition for symbolic (religious) capital between the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi religious leaders as well as competition in other fields over economic goods and cultural goods. Out of

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<sup>282</sup> Shenhav, ‘Modernity and the Hybridization’, p. 3.

this complex network of competitions, a new Mizrahi orthodox field had apparently emerged.<sup>283</sup>

Yadgar's plea for multiple-cause explanations notwithstanding, other critical scholars chose to deal with the Shas 'enigma' in a more conventional way, fuelling a large debate on 'what sends the Mizrahim stampeding to Shas'. To recall, Ram blamed globalization for increasing the gap between the poor and the rich, making it clear that the Shas voters should be counted among the non-globalized 'olive people'. Eva Illouz, a professor of sociology at the Hebrew University and an occasional contributor to the debate, asserted that the absorption patterns marginalized the Mizrahim in bad schools, letting Shas fill the void.<sup>284</sup>

All these commentaries must be understood as an effort of critical scholars to shore up their reputation. That the 'Arab Jews' conjured up by Shenhav could support the policies of Shas provided critics with an opportunity to make a broader point about critical, neo-Marxist scholarship. They lambasted Shenhav and his peers for engaging in 'libellous rhetoric' against the 'old sociologists' as well as 'vacuous activity of inflated rhetoric' and 'constant repetition of the Said mantra, all waged from the comfort of their offices'. They suggested that by replacing field research with 'abstract style for titles, library research and esoteric linguistic manipulations', their critical colleagues lost touch with reality.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Yaacov Yadgar, 'Shas as a Struggle to Create a New Field: A Bourdieuan Perspective of an Israeli Phenomenon', *Sociology of Religion*, 64/2 (2003), pp. 225, 228.

<sup>284</sup> Eva Illouz 'What if Judeo-Arabs had built the Institutions of the State of Israel?' *Haaretz*, 15 March 2012.

<sup>285</sup> Yossi Yonah and Yehouda Shenhav, *What is Multiculturalism ? On the Politics of Identity in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2005; Hebrew); Moshe Shokeid, 'For the Sin We Did Not Commit in the Research of Oriental Jewry', *Israel Studies*, Spring, 2001, p. 29.

Ironically, Shenhav's effort to remake the Mizrahim into Arab Jews received a serious rebuke from among his own ranks. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, a German-based Marxist think tank with an office in Jerusalem, asked a colleague of Shenhav at Tel Aviv University, Nissim Mizrahi, to conduct an empirical study of 'the obvious yet un-scrutinized gap between leftist ideology and the people it aspires to represent - a gap that has hindered attempts to initiate fundamental change in Israel's political culture and has impeded the creation of an effective movement for peace'. This phrasing left little doubt that Shenhav was part of the gap 'between leftist ideology and the people it aspired to represent'. The project planned 'to outline an intervention model that will provide grounded theoretical foundation for a new Palestinian-Mizrahi dialogue'.<sup>286</sup>

A study by Momi Dahan, an economics professor at the Hebrew University who headed the inequality project at The Israel Democracy Institute in Jerusalem, offered a harsher rebuke of Shenhav's theory. Dahan found a dramatic improvement in the socioeconomic status of the Mizrahim due to 'a nearly continuous narrowing of income gaps between Israeli households of two groups of origin (Europe/America versus Asia/Africa) since the 1990s'. In 2011 the disparity in net income between these two groups stood at 27 per cent, as compared to about 40 per cent in the mid-1990s. He concluded that, paradoxically, 'the increase in earnings inequality (between people with higher education and people without higher education) is responsible for the economic upsurge of Israelis of Asian/African origin. This increase in the rate of return for higher education generated greater incentive among those with lower

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<sup>286</sup> 'Ethnic Divides, Social Inequality and Public Participation in Peace Movements in Israel', a research project directed by Dr. Nissim Mizrahi, [http://israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large\\_advic&advice\\_id=8388&page\\_data%5Bid%5D=174&cookie\\_lang=en;http://www.scharf-links.de/44.0.html?&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=7377&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=56&cHash=7d06123150](http://israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large_advic&advice_id=8388&page_data%5Bid%5D=174&cookie_lang=en;http://www.scharf-links.de/44.0.html?&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=7377&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=56&cHash=7d06123150)

education (from Asia/Africa) to increase their investment in education. This suggestion is consistent with the increase of the education level of Israelis originating from Asia/Africa, which was more rapid than that of native Israelis whose families came from Europe/America'. By emphasizing the rapid educational achievements of the Mizrahim the study vindicated traditional sociology advocating education as a vehicle for social integration. In other words, the melting pot that Eisenstadt's nation-building model predicted took about half a decade to achieve.<sup>287</sup>

Dahan, himself a Mizrahi, took a rather dim view of his academic colleagues who, in his view, peddled the old ethnic grievances. This much was clear in his commentary on the very public firing of an economist who, in a lecture at Sapir College in 2012, described Bank Leumi as the 'bank of white people' along with reference to the 'ruling white society' and the 'robber kibbutzim', long considered a 'white' bastion. Dahan noted that the speech was motivated more by personal distress than 'by dispassionate observations'.<sup>288</sup>

Much as the Mizrahim created problems for critical sociologists who wanted to portray them as victims of Zionism, turning women into alleged targets of the Zionist enterprise proved to be even more complicated.

### **Zionism as a Patriarchal-Militaristic Project: The Victimization of Israeli Women**

By standards of positivist sociology the position of women in Israel should have been considered advanced, even by western standards. The gender equality of the Zionist movement, the relatively important role of women in the nation-building

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<sup>287</sup> Shahar Smootha, 'New Research: The Gap Between Ashkenazim to Mizrahim Substantially Narrowed Down', *Globes*, 12 October 2013 (Hebrew).

<sup>288</sup> Sharon Shpurer, 'Movin' On Up', *Haaretz*, 20 January 2012.

process, not to mention their integration in the Israel Defence Forces, propelled Israel into the higher rung of the global developmental chart.

Yet despite the fact that women's socioeconomic and political conditions improved during Israel's first three decades, the Haifa group was not impressed with gender equality with Swirski claiming that women were discriminated against and most likely to be found in lower-class precincts in society. This claim was a reflection of the Marxist thesis that, in search for profits, Israeli capitalism was likely to exploit women and other vulnerable sectors including Arabs and Palestinians. His solution to overcoming this and other forms of inequality was to launch a 'second socialist revolution'.<sup>289</sup>

Barbara Swirski, who worked in battered women shelters in Haifa, offered a somewhat more complex reading of Marx and women. She linked violence against women both to their inferior economic position and to the militarism of Israeli society. By injecting a new element to the equation, she seemed to suggest that a social revolution - 'the one size fits all solution' was not enough. This was not incidental, since complaints of Marx's alleged gender blindness became part of the feminist critique in neo-Marxist circles. But Swirski's suggestion that violence towards women could not be eradicated without eliminating Israeli militarism was a novel demand and not likely to acquire a wide following. A handful of American feminist academics visiting Haifa University in the late 1970s paid lip service to the slogan of fighting economic inequality and militarism but were more interested in issues of self-realization. One of their leaders, Marcia Freedman, a professor of philosophy, became a lesbian and switched her efforts to promoting the rights of gays

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<sup>289</sup> Shlomo Swirski, quoted in Ram, *Israeli Nationalism*, p. 72.

and lesbians.<sup>290</sup> Academic research on feminism picked up in the 1990s, but assessments on how women fared in the Zionist project varied. Dafna Izraeli took the liberal position that women had done quite well but that more economic opportunities were needed to level the playing field. In 1987 Deborah Bernstein concluded that women remained ‘marginal in the struggle for social change’ in the Yishuv but attributed this marginalization to opposition from the conservative elements in the women’s movement. Her 1991 edited volume promised to take aim at the ‘official Zionist narrative’ of women’s role in the Yishuv but the chapters implied a consensus that women made important political and economic strides during that period. Hanna Herzog, a sociologist from Tel Aviv University, agreed with this premise, going so far as to praise the pioneer women; her complaint was that not enough credit was given to women pioneers in the official historiography of the period. The book editor promised to launch a vigorous effort to remedy this oversight.<sup>291</sup>

However, as already noted, by the end of the 1990s the neo-Marxist, critical paradigm had taken root, reconfiguring the field of women studies. Ram noted that critical feminism was very different from traditional women studies and Herzog, who had become a leading voice in the new field, provided a preview of the changes to come. She explained that critical feminism was ‘an umbrella for diverse and adversarial approaches all claiming to be authentically critical... Marxist, socialist, radical, psychoanalytical, existential, postmodern’. Deriving from Foucault and Gramsci, ‘all these approaches share the refusal to accept the existing cultural and

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<sup>290</sup> Barbara Swirski, ‘Control and Abuse: The Beating of Women in Israel’, *Mahbarot Lemehkar Uvikoret*, 7 (1981), 37-62

<sup>291</sup> Deborah Bernstein, *The Struggle for Equality: Urban Women Workers in Pre-State Israeli Society* (New York: Praeger, 1987); Hanna Herzog, ‘The Fringes of the Margin: Women’s Organizations in the Civic Sector of the Yishuv’, in Deborah S. Bernstein, (ed.) *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in the Pre-State Israel* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), 283-304

social order as self-evident'. Herzog emphasized that critical feminism sought not only 'the root of the gendered social order' but wished 'to engender social change'. To affect the public discourse, critical feminism needed to adopt a new approach, 'the method is the perpetual subversion of prevailing concepts, the adoption of an "oppositional imagination" in order to expose mechanisms of cultural domination and to question the underpinnings of hegemonic thought'.<sup>292</sup>

Herzog made clear that adopting this method meant much more than complaining about paucity of research on Yishuv women. The new goal of feminist critique was to fight the militarization of Israeli society stemming from the Israeli-Arab conflict, something that Swirski has suggested in the past. The mission of the feminist movement was said to 'civilize' Israeli society by subverting its 'masculine, nationalist, militaristic and exclusionary traits'. To this end Herzog urged to put an end to the 'grand narrative' and introduce the 'subversive logic' that 'opened the space to various critical voices'. Calling her own voice a 'post-Zionist narrative', she promised to apply the spirit of Foucauldian critique to 'Zionist historiography'. Indeed, Herzog's new writings indicated a dramatic shift from her 1992 position. She found that 'Zionism has created a regime of knowledge operating through the pastoral power of identification with the collective... including women as mothers of the nation'. At the same time, she accused the Zionist system of 'shunting them off to the sidelines and denying them access to various positions of power'.<sup>293</sup>

Changing the view of history, as already noted, was common among critical scholars who needed to adapt to altered political circumstances or fashionable

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<sup>292</sup> Hanna Herzog, *Gendering Politics: Women in Israel* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 5-6.

<sup>293</sup> Hanna Herzog, 'Post-Zionist Discourse in Alternative Voices: A Feminist Perspective', in Ephraim Nimni (ed.) *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Fundamentalist Politics in Israel* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 154-55.



paradigmatic developments. But critical feminism faced a particular conundrum; if the Zionist movement was a colonialist project, the pioneer women were every inch as guilty as their colonialist husbands and colleagues. The only way to absolve them of the colonial guilt was to turn them into victims of the Zionist enterprise, as Herzog had done.<sup>294</sup>

While revising the past posed difficulties, dealing with the contemporary task of undermining the 'patriarchal-militaristic' structure proved to be far more daunting. Solving the conflict was a necessary step in doing away with Israeli militarism and, according to the paradigm, women and other minorities expected to join the peace movement since minorities were said to suffer from military conflicts. However, creating a 'feminist sisterhood for peace' was much more difficult in reality than in theory. Cracks within the feminist movement surfaced as early as the 1980s when one Mizrahi feminist voiced her alienation by stating: 'no sisterhood'. Things deteriorated further in the 1990s over accusation that Ashkenazi feminists ignored concerns of Mizrahi women - low pay, lack of social infrastructure and skimpy welfare services – in order to pursue self-realization, a reference to feminist-lesbian forums that Freedman and others had launched. Mizrahi critics also denounced the waste of resources on what they considered symbolic issues like having women pilots in the Air Force, an issue that was deemed of marginal interest to lower-class Mizrahi women. Things came to a head during one of the annual feminist conferences where lesbian feminists demanded a separate slot. Since most of the lesbians were Ashkenazi, Mizrahi activists wanted to adjust the quota-based system of

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<sup>294</sup> Herzog, 'Post-Zionist', p. 158.

representation. The fight led to a lot of hard-feelings with the Ashkenazi feminist calling their comrades 'whiners', a reference to their alleged countless complains.<sup>295</sup>

Mizrahi academic-activists dealt with another blow against the common peace front by taking Ashkenazi feminists to task for championing Palestinian rights. They accused them of hypocrisy for picking 'politically correct topics' like demonstrating for peace or advancing the cause of Palestinian lesbians but relinquishing the struggle for low-class Mizrahi women. They alleged that the Ashkenazi women preferred to work on peaceful coexistence to deflect from their failure to acknowledge their discomfort with their own 'other', Jews from Arab countries. Coming from privileged backgrounds, Ashkenazi feminists were said to exhibit the same racist attitudes towards low-class Mizrahim as other 'whites'. Worse, the elitism of the Ashkenazi feminists was assumed to be closely related to their class interests as employers of Mizrahi baby-sitters and cleaning women. For their part, the Mizrahi women were said to refer to their Ashkenazi employers as 'ladies', a class moniker that originated in the Yishuv period.<sup>296</sup>

Efforts at creating a unified front were further marred by allegations of power-grabbing, hegemony and domination. Mizrahi academics blamed their Ashkenazi counterparts for creating a 'very powerful hegemonic discourse' and, indeed, 'epistemic violence' defined as 'conspicuous aggression of those who define their systematic knowledge as the only "true" and "objective" knowledge - against any other claims to knowledge'. As one Mizrahi activist put it, Israeli women

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<sup>295</sup> Smadar Lavie, 'Mizrahi Feminism and the Question of Palestine', *Journal of Middle East Studies*, Spring 2011, pp. 56-88; Pnina Motzafi-Haller, 'Negotiating Difference in Israeli Scholarship: towards a New Feminist Discourse', in Adriana Kemp et al (eds.), *Israelis in Conflict*, p. 164; Henriette Dahan-Kalev, 'Tensions in Israeli Feminism: The Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Rift', *Women's Studies International Forum* 24/6 (2001), pp. 669-684, <http://www.ha-keshet.org.il/english/Tensions.htm>.

<sup>296</sup> Motzafi-Haller, 'Negotiating', pp. 165-66; Dahan-Kalev, 'Tensions'.

organizations 'are managed by an exclusive forum of women who believe that their academic and professional degrees grant them [privileged] insights'. Their own initial subversive act was to 'define ourselves as feminists and Mizrahi'. In a follow up, they deconstructed the skewed power relations between the two groups going so far as to claim that Ashkenazi feminists rode the coattails of their influential fathers or husbands to positions of prominence in society.<sup>297</sup>

One Mizrahi critic accused her Ashkenazi peers of preferring Palestinian women of similar educational background over lower class Mizrahi women. The international foundations that supported these professional coexistence seekers - known as *dukers* (a short form of the word *du-kium*, coexistence) - made matters worse, in this view. The elegant venues in which middle-class Israeli and Palestinian feminists met to discuss conflict resolution had no place for the non-English speaking Mizrahim.<sup>298</sup>

With issues of class and ethnicity crisscrossing the critical feminist discourse, the unified narrative of Israeli women as victims of Zionism was thrown into disarray. Clearly, critical Mizrahi feminists felt victimized by their Ashkenazi counterparts, raising the question whether the latter should be considered authentic victims of Zionism or just elitists posing as do-gooders in their spare time. With identity politics built into the critical paradigm, competitions over victimhood and oppression could become fierce, as already demonstrated in Chapter 1. Mizrahi feminists resented the fact that the 'trifecta of oppression' was bestowed on feminists, Palestinians, and lesbians. They also complained that they were underrepresented in universities, the implication being that more academic slots for female Mizrahi scholars would go some way towards assuaging the sense of Mizrahi victimhood.

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<sup>297</sup> Motzafi-Haller, *Negotiating*, 164-166; Dahan-Kalev, *Tensions*, 669-684.

<sup>298</sup> Pnina Motzafi-Haller, 165-166; Lavie, *Mizrahi Feminism*, 56-88.

In many respects, the failure to mobilize feminists for the mission of ‘civilizing’ Israel and ending the conflict should have been expected. As noted, the critical paradigm is engineered to ‘subvert’ any broader narrative, a factor that has contributed to the splintering of the movement into narrow, identity-based groups. Certainly, ethnic and class grievances have never been far from the surface in the critical discourse in Israel, often articulated by Keshet members. In 1996 Shenhav created quite a stir by accusing his colleagues on the Left with privileging the Palestinian case at the expense of the Mizrahim.<sup>299</sup>

More surprising was that some Mizrahi critical scholars concluded that without first healing the domestic schism and ethnic divisions it was impossible to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a most radical version of this idea, as advocated by Shenhav and Smadar Lavie, the only real solution was to create a bi-national state where the Palestinians and the Mizrahi Jews would form a majority relegating the Ashkenazim to a permanent minority. The logic of this position put radical Mizrahim at odds with those in the critical community who preferred a two-state outcome, a topic of yet another heated debate.

As will be shown in the next chapter, the various visions of a post-conflict Israel were deeply related with a critical assessment of the country’s political system.

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<sup>299</sup> Yehouda Shenhav ‘The Bond of Silence’, *Haaretz*, 27 December 1996.

## **Chapter 5 Israel's Political System in Critical Political Science**

The sociologists who pioneered the neo-Marxist, critical paradigm, were eager to extend their critique to the political system in Israel. As shown earlier, the positivist and critical paradigms offered radically different perspectives on what constituted a democracy. None of the categories that factored into a positivist-based grading of democracy - elections, civil society, political freedoms - played a role in the contending paradigm that pegged the legitimacy of the authority system on the country's distributive justice system. The *dependencistas* in particular were adamant that 'true' democracy could not coexist with a capitalist economy that did not distribute wealth in an equitable way. Bolstered by Wallerstein's world system theory,

critical political geography shifted even more attention to egalitarian distribution of resources, along with attention to marginalized (proletarian) groups. As one of the advocates of the critical approach put it, a “true” democracy is sensitive to social justice’.<sup>300</sup>

## **Israel as a Colonial-Heritage Democracy**

When Eisenstadt published *The Israeli Society* in 1967 - compiled from his Hebrew language writings in the 1950s - few would have disagreed with his approach to nation-building. As indicated in the previous chapter, functionalism-structuralism was a quintessential positivist tool for modelling the complex ways in which disparate societal groups come together to create and sustain a political system. Two of its leaders - Talcott Parsons and David Easton - wrote the ‘bible’ on the subject, providing the formula for homeostatic harmony: as long as the inputs and outputs into the system were in equilibrium the political system could sustain a status quo through consensus, social order, integration and solidarity.<sup>301</sup>

This in turn inspired the consociational democracy theory developed by Arno Lijphart. Looking at his native Netherlands, which had overcome centuries of social, ethnic and religious strife, he suggested that ethnic and religious groups had to compromise with each other to create what he called consociational democracy. Well received among scholars of democracy, the model was touted as an answer to doubts

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<sup>300</sup> Michael Shalev, quoted in Ben-Rafael, ‘Critical Versus Non-critical Sociology’; Peter Taylor, *Political Geography: World Economy, Nation-State and Locality*, (London: Longman, 1996); idem, *The Way the Modern World Works: World Hegemony to World Impasse* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

<sup>301</sup> Parsons, *The Social System*; Easton, *The Political System*.

about democratic viability in deeply divided societies; indeed, Lijphart included Israel among the twenty-one consociational democracies identified in his survey.<sup>302</sup>

It was Sammy Smooha, a Haifa University sociology professor, who would depart from Lijphart to introduce the concept of ethnic democracy to the Israeli discourse. A graduate of the Department of Sociology at Berkeley, Smooha followed the work of Pierre van den Berghe who utilized the case of South Africa's apartheid to develop the concept of *Herrenvolk* democracy - a system that reserved full democratic privileges to the dominant group only. *Herrenvolk*, a variant of the ethnocratic paradigm, asserted that minority groups (defined by race, ethnicity or religion) suffered systemic discrimination in addition to human rights violations. While van den Berghe considered Israel an ethnocracy, Smooha maintained that ethnic democracy was a much better fit as the Jewish state, despite a dominant core ethnic group, extended political rights to the non-core group along with incomplete individual rights. He felt strongly that Israel should be regarded as an archetype of an ethnic democracy, a good enough facsimile of a liberal democracy in a deeply fragmented society.<sup>303</sup> Yet it was before long that critical sociologists and political scientists were to take this paradigm a step further by presenting Israel as a non-democracy.

Gershon Shafir and his Tel Aviv University colleague Yoav Peled, a political science professor, were the first offer a systematic treatment of the supposed Israeli non-democracy. Identifying themselves as members of a 'new generation of critical social scientists' determined to set the record straight, Shafir recalled that his

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<sup>302</sup> Arno Lijphart, *Democracies; Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty One Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

<sup>303</sup> Sammy Smooha, 'Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype', *Israel Studies*, Fall 1997, pp. 198-241; Alan Dowty, 'Is Israel Democratic? Substance and Semantics in the "Ethnic Democracy" Debate', *ibid*, Fall 1999, pp. 1-15.

conversion to critical scholarship occurred during a 1973 lecture by Eisenstadt where the eminent professor apparently failed to mention the Israeli Black Panthers, a group of protest Mizrahi activists. Peled, who came from a prominent leftwing family and joined the Communist Party himself, was eager to follow the Gramscian imperative as a scholar-activist.<sup>304</sup>

Peled and Shafir's early work on the split Jewish labour-market in the Pale of Settlement in Russia provided a clue to their subsequent view of the colonial origin of Israeli democracy. Two observations were especially pertinent, namely that the straightforward model of capital chasing the cheapest labour did not tend to work in an ethnically stratified society because of the role of the state in the economy, which they conceptualized in three different ways: the pluralist view that conceived the state as neutral arena for groups' struggle; the functionalist view where the state was said to mediate the group struggle to assure social stability; and the conflict approach where the state acted to promote the interests of the dominant ethnic group.<sup>305</sup>

While the Jews of the Pale did not succeed in leveraging their influence, the Jewish workers in Palestine, according to Shafir and Peled, did much better due to their position as a dominant group. In the colonialist setting of the Yishuv they commanded higher wages while the marginal Arabs suffered from exclusionary labour practices and low wages. To extrapolate the colonialist condition onto the independent State of Israel the authors borrowed from a theory of republican citizenship that became popular in the late 1980s. According to a group of political philosophers and legal scholars, there was a significant difference between the notions

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<sup>304</sup> Ben-Rafael, 'Critical versus Non-Critical Sociology'; Gershon Shafir, 'Israeli Society: A Counterview', *Israeli Studies*, 1/2 (1996), pp. 189-213.

<sup>305</sup> Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir, 'Split Labor Market and the State: The Effect of Modernization on Jewish Industrial Workers in Tzarist Russia', *American Journal of Sociology*, May 1987, pp. 1435- 65.



of citizenship in liberal versus republican democracy. The former implied a passive sense of citizenship whereby individuals were recipients of a certain participatory rights regardless of their civic proclivities. The latter postulated that democracy required a certain type of virtue and identity to create the common good. While the original interest in republican citizenship was not ideological, Cass Sunstein, John Friedmann and other leftist scholars were quick to point out that the republican democracy privileged were bearers of certain virtues deemed to benefit the collective. Conversely, those who were remote from the communitarian virtue - ethnic or racial minorities and immigrants - were considered second or third class citizens in the United States and Britain, countries viewed as liberal democracies.<sup>306</sup>

Peled, who rejected both Eisenstadt's consociational democracy and Smooha's ethnic democracy, found the republican citizenship model more commensurate with Israel's colonial-heritage democracy, alleging this pattern to be deeply rooted in the Yishuv's political culture. Pioneering (*halutziut*) served as the civic virtue of the community, 'the criterion by which civic recognition was awarded to individuals and groups'. Defining virtue through the Zionist-pioneering endeavour created a dual distinction system that differentiated between Jews and Arabs and between the pioneering Ashkenazi elite and other Jews who were considered mere immigrants. The 'ethno-republican community' served also a 'democratic republican community' where individual rights and procedural rules of democracy were observed - but first class citizenship was reserved for those identified with the civic virtue of pioneering.

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<sup>306</sup> Cass R. Sunstein, 'Beyond the Republican Revival', *Yale Law Journal*, July 1988, pp. 1539-90; Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); idem, 'The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self', *Political Theory*, 1984, 12, pp. 81-96; Marilyn Friedman, 'Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community', *Ethics* 99 (1989), pp. 275-90.

Consequently, 'like those who cannot acquire full republican citizenship,' Israeli Arabs have a 'truncated political status: they do not share in attending to the common good but are secure in their possession of what we consider essential human and civil rights'.<sup>307</sup>

Transiting into statehood in 1948 allowed Ben-Gurion, in Peled's opinion, to engage in some clever juggling of republican and liberal forms of citizenship. By promulgating the Law of Return - a basis for immediate citizenship - the new state privileged the commitment to the communitarian good of the Zionist project. Interestingly, Ben-Gurion argued that the right of Jews to return was not granted by the state but predated the state in the sense 'that the state itself came into being through the right that Jews had always had to the Land of Israel and in order to enable them to fulfil that right'. Recognizing the primordial rights of Jews was not entirely unique, as other immigrant societies enjoyed the principle of 'communal self-determination' that is the right to 'to shape its own cultural character to provide refuge to its ethnic kith and kin'. Peled conceded that such an arrangement made sense from a strong republican standpoint but was 'an anathema to liberal political theory'. At the same time, Ben-Gurion started granting Arabs equal rights thus satisfied the requirements of liberal citizenship, making Israel an ethno-republican democracy. Peled emphasized that ethno-republicanism was different from the South African *Herrenvolk* democracy or some other blatantly discriminatory system, giving Israeli Arabs a strong incentive to operate within the system of law. While the system was not ideal because the Arabs - and to a lesser degree the Mizrahi Jews - could not partake in the 'common good', the arrangement was quite tolerable: 'The overt use of

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<sup>307</sup> Yoav Peled, 'Ethnic Democracy and the Legal Construction of Citizenship: Arab Citizens of the Jewish State', *American Political Science Review*, June 1992, p. 434.

ethnicity (as of other particularistic markers, e.g. gender, class, or religion) to categories of citizenship is offensive to anyone committed to liberal values... It may serve us well, however, to remember that discrimination based on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, gender, and sexual preferences has not been unknown in liberal democracies'. This two-tiered republican democracy gave the Israeli Arabs a set of liberal rights and a political space to 'consolidate those rights'. Indeed, in a choice between perfect civic equality and blatant discrimination, the ethnorepublican arrangement 'may not be the worst possible choice'.<sup>308</sup>

Published shortly before the start of the Oslo peace process, the article did not discuss the status of the Palestinians in the territories, nor did it address a possible settlement of the conflict. After all, as conceptualized by Peled, a colonialist democracy was not expected to voluntarily decolonize by giving up its conquest. To account for decolonization, aka the peace process, Peled, joined by Shafir introduced some Marxist insights. Claiming that the third generation Ashkenazi elite - heirs to the founding fathers 'virtuous pioneers' - became entrepreneurs in the newly emergent market economy, Shafir and Peled posited a clash of interests between those whose personal fortunes were tied to a liberal market economy and global competition and the occupation: 'For these reasons, settling the conflict - decolonization portions of the occupied territories through accommodation with the PLO - became an economic necessity for the Israeli business community'. Along with economic liberalization there was a shift towards liberal values that underpin liberal democracy. The two predicted that with the end of decolonization, there would be a move to

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<sup>308</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 435, 440.

‘universalization of the citizenship structure as well to reduce ethnic discontinuities which interfere with the smooth operation of the market’.<sup>309</sup>

Expanding on the economic dynamics underpinning the decolonization process, Shafir and Peled also added the Intifada to the factors reconfiguring the citizenship discourse. Virtually invisible at the bottom of the discursive pyramid, the Palestinians upped the ante posing economic (and moral) challenges to the neo-liberal elite. Persuaded that the occupation was a detriment, the business community took the lead in pushing the peace process. Dov Lautman, president of the Israeli manufactures’ association was quoted in the article as complaining about the slow progress of negotiations and urging the government to expedite the process so as to allow Israel to partake in the ‘unprecedented prosperity’. The authors conceded that the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin forced yet another change in the republican versus liberal discourse, describing the opposition to decolonization as ‘the hard core composed mostly of settlers and their religious Zionist backers’ driven by ideology rather than economic calculus. Still, reflecting their belief in the primacy of economics, they expressed confidence that the decolonization would proceed apace, bypassing the purely ideological forces of opposition to colonialism.<sup>310</sup>

Inspired by the same economic determinism, Shafir subsequently proclaimed that process of decolonization was irreversible. In this scenario, for the new elites whose economic self-interest clashed with the traditional values of colonialist Zionist society - settlement and long-term military service were seen as having the upper hand in the democratic discourse. By organizing around business as the new civic

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<sup>309</sup> Yoav Peled, ‘From Zionism to Capitalism’, *Middle East Report*, July-August 1995, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>310</sup> Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir, ‘The Roots of Peacemaking: the Dynamics of Citizenship in Israel’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, August 1996, pp. 391-413.

virtue, they were actually pushing for a liberal citizenship. Still, Shafir invoked Gramsci who warned about destructive dynamics capable of undermining long-term processes. As he saw it, ‘the noxious intentions and destructive actions of religious zealots - Palestinian and Jewish’ would try to scuttle the process of decolonization.<sup>311</sup>

Shafir and Peled found the prospect of Israel’s ‘socioeconomic liberalization’ and its impact on decolonization highly compelling, spurring them to bring out an edited book on the subject. Published before the collapse of the peace process in September 2000, the tome described the DOP as an act that ‘stunned the world’ and a ‘decisive step’ towards peaceful resolution of one of the world’s ‘most intransigent international feuds’. The thesis they ‘wished to advance’ was simple: ‘peacemaking and economic growth - are closely related’. Though clearly aware of the peace spoiling ‘zealots’, the selected articles focused on the economic peace dividend. So much so that Uri Ram, hardly a fan of capitalist globalization, contributed an essay on the ‘promised land of business opportunities’ as a driver of the peace process.<sup>312</sup>

With so much attention on the alleged economic dynamics of the Oslo process, Shafir and Peled felt the need to update their original notion of republican democracy in a work described as the ‘culmination of many years of intellectual cooperation’ and one that has been ‘many years in the making’. Reference to the continuity of the project notwithstanding, the new book shifted to a more radical form of critical theory of citizenship. Rogers Smith, a self-described critical political scientist provided much of the inspiration. Smith decried Western civic ideology for

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<sup>311</sup> Gershon Shafir, ‘Israeli Decolonization and Critical Sociology’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring, 1996, pp. 23-35.

<sup>312</sup> Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, ‘Introduction: The Socioeconomic Liberalization of Israel’, in Shafir and Peled (eds.) *The New Israel: Peacemaking and Liberalization* (Boulder: Westview, 2000), pp. 1, 10-11; Uri Ram, ‘The Promised Land of Business Opportunities: Liberal Post-Zionism in the Global Age’, *ibid*, pp. 217-42.

harbouring inequalities and exclusionary principals and was equally dissatisfied with the republican citizenship discourse. In his opinion, both the liberal and republican principles were part of a myth forged by elites to create an imagined popular identity and provide the legitimacy of the ruling class. Instead of analytically privileging the two discourses, Smith urged the adoption of what he called 'a multiple traditions' view of American citizenship. In other words, he wanted to include the disfranchised - illegal immigrants, asylum seekers and other marginal groups - in the citizenship discourse, rejecting as 'hegemonic' and 'nationalistic' the notion that citizenship and the consequent democratic rights should be limited to the established groups.<sup>313</sup>

Shafir and Peled's version of 'multiple traditions' featured three distinctive citizenship discourses: the liberal, the republican and the ethno-nationalistic. The latter was said to originate in German Romanticism and focused on the community 'conceived as a nation, or ethnic group'. Even more exclusive than republican citizenship, the ethno-national ideal of citizenship was delineated by the ethno-national identity of its members, denying to non-members the chance to assimilate. Using the three-tiered citizenship concept as a base, the authors reached out for other theoretical insights, among them Yasemin Soysal's 'incorporation regimes'. They noted that such regimes dictated the allocation of resources to the different social groups by state and para-state institutions while legitimizing such differential allocation through a 'citizenship discourse'. Indeed, 'to understand a particular

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<sup>313</sup> Gershon Shafir, Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. ix-x; Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 13-35.

incorporation regime...we must be familiar with its main allocative institutions and with the citizenship discourse, or discourses, that prevail in its political culture'.<sup>314</sup>

Surveying Israel's history from the perspective of the three-tiered citizenship construct, Shafir and Peled arrived at some new conclusions. They insisted that, spurred by economic interest, liberal democracy had grown considerably at the expense of the republican democratic discourse. But it was the new ethno-national citizenship discourse - as embodied by the National Zionist settlers and the right wing parties - that worried them, not least because of its alleged racially-tinged hatred towards the Palestinians. In this new version the ethno-national discourse was surmised to be a formidable opponent of de-colonization and indeed, a chief architect of 'contemporary colonization'. Though Nazi Germany was not mentioned, there were hints that, behind a liberal façade, Israel nurtured a complex discursive regime with dangerous racist and nationalist overtones. Still, written before the outbreak of the 'al-Aqsa Intifada', the book expressed confidence in the irreversibility of the process of decolonization as a step to creating a real liberal democracy.<sup>315</sup>

Reaction to the book followed predictable lines. Hailed by neo-Marxist, critical scholars as a path breaking work, it was questioned by positivists. As argued in the preceding chapter, Lissak led the charge against critical social scientists in general and Shafir and Peled in particular, accusing them of misrepresenting and distorting the practices of the Yishuv and ignoring facts that did not fit their deterministic Marxist theory. He asserted that, far from being rapacious colonizers, the Zionists desired an anti-colonialist solution of creating a Jewish and a Palestinian

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<sup>314</sup> Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics*, 6, 11; Yasemin Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*, (University of Chicago Press, 1994)

<sup>315</sup> Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli*, pp. ix-x, 171.

state in the region. Other disciples of Eisenstadt denounced what they described as ‘the simple Marxist assertion that conditions of life exclusive and directly undermine the conscience of individuals’. They noted that many of the decisions made by the pioneers, including the revival of the Hebrew language, could not be explained in materialistic terms.<sup>316</sup>

Lost in the exchange about particulars of the Yishuv era and the motivation of the pioneers was the far more important issue of methodology. Only one reviewer pointed out that though a ‘central axis of Western political philosophy’, the ‘citizenship discourse’ was too vague a construct to measure the level of democracy. More significantly, she found the construct to be a ‘proscriptive rather than descriptive convection’ signalling the authors’ ideological preference – ‘one that ultimately promotes “a democratic multiculturalism” with “multiple public spheres” based on both universal individual rights’. Differently put, the reviewer suggested that the negative evaluation of Israeli democracy was guided by the authors’ ideological goals. Since Shafir collaborated on a number of projects aimed at expanding liberal citizenship based on international criteria (that would have given immigrants and undocumented workers in the West full citizenship rights), this charge was not entirely unfounded.<sup>317</sup>

Whatever the criticism, Shafir and Peled’s hopes for ending the conflict and creating a ‘real’ liberal democracy vanished in the wake of the al-Aqsa Intifada, along with their complex and nuanced description of Israel’s authority system. Radicalized by the collapse of the Oslo process, Peled adopted a new position claiming that Israel’s authority system could not be compatible with a democracy unless it was

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<sup>316</sup> Ben-Rafael, ‘Critical versus Non-Critical’, p. 182.

