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### WRESTLING WITH ZIONISM

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by Daphna Levit



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אל מלא רחמים אלמלא האל מלא רחמים היו הרחמים בעולם ולא רק בו

God full of mercy, Were it not for the God full of mercy There would be mercy in the world and not only in Him.... —Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000)

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#### PROLOGUE

In the small Canadian province of Nova Scotia, given its tiny Jewish population you might not expect much interest in Jewish history, or Zionism. Nevertheless, following the publication of an earlier book on the Middle East Peace Process, I was invited by a university there to offer a course on the Zionist narrative and its Jewish dissenters. *Wrestling with Zionism* is the product of a realization that, in order to address the myriad controversies inherent in Zionism since its inception and provide a provisional chronology of criticism of the founding narrative, I needed to reexamine the story myself.

Growing up in Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, in a totally secular environment, my contemporaries and I adhered to one God—our country, and we believed it was our duty to protect it from harm, real or invented. We were all culturally Jewish. Although we differed in degree of religious observance and conviction, we were immersed in the writings of Theodor Herzl, Ahad Ha'am, and Chaim Nachman Bialik. We perceived Orthodox Jews, who chose to live a medieval lifestyle in marginal and isolated communities with which we rarely had contact, as peripheral and irrelevant.

According to the strident Zionist narrative promoted today, the forces that established the State of Israel did so based on historical and biblical grounds. But we never thought to question the righteousness of the Zionist cause and the contradiction inherent in the biblical argument, which entirely distorts the premise of the secular/political Zionist movement.

Most of the early Zionist leaders were ardent socialists and nationalists, swept up in the nineteenth-century *zeitgeist* of social upheaval in Europe. Their secular/political Zionist hope was to create a Jewish homeland for a completely new kind of Jew; a Jewish homeland for a community that would discard much of its religious identity. The three-millennia history of Judaism was to be rejuvenated and replaced by a modernistic amalgamation of nationalism, socialism, enlightened Western culture, and some as yet undefined ethnic Jewish identity. As Ahad Ha'am wrote in 1897:

It is not only Jews who have come out of the Ghetto: Judaism has come out, too. For Jews the exodus is confined to certain countries, and is due to toleration; but Judaism has come out (or is coming out) of its own accord wherever it has come into contact with modern culture.<sup>1</sup>

My own lengthy process of disillusionment with the Zionist narrative and search for other dissenting voices began soon after the Six Day War of 1967, when I served as a press liaison officer at the Allenby Bridge and watched Palestinian refugees attempting to flee across the border. The separation from my country was gradual and took several decades. In 2002 I left Israel for Canada, at a point when the Zionist agenda was becoming increasingly militant and intolerant of opposition.

Later, struggling with my reactions to the 2008–2009 Gaza War, I wrote about the dissonance I had felt so strongly for many years.

#### My Unwanted Complicity

I came to Nova Scotia just before George Bush launched the Iraq War. My fifteen-floor apartment building in Ramat Aviv was one of two tall towers with an unobstructed view of the Mediterranean Sea, a major power plant, and the University of Tel Aviv. It was also the tallest structure visible from any land or sea border. When my next-door neighbor on the eleventh floor, a correspondent for ABC News in Israel, came over to show me a protective uniform sent by her American employer, I knew it was time to get out. She modeled the outfit that covered her from head to toe in a synthetic material designed to protect against chemical warfare. Not one inch of skin was exposed. Breathing was possible only through an internal oxygen tank. ABC had not, however, sent these outfits for her two very small children.

I did not want to sit in the direct path of retaliatory scud missiles,

which were bound to come. Certainly not for a war that was based on a total lack of knowledge of the region by a leader whose basic intelligence I seriously mistrusted, or as then President George W. Bush himself would say, "misunderestimated."

An Israeli mantra teaches us from birth that "they all hate us," and we must stand firm against "them." Who "they" are depends on the context: the Europeans, the Germans, the gentiles, the Arabs are all likely candidates. Intelligent, educated friends of mine refused to read the foreign press analyses of the Middle East because "they don't understand us" or "they will distort everything about us anyway."

Not long before the Six-Day War, when I was eighteen, I had embraced this worldview and couldn't wait to join the army and prove my patriotism. I volunteered for the "Nahal" to serve on a border outpost. One fatal incident of "friendly" fire, and several of the hostile variety, resulted in equally dreadful horror. But I was too young then to comprehend the irony and futility of war. I doubt that many of the eighteen-year-olds today, who become soldiers, can do much better. Perhaps that is why soldiers are recruited at that age.

We grew up in Israel convinced that there is nothing more exalted, worthy, or noble than giving our life for our country. Much as in the US, where children are taught that their country is the land of the free, the home of the brave, of true democracy, so in Israel we are raised to believe that our country was a miracle created by the blood of its heroes and that we can all be heroes in this magnificent battlefield for the salvation of our People. The Nation and the People are much more important than the individual. It can be seen that, in Israel, as in much of the Middle East from which it wishes to be disassociated, the life of an individual is expendable, at least as far as the mostly military leaders who govern the country and take it repeatedly to unbeatable wars are concerned..

In 2002, all my pacifist activities in Israel ended in my own flight to safety. Over the years, I had been active in a variety of human rights organizations, such as B'Tselem, peace movements such as Gush Shalom and ICAHD, which protests the gratuitous destruction of Palestinian houses. I went to the Occupied Territories to assist Physicians for Human Rights as they attempted to provide medical care beyond borders. I helped deliver water with Ta'Ayush and monitored the treatment of Palestinians at border crossings with Makhsom Watch. For the first Mitchell report, I translated autopsy findings about Israeli Arabs killed just before the Second Intifada. I was tear-gassed and verbally assaulted by soldiers of my own country as I participated in many of these nonviolent, democratic activities.

And over the past few weeks, with Gaza attacked mercilessly by my people who claim to be global victims, every morning, overcoming nausea, I ask myself, *How many did we kill today*?

I did not myself become collateral damage for politicians who claim to serve the people, but fight using the lives of others to score votes. I do not want to count the victims of this lunacy but, if it would achieve peace, I would die to stop the madness.

Since my military service in the Six Day War, I have been seeking other Israelis who have also questioned the justifications given for perpetual war. As a Jewish state, Israel was supposed to be a "shining light unto the nations of the world," a morally driven nation that upheld the value of life and the ideal of justice for all. Instead, we became a military power, armed to the teeth and blind to the victims of our own cruelty. I found other, perhaps more enlightened, kindred spirits in my quest for absolution from the guilt of my complicity in the actions of my country.

How should we respond when human life is so devalued and made expendable, ironically by those who themselves have known what it means to be targets of state violence of unspeakable cruelty? My search for other dissenting voices led me to other narratives.

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 was an event with far-reaching consequences: for Jews who became Israelis, for those who did not and remained the Jewish diaspora, for the diverse peoples of the Middle East, and for much of the rest of the world.

Since then, whenever Israel is covered by the media, it is typically identified according to its self-created narrative as the "homeland of the Jews," or the "Jewish state," or the "only democracy in the Middle East." These axioms are most frequently accepted uncritically in major Western media, questioned only in confrontational debates about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Regardless of the role Israel's continuing military occupation may play in regional havoc, whenever public discussion concerns Israel, the voices of Zionists and their staunch defenders are the ones that are amplified, and assumed to represent the beliefs of all Jews. Alternate or dissenting voices about Zionism and its aftermath—those of highly respected Jewish and Israeli scholars—are rarely heard. These are the voices presented in this book.

Among them are academics, theologians, political activists, lawyers, and journalists who have questioned Israel's evolution on religious, secular, moral, or philosophical grounds. All have labored persistently, in an environment hostile to opposition, and despite threats of ostracism or harm. Their voices offer a counter-history to the dominant founding narrative of the Israeli state. As well, they represent and convey a courageous tradition of intellectual freedom, witness, and resistance.

#### DESIRE FOR A HOMELAND AND THE BIRTH OF ZIONISM: Theodor Herzl and Ahad Ha'am

In the late eighteenth century, in Jewish communities across Europe, crosscurrents of opinion about assimilation and the Haskalah Jewish Enlightenment Movement developed and led to the origins of the political Zionist narrative. These currents were reflected in the founding viewpoints of Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), and the cultural Zionism of Ahad Ha'am (1856–1927), which were divergent.

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 was the motivation, inspiration, and end product of Zionism which was appropriated as a Jewish concept at the end of the nineteenth century. Today it is the raison d'etre and historical justification for the politics of a Jewish homeland.

In the late eighteenth century, only some five thousand Jews lived in the part of the world known then as Palestine, now as Israel, and they were concentrated mostly in Jerusalem. There is no evidence of any collective Jewish attempt to migrate to that part of the world during the entire sixteen hundred years after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. For a multitude of reasons, but primarily because Jerusalem was perceived as a *spiritual destiny* rather than a *geographic location*, Jews had no tradition of pilgrimages to the Holy Land, as did Christians and Muslims.

