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*Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel*

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## *“All That Stuff Was Zionism”*

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On a hill above the Tel Aviv–Haifa highway at the Herzliya junction, there is a statue of Theodor Herzl, the town’s namesake. Resembling a silhouette, it is the Herzliya municipality’s contribution to raising Zionist consciousness. Uri Lifschitz, the sculptor, turned out a pretty ludicrous Herzl: the image is as flat as a wood shaving; Herzl is dressed in a black frock coat and looms above a water tower. To keep him from tipping over, he’s secured in place with steel wire.

A few years after it was erected, the sculpture was repaired, and for the duration of the renovation a sign hung from the water tower, emblazoned with the contractor’s name: Mohammed Mahamid, an Israeli-Arab. When the repairs were complete, the original legend reappeared under the sculpture: “Herzliya, a dream of a city,” referring to the most famous

statement attributed to Herzl, the prophet of Jewish statehood: "If you will it, it is no dream."

The history of Zionism proves that statement. In one hundred years of activity the Zionist movement led a part of the Jewish people to partial independence in a part of the Land of Israel, and for all the downside, it's a success story.

A yearning for the Land of Israel has attended the Jews always. It's a central subject in their writings from the Bible onward and a component of Jewish identity. In every country and at every time Jews have believed in the Exodus from Egypt to the land of Israel and the giving of the Torah. They knew of the kingdom of Israel, the Babylonian exile, and the oath of those exiles: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her cunning." Year after year they vowed, "Next year in Jerusalem." Most Jews didn't actually try to return to the Land of Israel; it was a religious object of desire, often an abstract spiritual concept, not a geographical destination they would actually consider moving to.

The first Zionist colonies were established in Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century, but only a handful of Jews settled in them. The Zionist enterprise received a big push forward when the movement succeeded in obtaining the support of the British Empire. Britain gained Palestine during World War I and ruled it for thirty years. Israel's collective memory tends to emphasize the struggle against the British regime. Among other things, the British are remembered for the restrictions they placed on Jewish immigration and land

purchases. They are accused of support for the Arabs and animosity toward the Jews. Jewish terrorist actions against the British are depicted as a war of liberation.

A larger view gives a different picture. The British opened Palestine to mass Jewish immigration, and the Jewish population increased more than tenfold. The Zionist movement was allowed to purchase land, engage in agriculture, and establish hundreds of new settlements, including several cities—Herzliya was one of them. Palestine's Jews established elected political institutions, an army, and an economic infrastructure, including industrial plants and banks. The Zionist movement was allowed to establish an independent school system. These schools, and a large number of other public institutions, promoted Hebrew culture and a local national identity. All these helped the Jews defeat the Arabs and establish the State of Israel.

Israel is one of the great accomplishments of the twentieth century, despite its imperfections. During its early years, to live in Israel was to live in a state of gnawing anxiety. There was a pervasive feeling that everything was transitory and who knew whether two years from now there would even be a country. That's the explanation for the odd custom that Israeli passengers on El Al flights adopted: when an airplane landed in Tel Aviv, they would all break out in applause. The working assumption was that the plane would crash. Landing safely was cause for celebration.

The difficulties were in fact enormous. Israel overcame most of them. Very few people still applaud El Al pilots when the

plane lands. There are third- and fourth-generation Israelis; they speak Hebrew with their parents, go to the same schools their parents went to, serve in the same army units, have the same experiences. They have a common way of life, a common sense of humor, common expectations. Today's Israeli children have something their parents and parents' parents often didn't have: living and proximate grandparents. That this ostensibly simple fact has become banal is the country's greatest achievement.

Israel defends its citizens. From time to time there are terrorist attacks, but generally the state provides its inhabitants with personal security. The Web sites of the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organization, and UNESCO show that most Israelis are far better off than most of the people in the world. The data tables generally include about 150 countries; they compare measures such as GNPs, infant mortality rates, life expectancies, and literacy. Israel is in the top twenty on all such indexes. The standard and quality of life granted its citizens places it alongside several European countries. Most Israelis are better off each year, and this trend is continuing despite the widening gap between rich and poor. Most Israelis can thus assume that their children will have better lives than they have had, just as their own lives have been better than those of their parents.

Theodor Herzl's statue at the entrance to the city that bears his name looks out over an array of tall glass-and-steel office buildings. They are breathtakingly ostentatious, exuding suc-

cess and luxury. Most of their tenants are giant high-tech companies, both Israeli and international, all in the spirit of the prophet: he dreamed of a flourishing urban culture. Herzliya has fancy stores and exclusive restaurants of the kind that Herzl himself craved. The stores have names like Tophouse, Columbus, and Beverly Hills, and there's a McDonald's as well. It's all in the spirit of the American century that Herzl heralded, including the Mizra Delicatessen, which sells pork-based cold cuts produced by a northern kibbutz. Its spacious salesroom is a kind of Shrine of Bacon offering imported tidbits from all over the world. Huge crowds of Israelis shop there; on Saturdays every parking place in the vicinity is taken. Herzl would have been thrilled. Actually, if Herzl lived in Israel today, he too might be attacked as a post-Zionist. In many ways, in fact, Herzl was the first post-Zionist.

Herzl believed that the Jews needed their own country because most of them could not live in their countries of residence as equal citizens. He saw persecution of and discrimination against the Jews as an immutable fact. So long as Jews lived in the Diaspora, they would be the victims of anti-Semitism. That is the Jewish problem. Herzl described two possible solutions: assimilation or emigration to another country where the Jews could establish a state of their own. Herzl did not believe in assimilation. So he called for a Jewish state.

Herzl recognized that the Land of Israel was the ancient and inalienable historical homeland of the Jews, but he seems to have stressed its merits largely as a way of marketing his

Zionist idea and capturing the hearts of the Jewish public. For his part, he didn't think the State of Israel necessarily had to be established in the Land of Israel. As far as he was concerned, Argentina was a definite possibility; he lauded it as one of the world's richest countries, with a huge territory, a sparse population, and a temperate climate. Late in his life, Herzl's diplomatic activity led the British Empire to offer the Jewish people national autonomy in East Africa—the territory under offer was mistakenly identified as Uganda. Herzl favored accepting the offer, at least as a temporary arrangement.

The first Arab protests against Zionism's aspirations were voiced while Herzl was still alive. Given his worldview, he might well have taken the view that the Land of Israel was not worth the price of war—Argentina might have been much simpler. He was also aware of the opposition the Zionist idea aroused in the Christian world and agreed that Jerusalem should not be included in the territory of the Jewish state. Herzl did not even place much value on the Hebrew language. "Who among us knows Hebrew well enough to use the language to ask for a train ticket?" he wrote. He supposed that the Jews in Israel would all speak their native languages. Switzerland was his example. He imagined his Jewish state as a nation of Jewish immigrants: "In the Land of Israel, too, we will remain what we are now, just as we will never cease to love, with regret and longing, the countries of our birth from which we were expelled," he wrote. That's exactly what happened, to the disgruntlement of some of the founding fathers of Israeli Zionism.

Menachem Begin wrote that the Jewish state was established thanks to Herzl's book *The Jewish State*, but this fundamental text of the Zionist movement articulates a Zionism that many Israelis have not adopted. One the whole, the founding fathers who settled in Palestine cultivated a local breed of Zionism that was very different from Herzl's. The most important difference between this homegrown ideology and Herzl's is that at a certain point the Zionists in Palestine ceased to view the establishment of the state as a means for solving the world Jewish problem and began to see it as an independent, and local, goal.

In comparison with Israeli Zionism, then, Herzl's Zionism comes out looking somewhat dim, pale, moderate, and promising, really not at all patriotic—exactly what the Israeli political right now identifies as post-Zionist. Herzl would probably not have been surprised by this. From the start, most of the people who attacked his Zionist creed were Jews: religious Jews, liberals, and Marxists. Jewish opposition to Zionism is hardly a new Israeli invention; it has dogged the Zionist movement from its very beginnings. Until Israel was established, in fact, most Jews were not Zionists. And after its establishment, Israelis agreed to compromise on a fairly fuzzy, almost post-Zionist definition of their identity.

Zionism's first enemies were ultra-Orthodox Jews. Their rabbis viewed Zionism as heresy, feared that it endangered the Jews, and estimated that it was liable to challenge their position as

the primary communal leaders. On the eve of the first Zionist Congress in 1897, the national organization of German rabbis condemned Zionism and stated that it ran counter to the messianic destiny of Judaism as expressed in the Holy Scriptures and other religious texts. The principal theological argument against Zionism was that the political effort to lead the Jews out of their Exile was "forcing the end." In other words, it created an artificial replacement for God and the true redemption. In doing so, they said, it violated the Jewish people's vow to wait patiently for the complete redemption that would come in the days of the Messiah, which depended entirely on the will of God. The Exile had acquired a halo of sanctity. Making frequent references to false messiahs of the past, the rabbis described Zionism as "the war of the evil urge," nothing but deception. "God forbid we should follow those sinners," they warned with a vehemence that had until then been reserved solely for Jews who had converted to Christianity.

Alongside the Talmudic injunction not to "mount the wall"—which was taken to mean a prohibition against organizing mass immigration to the Holy Land—ultra-Orthodox leaders also cited the injunction against violating any law of the lands of the Jewish Diaspora. The demand that Jews wait passively, while maintaining a low public profile, was founded not only in the rabbis' religious views but also in their responsibility for the safety of a small, weak religious minority that was always and everywhere confronted with discrimination, deportation, and violence. In the rabbis' opinion, Zionism was liable to be viewed as rebellion and nationalist agitation

against the supreme authority of the countries in which the Jews resided. Such a perception, they feared, would endanger the entire Jewish community, both Zionism's supporters and its opponents.

But Zionism was also perceived as a competitor to religion, as subversion against rabbinical authority, because it promoted a new, secular Jewish identity. Zionism did not invent national Jewish secularism; that had emerged under the influence of changes in the societies in which the Jews of Europe lived. Nor did the Jewish identity fostered by the Zionist movement necessarily require a rejection of religious principles. But the political organizational activity of the Zionist movement threatened the religious establishment's monopoly. A number of rabbis overcame this ostensible contradiction between Judaism and Zionism, founding the religious Zionist movement.