<sup>317</sup> Kaylin Goldstein, ‘Reading Palestine-Israel on Coloniality and other Paradigms’, *Middle East Report*, Winter 2002, pp. 50-52.



ready to follow the path of the new South Africa: 'The obvious model for the transformation of the Israeli control system into a secular, democratic state is the transition experienced by South Africa'. Though having previously rejected the apartheid model, Peled quoted Mona Younis, who used a class-based analysis comparing the South African and Palestinian national liberation movements, hailing her argument that 'it was the involvement of this African working class in the struggle for national liberation that ensured its democratic character and, ultimately, its political success'. Conversely, the working class in Israel was not involved, dooming the goal of the PLO and its supporters to create a 'democratic, non-sectarian states in all of the territories of their respective homelands'. Without such a transformation, he argued, Israel would not resemble a democratic, non-sectarian state.<sup>318</sup>

The post-9/11 reality led Peled to update yet again his three-tiered citizenship construct. In a 2007 Tel Aviv University workshop on 'Democratic Citizenships and War' Peled acknowledged for the first time that Israel had experienced war and Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) virtually since its inception, yet claimed that his three-tiered concepts of citizenship - republican, liberal and ethno-national - were still valid, albeit in a security rather than colonial setting. In this interpretation, the first tier of the citizenship discourse was reserved to those in the forefront of the security struggles, with the third tier reserved for those who endangered the security project, notably the Israeli Arabs and the Palestinians. Positioned in-between was the liberal citizenship discourse that tried to guard civil rights from antiterrorist legislation and practices.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Yoav Peled, 'Zionist Realities. Debating Palestine-Israel', *New Left Review*, March-April, 2006, pp. 21-36.

<sup>319</sup> Yoav Peled, Noah Lewin-Epstein, Guy Mundlak, Jean Cohen, (ed.), *Democratic Citizenship and War*, (London: Routledge, 2012).

This seeming recognition of the importance of terrorism on the citizenship discourse did not last for long. In a 2013 edited book on ethnic democracies Peled returned to his original three-tier discourse but reassessed the location of the Israeli Arabs in line with a Marxist interpretation of political developments. He explained that after the collapse of the Oslo peace process in 2000, the Arab citizens suffered a serious regression of their rights because of the liberal concept of citizenship - an outcome of the privatization and liberalization of the economy - malfunctioned. In this version, 'the ideological shift from corporatism to neoliberalism as the guiding principle of economic organization... moving away from the principle of pioneering Jewish solidarity as a limitation on the profit motive... left the republican principle of incorporation devoid of a material basis and weakened it vis-à-vis the other two principles, or discourses of citizenship'. With the republican principle diminished, a 'head-on collision' between liberal democracy and ethno-naturalism occurred, allowing the latter to push back the rights of Israeli Arabs.<sup>320</sup>

By reverting to the Marxist-based interpretation of the three-tiered citizenship, Peled erased any mention of the impact of the anti-terror campaign on the discourse, thus restoring the consistency of his research. But the work raised considerable methodological problems, not least because some of the examples were clearly indicative of the state's desire to prevent Israeli Arab MKs from embracing the cause of terrorist organization. By trying to explain the alleged diminution of liberal citizenship by changes in the 'material base' of republican discourse, Peled avoided a much needed discussion of how a democracy should deal with an ethnic minority with conflicting national loyalties.

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<sup>320</sup> Yoav Peled, *The Challenge of Ethnic Democracy: The State and Minority Groups in Israel, Poland and Northern Ireland*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 149.

Much as the Shafir-Peled work gained special status among detractors of Israeli democracy, the construct of a multiple citizenship discourse was too complex to be readily related to the apartheid label that Matzpen activist scholars such as Uri Davis, working with a revived Council for American Judaism, affixed to Israel in the early 1980s.

In the peculiar hierarchy of perceived academic legitimacy, such works stayed on the margins of the scholarly discourse. Kimmerling recalled his hesitation to use Matzpen ideas, explaining that its intellectuals were not professional social scientists and tended to mix politics with writing. As the preceding chapter showed, it took Kimmerling more than a decade of a tortuous intellectual journey to join the critical sociology camp. It was only fitting thus that this former student of Eisenstadt turned the apartheid model into legitimate social science, making a strong impact not only in sociology but also in political science.<sup>321</sup>

### **Israel as an Apartheid Democracy**

There was nothing in Kimmerling's early work to indicate that, in his view, Israel's democracy was marred by a colonialist design. To the contrary, writing in the early 1980s, Kimmerling described the 1967 war as 'an accident' claiming that there was no design to seize territories in order to expand the colonialist empire and the control of the territories was 'accidental'. As a matter of fact, in a coauthored book, he used a theoretical framework derived from disaster theory to argue that the Israelis developed an effective coping mechanism with the conflict-driven interruptions of civilian routine. By treating emergency situations as temporary aberrations, the state

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<sup>321</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, 'Sociology, Ideology and National Building: The Palestinians and their Meaning in Israeli Sociology', *American Sociological Review*, August 1992, pp. 446-60.

and the citizens invested all their resources to get back to the 'normal' state of existence. As a result, the economy and the social system were able to function, avoiding the type of convulsions that ruined democracies elsewhere.<sup>322</sup>

Kimmerling's observation of the Israeli peace process with Egypt - requiring the evacuation of the Sinai Peninsula and the city of Yamit - indicated optimism about the democratic process. He suggested that, in responding to the Egyptian overture, Israeli society was forced to engage in a series of trade-offs between territory and security, territory and peace, and territory and democracy. The societal discourse on the trade-off, he asserted, indicated that most Israelis were ready to give up territory not only to secure peace but to assure the continuation of democratic practices and international recognition. In other words, in the case of Sinai the question 'how much territory for democracy' was answered resoundingly in favour of democracy. He left open the possibility that Palestinian land could be given up in a similar trade-off.<sup>323</sup>

By the end of the decade, however, Kimmerling, as shown earlier, had begun his transformation. In a 1988 preface to an edited volume on territory and democracy he reproached the contributors - mostly his Hebrew University colleagues - for leaving out the occupied territories when discussing Israel's democracy. For his part, he was ready to side with those who accepted the long-standing Matzpen view that the Israeli political system could not be judged in separation from the occupied territories. Kimmerling credited American scholars in the Association for Israel Studies (AIS) for 'making it possible', noting that they were less encumbered by 'the ideological load

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<sup>322</sup> Baruch Kimmerling and Irit Baker, *The Interrupted System: Israeli Civilians in War and Routine Times* (New Brunswick: Transactions Books, 1985); Baruch Kimmerling, 'Change and Continuity in Zionist Territorial Orientations and Politics', *Comparative Politics*, January 1982, pp. 191-210.

<sup>323</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, 'Peace in Exchange of Territory: A Macrosociological Analysis of the Concept of Peace in Zionist Ideology', *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, February 1987, pp. 5-27.

than [their Israeli] predecessors'. This coded reference to the AIS was highly significant; he subsequently affirmed that the AIS played a 'vital role' in legitimizing the Mazpen approach and helped his evolving view on the nature of Israeli political system.<sup>324</sup>

Stanley Greenberg, then associate director of the Southern African Research Program at Yale University working on ways to undermine the apartheid system in South Africa, was also instrumental in Kimmerling's change of mind. While Greenberg's first book, *Race and State in Capitalist Development* offered a standard Marxist examination of the anti-apartheid struggle, the second, *Legitimizing the Illegitimate: State, Markets and Resistance in South Africa* adopted the legitimacy discourse approach of Gramsci. Scrutinizing the discursive practices of the Afrikaners, Greenberg found their hegemonic discourse - with claims of 'God-given vocation' - to be 'like the Hebrews of the Old Testament'. Pursuant of this perceived mandate, white South Africans created a society 'where illegitimacy is a defining characteristic of the social order'. Furthermore, the 'entrenched illegitimacy' of apartheid 'embodies three central ideas: primacy of racial-national rights, centrality of the state and the subordination of the civil society, and fashioning of the homeland as an entity fully separated from the civic realm'. Greenberg suggested that, drawing on a divine mandate, Israel created a similar structure of illegitimacy with regard to the Palestinians.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, 'Preface', idem (ed.), *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. ix; idem, 'Sociology, Ideology and National Building. The Palestinians and their Meaning in Israeli Sociology', *American Sociological Review*, August 1992, pp. 446-60.

<sup>325</sup> Stanley B. Greenberg, *Race and State in Capitalist Development*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); *Legitimizing the Illegitimate: State, Markets and*

On a visit to Israel, Greenberg penned a paper ‘The Indifferent Hegemony: Israel and the Palestinians’ calling attention to the delegitimizing aspects of control over the Palestinian population. Soon after, Kimmerling quoted the paper in a chapter ‘Boundaries and Frontiers of the Israeli Control System’. He declared that after 1967 the ruling elites in Israel showed ‘virtually total lack of interest and ability in creating a common identity or basic value system to legitimize its use of violence to maintain the system, or in developing other kinds of loyalties toward force and power’, warning that by holding on to the territories ‘we might see the institutionalization of the process of transforming the Israeli control system into a *Herrenvolk* democracy, without its racist dimension’.<sup>326</sup>

By the early 1990s, Kimmerling’s resolve to join the critical camp had become all but evident. He excoriated Eisenstadt for refusing to include the treatment of Palestinians in the ‘framework decision’ of Israeli sociology, allegedly to avoid the ‘embarrassment of characterizing Israeli society - before and after sovereignty - as an immigrant-settler (if not colonial) society’.<sup>327</sup> In an article published the following year, Kimmerling described Israel as a militaristic society rooted in the violence of its colonialist past and the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians. Contradicting his early work, he now claimed that the militaristic ethos was shared by civilians, a phenomenon he described as cultural militarism. Wars were a central part of the collective identity of Israelis and turned into an integral, routine part of Jewish society. Invoking Gramsci’s concept of hegemonic discourse Kimmerling argued that

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*Resistance in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 130-1, 135, 207

<sup>326</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, ‘Boundaries and Frontiers of the Israeli Control System: Analytical Conclusion’, in Baruch Kimmerling, (ed.) *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 266, 280

<sup>327</sup> Baruch Kimmerling ‘Sociology, Ideology and Nation-Building’, p. 450.

‘civilian militarism in Israel ministered the approach most acceptable to the majority in the Jewish collectivity’. More to the point, given this integral militarism, Israel could not be described as a democracy but rather as a democracy of the ‘ruling nation’, an allusion to the South African *Herrenvolk* system.<sup>328</sup>

Kimmerling’s reinvention as critical sociologist did not go unnoticed. Yoram Peri, a Tel Aviv University political scientist and a leading expert on the Israeli military, described Kimmerling as a scholar with a ‘developing line in his perception: ‘If, in his early works in the 1970s he was close to his teachers Lissak and Horowitz, he later developed the most critical approach in his attitude to the underlying ethos of the Israeli society’. Peri produced extensive survey data to show that the concept of ‘militaristic hegemony had no empirical basis’ but was not hopeful that Kimmerling and his new ideological peers would be persuaded. To his mind, the vast majority of critical scholars ‘identifies with the criticism of the Zionist movement and questions the Zionist meta-narrative. They accept the Palestinian criticism of the nature of the State of Israel, support the post-Zionist ideology, and seek to establish in Israel a civil society of all its citizens, Jews and Arabs, through the negation of the Jewish identity of the State and its ties to Diaspora Jewry’.<sup>329</sup>

In a book published just before the al-Aqsa Intifada Kimmerling elaborated on the concept of the ‘military-cultural complex’. Arguing that ‘settler culture’ in the territories was just the ‘tip of the iceberg’ of Judaism’s ‘mixture of religious and secular chauvinism’, claiming that the 1967 war ‘reawakened the dormant codes of the immigrant settler political culture’. In his opinion, this cultural militarism

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<sup>328</sup> *Ibid*; Baruch Kimmerling, ‘Patterns of Militarism in Israel’, *European Journal of Sociology*, November 1993, pp. 196-223.

<sup>329</sup> Yoram Peri, ‘The Radical Social Scientists and Israeli Militarism’ *Israel Studies*, 1 (1996), pp. 240, 254.

trumped all other considerations, so much so that the 'Palestinian territories' were chosen for expansion because of national Zionist ideology rather than economic benefits, as Shafir and Peled surmised.<sup>330</sup>

As shown in the preceding chapter, the collapse of the peace process greatly embittered Kimmerling, spurring him into Gramscian-like prodding of scholars to use their academic position to change society. He blamed Israel alone for the failure of the July 2000 Camp David summit, deriding Barak's concessions as designed 'to give up enough of the territory but to keep the advantage of the colonization project flowing. No Palestinian will agree to that'. His readiness to change opinions to suit the circumstances has also evolved, creating serious inconsistencies. For instance, ignoring his militarization thesis his newest version stated that 'we made profit from the territories and Israel's reluctance to give them up is an egregious manifestation of the colonialist instinct... it is amazing to think that at the beginning of the third millennium a country is actively colonizing by marginalizing its citizens and acting against international law'.<sup>331</sup>

For Kimmerling, like virtually all critical scholars, Ariel Sharon, the military hero-turned-politician represented all that was wrong with Israel's cultural militarism. In a book titled *Politicide*, he stressed that under Sharon - and even well before him - Israel had engaged in *politicide*, defined as a process that aimed, as its ultimate goal, at 'the dissolution of the Palestinian people's existence as a legitimate social, political, and economic entity'. The national existence of the Palestinian people, he argued, was being destroyed through 'murders, localized massacres, the elimination of leadership and elite groups, the physical destruction of public institutions and infrastructure, land

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<sup>330</sup> Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline*, pp. 3-4, 232.

<sup>331</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, 'The Decline of Colonialism', in Adi Ophir (ed.) *Real Time*, pp. 128-137.



colonization, starvation, social and political isolation, re-education and partial ethnic cleansing'.<sup>332</sup>

While Kimmerling conceded that in the past Israel had been an 'imperfect democracy', politicide, in his opinion, turned the Jewish state into a 'Thatcherist and semi-fascist regime'. Some three dozen pages later, his definition of the authority system changed:

Israel [has] ceased being a true democratic state and became a *Herrenvolk* democracy. This term, coined to describe South Africa under Apartheid described a regime in which one group of subjects (the citizens) enjoys full rights and another group (the non-citizens) enjoys none. The laws of Israel became the laws of a master people and the morality that of the lords of the land.<sup>333</sup>

There was more confusion pertaining to the time framework. At times Kimmerling seemed to suggest that the transformation occurred when Israel decided to make the occupation permanent, on other occasions he hinted that apartheid was actually built into the very fabric of the 'colonialist' Zionist enterprise.

It would be easy to suggest that such contradictions were very much in line with neo-Marxist, critical standard of mixing politics with academics. As noted, Kimmerling proved quite adept at changing his 'narratives' to fit the shifting political circumstances. Yet there was something more personal, indeed emotional, about *Politicide*. The visceral hatred of Sharon compounded by the disjointed and self-contradictory definitions of the 'Israeli regime' was out of character for what was

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<sup>332</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, *Politicide: The Real Legacy of Ariel Sharon* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 3-4.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

billed as a serious scholarly study. The preface provided a clue to Kimmerling's state of mind. Strongly rejecting the label of a 'self-hating Jew' he described his book as a warning against the alleged plans to ethnically cleanse all the Palestinians. As he put it, 'the apartheid policy was not just a catastrophe for the Palestinians people but for the Israelis as well'.<sup>334</sup>

That Kimmerling came to see his work as a clarion call to a society allegedly morally corrupted by apartheid was quite evident from his subsequent attack on Benny Morris. As noted in Chapter 3, in a 2004 interview in *Haaretz*, Morris created a stir by denouncing the Palestinians as perennial losers. Kimmerling's assessment of Morris's character was scathing: 'Then he turns to his own prejudices and stereotypes of the Islamic and Arabic culture that happen to be fashionable... since the September 11 calamity. But the historian is not just a part of the collective mood and expresses it, he also provide historical and intellectual legitimacy to the most primitive and self-destructive impulse of a very troubled society'. Having voiced his indictment of his former fellow traveller, Kimmerling claimed that Israel was more than a 'troubled society':

It should be treated the way we treat individuals who are serial killers. After thirty five years of oppression, colonization of their land, expropriation of their water, ignoring almost all of their freedoms, administrative detention of tens of thousands of Palestinians, systematic destruction of their social and material infrastructure, it is more than ironic to talk about the Palestinians as barbarians and a sick society. If the Palestinian society is sick, who is

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<sup>334</sup> *Ibid*, Preface.

responsible for this sickness and which society is sicker and an institutionalized serial killer?<sup>335</sup>

Not incidentally, by excoriating Morris Kimmerling hoped to establish himself as a pioneer of the New Historiography/New Sociology movement. Claiming that during research on a doctoral dissertation in the 1970s he proved that Plan D referred to ethnic cleansing, he recalled departmental colleagues warning him that the thesis was too explosive to be published for ‘many years’: ‘It was probably hard to find major commercial and even university press publishers (especially in the United States) who were willing to publish a book or monograph that was perceived as undermining the official Zionist version in the fields, not to say presented as an alternative Palestinian “narrative”. These narratives were published in the past decades mainly by little “fringe” publishers and by some “brave” university presses’.

Addressing the strong emotions surrounding the nature of Israel’s authority system, he acknowledged the sharp divisions on the issue:

Israel perceives itself as a ‘Jewish and (liberal) democratic’ state, but it is hard even domestically to define the meaning of those two contradictory terms, when most of Jews give priority to the state’s ‘Jewishness’, accepting that Arab citizens enjoy ‘reduced citizen’s rights’, or that the Jews have to protect their demographic majority and political and cultural hegemony by formal discrimination... To this must be added the gradually converged direct ‘control system’ over the territories and population occupation in 1967. Naturally, Israel was characterized by Palestinians and their supporters as an ‘apartheid

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<sup>335</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, ‘Benny Morris’s Shocking Interview’, *History News Network* 26 January 26 2004 (<http://hnn.us/articles/3166.html>).

state'... In an inter-communal war perceived as a zero sum game, each side is using indiscriminate violence to get rid of the other side.<sup>336</sup>

Some critics denounced Kimmerling's inappropriate use of the apartheid label to demonize Israel. Others accused him of academic opportunism and rewriting his history for political gain by alleging that his anti-positivist position somehow hurt his career.<sup>337</sup>

Yet as the foremost post-Zionist scholar and a professor at the Hebrew University, Israel's top university, Kimmerling gave the apartheid label considerable legitimacy. His premature death in 2007 left others to claim his mantle in developing variations on the apartheid theme. Two scholars at Ben-Gurion University - Oren Yiftachel and Neve Gordon - took a leading role in this effort.

### **Israel as an Ethnocracy**

Yiftachel, a political geographer with a degree in urban planning, joined the Geography Department at Ben-Gurion University in 1993. According to his homepage, he 'has tried to combine teaching and activism for social and political justice. Co-founded and was an active member in a range of organizations working to assist Arab-Jewish peace, anti-colonialism and social equality in Israel/Palestine'.

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<sup>336</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, 'The Continuation of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict by "Academic" Means: Reflections on the Problematiques of Publishing Books and Reviewing Them', *Contemporary Sociology*, September 2006, pp. 447-49.

<sup>337</sup> Chad Alan Goldberg 'Politicized Revisited', *Contemporary Sociology*, May 2005, p. 229; Eliezer Ben-Rafael, 'Critical versus Non-critical Sociology'.

Yiftachel was keen to show his own commitment to Gramsci noting that his 'own approach draws from neo-Gramscian perspective'.<sup>338</sup>

Unlike Kimmerling whose transformation from a positivist to critical sociologist was long and anguished, Yiftachel was proud of his credentials as a critical political geographer having been influenced by John Friedmann, a Wallerstein disciple involved in the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA), a group of scholars and activists constructing the Third System Project. Inspired by the South American *dependencistas*, the IFDA planned to harness the power of people by raising their consciousness to challenge the dominance of markets and the state. Using the Gramscian formula, Friedmann described the Third System as 'a movement of those free associations, citizens and militants, who perceive that the essence of history is the endless struggle by which people try to master their own destiny'. Among the groupings mentioned were those 'actively serving people's aim and interests, as well as political and cultural militants who, while not belonging directly to the grassroots, endeavour to express people's views and to join their struggle'.<sup>339</sup>

Clearly eager to be among those 'actively serving people's aim and interests', Yiftachel set out to implement this mandate. Writing on an Internet Forum for Critical Geography, he stated that though 'Our jobs here [in Israel] are more secure with the tenure system (still?) in place... this has not nurtured any tendency for critical geography'. He blamed low faculty salaries and the 'most acute need' to supplement income with government consulting fees for the reticence of his colleagues to adopt a

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<sup>338</sup> Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel and Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 6; personal website at <http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/yiftachel/yiftachel.html>.

<sup>339</sup> John Friedmann, *Empowerment. The Politics of Alternative Development* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1992), pp. 3-4.

critical perspective. Still, Yiftachel seemed optimistic: ‘your list, as well as the Vancouver conference and several recent journals are helping us in “diffusing” critical material which may have some long-term effect on students and faculty’.<sup>340</sup>

Co-edited by Yiftachel, the Ben-Gurion University-based journal *Hagar: Studies in Culture, Politics and Space* became a premier outlet for critical writings. His homepage boasts his considerable contribution to the field: ‘in urban and planning studies he was among the first to focus on the “dark side” of urban planning and has contributed much to opening up planning theory to critical theory in general, and to issues of identity, power and space in particular’. More importantly, ‘in political geography his groundbreaking work formulated the concept of “ethnocratic” regimes, which has opened up several important debates in ethnic and racial studies, regime theories and research in Israel/Palestine and the Middle East’.<sup>341</sup>

Yiftachel wasted little time in popularizing the concept of ‘ethnocratic regimes’. With support from Ben-Gurion University’s Centre for Regional Development in December 1993 he co-organized a conference on ‘Urban Development, a Challenge for Frontier Regions’. In the preface to the volume of proceedings, Yiftachel claimed to have ‘invited contributions from various other Israeli experts on these issues: geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists, which have now become the main body of chapters in this book’. In fact,

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<sup>340</sup> Oren Yiftachel, ‘Subject: publishing and jobs’, a forum for critical and radical geographers, 2 November 1997 (<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=crit-geog-forum;64091ed5.9711>).

<sup>341</sup> <http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/yiftachel/yiftachel.html>.

virtually all participants were neo-Marxist, critical scholars such as Dan Rabinowitz, Yoav Peled, Hanna Herzog and Lev Grinberg.<sup>342</sup>

Setting the tone of the debate, Yiftachel rejected the positivist model of nation-building invoking the Wallerstein-Taylor class-based theory. He argued that 'spatial changes in settlement in general and frontier settlement in particular, are often part of a transformation aimed at deepening social control and inequalities over peripheral groups'. In a subsequent chapter, Yiftachel applied the theme to the Galilee Arabs, who due to possessing a homogenous territory became an 'internal frontier' where land had to be conquered, that is Judaized, creating a 'pattern of class oppression'. Taking a rather dim view of democratic processes, he dismissed them as a 'procedural measures' - a quintessential notion of the neo-Marxist, critical paradigm. Equally important, Yiftachel claimed that Israel could not claim to be a real democracy because it failed to deliver social justice: 'While the present paper deals mainly with territorial control of minorities against the background of an ethnic struggle over land control, it must be remembered that such territorial struggle is embedded within the operation of a certain (capitalist) economic system and its supporting political institutions'.<sup>343</sup>

To provide a more trenchant critique Yiftachel joined forces with two political scientists to argue that equal and inclusive citizenship, popular sovereignty and civil rights, protection of minorities and regular, universal and free elections were not enough to qualify Israel as a 'real democracy'. In their view, without fixed borders that would restrain the considerable statutory privileges of the Jews, the Israeli

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<sup>342</sup> Oren Yiftachel, *Urban Development, a Challenge for Frontier Regions: Book of Abstracts* (Beersheba: Negev Center for Regional Development, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1998), 'Preface', p. ix.

<sup>343</sup> Oren Yiftachel and Avinoam Meir (eds.), *Ethnic Frontiers Landscapes of Development and Inequality in Israel* (Boulder: Westview, 1998), pp. 7, 43-47.

political system amounted to ethnocracy. In Yiftachel's words: 'Israel is a state and a polity without clear boundaries; and the country's organization of social space is based on pervasive and uneven ethnic segregation'. As a result, 'the Israeli polity is governed not by a democratic regime, but rather by an "ethnocracy", which denotes a non-democratic rule for and by a dominant ethnic group, within the state and beyond its borders'.<sup>344</sup>

As in the case of other post-Zionists, the collapse of the Oslo accords darkened Yiftachel's views. In an edited volume published shortly after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, he described the peace process as 'peace pretence' and a cover up for the continuation of the occupation, blaming the alleged Israeli appetite for land for its failure and warning the 'Israeli leadership and people' of the looming spectre of apartheid. The same message was underpinned in a number of articles written in the early 2000s. In one, 'From Fragile Peace to Creeping Apartheid: Political Trajectories in Israel/Palestine', Yiftachel attributed the failure of peace to 'the ethnocratic culture developed in Israel, which saw the Judaisation - and de-Arabisation - of Palestine/Israel as a moral historical process, with scant attention to its impact on the Palestinian-Arabs'.<sup>345</sup> In the summer of 2002 he repeated the apartheid charge when describing an alleged Israeli plan to offer 'a mixture of measures ranging from firm

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<sup>344</sup> Asad Ghanim, Nadim Rouhana and Oren Yiftachel, 'Questioning "Ethnic Democracy": A Response to Sammy Smooha', *Israel Studies*, 3 (1998), pp. 253-67; Oren Yiftachel, 'Democracy or Ethnocracy: Territory and Settler Policies in Israel/Palestine', MERIP, *Middle East Research Project*, July 1998; "'Ethnocracy": the Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine', *Constellations: International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, 6/3 (1999), pp. 364-90.

<sup>345</sup> Oren Yiftachel, 'From Fragile "Peace" to Creeping Apartheid: Notes on the Recent Politics of Israel/Palestine', *Arena Journal*, 16 (2001) [http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/yiftachel/new\\_papers\\_eng/arena-print.htm](http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/yiftachel/new_papers_eng/arena-print.htm).



ethnic control to apartheid and future transfer, but couching them in terms more acceptable to the Jewish Israeli ear'.<sup>346</sup>

Yiftachel's growing use of the terms 'creeping apartheid' or 'apartheid' instead of his customary 'ethnocracy' was apparently related to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement formally launched after the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban. To make the BDS advocacy palatable to the general public, there was an urgent need to present Israel as an apartheid state, a charge considered more legitimate when made by ostensibly bone fide Israeli academics.

Also noted was Yiftachel's experience with the journal *Political Geography*, which Taylor and his disciples turned into a premier outlet for critical studies. In early 2002 Yiftachel submitted a co-authored article describing Israel as 'a state dedicated to the expansion and control of one ethnic group' and suggesting that 'such societies cannot be classified as democracies in a substantive sense'. Yet David Slater, one of the journal's editors and a prominent supporter of the Palestinians who signed the 2002 British petition to boycott Israeli universities, felt that the journal should not accept works by Israeli academics. After an acrimonious exchange Slater backed down but Yiftachel was asked to make substantial revisions, including an explicit comparison between Israel and South Africa. He complied, raising the salience of the apartheid analogy.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Oren Yiftachel, 'Between Apartheid and Conciliation', in Ophir (ed.), *The Time of Truth*, pp. 156-66; idem, 'Political Trajectories in Israel/Palestine', *Arena Journal*, 16/1 (2001), pp. 13-25; idem, 'Israel Elects Sharon: Contradictions of a Creeping Apartheid', *MERIP*, 12 February 2001; idem, 'The Shrinking Space of Citizenship: Ethnocratic Politics in Israel', *MERIP*, summer 2002.

<sup>347</sup> Andy Beckett, 'It's water on stone - in the end the stone wears out', *Guardian*, 12 December 2002.

In a revised form of the *Political Geography* article, Yiftachel and his co-author explained the reasons for making comparisons with South Africa. Yet seemingly dissatisfied with his limited impact, he decided to devote an entire book to the subject. Crediting Gramsci and other critical theorists for their inspiration, Yiftachel stated that his work was aimed at developing a ‘critical ethnocentric theory’ by integrating geography into political science. Specifically, he contended that the process of Judaizing Israel/Palestine with its ‘associated dislocations, struggles and contradictions’ should be front-page in evaluating Israeli democracy. More to the point, Yiftachel hoped that his work would undermine the scholarly and popular perception of Israel as a democracy in good standing.<sup>348</sup>

Without naming Eisenstadt or his students, Yiftachel asserted that ‘the classification of Israel as a democracy may appear to function more as a tool for legitimizing the political and legal status quo than as a scholarly exploration guided by empirical accuracy or conceptual coherence’. Somewhat surprisingly, Peled and Shafir, whose work Yiftachel described ‘as groundbreaking on many counts’ did not entirely escape criticism. Particularly upsetting to Yiftachel was the notion that three tiers of the citizenship discourse implied discursive equality, thus masking the profound power disparities among the citizenship groups. He further charged the two authors with using misleading categories and falling to the trap of ‘conceptual stretching’. Using Habermas’s distinction between ‘constitutional patriotism’, a mechanism associated with universal democracy, and ‘false’ forms of democratic participation, Yiftachel claimed that ‘the questionable use of these terms confuses

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<sup>348</sup> Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, pp. 6, 20, 34.

more than assists in the understanding of the Israeli political system and erroneously enables its classification as democratic'.<sup>349</sup>

Much as Yiftachel deplored others' incoherence, his own theory of ethnocracy was seriously flawed. In the preface, he thanked his editorial staff for 'chastising me ceaselessly, regularly and rightfully for inconstancies, duplications or general sloppiness'. Yet for all the editorial team's efforts, the work - assembled from previously published articles and drawing upon an empirical base generated by four somewhat disparate projects - was vague, at times, inconsistent and contradictory.<sup>350</sup> Emblematic of these problems was the book's very subject matter - the construct of ethnocracy. Yiftachel first argued that with 'blurred borders and boundaries and the partial inclusion of peripheral groups, Israel has neither managed to create a firm sense of "Israeliness" nor a genuine Israeli (as distinct from Jewish) polity. This presents severe obstacles for the development of civil society and hence democracy'. Yet, though he promised to define civil society in the next chapter, there was instead a long discussion of Israel's politics and political economy replete with references to the core project of Judaization of Israel/Palestine. In one of the many contradictions, Yiftachel acknowledged that the Judaization project was challenged by new dynamics like globalization, liberalization, mass immigration from the Soviet Union (that included some 300,000 non-Jews) and the growing consciousness of Palestinians. Yet he did not incorporate these civil society dynamics in the way that Shafir and Peled did so as not to detract from the ethnocracy thesis.<sup>351</sup>

Yiftachel's struggle to reconcile ethnocracy as an all-encompassing ethnic ethos on the one hand, and the ambiguous demarcation between Judaism as ethnicity

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<sup>349</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 89, 99-100.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid*, p. x.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 85, 103-10.

and religion on the other, generated additional contradictions. In his original formulation, ethnocracy was anchored in *ethnos*, the ethnic Jewish population. The chapter on the 'making of ethnocracy' was clear that the secular pioneers - the original builders of the ethnocracy - and their Israeli offspring were the closest to the Judaization project and accrued most of its benefits, turning them into a privileged elite: As the religious component of Judaism became more dominant, along with a dramatic increase in the ultra-Orthodox community, questions about the ethnocracy construct surfaced.

By way of pre-empting criticism, Yiftachel discussed the problem under the heading 'ethnocracy or theocracy'. On the one hand he reassured readers that, contrary to 'rhetoric' very few religious laws were passed to qualify Israel as a theocracy. On the other, he argued that it was the religious population (ultra-Orthodox and religious Zionists) that was most hostile to Palestinians and most keen to continue the Judaization project.<sup>352</sup> Both statements could be questioned on empirical grounds, but Yiftachel's sleight of hand actually undermined the entire theory. For if Israeli ethnocracy privileged those closest to the Judaization project, then how was it that so many of the new 'Judaizers', notably Shas supporters, belonged to the lower classes?

By lumping together the religious-Zionist settlers and the ultra-Orthodox in one category Yiftachel weakened the argument of forced segregation - another key factor in the ethnocracy construct. According to his scenario, Israel's dominant Ashkenazi elites were allowed to separate themselves from the lower classes and the indigenous population - the Israeli Arabs and the Palestinians. In reality though, only the settlers were segregated from the Palestinians; the ultra-Orthodox within the

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<sup>352</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 102-23.

Green Line were voluntary segregationist anxious to protect their religious lifestyle. Yiftachel's effort to demonstrate that the Mizrahim were another victimized group segregated from the dominant Ashkenazi population by the ethnocratic regime made even less sense. As the preceding chapter indicated, high levels of intermarriage shrank the 'pure' Mizrahim group, undermining key arguments in critical sociology. The same statistics suggested that Shas members were the largest segment among the non-intermarried Mizrahim; like their Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox counterparts they were self-segregators.<sup>353</sup>

Perhaps more significantly, for all the book's academic veneer, Yiftachel never meant it to be an objective study but a proscriptive-normative document aimed at furthering his goal of creating a bi-national state. As he put it, 'the normative ending of this book requires further comment on the Israeli demos'. To make Israel a 'legitimate democracy' he urged changing the status of its Arab citizens, providing an equitable distribution of resources, and creating a multicultural polity. Put differently, in his opinion, Israel had to adopt a bi-national framework and a socialist distributive justice system to qualify as a democracy. Before this scenario could materialize, Yiftachel urged a long-term project of creating a new framework and consciousness of coexistence, premised on the legitimacy of both Jewish and Palestinian bonds to their common land. Echoing the Third System Project guidelines, he counselled dealing with the denied root cause of conflict, such as the 'return of Palestinian refugees and the Jewish right of self-determination'.<sup>354</sup>

Yiftachel acknowledged that the bi-national scenario 'was put forward by Jewish thinkers of the 1920s' - a reference to Brit Shalom - but felt that his generation

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<sup>353</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 120, 125-30.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 284, 287.

could do better than Magnes and his professors because bi-nationalism ‘has received renewed attention among Palestinians, mainly in Israel and the diaspora’. Conversely, Jews showed strong resistance to the bi-national project, which he attributed to a desire to hold on to power: ‘Because a democratic bi-national state can only be established by mutual agreement, the sweeping Jewish opposition renders this option, at this point in time, highly unlikely’.<sup>355</sup>

Still, as a dedicated Gramscian, Yiftachel was resolved to push for the changes needed to create a true democracy in a bi-national state. With little prospect to persuade the Israeli Jewish public he planned to use the ‘contradictions and tensions embedded in the coterminous existence of limited democratic institutions and procedures and entrenched patterns of ethnic dominance’ to mobilize the international community. The prospects there, in his view, were good since there was a ‘growing importance of human and minority rights in the international political discourse and on the growing institutionalization of democratic norms among the international community’. In other words, to attract attention of the international community, warnings about ‘creeping apartheid’ were required.<sup>356</sup>

Yet Yiftachel, who failed to develop measurable indices for ‘creeping apartheid’, was also stumped by Israel’s 2005 unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. To account for a development that was antithetical to his ethnocentric theory, a change of narrative was called for; he now argued that the ‘Israeli regime system has long been ethnocentric, but more recently, the ultimate logic of Judaization led Israel to adopt unilateral separation’. Those wondering how occupying Palestinian territory and withdrawing from it are parts of the same ‘logic of Judaization’, were not

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<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*, p. 282.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

enlightened by his comments on the 2009 elections, which spoke on ‘democratic distortion’, ‘colonialist’ agenda and ‘creeping apartheid taking place’ in the entire territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean.<sup>357</sup>

Mainstream scholars found the ‘ethnocracy-creeping apartheid’ construct highly questionable. Alan Dowty went so far as to accuse Yiftachel of failing to comport to academic standards, noting that virtually all indices of ethnocracy existed in countries considered democratic, which in turn meant that Yiftachel compared Israel to an ideal democracy rather than a real one. Indeed, Dowty touched upon a larger issue common in critical scholarship - a lack of a comparative perspective that would have placed Israel among the so-called ‘imperfect democracies’, that is, countries that tried to balance democratic rules of the game with daunting challenges. For instance, Yiftachel’s case for apartheid featured the nomadic Negev Bedouins. While their nomadic lifestyle has been undermined by their growing residence in established settlements, nomadic populations in Europe and elsewhere had their traditional ways similarly challenged by the increasingly urban environment taking over the expanses needed for free roaming.<sup>358</sup>

Whatever the methodological pitfalls of the apartheid model, it served well Yiftachel who, as the chairman of the board of *B’Tselem* NGO was calling at the time for ‘effective sanctions’ against Israel. It was not hard to imagine, as one observer put

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<sup>357</sup> Oren Yiftachel, ‘Creeping Apartheid in Israel-Palestine’, *Middle East Report*, 253, Winter 2009, pp. 7-15, 37; idem, ‘Voting for Apartheid: The 2009 Israeli Election’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring, 2009, pp. 72-85.