As early as the seventeenth century in Europe, some Protestant groups for whom the Bible was considered historical truth developed the notion of "Christian Zionism," which advocated the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land. This restoration would fulfill biblical prophecy and serve as precondition for the Second Coming of Christ. Moreover, the longing for Jerusalem was expressed in religious hymns and in the work of Western European Christian writers, artists, and pilgrims, long before the Jewish aspiration for a homeland in Zion was articulated and promoted. Like their Jewish counterparts throughout Europe, Jerusalem, for these Christians, was primarily a metaphor for all that is holy and exalted, and could never be defined by borders. It could even be located in England. William Blake's (1757–1827) famous poem "Jerusalem" begins with the verse:

AND did those feet in ancient time Walk upon England's mountains green? And was the holy Lamb of God On England's pleasant pastures seen?

It ends:

I will not cease from mental fight, Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, Till we have built Jerusalem In England's green and pleasant land.

The nineteenth century was a tumultuous time for Europe. The political and intellectual impact of the American and French Revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century, and the collapse of the Spanish, Napoleonic, and Holy Roman Empires, reverberated in subsequent conflicts for national independence and identity. The idea of a "homeland" for ethnic, racial, or religious groups evolved into an urgent cause in global politics, and not long after into a rallying cry for battle, sadly leading millions to their deaths.

The Jews of Europe were not impervious to the turmoil of the time and to the quest for national identity, but their responses were not uniform. There were many divergent opinions, with the sharpest divide appearing between Jewish communities in the east and west of Europe, who had differing experiences of Jewish life and conflicting opinions about national identity.

#### A Diaspora Divided

The goal of the *Haskalah*, or the Jewish Enlightenment movement, which began in Western Europe in the 1770s and spread eastward to Russia, was to integrate Jews into their host European societies and put an end to their

segregation, but also somehow to maintain Judaism. In Eastern Europe, Jews were under intense pressure to end their isolationist ghetto lifestyle from within by both the Jewish Enlightenment and the "Lovers of Zion" movements<sup>2</sup> and from without by a surge of ant-Semitic pogroms and the Russian Tsar's May Laws of 1882. Over two million Jews fled Russia at this time, most either to Western Europe or to America. A minority wanted to settle in Palestine as farmers, thereby liberating themselves from the oppression in their host countries. Others in this group were less interested in agriculture than in scholarship and communal culture, hoping to recast their own moribund spiritual Judaism.

By the nineteenth century, the Jews of Western Europe, influenced by the Jewish Enlightenment Movement that had taken hold in primarily urban Jewish communities, had largely integrated into their host countries by adopting prevailing values, local languages, and local dress. The Jewish education system had mostly been modernized and had created Jewish citizens who could function in the contemporary secular world. Many Jewish leaders were active, even prominent, in philosophy, education, culture, economics, and politics. The Jews of Germany, in particular, became the model of the new Jew whose life, language, and values were closely tied to that of their host country. Many considered Judaism a religion and therefore an individual, even private choice. Although European Jews in the East and in the West may have been at different stages of their "enlightenment," or transformation to modernity, most wanted to find a way to integrate Jewish religion and traditions with the non-Jewish or secular European societies and cultures. This was a more difficult project. Generally, the more contact Jews had with the gentile world, the less Jewish they became.

Jews influenced by the Enlightenment, living in their distinct communities, and speaking diverse languages, became increasingly intent on having a common language other than the predominant German. A literary community of determined writers, essayists, and political thinkers developed a modern version of biblical Hebrew. This was particularly important to Jews from Eastern Europe who were not all fluent in German and were averse to replacing their own language with another that had no inherent relationship to their identity. Eastern Europeans were especially interested in the language of the Bible, as they had maintained their religious traditions and Hebrew prayers well after the secular Jews of the West had abandoned theirs. The revival of the Hebrew language, long considered a classical or sacred language, was vital to the creativity required for retaining the Jewish culture of the past and establishing a communal voice for the future. It was also a prerequisite for national identity.

At the end of the nineteenth century, there were many opposing schools of thought dividing the Jews of Europe: traditionalist rabbis who wanted to make no changes at all to Jewish values and customs; secular extremists who wanted total assimilation; and moderates who wanted some combination of secular Jewish culture. As the fervor of nationalism grew more intense throughout Europe, the Jews of Europe cultivated their own corresponding ideologies. But there were significant divisions here too, most glaringly between those who believed the Jews needed an independent nation, the Zionists, and those who believed that diaspora Judaism was a destiny cultivated for several thousands of years and had to be preserved.

The Zionists had come to believe that anti-Semitism was universal and permanent, and that the only solution for the Jews was to have their own land. Diaspora Jews believed that history had made its decision regarding Jewish nationhood eighteen centuries earlier through the dissolution of the Jewish state and the destruction of the Temple. Among the leading German Jewish thinkers of the time were Hermann Cohen (1842–1918); a philosopher and Kant scholar who opposed Zionism because he viewed it as antithetical to Judaism's spiritual and moral mission; Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), a philosopher and theologian who, together with Martin Buber, translated the Bible from Hebrew to German, an edition much acclaimed by scholars. Rosenzweig's theological and philosophical objection to Zionism derived from his commitment to a living Judaism, with its obligatory roots in the diaspora.<sup>3</sup>

The first Zionist Congress, held in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, drew about two hundred participants from almost twenty-four countries who came to establish the Zionist Organization and formulate its goals. They did not represent the majority of Jews in Europe, and opposition to their cause came from many sources, including assimilationists who feared the consequences to them in their host countries resulting from the strident aspirations of the Zionists.

Nevertheless, the First Congress was held and approved the

following resolution: "Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in the historic Land of Israel secured under public law." It specified the following goals.

Zionism aims at establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine. For the attainment of this purpose, the Congress considers the following means serviceable:

1. The promotion of the settlement of Jewish agriculturists, artisans, and tradesmen in Palestine.

2. The federation of all Jews into local or general groups, according to the laws of the various countries.

3. The strengthening of the Jewish feeling and consciousness.

4. Preparatory steps for the attainment of those governmental grants which are necessary to the achievement of the Zionist purpose.

Theodor Herzl was elected president of the Zionist Organization. He wrote:

Were I to sum up the Basel Congress in a word—which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly—it would be this: At Basel I founded the Jewish state. If I said this out loud today I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive it.<sup>4</sup>

In this as in many other of his observations, Herzl was prescient.

#### Theodor Herzl's Political Zionism

To this day, Theodor Herzl is widely considered the founding father of the State of Israel and the Jewish visionary of Zionism, although he died well before the state was established. Born in 1860 in Hungary during the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to a secular and Germanspeaking family, he firmly believed that Jewish emancipation from the ghettos of Europe was a matter of conforming to the secular norms of his host society. He initially considered this to be the best way to counter anti-Semitism. It is important to note that Herzl had little if any religious education. He had limited apparent knowledge of, or interest in, the Jewish Yiddish culture that had thrived in the ghettos of Eastern Europe. His family may have observed some traditions, but in his early years he was more interested in studying the works of the great German writers than in biblical and Talmudic learning.

When he was eighteen, his family moved to Vienna where he studied law at the University of Vienna. After a brief legal career, he found a greater interest in journalism, playwriting and political activism. He was sent to Paris as a correspondent of *Neue Freie Presse*, a respected Viennese newspaper. Paris was well suited to this enthusiastic promoter of integration, since it was in France that the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, promising freedom and equality for all, had been passed in 1789. In this position he covered the sensational Dreyfus affair and trial from 1894.

Captain Alfred Dreyfus was a young Jewish French officer convicted of treason for spying for Germany and sentenced to life imprisonment and penal servitude on Devil's Island. Judicial mishandling of the case, errors, and intentional cover-ups were revealed and caused uproar in France. Influential writer Emile Zola published *J'accuse*, an open letter to the press on January 13, 1898, accusing the government of anti-Semitism. In public protest of the verdict, French intellectuals produced an abundance of pamphlets proclaiming Dreyfus' innocence. These were countered by equally prolific supporters of the verdict. Dreyfus was eventually cleared and reinstated into the French Army, but the scandal revealed major ideological and philosophical divisions in France.

Most studies of Theodor Herzl claim that the Dreyfus trial had a major impact on his earlier assimilationist convictions. The mass demonstrations outside the court during the proceedings, with unruly chants of "death to the Jews," made him rethink his stance on anti-Semitism and consider the necessity of a state for the Jews. There are some Israeli historians who claim that Herzl's pivotal conversion had nothing to do with the trial because he had already embraced Zionism by this time, but the trial served him well by convincing other Jews of the urgency of his plan. In any event, Herzl could not publish his political thoughts on the "Jewish Problem" in his Viennese newspaper and instead, along with many other strongly opinionated writers on the Dreyfus case, resorted to pamphlets. These were the most popular means of arguing the heated and controversial topics of the day in France. His opinions became increasingly known and gained influence among European Jews.

In 1896 he published his pivotal book, *The State of the Jews*, absolutely revoking any earlier belief that assimilation would lead to emancipation because, as he concluded, anti-Semitism was inevitable. He observed, "The Jewish Question exists wherever Jews live in perceptible numbers." Therefore, migrating Jews carry it into every country to which they move. We had already introduced it into England and America. He went even further by declaring that emancipation had actually deepened anti-Semitism. "In vain are we loyal patriots...In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers."