The Zionism that Herzl represented was anchored in the liberal nationalism then blossoming in Europe, which quite naturally attracted many Jews. But this same perspective led many Jews to the conclusion that the only way for them to be recognized as citizens with equal rights was to integrate into the liberal national society taking shape around them. Jewish liberalism thus offered its own solution to the Jewish problem, one opposed to the Zionist solution. The desire to become integrated as equals into the countries of the Diaspora, yet still to preserve religious identity, encouraged a "reform" of Judaism that was expressed principally in forms of worship. Many

Reform Jews also saw Zionism as a threat to their status in the countries in which they lived.

At the dedication of a Reform synagogue in Charleston, South Carolina in 1841 one of the speakers declared, "The United States is our Land of Israel, this city is our Jerusalem, and this house of God is our Temple." There were those who gave up religion entirely or even accepted Christianity. Their goal was to eliminate the difference between them and their neighbors. Zionist ideology imposed otherness on them, labeling them as Jewish nationals. One of the high points of this dispute was the confrontation between two ministers in the British government, both of them Jewish: Herbert Samuel, a Zionist, and Edwin Montagu, his cousin.

Samuel served as postmaster general and later home secretary and was the first British high commissioner in Palestine. In 1917 he was among the driving forces behind the British declaration of support for the Zionist movement, known as the Balfour Declaration. Montagu, minister of munitions and then secretary of state for India, did his best to prevent the declaration from being issued. He rejected the claim that the Jews are a nation. The demand that they be recognized as having a distinct national identity threatened to hinder their struggle to become equal citizens of the countries in which they resided. In an emotional and touching letter Montagu sent to his prime minister, David Lloyd-George, he wrote that if the Land of Israel were declared the national home of the Jewish people, every antisemitic organization and newspaper would ask by what right a Jew served as a minister in the British government.

"The country for which I have worked ever since I left the University—England—the country for which my family have fought," Montagu wrote, "tells me that my national home, if I desire to go there, therefore my natural home, is Palestine." He presumed that the non-Jewish world would support Zionism in the hope of getting rid of all its Jews. Theodor Herzl also thought of this possibility but, unlike Montagu, welcomed it: "The anti-Semites will be our most loyal friends; the anti-Semitic countries will be our allies," he wrote in his diary. There were those who denied that the Jews were a nation, and there were those who assigned the Jews a historic mission as exiles and saw their dispersal among the peoples of the world as a cultural and ethical ideal.

Many Jews believed that the Jewish problem would be solved in the framework of a new order, in the spirit of Marxist ideology. The Zionist movement did not reject socialist principles; indeed, the Zionist labor movement led the Jewish community in Palestine to its victory. But many believed that to be truly class-conscious, one had to sacrifice one's national identity. The Marxist movement in Europe allowed Jews to be active in its ranks and even to reach prominent leadership positions. Jews stood out among the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and in a number of social-democratic parties. There was also a Jewish Marxist movement, the Bund, an influential competitor to the Zionist movement.

Alongside criticism from without, the Zionist movement also had to deal with differences of opinion among its

members. Rival parties were formed that represented not only competing interests and sides in power struggles, but also worldviews that ranged from the far right to the far left. From the very first, opinions differed not just on tactics but also on fundamental questions, including the movement's goals and its way of achieving them. Early on, debates raged over the question of who was a Jew and who was a Zionist. Ahad Ha'am, the writer and thinker and Herzl's in-house rival, believed that it was enough to establish a "spiritual center" in Palestine. He opposed the creation of a politically sovereign state. There were those who reasoned that Zionism ought to fight for the rights of Jews in their countries of residence, whereas others believed that it should not. They argued over whether people could be Zionists without leaving their country of origin, or whether only a person who settled in the Land of Israel was a true Zionist.

Contrary to the prevailing wisdom in Israel today, the Zionist movement's principal opponents were thus Jews. The movement did not succeed in convincing most of the Jewish people that it was viable, and that was its great failure. By the time most Jews in the world had identified with Zionism's objectives, the movement had suffered a series of heavy blows.

Most Jews who settled in Israel did not do so because they were Zionists. They came as refugees, despite the fact that they were not Zionists. The same was also true, to a certain extent,

of those who came in the earliest waves of immigration. The Zionist movement could tell itself that it had been proven right—Israel had become the place of refuge for persecuted Jews. True, but that could not change the fact that most of those who settled in the country came reluctantly. Most of them had trouble cutting themselves off from their past lives in the Exile. Nine out of every ten pioneers who came in the Second Aliya, the wave of immigration in the decade following 1905, ended up leaving the country.

For about ten years after settling in Palestine, writer Mot-dechai Ben-Hillel Hacohen, a delegate to the first Zionist Congress and whose daughter was married to Ahad Ha'am's son, continued to read *Die Jüdische Rundschau*, the German-Jewish newspaper. He was ecstatic when he had a chance to pore through Russian newspapers reporting the events of the Communist revolution. "What wonders are being done there in that country, in our near-far homeland!" he wrote in his diary. He feared that once granted equality, the Jews of Russia would not come to settle Palestine; they would no longer have any reason to leave. But when he read that the Russian czar had abdicated his crown and that a provisional government had been established, he wrote in his diary, "Our redemption is near, our complete redemption!" It was as if he were living on the Dnieper rather than near the Yarkon River in Tel Aviv.

In the 1920s refugees from the economic crisis in Poland arrived, in what was called the Fourth Aliya. Many, perhaps most, settled in Palestine because the United States was closed



to them. In the 1930s it was the turn of refugees from Nazi Germany to arrive. The majority of participants in this Fifth Aliya would have preferred to remain in their own country or to emigrate elsewhere; they remained a generation of immigrants. Many of them had trouble breaking free from their sense of loss. Playwright Ya'akov Shabrai in his wistful comedy *Striped Tiger* wrote the following words for Shoshana, the owner of a small restaurant on the Tel Aviv beach in the 1930s: "If I had stayed there I could have gone to the Academy and I'd have long since been in the opera." The author's stage directions specify that the frustrated diva should be wearing a foxskin stole. The Tel Aviv heat was not hers.

The longing for the "old country" grew stronger whenever life in Israel became harsher and more demanding and the disparity between reality and expectations greater. Many passed this feeling on to their children. The latter internalized it without always being aware of its origin. This is the source of the heavy baggage carried by the phrase *butz la'aretz*, "overseas." Most of the world's inhabitants live in poverty under authoritarian regimes, but when Israelis say "overseas" they mean a standard of living and culture that is higher than at home. Long before anyone spoke of post-Zionism, in the 1920s, 1930s, 1950s, and 1960s, many Israelis left their country. Few did so because they'd read a post-Zionist book published by some professor. They left because it was hard to live in Israel. Often those who emigrated continued, in their new homes, to consider themselves Israeli and Zionist.

Some of the Zionist movement's ideologues, especially

those from the labor movement, attributed a moral purpose to Zionism. Inspired by other Jewish writers who were not necessarily Zionists, these ideologues described life in the Diaspora as degenerate and parasitic. It was, they wrote, a life based on trading, brokering, and moneylending. They believed that the consummation of Zionist ideology would lead to a revolution in values. Unlike Herzl's brand, Zionism in Palestine cultivated profound scorn, even rancor, toward Jewish life in the Exile and Jewish culture. Then after the slaughter of the Jews during World War II became known one Zionist newspaper in Palestine wrote: "Had the [Nazi] enemy succeeded in striking at us in *this* place, it would have been a blow that extinguished the soul. The destruction would certainly have been much smaller in quantity than the destruction of Jewish Europe, but in quality and historical significance it would have been much greater." In a meeting between Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and a group of writers not long after the state was established, the poet Leah Goldberg said of the Jews, "This people is ugly, mediocre, morally deranged, and difficult to love."

The "rejection of the Exile" led the Zionist labor movements ideologues to devise an ideal "new Jew," or "new man" they sought to create in the Land of Israel, at times through coercion. Aharon Appelfeld, a novelist, has written about a boy, an immigrant from Poland, whose classmates bullied and beat him up because he could not sunbathe as they did. The boy assured them that he was trying as hard as he could to make his skin darker, but they believed that had he really

wanted to change, he would have done so. His pale skin seemed to bring the Exile and the Holocaust to them, so they beat him up. The people who ran the immigrant camps of the 1950s similarly tried to impose a secular Israeli identity on Yemenite children, forcing them to cut off their sidelocks.

The dream of a "new man" was borrowed from ideas that were then in vogue in the Soviet Union, Weimar Germany, and Fascist Italy. There were those who spoke of a "new Jewish race." Ze'ev Jabotinsky, leader of right-wing Revisionist Zionism, spoke of "a new psychological race of Jew." In this context, the term *Jew* was often eschewed in favor of *Hebrew*. The new Hebrew, the opposite of the Diaspora Jew, was supposed to skip over two-thousand years of exile and connect directly with the heroes of the Bible. In posters and in photographs he was depicted as a muscular, light-haired, happy youth. The young Israeli man is superior in every respect to the young Jewish man of the Diaspora, claimed one of the leaders of the local educational system: "He is erect, brave, handsome, well-developed in his body, loves work, sport, and games; he is free in his movements, devoted to his people and its patrimony." He was frequently depicted as a farmer; being close to the land was considered truly Zionist. City life and, often, theoretical studies, including university, were not.