<sup>358</sup> Alan Dowty, ‘Is Israel Democratic? Substance and Semantics in the “Ethnic Democracy” Debate’, *Israel Studies*, Fall 1999, pp. 1-15. See also: Havatzelet Yahel, Ruth Kark, and Seth J. Frantzman, ‘Are the Negev Bedouin an Indigenous people?’ *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2012, pp. 3-14.

it, that ‘the word apartheid is useful for mobilizing people because it is an emotional word’.<sup>359</sup>

### **Amplifying the Apartheid Charge**

Neve Gordon, a political scientist from Ben-Gurion University, was likewise a long time activist keenly aware of the value of presenting Israel as an ethnocracy engaged in ‘creeping apartheid’. A professional pro-Palestinian activist, he headed Physicians for Human Rights-Israel during the first intifada, charging the Israeli authorities with torture of Palestinian prisoners and other crimes against humanity.<sup>360</sup>

As a graduate student at Notre Dame University, Gordon worked with Fred Dallmayer, a political scientist who introduced him to Foucault. Gordon’s doctoral thesis, ‘Social Control in Democracies: A Theoretical Analysis’, was based on Foucault’s interpretation of power as a hidden and subtle underlying mechanism of manipulation. For Foucault ‘power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization’. Furthermore, power ‘is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another’. By conceptualizing power as omniscient but imperceptible and fluid, Foucault could then argue that political institutions and processes, including democracy, were just illusions, hiding the real controls exerted by authorities. One of them was bio-power, a term that Foucault coined to describe practices of public health and risk regulations, and other regulatory mechanisms linked to physical health. Foucault strongly suggested that bio-power was an efficient way to supplement two

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<sup>359</sup> Natan Nestle, ‘Groups that Demonize Israel Place themselves outside the Tent’, *Jerusalem Post*, 27 February 2012.

<sup>360</sup> Neve Gordon and Ruchama Marton, *Torture: Human Rights, Medical Ethics and the Case of Israel* (London: Zed Books, 1995).



traditional tools of control - disciplinary power and sovereign power. The former was said to be based on coercive tactics, notably involving military or police forces; the latter was managed through legal and juridical intervention.<sup>361</sup>

After Foucault's premature death, Giorgio Agamben, a fast-rising critical philosopher, expanded on the issue. In what amounted to an antithesis to Foucault's sovereign power, Agamben declared that it should be defined through exception, the power to withdraw and suspend law. By suspending the legal system, the authorities could turn groups or entire populations within the zone of exception into *homo sacer*, individuals whose lives could be taken with impunity:

The entire Third Reich can be considered a state of exception that lasted twelve years. In this sense, modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system'.

On a more contemporary note Agamben criticized the Italian government for detaining illegal immigrants and the Bush administration for keeping Taliban and other enemy combatants in Guantanamo Bay.<sup>362</sup>

In Gordon's ontological analysis of Foucault's concept of power there was a clear focus on the complex interaction of power dynamics that shape identity and guide the behaviour of subjects. He made a particular point of noting Foucault's

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<sup>361</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), pp. 92-93.

<sup>362</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 2-4, 40.

concept of control based on the Benthamian panopticon: an observer such as a prison guard in tower generates the 'the perpetual gaze:' 'It is as if the "gaze" penetrates the individual, helping to shape the "soul" so that it conform to the existing rules, codes, and mores'. Revisiting the concept of the panopticon, Gordon, echoing the criticism of another critical philosopher, found it too centralized to fit Foucault's ubiquitous and pervasive presence of power. His solution was to suggest a cubicle - such as an office cubicle - where 'the mere *possibility*' of someone watching was enough to enforce authority.<sup>363</sup>

Armed with the Foucault-Agamben theory, Gordon proceeded to analyse the Israeli rule in the territories. The work, billed as the first analysis of the 'infrastructure of occupation', was not a direct evaluation of the Israeli non-democracy; yet it cast an extremely harsh light on what he called the Israeli 'regime'. In his words, 'I do not only mean the forces or mechanism that use coercive measures used to prohibit, exclude and repress people, but rather the array of institutions, legal devices, bureaucratic apparatuses, and physical edifices... to produce new modes of behaviour'. By uncovering these subterranean dynamics, Gordon expressed hope that his 'interrogation' would help to 'see beyond the smoke screen of political proclamations, and thus improves our understanding of why the acrimonious Israeli-Palestinian conflict has developed in the way it has'.<sup>364</sup>

As Gordon saw it, Israel had used a sophisticated blend of controls - disciplinary, sovereign and bio-power to subjugate and control the Palestinians. With its ill-defined contours and subversive logic, Foucault's bio-power made it

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<sup>363</sup> Neve Gordon, 'Foucault's Subject: An Ontological Reading', *Polity*, Spring 1999, pp. 395-414; idem, 'On Visibility of Power: An Arendtian Corrective on Foucault', *Human Studies*, 25/2 (2002), pp. 125-45.

<sup>364</sup> Neve Gordon, *Israel's Occupation* (California: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 3-4.

possible to present virtually every seemingly positive act of the authorities as a negative one. For instance, Gordon listed the initial efforts to improve the standard of living of the Palestinians: ‘In the health field practices were introduced to encourage women to give birth at hospitals (a means of decreasing infant mortality rates and monitoring population growth) and to promote vaccinations (in order to decrease the incidence of contagious and noncontagious diseases)’. While many would applaud these progressive and beneficial measures, to Gordon they were instances of a bio-power control mechanism. To make sure that Foucault's metaphor of controlling the collective body was not lost on the reader, Gordon related the alleged extensive Israeli Big Brother effort to ‘monitor every aspect of Palestinian life’: ‘Televisions, refrigerators, and gas stoves were counted, as were the livestock, orchards, and tractors... There were detailed inventories of Palestinian workshops for furniture, soap, textiles, olive products, and sweets. Even eating habits were scrutinized, as was the nutritional value of the Palestinian food basket’.<sup>365</sup>

Disciplinary powers, and a large dose of sovereign controls, in Gordon’s judgment, were extensively employed during the first two decades of Israel’s control. But, following the first intifada Israeli authorities realized that a new way to keep the territories quiescence was needed. As a result, they decided to outsource the control in the territories, via the Oslo Accords, to the newly-created PLO-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA). Gordon strongly suggested that the Israeli leaders had no intention to achieve peace but rather to use it as a means for allowing the IDF to ‘outsource the responsibility for the population’. He pointed out that, in 1996, less than a year after the Rabin assassination, virtually all ruling functions were passed to the PA that assumed ‘responsibility for the occupied inhabitants’. To some this would have meant

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<sup>365</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 8-9.

the end of Israeli occupation. To Gordon it was the intensification of occupation by other means.

Gordon ran into a theoretical wrinkle when, following the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, Israel did not dismantle the PA to regain back its ‘outsourced’ sovereign power. On the contrary, IDF’s military operations refrained from permanent reoccupation of the symbols of PA authority. Again invoking Agamben, Gordon suggested that ‘Israel now operates primarily by destroying the most vital social securities and by reducing members of Palestinian society to what Giorgio Agamben has called *homo sacer*, people whose lives can be taken with impunity’.<sup>366</sup> True to neo-Marxist critical scholarship practises, Gordon felt little compulsion to support his ‘narrative’ with sound data: evoking Agamben, in his view, sufficed to charge Israel with such misconducts as ‘widespread extrajudicial executions’. At the same time, Agamben gave him yet another opportunity to portray Israel in the darkest possible light by enabling an implied comparison between Nazi Germany and the disputed territories. To push for the Holocaust-Palestinian analogy, Gordon listed the ‘two impulses’ that guided Israel as ‘militaristic and messianic’, a term that Agamben and others often associated with the Nazi regime.<sup>367</sup>

Using a far-fetched interpretation of Israeli reality to fit the Foucault-Agamben model was one thing; trying to incorporate Islamist fundamentalists into the critical framework was another. For all his allusions to spiritual power, Foucault failed to incorporate religion into his theories. By default, his followers reverted to the neo-Marxist view of religion as false consciousness manufactured by the hegemonic class. Alternatively, religious impulses were perceived as a reaction to material deprivation,

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<sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>367</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 2; Gordon, *Israel’s Occupation*, p. 5.

class subjugation and marginalization. The resulting confusion was very much in evidence in Gordon's efforts to explain the emergence of Hamas as the preeminent Palestinian power. After describing the group's views as 'a kind of postmodern fundamentalism', he went on to claim that much of its appeal stemmed from a critique of postcolonial Western domination and cultural imperialism and globalization. Gordon actually found that 'the deconstruction of the universal pretensions of European civilization... has led to a growing recognition that the West too is a provincial culture with its own hegemonic project'.<sup>368</sup>

Gordon's theoretical straightjacket created additional difficulties, notably in explaining the bloody struggle between Hamas and the Fatah movement in the Gaza Strip. Since critical orthodoxy made no room for internecine fights among victims of 'hegemonic oppression', Gordon was reduced to blaming Israeli and American policies for the turmoil. He assailed Israel for boycotting Hamas and excoriated the United States for imposing a scheme on Gaza 'that, for clarity's sake, one could call the Somalia Plan', namely 'inadequate resources, economic sanctions, thousands of armed men in distress, and foreign support of certain factions are, after all, the ingredients from which warlordism, a la Somalia, is made'.

By asserting that the Palestinians were powerless victims of an Israeli-American power play Gordon managed to keep the narrative within the boundaries of critical theory. At the same time, he constructed a radical contradiction when, in another part of the book, he described Hamas as hegemonic power intent on subjugating secular Palestinian society: 'Hamas aspires to establish a theocratic regime, one that is extremely oppressive toward women and several other segments of

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<sup>368</sup> Gordon, *Israel's Occupation*, p. 222.

society. The successful consolidation of its control will be extremely tragic for all those who have fought the establishment of a secular democracy in Palestine'.<sup>369</sup>

Prescient as the above statement was, Gordon did not follow up on the human rights violations of Hamas's increasingly theocratic rule in the Gaza Strip. Instead he chose to dwell on the apartheid analogy writing a number of articles on the subject in popular venues. As a political activist, Gordon's appreciation of what he described as 'transitional normative regime', that is 'dense networks' of human rights groups was well known. In a co-authored article, he observed that such 'normative regimes' successfully 'socialized' states into granting democratic rights, protecting the welfare of migrant workers and eliminating certain practices such as torture, disappearance, and extrajudicial killings. To 'socialize Israel' the international 'normative regime' had to be persuaded that it was an apartheid state. Indeed, in what was a clear coupling of academic research and advocacy in 2009 Gordon wrote an op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times* urging to impose BDS on Israel - described as a right-wing apartheid-like state.<sup>370</sup>

Making the case for 'socializing Israel' through international sanctions was not without cost. Even before the BDS op-ed exposed Gordon to withering criticism, he felt the need to defend his patriotic credentials, writing about his love for Israel, emphasizing its uniquely democratic system where ordinary citizens had relatively free access to political authorities, and where activists could create a grassroots movement and effect political change. Gordon used his own experience to point out that, in spite of his radical ideas, he suffered few impediments both inside and outside

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<sup>369</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 222-34.

<sup>370</sup> Nitzza Berkovitch and Neve Gordon, 'The Political Economy of Transnational Regimes. The Case of Human Rights', *International Studies Quarterly*, December 2008, pp. 881-904; Neve Gordon 'Boycott Israel', *Los Angeles Times*, 20 August 2009.

the classroom. More surprisingly for a neo-Marxist, there was a first hint of an admission that some of the distributive justice disparities were related to the unique problem of the ultra-Orthodox demographics and, to a lesser extent, the Israeli Arab sector. That Gordon was capable of this rather gushing portrayal of a country that he repeatedly excoriated as a right-wing apartheid regime indicated his extraordinary flexibility in deploying facts to fit the narrative of the moment.<sup>371</sup>

Like virtually all his peers, Gordon enthusiastically welcomed the ‘Arab Spring’. The wave of optimistic outpouring, especially by left-wing and liberal observers was subsequently attributed to ‘optimism bias’ theory, especially among those keen to remove the stain of ‘Arab exceptionalism’ - the idea that Arabs could not sustain a democracy.<sup>372</sup> But Gordon seemed to emulate Foucault who had heralded Islamist Iran as a ‘true participatory democracy’ and an example of egalitarian justice, proclaiming that Ayatollah Khomeini could teach the West a lesson or two in democratic governance. Mimicking Foucault, Gordon declared that Israelis should take lessons in democracy from the Tahrir Square protestors. He blamed the media and Israeli politicians for fomenting fear of the Muslim Brotherhood, a tactic he described as ‘colonialist and Orientalist’: ‘Political Islam is constantly presented and conceived as an ominous force that is antithetical to democracy’. Gordon chastised an Israeli official for warning that Egypt might end up like Iran and Gaza under Hamas, describing it as self-serving and hypocritical. He assailed Defence Minister Ehud Barak for describing Israel as ‘a villa in the jungle’, namely ‘a civilized Western island surrounded by semi-barbaric Arabs and Muslims’. In Gordon’s opinion, ‘this approach has helped bolster an already existing fear of

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<sup>371</sup> Neve Gordon, ‘Israel’s Struggle for Social Justice’, *The Nation*, 26 May 2008.

<sup>372</sup> Walter Laqueur, ‘Reality Check: The Hazards of Optimism’, *World Affairs Journal*, March/April 2013.

political Islam among the Jewish citizenry, which is constantly being presented as an ominous force that is both antithetical to democracy and an existential threat to Israel. Indeed, it has helped to reinforce the Zionist trope that Israel is an island of civilization in the Middle East, and serves as a wall against barbarism'.<sup>373</sup>

As the 'Arab Spring' deteriorated into wholesale violence in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, as well as a power struggle between the Egyptian secularists and the Muslim Brotherhood - bolstered by the extremist Salafis - Gordon's enthusiasm for Arab democracy has diminished.

### **Israel as a Military-Democratic Regime**

Like Yiftachel and Gordon, Lev Grinberg, a professor of sociology at Ben-Gurion University, found a way to combine a highly active political life with an academic career. By his own account, having arrived from Argentina as an ardent socialist Zionist in 1971 he turned against the 'hypocrisy' of the Labour Party - 'the phony socialism of a party that essentially represents the ruling group in the society' - and later on joined the Black Panthers, among other protest groups. In search for an alternative, Grinberg turned further left creating Campus, an Arab-Jewish student group; its Mizrahi member were subsequently inspired to join the Mizrahi Rainbow

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<sup>373</sup> Neve Gordon, 'Israeli Media "fears" New Egypt', *Aljazeera*, 21 February 2011; 'A Villa in the Jungle: The Arab Awakening through the Lens of the Israeli Media', *Middle East Law and Governance* 3 (2011), pp. 105-17; Neve Gordon and Yinon Cohen, 'Western Interests, Israeli Unilateralism, and the Two-State Solution', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring 2012, pp. 6-18.



Coalition. In between studies, Grinberg worked as a labour organizer and an anti-Histadrut activist.<sup>374</sup>

Grinberg's choice of research topics reflected a highly critical view of Israel's distributive justice systems. His first work, *Split Corporatism* borrowed Shlomo Swirski's themes of workers' exploitation and other alleged social injustices. His subsequent book, *Histadrut Above All* repeated many of the same charges and noted the corruption and lack of equality in the labour movement.<sup>375</sup>

Grinberg's early work was only tangentially related to authority system; this changed when he joined *Yesh Gvul*, a watchdog monitoring the IDF to prevent 'war crimes'. In a review of the Peled-Shafir book, Grinberg offered a preview of his own theory of Israeli democracy. While praising the work as 'highly ambitious', he found it conceptually and factually wanting, accusing the authors of ignoring 'new practices of settlement, colonialism and republicanism' and producing 'a questionable general theory of Israeli dynamics and historical processes, suggesting uncritical assumptions about liberalism, decolonization and democracy'.<sup>376</sup>

In Grinberg's opinion, the civilian political system has not been functioning since the Rabin assassination in November 1995 as consecutive governments failed to muster support to deal with the challenge of Israel's peaceful incorporation into the Middle East. 'This paralysis creates a vacuum into which the generals are drawn', he argued.

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<sup>374</sup> Aviv Lavie, 'Not for the Faint Hearted', *Haaretz*, 7 May 2004.

<sup>375</sup> Lev Luis Grinberg, *Split Corporatism in Israel* (Albany: State university of New York Press, 1991); idem, *Histadrut Above All* (Jerusalem: Nevo, 1993; Hebrew).

<sup>376</sup> Lev Grinberg, 'Book Review', *Contemporary Sociology*, May 2003, pp. 348-49.

Because when the politicians don't seem to know what to do, the generals think they do... They are supremely self-confident individuals. But that does not mean there is a danger of a military putsch. On the contrary... the army feels more comfortable with the present system - it sets policy, while responsibility remains with the politicians. In the current intifada... the political echelon lost control of the army, which used disproportionate force, which led to escalation. But when the politics of force failed, what did the army say? 'Our hands are tied, the politicians are to blame'.<sup>377</sup>

Reflecting Grinberg's radicalization during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which drove him to charge the IDF with war crimes, these comments signalled his full embrace of critical scholarship with which he had toyed for a number of years. In his first venture into critical theory in 1999 he echoed Benedict Anderson, arguing that every democracy was imagined twice, 'once because it imagines the national community and then because it elected officials to represent "people"'. In a real democracy, disillusioned citizens could mobilize and vote out the government. However, in Israel where some groups are prevented either formally or otherwise from accessing state power, democracy is imagined'. Appropriating the discourse on symbolic politics, Grinberg went one step further, accusing Israel of symbolic genocide against the Palestinians: 'Because the world will not permit total annihilation, a symbolic annihilation is taking place instead'. Critical theory considers exclusion and misrecognition to be tantamount to symbolic violence, but Grinberg actually claimed that only international pressure prevented Israel from physically annihilating the Palestinians.

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<sup>377</sup> Leslie Susser, 'Military Complex - Cover Story', *Jerusalem Report*, 27 December 2004.

Critics pointed out that at the level of intent, Grinberg found no difference between Israel and the genocidal Third Reich, a comparison that many called appalling.<sup>378</sup>

By 2006 Grinberg had managed to put his scattered writings into a book-length work. Unlike other critical scholars, however, he dispensed with academic pretences, describing the book as ranging ‘between theory, research and the personal politics of the researcher’. He went on to state that ‘I do this consciously and am aware that my interpretation of political dynamics is influenced by my moral preferences... intentionally designed to facilitate a political critique of politics’. ‘I have no pretence... of having an objective or scientific position’, he explained, ‘my interest in the past is also motivated by my aspiration to build a better future’. Though Grinberg was frank about using research for polemical ends he was somewhat confusing when discussing the book’s real goal: ‘The political part at the end of the [last] chapter is not at all a detailed discussion about how to resolve the conflict, which would contradict my entire theoretical approach’.<sup>379</sup>

The absence of a clear link between the theoretically-inspired discussion and the proposed solution was only one of the work’s shortcomings. Another stemmed from the inconsistencies in defining democracies. After reviewing the constructs proffered by Smooha, Kimmerling, Peled-Shafir and Yiftachel, Grinberg rejected all of them because they did not include the crucial issue of borders: ‘In the absence of recognized borders, it is very difficult to contain conflict by political dialogue: hence, conflict usually deteriorates into violence’. Invoking Arendt’s philosophical

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<sup>378</sup> Lev Grinberg, ‘Imagined Democracy: A Theoretical Background and a Historical Perspective’, *Israeli Sociology*, 3 (1999; Hebrew); *La Libre Belgique*, 29 March 2004 quoted in Joel Fishman, ‘Lev Grinberg and the Meaning of Symbolic Genocide’, *Nativ*, June 2004.

<sup>379</sup> Lev Luis Grinberg, *Politics and Violence in Israel/Palestine: Democracy versus Military Rule* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 3, 202, 211.

postulation that ‘violence is the negation of politics’ he argued that politics was all about ‘recognition, representation, dialogue, mediation, bridging coalitions, and agreements’. Creating a radical distinction between politics and violence was crucial to Grinberg’s effort to separate himself from mainstream political science that perceived politics and violence as two poles of the same continuum: ‘The moment that politics and violence are interpreted as continuum of two mutually supportive forms of power relations, our theory becomes a non-critique of violence, and unintentionally legitimizes it by presenting it as a ‘normal’ and expected form of power relations’.

Though Grinberg made much of Arendt’s theory, he was forced to admit that ‘this theoretical argument does not mean that, in concrete cases, politics and violence cannot take place at the same time and even sometimes by the same actors’. Obfuscating the argument, he argued that ‘violence is always used by the dominant elite to prevent or bypass negotiations by unilateral action... In reaction to their non-recognition, oppressed groups also exert violence and sometimes succeed in imposing political negations on the rulers’. Grinberg’s additional caveat muddied the waters further, as he asserted that ‘violence can lead to politics only when both sides conclude that they cannot achieve their goals by force’.<sup>380</sup>

Trying to fit the assessment of Israel’s authority system into Arendt’s theory complicated virtually every aspect of his analysis. Having declared Israel to be a non-democracy - as opposed to Yiftachel and Gordon’s apartheid state - Grinberg was hard pressed to provide some content to his construct. He settled on a military-democracy since ‘in the absence of borders, politics is displaced by violence. Military discourse, organization and actors become dominant because the citizens they claim

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<sup>380</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 2-3, 46.

to protect feel fear and anger'. He further explained that the military features prominently in the context of the 'security myth'.<sup>381</sup>

To demonstrate how the military-democratic regime really worked, Grinberg used a modified form of political field theory of Paul Bourdieu who conceived of politics as a set of intersecting but autonomous symbolic spaces where political actors exercised coercive power through physical and symbolic violence. The former was applied by traditional tools of control such as military, the latter imposed through assimilation or, alternatively, non-recognition or silent exclusion. Grinberg was also inspired by Michael Mann, a neo-Marxist theoretician who furnished a class-based theory of 'genocidal ethnic cleansing' committed by democracies suggesting that 'upper class societies' in Europe were likely to denigrate lower class, proletarian groups, making ethnic cleansing easy. In this version, the conflict between Israel (an upper ethnic group) and the proletarian Palestinians resulted in more than half a century of ethnic cleansing, 'most murderously in the 1940s, supported by the "imperialist" United States'. Israel, Mann contended, was a prime example of a 'settler-conqueror' democracy devising the typical settler state, democracy for the settlers, lesser rights for the natives. Approvingly quoting Mann, Grinberg claimed that the latter's research proved that 'democratic regimes might be even more aggressive and brutal toward excluded social groups than non-democratic regimes, whether colonial, dictatorship, or communist. In case of symbolic exclusion, democracy becomes a problem'.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 4, 24.

<sup>382</sup> Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy. Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 519; Grinberg, *Politics and Violence*, pp. 15-16, 20,

Grinberg deemed the Israeli military an agent of physical violence since it was 'ready to use it against the other, especially when the "they" are considered not part of the "us"'. Lacking defined borders, Israel gave the military a key role in the political space, turning the IDF into a de facto arbiter of the democratic process. By bestowing on the military such a prominent position - a notion at odds with the customary view of IDF-civilian relations - Grinberg could claim that the Israeli democracy was unduly violent, making it an 'imagined democracy'.<sup>383</sup>

Under any circumstances, a theory based on Arendt, Bourdieu and Mann would be hard to apply to evaluating democracy, which as noted, was defined by positivist criteria such as the existence of appropriate institutions and processes. Grinberg's haphazard use of open and closed spaces and the mingling of physical and symbolic violence made his description of the military-democratic regime confusing and inconsistent. Failure to provide rigor evidently did not faze him; he mocked positivist efforts to develop formal democratic rules as a 'huge industry of typologies'. He went on to proclaim that 'my interest is not in classification but in providing a tool for the analytical critique of political practices that prevent representation of social conflict, the opening on new agendas, and the entry of new political actors'.

That Grinberg had little use for rigorous classification was quite evident from his changing definition of the military-democratic regime. At one point he claimed that the Israeli civil society and the political parties were weak and likely to be overwhelmed by the military. On another occasion he seemed to imply that despite the 'ambiguity between democratization and colonization' in the regime there was dynamism in the civil society. Grinberg justified these contradictions by yet another

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<sup>383</sup> Grinberg, *Politics and Violence*, pp. 12, 15-16, 20.

explanation: ‘this is the double meaning of imagined democracy: while it facilitates the dynamic opening by means of imagination, it might be an illusion or fake, which closes political space, preventing the realization of democracy’.<sup>384</sup>

Grinberg’s hardest task was to explain how the military, whose very existence was contingent on the Arab-Israeli conflict, could embrace the Oslo process. His ingenious solution was to claim that it was Rabin’s personal charisma that made the opening of the political space possible. Rabin was said to create the ‘demobilization of the parties and organizations of the left, concealing their leaders under the skirt of his security platform and “Mr. Security” image, and making himself the embodiment of the political process that would move the nation from war to peace’. Without Rabin and his charisma the political space closed; worse, his successor Shimon Peres - ‘the figure who symbolized the “left-wing tribe”, who turned inward, and was unable to recruit widespread support’.<sup>385</sup>

If Rabin’s alleged charisma helped Grinberg to explain the initial impetus for the Oslo process, it made it harder for him clarify how the military - the guardian of the perpetual conflict - prevented the Likud government of Benjamin Netanyahu from antagonizing the Palestinians. Even more puzzling, Grinberg subsequently suggested that during the al-Aqsa Intifada the military was intent on closing the space for the Palestinians by brutally persecuting them. To explain the reversal of the military he claimed that public opinion - the locus of civic society - was so outraged by suicide bombings that it legitimized the use of force. Differently put, it was the civic society

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<sup>384</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 23-24, 45.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 93-94.

space that pressured the military to close the conflict resolution space, a development that was at odds with the theory of the military impetus of the military-democracy.<sup>386</sup>

But it was the Palestinian side that proved most challenging to Grinberg. In order to blame Israel for its alleged failure to resolve the conflict he required a ‘narrative’ that absolved the Palestinians of any culpability. For instance, Grinberg failed to mention that Peres’s electoral loss had little to do with the ‘left-wing tribe’ but rather with a series of Hamas brutal suicide bombings and a barrage of rocket attacks by Hezbollah to undermine Labour’s chances at the poll. Grinberg was also eager to portray Arafat and the Palestinian Authority fully compliant with the Oslo accords, a questionable proposition given Arafat’s underhand tactics. Indeed, Grinberg suggested that ‘Arafat managed to negotiate with Hamas moderates who accepted the Oslo II accord’. The truth was very different: Arafat consistently turned a blind eye to Hamas’s murderous attacks and only took action under irresistible Israeli and/or American pressure.<sup>387</sup>

In yet another ploy to shift blame on Israel Grinberg consistently described the settlers as ‘Yesha zealots’ responsible for sabotaging the peace process, an adjective missing from his references to Hamas that were defined on a number of instances as ‘moderate’ and ‘pragmatic’ – though the Islamist group was responsible for the murder of hundreds of Israelis in planned terror attacks while the settlers confined their opposition to political protest (with the odd exception of a violent act, notably Baruch Goldstein 1994 ‘Hebron massacre’).<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Grinberg, *Politics and Violence*, 94

<sup>387</sup> See, for example, Efraim Karsh, *Arafat’s War* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2003).

<sup>388</sup> Grinberg, *Politics and Violence*, pp. 58-61, 85-89, 91, 95.



Grinberg's determination to ignore the strong showing of the Islamists was notable in his discussion of possible solutions to the conflict. Stating that 'security is the most important problem in the discourse of Israel' he attributed its threat perception to the 'traumatic past of the Jews in Europe and the Holocaust' and to a defensiveness 'rooted in ancient religious texts'. Without mentioning Hamas or Islamic Jihad (and Fatah's Tanzim militia, which claimed its share of terror attacks), Grinberg went on to argue that 'the myth of eternal and a-historical insecurity has been the national myth since 2000'. In other words, it was this 'imaginary threat' elevated to a myth that prevented the opening of the Palestinian space thus condemning Israel to the eternal status of a violent military-oriented 'imaginary democracy'.

According to Grinberg, the only viable way to democracy was through an Israel-Palestine Union (IPU), a federative structure with two separate governments that 'must administer everything that can be separated' and a federal government that 'must administer everything that is indivisible'. The IPU would require a 'major international peacekeeping force designed to protect the Palestinians from Israeli military forces and the total disarmament of all civilians, Jews and Palestinians'. By disarming the IDF, the military would have been removed from the democratic-military regime; Israel could be on its way to a true democracy.<sup>389</sup> Improving slightly on his original designation of military-democracy, he adopted the name 'occupying democracy' explaining that, unlike Europe, Israel did not have fixed borders and the two groups - Jews and Palestinians - suffered from a severe imbalance of power that made democracy impossible. Interestingly enough, Grinberg changed the explanation for the failure to settle the conflict, attributing the fiasco to negative synergy - the

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<sup>389</sup> *Ibid*, p. 214.

effort to democratize the PA and the refusal of the Israeli government to dismantle all the settlements. Still, he predicted that the ‘occupying democracy’ will sustain itself unless the international community would force Israel to resolve the conflict, preferably by creating the IPU.<sup>390</sup>

For Grinberg and other critical scholars, the democratic character of a bi-national construct was self-evident and obvious freeing them to focus on the alleged ills of the non-democracy, be it ethnocracy or military-democracy. By using this ‘methodology’ these scholars could present bi-nationalism as an act of redemption from the sins of Zionism. This in turn meant that, consciously or unwittingly, those who were most eager to see a Jewish-Palestinian state were most likely to give the Israeli democracy a failing grade. That the bi-national entity was expected to have a progressive distributive justice system is another boon for those considering egalitarianism an essential feature of democracy. Conversely, those who were pushing for a two-state solution were less likely to describe the political system in terms reserved for South African style apartheid.

Whatever the visions for a post-peace state, the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has engendered a large literature which, as already noted, tended to blame Israel. This was hardly surprising given the paradigmatic approach; more unexpected was the intense use of the Holocaust to account for the alleged Israeli intransigence.

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<sup>390</sup> Lev Grinberg, ‘Not One, Not Two, Thoughts on the Common Future in Israel-Palestine’, *Public Sphere*, Summer 2012 (Hebrew).

## **Chapter 6 The Holocaust in Post-Zionist Thinking**

For pre-WWII anti-Zionists the intellectual path to a bi-national state was clear and straightforward. According to Martin Buber, Yehuda Magnes and their disciples, universal humanistic values would easily trump ethnic or religious tensions. The communists had little use for humanism but postulated that differences between Jews and Arabs could be easily overcome by a common class struggle against Jewish and Arab capitalists. United in their abhorrence of nationalism, bi-national advocates dismissed Zionist warnings of growing anti-Semitism in Europe as ‘propaganda’ intended to scare Jews into immigrating to Palestine.

Even before the full scope of the Jewish genocide transpired, the anti-Zionist movement crumbled politically and philosophically. Brit Shalom and its Ihud successor virtually evaporated, Magnes died lobbying the State Department against Israel's creation, while Buber and his academic acolytes had little to say about the Holocaust and still saw no justification for a Jewish homeland. To the contrary, writing in the early 1950s Buber advocated a 'Near East confederation that would encompass Palestine and bordering countries'.<sup>391</sup>

In any event, with Buber returning to his original interests in spirituality and metaphysics, it was Arendt, who arrived in New York in 1941 after fleeing Germany via France, who filled the intellectual anti-Zionist void. For Arendt, who studied under Martin Heidegger and Carl Jasper in the 1930s, this was a surprising turn-about since she initially described Zionism as a 'national liberation movement of the Jewish people' and praised the Socialist Zionist parties for creating a legitimate Jewish existence in Palestine through labour.<sup>392</sup>

This appreciation, however, was replaced before long with anxiety over the possible excesses of Jewish nationalism, epitomized in her eyes by the Revisionist movement of Jabotinsky whom she considered a 'fascist'. Arendt, who fell under the spell of the Jewish Soviet writer Ilyah Ehrenburg, a spokesman for Stalin, became convinced that Jews would be better off as a protected national minority. Lauding the Soviet Union as an ideal model, she declared that the Jews there were fully protected from anti-Semitism by its progressive constitution. Behind this enthusiasm for the soviet model were twin concerns: the 'excessive' manifestation of Jewish power and the future of the Palestinian Arabs. The first was addressed in a *Commentary* article

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<sup>391</sup> Buber, Martin, 'We Need the Arabs, They Need Us!' in Paul Mendes-Flohr (ed.), *A Land of Two People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

<sup>392</sup> Sol Stern, 'Hannah Arendt and the Origins of Israelphobia', *City Journal* Winter 2012.

where she bemoaned the ‘fanaticism and hysteria of Zionism’. The second was revealed in her call to the United Nations to work with Ihud and other non-Zionist Jews to create a bi-national state. Undeterred by Magnes’s lack of success in finding Palestinian Arab partners, she blamed Ben-Gurion for failing to make the bi-national vision work, giving virtually no accounting of the political attitudes of Palestinian Arabs.<sup>393</sup>

It was Arendt’s subsequent reflection on the Holocaust, however, that made her the intellectual leader of the anti-Zionists and their academic successors, the post-Zionists. Realizing early on the importance of the nascent research on the extermination of the Jews, she tried to shape the public debate as a reviewer for respectable American presses. Raul Hilberg, author of the seminal three-volume study *The Destruction of European Jews* recalled that, on Arendt’s recommendation, a number of prestigious publishers, including Princeton University Press, rejected his manuscript. In a subsequent note, Arendt called that scholar ‘quite stupid and mad’ but this did not stop her from extensively borrowing from Hilberg’s book when covering the Adolf Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem in 1961. This glaring breach of ethics was virtually overlooked in the huge controversy created by her own book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Arendt accused the State of Israel and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion of manipulating the Holocaust for political gain and blamed the Jewish leadership in Europe for complicity in the Holocaust.<sup>394</sup>

But it was Arendt’s methodology that proved most attractive to post-Zionists seeking to alter the view of the Holocaust from a unique evil perpetrated against the Jews to one denoting a universal phenomenon of evil. Arendt laid the groundwork for

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<sup>393</sup> Hazony, *The Jewish State*, p. 262.