According to Herzl, the historical stigma of the Jews as contemptible money lenders was the result of medieval conditions that forced the Jews into the businesses of finance, and that history of barring Jewish entry into any other industry was being repeated. At a time of great economic, industrial, and social turmoil in Europe, and regardless of assimilation, the alleged financial success of Jews made them disgraceful, be they capitalists or socialists.

"Educated Jews without means are now fast becoming Socialists. Hence we are certain to suffer very severely in the struggle between classes, because we stand in the most exposed position in the camps of both Socialists and capitalists."<sup>6</sup>

Herzl's book was an attempt to provide a blueprint for the process of establishment of an independent Jewish state and a comprehensive plan for its implementation. Uncertain where this Jewish state should be located at the time of writing his book he wrote in his diaries, "The promised land is where we shall take it...<sup>7</sup> In *The Jewish State* he wavered. "Shall we choose Palestine or Argentina? We shall take what is given us, and what is selected by Jewish public opinion. The Society will settle both these points."<sup>8</sup>

At a later point he even proposed Uganda as a possibility. This lack of geographic clarity by the undisputed founder of Zionism is in blatant contradiction to the current Zionist narrative of a long delayed and clearly defined historic right. The idea of uprooting communities and moving them to an unknown foreign region was not new, as it had been a recurring feature of European colonialism. At the 1878 Congress of Berlin, British Prime Minister Disraeli allegedly said that Bismarck's idea of progress was to seize someone else's territory.<sup>9</sup>

Although Herzl certainly did not consider himself a colonialist, he proposed uprooting the Jews to lands he knew very little about. He perhaps had a vague understanding of the contemporary realities of Palestine or Argentina, their geography, resources, or economies. Nevertheless, his vision of the future in the new nation state included practical details of trade, land purchase, property holdings, industries, town planning, law, language, and the army. It provided no details about the people already living there, about whom he and his fellow Zionists knew little and cared less. For them Zionism served a higher purpose, and their plan fit into the great movement of European expansion.

It bears repeating that the notion of a homeland in Palestine was not an imperative for the largely secular members of the early Zionist movement. The World Zionist Organization, founded in Basel in 1897, determined that the Jewish homeland should be in Palestine, as the case could be made for a biblical connection, which would be more convincing to other Jews and provide a stronger negotiating position with other governments who would need to be persuaded. For the new nation, imported from civilized Europe, negotiation with the primitive population of Palestine was never considered. Herzl believed that European leaders would be eager to encourage Jews to have a homeland, and he envisioned a perfectly peaceful departure.

The departure of the Jews will involve no economic disturbances, no crises, no persecutions; in fact, the countries they abandon will revive to a new period of prosperity...The outgoing current will be gradual and continuous, and its initial movement will put an end to Anti-Semitism...The movement will not only be inaugurated with absolute conformity to law, but it cannot even be carried out without the friendly intervention of interested Governments, who would derive considerable benefits from it.<sup>10</sup>

In *The Jewish State*, Herzl expounded on his preferred form of government—an "aristocratic republic"—and on the role of a constitution, the government, and jurists. Had he lived, he would have seen nothing resembling his prophecy in these areas, nor would his firmly pronounced secular stance be realized.

We shall therefore prevent any theocratic tendencies from coming to the fore on the part of our priesthood. We shall keep our priests within the confines of their temples...But they must not interfere in the administration of the State.<sup>11</sup>

He would have been surprised, if not shocked, to learn that many of the staunchest defenders of Zionism do so in the name of religion. He also could not have foreseen the enormity of the Israeli army, as he anticipated that the Jewish state would be "neutral," needing only an army of well-equipped volunteers to keep order.<sup>12</sup>

Theodor Herzl is renowned among Israelis as the undisputed founding figure and the force behind the movement that created the State of Israel. He only lived to the age of forty-four but managed in that short time to dream a new destiny for the Jewish people and posthumously realize some of his utopian vision that had been inconceivable and often ridiculed in his lifetime. Although Israel today is hardly the state Herzl imagined, his conception was remarkable and audacious. The State of Israel, at seventy, is indeed an independent sovereign nation, but its adamant determination to be exclusively Jewish may have placed it back in a self-created ghetto that its originators sought to escape.

#### An Earlier Zionist from the East

Herzl was not the only, nor even the first, Zionist. From Eastern Europe, Dr. Leon Pinsker, a medical doctor born in Polish Russia in 1821, also firmly believed in assimilation. Initially, he advocated for the secular education of Jews in Russia and better integration into Russian society. But a violent pogrom in Odessa in 1871 convinced him that Jews could never be safe there. He traveled into other parts of Europe searching for like-minded thinkers to organize a national movement of Jews.

In 1884, Pinsker anonymously published in German a pamphlet

entitled Auto-Emancipation: A Warning Addressed to His Brethren. By a Russian Jew. But his authorship was revealed, and the pamphlet attracted both favorable and intensely critical attention. In it he claimed, "Among the living nations of the earth the Jews are as a nation long since dead." Initially, he emphatically opposed the idea of a homeland in Palestine.

If we would have a secure home, give up our endless life of wandering and rise to the dignity of a nation in our own eyes and in the eyes of the world, we must, above all, not dream of restoring ancient Judaea. We must not attach ourselves to the place where our political life was once violently interrupted and destroyed. The goal of our present endeavors must be not the "Holy Land," but a land of our own.<sup>13</sup>

A better solution, he thought, would be the purchase of land in America.

Every one who has the slightest judgment can see at first glance that the purchase of lands in America would, because of the swift rise of that country, not be a risky, but a lucrative enterprise.

Eventually, but before Herzl did so in Paris, Pinsker abandoned his assimilationist views in favor of Jewish nationalism and came around to the idea of a homeland either in Palestine or elsewhere. He formed the Lovers of Zion movement, a group based in Odessa, which in 1882 established the first Zionist settlement in Palestine. Most of the members of this group joined the Zionist Organization once it formed.

#### Ahad Ha'am's Cultural Zionism

But the greatest challenge to Herzl's nationalism and concept of a Jewish state came from a contemporary Eastern European Zionist with an extraordinary clarity of vision and increasing literary importance. Asher Ginsberg was born in 1856 near Kiev in Imperial Russia to a religious Hassidic family. It was a difficult personal and intellectual struggle for him to leave the cloistered religious world and become a secular thinker, unlike Herzl who never had to relinquish that culture. Despite mastering German, French, and English (in addition to his knowledge of Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew) and familiarizing himself with the writers and philosophers of his time, he continued to value the Jewish history of ideas. He never considered Judaism antithetical to modernity.

Under the Hebrew pen name Ahad Ha'am, which literally means "one of the people," he was a prolific writer of essays in Hebrew. The main concern of his writing was the survival of the Jewish people, and he objected to Herzl's lack of Jewish "*nefesh*," or spirit. The most often quoted observation illustrating the difference between the two is that Ahad Ha'am wanted a Jewish state, not merely a State for the Jews. Sovereignty should not be the sole purpose of Zionism; the preservation of Jewish morality and justice should be its ultimate achievement.

In "Slavery in Freedom," an essay written in 1891 before the Dreyfus trial, Ahad Ha'am wrote of assimilationist Western Jews:

Beneath the cloak of their political freedom there lies another, perhaps harder, form of slavery—*intellectual* slavery...Having agreed, for the sake of emancipation, to deny the existence of Jews as a people and regard Judaism simply and solely as a religion, Western Jews... pledged themselves...to guard...the religious unity of Israel...What, then, are those Jews to do who have nothing left but this theoretical religion, which is itself losing its hold on them? Are they to give up Judaism altogether and become completely assimilated to their surroundings?<sup>14</sup>

For Ahad Ha'am the forces of assimilation had overwhelmed the Jews of Europe and taken away their essence. Their only goal had become to be like other nations. In an essay written in 1902, on the tenth anniversary of Dr. Pinsker's death, he wrote: "Assimilation with the nations? If real assimilation be meant—the assimilation that reaches to the very soul and ends in annihilation—that is the kind of death which does not come of itself..."<sup>15</sup>

Ahad Ha'am attended the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, and shortly thereafter wrote an essay entitled "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem." His analysis of the Congress was not complimentary, and he disagreed with the efforts made by Herzl and the organizers to "avoid giving opportunity for discussion in order to appear united."<sup>16</sup> As an illustration of the disunity in the views of Zionists, he continued to compare the Western European to the Jews from the East: "In the West, it is the problem of the Jews, in the East the problem of Judaism. The one weighs on the individual, the other on the nation."<sup>17</sup>

Since Judaism everywhere had come out of the ghetto, Ahad Ha'am agreed that it could no longer remain isolated while learning how to maintain its essential being. But he then introduced a crucial argument against political Zionism, one which remains valid to this day.