Working the land was meant to fortify the Yishuv, the Jewish community in Palestine. It was also considered a moral obligation, a "religion of labor," as it was sometimes called. An article in the newspaper *Ha'aretz* stated of the graduates of the Ben-Shemen Agricultural School, "They will bring pure

and clean blood to our national labor, the labor of the land." The children of Palestine's farming settlements were living, in the view of Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann, "the original Hebrew life." At times working the land was described in almost erotic terms by, among others, poet Chaim Nachman Bialik. Agricultural workers, he wrote, "empty the strength of their youth into the bowels of this blasted ground in order to bring it to life." Moshe Smilansky, a farmer and writer, said that living in Tel Aviv was like living in a huge hotel and warned that "the shopkeeping mentality" would lead the city's residents to "hucksterism, assimilation, and apostasy," not national revival. "Store after store," carped another commentator, hotel after hotel, pensions, hairdressers, soft drink stands, kiosks. Soft drink vendors were a popular and disparaging symbol for immigrants who preferred the convenience of city life to farming. One writer in *Ha'aretz* referred to the "horrible scourge" of interest-charging moneylenders and "all sorts of other blood-sucking leeches." When people wanted to prophesy the most dire, horrible future imaginable, they predicted that someday Tel Aviv would have a stock exchange. The goal was to "obliterate the memory of the city."

Nevertheless, the society that arose in Israel was manifestly urban, similar to that characteristic of Jewish life in the Diaspora. As in the Diaspora, most Jews in Israel did not engage in production. They were traders, middlemen, and members of the other professions typical of Jews elsewhere. The phenomenon only became more pronounced. In the mid-1950s, 16 percent of Israelis worked in agriculture. By the mid-1990s

that figure had dropped to 3 percent. Kibbutz members claimed to be the Zionist elite and, until the Six Day War, acted as the movement's caretakers. They played a large role in marking out the country's borders, but the focus of Zionist activity was in Tel Aviv, not in the kibbutzim.

The Zionist enterprise in the Land of Israel required the establishment of a Jewish majority, and that meant increasing the Jewish population. At the beginning of 1921, after the first serious clashes between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, *Ha'aretz* made an emotional plea to the world's Jews: "Do not leave us alone at the front. Do not slight the blood of the pioneers you sent before the nation! Come to us in your masses, come to us in your multitudes to strengthen the Hebrew position, to bring us more working hands, hands for defense!"

In the wake of one of the first attacks on Palestine's Jews, Joseph Klausner, a historian, wrote: "If the Arabs imagine that they can provoke us to war and that because we are few they will easily win, they are making a huge error. Our campaign will include all 13 million Jews in all the countries of the world. And everyone knows how many statesmen, how many opinion makers, how many people of great wisdom and great wealth and great influence we have in Europe and America." This statement was one of the first indications of the about-face that would take place among Palestine's Zionists. Instead of seeing the state as a means of saving the world's Jews, they

demanding that the world's Jews defend the community in Palestine.

The theoretical obligation to world Jewry ostensibly remained unchanged. When the Zionists demanded that world Jewry reinforce the community in Palestine and finance the Zionist project, the movement's leaders acted on the assumption that the settlers were functioning as a vanguard and were building the state that would in time take in the entire people. In June 1938, Ben-Gurion wrote, "The purpose for which the Jewish state will be established is to absorb a maximum number of immigrants and in doing so to aid in solving the question of the Jewish people in the world." The state was meant to "redeem" the world's Jews and to realize their right to return to their homeland. At the same time, Ben-Gurion also said that he did not oppose saving Jews in other countries "despite our Zionist ideology." But in fact he tended to see attempts to aid Jews elsewhere as harmful competition. He attacked, for instance, the Joint Distribution Committee, a welfare organization that worked worldwide and was not subordinate to the Zionist movement. This is the background to Ben-Gurion's view of the international conference that convened in Évian, France, to discuss the Jewish refugee problem. He warned that opening other countries to Jewish immigration was liable to thwart the Zionist demand that they be sent to Palestine.

The British authorities gave the Zionist movement a virtually free hand in choosing which Jews would be allowed to settle in Palestine. The movement's representatives chose its candidates carefully. The first preference was for young men. Even

during European Jewry's worst travails, the leadership of the Jewish Agency—the Jewish independent administration in Palestine—preferred to prevent the arrival of the elderly and ill. In a few cases it even sent people back to Nazi Germany because they had become a burden on the community in Palestine.

The Zionist enterprise also depended to a large extent on Jews being willing to fund it. Ben-Gurion was concerned that the persecution in Europe would affect the movement's ability to raise money for development in Palestine. "While myriads of Jewish refugees are languishing and suffering in concentration camps, even the Zionists among them will not respond to the needs of Palestine," he wrote. Less than two weeks after the beginning of World War II, he declared that "the fate of the Land of Israel hangs in the balance." The distance between the perceptions of the community in Palestine and those of the rest of the Jewish world, and between the ideas of Herzlian Zionism and those of the Yishuv were by this time profound.

The persecution of the Jews leading to World War II had forced the Zionist movement to face a truth it had tried to repress. Palestine could not solve the Jewish problem in Europe, a fact that became ever more clear as Arab opposition to the Zionist project increased. At least two Zionist leaders, Max Nordau and Ze'ev Jabotinsky, proposed transporting Jews to Palestine in large rescue operations. There was no practical possibility of doing this, not only because the British prohibited mass immigration, but also because the country could not absorb refugees at such a pace. In 1934 Ben-Gurion said that Palestine had room for 4 million Jews. Two years later he spoke

of "at least" 8 million. Some spoke of bringing 50,000 Jews a year; others spoke of 100,000 Jews a year. At that rate the process would have taken between fifty and one hundred years, and even then just half the world's Jews, at most, would be living in Palestine. In 1937 Ben-Gurion talked about bringing 1.5 million Jews, explaining that this was vital in order to create a Jewish majority. That would have taken fifteen years. Toward the end of the war, Ben-Gurion spoke of the need to bring over 1 million Jews "immediately."

None of these figures would have saved most of the Jews who were persecuted in Europe. The tragedy of Zionism in a nutshell is that while it may have foreseen the catastrophe, the solution it offered was irrelevant. Furthermore, prior to the establishment of the state the Zionist movement did not have the functional ability to organize mass rescue operations. The first rescue it mounted after the Nazis came to power was through an agreement made with the Third Reich allowing German Jews to take a large part of their property with them to Palestine.

At a later date it became common wisdom that had the State of Israel been established in 1937, in accordance with the British partition plan, it would have prevented the Holocaust. There is no reason to think so. In half a century of independence Israel has not yet absorbed 6 million Jewish immigrants. The movement did manage to get several thousand out of occupied Europe; perhaps it could have rescued more. The Zionists certainly could not have rescued millions, and in fact only a relatively small portion of the Holocaust's survivors owed their

lives to the movement's rescue efforts. The story of the Zionist movement during the Holocaust is one of helplessness.

The archives preserve the words of one Jewish Agency rescue worker in Istanbul. Only a small number of people relative to the magnitude of the catastrophe had been saved, he estimated, but those who escaped came out as Zionists, with their eyes set on Palestine. "We have saved their souls," another rescue worker comforted himself. In this spirit the Zionist movement argued that a large majority of the Holocaust survivors in displaced persons camps after the war wanted to settle in Palestine. There is good reason to doubt that. The choice facing the refugees was Palestine or a return to their countries of origin in Eastern and Central Europe, to devastated, starving cities and to communism and anti-Semitism. But for a handful of exceptions, the survivors were not given a choice between Palestine and the United States. Quite naturally, they chose Palestine. Most of the refugees, physically and mentally ravaged, were nothing like the Yishuv leaders' hopes. "At first I thought they were animals," wrote one of the first emissaries to reach the camps. But the main question on Ben-Gurion's mind was "Where will we get people for Israel?"

Ideological bewilderment and shame at the failure of its rescue efforts were only the lighter part of the blow the Holocaust dealt to the Zionist movement. The real catastrophe was the loss of the population that had been designated for a Jewish majority in Palestine—the population of Europe.

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The Zionist movement was born in Europe, drew its inspiration from Europe and was part of its history. Zionism's romantic nationalism, liberalism, and socialism all came from Europe. The movement's founding figures had assigned it a cultural mission. The Jewish state in the Land of Israel, Theodor Herzl wrote, would serve Europe as a defensive wall against Asia: "We can be the vanguard of culture against barbarism." Max Nordau asserted that the Jews would not lose their European culture in Palestine, nor would they adopt the inferior culture of Asia, just as the British had not turned into Indians in America or Papuans in Australia. "We will endeavor to do in the Near East what the English did in India. . . . It is our intention to come to Palestine as the representatives of culture and to take the moral boundaries of Europe to the Euphrates River," Nordau said at one of the Zionist Congresses. In their contacts with the British government, Zionist leaders continually emphasized that the Jewish state would be a cultural outpost for Europe. Thus European culture was meant to constitute part of the essence of the New Hebrew.

Practically, the Zionist movement could not lay the foundations for a state on its own. It had to hitch its fate to one of the empires, and the British Empire's sponsorship created the impression that the Zionists were settling in Palestine as agents of colonialism. Ironically, Zionist leaders in Palestine were furious at British administrators, who classified them as *natives*, an insulting colonialist term. The Zionists maintained that the natives were the Arabs; they, the Zionists, represented European culture.

They defined their European self-image not only in opposition to their view of the Arabs but also in contrast to their view of the Jews of the Arab countries. In the early periods these were largely from Yemen. Before the news of the slaughter of Europe's Jews reached the Zionist movement, it took little interest in the Jews of the Arab world. "We have been accustomed to see the Jews of the East largely as a subject for historical and anthropological study," a Zionist leader said. According to Ben-Gurion, they had not "noticed" the Jews of the Orient. "We came here as Europeans," Ben-Gurion said. "Our roots are in the East and we are returning to the East, but we bear with us the culture of Europe."

The Holocaust forced Zionism to bring Jews from the Arab world to the new country. Taking them in was a blow to its self-image and to its cultural aspirations, so the Zionist leadership did not bring oriental Jews to Israel eagerly, but because there was no other choice. "Israel needs working and fighting hands," said one of the first government ministers. As a result, even at the beginning of the 1950s, the Israeli government conducted a policy of selecting immigrants useful to the state, "good human material." It also regulated the rate of immigration in accordance with the country's needs, which did not necessarily match the needs of Jews in other countries.