<sup>394</sup> Amos Goldberg, ‘Filling the Gaps in Israel’s Holocaust Reading List’, *Haaretz*, 13 December 2012; Nathaniel Popper, ‘A Conscious Pariah’ *The Nation*, 19 April 2010.

a universalistic reading of the Holocaust by attributing the Nazi movement to the crisis of modernity that had befallen Germany. Using an essentialist historiographical approach, Arendt was able to ‘dehistoricize’ the Nazi brand of totalitarianism in a way that the industrial massacre of the Jews looked as a peripheral issue, hardly deserving special attention.<sup>395</sup>

Still, Arendt could not avail herself of the fledgling tools of critical philosophy that would make the universalized Holocaust an effective tool for a harsh criticism of Zionism and Israel. As Elhanan Yakira, author of a study on the subject put it, the anti-Zionist movement was ‘strengthened by very powerful academic and intellectual trends... including theories, modes of thoughts, methodologies, meta-historical prepositions’.<sup>396</sup>

Unlike the better-known Holocaust deniers, this group of intellectuals and scholars has used critical theory to propagate the idea that the catastrophe of the Holocaust devolved into the Palestinian catastrophe. Permeated by the sense of perpetual victimhood combined with a sense of moral entitlement, the Jews were said to become not only desensitized to the suffering of the ‘other’ but actually inflicted the ontologically-defined universal evil of the Holocaust on the Palestinians. Israeli critical scholarship on the Holocaust produced three versions of the ‘catastrophe of the catastrophe’ theme.

### **Israel as Nazi Germany**

A leading role in this trend has been played by Adi Ophir, a philosophy professor at Tel Aviv University. Beginning his academic career at the philosophy

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<sup>395</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973).

<sup>396</sup> Elhanan Yakira, *Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust: Three Essays on Denial, Forgetting, and the Delegitimation of Israel* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 51.

department of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Ophir has been a veteran political activist with roots in the Peace Now movement. In 1987 he co-founded *The Twenty First Year*, a circle of academics and intellectuals with links to Matzpen who wanted to fight the 'occupation' which they believed 'defined the State and structured its society, economy, and culture'.<sup>397</sup> The group pioneered the idea of boycotting products and services made in the territories and urged conscripts and reservists alike to refuse military service there.

Throughout the years Ophir has led high-profile campaigns, including appeals to the international community to stop Israel from an alleged plan to expel all Palestinians from the territories. His view of Israel was unequivocally dark: 'a garbage hip of Europe... a site of experiment... in ethnic cleansing... a regime that produces and distributes evil systematically'. Ophir, who described himself as a 'moral entrepreneur', felt personally compelled to bring 'a new concept of sovereignty and a new model of relations between politics, law, and morality in the Western states'.<sup>398</sup>

But it was in his effort to apply critical philosophy to deconstruct the Holocaust that Ophir made his mark. Ontologically a nominalist, he was at ease with the notion that the world external to individuals was made of concepts, names and labels that structured reality. But even a dedicated critical philosopher like him could not dismiss the Holocaust as yet another label. Unwilling to follow Holocaust deniers who claimed that the mass murder of Jews either did not occur or was vastly

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<sup>397</sup> Joe Lockard, 'Israeli Utopianism Today: Interview with Adi Ophir', *Tikkun*, November/December 2004.

<sup>398</sup> Quoted in Hazony, *The Jewish State*, p. 12. See also: Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, '100 Years of Zionism, 50 Years of a Jewish State', *Tikkun*, March-April 1998, pp. 68-71; Ophir, 'The Contribution of Global Humanitarianism to the Transformation of Sovereignty', paper presented at the International Workshop on Catastrophes in the Age of Globalization, Van Leer institute, January 2003.

exaggerated, Ophir borrowed from the more sophisticated approach of the French radical left which one observer described as ‘stylishly nihilistic view of the world, which insists that all meaning is relative, that all truth is elusive and therefore futile... assail those two pillars of human civilization, memory and truth’.<sup>399</sup>

Launched by Paul Rassinier, a French socialist pacifist who survived a number of concentration camps, this tradition viewed Auschwitz and other camps not as the epitome of evil but as an extreme manifestation of a universal logic of exploitation and oppression. In his widely read *Holocaust Story and the Lies of Ulysses* Rassinier argued that Nazi camps did not differ that much from other camps, be they French penal institutions or the Soviet gulag.<sup>400</sup> In the words of one critic, Rassinier’s theory that a ‘camp is a camp is a camp’ resonated with the anarcho-pacifist fringe of the French left, for whom the essence of the state was translated into the logic of war and enslavement. Not incidentally, Rassinier made scant mention of the extermination of the Jews - as victims they were interchangeable with the inmates of any penal institution.<sup>401</sup>

Rassinier’s colleagues in the ultra-left *Socialisme ou Barbarie* circle and its splinter *Pouvior Ouvrier* group elaborated on these themes. Pierre Guillaume, an activist with roots in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, an offshoot of the Trotskyite movement, was the founder of the *La Vieille Taupe* (the Old Mole), a bookstore and a publishing press and a follower of Amadeo Bordiga, the Italian communist and leader of International Communist Party. In 1960 Bordiga penned an essay ‘Auschwitz or the Great Alibi’ that appeared anonymously in the French Bordigist publication

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<sup>399</sup> Michiko Kakutani, ‘Critic’s Notebook: When History is a Casualty’, *New York Times*, 30 April 1993.

<sup>400</sup> Paul Rassinier, *Holocaust Story and the Lies of Ulysses* (Paris: Institute for Historical Review, 1989).

<sup>401</sup> Yakira, *Post-Zionism*, p. 7.



*Programme Communiste*. Applying a Marxist analysis to the Holocaust, Bordiga concluded that anti-Semitism had nothing to do with the extermination of the Jews. Rather, the killings represented a radical form of action against a capitalist class that was easy to identify and concentrate. They were not killed 'because they were Jews but because they were ejected from the production process'. To add consistency to his class analysis, Bordiga claimed that 'German capitalism resigned itself with difficulty to murder pure and simple'. In a somewhat muddled addition, he found that Western 'imperialists' used the killing of the Jews to 'justify... the despicable treatment inflicted on the German people'.<sup>402</sup>

By reprinting the essay in *Vieille Taupe* in 1970, Guillaume signalled a synthesis of a number of themes. He emphasized the fragility of historical accounts: 'With the destruction of history, contemporary events themselves retreat into a remote and fabulous realm of unverifiable stories, uncheckable statistics, unlikely explanations and untenable reasoning'. Embellishing Bordiga's portrayal of Jews as capitalists he claimed that their 'mono-ethnic organizations' were nothing more than a convenient facade of capitalism: 'By words referring to the ideology and the mono-ethnic organisational structures that pretend to be representatives of the Jewish "community", but who seem to have tied their fate to the development of capitalism, and are nowadays widely involved in its moral rearmament, thanks to a victim ideology of their own'. Finally, he acknowledged that Auschwitz did exist and that 'Some Jews have been the victims of persecution' and even that they were entitled to compassion and compensation. At the same time, Guillaume deplored the "victim ideology" the one-sided representation system, apologetic and mythological, through which organizations that pretend to represent the Jewish victims, use, for their own

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<sup>402</sup> Amadeo Bordiga, 'Auschwitz as the Great Alibi', *Programme Communiste*, 1960, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1960/auschwitz.htm>.

profit and to the benefit of their political plans, the real victims, who become twice victimized'.<sup>403</sup>

Though Guillaume crossed the threshold of respectability by reviving *The Vielle Taupe* as a Holocaust denial press in the 1980s, his early position nourished a new generation of radical leftists who added it to their high-profile anti-colonialist message. By universalizing the Jewish catastrophe and insisting that this was just one instance of the oppressive power of the state acting against the true victims of exploitation - the workers, the minorities and the Third World peoples - they could claim that the Palestinians were the 'true victims' of the Holocaust. In an ontological sleight-of-hand the victimhood of the Jews was transferred onto the Palestinians; more to the point, Auschwitz was said to have blinded Israelis to the suffering of all other victims, especially the Palestinians.

The Rassinier-Bogarti synthesis popularized by Guillaume and *The Vielle Taupe* circles acquired academic legitimacy through the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard, a political-activist-turned philosopher. Lyotard, who first introduced Guillaume to the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, achieved fame by articulating the meaning of postmodernism. He rejected the 'grand-narrative' or meta-narrative that is based on positivist science and a universally accepted hermeneutics of meaning. In his view, rather than bound by one common belief, postmodern discourse reflects a variety of beliefs, a multiplicity of aspirations and heterogeneity of desires. To decode this postmodern multiple discursive convention, Lyotard turned to the concept of 'language-games' invented by Ludwig Wittgenstein to denote the existence of a

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<sup>403</sup> Pierre Guillaume, 'Debord', *The Vielle Taupe*, Spring 1995, <http://www.notbored.org/guillaume.html>.

multiplicity of communities, each with its distinctive system for generating and circulating meaning.<sup>404</sup>

The micro-narratives produced by language games with their fractured and splintered knowledge, however, presented a moral problem for the postmodern condition because it could not produce a universal code of ethics. To deflect possible criticisms, Lyotard published *The Differend*, arguably his most important work, to prove that ethical behaviour was possible by revamping traditional ways of thinking about justice and injustice. He contended that injustice occurred when language rules from one language regimen were applied to another. In essence, in his view, ethical behaviour amounted to being vigilant to the threat of particularities being encased in abstract conceptuality, silencing the voice of the aggrieved individuals or groups. To be ethical, one had to bear witness to the '*differend*', a situation where the 'plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim'. At the same time, he argued that in the absence of a universal rule of judgment between two heterogenous genres, 'a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments'.<sup>405</sup>

Applying this logic to the Holocaust Lyotard suggested that the Jews were *differends*, victims denied the 'means to argue' by their Nazi tormentors. But the Holocaust was also a central metaphor for his treatment of names, catastrophe and the problem of memory and forgetting in the postmodern sensibility. In one ontological sense, Auschwitz was a concrete name place and Jews were a concrete people who were exterminated and their memory virtually erased. At another, Auschwitz stood as

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<sup>404</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition; A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); idem, *Just Gaming* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

<sup>405</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 9.

a name for lower case Jews, an idea of a catastrophe that has befallen countless other *differends* of the twentieth century. By universalizing the meaning of Auschwitz, Lyotard sought to remind the world of the need to remember these victims ranging from political prisoners in Stalin's labour camps to casualties of Western neo-colonial push under the guise of development and, indeed, the Palestinians.<sup>406</sup>

Ophir's acquaintance with the radical French take on the Holocaust dated to the 1980s, when Matzpen intellectuals began publicizing it in Israel. In 1980, Boaz Evron, by then the driving force behind the neo-Canaanite ideology, wrote an essay 'A Danger to the People' that highlighted the major Rassinier-Guillaume themes. Put succinctly, Evron claimed that two misfortunes had befallen the Jews, the Holocaust and their interpretation of the Holocaust. In what could be termed as the catastrophe of the catastrophe the Israeli Jews were said to develop a habit of identifying the 'Nazis with the Arabs in general the Palestinians in particular'. He further noted that these parallels created a national zero-sum-game perception whereby the conflict could lead to either victory or a Holocaust-like destruction. As a result, 'the Israelis became free of moral restrictions since one who is in danger of annihilation seems himself exempt from any moral considerations which may restrict his effort to save himself'.<sup>407</sup>

Yehuda Elkana, a Hebrew University professor who founded the Cohn Institute of Humanities at Tel Aviv University, furthered Ophir's growing appreciation for the French radical circles. Ophir, an Elkana protégé and one of the first hires at the institute, was familiar with his mentor's affinity for the Rassinier's 'camp is a camp is a camp' approach. In 1988 Elkana, an Auschwitz survivor, wrote

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<sup>406</sup> Stephen David Ross, 'Lyotard and Disaster: Forgetting the Good', in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds.), *Postmodernism and the Holocaust* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), p. 265.

<sup>407</sup> Boaz Evron, 'The Holocaust: A Danger to the People', *Iton* 77, May-June 1980.

an article titled 'In Favour of Forgetting' in which he recalled spending a number of months in a Russian 'liberation camp' with former prisoners from many nationalities. Observing their behaviour Elkana concluded that 'what has happened in Germany can happen everywhere, and to every people, mine included'. Elkana urged the Israelis to forget the past as represented by the Holocaust in order to move forward and settle the conflict with the Palestinians. Ophir followed with an article titled 'Two Tier Thinking: A Moral Point of View', subtitled a homage to Yehuda Elkana.<sup>408</sup>

But Ophir's own self-proclaimed effort to change attitudes to the Holocaust was much more ambitious. As early as 1986 he published an essay 'On Sanctifying the Holocaust: An Anti-Theological Treatise' that echoed the Evron-Elkana theme. He urged to stop what was described as a pathological drive to memorialize the Holocaust to the point where it became a civil religion and denounced the Zionist 'agents of identity' who exploited the Holocaust for political gains. Alluding to the Ten Commandments, Ophir suggested that the 'Holocaust religion' or 'upside down Sinai' came with its own key commandments such as 'remember the day of the Holocaust to keep it holy, in memory of the destruction of the Jews of Europe' and that shirking from the task of remembering was the 'archetype of sin'. Another commandment - 'thou shall have no other holocausts' - extolled the uniqueness of the Jewish catastrophe. As a result, no other man-made disaster such as the slaughter in Biafra or the Soviet Gulag was allowed to be compared to the killing of Jews. Extending the comparison Ophir wrote: 'Like God's altar in Canaan one generation after the settlement... a central altar has arisen which will gradually turn into our

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<sup>408</sup> Yehuda Elkana, 'In Favour of Forgetting', *Haaretz*, 2 March 1988; Adi Ophir, 'Homage to Yehuda Elkana: Two-Tier Thinking', *Science in Context*, 9/2, 1991, pp. 177-88; Idith Zertal, 'From the People's Hall to the Wailing Wall: A Study in Memory, Fear, and War', *Representations*, Winter 2000, p. 98.

Temple, forms of pilgrimage are taking hold, and already a thin layer of Holocaust-priests, keepers of the flame, is growing and institutionalizing'.<sup>409</sup>

Over time, Ophir found more flaws with the way the Holocaust had influenced Israeli society. Published in a 2000 volume *Order of Evils*, he included a long list of the alleged misuse of the Holocaust. One, already touched upon in 'Sanctifying the Holocaust', involved the March of the Living, an annual trip organized by the Ministry of Education to expose high school Israeli students to the concentration camps in Poland. Using a sarcastic tone he described the trips as 'Hajj', a reference to the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>410</sup> Another misuse, derived from Rassinier-Guillaume, noted that 'Holocaust worship' removed the murder of the Jews from the realm of rationality and hence rational discourse. The belief in the uniqueness of the Holocaust was, in Ophir's view, the source of moral blindness that enabled Zionism to dispossess the Palestinians. In other words, Israel was able to get away with an act of colonial aggression by simply invoking the memory of the 'six millions'.<sup>411</sup>

Ophir's principled opposition to Zionism and the creation of the State of Israel - the catastrophe that the Holocaust allegedly inflicted on the Palestinians - did not soften during the Oslo years. An ardent supporter of a bi-national state, he had little use for the negotiations and was not dismayed, as some of his colleague, by their collapse, referring to the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada as *zman emet* (real time) and describing it as a 'time when people say what they really mean'. He admitted to suffering no intellectual confusion as 'there was no undermining of the paradigm that

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<sup>409</sup> Adi Ophir, 'On Sanctifying the Holocaust', *Politika*, 8 (1986) pp. 2-5 (Hebrew).

<sup>410</sup> Idem, *The Order of Evil: toward an Ontology of Morals* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000; Hebrew), pp. 69, 346.

<sup>411</sup> Yakira, *Post-Zionism*, pp. 71-79, 164; Ophir, *The Order of Evil*, p. 552.

dictates the understanding of reality'. This reality was centred on the 'occupation... on the scenes of evil, on the suffering there on the humiliation'.<sup>412</sup>

In the circumstances, Ophir decided to turn the violence of the al-Aqsa Intifada into a 'teachable moment' on the alleged connection between the Holocaust and the mistreatment of the Palestinians. In an introduction to the volume named after one of his articles, 'Avodat Hahove' (Worshipping of the Present), he emphasized the didactic goal of the book.<sup>413</sup> The collected essays solicited enough attention to prompt Ophir to expand on the subject by publishing the *The Order of Evil: toward an Ontology of Morals* in 2000. In many respects, the c. 600-page book - a compilation of his prior writings on the Holocaust - is a difficult and confusing work. The chapters are made up of numbered paragraphs with abrupt endings - on occasion arranged in a fragmentary and non-sequential manner. The difficulty created by this highly unorthodox style is compounded by the esoteric language and impenetrable prose not uncommon in critical literature.

Pioneered by Theodore Adorno, who famously disdained the positivist regimen of facts and precise explanations, it was more recently associated with the critical scholar Judith Butler - recipient of the Bad Writing Award by the editors of *Philosophy and Literature*. Certainly, Ophir fits the mould as attested by this rather typical sentence: 'Inclusion through exceptional exclusion is no longer an exceptional relation to exceptional subject; it has become a daily relation to exceptional moments in the life or body of any individual, and an ongoing task of dealing with the life of entire population existing under exceptional circumstances'.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Ophir, *Real Time*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>413</sup> Idem, *The Worship of the Present: Essay on an Israeli Culture for Our Time* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 2002), p. 168.

<sup>414</sup> James Miller, 'Is Bad Writing Necessary? George Orwell, Theodore Adorno and the Politics of Literature', *Lingua Features*, December-January, 2000,

In the preface to *The Order of Evil* Ophir acknowledged his affinity to the postmodern French philosophers and expressed his desire to follow in their footsteps and ‘try explicitly to restore to this world a moral point of view and give a critical account of it’.<sup>415</sup> In line with this ambitious goal he asserted that the Israeli condition was ‘constantly on the horizon’ even when ‘there is a conscious and explicit attempt to be liberated from the limitations of the dejecting prism that the Israeli context forces on the systematic effort to think the moral matter and to interpret moral categories’. Ophir described the limitations as ‘first and foremost relevant to the meaning of the Holocaust in Israeli culture’. While it is beyond the scope of the present study to analyse his lengthy theoretical discussion of evil, a number of points bear clarification.

Having defined evil as ‘superfluous suffering’, something that has no value to the evil doer, Ophir offered a road map for rectifying Israel’s ‘moral blindness’ based on a three-step strategy for redefining the meaning of the Holocaust beginning with de-sacralising this genocide by universalizing its meaning. Ophir chose two ontological tools to achieve this goal: demystifying the magic name of Auschwitz and putting the genocide of the Jews on an ontological continuum of evil that essentially meant to ‘liberate Auschwitz from the dogma of uniqueness... to restore several conceptual continua to position it within the geography and history of contemporary evil’.<sup>416</sup>

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<http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/9912/writing.html>; Adi Ophir, ‘The Contribution of Global Humanitarianism’, in Workshop on The Catastrophe in the Age of Globalization, (Tel Aviv University, 2003) <http://roundtable.kein.org/sites/newtable.kein.org/files/moral%20technologies%20E.d>

<sup>415</sup> Ophir, *Order of Evil*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 22, 28, 165.



Citing Lyotrad's language games Ophir declared that in the 'conventional truth' Auschwitz played a 'metonymic role' - 'a catastrophe name-place that has magic power'. Indeed, 'the catastrophe name-place is always shrouded in a kind of aura that is signalled in a tone of voice... in the fragmentation of speech'. The aura signifies the inability to express the event in accordance to the rules of 'conventional truth game'. Stemming from the unique horror of the place conveyed by the testimony of the survivors, this particular aura 'partitioned those who seek to understand the catastrophe of the place from the place and event that the catastrophe was'. Since, in Ophir's view, the 'name must not be allowed to exert its magic power', the aura should be broken. Echoing Rassinier, he raised doubt whether survivors could be counted on to provide a picture of the horror that Auschwitz was.<sup>417</sup>

Though careful not to blame the former inmates themselves, Ophir nevertheless implied that they were 'bewitched' by their memories. In his opinion, this 'bewitchment' contributed to the separation between them 'and all the others who were not'. Ensnared by the magic name, they made it hard for others, presumable Ophir, and even some survivors - an apparent reference to his mentor Elkana - to make a more general sense of the catastrophe. The testimony of the survivors who became the guardians of the separation had to be given a different meaning, if the magic name of Auschwitz was to be erased. 'It must begin at precisely the point that the autobiography, the literature, and the history cease to represent and begin discussing the very problem representing the catastrophe... it must situate itself between the reader and the represented world... without assuming any act of identification or sympathy'. Given that Ophir considered the Holocaust to be a new

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<sup>417</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 520-22.

civil religion, he felt justified in describing his work as being akin to ‘desecrating the name of Auschwitz’.<sup>418</sup>

‘Desecrating the name of Auschwitz’ and placing the Holocaust on the same ontological continuum of evil proved a complex task forcing Ophir to wrestle with squaring Rassiner’s dictum that a ‘camp is a camp is a camp’ with his own definition of evil as a superfluous suffering serving no other goal. Quite clearly, since few camps could pass the restrictive muster of being a place where only superfluous evil was committed he proceeded to explain ‘a catastrophe place as a place where an exceptional concentration and intensification of evil-producing mechanisms occurred’. Ophir conceded that Auschwitz was one such place but insisted that according to ‘phenomenological logic’ guiding his work, the Holocaust did not pass the threshold of a vital test: of the appearance of something new out of something else. In other words, the evil of Auschwitz was not a unique case, a singularity, and should be placed on a continuum that included a long list of catastrophe places like Kolima, Kampuchea, Biafra, among others.<sup>419</sup>

To justify placing other catastrophe places on the continuum of evil, Ophir explained that the ‘suffering and loss is common to the ghetto and concentration camps, to the Gulag, and to refugee camps and prison camps in wartime’. But, as he realized, the concept of ‘suffering and loss’ was too vague to serve the comparative required by the ontological logic of his continuum of evil. As a result, he suggested that it ‘was possible to objectify loss and suffering’ by developing systematic knowledge ‘about the creation of loss and suffering, their mechanics and dynamics, and their enmeshing with various exchange systems in social space’. While admitting that such quantification was the subject of ‘future science,’ he felt confident that

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<sup>418</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 522, 527, 533.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 450, 519, 533, 536.

‘what I said about them so far is enough to signal the direction of this study’, namely that ‘the inferno of Nazi camps where Jews were imprisoned could be found in the Gulag and in war prisoner camps run by Japan and China’. He even went so far as to claim that Western ‘capitalist economy and the nation-state’ were ‘by far the most powerful of the systems producing and distributing superfluous evil’. ‘The United States and the industrialized countries of Europe’, he claimed, ‘methodically subjugated, exploited, plundered and destroyed’.<sup>420</sup>

Much as Ophir tried to convince his readers that from a phenomenological standpoint there were more similarities than unique cases on the catastrophe list, he felt the need to confront the industrial scale killings in Auschwitz, something that Holocaust deniers minimized or denied. Since Ophir could do neither, he was forced to come up with a rather peculiar explanation of the largest mass killing in modern history. In his version, if Auschwitz were a model of killing, ‘perhaps this was not an epitome of human distortion and perversion but rather of human excellence, a model in which killing was brought to a perfection of efficiency and precision’. Ophir gave the Germans - as opposed to perpetrators of messier and less organized evils - high marks for solving the problem of industrialized murder: ‘The industrial process included living raw material slated for extermination, and waste material created in the course of the production process that in turn needed to be eliminated. The incoming raw material took up almost the same volume as the waste material left after the production of death’. The Nazis’ ingenious solution was to invent the crematorium - an efficient way to reduce ‘waste’ from the death industry thus ‘creating a product that took up no space or volume’.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 534, 538.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 531,541-42.

To Ophir this efficiency did not indicate a singularity but rather an extreme case of the superfluity that made up the continuum of evil: 'Auschwitz turns from a private name into the family name of the victims of the West-Native Americans, the Africans, the Japanese of Hiroshima and all the rest'. Echoing Lyotard he concluded that 'Auschwitz becomes a metonym for the real; the *differend* of the memory of the extermination becomes a metonym for the *differend*; the problem of representing Auschwitz becomes a metonym for the representation of reality in general'. While conceding that the Jews were an ideal victim, an extreme *differend*, Ophir resisted the label of uniqueness. On the contrary, in his view, had the Germans won the war against the Soviet Union 'it is likely that an annihilation of the Slavic people would have commenced'. He further speculated that a stable Europe under Hitler would have entailed the extermination of other categories of *differends*, including 'the disabled and the mentally ill'. Quite clearly, the hypothesized annihilation of Slavs helped Ophir make the case against singularity: 'Anti-Semitism cannot explain the Nazi myth; it explains only the fact that the Jews were its first and principal victims'.<sup>422</sup>

That Ophir had to revert to such patently false, indeed absurd argument offered yet another indicator of the weakness of his continuum of evil construct. It was true that the Nazis considered the hundreds of millions of Slavs inferior, as Ophir noted, but they never planned to exterminate them - a task that would have exponentially dwarfed the extermination of Jews. On the contrary, Hitler planned to use the Slavs as labourers to serve the master race, a fact well publicized by the Nazis. Ophir's other examples were even more outlandish, including the following: 'People kill in a systematic, industrialized way as a matter of routine every day - killing animals for food'. Odious as the comparison between Jews and animals is, it

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<sup>422</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 543, 571.

contradicts his own definition of evil as superfluous suffering since animals are slaughtered for food. Ophir's parenthetical addition to the sentence - 'one should take into consideration the possibility, at the moment seemingly absurd, cynical, horrifying or insane that the three-and-a-half years in Auschwitz will pale in the face of centuries of industrialized slaughter, the endless and superfluous taking of life by human beings' - muddied the water further, since it could refer to either animals or human beings.<sup>423</sup>

Amassing technical examples in favour of a continuum of evil, however, left Ophir ill-prepared for the moral argument that historians Yehuda Bauer and Steven Katz mustered in describing Auschwitz as a unique Jewish tragedy. They and many other observers noted that it was the intent of the Nazis to exterminate the entire Jewish people that made the Holocaust a singular moral offense. To pre-empt the Bauer-Katz thesis Ophir postulated that intent should not matter in evaluating the morality of Auschwitz. He argued that

The intention to exterminate an entire group or other destructive or wicked intentions is important to the historical explanation... only when considering the structural conditions calling for and making possible the realization of this intention. Regarding the moral meaning, the importance of intent is doubtful. The same superfluous evil... could in principle have followed from a realized intention of total extermination... but it could also have followed from an abstinence from action capable of preventing an inadvertent extermination.

The latter part of the argument was particularly significant as it created a construct broad and ambiguous enough for Ophir to fit all his favourite examples of evil.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> *Ibid*, p. 530.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid*, p. 562.

Muddled as Ophir's arguments in favour of a continuum of evil were, the objective behind the campaign against the Holocaust's singularity was clear enough. Turning Auschwitz to a universal catastrophe would save the Israelis from themselves since 'the effort to singularize often serves to justify state crimes or to represent them in a way that fends off criticism', thus driving them to reach a 'dangerous point where the victims' heirs express positions and implement practices that are alarmingly reminiscent of the slippery slope that led "there"'. In plain English, by putting the Holocaust on a continuum of evil, Ophir was trying to restrain the Israeli Jews from engaging in Nazi-type behaviour towards Palestinians.<sup>425</sup>

Ophir listed a number of alleged Israeli offences stemming from control of the territories: 'The regime methodically deployed mechanisms of control and domination, reverted to violence, and employed ideological and technological means of "governance" that combined rule over the population with surveillance of each individual in it'. These and other methods were said to be part of a 'broad spectrum of possibilities for harming Palestinian subjects... through different forms of state violence'.<sup>426</sup>

Bearing in mind the ontological continuum of evil Ophir construed the charges in a way that maximized the Israel-Nazi Germany equation. Choosing terms to carefully convey that the Palestinians suffered their own Holocaust at the hands of the Jews he wrote about the 'gaping bottom of the slope' where the Palestinians, a 'superfluous group', were allegedly subject to 'methodical removal' and 'destruction'. Without using the name Auschwitz, Ophir claimed that Israel turned the territories into a 'chronic catastrophe place'. That only tens of thousands of Palestinians still lived under direct Israeli control at the time when the book was published made little

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<sup>425</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 560-61.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 59-92.

difference for Ophir.<sup>427</sup> As we saw it, ‘evil rolls on three slopes’, one being ‘governance and domination, or the possibilities available to the powers that be for harming their subjects in intentional and organized way; this is the methodized, controlled annihilation of a defined that is part of the population, of a size as large as the regime may wish’. By charging Israel with the ‘possibilities’ available through ‘governance and domination’, Ophir did not have to prove that it actually murdered masses of Palestinians in extermination camps, only that the Zionist ideology turned the Palestinians into superfluous ‘others’ in the same way as the Nazi ideology transformed the Jews into ‘others’ prior to their extermination.<sup>428</sup>

Critics like Yakira deplored Ophir’s habit of ignoring the empirical reality, pointing out that ‘there is certainly room to question’ whether ‘presenting Israel as a machine of evil, complete blind to the suffering of its victims, is true to the fact’. Yakira was especially annoyed by Ophir and other radical scholars who compared Israel’s control of the territories to the Final Solution, describing them sarcastically as self-appointed ‘bearers of special truth’ and members in a ‘kind of secret order of initiation’. Though Yakira presented a lengthy rebuttal of Ophir, positivist arguments could hardly win a debate with critical scholars who adamantly rejected the very notion of an objective reality.<sup>429</sup>

Indeed, as noted above, Ophir prided himself on being a moral entrepreneur engaged in inquiry that stood outside the ‘academic consensus’ - a reference to the mainstream community of positivist researches. Well aware that his scholarship

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<sup>427</sup> In accordance with the Oslo Accords by May 1994 Israel had completed its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip (apart from a small stretch of territory containing Israeli settlements) and the Jericho area of the West Bank. By the end of 1995 Israeli forces had been withdrawn from the West Bank’s populated areas with the exception of Hebron (where redeployment was completed in early 1997). See Efraim Karsh, ‘What Occupation?’ *Commentary*, July-August 2002.

<sup>428</sup> Ophir *Orders of Evil*, pp. 566, 587.

<sup>429</sup> Yakira, *Post-Zionism*, pp. 54, 66, 89.

needed alternative academic outlets, he founded the critical journal *Theory and Criticism (Teoria Uvikoret)* based at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. As head of the Political Lexicon project at the Minerva Centre for Humanities at Tel Aviv University, he created another journal, *Maft'e'ah (Key)*. Both publications served as a forum for Ophir's research that supported his ontological linkage between the Holocaust and the alleged Nazi-like treatment of the Palestinians. By one count there were some 52 items related to the Holocaust in *Teoria Uvikoret* and eleven in *Maft'e'akh*. Outside the academic discourse, Ophir expanded his ontological continuum of evil to political commentary as epitomized by a series of articles during Israel's 2008-09 operation against Hamas in Gaza. Using terms like 'zone of emergency' and 'zone of catastrophe' he claimed that 'Israel governs Gaza by an ongoing measured and calculated catastrophization that becomes more brutal, deadly and shameless with each wave of violence. More is yet to come'.<sup>430</sup>

Ophir's students furthered the Israel-Nazi imagery. In an article published in *Maft'e'ah*, Michal Givoni argued that testimony 'is more than just a piece of evidence, testimony marks the inscription of the political into an array of truth games, in which the truth is considered not an end itself but a medium for ethical and political transformation'. Crediting Lyotard and Ophir with abolishing the 'temporal and ontological gap that is usually presumed to separate testimony from the event', she derided the 'evil' manifested in the IDF's Gaza operation and argued that exposing the 'murderous plans' against the Palestinians was part of the testimony as 'moral witnessing'.<sup>431</sup> Ariella Azoulay, Ophir's colleague at the Minerva Humanities Centre - where she was listed as a photo-lexicographer - specialized in producing visual

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<sup>430</sup> Adi Ophir, 'Reflection on Gaza from Tel Aviv', *ZSpace* 11 January 2009 <http://www.zcommunications.org/reflections-on-gaza-from-tel-aviv-by-adi-ophir>.

<sup>431</sup> Michal Givoni, 'Witnessing/Testimony', *Maft'e'ah*, 2 (2011), p. 149.



depictions of the Nakba-Holocaust equivalency. Her favourite visuals featured Palestinians dressed as prisoners behind the separation fence to conjure up the fence surrounding Auschwitz. Occasionally, a caption would make the point that ‘in this act, too, Palestinians are the ones who will be arrested. This time, however, they force the Israeli soldiers to chase them as if they were chasing (Jewish) prisoners under the Nazi regime’.<sup>432</sup>

### **The Holocaust as a Psychological Deformity of the Jews**

While Ophir could take credit for applying the most radical form of French critical theory to demonstrate the Holocaust’s destructive impact on Israel, other activist scholars relied on a mixture of less defined analytical approaches to reach the same conclusion.