A political ideal which does not rest on the national culture is apt to seduce us from our loyalty to spiritual greatness and beget in us a tendency to find the path of glory in the attainment of material power and political dominion...undermining our historical basis.<sup>18</sup>

A recurring objection to political Zionism was that it had lost sight of the spiritual or moral aspect of Jewish renewal, concentrating exclusively on the material safety and wellbeing of the individual. In his essay, "Summa Summarum, "written in 1912, he says:

The Zionism of the "politicals," most of whom were brought into the camp not by a heartfelt longing for the persistence and the development of Jewish nationality but by a desire to escape from external oppression through the foundation of a "secured home of refuge" for our people—their Zionism is necessarily bound up with that object and with that alone: take that away and it remains an empty phrase.<sup>19</sup>

In 1891, after visiting Palestine for the first time, in an essay entitled "Truth from the Land of Israel," Ahad Ha'am disclosed some crucial facts about the Zionist project in Palestine, ones to which he would return in many subsequent essays. He observed that Palestine was not empty; it was not uninhabited. Its peoples were not savages, and Jewish moral superiority was unwarranted. Jews in Palestine were behaving in hostile and cruel ways to the native population.

In September 1922, he wrote a letter to the *Ha'Aretz* newspaper after a revenge killing of an Arab boy by Jews: "Is this the dream of the

return to Zion which our people dreamt for thousands of years: that we should come to Zion and pollute its soil with the spilling of innocent blood?"<sup>20</sup> He was adamant about the rights of people in their own lands and the abuse of those rights by a colonization project.

#### Ahad Ha'am on The Balfour Declaration

On November 2, 1917, Lord Arthur James Balfour, the Foreign Secretary of Britain, announced a declaration of sympathy with the Jewish Zionist aspirations. Balfour seemed to have identified the interests of Zionism with those of the British when he wrote: "Zionism be it right or wrong, good or bad, is of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land."<sup>21</sup>

Ahad Ha'am had much say about the Balfour Declaration, which in fact stated:

His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

In his essay "After the Balfour Declaration," written in 1920, he pointed out that the text suggested to the British government by the Zionist spokesman was "the reconstitution of Palestine as the National Home of the Jewish People" as opposed to the formulation of "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." This meant that the Zionists were not being given title to Palestine as their historical home without any regard for the population already residing there. They were not intended to replace or rule over the current inhabitants, and the declaration clearly addressed the right of non-Jewish inhabitants.

Although Ahad Ha'am may have been the odd combination of a secular Zionist promoting Jewish values, he was a staunch defender of human rights. The native inhabitants had been there for millennia and had every right to pursue their own national identity, with no Jewish overlord. He wrote:

The Arab people too, which we have always ignored from the very beginning of the colonization movement, listened and believed that the Jews were coming to expropriate its land and to do with it what they liked. All this inevitably led to friction and bitterness on both sides.<sup>22</sup>

In much of his writing Ahad Ha'am warned Jewish settlers in Palestine to treat Arabs fairly, cautioning that hostility and cruelty would lead to resentment and put the Zionist project in grave danger. He was the first Zionist to seriously deal with the now ubiquitous question of Judaism as nation-state or religion. He stressed that the only legitimate claim Jews could make for a sovereign nation was if it reflected Jewish tradition of morality and universal conscience. He implicitly endorsed a two-state solution to the problem of sharing the land with its existing population.

Despite the relevance of his thinking to contemporary Israel, Ahad Ha'am has been relegated to a secondary status, after Theodor Herzl. His ideas so often contradict the dominant narrative of contemporary Israel that he is not yet appreciated as the visionary that he was. Except, of course, by those who actually read his essays.

#### SPIRITUAL AND SECULAR JEWISH CONCERNS ABOUT The creation of a state: Martin Buber and Albert Einstein

In opposition to a political concept of Zionism, Austrian-born philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965) advocated social and spiritual enhancement. Renowned mathematician and physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955), a cultural Zionist, opposed nationalism and envisioned a binational state.

The claim to the "Land of Israel" is promoted as, and generally believed to be, biblical, inspired by years of longing for a geographically defined homeland for the Jews. The deliberations among early Jewish Zionists about the possible location of that homeland are infrequently—if ever discussed in contemporary discourse, nor are the protests of religious Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to all the factions of the Zionist movement. Nationalist Jews continue to use the Bible to justify an ever-expanding Israel and are among the loudest defenders of Zionism today. That narrative is widely accepted to be historically true.

The distinction Ahad Ha'am made between a Jewish religion and a Jewish nation-state provokes discussion about the concept of the state in the contemporary global political system. Arguably, a modern state is a geographic-political construct, not a religious one, and Israel is considered one such independent sovereign country. But if Israel is the biblical homeland of the Jewish people, and considers itself a Jewish state, it would reasonably equate being Israeli with being Jewish, which is identified as a religion.

Israel today is also a political state, one that purports to be democratic. Not all citizens living in Israel are Jewish, and if Israel is a democracy, non-Jews living in a Jewish state should have equal rights. Sadly, they do not.

To add to the complexity of this "religious democracy," not all Jews are Israelis. In fact, most are citizens of other countries. Should all of them automatically be granted Israeli citizenship? This would be analogous to giving all Catholics Vatican, or at least Italian, citizenship. In fact, all Jews, regardless of their other citizenships, are given preferential treatment when they immigrate to Israel, their "homeland." These preferences are not offered to non-Jews who reside in the country and whose families have lived there for generations. Many Israelis today are completely secular, if not atheist. What could be their claim to the Holy Land other than, perhaps, having been born there? If that is indeed the case, why are their rights preferred to those of the non-Jews born there and living without preferred rights? This is clearly problematic but essentially raises the question: Can a religious state be a democratic one?

Philosopher and theologian Martin Buber takes the claim of nationhood much further.

#### Bridging the Diaspora Divide

Martin Buber was born in 1878 in Austria, to a German-speaking family of observant Jews. His parents separated when he was a toddler, and the four-year-old Martin left Vienna to live with his grandparents for ten years in Lemberg, then in Poland, where German continued to be the dominant language at home. This early move eastward may have predestined him many years later to attempt to bridge the cultural divide between the diaspora Jews of the East and the West.

Buber was a prolific writer, in German and Hebrew, whose works encompassed Jewish mysticism, philosophy, political philosophy, psychology, education, art, and biblical studies. Beyond his involvement in the evolution of Zionism, he is best known as an existentialist philosopher and a theologian, at the core of whose work is his concept of dialogue. In his preface to a compilation of his essays, *Israel and the World*, he states his predominant theme: "According to the Jewish faith, the history of mankind as well as the life of an individual is a dialogue with God." The first essay, "The Faith of Judaism," begins: "My subject is not religion but only the faith of Judaism." Buber believed in a living faith, an existential experience of faith, not in empty ritual and laws.<sup>23</sup>

Buber's translation of the Hebrew Bible into German, in collaboration with another prominent Jewish theologian, Franz Rosenzweig, was considered a monumental achievement. Hannah Arendt effusively His splendid German translation of the bible ... no such endeavor had been attempted since Luther—to interpret the Bible poetically in another language...at both ends of German Jewish history, the beginning and the end, there stands a translation of the greatest Jewish possession—the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

Like Ahad Ha'am, whose cultural Zionism he embraced, Buber was multilingual: in Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, and German; he acquired Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and English. Buber had enormous respect for Ahad Ha'am, calling him a "true Zionist."<sup>25</sup> He would have appreciated the compliment given him many years later by Hannah Arendt: "What Ahad Ha'am had been for Eastern Europe, Buber became for Western Europe."<sup>26</sup>

As for the political Zionists, namely Pinsker and Herzl, Buber describes them as fundamentally encountering "the history of their own people in essentials only in the shape of anti-Semitism."27 Zionism for them was the route to become like all other people and thereby avoid anti-Semitism. Roughly two decades younger than Herzl and Ahad Ha'am, Buber belonged to a newer generation of Zionists who had never advocated for assimilation and never assumed it could lead to emancipation. His contemporaries were modern Jews who were less concerned about anti-Semitism, more committed to stimulating values and a revitalized Judaism. They considered Buber inspirational and much more ideologically authentic than the assimilationists, the political Zionists, or the rabbis. He did not encourage just another nationalism, which makes the nation an end in itself. He believed Zionism was a far greater undertaking, which was to become a community of Jewish people dedicated by their "will to perfection" to take part in a new kingdom of God. This was a concept that related to his existential dialogue with God as an essential part of Zionism. According to Buber, the will to perfection means improving our souls toward God. But if Jews in Zion sever their connection to the faith and to the history of their people, there can be no nation.

This was no call to return to rabbinical orthodoxy, but rather to a spiritual revival for a Jewish collective that could only thrive in its own land and with its own language. The work required for this task is "the complete surrender of self...The people must learn to love Zion ... The whole heart of the people must be caught up in this burning love."<sup>28</sup>

A significant number of Buber's early followers were socialists, critical of the bourgeois values of Western European Jews, particularly of the well-assimilated and affluent German Jews. These burgeoning socialists were eager to cultivate a unique Jewish nationalism that was less worldly. For them it was the duty of every Zionist to resettle in an "undeveloped" Palestine, then under the Turkish mandate, and face the prospect of physical hardship away from the luxuries of civilized Europe.