There is no easy way to determine which of the oriental Jews came to Israel because they wanted to leave their countries of origin and which were forced to come by circumstances. Some were most likely inspired by one form or another of religious or political messianism, or a combination of the two.

Most likely, many joined other immigrants out of fear of being left behind. Very few had the opportunity to choose between immigration to Israel and to some other country. A large number left their homes because the Zionist struggle in Palestine did not allow them to remain; they had been identified, like it or not, as Zionists. At this point in its history, then, the Zionist movement did not serve as a solution to the Jewish problem. On the contrary, it led to the uprooting of entire Jewish communities.

Alongside the need to absorb the survivors of the Holocaust and the Jews of the Arab world, Israel was required to compromise with a new kind of Zionism that had its source largely in the United States. During Israel's early years, Ben-Gurion tried to maintain the position that a Jew who considered himself American, who did not feel that he lived in exile, was not a Zionist. Prime Minister Golda Meir asked, "Why aren't we allowed to say that the only Zionist is the one who packs up his belongings and moves to Israel?" She emphasized that "we cannot make peace with the thought" that "the Jewish Exile" would always exist. In the United States this exclusive approach was rejected.

Israel was forced to compromise with America's Jews because it needed their support. Ben-Gurion thus agreed that the decision to immigrate to Israel should be made freely by every individual. Israel and the Zionist movement invested effort and money in persuading Jews to immigrate, but after a long debate agreed to forgo the contention that the goal of Zionism was to gather in "all the exiles." Instead, its goal was

"the ingathering of exiles." In time, it stopped referring to the *Exile* and began using a more neutral term, *Diaspora*. Zionist identity was thus reformulated in the United States, where Jews recognized the central position of the State of Israel and the duty to assist it, but without renouncing the need to care for Jews in other countries. Over the years, American Jewry has set aside larger and larger shares of the money it collects for Jewish projects in the United States, instead of sending the money to Israel.

Sometime after the Soviet Union severed diplomatic relations with Israel, the country put itself at the head of a worldwide struggle against the restrictions that the Soviet regime imposed on Jewish emigration. The fight was for the right of Soviet Jews to immigrate to Israel. But when Jews were allowed to leave, when the first cracks appeared in the Communist regime, it turned out that most of them by far preferred to settle in the United States—and that is what they did. These "dropouts," as they were called in Israel, were a most serious blow to Zionism's self-image and prestige. When it found itself almost without immigrants, Israel did what the Zionist movement had done after the Holocaust: it "discovered" Jews that until then had aroused at best folkloristic interest—the Jews of Ethiopia. Before the 1980s Israel had refused to take them in. But thereafter they were received with great enthusiasm, as if they were the saviors of the Zionist enterprise. Yet, within a very short time, the newcomers found themselves facing treatment that ranged from reserved to hostile. In the meantime, the Communist empire collapsed. Israel then

demanding that the United States end the free immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union because they were no longer political refugees. Since then, most Jews who have left the former Soviet Union have settled in Israel. But tens of thousands have chosen the only other country that gives preferential treatment to Jews: Germany.

These, then, are the struggles, the cracks, the compromises, and the long series of blows that the Zionist movement has had to endure over the years. Not one of them was the product of the rise of "post-Zionist" ideology. To this list may be added the conflict with the Arabs and a series of developments within Hebrew culture, some of which are manifestly anti-Zionist.

Arab resistance confronted the Zionist movement with a range of problems and ideas, both practical and political. The Zionists were never content with being strong; they insisted also on the justness of their cause. They did not want to conquer Palestine by force, but rather to receive it by right. In their efforts to be just and correct, in their own eyes and in the eyes of others, they frequently stressed that they were bringing good fortune and prosperity to all inhabitants of the land, both Jews and Arabs. In keeping with this notion of justice, the original idea was to try to purchase land, and indeed the Zionists legally bought part of Palestine's territory from its owners.

But war was inevitable. Israelis have looked back a thousand times in an effort to figure out where they erred and what should be done in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

No other subject has so preoccupied them. They made mistakes at certain junctures. Not every step they took was justified; not every position they adhered to was vital. But the only way to reach an agreement with the Arabs would have been to renounce the Zionist dream itself. Until Israel established itself as a military power whose survival was ensured, nothing could have brought the Arabs to allow the Zionist movement to create a Jewish majority even in a part of Palestine. The dispute was not territorial. It wasn't a debate over where the border would run, nor an argument over how governance should be structured and shared. It wasn't the Zionists' refusal to integrate into the culture of the East that prevented reaching an agreement, but rather the fundamental and absolute refusal of the Arabs to acquiesce in the Zionist enterprise itself. Resolution could be achieved only by force.

The Zionist movement at times depicted the Jews as a people without a land returning to a land without a people. Zionist historiography has cultivated the thesis that the settlers were shocked when they discovered that Palestine was inhabited by Arabs. The truth is that the movement's leaders knew very well there were Arabs in the country, and that they opposed the Zionists. From the beginning the Zionists knew their project would involve confrontation with the local population.

In fact, at the start of the twentieth century the Arabs were already saying nearly everything they would say in the hundred years that followed. One of the leaders of the Arab community

in Jerusalem wrote to Theodor Herzl, "The world is big enough, there are other uninhabited lands in which millions of poor Jews could be settled. . . . in the name of God, leave Palestine alone!" That was in 1899. Two years later, Arab leaders signed a petition demanding the restriction of Jewish immigration to Palestine and a prohibition against their purchase of land, laying the foundations for the battle against Zionism. In 1905, Najib 'Azuri, one of the heralds of the Arab national movement, published a book in Paris. The awakening of the Arab people, 'Azuri wrote, was taking place simultaneously with the Jews' attempt to reestablish the ancient Israelite kingdom. The two movements were doomed to fight relentlessly until one defeated the other. The fate of the entire world depended on the outcome, he wrote.

Ahad Ha'am had already addressed the issue in his *Truth from Palestine*, published in 1891. Jewish settlers, he wrote, "treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, trespass unjustly, beat them shamelessly for no sufficient reason, and even take pride in doing so." He gave a psychological explanation for the phenomenon: "The Jews were slaves in the land of their Exile, and suddenly they found themselves with unlimited freedom, wild freedom that only exists in a land like Turkey." This sudden change had produced in their hearts an inclination toward repressive tyranny, as always happens "when a slave rules." Ahad Ha'am warned: "Outside Palestine, 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 on around it . . . But should the time come when the life of our people in Palestine imposes to a smaller or greater extent on the natives, they will not easily step aside."

Others also wrote about the "Arab problem." It wasn't easy for the Zionists to explain to themselves and others that the conflict over the Land of Israel sometimes put the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine in danger, sometimes even in more danger than they would have faced in the Diaspora. Many Zionists also had difficulties resolving the contradiction between the movement's commitment to democratic values and the right of national self-determination on the one hand and their efforts, on the other hand, to impose a regime that was unwanted by a majority of the country's inhabitants. Most Zionists were not cynics; they believed in the justice of their cause and in European liberal values. For that reason they said that the Jews in Palestine spoke in the name of all the world's 17 million Jews, and that their status as a minority was but temporary, until the others arrived. The Land of Israel was the only country the Jews had, they said over and over again, while the Arabs had many lands. In keeping with this, the Zionist movement explored the possibility of funding the transfer of the Arab population, or at least a part of it, outside the borders of Palestine in the framework of "voluntary relocation," as they called it. Such a policy would create a Jewish majority and thus preserve Zionism's allegiance to democratic principles.

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For a century, life in Palestine, then in Israel, swung between terrorism and war and terrorism. The confrontations during the British Mandate generated hatred, fear, and a view that the establishment of the Jewish state required removing the Arabs from the country. That happened in 1948: hundreds of thousands of Arabs left, fled, and were expelled from their homes to become destitute refugees. Most of them were not allowed to return. A large part of their lands and homes were confiscated. Those who remained became citizens of Israel and were permitted to vote for and be elected to the Knesset. In practice, they were not allowed to engage in free political activity. That was seen to by the military government imposed on them during the country's early years. The military regime was gradually withdrawn, but even after it was canceled a series of laws and arrangements remained in force that discriminated against Israel's Arabs.

The permanent state of war was the fuel that propelled Israel and the substance that held its people together in a single, mobilized, resilient society, tied by bonds of Zionist patriotism. To a large extent, it determined the structure of the economy and was the central element in Israeli self-consciousness and politics. Yet at the same time there were also voices raising questions about the basic goals of the Zionist movement. There was, of course, the ultra-Orthodox community, which never accepted Zionism and which was a not insignificant proportion of the public. During the Mandate period a number of important intellectuals, leaders in their

fields—like Martin Buber—tried to promote various alternatives to the Zionist idea. These included Jewish integration into an Arab federation and the establishment of a joint Jewish-Arab state.

In such a binational state there would not be a Jewish majority, and in this it lay outside the fundamental principles of the Zionist platform. But the idea's supporters included the Hashomer Hatzair movement, one of the major forces on Israel's Zionist left. The idea of a binational state, and other ideas that departed from Zionist principles, were also current in Aliya Hadasha, a centrist party of mostly German immigrants that had the support of about 10 percent of the population.

One Saturday at the end of the 1920s, three young men sat on a bench on Allenby Street in Tel Aviv, chatting and smoking cigarettes. A religious Jew who passed by reproached them for smoking on the Sabbath. "But I'm not Jewish," one of the young men responded. His name was Uriel Halperin, who later became famous, under his pen name Yonatan Ratosh, as a poet and the prophet of the Canaanites. The epithet "Canaanites" was first applied to Ratosh and his Hebrew Youth movement by its opponents but was later adopted by the group itself. They considered themselves Hebrews, not Jews; they fought not only the Jewish religion but Zionism as well. They denied the existence of a Jewish people and believed that Muslims, Druze, and Christians

could be members of the Hebrew nation. Their Hebrew chauvinism included patently fascist elements. But they found no political leader, never developed organizationally, and attracted only a handful of followers.