Moshe Zuckerman, a professor of German history at Tel Aviv University and a veteran Marxist activist, did much to spread the Israel-Nazi equation in the Marxist, pro-Palestinian circles in Germany, a frequent venue for his visits. In what was arguably a highly unorthodox theoretical choice, Zuckermann combined the Frankfurt School and neo-Marxist quest to uncover the ‘false consciousness’ behind societal ideology with psychoanalytical themes. He seemed particularly excited about the latter writing that ‘psychoanalysis has revolutionized academic and cultural thinking in the twentieth century’. Though admitting that Freudian psychoanalysis was controversial as a tool of social analysis, Zuckermann noted that the Frankfurt School made a successful attempt to connect ‘macro-sociological analysis of society with central categories of psychoanalysis’. One of his essays begins with ‘Moshe Zuckermann approaches his subject matter, the major ideological themes in Israeli

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<sup>432</sup> Ariella Azoulay, ‘When the Body Politic Ceases to be an Idea’, *Manifesta Journal*, 16, <http://www.manifestajournal.org/issues/regret-and-other-back-pages/when-body-politic-ceases-be-idea>.

political culture, inspired and informed by the Frankfurt School. His goal is to analyse the production of a common identity, which is by necessity 'a false consciousness'. To uncover the process responsible for the creation of this consciousness, 'what is habitually hidden must be uncovered'. Using these combined tools, Zuckermann claimed that the 'psychological deformation' of Israeli society stemmed from the 'ideologized Holocaust discourse'.<sup>433</sup>

Zuckermann put the psychoanalytical approach to use in an article that echoed Elkana's plea to forget the Holocaust, which he lauded as an 'unprecedented act of bravery' that chastised Israeli society for its national neurosis. While not opposed to private acts of remembrance, Zuckermann took a very dim view of the 'pathologically compulsive' public commemorations that enhanced the 'psychological deformation' of Israeli citizens. In his opinion, the deformation stemmed from the 'Holocaust credit' given to the Jews by a world feeling guilty for the genocide and willing to overlook the dispossession of the Palestinians that enabled Israel's creation. It was, in his opinion, the same 'Holocaust credit' that compelled the international community to overlook the many transgressions of the 'occupation'. Internally, the 'credit' bolstered nationalism and militarism in Israeli society to the point where, in his view, the question of whether 'it was possible for the victims to become murderers' could be legitimately raised. Indeed, Zuckermann found an 'associative link' between the alleged repression in the territories and Jewish suffering during the Holocaust. In his words, 'every dead of an action in Gaza, every victim of a volley fired in the air in the

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<sup>433</sup> Moshe Zuckermann 'Toward a Critical Analysis of Israeli Political Culture', in John Bunzl and Benjamin Beit Hallahmi (eds.), *Psychoanalysis, Identity and Ideology: Critical Essays on the Israel/Palestine Case* (Berlin: Springer Science-Business Media 2002), pp. 59-61.

West Bank, every act of brutal suppression' is rooted in Auschwitz. The Jewish collective has to behave in ways that could never be associated with Auschwitz.<sup>434</sup>

The Iraqi missile attacks on Israel during the 1991 Gulf War gave Zuckermann an opportunity to expand on these themes. In a book titled *Holocaust in the Sealed Room (Shoah Baheder Haatum)* he used press coverage to prove that the memory of the Holocaust, reduced to a 'cultural code', created a society that suffered from a deep neurosis interspersed with hysterical reactions. In his view, this neurotic mental state was reflected in the numerous references to Germany and the gas chambers and the inappropriate comparison between Saddam Hussein and Hitler underpinned by 'anxiety and baseless comparisons to the Holocaust'. Worse, the subtext of press articles indicated to him that Jews learned a highly particularistic lesson from the Holocaust: they alone were the victims of a unique catastrophe creating 'the whole-world-is-against us mentality' and a steely resolve of 'never again'.<sup>435</sup>

Needless to say, Zuckerman, like Ophir, was passionately opposed to Jewish particularism, advocating the perception of the Holocaust as 'the objectification of the most radical example of a relationship between murderers and murdered'. For him the Holocaust required individual survivors and the State of Israel to adopt a universalistic code of sanctifying all human life. Through this highly generalized ethos Zuckermann conveyed his very specific concern for alleged acts of oppression in the territories: 'The Zionist collective cannot escape the truth that every "deviation" in Gaza, every victim of a "warning shot in the air" in the West Bank, that every act of brutal suppression is distancing it from its ethical and humane conduct befitting victims of the Holocaust and moving it the realm of 'mentality represented by the

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<sup>434</sup> Moshe Zuckermann, 'The Course of Forgetting: Israel and the Holocaust', *Telos*, 21 December 1988, pp. 43-54, 78.

<sup>435</sup> Moshe Zuckermann, *Holocaust in the Sealed Room* (Tel Aviv: self published, 1993; Hebrew), pp. ix-x, 21-28, 150.

identity of the murderers'. Echoing Ophir, he blamed the use of the Holocaust memory for the creation of a xenophobic and militaristic society, accusing Israel of 'fetishization of the extermination sites'.<sup>436</sup>

Zuckermann reserved special rebuke for actual survivors who engaged in 'ideological reification', namely turning the memory of the Holocaust into a commodity, describing them as 'a noisy bearer of a well-marketed misery cliché'. Indeed, in his view, the memories of these individuals should be denied credibility as well as compassion. He displayed a particular contempt towards 'Holocaustologists' - his name for those who allegedly used the memories for material and ideological gains; Holocaust activist and Noble Peace Prize Laureate Eli Wiesel figured prominently on this list. This scorn was more than matched by his derision of the State of Israel that turned the memory of the victims into the 'Holocaust credit', a sort of unlimited credit card used to establish the state in the first place and to oppress the indigenous Palestinians.<sup>437</sup>

With his theory of a Holocaust-related 'psychological deformation' seemingly confirmed by the Gulf War, Zuckermann had a hard time coming to terms with the Oslo peace process. In particular, he needed to explain how Israeli Jews could reach out to the Palestinian 'Nazi-like' enemies, or talk to Yasser Arafat who was 'tabooed in the past as a Nazi'. Grappling with the discrepancy between his theory and political reality drove Zuckermann to some interesting intellectual zigzagging. He initially considered Oslo a devious ploy to perpetuate the status quo but the assassination of Rabin in November 1995 prompted a new interpretation whereby the Jewish 'tribe' had apparently split into two: the 'action-inclined fanatics', namely the settlers and their supporters, and the peace advocates inhabiting the Rabin camp. Zuckermann

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<sup>436</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 30, 60.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 30, 184.

claimed that the ‘alleged Jewish unity, nourished by Jewish history of real persecution, culminating in the Holocaust of the twentieth century, which provided Zionist ideology, over decades, with a seemingly everlasting impetus’ created an ‘Angst ideology’. With the Arabs feeding into the national angst, Zionism was able to maintain a consensus ‘in the face of the fetishized security problem’ until Rabin, a national security hero, managed to persuade the peace tribe to let go of the Holocaust memory curse.<sup>438</sup>

Zuckerman’s tentative willingness to give the ‘peace tribe’ the benefit of the doubt all but disappeared after the Camp David fiasco and the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada. His November 2000 essay ‘The Yearning of Anxiety and Ideology of Peace’ attested to considerable radicalization laced with bitterness and sarcasm. Zuckermann chose to blame Israel for the failure of Camp David while ignoring Barak’s offers and the US-Israeli position known as the Clinton Parameters - a blueprint for resolving the conflict that proposed an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital - and claiming that the Palestinians could not accept a deal without East Jerusalem. Equally important, in his view, was the fact that no peace settlement was possible without acknowledging the historical calamity that Israel inflicted on the Palestinians and a discussion of their ‘right of return’ – the Arab euphemism for Israel’s demographic subversion.

More broadly, Zuckermann linked the Camp David failure to the underlying dynamics of the Holocaust-deformed Israeli psyche that included a half-suppressed collective feeling of guilt towards the Palestinians that found its release in ‘catastrophic violence toward the subject of the guilt feelings’. Attributing such

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<sup>438</sup> Moshe Zuckermann, ‘The June 1967 War and its Influence on the Political Culture in Israel’, in Haim Gordon, (ed.) *Looking Back at the Six Day War* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), pp. 149-56.

dynamics to paranoid ideology of ‘perpetual victimhood’ Zuckermann explained that it blinded Israelis to the ‘cry of suffering, the humiliation and injustice of their [Palestinian] victims’. And by way of reinforcing the Nazi-Israeli symmetry he asserted that those who ‘benefited from the suffering of Jewish babies during the Holocaust were totally inured to fate of Palestinian babies who stayed anonymous’. As if this lengthy catalogue of alleged psychological deformations was not enough, Zuckermann felt compelled to end on a metaphysical note writing that it was the ‘yearning of anxiety’ - the siren call of Jewish existential victimhood - that defeated the ‘ideology of peace’.<sup>439</sup>

Zuckerman’s radicalization permeated the pages of his 2001 book, *On the Fabrication of Israelism: Myths and Ideology in a Society in Conflict*. Evoking the essay ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’ by Adorno and Horkheimer, he argued that the Israeli ‘culture industry’ was heavily influenced by manipulating the memory of the Holocaust. In this view, the state subverted the meaning of suffering by the victims by drawing a ‘Zionist-appropriate conclusions’ from the memory’. Worse, because of such subversion, Palestinians were killed without the need to properly designate it an act of murder:

A Jewish-Israeli *kalgas* killed a Palestinian child. In other words, not murdered, simply ‘killed’. One must be careful with words: In a society where the shock of the horrific in itself is less powerful than the overgrown narcissistic humiliation, because of the chosen words to describe the horrific, a shock that demands the right to protest, easily becomes a reason for libel-suit. But until the case is clarified in court one must not say that *kalgas* is *kalgas* and that the murdered was murdered.

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<sup>439</sup> Moshe Zuckerman, ‘The Yearning of Anxiety and the Ideology of Peace’, in Ophir (ed.), *Real Time*, pp. 265-74.

Zuckerman's use of the Hebrew term *kalgas* - loosely translated as a military thug, or mercenary, but used almost exclusively for Nazi soldiers - was highly indicative of his goal of deepening the Nazi-Israeli equivalency.<sup>440</sup>

Zuckerman's subsequent work, a compilation of letters and essays published under the title *Reification of Man: Aphorisms on Social, Political and Cultural Topics* hewed even closer to the Frankfurt School. As noted, the neo-Marxists added a discursive-psychological dimension to the 'false consciousness' theory claiming that modern culture turned human relations into a commodity with fixed market values. Zuckermann used this theory to argue that German and Israeli societies formed a symbiotic relationship based on the monetization of the Holocaust: 'Israel and Germany are Siamese twins' in which the former's quest for financial assistance was exchanged for latter's need for redemption for its sins. This profitable relationship, in Zuckerman's view, led to a wholesale fetishist attitude towards the 'Holocaust production'. Most interesting, Zuckermann adopted the classic Marxist accusation that Jews were responsible for anti-Semitism, this time around towards their collective entity, the State of Israel. He blamed the 'Zionist dialectics' for the new wave of anti-Semitism writing that 'after Israel was created, Jews honestly earned every gram of hatred that they attract' - as if six millions of them had not perished in the decade preceding the establishment of the Jewish state.<sup>441</sup>

The al-Aqsa Intifada and the subsequent standstill inspired Zuckermann to elaborate on the 'poisonous fruits' of the Holocaust. In an essay titled 'The Shoah [Holocaust] on Trial' Zuckermann revised his original theory, now claiming that the instrumentalization of the genocide's memory created the 'hatred of the Other'. He

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<sup>440</sup> Moshe Zuckerman, *On the Fabrication of Israelism: Myth and Ideology in a Society at Conflict* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2001; Hebrew), p. 103.

<sup>441</sup> Moshe Zuckerman, *Reification of Man: Aphorisms on Social, Political and Cultural Topics* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2003; Hebrew), pp. 13, 35, 52.

based the update on Walter Benjamin, an early member of the Frankfurt School, whose psychoanalytical insights influenced both Adorno and Horkheimer. In Zuckerman's rendition, 'hatred (like the will to see oneself as victim) feeds on the "image of the subjugated ancestor" as well as on one's own subjugation; at the same time, however, it makes one blind to the combated opponent and enemy, leads to blind demonization and an unrealistic Manichaeization of a just struggle for emancipation'.<sup>442</sup>

Applied to the Arab-Israeli conflict, these profound hidden dynamics took root after Israel normalized its relations with Germany leading to the diversion of the natural hatred Jews had allegedly harboured towards Germany to a different 'Other'. Zuckermann quoted a participant in the March of the Living to prove his point: 'Somebody has to be blamed for the Holocaust; we have to hate somebody, but we have already made our reconciliation with the Germans'. To illustrate how casual such a transformation could be he added that 'the easily performed transformation of the Nazi into a Pole, a Palestinian, or anybody else - indeed reveals the essentially vengeful and thus oppressive nature of the politically structured Israeli collective memory'.<sup>443</sup>

Zuckermann explained that 'the pupil expresses the need to hate because the Israeli collective memory never went through a real process of grieving; the collective recoils from remembering the Holocaust in terms of its having been the catastrophe of the victims'. Since the collective memory has not taught him to 'work through a true process of mourning... hatred is a necessity for him'. Collectively, 'this "hatred" turns

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<sup>442</sup> Idem, 'Shoah on Trial: Aspects of the Holocaust in Israeli Political Culture', in Ilan Pappé and Jamil Hilal (eds.) *Across the Wall: Narratives of Israeli-Palestinian History* (London: Tauris, 2010), pp. 75-86; idem, 'Islamofascism: Remarks on a Current Ideogeme', *Die Welt des Islams*, 52 (2012), p. 364.

<sup>443</sup> Zuckerman, 'The Shoah on Trial', pp. 79, 82-83.



out to be instrumental for the achievement and satisfaction of heterogonous goals and purposes, at time even the rhetorical legitimization of policies and ideologies that are clearly bound to produce an ever growing oppression and to result in more and more victims'.<sup>444</sup> This oppression was said to have transformed the land of Israel/Palestine into 'a landscape praised by its occupiers for the sanctity of its lands - and saturated by its occupiers with the pollution of oppression, with endless human suffering as well as with the death of hopes of a home and of homeliness, safety, tranquillity and peace'.<sup>445</sup>

With the Israeli-Palestinian conflict increasingly overshadowed by radical Islam and a new virulent form of anti-Semitism in Europe, Zuckermann was forced to change his approach again. Abandoning all academic pretences he took up the two subjects in a highly polemical German-language book *Antisemit!*. He strongly denied that Islam's hostility to Israel had mutated into anti-Semitism noting that 'anti-Semitic agitation in Arab media corresponds to anti-Arab racism in Israel'. Not satisfied with a simple equivalency, he suggested that the 'inhumane popular voice' of Israelis speaks larger than any anti-Arab propaganda. As for neo-anti-Semitism, in Zuckerman's opinion this was a consequence of Israel's 'inhumane policy' in the occupied territories and the attack on Gaza where the IDF committed 'war crimes'. All in all, he felt confident that the new anti-Semitism was engineered by Israeli Zionists: 'the claim of Zionism to overcome anti-Semitism (as an answer to it) made it necessary to preserve anti-Semitism in the world, as long as the project of Zionism does not come to a historical arrangement - according to central postulates of Zionism, has to continue until the majority of the Jews in the world, whether because

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<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>445</sup> Cited in Dora Apel, *War Culture and the Contest of Images* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2012), p. 215.

of life-historical pressures or as a result of free choice, do not live in the Zionist state of Israel, which was established for them'.<sup>446</sup>

In yet another effort to defend Islamism, Zuckermann invoked classic Marxist materialism. He declared that Western tendency to criticize Islam, including the use of the terms Islamofascism, has complex psychological roots: 'Islamophobia ideologizes those who are phobic about Islam... or if the already matured ideology requires phobia to ground its psychosocial anchoring in the public realm'. At the same time, 'the role attributed to both Islamist and non-Islamist protagonists in the Arab world is oriented solely towards their function in the pursuit of the geopolitical interests of American (or Western) capitalism. Islam and its Islamist representatives then become a problem when finding themselves in an economic-political contradiction to the interests and demands of the US that have very little to do with religion per se or with its specific shapes'.<sup>447</sup>

When discussing Germany, Zuckermann swapped quite inexplicably the Marxist generalization for a cultural explanation writing that Islamophobia was a mutated form of anti-Semitism. There the Islamophobic 'ideologeme is concocted - from the solidarity with Jews based on German historical responsibility, from the latent anti-Semitic projection of what is historically unresolved onto Islam, or from the rationalization of an already influential Islamophobia by means of a 'solidarity with the Jews' that can find an ideological consensus. Indeed, Zuckermann went so far as to accuse Israel of 'instrumentalizing' Islamophobia in Germany and beyond. The Jewish state was also blamed for generating Islamist anti-Semitism in yet another way. Zuckermann suggested that if Palestinians 'view settlers in the occupied

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<sup>446</sup> Moshe Zuckerman, *Antisemit! Ein Vorwurf als Herrschaftsinstrument* (Vienna: Promeida Verlag, 2010), p. 14.

<sup>447</sup> Moshe Zuckerman, 'Islamofascism. Remarks on a Current Ideologeme', *Die Welt des Islams*, 52/3-4 (2012), pp. 354, 357, 361-62, 364-65.

territories as the embodiment of everything Jewish and see the manifested repression as the essence of Jewishness, then their completely understandable anti-Zionism turns into anti-Semitism, thereby driving... hatred into excessive, ideologically solidified fantasies of annihilation'.<sup>448</sup>

Like Ophir, Zuckermann was criticized or echoing the work of Guillaume and the *La Vieille Taupe* circle, with some accusing him of gross misrepresentation of Israeli political culture and flirting with Islamism.<sup>449</sup> But there was virtually no effort to systematically scrutinize the methodology that underpinned his texts. Though Zuckermann claimed to follow the Frankfurt School, a closer analysis of *The Holocaust in the Sealed Room* and other writings reveals a version of classic reductionist tradition pioneered by the psychological anthropologist Geza Roheim. Akin to the psychoanalytical tradition in political science, the theory postulated that all mass phenomena could be conceptualized in terms of individual psychological processes. Rigorously applied, reductionism was expected to reveal the conscious and subconscious feelings of the collective. Yet critics such as Ernest Nagel and Michael Billing asserted that reductionist methodology - where the group and the individual were treated as isomorphic constructs – could lead to misinterpretation and abuse. Nagel, a leading philosopher of science, noted that such ‘hypostatic interpretations of what is denoted by collective terms have frequently been exercised in irresponsible intellectual construction’. Furthermore, ‘it is virtually impossible to assess their

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<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>449</sup> Yakira, *Post-Zionism*, pp. 101, 121, 124; Robert Wistrich, *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, the Jews and Israel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), p. 470.

validity since they are formulated far too unclearly to permit an unambiguous determination of what follows from them'.<sup>450</sup>

Insomuch as Zuckermann borrowed from classic reductionism, his threshold for scientific rigor was even lower than the lenient standards of the discipline. For instance, Nagel warned about the difficulties of creating a causal model out of hypostatical relations since individual conditions such as 'guilt' 'paranoia' or 'neurosis' could not be assumed to create a collective behaviour of 'submission' or 'aggression'. Ironically, Zuckermann admitted as much. Praising the Frankfurt School's ability to demonstrate great affinity between 'character formation' and 'political formation' he cautioned that 'such an approach is less concerned with a linear casual connection between depth-psychological [sic] influence on politics, which are often difficult to recognize, and their sedimentation in the realm of ideology'.<sup>451</sup>

Absolved from the need to prove causation between the 'Holocaust-deformed' Israeli character and perceived collective behaviour, Zuckermann was at liberty to relate the alleged Nazi-like treatment of the Palestinians to the historical trauma. The lack of a sound research protocol associated with reductionism made his other findings suspect as well. To recall, he claimed that Israelis displaced their hatred of Germans onto the Palestinians, but his evidence was limited to quoting two minor literary figures and an unverified teenage participant in the March of the Living. A similar lack of research standards marred *Holocaust in the Sealed Room*, which was based on quotes from editorials, articles and letters to the editor. As a rule, content

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<sup>450</sup> Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), p. 537; Michael Billing, *Social Psychology and Group Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 45-47.

<sup>451</sup> Zuckerman, 'Toward a Critical Analysis', p. 61.

analysis requires a representative sample of a larger universe of relevant cases; Zuckermann did not bother to explain the criteria underlying his choices thus raising the possibility of tendentious selection.

Zuckerman's vague, imprecise language and polemical style detracted further from the credibility of his work. Nagel was particularly concerned that 'irresponsible intellectual use' of reductionist theories would result in a polemical style and inflamed slogans masquerading as academic research. Zuckerman's determination that 'Islamofascism' was a tool in the campaign to defame Islam - and one that Israel played a key role in producing - fits closely Nagel's warning. Even a perfunctory bibliographical search would have shown that the 1979 revolution in Iran triggered a serious academic debate on the nature of the Islamist regime. The prestigious journal *World Politics*, for instance, published an article that found the Islamic revolution to share some core characteristics with 'regressive' fascist movements. Subsequent research linked Islamism with the phenomenon of generic fascism.<sup>452</sup>

Zuckerman's decision to forgo any comparative perspective undermined his work in other ways as well. As we have seen, *Holocaust in the Sealed Room* made much of the fact that, traumatized by the Holocaust, Israeli Jews took to comparing Saddam Hussein (who resorted to massive use of chemical weapons during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, including many attacks on civilians) to Hitler's gassing of the Jews. In fact, similar comparisons were made by non-Jews and, on at least one occasion, by an American president.

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<sup>452</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, 'Iran's Islamic Revolution in Comparative Perspective', *World Politics*, April 1986, pp. 383-414; Jeffrey M. Bale, 'Islamism and Totalitarianism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion* 10 (2009), pp. 73-96; Emilio Gentile, 'Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion*, 5/3 (2004), pp. 335-75; Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*.

Zuckerman's treatment of work on Saddam's psychology was arguably 'intellectually irresponsible' in the way defined by Nagel. In order to demonstrate that the brutal Iraqi dictator was a figment of the Holocaust-scarred Israeli imagination, Zuckermann mocked the psychological studies of Saddam, calling them 'pop-psychology' and 'pseudo-psychology'. He found it especially amusing that some scholars pointed to the resemblance between Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and Saddam's *Our Struggle*, a programmatic book that was a required reading in Iraq. In reality, the noted psychiatrist Jerrold Post, founder of the CIA's Psychological Profiling division and a leading expert on political leaders, who testified before Congress in the run-up to the 1991 Gulf War, took a very different position. He and other experts painted Saddam as a ruthless tyrant who emulated Hitler and Stalin and was given to high risk taking and miscalculations. In Post's view, Saddam was not a 'madman' but a highly dangerous leader because of a mixture of 'messianic ambitions, absence of consciousness, unrestrained aggression and a paranoid outlook'. Closer to home, Zuckermann should have been aware of similar psychological assessments by two respected Israeli experts on Iraq - Amatzia Baram of the University of Haifa and Ofra Bengio of Tel Aviv University, Zuckerman's home institution.<sup>453</sup> But whatever their empirical findings, positivist scholars were unlikely to persuade Zuckerman.

Nor were the facts ever allowed to stand in the way of Zuckerman's fellow traveller - Moshe Zimmermann, Professor of German history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who hasn't shied away from persistent indictment of Israel, including the odious equation between Israelis and Nazis.

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<sup>453</sup> Zuckerman, *Holocaust in the Sealed Room*, pp. 79-88; Jerrold Post, 'A Political Personality Profile of Saddam Hussein', Testimony to House Foreign Relations Committee, December 1990, quoted in Ofira Seliktar, *The Politics of Intelligence and American Wars with Iraq* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 50-52.

Unlike his Tel Aviv colleague, Zimmermann, did not use critical, neo-Marxist methodology to prove that the Holocaust deformed the collective Israeli Jewish mindset. Instead he opted for what could be defined as political polemics with an overlay of popular psychology. Yet even without the methodological pretences, Zimmermann's work was remarkably similar to that of the critical scholars. His 2002 *Germany's Past, Israel's Memory* showcased all the critical themes, including a chapter that paid the *de rigueur* homage to Elkana. He related Israel's aggressive foreign policy to the instrumentalization of the Holocaust memory and the 'credit' it received from an international community (supposedly) overcome with guilt and remorse for allowing the catastrophe to occur. In Zimmerman's words, it 'was passive during the Holocaust and active in 1948'.<sup>454</sup>

Much in the same popular psychology style Zimmermann castigated the 'March of the Living' and visits to *Yad Vashem*, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. Strongly implying that such excursions served as an incubator of nationalism, chauvinism and other alleged pathologies he repeated Elkana's plea for 'forgetting'. Still, he was less than optimistic since the instrumentalization of the Holocaust depended on a multipronged effort of memorialization. According to Zimmermann, in the early days of the state there was little public commemoration or indeed, a certain neglect bordering on indifference, and it was the Eichmann trial that unleashed the pervasive memory manipulation. Much like Elkana, he considered the Holocaust memory to be a curse that propelled Israel towards an oppressive, fascist state.

Evidently encouraged with the foray into popular psychology, Zimmermann decided to diagnose additional problems of the collective Jewish-Israeli psyche. One of his new topics was a dig at the 'muscle Jewry' - creation of the Zionists - as

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<sup>454</sup> Moshe Zimmermann, *Germany's Past, Israel's Memory* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2002; Hebrew), pp. 25- 26.

opposed to the 'nervous Jewry' of the Diaspora. But it was Zimmermann's diagnosis of 'Israel's prenatal memory' that took the popular psychology genre to a new frontier. In a take on the 'original sin' theory, he postulated that the birth of Israel was affected by the 'prenatal anxiety' stemming from the Holocaust.<sup>455</sup>

Popular psychology was only one of the tools Zimmermann applied to analysing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Another was projecting his own beliefs on groups such as the German Jews who arrived - like his parents - in Palestine during the 1930s. Without producing any empirical evidence he claimed that the majority of German Jews were averse to 'Zionist politics fixed upon the conflict with Arabs'. Since it was impossible to ascertain how many German Jews were Buberites, the tactic served to provide a broader legitimacy to Zimmermann's own views.<sup>456</sup>

With a growing inventory of alleged psychological abnormalities it was only a matter of time before Zimmermann produced a book-length study on the alleged root-cause of Israel's supposed reluctance to make peace with the Palestinians. According to his diagnosis, the Israelis harboured a deep fear of peace brought about by the Holocaust experience that, for political reasons, was manipulated by the government, the media and right-wing groups. Zimmermann's theory was simple: these and other elements spread the fear of another Holocaust because they were either fearful or sought to exploit the potential of fear to induce anxiety and strife. This artificially fomented fear was said to be directed against Arabs and Palestinians, the ultimate 'other'. Consequently, after decades of manipulation, Israeli Jews have developed a fear of peace.

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<sup>455</sup> Moshe Zimmermann, 'Muscle Jewry - the Remedy to the Nervous Jewry', *Zmanim* 83 (2003), pp. 56-65; idem, 'Israel's Prenatal Memory: Born in 1948 - Traumatized in 1938', in Ruth Wodak and Gertrud Auer-Borea, (eds.) *Justice and Memory: Confronting Traumatic Past* (Austria: Erschienen, 2009), pp. 309-16.

<sup>456</sup> Moshe Zimmermann, *Deutche gegen Deutsche: Das Schicksal der Juden 1938-1945* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2008), p. 247.



To support this theory Zimmermann offered the following observations: The fear of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust was turned into the foundation of a system of socialization that turned it into a political guideline and a psychological state permeating the entire society. Seventy five per cent of Jewish voters who cast their votes for the dominant right-wing parties in 2009 were clearly an indication of the success of the socialization system; these parties grew strong because of the perception of a perpetual victim and advocated a pre-emptive war in order to avoid 'another Holocaust'. These and other elements of the Israeli society made it hard to conduct meaningful peace negotiations because of fear of being perceived as 'suckers'. Finally, these groups keep Israel's foreign supporters at bay by spreading fears and insecurity which in turn makes the latter hostage to their alarmist visions and insecurities to prevent movement towards peace.<sup>457</sup>

Zimmermann extended his diagnosis of the alleged Holocaust pathology to what was described as a special kind of Israeli arrogance - as sort of 'we can do anything' attitude. The Holocaust 'dispensation' affected all facets of Israeli policy but was most pervasive, in his view, in the mistreatment of the Palestinians. This alleged fact led to new wave of anti-Semitism that, ironically, triggered fresh existential fears. All in all, this anxiety was said to create a deep-seated paranoia in the population, keeping the society psychologically isolated and immersed in self-righteousness - an ominous combination made more combustible because of the nuclear arsenal. Zimmermann found it particularly alarming that Israel turned Iran into a 'surrogate demon and a new evil state'.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 22-23, 118.

<sup>458</sup> Moshe Zimmermann, *Die Angst vor dem Frieden: Das israelische Dilemma* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag: 2010), p. 142.

After years of writing about the alleged propensity of the Israeli Jews to exaggerate the danger of anti-Semitism, Zimmermann was taken aback by 'What Must be Said' - a recent poem by Gunter Grass widely considered to be anti-Semitic. He reiterated that 'Israel likes to seal itself off, reducing itself to the idea that it is surrounded by enemies. The government's doctrine is that Israel must defend itself against its enemies. There has to be a "Zionist response" to the 'anti-Semites'. This is an Israeli reflex'. But he was forced to acknowledge that Grass's writings took anti-Semitic overtones since the writer held Israel rather than Iran responsible for a possible nuclear catastrophe. Still, rather than chastising Grass, Zimmermann chose to lament that the writer helped the Israeli right-wing, not least by providing a confirmation that 'the whole world is against us'. Zimmermann's own reluctance to help the 'right-wing' generated a tortured answer to whether Grass is now an anti-Semite: 'This is a complex issue that requires even more complex answers. Of course, Grass is not a rabid anti-Semite who wants to expel or murder Jews. But anti-Semitism is much more complex than that. And Grass uses images and myths that are tinged with anti-Semitism'.<sup>459</sup>

Zimmerman's work was enthusiastically reviewed by German analysts from the radical left and pro-Palestinian circles. The German-language *Fear of Peace*, in particular, was celebrated by those who, in the words of one commentator, uncovered the pathology of Israel's political culture that 'if you believe in the statements of many of its politicians and intellectuals - even willing to use these terrible of all

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<sup>459</sup> Moshe Zimmermann, 'Absurd Travel Ban. Gunter Grass Has Aided Israel's Right Wing', *Spiegel Online International*, 9 April 9 2012.

weapons [nuclear weapons] without hesitation – one dare not imagine what this would mean for the Middle East’.<sup>460</sup>

Some Israeli analysts, however, criticized Zimmermann’s methodology, finding it hand-tailored to produce polemics expressing a personal point of view. Projecting a post-Zionist view on a historical group - as noted above - was a favourite technique, according to one critic. A much more troubling product of Zimmermann’s and – and to the same extent, Zuckerman’s - methodology was to legitimize the link between the Holocaust and the Nakba. In a strongly worded article, Seth Frantzman argued that German history professors bore special blame because they ‘should have known better’ that the Holocaust was a unique event, in no way comparable to the Nakba. He also charged the German history departments in Israel for ‘mission creep’ - that is allowing their faculty tasked with studying German history - to write about the alleged impact of the Holocaust on the Israeli psyche. His conclusion was that such abuse of academic freedom has greatly contributed to the process of perverting Israeli intellectual thought by comparing of Zionism and Nazi Germany.<sup>461</sup>

### **The Holocaust as ‘Zionist Capital’**

Idith Zertal was a relative newcomer to the ‘opprobrium community’ but, in most respects, she was a perfect fit. A former journalist and cultural essayist, Zertal was the editor of *Zmanim*, a historical journal she co-founded with Yossi Sarid, one time leader of the left-wing Meretz party where she held a position of influence. A bitter critic of Israeli policies in the territories, she was involved in numerous pro-Palestinian activities.

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<sup>460</sup> Arn Strohmeyer, ‘Peace with Arabs would be a nightmare, [http://www.arendt-art.de/deutsch/palestina/Stimmen\\_deutsch/strohmeyer\\_arn\\_angst\\_vor\\_frieden\\_zimmermann\\_moshe.htm](http://www.arendt-art.de/deutsch/palestina/Stimmen_deutsch/strohmeyer_arn_angst_vor_frieden_zimmermann_moshe.htm).

<sup>461</sup> Seth Frantzman, ‘Israeli Scholars of German, the Nazis & Nakba’, *Words and War*, 22 February 2009. <http://www.wordsandwar.com/2009/05/08/israeli-scholars-of-german-nazis-and-nakba/>.

Zertal made her academic debut in a work on the history of the *Mossad Lealiya Bet*, an organization founded in 1939 to facilitate ‘illegal’ Jewish immigration to mandatory Palestine, known as *haapala*. A precursor of the modern-day Mossad, the secret group worked in conjunction with the Jewish Agency and *Palyam*, the maritime unit of Palmah, the Special Brigades of the Hagana. Between 1945 and 1948 over 100,000 Jews, mostly Holocaust survivors in Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Germany, attempted to enter Palestine. Unwilling to relax its strict immigration quotas for fear of Arab response, Britain intercepted the majority of the ships and sent their passengers to detention camps in Cyprus and as far as Mauritania. In what became one of the most dramatic and symbolic events of the *haapala*, in 1947 the British boarded the ship *Exodus* and forcibly removed the passengers who were sent back to Germany. The *Exodus* affair attracted worldwide attention and embarrassed the British government; the famous American journalist I.F Stone travelling with the refugees helped to publicize their plight in his highly acclaimed book, *Underground to Palestine*.<sup>462</sup>

In taking up the subject of Holocaust survivors in Israel Zertal was hardly a research pioneer. By the end of the 1980s, a burgeoning literature on the subject included a number of doctoral dissertations, scholarly publications and even popular books. A subset of the field dealing with *haapala* threw light on the complexities of gathering the DPs and smuggling them on board of ships destined for Palestine. The historian Aviva Halamish, an expert on the period, credited the Yishuv for reasonably good work under the extreme circumstances of post-war Europe; she acknowledged,

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<sup>462</sup> Isidor F. Stone, *Underground to Palestine*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

however, that in the general chaos the old, the very young and pregnant women were allowed to make the hazardous journey.<sup>463</sup>

Tom Segev, the revisionist journalist and New Historian, touched upon the subject in his numerous writings. It was his controversial *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* however, that raised doubts about the benevolence of the Yishuv towards the survivors. In a chapter evocatively titled 'A Barrier of Blood and Silence' he suggested that the Jews of mandatory Palestine were ambivalent at best and repulsed at worst by the new arrivals: 'People sincerely feared meeting the survivors face to face, with their physical and psychological handicaps, their suffering and terror. How we will live with them, they asked themselves over and over again - and their fears were justified'. When describing the children-survivors and their Israeli caregivers, Segev went even further: 'an all-out battle war between the old and the new, a mythic battle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness'.<sup>464</sup>

Zertal's initial take on *haapala* was hardly controversial. In a 1989 article she referred to the survivors as 'disappeared souls' and wondered why, despite their importance in the *haapala* saga, not to mention their demographic mass, they disappeared from the public and political map. Along the way Zertal acknowledged that Ben-Gurion was received with huge enthusiasm during his visit to the DP camps; more to the point, opinion polls carried out by non-Zionist sources indicated that the vast majority of the refugees wanted to immigrate to Israel.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Aviva Halamish, 'Britain vs. Exodus 1947: who won and at what price?' in Nahum Bogner, Avivah Halamish, Idith Zertal (eds.) *The Contribution of the Haapala to the Struggle Against the British, 1945-1947* (Yad Tabenkin: Ramat Efal, 1991; Hebrew).

<sup>464</sup> Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991), pp. 158, 169.

<sup>465</sup> Idith Zertal, 'Disappearing Souls: The Maapilim and the Mossad Lealiya Bet in the Struggle for the Establishment of the State and Thereafter', *Hatzionut*, August 1989, pp. 107-26 (Hebrew).