As a child living with his enlightened, scholarly, and religious grandfather, who among other things was an editor of rabbinical texts with an interest in Hassidic mysticism, Martin Buber encountered the spiritual revival movement of Hassidism. Hassidism was a form of ecstatic mysticism that originated in the Ukraine in the eighteenth century and spread to other parts of Eastern Europe, in opposition to orthodox and dogmatic rabbinical Judaism. Hassidism stressed the importance of joy in worship, of salvation through joy rather than through suffering. Although he had to be orthodox and devout, a Hassid could be a simple Jew, without elite scholarly teaching. Buber came back to study Hassidic writings in his twenties and spent much of the rest of his life immersed in the study and translation of Hassidic texts from Yiddish into Hebrew and German, convinced that Zionism required a renaissance of its Jewish literary and secular identity in terms of folklore and legend. These were abundant in the Hassidic texts. He certainly did more than any other Western European scholar in bringing the culture of Eastern Europe to the West, attempting to bridge the Jewish diaspora divide.

#### Zion Must Be Born in the Soul (Psalm 87:5)

The frenetic negotiations and political debates of the Zionist organizations, both within their own ranks and with various outside powers, were persistent. But Buber believed they had lost any meaningful direction. They were demanding a "fatherland," which he criticized in *On Zion.*<sup>29</sup>

A people or a section of people can "want" a land for immigration, a land to colonize, but one cannot "want" a fatherland ... anyone who talks like that has been startled out of his sense of security, but is not concerned with the restoration of a historical continuity but merely with a support to hold unto.

In 1901, Buber agreed to be editor of Herzl's Zionist journal *Der Welt.* But he left it after one year, disillusioned with the material goals of political Zionism. Instead, he founded his own publishing company and in 1916 established the journal *Der Jude* to provide a platform for Zionist literature and for debates about the direction of Zionism. He opposed the ideology of Jewish nationalists that had become an end in itself. "The moment national ideology makes the nation an end in itself, it annuls its own right to live, it grows sterile."<sup>30</sup> The land of Israel alone was an insufficient condition for the creation of a viable and long-lasting Jewish nation. The nation created had to be an exemplary ethical community seeking spiritual purpose:

We talk of the spirit of Israel and assume that we are not like unto all the nations because there is a spirit of Israel. But if the spirit of Israel is no more than the synthetic personality of the nation, no more than a fine justification for our collective egoism, no more than our prince turned into an idol—then we are indeed like all other nations. And we are drinking with them from the cup that inebriates. And when we grow drunk after their fashion, we become weaker than any other nation and find ourselves defenseless in their hands.<sup>31</sup>

He scolded the nationalists whose only goal was living in the land they described as "promised" to them, without having any sense of their spiritual purpose, which he defined as "the great upbuilding of peace."<sup>32</sup>

Their only wish is to join the wolf pack. If we are not acceptable in the pack, it is enough to live on its fringes, in its neighborhood ... Of all the many kinds of assimilation in the course of our history, this is the most terrifying, the most dangerous, this nationalist assimilation. That which we lose on account of it we shall perhaps never acquire again.<sup>33</sup>

#### Binationalism

Martin Buber began advocating for a binational Jewish-Arab state in the early 1920s, claiming it was necessary for the Zionists to live in peace with the Arabs, even at the cost of the Jews remaining a minority in the country. In 1925, he was involved with other Jewish intellectuals, including Albert Einstein, in the creation of the organization Brit Shalom (Covenant of Peace), which argued for a binational state with equal rights for Jews and Arabs. In 1938, Buber settled in Israel to teach at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he continued to argue for a binational, rather than exclusively Jewish, state.

On May 14, 1948, the United Nations resolved to partition Palestine. Although Buber initially considered this decision unfortunate, he came to accept it, saying that the *spirit* now had to be served from this new basis. But he persisted in warning that the new state must become a spiritual force or it would not endure. By "spiritual force" he meant that Zion must now become the new sanctuary of nations. If it only wants to have a land like other lands, the land will sink beneath its feet.

Buber objected to politics that employs power to expand power, arguing that power without faith was comparable to life without meaning. Throughout his life as a Zionist, he wanted the main objective of Zionist policy to be cooperation with the land's Arab inhabitants; to guide the two nations of Palestine into a peaceful community, free from mutual domination. In a speech he gave on nationalism as early as 1921, he said:

Power is intrinsically guiltless; it is the precondition for the actions of man. The problematic element is the will to power, greedy to seize and establish power ... A will to power, less concerned with being powerful than with being "more powerful than," becomes destructive. Not power, but power hysteria is evil.<sup>34</sup>

Expressing his own desire rather than the reality he witnessed, he wrote in a letter to Gandhi in 1939, "I belong to a group of people who from the time Britain conquered Palestine have not ceased to strive for the concluding of a genuine peace between Arab and Jew."<sup>35</sup> In an essay entitled "Israel's Mission and Zion," written well after the State of Israel had been established, he bemoaned the bleak utilitarian secularization of

the nation in which political life is supreme. Since the conditions for the arrival of the Jewish Messiah clearly had not been fulfilled, he ended the essay with a question to Ben-Gurion that remains unanswered.

In how many hearts of this generation in our country does the Messianic idea live in a form other than the narrow nationalistic form ... without the yearning for the redemption of mankind and without the desire to take part in its realization ... It is no longer identical with the Messianic visions of the prophets of Israel, nor can that prophetic mission be identified with a Messianic ideal emptied of belief in the coming of the kingdom of God.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout his life, Buber objected to the idea of national destiny, secular or religious, if it resulted in domination over any other nation, devoid of any meaningful relationship with God and devoid of the Jewish spirit that seeks peace and redemption.

#### A Spiritual Scientist

From an entirely different perspective, another German-speaking secular Jew, born one year after Martin Buber, into an assimilated and completely secular family, came to many similar conclusions about the purpose and evolution of Zionism. Albert Einstein initially endorsed the idea of a homeland in Palestine for the Jews, but he opposed the idea of a state with borders, with an army and with temporal power. Peaceful coexistence in that homeland was more important than any national objective. Like Buber, he considered himself a cultural, rather than political, Zionist and supported the idea of a binational state in which Jewish Arab cooperation was a prerequisite. In a speech given to the National Labor Committee for Palestine, in New York, on April 17, 1938<sup>37</sup> entitled "Our Debt to Zionism" he said:

I should much rather see reasonable agreement with the Arabs on the basis of living together in peace than the creation of a Jewish state. My awareness of the essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish state with borders, an army, and a measure of temporal power, no matter how modest. I am afraid of the inner
damage Judaism will sustain—especially from the development of a narrow nationalism within our own ranks, against which we have already had to fight strongly, even without a Jewish state ... If external necessity should after all compel us to assume this burden, let us bear it with tact and patience.<sup>38</sup>

Einstein renounced his German citizenship, with his father's help, for the first time when he was seventeen, one year before he would be drafted into the army. He had already declared his disgust with German authoritarianism and militarism as motivation to continue his studies in Switzerland, with the blessing of his family. At that time, he had little interest in his Jewish heritage and, having had a brief childhood flirtation with Judaism to the dismay of his family, claimed to have been repelled by it and by its affluent bourgeois circles.<sup>39</sup>

But as anti-Semitism in Germany became impossible to ignore, he reconnected to his Jewish identity and in the 1920s affirmed that although he was no religious Jew, he was happy to be a member of the Jewish people.<sup>40</sup> In *The Jews*, he wrote:

The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, an almost fanatical love of justice, and the desire for personal independence—these are the features of the Jewish tradition which make me thank my stars that I belong to it ... Judaism seems to me to be concerned almost exclusively with the moral attitude in life and to life ... But the Jewish tradition contains something else, something which finds splendid expression in many of the Psalms—namely, a sort of intoxicated joy and amazement at the beauty and grandeur of this world ... from which true scientific research draws its spiritual sustenance ... <sup>41</sup>

In 1914, Einstein returned to Germany to a position at the University of Berlin where he stayed throughout World War I and reacquired his German citizenship. While developing new laws in physics that would earn him the Nobel Prize in 1921, he was also vigorously engaged in political causes. In 1918, he was active in the German Democratic Party and, as a member of the German League of Human Rights, he worked to repair relations between Germany and France. During the 1930s and into World War II, Einstein wrote affidavits recommending United States visas for European Jews who were trying to flee persecution and lobbied for looser immigration rules. He raised money for Zionist organizations and was, in part, responsible for the 1933 formation of the International Rescue Committee. He moved to the United States in December 1932, to work at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, California, and lecture at the newly founded Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. The rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party compelled Einstein to renounce his German citizenship again in 1933.

#### Anti-Semitism

By this time, Einstein was internationally acclaimed and even within Germany was considered its most celebrated genius. But Nazi activists in Germany published pamphlets, and even textbooks, denigrating him. The Prussian Academy of Science, to which he had been elected as the youngest member in 1913 at the age of 34, now accused him of being an agitator in foreign countries. In a letter dated April 5, 1933, he responded that he had never taken part in any "atrocity mongering" and that he had renounced his Prussian citizenship because, in his words, "As long as I have any choice, I will only stay in a country where political liberty, toleration, and equality of all citizens before the law are the rule."<sup>42</sup> A flurry of letters were exchanged in which first the Prussian Academy, and later the Bavarian Academy, accused the renowned Einstein of harming Germany by not defending it.