Yet the Canaanite worldview was more than an intellectual curiosity. It sustained a mood that was anchored in part in the new Hebrew consciousness that the Zionist movement itself had cultivated. It influenced an entire generation of young people who sought a Hebrew alternative to Zionism. It was the new Israeli identity of a number of writers and artists. One of their most visible representatives was a young German-born journalist named Uri Avneri.

Eight months after Israel declared its independence, Avneri published in *Ha'aretz* his "Confessions of a Young Hebrew," in which he invoked some of the innovative slang of the time, such as using the term "Zionism" to mean "vapid rhetoric;" the full phrase was "Zionism, in quotation marks." "The greatness [of the generation of 1948]," Avneri wrote, "has been its pragmatism. In the combat units, all the ideological slogans and phrases entirely disappeared. All that stuff was Zionism, stuff that had no content and was beside the point." Avneri tried to be the voice of a generation of fighters who had experienced the shock of returning from battle. In fact, he not only expressed an existing mood; to a large measure, he invented it, under the influence of a similar mood that was current among soldiers in Europe after World War I. A while later Avneri bought the weekly magazine *Haolam Hazezeb* and became its editor.

*Haolam Hazeh* was more than a magazine. It united its readers into an elitist peer group and gave them an unmatchably flattering self-image. Avneri told them that the very fact that they read the magazine meant they were among the good and the righteous, the intelligent and the daring. He fortified their sense of being tomorrow's forces of light standing against yesterday's forces of darkness, the few versus the many. In doing so, Avneri created, over the years, an entire set of myths and images that existed only in the pages of his magazine, in a language and style that also existed only in the pages of his magazine. He constructed an imaginary world of heroes and villains, and his magazine was an object of adoration and disgust, of affection and anxiety.

Paradoxically, Avneri identified Zionism with the Diaspora mentality that native Israelis wanted no part of. Zionism was the opposite of the liberated, Hebrew identities of the Sabra generation, the cohort of young, native-born Israelis. More than anywhere else, this was expressed in *Haolam Hazeh's* treatment of the Kastner affair at the beginning of the 1950s. Rudolf Kastner, a leader of the Budapest Jewish community and an activist in Mapai, the labor Zionist party led by Ben-Gurion, was the central witness in a libel trial growing out of accusations that he had collaborated with the Nazis. Avneri portrayed the affair as a battle between the old, cringing, submissive Diaspora Jewish mentality, represented by Kastner, and the young, upright, rebellious Hebrew—Mordechai the Jew of the Book of Esther versus Judah the Maccabee.

Along with his adoration of the Israel Defense Forces, the

Hebrew army, Avneri called for an alliance with the Arabs to be founded on the common "Semitic" identity of the Middle Eastern peoples. This, too, was a notable deviation from the prevailing Zionist identity. Avneri was among the first Israelis to call for the establishment of an Arab state in Palestine, alongside Israel.

*Haolam Hazeh* gave extensive coverage to and promoted a long succession of protest movements, among them Israel's Black Panthers, a group of young oriental Jews from disadvantaged neighborhoods, and Matzpen, a radical Trotskyite faction. Some of these movements engaged only in political and social protest, including criticism of Israel's military policy. Others, encouraged by Avneri, offered cultural alternatives, and some of them sought to challenge the Zionist idea itself. It was Avneri who later invented the term *post-Zionism*. As part of this philosophy, he frequently encouraged the publication of new historical revelations and challenged accepted historical truths.

Indeed, myths were being challenged long before the terms *new historians* and *post-Zionism* appeared. In the 1950s, the media were already publishing exposés about war crimes committed by Israeli soldiers during the War of Independence. There were also revelations about infighting between Zionist factions dating nearly to the dawn of the movement, on occasion leading to murder. The prevailing myth of the Yishuv's battle against the Nazi scourge was challenged in a book by Yoel Brand, a Zionist functionary who reported that the movement had conducted negotiations with Adolf Eichmann. Other

writers chronicled Israel's discrimination against Jewish immigrants from the Arab world. Still others wrote less than complimentary biographies of mythic leaders or challenged the country's military policy. The publication of the diaries of former prime minister Moshe Sharett showed him to be a sharp critic of many of Ben-Gurion's policies, and Yitzhak Rabin's autobiography included a chapter—which was censored—on the expulsion of Arabs during the War of Independence.

Even ancient history was not spared. Reserve General Yehoshafat Harkabi wrote a book charging that Bar Kochba, the leader of the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 132–35, had been not a hero but a madman. He had, Harkabi claimed, led the Jewish people into a catastrophe comparable to the Holocaust.

Self-criticism and doubt, or what some call “a weakness of vision” up to and including defeatism and despair, have thus always been an inseparable part of Zionist history. Long before anyone invented post-Zionism, the movement was much weaker, and its influence much smaller, than many Israelis realize. It has always had to confront opinions that whittled away at both its ideology and its mythology.

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## FACING ELVIS'S STATUE

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*“When They Start Shooting  
I Start Missing New York”*

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At Neve Ilan, along the road to Jerusalem, there is a gas station. Next to the gas station is the Elvis Presley Diner. A few years ago the proprietors erected a glistening white, larger-than-life statue of the singer at the restaurant's entrance. The image bears a plaque noting the sculptor's name: Lance Hunter. This Elvis signals victory—the Bolshevism of the early Ben-Gurion years has been defeated. Israelis have chosen America.

The full story of the Americanization of Israel has yet to be told, even though it is central to the country's history. It can be summed up simply: ever-growing dependence on the United States in every area of life. Americanization has weakened social solidarity and, in contrast with original Israeli Zionism, has made the individual the centerpoint of life.

Once a year, on the eve of Independence Day, Israelis used

to go out to the streets to dance the hora to accordion music until dawn, re-creating the spontaneous joy of 1947 when the United Nations General Assembly voted to establish a Jewish state. Strangers would join hands in the circle dance that in Israeli poetry and literature symbolizes the unity of the collective.

As years have gone by, the custom has almost entirely vanished. Since the 1970s Israelis have preferred to celebrate at private parties or family picnics in parks or on the beach. Many of the holiday-makers buy little Israeli flags from boys who peddle them at road junctions, then they attach the flags to their car windows. In recent years one sees cars flying the American flag as well—also available at major intersections. “America,” Zvi Sobel of the University of Haifa has written, “has become Israel’s alter-ego, politically, economically, and culturally. America has become the teacher, the giant father figure hovering over us; in fact, it holds the keys to life in Israel, the keys of existence.”

Some basic lines of the Israeli story are similar to those of America. In Israel, as in the United States, immigrants arrived in a country that was already partly inhabited. They pushed out and in many cases destroyed the local inhabitants. Both Israelis and Americans gained their independence fighting the British. In both places the revolution was supposed to express a commitment to universal values of freedom and justice, but in both places a long time passed before this ethical commitment became actual policy. Israeli democracy developed gradually; in its early years, Israel did not respect fundamental

human rights and did not guarantee equal civil rights to all. During those same years the American democracy had not yet formally ended discrimination against blacks. In both places the flaws in democracy were papered over with self-righteous rhetoric.

Like the United States, Israel endeavored to be a social and moral melting pot, but in practice it established a new multicultural society. In time, assimilation even ceased to be a declared goal, and pluralism was praised. Sami Shalom Shitrit, a Moroccan-born teacher and poet, brought back the principle of multiculturalism from his studies in America. No more “absorption through modernization,” which is what the founding fathers of Israeli sociology recommended to achieve a “blending of the exiles,” but rather cultural separation. “Like the blacks in America, Sephardic Jews in Israel suffered discrimination at the hands of Western Ashkenazic Jews and must assert their own identities.” He declared:

In the United States, whose failures we faithfully imitate, but with a 20-year delay, blacks have begun to study history within their communities with a drastic change in approach. They teach history based on the reality of the street and the community, returning to African origins, via slave-hunting by whites, through the years of slave labor, the years of discrimination and racism, to today’s continuation of the struggle.

An American black child today learns American history from the point of view of the victim. He must undergo this

process in order to develop a full, unconflicted identity. I would adopt this approach without waiting 20 unnecessary years. . . .

Theodor Herzl wrote, "America will surely overtake Europe, just as a large estate swallows up a smaller one." He wrote this in response to Zionists who proclaimed that Jews who returned to their land should become farmers—an idea Herzl considered a peculiar error. The future after all belonged to industry, he believed, and he was right. The twentieth century, whose beginning coincided with the final years of Herzl's life, was the American century. All nations kept their eyes on the American experiment—not just the Zionists, and tried, to one degree or another, to emulate it.

Sometime after World War I broke out, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda left Palestine for a visit to the United States. Before leaving he deposited his manuscripts with the American consul in Jerusalem, Otis Glazebrook, to keep them safe. The work of this great Hebrew linguist laid the foundations for one of the Zionist movement's principal achievements: turning Hebrew into a spoken language. During the war the U.S. government sent assistance to the Jews of Palestine, almost certainly saving them from famine. Mordecai Ben-Hillel Hacohen recorded in his diary, "The entire national enterprise in Palestine has fallen on America's shoulders." The United States also assisted refugees from Palestine, and one of the Hebrew battalions that

participated in the conquest of the Turks was mustered in America. Several of the Yishuv's public leaders who had been expelled by the Turks spent this period in the United States, among them Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, later Israel's second president, and David Ben-Gurion.

Michael Bar-On, who has written about the American sojourns of several Palestinian Jewish leaders, made note of the fact that they were involved principally in the life of the Jewish community. Yet Ben-Gurion, Ben-Zvi, and others were disappointed by the marginal interest American Jews took in them. Ben-Zvi complained that in America Zionism had become a leisure activity. He and his colleagues thought that the freedom offered by the United States negatively affected American Jews' willingness to enlist in the Zionist cause. "America will shorten our lives," Ben-Gurion wrote to a colleague. Their dependence on American Jewish aid made Yishuv figures feel even more hostile and scornful. The feelings were exacerbated by their principled commitment to socialism.