But shortly afterwards, during a 1990 conference organized by Halamish on the subject of the haapala, Zertal changed her stand. Abandoning the question of why the survivors disappeared from public consciousness, she postulated that the Zionists used the Holocaust in general and the survivors in particular for political purposes. That the Holocaust helped to create the Jewish state was, of course, not a new idea; but Zertal upped the ante by accusing Ben-Gurion and his colleagues for turning the survivors into political cannon fodder. As she saw it, there were two basic approaches to dealing with Jewish people: 'the work of the future' (*avodat haatid*) and the work of the present (*avodat hahove*). The former was defined as a future-oriented Zionist project where individuals were secondary to the ultimate, messianic goal of creating the state and redeeming the Jewish collective. The latter was said to focus on the Jewish people with a view to catering to their needs in the present regardless of how such a focus would affect nation-building. To her mind, by adopting the 'work of the future' the Zionists sacrificed the real necessities of the Jews, including the Holocaust refugees brought to Palestine. In the manner of critical scholars, Zertal summed up her research by declaring that there was no 'one truth' in narrating history expressing the hope that her narrative would gain wide acceptance.<sup>466</sup>

Indeed, her 1996 book *Zehavam shel Hayehudim: Hahagira Hayehudit Hamahrtit Leerets Israel, 1945-1948* (*The Gold of the Jews: The Clandestine Jewish Immigration to Palestine, 1945-1948*) was a match to Segev's book. Thanking Moshe Zuckermann for inspiration, she emphasized her commitment to critical scholarship: 'the new perspective is the result not only of new evidence but also of new historiographical concept and issues central to the historian's time and place. Such new perspective... may provide a more subtle and sophisticated decoding of

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<sup>466</sup> Idith Zertal, 'The Mossad Lealiya Bet as a political tool of the Zionist leadership', in Bogner et al (eds.), *The Contribution*, p. 53.

those events and offer new insights'. Given Zertal's intensive political involvement, there was little doubt that the issue central to her concern was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The reference to 'sophisticated decoding' was a way of signalling the alleged superiority of critical scholarship over positivist history while allowing a liberal approach to empirical material in the manner of New Historians.<sup>467</sup>

Zertal deconstructed the 'official Zionist narrative' of the 'illegal immigration' by advancing two interrelated claims. The first posited that Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders cynically unscrupulously used the Holocaust survivors to create a Jewish state. She explained that the 'Israeli Zionist collective' benefited from the 'immense political power precisely from the "collapse of the earth", from the ultimate Jewish catastrophe'. Noting that Ben-Gurion was particularly cold and calculating, she described him as 'the theorist and expert practitioner of transforming Jewish agony into Zionist power' eager to turn Holocaust survivors into 'the object he needed for the complete realization of his concept of "exploiting the Jewish tragedy"'.<sup>468</sup>

The Mossad officials received equally bad reviews. Yehuda Arazi was described as 'an adventurer, a lover of life, and a hedonist' who used illegal arm shipments to smuggle 'high-quality chocolate, and sausages, and expensive bottles of liquor'. Of Shaul Meirov, Zertal wrote that he 'lacked uniqueness and charisma' as well as operational experience but got ahead due to his belonging to 'every primary sociological grouping in the Palestinian Zionist community'. Hinting that he was an elitist phony with no compassion or interest in the welfare of the survivors, she blamed him for reckless endangerment of refugees going back to the 1940 sinking of the refugee ship *Patria* where more than 260 perished. All in all, the *haapala* leaders

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<sup>467</sup> Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: The Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. xi, 4.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 6, 37, 215.

were said to be driven by a strong desire to pursue ‘consciousness mobilizing’ through spectacular public relations stunts like the *Exodus*.<sup>469</sup>

In Zertal’s view, both the ideological imperatives and personal psychology combined to create an atmosphere where the wishes of the survivors were routinely ignored. To prove the point, the book detailed the alleged strong-armed tactics used by the organizers to get the refugees onto the boats. Accordingly, in many cases, peer pressure was applied on those reluctant to immigrate to Palestine; on the boats, survivors were allegedly manipulated into acts of resistance and mass hunger strikes that took a toll on a highly vulnerable population. Zertal concluded that there was little sympathy for those who were killed and wounded in the process of defying the British. She described as ‘pompous’ the eulogy offered by Yigal Allon, the Palmah commander: ‘Our pain at their death, and at their absence from our camp, is great, but in the end we are saving ourselves additional sacrifices and directly helping to save many who could expect destruction’. She stated, ‘In fact, the Yishuv suffered no pain at all’ as most of the ‘refugees remained anonymous’.<sup>470</sup>

If anything, Zertal’s second claim was even harsher, painting the Zionist leaders as horrified and repulsed by the Holocaust remnants. To reach this conclusion she borrowed from Sigmund Freud’s article on deep-seated alienation capable of transforming a phenomenon that is *heimlich*, meaning ‘the intimate, the close, the well and long known’ into *unheimliche*, denoting ‘the uncanny, the foreign, the threatening, the mysterious’. In her view, though the Zionist discourse on the refugees was ‘suffused with the rhetoric of pity’ it was also patronizing and stigmatizing - ‘the other side of the deep terror aroused in the Zionist subject by this familiar stranger, this close yet distant diasporic arriving in the homeland’. She quoted a

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<sup>469</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 37, 177-82.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid*, p. 151.



number of *haapala* operatives who complained about the poor 'human material' or stating that 'the refugee element is very bad'.<sup>471</sup>

But the crux of Zertal's theory rested on what was described as two 'canonical' texts, 'My Sister on the Beach' authored by Yitzhak Sadeh, the famed Palmah commander, and 'Michael's Page' by the leading poet Nathan Alterman. Without explaining why the texts should be considered 'canonical' she decided to treat them as 'historical documents' - rather than the more customary 'literary representation of the historical'. To confuse matters further, Zertal declared that 'my reading of these texts is "suspicious"... assuming that every text contains traces of something that the author is unconscious... traces of what he does not want to be uttered or is not utterable'.<sup>472</sup>

In Sadeh's poetic exhortation addressed to a refugee 'sister' carried to the shore by Palmah members, Zertal found a stark juxtaposition between the 'beaten, filthy and weeping' survivor of a concentration camp brothel for Nazi officers and the healthy, strong and courageous native sons. Such contrast, in her view, was a double insult to the girl - an example of the Zionist patronizing of the weak and defenceless Diaspora Jews as well a male-chauvinistic treatment of women. By branding her 'For Officers Only' Sadeh violated the girl once again, 'for all the agonies she has already known. The additional blow is the gaze directed at the girl - interrogative, selective, all-knowingly hegemonic stigmatizing and invasive - a look that marks her and transforms her into an appropriated object whose innermost privacy is desecrated'. Zertal has little doubt that, subconsciously, Sadeh was 'in line with the popular local parlance... that the girl survived the Holocaust... because she did not defend the integrity and the purity of her body, because her (Jewish) body served (Nazi)

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<sup>471</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 262-63, 271-72.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 217, 263-64.

officers'. Since her body was 'defiled' by serving as her ticket to life, she was a loser twice: 'She is defeated in every way, damned by the Law of the Land of Israel and tainted by the masculine law of Yitzhak Sadeh, the emblematic creator of the new Israeli manliness'.<sup>473</sup>

Deplorable as Zertal found Sadeh's treatment of Diaspora representatives, she considered Alterman's take on the *unheimlich* positively egregious. Like Sadeh, Alterman conjured up a night time embarkation of refugees on a beach, but in this case Zertal did not detect even the 'rhetoric of pity'. In Alterman's words the rescuers sensed the 'fear in their [survivors] breath, and the moaning of their tortured and outcast bodies: But also their hands closing on our throats'. With the survivors multiplying in the land, they 'will wander among the masses...in a war of two... unseen and unbridled, will crawl like a thread... to resolve whether its millstone will grind the grain or the grain grind the millstones'.

Zertal, who considered Alterman Ben-Gurion's poetic alter ego, suggested that the poem reflected an existential anxiety of the Zionists - the bearers of the Diaspora burden - and the 'ravaged and defeated remnants'. She noted that in the Alterman text there was no body-to-body touch between the two groups on the beach, 'not an instant of eye contact between the bearer and the burden'. 'If in Sadeh's text the gaze is imbued with ideology and culture', she wrote, 'here there is no gaze at all, no recognition'. Reading further into the alleged chasm between the two cultures posited by Alterman, Zertal noted the 'the fatal distance... cannot be bridged unless Zionist hegemony is imposed... only the Diaspora must fundamentally and unilaterally change and cease to be what it is, and in this way fulfil its function in the Zionist scenario'.

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<sup>473</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 263-69.

At the same time, Zertal found the poem to represent the ‘unexpected, mysterious, ostensibly paradoxical anxiety’ that amounted to the Zionist unconsciousness, ‘a life-and-death war between the bearers and the burden, the grain and the millstone, two mutually exclusive entities that cannot dwell together’. Moreover, while an unexpected public relations bonanza and a ‘vital but terrifying act in the great project of establishing a state out of destruction’ the refugees were met with a strong ambivalence: ‘Yet this is not a welcome of unconditional love, an act of inclusion stemming from real compassion, but rather an “unseen and unbridled” war, an encounter of life charged with potential death’. Reading even deeper into Alterman, Zertal imputed yet another layer of meaning: ‘Another saying is insinuated into the verse, one that undermines the accepted power equation...between the bearers and the burden. The ostensibly omnipotent Israeli might be broken and destroyed by the presence of the previously negated and repressed Diaspora’.<sup>474</sup>

By ending the book with the poetic texts Zertal hoped to strengthen her otherwise historical account of the alleged objectification and exploitation of the Holocaust refugees. Stretching the argument further, she was able to condemn the entire ‘Zionist project’ for its willingness to ‘obliterate that ‘other’ by ignoring it. Worse still, Zertal charged Ben-Gurion and his colleagues of refusing to ‘see’ the Final Solution by not harnessing ‘all its resources for a great, uncalculated, even if largely hopeless rescue campaign’. She explained that the failure to come to the aid of the European Jews stemmed from the overriding Zionist goal to prevent ‘the vision of a Jewish state’ from shattering ‘under the overwhelming weight of horror and mourning’. In this complex Zionist script, Zertal argued, the victims had to be

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<sup>474</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 270-71.

simultaneously sanctified and tarnished 'in order to realize the ultimate, complete Zionist redemption - the Jewish state'.<sup>475</sup>

Well-written and clearly articulated, Zertal's work attracted considerable public attention, both positive and negative. While post-Zionist scholars and Arab sources produced rave reviews, critics accused the author of selective use of facts and fabricating a narrative that fitted her political agenda. Uri Goren, a captain on one of the haapala vessels, wrote a letter to Zertal to protest the depiction of the Aliya Bet operatives as cynical manipulators of the Holocaust survivors. The former Palyam member was most emphatic that those boarding the ships, including the Exodus, were highly eager to immigrate to Palestine. In his own book, *On Both Sides of the Crypto*, Goren related how overwhelmed his colleagues were by the enormous tragedy that had befallen their charges and how hard they tried to help them. Goren urged Zertal to interview the survivors, only to elicit her comment that 'historical research is not a copy of what people recalled. Decent historical analysis involved critical analysis, sometimes painful analysis of texts and documents of the related period'.<sup>476</sup>

But Zertal's virtually exclusive reliance on the official documents of the Mossad for Aliya Bet raised a serious methodological question of how she could determine that the survivors were reluctant immigrants at best, and coerced onto the boats, at worst. If Zertal felt that people could not be trusted to recall events from their past - a questionable proposition in social science research - she could have used a large body of contemporaneous evidence such as flyers, bulletins and newspapers published in the camps, articles in the Jewish press and other documents.

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<sup>475</sup> *Ibid*, p. 274.

<sup>476</sup> Uri Goren, *On both Sides of the Crypto*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2008), pp. 204- 12.

Zeev Mankowitz, a doctoral student at the Hebrew University did extensive research on the attitudes of survivors in DP camps in the American sector in Germany. His dissertation 'The Politic and Ideology of Survivors of the Holocaust in the American Zone of Occupied Germany 1945-1946' was defended in July 1987, years before Zertal commenced her project. Mankowitz claimed that, as a rule, the DPs were highly motivated to reach Palestine, a fact confirmed in the polls quoted in her own 1989 article 'The Disappeared Souls'. As Dan Michman, a professor of Holocaust studies at the Bar-Ilan University, noted, Zertal managed to give credibility to her theory by careful cherry-picking of evidence.<sup>477</sup>

Zertal's methodology behind the 'canonic texts' was also questioned. The Holocaust historian Dalia Ofer denounced the use of the poems as historical texts noting that 'by making a very imprudent literary use, she derived a far-fetched philosophical conceptual point on the relations between the Yishuv and the immigrants'. Ofer suggested that positivist scholarship would not allow for such an overreaching generalization but using the critical approach Zertal disregarded facts and bent research rules to fit her theory of subjection and manipulation.<sup>478</sup>

Such criticism notwithstanding, by the early 2000s Zertal had embraced the more radical brand of critical Holocaust scholarship pioneered by Ophir and Zuckerman. She offered a preview of her new approach in a 2000 article titled 'From the People's Hall to the Wailing Wall: A Study in Memory, Fear and War' was a nod

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<sup>477</sup> Zeev Mankowitz, 'The Politic and Ideology of Survivors of the Holocaust in the American Zone of Occupied Germany 1945-1946', Hebrew University of Jerusalem, PhD dissertation, July 1987; Dan Michman, 'From Holocaust to Resurrection! From Holocaust to Resurrection?' *Studies in Israeli and Modern Jewish Society* (Beersheba: Ben Gurion University, 2000; Hebrew), p. 250.

<sup>478</sup> Dalia Ofer, 'The Bearers and the Burden: Between Means and Goals - Policy, Olim, Immigrants and Ordinary people (On *Zehavam Shel Hayehudim* by Idith Zertal)', *Studies in Israeli and Modern Jewish Society* (Beersheba: Ben-Gurion University, 1998; Hebrew), pp. 633, 636, 640 642-44.

to Ophir's theory of Holocaust worship. After paying the customary lengthy homage to Elkana, Zertal offered the stock lament that 'it appears that in this age the affliction with memorization and obsession with rituals of commemoration is actually an immense concerted assault on our very ability just to remember the past'.<sup>479</sup>

Her 2002 book, *The Nation and Death, (Hauma Vehamvet)*, offered a lengthy exposition of this theme starting with the Ophir-like assertion that Auschwitz was used to create a national martyrology of the 'sanctified and sacrificed'. Before the Holocaust could be made into a focal power of national worship, she argued, it had to be 'Zionized', a term describing the alleged highjacking of key Holocaust events to fit the national-Israeli narrative. To prove her point, Zertal contended that the Warsaw ghetto uprising was incorporated 'into the chain of Israel's heroic battles for its homeland and the "Zionist" wars'; to this end, the 'expunging of its incompatible, non-Zionist components' had to be carried out.<sup>480</sup>

Marek Edelman, the uprising's deputy commander, was a prime example of the alleged Zionist 'expunging' of the national narrative. Describing Edelman's exclusion as the 'most striking case of silencing and obscuring' Zertal noted that the former Bund member and 'subsequently a Polish socialist' refused to view 'the establishment of the State of Israel as the belated "meaning" of the Holocaust'. She added that Edelman was not a Zionist and even after the war viewed Poland as his homeland 'because it was the place where his friends had died and his people been felled'. In her view, though Edelman conducted himself well in the uprising he protested at the collective suicide of the uprising commander, Mordechai Anielewicz, and his fellow fighters in the command bunker on Mila 18, making him a persona-

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<sup>479</sup> Idith Zertal 'From the People's Hall to the Wailing Wall: A Study in Memory, Fear and War', *Representations*, 69 (Winter 2000), pp. 96-126.

<sup>480</sup> Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 32, 34.

non-grata in the Zionist pantheon of heroes - where Anielewicz occupied pride of a place. Indeed, to Zertal Edelman was the antithesis to the 'Zionist 'theory of death', not least because of his subsequent metamorphosis into 'a renowned cardiologist, a lifesaving humanist, capable of transforming inevitable death... into a tolerable event'.<sup>481</sup>

In yet another nod to Ophir, Zertal decried the worship of the Holocaust as a 'memorial without memory'. Quoting Lyotard she emphasized the ontological impossibility of conveying what the victims of a catastrophe went through. At the same time she lambasted Israel for failing to 'give voice to those who could not speak for themselves' and, more to the point, for turning their suffering into an 'ultimate card' in dealing with the international community. In a version of Zuckerman's 'credit card' theory Zertal declared that, by assuming the mantle of the 'sanctified', Israel demanded immunity from criticism of its foreign policy in general and in handling the Palestinians in particular.<sup>482</sup>

In what was perceived to be an even more egregious use of the 'sanctified and sacrificed' Israel was said to turn the evil that had befallen the Holocaust victims into a legal formula, Zertal's depiction of the 1950 Nazis and Nazi collaborators Law. Invoking Arendt, she argued that 'the verbal translocation of Nazi crimes from their historical setting to a symbolic site (Israel), their very reproduction and duplication in the act of speech, in themselves already depreciated them, even if unintentionally, and marked the start of a long process of banalization'. To prove how banal the process had become, Zertal analysed a number of trials of Jewish capos and orderlies accused of brutalizing their fellow inmates.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 26, 35-37.

<sup>482</sup> Idith Zertal, *The Nation and Death* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 2002; Hebrew), pp. 16-17, 25.

<sup>483</sup> Idem, *Israel's Holocaust*, pp. 63, 95.

But for Zertal, as for Arendt, the Eichmann trial was the real pinnacle of the process of banalization. Having previously accused Ben-Gurion of detachment from and silence about the Holocaust, Zertal claimed that the Israeli leader used Eichmann to engineer 'grand national pedagogy'. In her words, 'Ben-Gurion's nationalism needed now to forge new memories according to its own specific profile and goals', most notably 'the Holocaust, along with its victims...was a metaphor, a terrible sublime lesson to Israeli youth and the world that Jewish blood would never be abandoned, or defenceless again'. She went on to explain that Ben-Gurion seized upon the metaphor to equate the Arabs with the Nazis and, moreover, to develop 'the ultimate weapon - an Israeli nuclear bomb'. Ben-Gurion's 'pedagogical moment' worked through 'transference of the Holocaust situation on to the Middle East reality' creating a 'false sense of the imminent danger... and utterly demonizing the Arabs and their leaders' on top of distorting the image of the Holocaust and 'trivializing the unique agony of the victims and the survivors'.<sup>484</sup>

By linking the Holocaust to Israel's drive to acquire nuclear weapons, Zertal echoed Zuckerman's theme of existential anxiety in the *Holocaust in the Sealed Room*. She used the 1967 Six Day War to make the same point, referring to a prominent Israeli journalist whose article 'From the Rhine to Erez' found some disturbing parallel between the response of the international community to Hitler and Nasser. Zertal quoted other articles that conveyed the same theme: 'The West's stand of non-intervention raised the spectre of Munich and enhanced a sense of another betrayal by the world'. While stating that it was not her 'intention to propose here a new version of the events which lead to the outbreak of war' she felt that the 'totemic' narrative of the Six Day War needed to be 'demystified' through critical scholarship:

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<sup>484</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 95-96, 98-100.



‘The narrative of the averted catastrophe or the redemption of the ancient land created by the June 1967 war is now confronted by critical versions of the question of the inevitability of the war’. According to her critical version, the danger of the Arab armies was greatly exaggerated and, more to the point, Israel played ‘the active part’ in most ‘events that preceded the war’. In other words, Israel was the instigator rather than the victim of Arab aggression; still, the Holocaust-driven existential anxiety made the official Zionist narrative easy to propagate.<sup>485</sup>

In her quest for the alleged government’s machinations behind the atmosphere of public foreboding in the weeks preceding the war Zertal spent a few pages discussing the ‘organized authentic anxiety’ - a juxtaposition of antonyms typical of critical scholarships designed to leave the reader confused whether the anxiety was authentic or manufactured. Using juxtaposed antonyms was only one of the many tactics she employed to undermine the ‘Zionist narrative’. Another one was misrepresenting facts as the case of Edelman illustrated.

The value of Edelman as the perfect anti-Zionist hero was well-appreciated by the tight network of pro-Palestinian activists even before the 1982 Lebanon war, which, as noted, jumpstarted political activism among the professoriate. In 1976 the Polish journalist Hanna Krall published a book based on interviews with Edelman titled *Zdazyc Przed Panem Bogiem* (Getting Ahead before God). In 1980, Daniel Bar-Tal, a lecturer at the School of Education at Tel Aviv University and a pro-Palestinian activist, travelled to Poland to obtain the publishing rights for the book; the Hebrew edition was brought out under the name *To Race God (Lehakdim et Elohim)* by Muli Melzer, a radical-leftist activist and owner of Adam Press.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 114-19.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

While Zertal mentioned Edelman's membership in the anti-Zionist Bund, she failed to note that after escaping from the ghetto he joined the People's Army (*Armia Ludowa* - AL), a small communist underground group created by Moscow as a counter to the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* - AK), the military arm of the legitimate Polish government in exile in London. While Edelman might have been a 'humanitarian', as Zertal asserted, his rejection of Israel was very much in line with the official position of the Polish Communist Party which, not incidentally, suppressed public commemorations of the Holocaust.<sup>487</sup> In the 1970s Edelman had veered towards the budding Solidarity movement but his views on Israel had not changed. He claimed that the Jewish state was not a viable entity in the Middle East and accused Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir of murdering Arabs. Edelman called Ben-Gurion 'a little Jew from a poor town unworthy of being considered a statesman'. In 2002 Edelman made news by comparing the plight of the Palestinians to that of the ghetto partisans and entertained a PLO delegation in his home in Lodz. Holocaust scholar Israel Gutman, himself a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the Auschwitz extermination camp, commented that Edelman 'was filled with hate for Israel for years... [The Bund was] so hostile to Zionism and stood out with their provocations against anything Jewish - opening soup kitchens even on Yom Kippur'.<sup>488</sup>

There is little doubt that Zertal, who worked under Gutman at the Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, knew about Edelman's real record. But presenting him as a former communist party apparatchik would have tarnished the portrait of the noble hero shut out of the official 'Zionist narrative'. Zertal's fidelity to

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<sup>487</sup> Andrzej Kawalec, 'Zapomniana Armia Ludowa', 36/2009 (Polish) <http://www.przeгляд-tygodnik.pl/pl/artykul/zapomniana-armia-ludowa>.

<sup>488</sup> Yair Sheleg, 'Warsaw Ghetto Leader's Letter to 'Palestinian Partisans' Raises a Storm among Uprising Survivors and Zionists', *Haaretz*, August 9, 2002

a political cause trumped the positivist requirement to provide a full historical account - a habit she picked up from the post-Zionist pioneers. Like them, she was also adept at changing the narrative to suit a particular ideological point as the 'Disappeared Souls' article clearly indicated.

All in all, producing a counter-narrative that promoted a political agenda was an overriding imperative for post-Zionist scholars who defined their mission in Gramscian terms. As the next chapter will illustrate, these narratives served as foundational texts for an array of political efforts that followed closely Matzpen's handbook of political activism.

## Chapter 7 Post-Zionist Scholarship in the Service of Political Activism

As shown by the preceding chapters, the anti-Zionist themes that Matzpen distilled from Brit Shalom, the Canaanites and the Communists in the early 1960s hovered in the margins of the public discourse for more than a quarter of a century. Post-Zionist scholars – whether former Matzpen members or those espousing a similar vision - mainstreamed these ideas by giving them academic legitimacy, a considerable advantage in a culture that held universities in high esteem. In less than a decade this cohesive and determined epistemic community, rebranded as post-Zionists, achieved a remarkable academic and public prominence.

To the Israeli followers of Antonio Gramsci, scholarship and activism were part of a seamless endeavour to change social reality. Yehouda Shenhav addressed this issue in an essay titled ‘Treason of the Intellectuals? Israeli Sociologists and the Colonial Occupation in the Palestinian Territories’. Ostensibly, his point of departure was Julien Benda, who famously accused (in 1927) the intellectuals of betraying their role by fomenting nationalistic hatred during the early decades of the twentieth century, urging them to adopt more objectivity and circumspection in the public discourse.<sup>489</sup> Shenhav, however, argued that, with Palestinian land under occupation, objectivity and silence - as practiced by his fellow intellectuals hiding behind the pale banner of political ‘neutrality’ - was the real act of treasonous behaviour. While making a nod to Weber who urged scholars to ‘protect sociology from the tyranny of politics’ Shenhav wanted ‘to protect politics from neutrality of sociology’. To this end

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<sup>489</sup> For an English version see: Julien Benda, *Treason of the Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1999).

he called upon sociologists to become public intellectuals, namely to embrace ‘intellectualism which suspends the dogma of academic neutrality’.<sup>490</sup>

Ishai Menuhin of the Department of Social Work at Ben-Gurion University spoke of many of his activist colleagues when emphasizing the need for ‘ideological commitment’ of academics. Echoing Gramsci he stressed the synergy of knowledge, academic status and social responsibility in driving social change. With ‘speaking out’ established as the pinnacle of personal and professional morality, ‘silence’ was declared to be an immoral behaviour. For example, Shenhav lamented that only a small percentage of sociologists were involved in research on the ‘occupation’, which had never been adopted as a paradigm in the social sciences. The activist psychologist Dan Bar-On from Ben-Gurion University likewise lambasted his peers for ‘silence’ and lamented the absence of Post-Zionist Israeli Psychology, adding that ‘there were few signs of critical Israeli political or social psychology’.<sup>491</sup>

The call to speak ‘truth to power’ was, of course, not new. As early as 1961, Hebrew University professors organized a petition against Ben-Gurion accusing him of political corruption. A few months after the 1967 war a large group of faculty signed a letter warning the government of the dangers of occupation. Yet for their bitterness, the above exchanges were located within the spectrum of the Zionist discourse.<sup>492</sup> By contrast, the post-Zionist faculty took up the Matzpen mandate of

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<sup>490</sup> Yehouda Shenhav, ‘Treason of the Intellectuals? Israeli Sociologists and the Colonial Occupation in the Palestinian Territories’, in Ramoneda Joseph et.al. (eds.), *Breaking the Wall II* (Centre de Cultura Contemporenia de Barcelona, February 2008), [http://www.cccb.org/rcs\\_gene/Yehuda\\_shenhav.pdf](http://www.cccb.org/rcs_gene/Yehuda_shenhav.pdf).

<sup>491</sup> Ishai Menuhin, *Activism and Social Change* (Tel Aviv: November Books, 2010), p. 8; Shenhav ‘Treason of the Intellectuals?’; Dan Bar-On ‘The silence of psychologists or why is there no ‘Post-Zionist’ Israeli Psychology?’ *Journal of Political Psychology*, 22/2 (2001), pp. 331-45.

<sup>492</sup> Keren, *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals*, p. 12; ‘Expressing their Views Against Annexation of Territories’, *Davar*, 21 December 1967; ‘Students squabbled over the establishment of the Committee Against Annexation’, *Davar*, 28 May 1968; ‘Students

changing the collective belief of the Israeli society. Anat Biletzki, a philosopher at the Tel Aviv University and a lifelong member of the communist party, described this as a two-staged process: first, highly activist academics and progressive intellectuals would create a ‘bubble’ of radical ideas that challenged the national consensus. Second, these radical notions would penetrate the societal discourse and alter long held perceptions.<sup>493</sup>

For the bubble concept to work, however, deeds were as important as words, a ‘winning combination’ that Uri Davis, a veteran Matzpen activist and conscientious objector (later, an honorary research fellow at IMEIS University of Durham and IAIS University of Exeter), was eager to exploit. As a member of the tiny Israeli Association of Conscientious Objectors and subsequently as deputy head of the League for Civil and Human Rights - founded by the Hebrew University professor Israel Shahak - Davis developed a plan to harness draft refusal and other acts of civil resistance against the ‘Zionist project’ in general and the occupation of the territories in particular. Teaming up with Elmer Berger, a leader in the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism who founded the American Jewish Alternatives to Zionism (AJAZ) in 1968, Davis established an outreach in the United States. In 1983 AJAZ, working with the International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racism and Racial Discrimination (EAFAD), hosted a conference on ‘Israel's Zionist Society: Consequences for Internal Opposition and the Necessity for External Intervention’ where Davis, who gave the keynote address, urged participants to broaden draft resistance as a way of delegitimizing the military component of the

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from Jerusalem demonstrated against annexation of the territories’, *Davar*, 17 June 1968.

<sup>493</sup> Yael Attiya and Ravid Rovner, ‘Bubble’ - Interview with Anat Biletzki, based on her lecture in the conference “Reworking Political Concepts II”, *Iton Philosophia* (Hebrew), 10 July 2013.

‘Zionist project’ and called for foreign intervention to stop the ‘settlement project’. While both Shahak and Davis were marginalized by those who saw them as ‘too radical’, elements of the Matzpen message spread through a network of reserve soldiers, as noted in Chapter 2, who found Peace Now too timid. Yesh Gvul urged selective refusal followed by the smaller groups.<sup>494</sup>

The refusal network - boasting a high percentage of graduates and post-graduate members - picked up steam after a number of academics got involved. One researcher found that among the random sample of 36 objectors in the 1982 Lebanon War, 23 held academic degrees, four were doctoral candidates and four held PhD degree. Some faculty, like Professor Daniel Amit of the Hebrew University, a service resister who famously described the IDF as working for ‘American imperial interests’, added cache to the younger refuseniks. Others, like Menuhin worked virtually full-time writing and distributing material for Yesh Gvul. Leon Sheleff, a professor of law and sociology at Tel Aviv University helped to defend Gadi Algazi, who made national news in 1979 for refusing draft (and later became a history professor at Tel Aviv University).<sup>495</sup>

But it was Ophir who put post-Zionism on the political map of the somewhat unfocused and fragmented peace movement. Drawing on the ideas that would later appear in his *Order of Evil*, in June 1987 he published a letter to ‘My Brothers and Collaborators’ in the political and literary journal *Politika* applauding his friends in the movement - ‘collaborators in spite of themselves, teeth clenching collaborators,

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<sup>494</sup> Uri Davis, ‘Israel's Zionist Society: Consequences for Internal Opposition and the Necessity for External Intervention’, in EAFORD and AJAZ (eds.), *Judaism or Zionism?: What Difference for the Middle East?* (London: Zed Books, 1986), pp. 176-201.

<sup>495</sup> Ruth Linn, ‘Conscientious Objection in Israel during the War in Lebanon’, *Armed Forces and Society*, July, 1986, pp. 489-512; Jon-Jay Tilsen, ‘Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Israel’, Congregation Beth-El Keser Israel, <http://www.beki.org/conscientious.html>.

collaborators with an agonized conscious'. Ophir wrote about his own decision to refuse evil, 'the evil... that you produce. This oppression you serve, my teeth clenching brothers, as small screws in a large machine, with some leeway for demonstrations, for protests, and for futile attempts at persuasion'. He appealed to all who were 'sick and tired of the occupation' to 'rise and throw their No in the face of the nation'.<sup>496</sup>

The article attracted considerable attention and by October Ophir, together with his then-Hebrew University colleague Hannan Hever, Anat Biletzki and a small number of academics, founded the *Twenty First Year* organization. The name referred to the twenty one years since the Six Day War and its charter, the 'Covenant for the Struggle against the Occupation' attempted to redefine political reality by emphasizing that the occupation was a permanent condition of 'the political and cognitive mind of the Israeli society'. Indeed, 'the occupation is here, within us, and its destructive influence is felt in each and every sphere of our life'. Obfuscating the Green Line, the permanent occupation made Israeli 'parliamentary government... serves as a fig leaf to cover the control relations between the occupying Israelis and the occupied Palestinians'. Ophir and his colleagues equated individual morality with active defiance of the occupation against which they pledged a 'total struggle' - waged through a refusal 'to collaborate with the Occupation and pledge to do either part or all of the following: never enter the occupied territories without an invitation from their Arab inhabitants; not allow their children to be exposed to the racist bias of the school system; boycott institutions and products of companies whose Palestinian

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<sup>496</sup> Mordechai Bar-On, *In Pursuit of Peace: A History of the Israeli Peace Movement*, (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 1996), p. 195



employees were denied human dignity and decent working conditions; and boycott goods produced by Israeli settlements in the occupied territories'.<sup>497</sup>

Professor Tamar Hermann of the Open University, a mainstream peace activist, considered the covenant 'intellectually and morally very impressive' but felt that few could 'follow the high language and the complicated argumentation of the core activists'. In her opinion, 'this highly sophisticated document alienated most audiences'.<sup>498</sup>

Attracting a mass following, however, was never the goal of *The Twenty First Year*; instead, it relied on a cadre of dedicated followers drawn from the Communist periphery and assorted anti-Zionist groups. Reuven Kaminer, the leader of the ultra-left Siah group, recalled that 'hundreds of men and women attended house meetings devoted to the discussion of the covenant' but, in reality, less than five hundred became involved in various projects. In the end, Ophir and his colleagues could count only on activist scholars to translate the abstract language of the 'total struggle' into political action.<sup>499</sup>

## **Resistance from Within, Intervention from Without**

When Ophir conceptualized resistance as boycotting all facets of the occupation, the small and loosely knit group of activists was looking for practical ways of implementing the boycott. Working with Matzpen, they distributed a list of target products from the territories, mostly in Jerusalem. Mordechai Bar-On, a retired

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<sup>497</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 193-97; Tamar Hermann, *The Israeli Peace Movement: A Shattered Dream* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 99; Israeli Left Archive <http://israeli-left-archive.org/cgi-bin/library?site=localhost&a=p&p=about&c=the21sty&l=en&w=utf-8>.

<sup>498</sup> Hermann, *The Israeli Peace Movement*, p. 100.

<sup>499</sup> Reuven Kaminer, *The Politics of Protest: The Israeli Peace Movement and the Palestinians Intifada* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996), p. 55; Bar-On, *In Pursuit of Peace*, p. 197.

IDF officer-turned-peace activist who was familiar with the organization, recalled that the internal boycott scheme fizzled out because members considered it ineffective.<sup>500</sup>

Efforts at ‘witness bearing’ did not fare much better. Reviving Shahak’s project of documenting the occupation, *The Twenty First Year* created a special unit called Witnesses to Occupation (*Edei Kibush*). Palestinians invited the Witnesses to document incidents of alleged IDF brutality, but Bar-On suggested that the volunteers were not professional enough and sometimes fell into the trap of Palestinian propaganda. Worse still, tensions developed between Witnesses willing to defy the IDF and those who wanted to stay out of trouble. The struggle came to a head in Qalkilia where the military imposed a curfew; told that they could not proceed, twenty-seven protesters led by Ophir circumvented the roadblocks and entered the town and were promptly arrested. While Ophir, Hever and other hard-core members relished the experience and the publicity that the incident generated, others were quite shaken. As Hever put it, ‘during the court proceedings our spirit was high... the prison experience eventually brought some people to the realization that they were not ready to pay the price’. Exacerbated by poor organization and a haphazard decision-making process, the internal divisions contributed to the breakup of the group in 1992.<sup>501</sup>

Some of the planned projects, however, were picked up by a number of individual founders. One project aimed at broadening the base of resistance to military service beyond selective refusal. Anat Matar, a member of the communist party and Biletzki’s colleague at the Philosophy Department at Tel Aviv University, spearheaded the effort to attract recruits and reserve soldiers. Matar, on the board of

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<sup>500</sup> Rachel Giora, ‘Milestones in the History of the Israeli BDS Movement: A Brief Chronology’, *Boycott!*, 18 January 2010 <http://boycottisrael.info/content/milestones-history-israeli-bds-movement-brief-chronology>.

<sup>501</sup> Bar-On, *In Pursuit of Peace*, pp. 225-27.