Once World War II broke out, there were campaigns to eliminate Einstein's work from the German lexicon as unacceptable "Jewish physics" (*Jüdische Physik*). Instructors who taught his theories were blacklisted, including Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg, who had debated quantum probability with Bohr and Einstein. One of his detractors claimed that the mass-energy equivalence formula needed to be credited to Friedrich Hasenöhrl to make it an Aryan creation. A man convicted of inciting others to kill Einstein was fined a mere six dollars.

After World War II ended, and the Nazis were removed from power, Einstein refused to associate with Germany and rebuffed several honors bestowed upon him by that country, as he could not forgive the Germans for the Holocaust. The vitriolic ant-Semitism he experienced, however, strengthened his self-awareness as a Jew and, although opposed to any form of nationalism, he became more involved in Zionist issues.

### Pacifism versus Zionism

It is not remarkable that Einstein became a fervent and lifelong pacifist with an abhorrence of any manifestation of militant patriotism. In his book *The World as I See It*, first published in 1935, he declared, "Heroism by order, senseless violence, and all the pestilent nonsense that goes by the name of patriotism—how I hate them!"<sup>43</sup> He went on to say, "In two weeks the sheep-like masses can be worked up by the newspapers into such a state of excited fury that men are prepared to put on a uniform and kill and be killed for the sake of the worthless aims of a few interested parties."<sup>44</sup>

Einstein considered the appeal of a Jewish homeland with a "secured binational status in Palestine with free immigration," but not a separate state. He disagreed with the Zionists who wanted more. On January 21, 1946, he wrote in a letter:

It seems to me a matter for simple common sense that we cannot ask to be given the political rule over Palestine where two thirds of the population are not Jewish. What we can and should ask is a secured bi-national status in Palestine with free immigration. If we ask more, we are damaging our own cause and it is difficult for me to grasp that our Zionists are taking such an intransigent position, which can only impair our cause.

He was in fact deeply conflicted regarding the creation of the State of Israel. In testimony before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in January 1946, he stated that he was not in favor of the creation of a Jewish state and, like Buber, publicly opposed the partition of Palestine. He even warned Chaim Weizmann, soon to become Israel's first president, against Prussian-style Jewish nationalism.<sup>45</sup> However, one year later he wrote to the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in an effort to persuade India to support the establishment of a Jewish state. In this letter, Einstein stated that the Balfour Declaration's proposal to establish a national home for Jews in Palestine "redresses the balance" of justice and history. Einstein's ambivalent support for the Jewish state and his pacifist convictions were sorely tested by several events that occurred during the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948 or, as Israel calls it, the War of Independence. The worst of these events was the attack on the village of Deir Yassin. On April 9, 1948, a small and peaceful Arab village of 600 people was savagely attacked by a Zionist paramilitary group of 120 fighters resulting in the deaths of many Palestinians, including women and children. The exact numbers are contested, but the International Red Cross found 150 corpses, among them people who had been decapitated or disemboweled. Some villagers were taken captive and paraded in the streets of Jerusalem, to the shock and horror of much of the Jewish community.

The "warriors" were apparently proud of their despicable massacre, publicized it widely, and invited all the foreign correspondents present in the country to view the heaped corpses and the general havoc at Deir Yassin. The militant revisionist organization behind the brutality was the Irgun, headed at this time by Menachem Begin, who in 1977 would become Israel's sixth prime minister. Begin himself was not physically present at the site on this day; he was in hiding from the British and the Zionist leadership as a wanted man for other unauthorized and violent attacks on Palestinians, and on the British. The Irgun later became a legitimate right-wing political party, Herut, which evolved into the Likud party, which has been for many years the ruling party in Israel.

On December 4, 1948, a group of 28 prominent Jewish leaders, Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt among them, wrote a letter to the editors of the *New York Times* denouncing Menachim Begin, the Herut (Freedom) Party and the Irgun, on the eve of a planned visit by Begin to the United States to raise support for his party. They described the Herut Party in the following terms.

... A political party closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties. It was formed out of the membership and following of the former Irgun Zvai Leumi, a terrorist, right-wing, chauvinist organization in Palestine ... It is inconceivable that those who oppose fascism throughout the world, if correctly informed as to Mr. Begin's political record and perspectives, could add their names and support to the movement he represents. Explaining the methodology of the Herut Party to recruit and intimidate, the letter concludes: "This is the unmistakable stamp of a Fascist party for whom terrorism (against Jews, Arabs, and British alike), and misrepresentation are means, and a "Leader State" is the goal."

When President Chaim Weizmann died in 1952, Einstein was invited to be Israel's second president, but he declined, stating that he had "neither the natural ability nor the experience to deal with human beings." Einstein wrote to his stepdaughter Margot after declining the presidency: "If I were to be president, sometime I would have to say to the Israeli people things they would not like to hear."

While Einstein's opposition to political Zionism was widely known and reported on during his life, the myth of Einstein's complete support of Israel was born the day after his death in his obituary in *The New York Times*, which called him a champion for the establishment of the Jewish state. Albert Einstein emphatically opposed a Jewish state that would be established solely on an ethnic or racial basis. His fierce support for universal human rights and consistent opposition to war and chauvinistic ethnic nationalism would place him at odds with the State of Israel today.

Einstein was one of the founders of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, served on its Board of Governors, chaired its Academic Committee, and was actively involved in its development. He bequeathed his personal archives and literary rights to his writings to the university, and many of his original documents are currently in the Hebrew University's Albert Einstein Archives. He is revered in Israel as a political and scientific icon, however, his wise words on the issue of Palestine and its conflict with political Zionism are seemingly forgotten or ignored. Notwithstanding his severe lifelong criticism, the man considered by Israel to be the intellectual superstar of the twentieth century was posthumously incorporated into the pervasive modern political Zionist narrative as a major supporter.

## Buber, Einstein, and the Early Political Zionist Movement

Given their historical circumstance and despite their very distinct vocations—philosophy and physics—Buber and Einstein, two outstanding contemporaneous thinkers, were almost unavoidably pushed into the Zionist movement by the rampant anti-Semitism in their countries, and they reached many of the same conclusions about it. Dissatisfied with rabbinical orthodoxy, Buber approached Judaism as historical and mystical, while the secular Einstein approached it as spiritual and moral. Neither could accept the goal of becoming a nation like all other nations, to escape anti-Semitism, if the cost was to be power and nationalism replacing justice, peace, and humanism. Both wanted a binational state that would embrace all resident cultures and prohibit the dominance of one over the other. This was their initial dissent from the Zionist movement, and later their main criticism of Israel.

## CHALLENGING THE POLITICAL ZIONIST NARRATIVE: HANNAH ARENDT

A foundation of political Zionism was the assertion that Jewish suffering was unparalleled in world history, and therefore that all Nazis were inhuman monsters. Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) dared to challenge this narrative pillar. For her report and book on the Adolf Eichmann trial, Arendt was vilified by the Israeli establishment. Arendt envisioned a federated, pluralistic state that would be a homeland for all its citizens.

There is wide consensus that Zionism emerged in reaction to anti-Semitism. Regarding the root causes of anti-Semitism, however, there is less agreement. Academic and popular explanations for anti-Semitism range from direct blame for the murder of Christ to social Darwinism to the Aryan Ubermensch "master race" doctrine. Many historical studies attest that German and Austrian Jews were the most integrated in Europe. Many intellectuals and diverse talents who came to prominence in the years leading up to the Second World War were secular Jews from these communities, among them: neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, physicist Albert Einstein, poet Heinrich Heine, philosophers Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Edmund Husserl; composers Gustav Mahler and Felix Mendelssohn, and more. Why anti-Semitism erupted with such explosive force in a country that seemed to have so fully assimilated its Jews is among the many questions tackled by one outstanding member of that community, Hannah Arendt, in her comprehensive political-philosophical writing about European Jews, totalitarianism, and Zionism.

### A Consummate European

Hannah Arendt was born in 1906 in Hannover, Germany, to educated parents, nonreligious social democrats who brought her up as a European.

Despite occasional encounters with anti-Semitism during her school years, she was secure, almost passionate, about her identity as a German Jew. Her initial academic interests were German literature and the classics, Greek and Latin, and Christian theology, which she studied at the University of Berlin. She then attended Marburg University to study philosophy with Martin Heidegger, moved to Heidelberg University to study with Karl Jaspers, and worked with several of the great philosophers of her age.

During the early 1920s, she was remote from Jewish and Zionist concerns, and "found the so-called 'Jewish Question' quite boring."<sup>46</sup> But by the 1930s, as German fascism took over the political landscape, she could no longer be bored by the Jewish question and her lack of interest was dramatically transformed. Arendt wrote prolifically on the historical bases of anti-Semitism in Europe, on the Enlightenment, the Emancipation of the Jews, the failure of assimilation, and on the potential benefits, as well as the inherent dangers, of Zionism. A persistent theme of her evolving but lifelong intellectual inquiry was the problem of Jewishness in the modern world.

Arendt was not a Zionist and not particularly inclined to join the movement, but she became a great friend of Kurt Blumenfeld, the charismatic president of the German Zionist Organization, whom she met in 1926 at a lecture he gave on Zionism. Blumenfeld, who had also recruited the secular Albert Einstein to Zionism, stated that he found Zionism through Goethe and wanted a "post-assimilation" form of Zionism, closer to German Idealism than to Jewish tradition. An extreme secularist, he advised Jews against insincere religious adherence.