After the war there was a short-lived proposal that the United States, rather than Britain, receive the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine. The idea was soon filed away, but American involvement in the Middle East increased. Contrary to common wisdom, the United States and not Britain was the major power in the region. Ben-Gurion had been among the first to become cognizant of America's growing influence and of the need to focus the Zionist movement's major efforts on Washington and New York. The longer he

pursued the American connection, the greater his standing grew, in comparison with Chaim Weizmann, who stuck to his conviction that the key to the future of Zionism lay in London. By the eve of Israeli independence Britain was a fairly marginal player—President Harry Truman was the pivotal man.

A few weeks after the declaration of independence, an American Jew named Fred Gronich appeared in Israel. Teddy Kolk, Israel's chargé d'affaires in Washington and an avid Americanophile, had referred him to Ben-Gurion. Gronich spent about a year and a half in Israel under an assumed name, Fred Harris. A short time after his arrival a rumor began spreading through the country: David Ben-Gurion had hired an American military adviser with the rank of colonel. *Kol Haam*, the Communist Party newspaper, accused the prime minister of treason.

Ben-Gurion frequently met with Gronich and from time to time invited him to meetings of the army's general staff. Gronich, he said, was superior to any other military expert he knew. Ben-Gurion frequently accepted his advice. It is doubtful whether anyone had a greater influence on the Israeli army at that time, with the exception of Ben-Gurion himself.

When the secret leaked out, *Kol Haam* wrote that "General Harris" had come to Israel "in order to hitch our army to the belligerent chariot of the American imperialists and to look into the conditions for establishing military bases on our country's territory."

The Cold War was raging at full force, but Ben-Gurion was still trying to lead Israel between the raindrops. Israel's

first government stated that the country's foreign policy would be based on friendship with all peace-loving nations, "and especially with the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." The Soviet Union had supported the establishment of the state, and Communist bloc countries had sold Israel some of its arms during the War of Independence. Thousands of draft-age Jews were allowed to immigrate to Israel from Eastern Europe. There was a large Jewish community in the Soviet Union, and Moscow was the capital of world socialism. Some of the parties in Ben-Gurion's coalition, including his own Mapai party, considered themselves part of the socialist world.

The United States was concerned that Israel would join the Soviet bloc. It therefore established a special fund to disseminate in Israel and several other countries American books, periodicals, films, and records. These cultural items were meant to counterbalance the propaganda that was flowing into Israel from the Soviet Union and its client states. Most Israelis responded enthusiastically to the initiative. Israel also received CARE packages from the United States. The Israeli ability to "get by" rose to the challenge—some of the contents of the CARE packages reached the black market. This was, perhaps, the first manifestation of post-Zionism.

The United States encouraged Israel to integrate into its sphere of influence and in doing so strengthened Mapai. A few days before the first Knesset elections, the American Export-Import Bank decided to grant Israel a \$100 million loan to finance immigrant absorption and development projects. It was



an almost inconceivable sum at the time. In a letter Ben-Gurion sent to Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, he wrote that Israel was refraining from joining the Cold War, but ruled that "the State of Israel is not passive or neutral in the world's great debates: in the ideological debate it is democratic and anti-Communist." Moshe Sneh, then a member of Mapam, a left-socialist Zionist and (at the time) Moscow-aligned party, wrote, "Aid is the first station, enslavement the second station, a bloc and bases the third, and from there the way is open to the final station: world war."

When the Korean War broke out, neutrality became nearly impossible for small countries. In the meantime the Soviet Union had abandoned its warm treatment of Israel and was instead trying to develop closer ties with the Arab states. Israel now found itself firmly in the American sphere of influence. Ben-Gurion even toyed with the idea of Israel joining NATO.

One of the first steps toward America took Israel through Germany. The conciliation policy promoted by Ben-Gurion, including the reparations and compensation agreement, involved, as did the choice between the superpowers, a tough moral decision. In the 1950s and early 1960s the Middle East was not high on the American agenda, and Israel at times found itself in conflict with the Americans. Conflicts would occur later as well, but in summing up fifty years of Israel-U.S. relations, Hanan Bar-On, a senior member of Israel's diplomatic service, stated, "Israel's dependence on the United States goes without saying."

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In his 1956 play *I Like Mike*, Aharon Megged satirized what he saw as the Israeli habit of self-abasement before anything coming from America, including the ideal husband for one's daughter. Nevertheless, unlike in several European countries, there was nearly no real public resistance to the penetration of American culture. The Israeli heroism myth had in 1961 already been incarnated in Paul Newman, in the role of Ari Ben Canaan, the hero of the film *Exodus*.

In part, this acceptance was a process of modernization. Israel's first supermarket opened in Tel Aviv in August 1958; in April 1960 the Voice of Israel radio station began its first commercial broadcasts. In the meantime, the first skyscrapers had been erected in Tel Aviv, with a Hilton Hotel opening in one of them. An usher tried to keep the minister of transportation, Moshe Carmel, from entering the hotel's opening ceremony because he had shown up without a tie. A Jewish Agency poster encouraging people to settle in kibbutzim depicted a kibbutz laborer wearing American jeans instead of the classic pioneer khaki or blue work fatigues. The new popular prophet of Israeli urban life was Uri Avneri, the editor of the weekly *Haolam Hazev*. Avneri covered, and to a large measure invented, a Tel Aviv lifestyle whose symbol was Dizengoff Street and whose heroes were teenagers with Elvis-style greased-back hair. They wore tight pants and pointed shoes, and had a hard time conceiving of anything better than heavy petting in Dad's car.

Avneri was a patriot. He didn't tell his readers that life in the United States was better than life in Israel. He told his readers that living in Israel was good because it could be like living in America. He encouraged this kind of thinking in almost ideological terms. "It is good that this generation has slain the old values and the old concepts," he wrote. "Without destroying the old there is no room for the new." Coca-Cola, Avneri added, was just as good as native Israeli soft drinks and the cha-cha was no less moral than the Krakoviak that the Zionist pioneers had danced. The first bottle of Coca-Cola appeared on the Israeli market in 1968. That same year the country officially began its own television broadcasts.

A series of newspaper ads for Ascot Cigarettes that began to appear in the 1960s were based on photographs of a lifestyle that portrayed the public's American dream: a woman in an evening gown next to a bar with a "USA" poster on the wall behind it, or a muscular young man playing tennis. Like basketball, tennis would later become a salient mark of Americanization. So would the American-accented Hebrew cry, "We're on the map!" shouted by Tal Brody, an American-born Israeli basketball star, when his Maccabi Tel Aviv team won the European Cup. The event was celebrated as a national holiday, even outshining, to a certain extent, the resignation of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin that same day. Many Israelis expressed their patriotism through their basketball teams, even when a large proportion of the teams' stars were American acquisitions. Young Israelis were soon sporting American sneakers instead of leather shoes or the traditional sandals.

Once most Israelis lived either in cities or on farms. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, more and more people moved into suburban "bedroom communities," some of which have their own local "country club," mall, and shopping center. People paste up notices on video-rental vending-machines inviting their neighbors to garage sales. The ends of the notices are cut into strips, on each of which is a telephone number, just like in America. People wear ties to work, once considered bourgeois and anti-Zionist, and they commute in their private automobiles. They own more than one car. Road signs are green and blue, as in America. Traffic police wear peaked American caps, emblazoned with the English word *POLICE*.

Many people spend most of their time in front of computers in air-conditioned offices. They receive their mail in long rectangular envelopes instead of the traditional Israeli squat-and-square ones. They send and receive e-mail, do their business on mobile phones, and pay with credit cards, an innovation that caught hold in Israel only in the late 1980s. Prices are often quoted in dollars. Israelis used to have their main meal of the day at lunchtime and follow it with a rest, returning to work in the late afternoon. Now, as in the United States, they eat their dinner in the evening. They are aware of their power as consumers, including their newfound freedom to choose which health plan to belong to and what kind of education their children receive. Some of them hire private security firms to protect their property. The Israeli ideal used to be living on a kibbutz; now it's living in swanky neighborhoods like Tel Aviv's Ramat Aviv Gimmel.

More and more Israelis are aware of the de rigueur of American political correctness. They no longer call people with dark skin *kushim*, after the biblical name for an African kingdom; they call them blacks, just like in the United States. They are aware of issues of environmental quality and the status of women. The law forbids sexual harassment and smoking in public places. Israelis munch hamburgers at McDonald's (one outlet is even kosher), drink milk from cartons instead of the traditional plastic bag, surf bilingual Hebrew-English Web sites. Instead of saying *shalom* when they meet someone and *lebitra'ot* when they part, they say "hi" and "bye." All this reflects a deep change in Israel's identity as a country, in its economy, army, media, and law.

In the mid-1960s the United States began supplying Israel with weaponry. The arms sales increased gradually but steadily. Until then, the Israel Defense Forces had received its most important equipment, including its combat aircraft, from France. The American supplies included Hawk missiles, Patton tanks, and later Skyhawk and Phantom airplanes. In parallel, the army underwent a rapid process of Americanization. "The Israeli Air Force is subject to the inch and the foot," wrote Haifa University's Zvi Sobel. The army's dependence on the United States is so profound, he wrote, "that cutting off the supply line could return Israel to the age of bows and arrows." Historically, this was a transition from the Palmach, the elite force of the Yishuv and War of Independence that operated

largely under Soviet inspiration, and the Haganah, the prestate defense force that brought the IDF the British military tradition. U.S. scientists and philanthropists also helped Israel develop its nuclear capability.

In 1968 Israel sent a new ambassador to the United States: Yitzhak Rabin, who had been the army's chief of staff during the Six Day War. Rabin, whose father had come to Palestine from Russia via the United States, was among those Israelis who fostered and even symbolized the American dream. "I view the tightening of the connection to the United States and the strengthening of strategic defense between it and Israel as our greatest challenge. . . . The diplomatic struggle will be focused in Washington. It is there that Israel's war for its future will continue," he wrote.