Yesh Gvul became involved in the *Shiministim* movement, a group of high school seniors planning to refuse military service. When her own son became a conscientious objector she joined the Conscientious Objectors Parents Forum (COs Parents Forum), declaring that any form of IDF service, not just combat units sent to the territories, were ‘accomplices in the crime’. Matar took pride in the fact that some of her students went on to refuse military service.<sup>502</sup>

The ‘Witnesses to Occupation’ project was taken over by three groups. The most prominent of them was *B’Tselem* - The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in Occupied Territories co-founded in February 1998 by Daphna Golan-Agnon, from the Law School at the Hebrew University and Edward (Edy) Kaufman, executive director of the university’s Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace. The organization pledged to force the Israeli authorities to treat the Palestinians according to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and published dozens of reports on issues as varied as home demolitions, land confiscations, treatment of minors during protests and medical conditions under occupation. In 1991 *B’Tselem* created a public stir after releasing a report on torture ‘The Interrogation of Palestinians During the Intifada: Ill-Treatment, “Moderate Physical Pressure” or Torture?’<sup>503</sup>

Somewhat overlapping *B’Tselem*, two more specialized groups pledged to keep the authorities accountable for the occupation emerged. In 1991, Menuhin and Avishai Ehrlich, a former Matzpen member who joined the faculty of Tel Aviv-Jaffa

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<sup>502</sup> Anat Matar, ‘The War to Annihilate the Civilian Palestinian Society’, *Electronic Intifada*, 29 December 2002; Adam Keller, ‘Punished - not for our disobedience but for our opinions’, *New Profile* <http://www.newprofile.org/english/node/308>; Laurie Zimmerman, ‘Interview with Anat Matar’, 30 May 2003, *Palestine, Information with Provenance (PIWP)* <http://cosmos.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/php/art.php?aid=12450>.

<sup>503</sup> [http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/199103\\_torture](http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/199103_torture).

Academic College, co-founded the Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), which became involved in numerous law suits involving alleged mistreatment of Palestinian prisoners. Jeff Halper, a one-time lecturer at Ben-Gurion University who was subsequently appointed an associate professor at the Friends World College - a college run by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) - founded The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD). Because of Halper's association with the AFSC, ICAHD received regular publicity and financial support from the United States.

Headed by Matar, Bilezki and Rachel Giora, *Open Doors* was active in releasing Palestinian administrative detainees in the 1990s. Among its signature cases was that of Ossama Barham, the longest serving administrative detainee who was released in 1999. The organization was credited with a decline in the number of detainees from several hundreds to some seventy by the end of the 1999s. Renamed the Israeli Association for the Palestinian Prisoners and, under the leadership of Matar, it has fought to change the status of Palestinian security prisoners.<sup>504</sup>

Much as these efforts were designed to create the 'bubble' for changing the domestic public opinion, radical academic activists had few illusions that they could be effective without help from the international community. In this sense they followed the model unveiled by Davis in his 1983 talk and a subsequent book comparing Israel to the apartheid regime in South Africa. In essence, the radical scholars wanted to harness the same international dynamics that brought change to South Africa. Research on normative changes in international relations based on South Africa explained the process. When in 1962 activists proposed a boycott in order to undermine the apartheid regime, these so-called 'norm entrepreneurs' created

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<sup>504</sup> Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (ICIPP), *The Other Israel*, August 1999, p. 17 <http://www.israelipalestinianpeace.org/issues/89toi.htm>.

a 'life cycle' of a normative change. In the first stage of 'norm emergence', de-legitimization of apartheid was embraced as a moral goal; in the second stage, known as a 'norm cascade', the anti-apartheid norm became widely disseminated throughout the world, followed by the third and final stage called 'norm internalization' - when the new norm was accepted by the international system. Transition from the second to the third stage occurred when the norm reached a tipping point, that is, was accepted by a critical mass of states or non-government international agents. Interestingly enough, the early stages of the South African 'life cycle' were sustained by a grassroots coalition of academics, cultural figures and human rights activists. As the labelling of apartheid illegitimate became diffused, effective economic sanctions were put in place.<sup>505</sup>

To replicate the South African experience, Palestinians persuaded Giora and some of her colleagues to create a full-fledged Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement working with similar-minded activists abroad. Giora, one of the leaders of *Boycott from Within*, described the highly important role the group played: 'The major role of the Israeli BDS movement has been to support international BDS calls against Israel and legitimize them both as clearly not anti-Semitic'. In other words, not only did the Israeli academics serve as 'moral entrepreneurs' at home but they helped defend the non-Jews involved in the BDS from charges of anti-Semitism. According to unwritten rules of the academic discourse, Jews, and better still, Israeli Jews, have served as 'moral shields' to groups taken radical stands against Israel.<sup>506</sup>

While the Oslo process silenced many would be 'moral entrepreneurs', the hard-core post-Zionist community considered the two-state solution yet another form

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<sup>505</sup> Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norms Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization*, Autumn 1998, pp. 887-917.

<sup>506</sup> Giora, 'Milestones'.

of Israeli domination - as claimed by Zuckermann in the previous chapter. A heated debate about the merits of pursuing the Oslo path versus painting Israel as a racist, apartheid state took place on the pages of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*. Embracing a Marxist perspective, the author of one article contended that no just solution to the Palestinian problem was possible without undermining the perception of Israel as democratic and benign. The task of academics and activists thus was to 'rethink the Palestinian question' and adopt the 'Israel as an apartheid state paradigm'. The author quoted from the work of Davis and offered suggestions on how to change Israel's image in the West; he also presented research indicating that painting Israel as an apartheid state would prepare the groundwork for a boycott movement.<sup>507</sup>

In planning an appeal to the international community, post-Zionist activists could rely on a burgeoning body of humanitarian law to prove the alleged existence of an apartheid regime. As a matter of fact, Palestinians who published the first volume on activism and international law as early as 1984 laid the legal groundwork; they and the Israeli activists receive help from a growing number of lawyers and legal experts who have embraced the apartheid analogy. For instance, Deena Hurwitz, a civil rights Jewish-American activist from the California-based Centre for Nonviolence who spent extensive periods of time in the Middle East, encouraged the apartheid metaphor in a book she edited in 1992. The edited work quoted Israeli academics and activists, including Daphna Golan Agnon, who expressed their dismay about the apartheid-like policies.<sup>508</sup> Arie (Ari) Dayan, a pro-Palestinian activist and journalist, quoted *B'Tselem* statistics indicating that up to June 1991 the police did not take action against 42 settlers suspected of killing Palestinians. Israeli and foreign

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<sup>507</sup> Mark Marshall, 'Rethinking the Palestine Question: The Apartheid Paradigm', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Autumn 1995, pp. 15-22.

<sup>508</sup> Daphna Golan, 'Letter to Deena', in Deena Hurwitz (ed.), *Walking the Red Line: Israelis in Search of Justice for Palestine* (Philadelphia: New Press, 1992), p. 101.

lawyers quoted by Dayan stated that this fact illustrated a key feature of apartheid - a dual law system for blacks and whites.<sup>509</sup>

In yet another effort to engage international law, Neve Gordon, an activist-turned-academic became the director of *Physicians for Human Rights - Israel* (PHR-I) founded by Ruhama Marton in 1988. Gordon, who accused Israel of egregious violations of human rights, published an edited volume on the subject 'Humanitarian Action in Catastrophe' based on a work group at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem.<sup>510</sup> To recall Chapter 5, he made good use of PHR-I statistics to show alleged bio-power control of the Palestinian population. Gordon was also active in organizing conferences on torture and other alleged abuses of the Palestinians, appearing with Derek Summerfield, head of Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (UK), who accused Israeli doctors of supporting torture. After years of protest, in 2009 the Israel Medical Association took the unprecedented step of severing its relations with PHR-I because of its use of 'the international arena to besmirch and sling mud at Israel's doctors'.<sup>511</sup>

Last but not least, Israeli activists worked with the UNCE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, known as the Aarhus Convention that was signed on 25 June 1998 in Aarhus, Denmark. According to Menuhin, Israeli activists could plug into the Aarhus Convention network to voice grievances about water deprivation and environmental degradation in the occupied territories, yet even before Aarhus Israeli

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<sup>509</sup> Arie Dayan, 'The Defeat Over Zionism and Racism: An Israeli View', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring 1993, pp. 96-105.

<sup>510</sup> Neve Gordon and Ruhama Marton, (eds.) *TORTURE: Human Rights, Medical Ethics and the Case of Israel* (London: Zed Books, 1995); Gordon, *Israel's Occupation*, p. xiii.

<sup>511</sup> Dan Even, 'IMA Cuts the PHR Over Call for Ouster of the Head of the World Medical Association', *Haaretz* 10 August 2009.

academics used the environmental justice movement to scrutinize water allocation in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>512</sup>

That within a decade scholars-activists translated *The Twenty First Year's* call for 'total struggle' into a burgeoning political venture was illustrative of the advantages that universities offered. The collapse of the Oslo peace process gave the radical faculty a much larger platform for political activism.

### **Mobilizing the International Community against Israel**

As shown in the preceding chapters, the Oslo failure and the onset of the al-Aqsa Intifada radicalized most post-Zionist scholars. Observing the watershed in the peace camp, Hermann described the deep despair of mainstream peace activists and their feeling that 'the sky actually fell on the peace movement'. In her view, it was at this juncture that the post-Zionists, 'with no constituency to lose on one hand, and so highly confident in their framing of the situation on the other', concluded that the conflict would not be resolved 'without a radical transformation of the Israeli national ethos'.<sup>513</sup>

To expedite this process the post-Zionists redoubled efforts to mobilize the international community against Israel's policies, capitalizing on the growing anti-Israel sentiment fuelled by such international initiatives as the 2001 UN-sponsored World Conference against Racism in Durban where hundreds of NGOs pledged to fight what they described as a racist and apartheid Israeli state.

One popular tactic involved appeals to the international community for military intervention on behalf of the Palestinians – allegedly confronted with a real danger of genocide. A 2002 manifesto 'Break the Conspiracy of Silence: Act Before it is too Late' was typical of this pattern. Signed by Gordon, Yiftachel, Biletzki and

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<sup>512</sup> Menuhin, *Activism and Social Change*, p. 56.

<sup>513</sup> Hermann, *The Israeli Peace Movement*, pp. 182, 187, 192.



others, it urged international civil society ‘to take immediate direct action’ to stop ‘Israel’s all-out war against the Palestinian people’. Evoking the Nazi equivalence, Neve Gordon wrote: ‘Examining the architectural similarity and differences between the camps Israel has constructed to hold Palestinians and the concentration camps Jews were held in during the Holocaust, urges one to ponder how it is that the reappearance of barbed wire in the Israeli landscape does not engender an outcry among [Holocaust] survivors’. Lev Grinberg amplified this metaphor in an interview with a Belgian newspaper where he claimed that Israel was practising ‘symbolic genocide’, while Ophir went so far as to urge a NATO strike against Israel to get the ‘regime’ to give up the territories.<sup>514</sup>

A new group, The Campus Shall Not Be Silent, with branches at Tel Aviv and the Hebrew universities was set up to draft and circulate scores of petitions to the United Nations, the EU, and a host of international organizations highlighting the plight of the Palestinians and warning of their imminent expulsion. Reaching particular intensity during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003, a petition titled ‘An Urgent Appeal for International Involvement: Save Palestine and Israel’ asserted that, under the cover of the American invasion, Israel was gearing to ethnically cleanse the entire Palestinian population. The text claimed that the Palestinian presence ‘stands in the way of Sharon’s life-long vision of Greater Israel’ and that ‘the elimination of the Palestinian national presence west of the Jordan river is implicit in the long-term aims of the Israeli right wing’. The expulsion rumour was

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<sup>514</sup> Break the Conspiracy of Silence, Act Before it is too Late, 29 March 2002, <http://www.pchrgaza.org/special/call.htm>; Neve Gordon, ‘Don’t Fence Me In’, *In These Times*, 6 January 2003 (<http://www.unz.org/Public/InTheseTimes-2003jan06-00023>); Lev Grinberg, ‘Symbolic Genocide’, *La Libre Belgique* ([http://www.ginsburgh.net/textes/Symbolic\\_Genocide\\_Grinberg.html](http://www.ginsburgh.net/textes/Symbolic_Genocide_Grinberg.html)) ; Ofira Seliktar, ‘Tenured Radicals. From Post-Zionism to Political Activism’, *Israel Affairs*, December 2005, pp. 717-36.

propagated by the Palestinian Authority and uncritically accepted by the academic activists.<sup>515</sup>

Universal jurisdiction, a legal concept that gave states the right to claim criminal jurisdiction over persons whose alleged crimes were committed outside the boundaries of the prosecuting state, even if the crime had no relations to the said state, was another source of inspiration. Shortly before the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada Gordon wrote an article demanding that Yaacov Pery, former head of the Shabak, Israel's internal security service (equivalent of MI5 and the FBI), be tried under international jurisdiction for his responsibility for the alleged torturing of Palestinian prisoners.<sup>516</sup> Defying IDF regulations, in February 2002 Gordon visited Arafat in his Ramallah compound to publicize Israel's alleged war crimes. Two months later he published an open-letter labelling Aviv Kochavi, Gaza Brigade commander, a war criminal.<sup>517</sup>

Coordinating with Yesh Gvul, Matar fingered Maj.-Gen. Doron Almog, CO Southern Command, as another war criminal. Daniel Machover, son of Matzpen co-founder Moshe and head of civil litigation in the London office of Hickman & Rose who represented the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), obtained a warrant arrest for Kochavi and Almog. Having flown into London, Almog was tipped off and, without disembarking his plane returned home. Kochavi was advised to cancel a planned stay at Sandhurst Military Academy. Gordon and Matar were among the

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<sup>515</sup> 'An Urgent Appeal for International Involvement: Save Palestine and Israel', 12 April 2003 [http://www.opendemocracy.net/appeal\\_from\\_israel\\_0](http://www.opendemocracy.net/appeal_from_israel_0) ; [http://www.israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large\\_advic&advice\\_id=194&page\\_data\[id\]=178&cookie\\_lang=en](http://www.israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large_advic&advice_id=194&page_data[id]=178&cookie_lang=en).

<sup>516</sup> Neve Gordon, 'For Oppressors, There Must be No Safe Haven', *National Catholic Review*, 7 April 2000.

<sup>517</sup> Idem, 'Open Letter to Aviv Kochavi', *Kol Hair*, 23 March 2002 (Hebrew); idem, 'Aviv Kochavi, How Did You Become a War Criminal?' *Counterpunch*, April, 2002.

signatories of a petition to Western governments urging them to prosecute Israeli 'war criminals' while cutting off all aid to the Jewish state.

Internationalizing the issue of Palestinian security prisoners was also a popular pursuit. Matar argued that these inmates, serving time after being legally convicted in terrorist/terrorist-related attacks, should be considered civil resisters. In an introduction to a co-edited book she argued that the label 'security prisoners' deprived them of their subjectivity, both as individuals deserving personal treatment and 'rational and essentially free beings who aspire to realize their freedom'. Treating them as a threat 'erases the fact that they are *subjects* and turn them into *objects*: an object - like a collapsing roof... a stone hurled from a slingshot, a knife, even a fingernail - can pose a threat, a security risk, a source of fear from which we must protect our lives'. Matar also repeated her previous claim that Israel de-contextualized terrorism, which, in her view needed to be viewed as a resistance movement against a long term occupation regime: 'The long years of occupation of the Palestinian Territories, the prevention of livelihood, of freedom of movement, of personal and community development'.<sup>518</sup>

Highlighting alleged torture was yet another popular way to appeal to the international community. Though the Israeli Supreme Court put a stop to the practice of torture in 1999, radical academics used the data provided by the Public Committee against Torture in Israel (PCATI), a small watchdog established by Shahak, to insist that cruel and inhumane treatment of Palestinian prisoners was still the norm.

But it was the boycott initiative on which the radical faculty pinned most of its hopes on. As noted in Chapter 5, Yiftachel's and Gordon's writings sought to provide academic legitimacy to the boycott movement. On the applied side, Giora and her Tel

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<sup>518</sup> Abeer Baker and Anat Matar, *Threat. Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israel*, (London: Pluto Press, 2011), pp. xiii-ix.

Aviv University colleague, linguist professor Tanya Reinhart, a student of Noam Chomsky, organized a boycott appeal in April 2001, writing: 'We call the world community to organize and boycott Israeli industrial and agricultural exports and goods, as well as leisure tourism, in the hope that it will have the same positive result that the boycott of South Africa had on Apartheid'. After disappointing responses in the US, Giora and her colleagues were forced to settle on the less sweeping and more doable academic and cultural boycott.<sup>519</sup>

Any doubts that universities offered an adequate platform for promoting the boycott idea were dispelled when Pappé appealed to British academics to intervene on his behalf during the 1999 Tantura affair claiming that his backing of Teddy Katz, who admitted to having fabricated a massacre in the Arab village,<sup>520</sup> led to his academic persecution. Writing to Mona Baker, a pro-Palestinian scholar from Manchester University, he asked British academics to boycott the University of Haifa, where he was a tenured senior lecturer at the time, along with Bar-Ilan University for opening an extension college in Ariel, outside the pre-1967 'green line'. The request was taken up by a newly organized group of scholars eager to boycott Israeli universities which quickly issued a petition 'endorsing the decision of European academics to boycott Israeli academic institutes'.<sup>521</sup>

The Palestinian Campaign for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), founded in 2004, provided the post-Zionists with a well-endowed and highly organized platform. Pappé, Giora and Matar were leading supporters of PACBI which, under the skilful leadership of Omar Barghouti, a Qatar-born Palestinian who grew up in Egypt and a one-time doctoral student at Tel Aviv University, quickly

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<sup>519</sup> Giora, 'Milestones in the History of Boycott'.

<sup>520</sup> See pp. 113-14 in this dissertation.

<sup>521</sup> Rebecca Stein, 'Pappé Faces Down Prosecution', *Middle East Report*, 223 (Summer 2002), p. 43.

seized the opportunity to broaden the boycott message in Britain and beyond. In December 2004 some 270 academics convened for a conference 'Resisting Israeli Apartheid: Strategies and Principles' in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London to hear Pappé urging a boycott as a means to apply moral and political pressure on Israel. Other speakers urged participants to draw lessons from the anti-apartheid boycott in South Africa, explaining that scholars and intellectuals acted as a vanguard that put the issue of apartheid on the world stage.<sup>522</sup>

In 2005 the central committee of the British Association of University Teachers (AUT) voted to impose sanctions on Haifa, Bar-Ilan and the Hebrew universities. Addressing the organization on the eve of its resolution Pappé, whose (false) claim of persecution by his university provided the pretext for the boycott, made an impassioned plea for the boycott:

I appeal to you today to be part of a historical movement and moment that may bring an end to more than a century of colonization, occupation, and dispossession of Palestinians.... The message that will be directed specifically against those academic institutes which have been particularly culpable in sustaining the oppression since 1948 and the occupation since 1967 can be a start for a successful campaign for peace (as similar acts at the time had activated the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa).<sup>523</sup>

He repeated this plea shortly afterwards when the AUT leadership, faced with intense internal and external opposition, was about to rescind its decision. 'I believe I am in a

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<sup>522</sup> Paul de Rooij, 'London conference a prelude to academic boycott of Israel', *Washington Report on the Middle East*, January/February 2005.

<sup>523</sup> Efraim Karsh, 'Columbia and the Academic Intifada', *Commentary*, July/August 2005, p. 27; Tamara Traubman, 'Haifa University Academic Remains Steadfast in Support of Boycott', *Haaretz* 27 April 2005.

better position than many to judge the tactical and moral dimensions of the academic boycott of Israel', he wrote in a widely publicized article in the *Guardian*.

My case was singled out by the AUT as the reason for boycotting my own university, Haifa. I felt honoured by this attention to my predicament and, at the same time, hoped that the general context, the need to end the callous occupation, will not be forgotten. In fact, judging from the reactions in Israel, after an initial confusion between the principled issue and private case, there seems to be a better understanding here of the link between the occupation and the silencing of those who oppose it.

'The University of Haifa threatens to sue the AUT for libel for false and intentional misrepresentation of action taken against me and the MA student Teddy Katz in and out of the campus', he added,

should the AUT retract its principled and ethical policy of boycott, it will inadvertently send a message to all Israelis that the occupation is legitimate and immune from any external pressure or condemnation... The AUT can choose to stand by and do nothing, or to be part of a historical movement similar to the anti-apartheid campaign against the white supremacist regime in South Africa... Clearly, someone has to be bold enough to take the lead in pressurising Israel through sanctions and boycott in order to avert another cycle of the bloodshed that is destabilising the Middle East and undermining world security and peace. Who, other than academics and intellectuals, can be expected to provide this much needed leadership?<sup>524</sup>

While the plea came to naught as the AUT rescinded its decision, the Israeli post-Zionists didn't desist from their efforts to entice the international community into a

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<sup>524</sup> Ilan Pappé, 'Back the Boycott', *Guardian*, 24 May 2005.

boycott. In 2008 Giora, Matar and others organized 'BOYCOTT! Supporting the Palestinians BDS Call from Within', with a clear cut mission statement: 'We Palestinians, Jews, citizens of Israel, join the Palestinian call for a BDS campaign against Israel, inspired by the struggle of South Africans against apartheid... encourage BDS actions as a legitimate political activity and a necessary means of non-violent resistance. We will act inside and outside Israel to promote awareness and support of BDS'. The Boycott! website lists dozen of appeals to academics, intellectuals, artists and corporations to terminate contacts with Israel.<sup>525</sup>

The anti-Hamas Operation Cast Lead in December 2008-January 2009 provided the activists with a perfect opportunity to make their case. Describing Gaza as 'Israel's Guernica' Matar and her colleagues published a letter in the *Guardian* urging international sanctions against Israel. In May 2009 Giora urged the congress of University and College Union (UCU, that replaced the now-defunct AUT) to boycott Israeli universities. In a high profile op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times* in August 2009, Gordon advocated strict sanctions on Israel. Describing his appeal as involving a painful personal decision, he argued that as a member of the peace camp for more than thirty years he was deeply concerned about what he alleged to be Israel's steady drive towards 'an apartheid state'.<sup>526</sup> Mindful of the need to show Israel's economic gains from its continued presence in the territories, these scholars produced a number of reports on the supposed profits of occupation. A spinoff-group, Who Profits from the Occupation, began publicizing the names of corporations that operated beyond the Green Line with a view of boycotting their products abroad.<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>525</sup> Points of Unity, *Boycott!* <http://boycottisrael.info/content/points-unity>

<sup>526</sup> Neve Gordon, 'Boycott Israel', *Los Angeles Times*, 20 August 2009/

<sup>527</sup> Giora, 'Milestone'.

Utilizing the generous travel allowance in Israeli universities, post-Zionist activists travelled extensively to promote their agenda abroad. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyse the hundreds of conferences, round tables, lectures, seminars and media appearances involved in this campaign. Ophir and Azoulay, for instance, visited a number of European cities to promote photo exhibitions aimed at creating a visual Holocaust-Nakba equivalence. Yiftachel used the substantial network of critical political geographers to promote the apartheid theory. Both Zuckermann and Zimmermann made frequent trips to Germany to address pro-Palestinian forums where their 'Holocaust deformation' theory was warmly received. Sand, whose book *The Invention of the Jewish People* was translated to more languages than any other Israeli history book, became an academic celebrity; in addition to lectures in a large number of universities, he was a frequent guest on numerous media outlets.

### **Radical Academics and the Universities**

A relative newcomer to the academic tradition, Israel has been influenced by the German, British and American concepts of academic freedom that, over centuries, worked out a balance among the needs of faculty, students and - in public universities - the public interest as expressed by its elected officials. As a rule, intramural academic freedom allowed scholars to pursue their research - defined by their field of specialty - free from interference from university authorities and the state. Teaching was expected to follow the same protocol but, as noted in Chapter 1, in the absence of scientific rigor, liberal arts struggled to provide students with 'truth'. William von Humboldt, arguably the leading pedagogical authority in nineteenth century Germany, argued that vigorous classroom discussion, including diverse points of view, was the most legitimate way of arriving at social truths. The so-called 'classroom as a



marketplace of ideas' concept had been subsequently adopted by British and American universities.<sup>528</sup>

Despite its large contingent of Jewish immigrants from Germany, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem did not follow the Humboldtian tradition and was even less inclined to balance the interest of the faculty with that of the Yishuv. To the contrary, liberal arts professors embraced the vision of the university's first president, Judah Magnes, of turning the institution into a cultural and secular-spiritual centre for world Jewry, which for him was largely associated with the Brit Shalom group and its bi-national agenda.

After Magnes's death it was the Hebrew University professoriate, whose relations with Prime Minister Ben-Gurion were stormy, that led the fight against the proposed Higher Education Act introduced by the government in June 1952. Based on the recommendation of the special committee headed by Yaacov Dori, president of the Technion, the bill envisaged the creation of a Council of Higher Education (CHE) chaired by the minister of education and comprising a majority of government representatives alongside leading scientific figures from Israel and abroad. The Dori proposal had the backing of the two technological universities - the Technion and the Weizmann Institute - but the Hebrew University faculty was hostile to the 'nationalization' of their institution and managed to persuade the opposition General Zionists Party that chaired the Knesset education committee to reject the bill. Despite numerous compromise attempts by the government, it took an unprecedentedly prolonged period to pass the Higher Education Act of 1958.

As noted in the introduction, the law was a triumph for Magnes's view in that it allowed a most expansive form of academic freedom - the 'liberty to conduct its

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<sup>528</sup> Seliktar, *Academic Freedom in Israel*.

academic and administrative affairs, within the framework of its budget, as it may see fit'. As a matter of fact, 'academic and administrative affairs' also included 'determination of programs of research and teaching, the appointment of the authorities of the institution, the appointment and promotion of teachers, the determination of a method of teaching and study, and any other scientific, pedagogic or economic activity'.<sup>529</sup>

Neither the Higher Education Act nor the subsequently-created Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC) dealt explicitly with academic freedom of faculty in an intramural or extramural setting. But the broad institutional autonomy clearly implied an expansive freedom on the individual level as well, as Haim Gans, a law professor at Tel Aviv University and an expert on academic freedom, advocated. Quoting an American professor who famously but erroneously declared that 'academic freedom is what faculty thinks it is' Gans argued that faculty had the right to teach and research topics of their choice without the interference of deans or other academic authorities. In case of a dispute with the university authorities deans should try persuasion as faculty could not be coerced into making changes. Gans vetoed any intervention since he felt confident that academic staff, especially senior faculty, could be trusted with self-control and ethical conduct. His view of extramural speech and action was also equally expansive; echoing Magnes's conception of academics as 'philosophers kings' he argued that scholars played a special role in the public discourse and thus should be given extra protection not only from the state but also from university authorities.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> The council of Higher Education Act 1958 [http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/data/heb/law/kns3\\_highereducation.pdf](http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/data/heb/law/kns3_highereducation.pdf) (Hebrew).

<sup>530</sup> Haim Gans, 'Academic Freedom', *Iyunei Mishpat* (May 1987), pp. 442-45 (Hebrew).

In the first three decades of Israel's statehood Gans's doctrine of academic freedom reflected prevailing realities. Unlike Germany, Britain and the United States where a combination of political and market forces limited extramural and intramural faculty rights, there was little to shake the expansive protocols created by the Higher Education Act. On the rare occasion that faculty speech or action attracted a public reaction, both the universities and the state shied away from action. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who pioneered the Nazi-Israeli equivalence in his Judeo-Nazi imagery, was never challenged; his colleague, Israel Shahak, who travelled abroad to lecture on the IDF's Nazi-like behaviour and engaged in illegal meetings with PLO representatives suffered no repercussions either. Amnon Rubinstein, then Dean of Law at Tel Aviv University and future minister of education, urged the Hebrew University to deal with Shahak adding that 'only in Israel has this concept [of academic freedom] attained such an extreme meaning as to become a synonym for lawlessness'. He further noted that 'university tenure' should not protect a faculty member engaged in a 'hate campaign' against his country especially when this hate campaign was financed by one's university, as was the case with Shahak whose self-abnegating foreign travels were paid by 'taxpayers' money that supported his sabbatical and research abroad'.<sup>531</sup>

Hebrew University Rector, Michael Rabin, responded that 'the disciplinary book of rules for academic employees' did not involve 'behaviour of a faculty member in non-university context'. As for the university's decision to promote Shahak to the rank of associate professor Rabin pointed out that he 'passed standard university procedures; to deprive him 'of these procedures is a primitive act'. A subsequent audit found that Shahak used no university funds for travel since 1972. In

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<sup>531</sup> Amnon Rubinstein, 'The Shahak Affair', *Haaretz* October 10, 1974

a slingshot at Rubinstein, Arie Sachs, a professor in the Department of Theatre Studies, described the attack as a ‘witch hunt’. There were outside calls to revoke Shahak’s citizenship but the government decided against it. Alan Dershowitz, the renowned Harvard University law professor, pointed to the irony that Shahak could complain about racism and totalitarianism in Israel precisely because of the freedom of speech he enjoyed.<sup>532</sup>

A later incident involving Moshe Zimmermann demonstrated the continuous reluctance to confront radically outspoken faculty. Having lost a lawsuit against a paper reporting his equation between settlers’ children and the *Hitlerjugend* and IDF soldiers and the Nazis, Zimmermann not only faced no censure at the university but Rector Haim Rabinowitz demanded an apology from Alexander Brenner, leader of the Jewish community in Berlin, who complained that ‘there are professors at the Hebrew University who compare the behaviour of the IDF soldiers to the behaviour of SS soldiers’.<sup>533</sup>

This historical reluctance was compounded by the influx of critical, neo-Marxist faculty who presented a number of novel challenges due to their neo-Gramscian combination of scholarship and activism. The extensive effort involved in *BOYCOTT!*, for instance, should have raised questions about permissible political activism within university. A study comparing academic freedom in Israel, Germany,

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<sup>532</sup> Michael Rabin, *Haaretz*, October 18, 1974; Arie Sachs *Haaretz*, October 16, 1974; in Paul Bogdanor, ‘The Legacy of Israel Shahak’, *IsraCampus.Org.il* , <http://www.isracampus.org.il/third%20level%20pages/Editorial%20-%20Paul%20Bogdanor%20-%20Israel%20Shahak.htm>; *Yedioth Aharonot* January 7, 1975; Israel Shahak Archiv, *Liga Tatitgket Hetzkampagne*, <http://erhard-arendt.de/deutsch/palestina/Shahak/Liga-Taetigkeit-Hetzkampagne/index.html>; Alan Dershowitz, ‘Shahak, Best Proof of Freedom of Speech’ Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1973 <http://www.chomsky.info/letters/197304--.pdf>

<sup>533</sup> Yair Sheleg, ‘When the anti-Israel sentiment comes from within’, *Haaretz*, March 10, 2005 <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/when-the-anti-israel-sentiment-comes-from-within-1.152640>

Britain and the United States concluded that combination of case law, ethic codes and contractual obligations made it virtually impossible for faculty in public institutions to advocate boycott. British academic Geoffrey Alderman, a history professor at Buckingham University and patron of the UK Council on Academic Freedom & Academic Standards, added that during times of war, Britain had a considerable amount of restrictions on the freedom of expression.<sup>534</sup> In Israel, where traditional wars have been overtaken in recent decades by Low Intensity Conflict (LIC), national security considerations have never entered the academic freedom debate.

In the absence of similar constrains neither the state nor the universities had a proper protocol to deal with activist professors. In chronicling the history of the boycott movement, Giora boasted of dozens initiatives launched by BOYCOTT! during and after the 2008-09 Gaza incursion. Upping the ante, Gordon's 2009 op-ed in support of BDS triggered a public firestorm. Despite considerable pressure, Ben-Gurion University President Rivka Carmi resisted calls from donors and members of the public to fire Gordon but the university was forced to adopt an ethics code that banned faculty from advocating boycott of their own university (and for that matter other Israeli institutions), among others. Undaunted, in July 2010 Giora lauded the effects of the BDS on the BOYCOTT! website writing: 'The BDS movement hit the bull's eye. It managed to undermine Israel's international status and tarnish its legitimacy'.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> Ofira Seliktar, 'Academic Freedom in Israel: A comparative Perspective', *Israel-Academia-Monitor.com* 2013, [http://israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large\\_advice&advice\\_id=8596&page\\_data\[id\]=176&cookie\\_lang=en](http://israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large_advice&advice_id=8596&page_data[id]=176&cookie_lang=en).

<sup>535</sup> Tomer Velmer, 'Ben-Gurion University changes ethics code over political dramas', *YNET*, 1 December 2011; Rachel Giora, 'Israel Must Change or Collapse: On the Impact of BDS', *BOYCOTT!* 1 July 2010, <http://boycottisrael.info/content/israel-must-change-or-collapse-impact-bds>.

Giora and Matar's boycott advocacy confronted Tel Aviv University President Joseph Klafter with a similar dilemma. During a May 2010 gathering of the international boards of governors Alan Dershowitz delivered a keynote address denouncing boycott activism as out of bound. In a subsequent, stormy meeting, a prominent American donor argued that, based on the university's bylaws, the two should be fired for 'breach of discipline'. In what led to a public scandal Klafter cut off the vote prompting the donor to resign and pledge his support to Bar-Ilan University. Some observers commentated on the financial loss, but Klafter had good reasons to avoid confrontation with the faculty. A hastily written petition organized by activist professors delivered a strong warning that any steps against Giora and Matar would result in a nasty public skirmish.<sup>536</sup>

Amid increasingly loud attacks on the 'McCarthyism' of the Likud-led government at the end of 2010, the CHE held a number of meetings to determine whether Article 15 of the Higher Education Act should be revised to combat BDS advocacy. But anticipating political problems a compromise formula was crafted: on 21 December the Council issued a declaration reaffirming academic freedom as a 'supreme value' but added that calls for boycott by faculty members were unacceptable because they constituted a threat to the system of higher learning and to society at large. The CHE urged the academic authorities to find ways and means to enforce the resolution.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> Zoe Fox, 'TAU Restricts Freedom of Speech', *Jerusalem Post*, 12 May 2010 ; video of Alan Dershowitz's speech (starts at 50 minutes), [http://video.tau.ac.il/Lectures/General/Public\\_Relations/Honorary\\_Degree\\_10/](http://video.tau.ac.il/Lectures/General/Public_Relations/Honorary_Degree_10/) Joseph Klafter, 'The Double Boycott Challenge', *Jerusalem Post* , 15 February 2010; Open Letter to the President of Tel Aviv University <http://2nd-ops.com/reuven/?p=61756>.