Arendt's personal involvement with Zionism began in the 1930s when, at Blumenfeld's request, and just weeks after the Nazi seized power; she undertook research on the extent of anti-Semitism in Germany. She was denounced by a librarian for collecting anti-state propaganda and arrested. After eight days of police detention, she immediately went into exile, slipping into Bohemia and making her way to France. In Paris, she continued to work for Zionist organizations, principally for Youth Aliyah, which rescued young Jews from Europe; feeding, clothing, and providing them with legal documents to prepare them to emigrate to Palestine as agricultural workers.

## "A People without a History"

Much of Arendt's writing focused on the relationship between Jews and history, or the creation of a history for the Jews who, according to some influential intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, didn't really have one. She refers to Johan Gottfried Herder who regarded Jews as alien to Germany and Europe. He considered them:

"a parasitic growth on the stem of other nations, a race of cunning brokers all over the earth. They have caused great evil to many ill-organized states, by retarding the free and natural economic development of their indigenous population."<sup>47</sup>

Herder argues that since the destruction of the temple in 70 AD Jews never possessed their own territory or state, and with some exceptions, depended entirely upon the protection of non-Jewish authorities for their physical existence. Although totally subject to the global forces of history, they had no clear vision, no grasp of the larger historical context in which they lived. In an essay she wrote in the 1930s entitled "The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question," Arendt describes Herder's Jew as one who is deprived of his own past and must form his identity on the basis of a past that is alien to him.

The Jews have become a people without a history within history ... Once again they stand face-to-face with nothing. From within a historical reality, from within a European secular world, they are forced somehow to adopt themselves to this world, to form themselves. But for them formation is by necessity everything that is the non-Jewish world.<sup>48</sup>

She saw some unappealing merit in his understanding. Assimilated European Jews who had spent decades trying to rid themselves of their Jewishness were, in the end, always Jews who had discarded the Judaic heritage of their ancestors' fathers, without gaining a deeply rooted home in Europe. Arendt counted herself among them, but while rejecting Judaism, which she saw as a system of beliefs that one can adopt or reject, she always accepted her Jewishness as an existential given that one cannot escape.<sup>49</sup> With no political tradition or experience, the Jews of Europe were mostly unaware of social or political tensions in their host state and therefore unaware of risks to themselves as loyal citizens. For Arendt, this lack of awareness of the historical context they inhabited, what in later writings she calls their "worldlessness," played a part in their tragedy. In an essay entitled "The Crisis of Zionism," from 1943, she writes:

During the years between 1933, the year in which Hitler came to power, and 1940, only a small fraction of the Jewish people could grasp the fact that they were at war, and this small fraction was without influence, formed of scattered individuals who more often than not did not even know one another.<sup>50</sup>

Lacking a fundamental overview of the long history of Jewish-gentile relations prior to the rise of Nazism, Jews largely misunderstood the history of anti-Semitism, which only aggravated their lack of political aptitude. Jewish historians have tended to present the Jews as innocent victims of intense hostility, which was exclusively the fault of the gentiles. Arendt rejected this and considered it a harmful premise. She claimed that for much of their history, Jews had segregated themselves—morally, culturally, and linguistically. In July 1967, in the preface to Part 1 of a new edition of her massive work, *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*, she asserts:

It was Jewish historiography ... that undertook to trace the record of Jew-hatred in Christian history, while it was left to the anti-Semites to trace an intellectually not too dissimilar record from Jewish authorities. When this Jewish tradition of an often violent antagonism to Christians and Gentiles came to light, the general Jewish public was not only outraged but genuinely astonished ... Judaism, it was now maintained chiefly by Jewish historians, had always been superior to other religions in that it believed in human equality and tolerance. That this self-deceiving theory, accompanied by the belief that the Jewish people had always been the passive, suffering object of Christian persecutions, actually amounted to a prolongation and modernization of the old myth of chosenness ... <sup>51</sup> Although her allocation of any part of the blame for centuries of Jewish alienation was clearly unpopular among conventional Jewish historians, whose theory of complete victimhood was being contested, she argued that for much of history the Jews chose separateness in order to preserve their identity, unaffected by outside influences. They intentionally isolated themselves from extensive contact with the world and considered isolation crucial to maintaining their uncontaminated "chosenness."

It is bitterly ironic, however, that the great flourishing of anti-Semitism began in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when assimilated Jews aspired to be accepted, as equals, by European societies. And that, she believed, was the impetus for Zionism. Only then, "after emancipation and with the spread of assimilation, has anti-Semitism played any role in the conservation of the people, since only then did Jews aspire to being admitted to non-Jewish society."<sup>52</sup>

### **On Eternal Anti- Semitism**

Initially, Arendt respected the idealism and courage of the early Zionist response to anti-Semitism, and immediately after the fall of France, she even supported the creation of a Jewish army to join the forces confronting Hitler. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she explains how, in their desperation, Jews found the idea of eternal anti-Semitism ironically consoling, as it could provide "a mysterious guarantee of the survival of the Jewish people," a means of keeping Jews together.<sup>53</sup> Regardless of her many subsequent disagreements with political Zionism throughout her life, Hannah Arendt appreciated Zionism as the Jews' first positive political response to their hostile reality, one that no longer considered victimhood a measure of faith.

On the other hand, she was intensely opposed to the doctrine of eternal and universal anti-Semitism adopted by mainstream Herzlian Zionism, according to which Jews could continue to have no responsibility for their fate. Because, as she wrote in 1944:

...the courage of despair, which drives individuals to suicide, can never organize a people. A people finds the courage to fight only if there is even the smallest chance of success. No one can defend himself against a whole world of enemies.<sup>54</sup> More forcefully, in 1946 she elaborates:

Herzl's picture of the Jewish people as surrounded and forced together by a world of enemies has ... conquered the Zionist movement and become the common sentiment of the Jewish masses ... If we actually are faced with open or concealed enemies on every side, if the whole world is ultimately against us, then we are lost.<sup>55</sup>

In "Zionism Reconsidered," she perceptively observed that the Herzlian Zionist vision of an eternal and unchangeable anti-Semitism "was held to be sound precisely because it was irrational, and therefore explained something unexplainable and avoided explaining what could be explained ..."<sup>56</sup>

## Arab-Jewish Cooperation

From 1940 onwards, Arendt argued for a political solution to the Jewish question. Her hope was a European federation in which the Jews would be one nation among others, with representation in a common parliament. At one point, she conceded that a settlement in Palestine might also be feasible, but only if it was attached to some European commonwealth. She envisioned a federated, pluralistic, democratic, secular state—a homeland for Palestinians and Jews coexisting peacefully as neighbors without any official state religion. Much like Ahad Ha'am and Buber, she wanted the Zionist project to develop slowly, through local agricultural and irrigation projects, to build trust among neighbors. She objected to an explicitly Jewish state, which she feared would always treat the Arab population as second-class citizens, and become militaristic and dominant. The strength of her conviction about federation was based in large part on her rejection of the idea of a nation-state with subjugated minorities.

Arendt shared many of the misgivings about the Zionist movement held by other European intellectuals of her time, especially about Jewish-Arab cooperation. An unwelcome presence in the Middle East, surrounded by a vastly larger Arab population, would inevitably create continual inner insecurity for Israel. It would not be the culmination of a longed-for ideal homeland. "A home that my neighbor does not recognize and respect is not a home."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, she was appalled by the indifference of nationalist Zionists to the Arab population already residing in Israel, and by their myopic political maneuvering with the bigger global powers for an exclusively Jewish state, supported by the same powers that were complicit in their own recent tragedy. "Only folly could dictate a policy which trusts a distant imperial power for protection, while alienating the goodwill of neighbors."<sup>58</sup> Such a state could only become an armed and introverted society, she predicted, one in which political thinking would be limited to military strategy. Such a state would make the Arabs homeless exiles and the Arab problem a lasting ethical, political, and military dilemma.

Nationalism is bad enough when it trusts in nothing but the rude force of the nation. A nationalism that necessarily and admittedly depends upon the force of a foreign power is certainly worse ... the Zionists, if they continue to ignore the Mediterranean peoples and watch out only for the big faraway powers, will appear only as their tools, the agents of foreign and hostile interests. Jews who know their own history should be aware that such a state of affairs will inevitably lead to a new wave of Jew-hatred; the anti-Semitism of tomorrow will assert that Jews not only profiteered from the presence of the foreign big powers in that region but had actually plotted it and hence are guilty of the consequences.<sup>59</sup>

In "Peace or Armistice in the Middle East," written in 1948, Arendt decried the unreasonable demands and irreconcilable predicament of the Jewish state.

The Jews are convinced, and have announced many times that the world—or history or higher morality—owes them a righting of the wrongs of two thousand years and more specifically, a compensation for the catastrophe of European Jewry which, in their opinion, was not simply a crime of Nazi Germany but of the whole civilized world. The Arabs, on the other hand, reply that two wrongs do not make a right and that no code of morals can justify the persecution of one people in an attempt to relieve the persecution of the other.<sup>60</sup> Foreshadowing the plight of Palestinians, Arendt expressed what very few Jews were willing to say so soon after the horrors of World War II: that the Palestinians bore no responsibility for the collapse of civilization in Europe but ended up being punished for it.