Ambassador Rabin's tenure in Washington coincided with the terms of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, during which the United States became ever more willing to supply Israel with military aid. During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Nixon asked Congress to approve aid to Israel in the amount of \$2.2 billion. The airlift from the United States included a variety of equipment and ammunition, including air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles, artillery, armaments for combat planes, tanks, radios, and other weaponry for a total worth of more than \$800 million. As part of its growing relationship with the U.S. military, the IDF adopted organizational and combat doctrines based on American practices. Israeli officers went to the United States for courses, and before long a phenomenon appeared in the IDF that would soon characterize Israeli society

as a whole. Rabin was one of its personifications. Israel's elites, in all areas, began to be filled by people who received their training in the United States. Many of them saw America as an ideal.

In its early years, when Israel was still ruled by the labor movement, the government's economic policy was aimed at promoting national goals, first and foremost strong defense and immigrant absorption. It was an economy mobilized in the state interest, in the spirit of the socialist and social-democratic ideology that the labor movement represented. Economic policy was also used to reinforce the dominance of the parties of the labor movement, and in particular Mapai, the largest. The Histadrut, the national labor federation that was controlled by Mapai, also played a central role. The state was the major power directing the principal social and economic processes, the most important of which was the absorption of more than one million immigrants, most of them indigent. Many came from underdeveloped countries and had not been prepared for life in a modern society. Many did not even know how to read and write. In those years, Israelis were supposed to think and feel in the first person plural. The national social, political, and ideological elite was a relatively small group, many of whom lived in kibbutzim.

Yet Israel's economic story proceeded, almost without reversals, in the direction of privatization and private enterprise. The process was gradual, but its most dramatic milestone came in May 1977, when Mapai, now the Labor Party, lost its first election and the opposition Likud came into

power. The new minister of finance, Simcha Erlich, was the leader of the free-market Liberal Party, one of the Likud's constituent factions. An early guest of the government was Milton Friedman, America's high priest of the free market. Not coincidentally, the new prime minister, Menachem Begin, singled out the kibbutzim as a target for attack. The social, economic, and ideological metamorphosis that accompanied the decline of the kibbutzim symbolized the transition from an explicit commitment to socialist values to the age of the free market.

In time the Histadrut also lost its economic power; the income gap between rich and poor grew larger. All this took place as Israel became increasingly dependent on economic aid from the United States. This dependence made it much like the old, pre-Zionist Jewish community in the Holy Land, which also lived off charity, primarily from Jews in the United States. Israel's economic history is thus a classically Jewish story, far from the ideal conceived by some of the founders of the Zionist movement.

Nixon's and Kissinger's America was still very much an ideological country, engaged in the Cold War and Vietnam. Israel itself was in the midst of its own ideological awakening brought on by the Six Day War. But in the United States a series of revolutions in values entirely changed society, making it more egalitarian, and human and civil rights were strengthened. After the Six Day War, however, it seemed as if the spirit

of the 1960s were passing over Israel. In fact, it simply came late. When it arrived, it changed Israeli society in the same way in which America had changed.

The protest against American involvement in Vietnam was incarnated in Israel as protest against Israel's occupation of the territories conquered in 1967. The American civil rights struggle became, in Israel, the fight against discrimination of Sephardic Jews, those whose families came from the Islamic world. Some young members of the Sephardic community founded an organization called the Black Panthers. Some of the young people who founded Peace Now in the 1970s were American-born; others had studied at American universities. In establishing an Israeli peace movement, they were imitating the American peace movement, and with it they copied an entire culture.

This American spirit, which produced the Camp David agreements between Israel and Egypt, would later lead people to feel they had had enough of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It also produced Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians were all signed under the sponsorship of the United States and due to the intense personal involvement of the sitting president. All these agreements were made possible, to a large extent, because of the willingness of the American people to finance them. They also reflect Israel's dependence on the U. S., and the depth of American penetration of all areas of Israeli life.

The choice of Senator Joseph Lieberman as the Democratic Party's candidate for vice president in 2000 played out in the local media almost as if it were Israeli news. David Landau of *Ha'aretz* described the choice as "an amazing and stunning event" and expressed his hope that Israel might achieve a similar level of liberality and political maturity. "May we hope that the choice of Lieberman—an important milestone in American history and a huge event in the history of the Jewish people—be for us Israelis, despite all the differences between here and there, a cause for introspection and perhaps even inspiration?"

As in America, Israeli politics has become more personal and more commercialized; candidates for prime minister now debate in the spirit of the debates broadcast on American television. This political style received formal expression when the system was changed, for a time, to provide for direct election of the prime minister. The rise of Benjamin Netanyahu in the 1990s was an important step in the Americanization of Israeli politics. Netanyahu came of age in the United States; Washington, D.C., is the capital of his inner world.

His accession to power also symbolized a change in attitude toward Israelis who had emigrated to the United States. Rabin had once berated the emigrants as "gutless scum." Yet, as the years went by, there was hardly an Israeli family without an emigrant, generally in America. In the 1980s Israel's television station broadcast a commercial aimed at encouraging people to make overseas phone calls to the United States. Such a message could hardly have been imagined just a few years before, not

only because people were expected to be ashamed of their expatriate family members, but also because many people didn't have telephones. They waited years to get one, and the government, which had a monopoly on telephone services, had no interest in urging people to call overseas. The telephone network was later transferred to a government corporation, Bezek, as part of a policy of shifting responsibility for the provision of public services from the government to commercial enterprises. Just like America.

The TV commercial depicted an elderly couple calling their son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren in the United States. The situation is crystal-clear—the family living overseas is not there temporarily. They are not tourists, students, or Jewish Agency emissaries sent to encourage immigration to Israel. America is their home. In an instant, living in the United States became legitimate and unremarkable. These days, insurance companies offer special policies for “Israelis in America.” Newspapers print ads that tell Israelis how to participate in the worldwide green card lottery. Granting legitimacy to living abroad followed on the heels of granting legitimacy to Jewish life outside Israel. Both changes reflect a coming to terms with non-Zionist, or at least non-Israeli, Jewish alter-natives.

Most Israelis see the September 11, 2001 attack on New York as an attack on Tel Aviv, identifying their own war on terrorism with America's. At the same time, they perceive America as a refuge, permanent or temporary, from the sweaty, arduous task of being Israeli. “When they start shooting I start

missing New York,” wrote Sami Shalom Shitrit after one of the waves of violence between the Israeli army and the Palestinians.

It began on a hill in Lebanon, even before that shitty war. Everyone was shooting like lunatics and Shemesh the sergeant called me over. He took out a U.S. road map and started describing the coast-to-coast motorcycle trip we'd do together right after our discharge. That's what gave him strength in the face of all that helplessness and madness. Afterward, we spent months learning the route from New York to Los Angeles, with a big zigzag from north to south. It was the greatest trek of my life, made in the dark, with a flashlight, on the laminated road map.

More than any previous politician, Benjamin Netanyahu based his career on his television appearances. In this, his election symbolized not only the Americanization of politics but also of the Israeli media. Television broadcasts gave the United States much greater influence in Israel, as elsewhere in the world. Most of the programs broadcast are imported from the United States, and nearly all of them are influenced by it. As a result of TV, people changed their daily schedules; they began to dress differently, eat differently, enjoy themselves differently, speak differently, think differently, and feel differently. For a time television had a unifying influence—everyone spoke about what they had seen the previous night. People became more involved in politics and social

problems. But television also made Israelis much more aware of themselves as individuals. They began to discover themselves as individuals distinct from the national collective, and as members of local communities with their own identities. In providing this new frame of reference, television contributed to the second notable innovation that Americanization brought to the Israeli media: the local newspaper.

The ideological party-sponsored dailies abundant in the prestate period and Israel's early years closed one after another in the 1970s and 1980s. They were replaced by publications addressing issues previously unfamiliar to most Israelis, such as environmental quality, consumerism, and the local leisure culture. At around the same time a new style appeared, unacceptable in the Israeli press of the past. New journalism was a direct import from the United States via writers who had spent time there. They brought back concepts, expressions, and even entire grammatical structures that existed only in English. When they returned, these new journalists joined a new echelon of leaders in almost every area. An American chapter was usual, almost mandatory, in the biographies of the Israeli elite.

The new journalism claimed to present the reader with the "real story" or the "story behind the story." The emphasis was on individuals, including the journalist himself, not entire societies, not ideas, not processes. What had once been considered an elitist propensity was then adopted as a guideline for the media as a whole. More and more personal stories, many

of them not political, took the place of political news. The trend became even more profound when television began to offer multiple channels. Local stations appeared alongside local newspapers. Locality was, apparently, the most decisive American influence on the public—they were now individuals. They stopped being first person plural. They were I's. Private radio stations and Internet sites led to increasing individualism in the media. The process was also reflected in Hebrew fiction, poetry, and popular culture.

Israel's new individualistic awareness was a real revolution. It encouraged equality between the sexes and sexual permissiveness, and gave a measure of legitimacy to unconventional sexual orientations. Military service, and service as a combat officer in particular, changed in the perception of many from a contribution to society to the first station on the road to joining the elite. Many young Israelis began to think of their post-discharge trip to India as the climax of their military service—an escape from every restraining framework, a return to liberated childhood. The number of men and women who do not serve in the army is steadily rising. Sami Shalom Shitrit wrote of this trend:

These kids have received something that previous generations did not have—citizenship of the world. Thanks to satellite, cable television, and electronic communication the world has entered the home of almost every boy and girl. And they have developed a sense of belonging to large swathes of our global

community. The boundaries between states are losing their significance, so the need to get killed over them becomes illogical to these kids, citizens of the world.

It's worth keeping this development in mind, because its momentum will only increase in the next century. It's worth thinking about more significant compensation for military service, beyond sense of mission and pride in the unit. I'm speaking about real wages, about true professional challenges, about free higher education, about lots of veteran benefits, and so on. There's no escaping it. Classes in Jewish and Israeli heritage won't lead people to sacrifice themselves. Even fundamentalist suicide bombers do what they do for personal benefit in the next world.

The willingness to accept individual discretion in whether or not to serve in the army extended to providing an official seal of approval to practices that had once been tacitly tolerated but never accepted. A case in point: ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students were exempted from military service under an agreement Ben-Gurion had reached with the Agudat Yisrael party when the state was founded. The exemption was incorporated into military regulations but never legislated; Israeli law continued to mandate universal service.