<sup>537</sup> Decision number 1110/11 of the Council on Higher Education on Academic Boycott- December 21, 2010 <http://che.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/58-493.pdf> (Hebrew)

Still, the stiff opposition from many academics and the voluntary nature of the resolution prompted right-wing lawmakers to propose an anti-boycott legislation. After a stormy public debate about democracy and freedom of speech, the bill - roundly decried by much of the academic community as a glaring example of 'Israeli McCarthyism' - was passed on 11 July 11, 2011.<sup>538</sup>

While the legislation dampened the internal pro-boycott drive it did not silence hard-core advocates. For instance, Gordon's *Los Angeles Times*'s op-ed turned up as a chapter in a 2012 book on the benefits of boycotting Israel. In the acknowledgements, the editor thanked Gordon who helped shape the book in its early stages, but Ben-Gurion University declined to investigate the issue. In the same year Matar took very public credit for dissuading British director Peter Brook from conducting a planned workshop at the Chamber Theatre because its actors performed in the West Bank town of Ariel. Though these cases represented a violation of the law, none of the offenders were disciplined.<sup>539</sup>

If the authorities were reluctant to react to the relatively clear-cut case of boycott advocacy, they were even less eager to take on the more complex problem of choosing research topics to further a political agenda. Embraced by many activists, the practice entailed a post-tenure switch from the field of expertise for which they were hired to researching and writing on the Arab-Israeli conflict, a field where most of them lacked the academic credentials to research. Yehouda Shenhav, for instance, appointed to research and teach sociology of organizations admitted to a switch after

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<sup>538</sup> The Law to Prevent Damages to the State of Israel through Boycotts – 2011 (Hebrew) <http://www.justice.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/2210C972-7884-481B-805F-E486F5FBC1E9/29067/2304.pdf>

<sup>539</sup> Audrea Lim, (ed.) *The Case for Sanctions Against Israel*, (Verso Books, 2012), lxii ; Ayala Blupolski reported in the Israeli paper for art and culture, Akhbar Ha'ir on 4 September 2012, that Matar persuaded Brook to cancel his visit. Translated by the Palestinian-Indian Campaign to Boycott Israel <http://incacbi.in/protesting-against-occupation-theatre-director-peter-brook-cancels-his-arrival>

joining the Rainbow Coalition as indicated in Chapter 4. His book claiming that the Mizrahim were actually Arab Jews attempted to provide academic legitimacy to the political agenda of creating an anti-Zionist Palestinian-Mizrahi alliance. After signing the 2004 Olga Document, a declaration of support for a bi-national state, Shenahv went on to write a number of monographs on the subject. Likewise, Adi Ophir spent much of his career writing polemics about the conflict or ‘how to do’ books to be used in political action. *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli-Rule in the Occupied Territories*, a book he co-edited with Michal Givoni and Sari Hanafi was typical in this respect. Resulting from a series of seminars at the Van Leer Institute the book, according to Hanafi, reflected the belief that ‘Israeli educational institutions are under an obligation to explicitly oppose the normalization of the occupation’. Calling their work ‘subversive’ and focused ‘more on advocacy than academia’ Hanafi and Ophir went on a book tour in Europe to highlight the illegality of ‘the occupation’.<sup>540</sup>

In the same vein, Zimmermann ‘remade’ himself into a Middle East expert so as to publish books highly critical of Israel’s foreign policy, while Zuckermann made a similar switch resulting in an extensive list of publications on the alleged Holocaust-deformed Israeli character. Arguably, Sand’s career move was the most stunning: *The Invention of the Jewish People*, followed by *The Invention of the Land of Israel* made this virtually unknown expert on French cinema and culture world famous despite having no qualification, or doing previous research, in the field that bought him this fame. Finally, as noted above, Matar abandoned any pretence of philosophical research to write about Palestinian security prisoners.

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<sup>540</sup> Adi Ophir, Michal Givoni and Sari Hanafi, (eds.) *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli-Rule in the Occupied Territories* (New York: Zone Books, 2009); Sari Hanafi. ‘My talk in the AUB town Hall’, American University in Beirut, March 2010  
[http://staff.aub.edu.lb/~sh41/dr\\_sarry\\_website/publications/9\\_Town%20hall%20meeting.pdf](http://staff.aub.edu.lb/~sh41/dr_sarry_website/publications/9_Town%20hall%20meeting.pdf).



University authorities willing to challenge this practice could have used the 1982 case of Ilan Rahoum vs. the Hebrew University, which denied him tenure. The District Court in Jerusalem ruled against the plaintiff holding that the ‘permanent faculty (starting with tenured senior lecturers) give the university its character and its scientific-research status’ as well as ‘contribute to the quality of instruction and supervision of students’. Since tenure was difficult to revoke, the Court justified the extra scrutiny given to the review process to assure that those promoted would perform their contractual obligations of teaching and research within the parameters of their specialization.<sup>541</sup> Though it is difficult to argue that activist professors who switched subjects to fields where they had no professional training or research record either gave ‘the university its character and its scientific-research status’ or contributed to the ‘quality of instruction and supervision of students’, university authorities did not avail themselves of the 1982 ruling. Ziva Shamir, former head of the History School at Tel Aviv University, suggested that fear of adverse publicity prompted academic leaders to ignore these and other breaches of academic freedom. In her view, such hands off policy enabled activists not only to engage in research aimed at fitting a political agenda but to turn their office into a branch of whatever party they belonged to.<sup>542</sup>

The post-Zionist narratives presented the academic authorities with a potentially more difficult quandary. As discussed in Chapter 3, the New Historians produced a variety of accounts of the 1948 war that, to various degrees, reflected their

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<sup>541</sup> NLC 42/ 63- Rahoum vs. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 13 IsrLC 412, 418 (1982) Hebrew. [http://www.nevo.co.il/psika\\_html/avoda/L-A-PADI-IB-1-412-L.htm](http://www.nevo.co.il/psika_html/avoda/L-A-PADI-IB-1-412-L.htm).

<sup>542</sup> Ziva Shamir, ‘Under the auspice of “academic freedom” the politicization of Israeli universities has deepened’ *Kivunim Hadashim*, 26-2012, [http://www.israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large\\_advic&advice\\_id=8482&page\\_data\[id\]=176&cookie\\_lang=en](http://www.israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large_advic&advice_id=8482&page_data[id]=176&cookie_lang=en).

shifting politics. By the early 2000s Pappé, by far the most radicalized of the group, had created the narrative of Israel's history as an unceasing ethnic cleansing from 1948 to the present; small wonder that he exploited the Katz affair to prod British academics to boycott Israeli universities. In his autobiography, *Out of the Frame: The Struggle for Academic Freedom in Israel* - an apparent nod to Edward Said's *Out of Place* - Pappé accused the-then head of the History School, Yoav Gelber, and Humanities Dean Yossi Ben Artzi of a 'witch hunt', arguing that after becoming 'even more categorical than Katz about the [alleged massacre] conclusion' he had to pay the price of speaking truth to power, becoming a 'pariah in my own university'. He recalled a special disciplinary hearing where 'I was accused of relentless defamation of the University and its institutions, both in written publication and in public events in Israel and abroad', adding that the fear of being fired took an emotional toll.<sup>543</sup>

Gelber dismissed the 'witch hunt' accusation out of hand. In his account, the university leadership was greatly reluctant to stand up to Pappé and the 'mobilized academy' and when the affair exploded 'did its best to sidestep the issue. It was dragged into the judicial case as if possessed to see it through against its will'. Gelber strongly implied a reluctance to challenge Pappé for fear of the British academics who rushed to condemn the university's 'assault on the academic freedom'. Ironically, Gelber and Pappé agreed that the university terminated the disciplinary proceedings because of international pressure. But while the former complained bitterly about the power of the 'mobilized academy' the latter took credit for mobilizing it on behalf of

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<sup>543</sup> Ilan Pappé, *Out of the Frame: The Struggle for Academic Freedom in Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), pp. 89-90, 95-97.

Katz and himself. Pappé subsequently attributed the failure to expel him to the ‘vigorous mobilization of the academic community’.<sup>544</sup>

The Katz-Pappé case illustrated yet another facet of the problem that post-Zionists scholarship presented, namely the existence of the critical, neo-Marxist narrative. Gelber, a traditional historian, complained that in the ‘postmodern era little was left of traditional or conventional historiography’. Adding that faculty returning from sabbatical or graduate students arriving from abroad ‘imported these crazes to the Israeli academe’, he urged the restoration of ‘the status of Israeli historiography, it is primarily necessary to determine what historical scholarship is’.<sup>545</sup>

Since neo-Marxist scholars established a dense network of research and publication it was not clear how academic authorities could restore the positivist hegemony as per Gelber’s suggestion. As a matter of fact, by the mid-2000s the new paradigm had not only successfully competed with positivism but was on its way to create its own dominance, according to some traditionalists. Arnon Soffer, a prominent geographer from Haifa University and a leading critic of the post-Zionists, described in his book, *In the Trap of Radicalism in the Academy* the ‘diligent networking of the group’ that led to its campus prominence. Some faulted the promotion process, which, according to one insider, tolerated cronyism at the expense of academic excellence. Others blamed double standards whereby the stringent requirements for excellence in the natural sciences have never been applied to the social sciences and humanities. According to this view the academic leaders including

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<sup>544</sup> Yoav Gelber, *Nation and History: Israeli Historiography between Zionism and Post-Zionism* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2011), p. 268.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid*, pp. xii- xiii, 272.

the Israeli Academy of Science considered the liberal arts to be of negligible value and not worthy of their scrutiny.<sup>546</sup>

Adding to the difficulties, activist scholars tended to impose their paradigm in the classroom in violation of the Humboldtian pedagogical tenets. In a rare public debate on the subject, Amnon Rubinstein, by then a law professor at the Interdisciplinary Centre in Herzliya, urged to embrace a more diverse perspective in the classroom in order to turn it into a 'marketplace of ideas'. Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, a former dean of social sciences at Tel Aviv University, was another harsh critic of radical scholars, accusing them of totally ignoring positivist scholars and noting that not a single work of Eisenstadt was offered in an introductory course in Israeli sociology at Tel Aviv University. By using their academic position to exclude material that did not fit their paradigm, in his view, they conveyed to students a uni-dimensional picture of reality and worse - depriving them of an opportunity to exercise critical thinking in pursuit of truth.<sup>547</sup>

Ziva Shamir was especially scathing. 'I am aware of the fact that it is difficult to go back to the era of positivism, and that the new trends in critical scholarship give the instructor more political leeway', she wrote. 'However, as member of a promotion committee I came across teaching evaluation forms with students' complaints about their "missionary" professors whose main goal was to convey their political message. The contemporary "missionary" faculty is doing damage to the teaching process... these instructors also contribute to hypocrisy in the classroom; on the one hand they speak about academic freedom but on the other, their teaching does not encourage

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<sup>546</sup> Arnon Soffer, *In the Trap of Academic Radicalism* (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2010; Hebrew), p. 6; Yohanan Glucker, 'It is Not Collegial', *Katharsis*, 6 (2006; Hebrew); Yaacov Bergman, 'The Academic Establishment Uses Deception', *Haaretz*, 23 December 2012.

<sup>547</sup> Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, 'First of all, Academic Integrity', *Haaretz* 29 June 2010.

pluralism and a free exchange of ideas'. Soffer described how, despite numerous complaints about what he considered a breach of academic freedom by radical scholars, the administration of his own university failed to act.<sup>548</sup>

Much as these observations were heartfelt, there was little indication that academic leaders were willing to tackle the complex and potentially explosive topic of evaluating the merits of critical, neo-Marxist scholarship. Tellingly, Shamir admitted to publishing her essay after retiring to avoid the 'public scolding orchestrated by radical scholars and their allies in the media' meted out to 'McCarthy faculty'. Soffer described how, despite numerous complaints about radical scholars at Haifa University, the administration refused to act in order to avoid a public fracas.<sup>549</sup>

Paradoxically, it was a routine evaluation of the Department of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University ordered by the CHE as part of an overall review of political science departments in Israel that proved how costly challenging critical scholars could be. The department - home of many radical activists - had a troubled academic history. In 2001 the CHE appointed a two member committee to evaluate its request to offer a BA program. Professor Zeev Maoz, a leading political scientist and a former head of the Jaffe Centre for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, found that the department did not offer core political science courses and that its faculty, who specialized in topics marginal to the discipline, were ill equipped to fill the void. He recommended closing the department but the second evaluator, Avner de Shalit of the Hebrew University, disagreed and, in November 2003, the CHE appointed a new committee under de Shalit. In March 2004, the new committee

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<sup>548</sup> Shamir, 'Under the Auspices of Academic Freedom'; Amnon Rubinstein, 'Freedom of Academic Speech', *Law and Business*, 13 (2010), pp. 11-59 (Hebrew); Arnon Soffer, 'How I Exposed the Subversive Left', *Haaretz*, 30 August 2010.

<sup>549</sup> Shamir, 'Under the Auspices of Academic Freedom'; Soffer, 'How I Exposed'.

decided that the department offered a ‘unique program’ and urged the CHE to strengthen ‘pluralistic approaches’ to political science.

But the International Committee for Evaluation of Political Science and International Relations Programmes, chaired by Professor Thomas Risse of Berlin’s Free University, seemed to side with Maoz. Delivered in September 2011, the ‘Ben-Gurion University Department of Politics and Government Evolution Report’ identified serious problems in the department: weakness of core political science offerings as well as excessive ‘community activism’ and lack of balanced views in the curriculum and the classroom. In the words of the report, ‘political science instructors should see to it that their own opinions are expressed as personal views so that students can take critical perspective and that there is a broad exposure to alternative perspectives in order to widen and deepen their own understanding’. The report urged improving the research and publication record of the faculty, noting that most have not published in mainstream presses and journals. Indeed, it recommended to the university ‘spelling out more clearly individual performance for tenure and promotion criteria, in line with MALAG [CHE] criteria’. The concluding section reiterated that ‘common standards of scholarly achievement and excellence [should be] emphasized in the process of hiring and promotion’. In an unprecedented move, the report stated that ‘if these changes are nevertheless not implemented, the majority of the Committee believes that, as a last resort, Ben-Gurion University should consider closing the Department of Politics and Government’.<sup>550</sup>

The Risse Report was the first official statement about the questionable value of critical, neo-Marxist scholarship. Yaacov Bergman, a leading expert on higher

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<sup>550</sup> ‘Committee for the Evaluation of Political Science and International Relations Programmes: Ben-Gurion University Department of Politics and Government Evaluation Report’, *Council of Higher Education*, September 2011, <http://che.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Ben-Gurion-Report.pdf>.

education, explained that, based on the Institute of Scientific Information - Social Science Index (SSCI), international ranking of social science departments favoured mainstream publications. He noted that Israeli social sciences trended 30 per cent below standard in contrast to the precise and life sciences that ranked constantly above average. One possible explanation for such poor performance was the preponderance of critical scholarship. Critical journals and presses such as Pluto, Verso, Zed or Zone - self-proclaimed 'progressive' or Marxist publishing houses - favoured by the radical scholars were not included in the SSCI; as the Risse Report stated, such venues were not part of the CHE criteria for hiring and promotion.<sup>551</sup>

But these arguments did little to stop departmental members and their numerous supporters from charging the government with a McCarthy-style witch-hunt. Some accused certain unspecified members of the International Evaluation Committee of harbouring 'extreme right views'. Others took issue with the 'misplaced faith' in the objective criteria used by the SSCI that, in their view, provided only an 'illusion of objectivity'. To recall Chapter 1, the discourse on the department followed closely the larger debate between the two paradigms.<sup>552</sup>

Without addressing the report's findings, Ben-Gurion University defended the department while promising to introduce the recommended changes. The administration made available three new slots to strengthen the core discipline but the department hired only one new faculty, an expert in quantitative methods, that

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<sup>551</sup> Science in Israel, 1998-2002, *The Institute of Scientific Information – Social Science Index (SSCI)* [http://www.in-cites.com/research/2004/february\\_2\\_2004-1.html](http://www.in-cites.com/research/2004/february_2_2004-1.html)

<sup>552</sup> Tamar Trabelsi-Hadad, 'Recommendation: Shut Down 'Leftist' Department', *Ynet*, November 23, 2011; Oded Goldreich 'On the Quality Evaluation Committees of Malag', January 4, 2012, *Israeli Social Science Net* <http://socialscienceisrael.org/archives/306> Hebrew; 'Objective Content Blind Measure versus Subjective Evaluations', *The Forum Protecting Public Education*, August 18, 2012 (Hebrew) <http://www.publiceducation.org.il/2012/08/1099>

comported to the CHE specifications. Of the two other hires, Michal Givoni was a student of Ophir specialized in radical humanitarian witnessing and testimony, while Ayelet Harel-Shalev was student of Gad Barzilai, Dean of the Law School at Haifa University appointed to be the ‘the sole external supervisor of the corrections in the department’. According to Bergman, ‘Barzilai was in a serious conflict of interests when he supervised the hiring of his own former student’.<sup>553</sup> Moreover, Harel-Shalev’s research on Israel’s alleged mistreatment of its religious minorities could hardly qualify as core political science. Likewise, the department’s choice of affiliated scholars in 2011-21 replicated past preferences. Hagar Kotef, a graduate student of Ophir took up the study of ‘the checkpoints regime’ in the West Bank while James Ron, a veteran political activist, had a strong history of criticizing Israel.

The changes failed to satisfy the Subcommittee for Quality of the CHE which announced its recommendations on 5 September 2012. These noted that the ‘reservations expressed by members of the International Evaluation Committee with regard to the implementation of recommendations made by the committee regarding the broadening of methodologies and theoretical approaches being taught in the Department of Politics and Government’ were not met. The subcommittee’s recommendations were harsh:

[The] Council expresses its dissatisfaction with the fact that the department of Politics and Government did not exploit this opportunity to recruit new faculty members in order to expand upon the methodological approaches employed by faculty in the department in a way that would reflect the pluralism of the discipline, as recommended by the International Evaluation Committee.

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<sup>553</sup> Yaacov Bergman, ‘Institutional Corruption at Ben Gurion University’, *Israel Academia Monitor*, 6 May 2013 [http://israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large\\_advic&advice\\_id=8662&page\\_data%5Bid%5D=171&cookie\\_lang=en](http://israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large_advic&advice_id=8662&page_data%5Bid%5D=171&cookie_lang=en).



Specifically, this relates to the absence of the positivist approach in Political Science among faculty of the department. The recruitment of faculty, the majority of whom represent a sub-field within the Interpretive Approach to political research (critical theory), which is already over-represented in the department, does not follow the recommendations made by the International Evaluation Committee.

A drastic recommendation was made that ‘in the current situation’ the department would not be allowed to enrol students for the 2013-14 academic year.<sup>554</sup>

Leaked to the media, the decision created an academic firestorm. President Carmi and top Ben-Gurion University officials accused the CHE of political bias and urged the international academic community to send letters of protest. In a private email that surfaced in *Israel Hayom* newspaper, David Newman, Dean of Social Sciences and former founding head of the department, wrote in an internal memo to his colleagues that

I am in favour of applying international pressure - in proper measure - together with a trickle of letters from a number of associations and people with international reputations - some of which will reach the media - in parallel with all the other kinds of pressure that are being applied today to the Council for Higher Education by lawyers and the activity of the president and the rector. It is not a 100-percent match to the policy that we set until now, but it

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<sup>554</sup> ‘Recommendation of the Sub-Committee for Quality Control with Regard to the department of Politics and Government’, 5 September 2012 <http://isacademyunderattack.wordpress.com/2012/09/19/recommendation-of-the-sub-committee-for-quality-control-with-regard-to-the-department-of-politics-and-government/>.

seems to me that they are under pressure now and we need to keep up the pressure and not let up.<sup>555</sup>

In an unprecedented mobilization of international academic circles, dozens of professional associations in political science, sociology and geography in the United States and Britain - as well as international associations representing thousands of scholars worldwide - sent letters of protest to the CHE and the ministry of education. The European Consortium for Political Research, the London School of Economics, and hundreds of individual scholars joined in, ignoring the international committee's damning findings and repeating the charge that closing the department was a politically motivated move that would damage Israel's academic standing in the world.<sup>556</sup>

Israeli faculty took a particularly active role in the campaign. Letters condemning the move were dispatched by virtually all relevant professional associations and many individual scholars, including a Noble Prize winner. Maoz was virtually alone in defending the CHE; having publicly disclosed his role in the 2002 evaluation he put much of the blame on the CHE's decision to accredit the program in the first place. But he also criticized Carmi for tolerating a seriously flawed department and allowing it to hire faculty that represented 'more of the same'. Convinced that the department could not right itself, Maoz urged the creation of an academic receivership to correct the problems. And by way of fending off charges of

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<sup>555</sup> Dror Eydar, 'The mis-education of Ben-Gurion University', *Israel Hayom*, 7 October 2012.

<sup>556</sup> 'Editorial Note: The international war against Israel's Council of Higher Education', *Israel Academia Monitor*, 11 October 2012 [http://israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large\\_advic&advice\\_id=8549&page\\_data\[id\]=171&cookie\\_lang=en](http://israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?type=large_advic&advice_id=8549&page_data[id]=171&cookie_lang=en).

political prejudice on his part he felt obliged to describe himself as a leftist in good standing.<sup>557</sup>

But Maoz's appeal made no impact on the Israeli academic community as it prepared to increase pressure on the CHE ahead of its meeting of 31 October 2012. A week before the meeting the prestigious Israel Democracy Institute organized a roundtable titled 'The Council of Higher Education: Legitimate Regulations or Infringement on Academic Freedom?' Predictably, there was a virtual consensus that the evaluation of the department was politically motivated with participants taking turns to condemn the CHE for gravely undermining academic freedom.<sup>558</sup>

Taken aback, the CHE was forced to defend its actions. In a public letter its director, Moshe Vigdor, complained about 'the unprecedented attack against the CHE' and accused the critics of actions where 'red lines were crossed'. He took special umbrage at Carmi and others who appealed to the international community: 'it is unheard of that a letter by the head of an Israeli academic institution is forwarded to elements abroad, including professors, professional unions and institutions against the CHE and the state - this and more, even before the CHE discussed the issue and before it resolved the issue'. Describing the attack as 'imported', he pleaded for the 'foreign interference' to stop.<sup>559</sup>

Following the huge build-up, the 31 October meeting was somewhat anticlimactic. Professor Risse, who was at attendance, told the university's representatives that only one of the three new hires comported with the original

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<sup>557</sup> Zeev Maoz, 'Academic Hypocrisy in Action', *Haaretz*, 20 November 2012; idem, 'Yes, to Closing', *ibid*, 28 December 2012.

<sup>558</sup> 'Roundtable: The Council of Higher Education: Legitimate Regulation or Infringement of Academic Freedom?' Israel Democracy Institute (Jerusalem), 22 October 2012 <http://en.idi.org.il/events/roundtables/roundtable-the-council-of-higher-education-legitimate-regulation-or-infringement-of-academic-freedom>.

<sup>559</sup> Moshe Vigdor, 'Stop the Attack against the CHE', *Haaretz*, 30 October 2012.

recommendation, concluding that the department ‘still lacks the necessary faculty in core topics’ as suggested by the report. The university was given three weeks to furnish a detailed plan for addressing the request but the threat of closure was subsequently removed. As reported in the Israeli press, ‘Meretz MK Tamar Zandberg, a PhD candidate at the department, told Ynet: “The decision today uncovered the fact that the attempts to shut down the department were driven by political interests and had nothing to do with academic achievements”’. Moreover, ‘the efforts to close the department backfired at those who vigorously advocated its closing once the academic excellence and professional conduct of the department became clear’.<sup>560</sup>

Coming a decade after the Pappé-Katz incident, the unprecedented intervention of foreign academics in what was a prerogative of a sovereign state to oversee the public higher education system it funded made it clear that imposing common standards on radical academics - the suggestion made by the international Risse Committee - was fraught with considerable perils. Though few in the CHE would have accepted the comment about the ‘excellence of the Department’ they were likely to agree with the ‘backfire’ metaphor. Indeed, the CHE was subsequently much more cautious when dealing with the critical scholars in the Sociology Department at Ben-Gurion University as part of its routine evaluation of sociology departments decided upon in 2009.

In January 2012, the CHE convened a committee of evaluation chaired by Professor Seymour Spilerman of Columbia University. Echoing the Risse committee the report on the Ben-Gurion University sociology department submitted in August offered a scathing critique of the dominance of the critical approach and the paucity of methodically oriented courses: ‘It is the view of the Committee that a sociology

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<sup>560</sup> ‘University Gets Chance to Reform Department’, *Israel Hayom*, 31 October 2012; Shahar Hai, ‘BGU’s “leftist department” to remain open’, *YNET*, 2 December, 2013.

department at a major university should not have the majority of its faculty working within conceptual perspective that is not mainstream in the profession'. The report urged to broaden the faculty to 'include other intellectual approaches as well as in the range of subfields covered by the department'. Referring to the faculty, the committee concluded that 'it is our majority drew extensively upon critical studies in their own research. Future hiring should therefore to be oriented to bringing into the department sociologists who work primarily from a rigorous empirical perspective'.<sup>561</sup>

For reasons not fully explained by the CHE, the Spilerman Committee submitted a second toned-down report in October 2012. Still, the new version took a negative view of the department stating:

The Committee is convinced that critical studies, with its orientation toward critiquing and changing society, has a contribution to make in the discipline and should remain a valued specialty in the Ben-Gurion Department. Moreover, much of what is labeled as critical sociology by the BGU faculty would elsewhere be considered political/historical sociology, which is a well-established subfield of the discipline. However, the faculty should be broadened to increase the representation of other intellectual approaches, as well as in the range of subfields covered by the department.

In other words, the department offered political-historical sociology labelled as sociology. On the same note, the committee found that

in its mission statement the department notes that students are taught to comprehend society and culture from a critical perspective, and not take for

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<sup>561</sup> The final evaluation report of the CHE <http://che.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Ben-Gurion-Sociology-and-Anthropology-Report-2012.pdf> ; The changed report forwarded by Yaacov Bergman, [https://www.dropbox.com/s/2lupw4t9gdnc9md/%20BGU\\_Sociology\\_Report\\_change\\_d.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/s/2lupw4t9gdnc9md/%20BGU_Sociology_Report_change_d.pdf) ; <http://israel-academia-monitor.com/uppics/upp4059.pdf>

granted the conventional assumptions of their society. While this intent is laudable, and helps to distinguish the Ben-Gurion department from other sociology-anthropology departments in Israel, the Committee is of the opinion that the objective of the department's programs should be, first and foremost, to familiarize students with the variety of theories, conceptual approaches, and methodologies used by sociologists and anthropologists to analyse social structures, cultures, and the functioning of social systems.<sup>562</sup>

It recommended that 'courses should be broadened further to include additional research from quantitatively oriented perspectives'. The Committee expressed concern that 'not all of the core fields of the two disciplines are covered adequately. For sociology there did not appear to be courses offered in basic topics such as work and occupations, social stratification, or family/life course studies'. Other core courses (e.g. historical sociology, religion) are listed as taught by adjuncts or retired faculty, which is a concern'.

In addition to the paucity of faculty capable of teaching empirically oriented and quantitative core courses, the committee identified other problems created by the imbalance between critical and positivist perspectives. In the MA program, the critical studies track had a very small enrolment as opposed the much more popular organizational sociology. As a result, 'faculty who work from a critical perspective also teach in the organizational sociology track - which raises issues about the minimal exposure of students in this track to empirical and quantitative materials. In general, we remain concerned about the mal-distribution of the faculty over specialties in light of the student enrolment, among other reasons'.

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<sup>562</sup> Committee for the Evaluation of the Sociology and Anthropology Program, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sociology and Anthropology Department, October 2012, <http://che.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Ben-Gurion-Sociology-and-Anthropology-Report-2012.pdf>

Finally, while faculty ‘consists of active researchers with strong publication records’ with ‘few exceptions, the sociologists have not published in the most influential journals of the profession, especially the *American Sociological Review*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *British Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, the *European Sociological Review* and the *Annual Review of Sociology*’. The orientation of these journals is to publish papers that are rigorously evidenced-based, while critical studies leans more in the theoretical direction and towards a public-oriented sociology. As a result of not publishing in top, general interest journals, the visibility of the department within the profession is lessened’.

Whether the critical orientation of the faculty was related to the department’s difficulty in raising competitive grants was not clearly articulated, but the committee urged the university to provide help in this endeavour. That the committee had little faith in the department to reform itself was also clear in other ways. For instance, in urging the department to hire more quantitatively oriented faculty the committee recommended that an outside scholar be involved in the process.<sup>563</sup>

Even though the October version of the report was modified, it represented a stinging rebuke of Uri Ram, the chair of the department and, as noted earlier, the leading critical sociologist after Kimmerling’s demise. For Ram the difference between positivist sociology - in his words ‘institutional sociology’ - recommended by the committee and his vision was dramatic. He vigorously objected to the notion of sociology that presented ‘itself as a neutral positive science, the role of which is to provide explanations and predictions’. While it stresses objective science it ‘serves the authoritarian and unequal order’. Critical sociology, on the other hand, ‘views

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<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*

sociology as a social activity' aimed at furthering specific values, 'the values of freedom and human equality'.<sup>564</sup>

At a minimum, if implemented, the recommendation would undermine Ram's vision. Whether the CHE will be able to impose the recommendation on the Sociology Department, however, is not entirely clear. While rarely admitted, the Department of Politics and Government's affair contributed to an intellectual understanding that post-Zionists were protected by a larger international network of scholars. In essence, a symbiotic relationship has developed between the two: the former generated research and activism that the latter could use to justify their anti-Israel actions. In an intellectual climate sensitive to claims of anti-Semitism, Jewish and, especially, Israeli academics were a virtually required presence.

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<sup>564</sup> Uri Ram, *Israeli Nationalism: Social Conflicts and the Politics of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 48.



## Conclusion

Operating within the critical, neo-Marxist paradigm post-Zionist academics operating within the critical, neo-Marxist paradigm have transformed the marginal anti-Zionist ideology of Matzpen, into a tool of delegitimization. The positivist view of Israel as liberal democracy based on a market economy was replaced by a narrative that offered a ferocious critique of all facets of Israeli history and society, hand-tailored to undermining its legitimacy in a number of ways:

- ‘New historians’ have turned the saga of Israel’s creation upside down so as to cast the Jewish state as ‘born in sin’ - a colonialist outpost of western imperialism established through massive ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population.
- A revisionist historian has cast the Jewish people as a recent Zionist invention aimed at establishing a false historical link between Jews and the Holy Land so as gain international legitimacy for the dispossession of the Palestinians.
- ‘Critical sociologists’ depicted Israel as an apartheid society dominated by an Ashkenazi-capitalist elite that has subjugated minorities, women and the working classes. In a twist of the Zionism-as-colonialism theory, the Mizrahim were reclassified as Arab Jews who - like their ‘Palestinian brethren’ - have allegedly been reduced to third class existence.
- ‘Critical political scientists’ have worked hard to discredit Israel’s democratic credentials, with some of them going so far as to present the Jewish state as a fascist-like, apartheid state.
- ‘Revisionist approaches’ to the Holocaust, the most traumatic event in modern Jewish history, have generated a gamut of delegitimizing conclusions: that

Israel has turned Holocaust worship into a civil religion designed to exploit Western guilt feelings in order to dispossess the Palestinians in 1948 and to hold on to the territories conquered in the 1967 war. At the deeper level the Holocaust is said to have perverted Israelis' perception of reality and morality in a way that entrenched them in a self-righteous victim mentality while committing Nazi-like atrocities against the Palestinians.

Needless to say, this 'critical' de-legitimizing endeavour has been marred with serious methodological flaws. These range from the use of unsubstantiated and/or single-source assertions while straining interpretation beyond available evidence, to failure to consider contradictory evidence and to spell out important procedural approaches, to selective use of data to prove particular points and the use of data out of chronological or factual context. For their part post-Zionist scholars often dismissed the positivist scientific method as reflecting the 'dominant narrative', maligning their critics as agents of right-wing nationalism, colonialism or racism. Some have even presented their work as being, in the words of Ophir, outside the 'academic consensus' and thus impervious to criticism.

Last but not least, virtually all post-Zionists analysed in this study have insisted on being duty-bound to do research that is filtered through a contemporaneous political reality. In other words, as political reality changes - or more precisely the scholar's perception of this reality, so does the respective narrative. As this work indicates, the failure of the Oslo process radicalized the post-Zionists at the personal level leading in many cases to the rewriting of their 'pre-Oslo narrative'. Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim and Baruch Kimmerling, to give a few prominent examples, produced new narratives demonstrating a virtual sea-change from their original accounts. Kimmerling, in particular, traversed the research terrain in a dramatic

fashion, shifting from a positivist sociologist lauding Israel for holding on to democracy in extremely difficult circumstances to a scathing critic deriding Israel as a militarist, fascist and apartheid state. Benny Morris travelled in the opposite direction. Deeply dismayed by the perceived Palestinians intransigence during the peace negotiations he modified the narrative of the 1948 war with a view to shifting the blame away from the Israelis and onto the Palestinians, again indicating the politicized basis of his work.

Certain features of the Israeli academy account for the rapid dissemination of the post-Zionist themes in the liberal arts in general and social sciences in particular. Compared to tertiary education in the West, Israeli faculty has been granted expansive academic freedom - a tradition created by the Hebrew University determined to carry out the vision of its founder, Judah Magnes. Despite several efforts at reform the state did not manage to limit this broadly conceived right, leaving an operational environment conducive to the flourishing of post-Zionism. Consequently, activist faculty have not only engaged in intense political work, often using campus facilities as a base, but many switched to writing on subjects related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict regardless of their original specialization.

In yet another manifestation of this pattern, the university authorities have accepted such research – often published in the “alternative” critical outlets, as a base of promotion.

The international committee of evaluation of the Department of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University offered a scathing indictment of such practices. The review made clear that “alternative” critical network of publishing venues does not comport to the academic standards of mainstream publications, and urged the department to abide by accepted standards of hiring and promotion. Faced

with the prospect of being closed down, the department and its vast network of domestic and international supporters effectively derailed the committee's recommendation. The uproar had a chilling effect on the Council of Higher Education that had ordered the review. A year later, a different evaluation committee censured the highly politicized Department of Sociology at Ben Gurion University for its heavy reliance on critical scholars and urged to hire more mainstream positivist faculty, the Council sanitized the report, apparently to avoid another international outcry.

Considered in conjunction with the Pappé-Katz-Tantura incident, where the actions of the University of Haifa triggered a call of academic boycott, these developments reveal a broad engagement of the scholarly international community in nourishing and protecting post-Zionist faculty.

Though beyond the scope of the present study, there is considerable evidence to demonstrate that activist academics receive extensive financial support. Some of its direct, in form of grants from foundations and foreign governments. Other is indirect, through visiting positions, often at elite universities, invitations to conferences, workshops and other academic conclaves. Quite possible, the newly invigorated push for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions will further enhance the standing of activist faculty whose writings became part of the canon legitimizing the movement. By the same token, the threat of boycott will probably have a chilling effect on the willingness of the state and/or the university authorities to curb this activism.

Clearly, the thesis has the potential to impact the ongoing discourse on the post-Zionist scholars at three different levels. Most important, the systematic and comprehensive analysis of the key post-Zionist texts illustrates in great details the many methodological shortcomings involved. The blurring of the lines between

political polemics and bone fide research is celebrated among the disciples of Antonio Gramsci, but should not be tolerated in research universities. Institutions of higher learning are beholden to standards of objectivity and dispassionate pursuit of knowledge - tenet of positivist philosophy. By violating this principle, post-Zionists have produced ever- changing narratives on a variety of topics, be it the Israeli authority system or the history of the 1948 war, to suit their political cause du jour. As noted, polemics masquerading as scholarship have helped to delegitimize Israel in the international arena. But it also undermined the standing of social sciences as measured by rigorous indices like Social Science Citation Index. Both of the Ben Gurion University evaluation reports touched upon this issue, but the present work can spur a more generalized debate on the limits of academic freedom in Israel.

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