Initially, the exemption applied to a handful of young men each year. But in the 1980s and 1990s, as the ultra-Orthodox population grew, the number of exemptions increased to thousands each year. Those Israelis who did serve began to

protest the inequity of the arrangement. A government commission set up to study the issue responded with a proposal to codify this evasion of service into law; in other words, what had once been a tolerated anomaly in the principle of universal military service was to be accepted formally by the public's representatives in the Knesset.

At some point even war, that fundamental collective Israeli experience, underwent a kind of privatization. Arab terrorism did not threaten the country's existence. Instead, it endangered the personal security of each individual. This is true of the Gulf War as well. Everyone knew that the missiles Iraq fired at Israel were no danger to the country itself. They did, however, threaten the lives of individuals.

The Gulf War was a distinctly individual experience. People sat in their sealed rooms, isolated from their neighbors, with gas masks on their faces that isolated them from their families as well. They followed the war on CNN, whose reception in Israel was itself one stage in the Americanization process. There were several minutes of tension—will the missile hit me or not? Large numbers of Israelis left their homes, especially in Tel Aviv, and went to stay in safer places. In a number of cases, this prevented disaster; some of the homes hit by missiles had been vacated by fleeing families.

Running away from the SCUDs was controversial. Some demanded a more steadfast, patriotic stand. The flight of the Tel Aviv elite in the Gulf War was a precedent that later legitimized flight from Kiryat Shemona, near the Lebanese



border. In the past, when the town was a favorite target for Palestinian rockets, its residents descended to their bomb shelters and sweated out the attack. Politicians and the media expressed compassion for their suffering and extolled their bravery. In the 1990s, under attack from the Shiite Hezbollah militia, many of the town's residents packed their bags and headed south and no one thought to criticize them.

In parallel, there was also a "judicial revolution," whose most important element was protection of civil rights and of some human rights, in the spirit of the American constitution.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of the Supreme Court's influence on public life in Israel. Likewise, it is hard to exaggerate the influence of the U.S. Constitution on the Supreme Court's rulings. Its influence has grown over the years and has become even more profound under the tenure of Aharon Barak, the current chief justice. Barak was an active partner in drafting a series of Basic Laws, which together constitute a kind of Israeli constitution. One of these is the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty.

The court's activism has largely been in the area of civil rights for Jews. Its rulings on civil rights for Arabs, be they Israeli citizens or residents of the occupied territories, is less impressive. The court has, for example, sanctioned some of the injustices of the military government that were imposed on Israel's Arab citizens until the mid-1960s and on the West

Bank and Gaza Strip after the Six Day War. It has, time and again, upheld deportations, house demolitions, and even torture.

It is against this background that the Supreme Court's recent ruling in the case of 'Adel and Iman Qa'adan stands out, one of the most revolutionary rulings in the country's history, as Chief Justice Barak was well aware at the time. "We are today taking a first step along an arduous and sensitive road," he wrote. "Let us rather advance cautiously from case to case, according to the circumstances of each one. Yet, even if the road is long, it is important for us to keep our eyes not on where we came from but where we are heading."

'Adel Qa'adan, a nurse at Hillel Yaffe Hospital in the town of Hadera, and his wife, Iman, a teacher, have two children and come from an Arab village in Israel, Baka al-Gharbiyya. They looked into the possibility of purchasing a home in a new settlement, Katzir, being built by the Jewish Agency on land it received for this purpose from the state. Katzir lies not far from Afula, a small city in the Jezre'el Valley to the east of Hadera. The site was originally occupied by the army, which prepared it for civilian settlement, and then became a kibbutz that belonged to the left-wing Hashomer Hatzair movement. The site was later given to a cooperative association that wanted to set up a "communal settlement," a type of small village that generally serves as a bedroom suburb where middle-class families live in rural surroundings while commuting to jobs in nearby urban centers. Communal

settlements are governed by the associations that set them up, and these have the legal power to select which families will be allowed to build homes in the village.

The cooperative association informed the Qa'adans that they would not be allowed to build a house in the settlement because they are Arabs and the village is designated for Jews alone. The Qa'adans petitioned the Supreme Court.

The decision to bring the question before the court was itself an innovation. In Zionism's hundred years, hundreds of settlements designated for Jews alone had been established throughout the country. Arabs cannot live in them. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, which represented the family, was aware of the issue's sensitive nature and took care to emphasize that it was not seeking to challenge Zionist history: "The petitioners are not focusing their arguments on the legitimacy of the policy that prevailed in this matter during the period that preceded the establishment of the state and in the years that have passed since its establishment. Nor are they challenging the decisive role played by the Jewish Agency in settling Jews throughout the land during the course of this century."

The Jewish Agency argued that Katzir was one link in a chain of small settlements that were meant to preserve Israel's open spaces for the Jewish people, and that its establishment promotes the goal of settling Jews throughout the country, and in particular in areas that are sparsely inhabited by Jews. They also cited the need to disperse the population across Israel for security reasons. The cooperative association

argued that Arab residents of the village would have difficulty performing guard duty, incumbent on all the families since the settlement had been the target of terrorist attacks. Furthermore, it claimed, the presence of Arabs would be liable to lead Jewish families to leave the settlement, turning it in the end from a Jewish into an Arab village. Also, not far away, in a settlement called Charish, Arabs were in fact allowed to build houses.

This was a classically American dilemma, and Barak read American court decisions in the process of preparing his ruling. One of these was the U.S. Supreme Court's famous 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. That case addressed the practice of maintaining separate schools for whites and "Afro-Americans." Barak explained in his opinion, as if the semantics of American political correctness had to be observed in Hebrew as well. He also quoted American court rulings that deal with the complex nature of equality, including the question of whether separate but equal facilities can be established for whites and blacks, or in the Israeli instance between Jews and Arabs—schools in the American case, settlements in the Israeli case. The U.S. Supreme Court held that separate is inherently unequal. Barak ruled that there are circumstances in which separate but equal is legal, for example so as to refrain from imposing assimilation on a minority group seeking to preserve its separate status.

Ever so cautiously, taking care not to undermine the Zionist foundations of the state, Chief Justice Barak stated that his ruling was directed toward the future, instructing the Jewish

Agency to "reconsider" the plaintiffs' request, this time on the basis of the principle of equality. The key point of the ruling was that the equality ought to guide the state's activities since it is, according to the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, both "Jewish and democratic." Four of the five judges sitting on the case concurred. Prior to the ruling, Barak asked the parties to reach an accommodation that would make it possible to avoid a ruling, but when they did not do so he said he faced one of the most difficult decisions of his life.

While Barak was laboring on his opinion, Member of Knesset Amnon Rubinstein published an article in *Ha'aretz* in which he called for the nationalization of the land belonging to the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the land purchase and management organization, one of Zionism's founding institutions. The JNF's chairman responded: "Mr. Rubinstein's article serves those who seek to sever, break, and shatter the connection between the Jewish people and their homeland and so to accelerate the process of changing the State of Israel's character and nature from a state of the Jewish people to a state of all its citizens, devoid of a Jewish soul and spirit."

The JNF chairman did not evade the issue of equality. "[It] is a fundamental value in the life of the Jewish people's state, precisely because the state is Jewish, and everything must be done to internalize equality as a value in our life as an independent nation," he wrote, volunteering, in the name of his organization, to free Israel from the need to act in contradiction of the principle of equality. "Entrusting the Jewish people's land to the JNF frees the State of Israel, even

though it is the state of the Jewish people, from having to deal with this issue and in so doing to violate the principle of equality."

Chief Justice Barak seems to have feared that his ruling would be interpreted as a retreat from the definition of Israel as a Jewish state. "The State of Israel's values as . . . Jewish and democratic," he wrote, "are based, among other things, on the right of the Jewish people to stand independent in its sovereign country." And indeed, "the Jewish people's return to its homeland is a consequence of Israel's values as both a Jewish and a democratic state." This sentence was apparently formulated to justify the Law of Return that grants citizenship to Jews immediately upon their arrival in Israel. "It is thus obvious that Hebrew will be the country's principal language and that its principal holidays will reflect the national revival of the Jewish people; it is also obvious that Jewish heritage will be the central element in the state's national and cultural heritage." To remove all doubt, Barak also devoted several lines to the Jewish Agency's role in realizing the Zionist vision, the ingathering of the exiles, and in making the country fertile and productive. He noted generously that the Jewish Agency had not yet completed the mission assigned to it. According to Barak, "There is no contradiction between the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state and complete equality among its citizens. On the contrary, equal rights for all people in Israel, whatever their religion and whatever their nationality, derives from the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state."

The Supreme Court's attempt to pull the punch aimed at one of the pillars of Zionism in the Land of Israel was only partially successful. Some Israelis reacted heatedly to the ruling; the Likud faction in the Knesset issued a statement saying that the court's decision heralded the end of Israel as a Jewish state. This might happen, the statement declared, even if "perhaps" the justices had intended no such a thing.

Of course they had intended no such thing. The faith that it is possible to combine the fundamental principles of democracy with the state's Jewish character is not entirely unfounded. But keeping the state Jewish and democratic is not as difficult as keeping it Zionist and democratic. This is a classic post-Zionist conundrum.

Apart from its effect on Israeli Zionism, there are indications that America has also influenced the religious identity of some Israelis. At the beginning of 2000 the Movement for Progressive Judaism, Reform Judaism's organization in Israel, published a survey purportedly showing that 35 percent of the Jewish population identified with Reform practices current for the most part in the United States. In fact, most of those who claim to "identify" with Reform Judaism define themselves as nonreligious. A survey sponsored by an American ultra-Orthodox group produced results that seem more in line with reality. From whom, Israelis were asked, would they prefer to receive religious services, such as circumcision, marriage, and funerals? A total of 22.3 percent said they would like to have these ceremonies conducted by the Reform movement. Just like in America.

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## FACING OVADIA'S STATUE

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