### An Obligation to Her Past

Stripped of her German citizenship in 1937, Arendt was stateless until 1950 when she became a US citizen. After the initial 1948 publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which examines the history of anti-Semitism, the rise of modern imperialism, and the evolution of totalitarian subjugation, she became an internationally recognized public intellectual. She taught at some of the most prestigious universities in the US, among them the University of Notre Dame, University of California, Berkeley, Princeton, Yale, and the University of Chicago. She also returned to Germany as research director of the International Commission for the Cultural Reconstruction of European Jewry, where she was responsible for one and a half million objects, books, and artifacts of Judaica held by Allied authorities as "abandoned property."

But by the 1950s, after Israel's establishment, she despaired over the lack of cooperation between Arabs and Jews, and stopped writing about the Jews and their promised land. Instead, she concentrated on her prodigious writings in political philosophy. In an interview with Gunter Gaus on October 28, 1964, broadcast on West German television,<sup>61</sup> she protested belonging to "the circle of philosophers" and stated that her profession, if she had one at all, was political theory. Most of her eighteen books attest to her original thinking in her chosen field and her enduring effect on contemporary studies of political philosophy, theory, and action.

## Eichmann and "the Banality of Evil"

In 1960 Israeli intelligence captured the Nazi Lieutenant Colonel Adolf Eichmann in Argentina and transported him secretly to Jerusalem, where it was announced that he would stand trial for crimes against humanity. He had been the senior officer charged with the deportation of Jews to concentration camps. Arendt requested and was given the assignment of reporting on the trial for *The New Yorker*. She explained her need to attend the trial as an obligation she owed to her past. Her coverage of the trial subsequently resulted in the book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*,<sup>62</sup> published in 1963.

The phrase, "the banality of evil," which completes the title and ends the book, may also be the most frequently quoted words Arendt ever wrote, and ones by which she is most widely identified. The self-explicit phrase refers to Eichmann, the man on trial, who considered himself an ordinary law-abiding citizen, displaying no guilt for his actions and no hatred for those placing him in a court of justice. In his defense he claimed that he bore no responsibility because he was simply "doing his job." This understatement seems even more horrifying as described by Arendt. "He did his duty ... he not only obeyed orders, he also obeyed the law."<sup>63</sup> The moral inversion of totalitarian rule allowed this to be the law of the land.

In the epilogue she observes, "The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal."<sup>64</sup> But this normalcy is terrifying precisely because they do not and can never know or feel that they are doing evil. Eichmann was one such normal man incapable of thinking for himself. Trapped in the moral distortion of totalitarianism, he believed he must obediently follow orders that he had neither the power nor the intellectual capacity to judge.

Arendt was struck by the absence of viciousness or overt anti-Semitism in Eichmann, who appeared more a banal bureaucrat than an inhuman monster. Her insight was that ordinary people might commit the most awful, reprehensible crimes. Many years later, in *The Life of the Mind: Thinking*, first published posthumously in 1978, she observed, "The sad truth is that most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be good or evil." Throughout the trial, she became increasingly suspicious of the prosecution's caricature of Eichmann as "the monster" responsible for all the suffering of the Jewish people. If Eichmann is perceived as the devil and not as a man, how could any criminal proceeding lead to a just outcome?

Furthermore, she objected to the use of a judicial proceeding to replay the history of Jewish suffering before the world. In Ben-Gurion's words: "We want the nations of the world to know ... and that they should be ashamed."<sup>65</sup> It was an orchestrated endorsement of Zionist militarism as the only way for Jews to be safe in a world populated with hate-filled, Jew-killing monsters. The political intention of the Israeli government was to use the trial to demonstrate that the only viable resistance to the Nazis among world Jewry had come from Zionists.<sup>66</sup>

But Arendt did not want this to be the purpose of the trial. It was important to her that the trial be about justice and not a repetition of the "age-old and, unfortunately, religiously anchored dichotomy of Jews and gentiles."<sup>67</sup> Anti-Semitism could not be considered the only motivation for the crime and eternal anti-Semitism as the justification for endless militarism. Her apprehension that the Holocaust would become a new civil religion, used to justify any of Israel's future aggressions, was prophetic. Like Buber, she feared that once Israel turned into a militaristic state with threatened borders, any vestiges of Jewish culture would gradually vanish. In the long run, the survival of Israel depended more on creating peace with its neighbors than on blaming the entire world for anti-Semitism.

Her criticism of the simplistic proposition that all gentiles are anti-Semites went further. It was this kind of blindness, she said, that prevented Jewish leaders in Europe during the war from distinguishing between friends and foes and led them—without exception—to underestimate their enemies. More perniciously, it allowed them to cooperate in some way with the Nazi bureaucracy.<sup>68</sup> She excoriated these Jewish functionaries.

In Amsterdam as in Warsaw, in Berlin as in Budapest, Jewish officials could be trusted to compile the lists of persons and of their property, to secure money from the deportees to defray the expenses of their deportation and extermination, to keep track of vacated apartments, to supply police forces to help seize Jews and get them on trains ... distributed the Yellow Star badges ... <sup>69</sup>

This analysis of the Jewish leaders' and council's cooperation with the Nazi's was certain to antagonize many within the Jewish communities, whether they were Zionists or not. Despite her vast amount of work on anti-Semitism, Jewish politics, and the Zionist project, written during the 1930s and 1940s, long before her controversial *Eichmann in Jerusalem* appeared, her report on Adolf Eichmann's trial resulted in her virtual excommunication in Israel and ensuing international notoriety. The article for *The New Yorker* and subsequent book turned some friends into fierce foes, but it also demonstrated her enormous moral and intellectual courage.

## The Reception of Eichmann in Jerusalem

The New Yorker presumably valued the buzz created by the article Hannah Arendt delivered. William Shawn, the editor of the The New Yorker, observed that no one talked about anything else. However, the reviews of the article and then of the book were ferocious. According to one Jewish American writer, Irving Howe, the bitter public dispute over the Eichmann book was "violent." Mary McCarthy, the novelist and a close friend of Hannah Arendt, wrote that it assumed the proportions of a pogrom. Arendt was described as a "self-hating Jewess" who was pro-Eichmann. She was accused of being oblivious to the suffering of Jews, of appealing to the anti-Semites of the world, and was threatened by at least one Jewish organization to withdraw the book or suffer retaliation. In a debate organized by Dissent Magazine, one Jewish American playwright, essayist, and theatre critic, Lionel Abel, apparently pounded on the table to loudly criticize the work, claiming that Arendt considered the holocaust banal and the Nazis more appealing than their victims.<sup>70</sup> To avoid such a gross misunderstanding, perhaps he should have actually read the book.

An old friend, highly respected German-Jewish intellectual Gershom Scholem, wrote a public letter accusing Arendt of having no love for the Jewish people and making a mockery of Zionism.<sup>71</sup> Scholem, a renowned scholar of Jewish mysticism, who had immigrated to Palestine in 1923 and was a cultural Zionist like Ahad Ha'am, with evident ties to Buber, had a complex history of shared and divergent interests with Arendt since the 1940s. His reaction was particularly hurtful to Arendt. Responding to Scholem's charges in a letter dated July 24, 1963, she responded:

You are quite right—I am not moved by any "love" of this sort, and for two reasons: I have never in my life "loved" any people

or collective—neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love "only" my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons. Secondly this "love of the Jews" would appear to me, since I am myself Jewish as something rather suspect. I cannot love myself or anything which I know is part and parcel of my own person ... I do not love the Jews, nor do I believe in them: I merely belong to them as a matter of course, beyond dispute or argument.<sup>72</sup>

Scathing reviews of the book also came from those enraged by her critique of extreme nationalist or chauvinist justifications for military rule in Israel. Arendt dreaded the spread of religious and nationalist fundamentalism among Israelis. She opposed the principle of *might is right*, which the government clearly endorsed; and she did not accept the idea that any military conquest in the area served the historical purpose of Zionism. She could not tolerate the fact that the Holocaust itself had been incorporated into a new civil-Zionist religion that could be used at any time to vindicate Israel's policies. She was astounded that at the end of such a momentous trial, the Jews could even contemplate the denial of equal rights for the Palestinians. It can be no surprise that the first Hebrew translation of the book came out in 1999, more than two decades after Arendt's death.

In the introduction to a new edition of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,<sup>73</sup> Amos Elon compared the treatment of Hannah Arendt to the excommunication of Baruch Spinoza, another "enemy of Israel." Like Spinoza, Arendt today seems to prevail over her detractors, since her books are still in publication four decades after her death and are translated into dozens of languages. But her reflections on Zionism do not form any part of the contemporary narrative, and her name is rarely mentioned in courses on the history of Zionism, as the discourse within Zionism about Israel's path to security and peace has not been tolerant of such dissenting ideas.

## Arendt's Continuing Presence

Hannah Arendt died in New York City on December 4, 1975, leaving behind through her work a lens for unraveling some of the most

fundamental elements political Zionism. Her work reminds us of how repression of dissent may operate as a key dynamic giving way to the rise of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, a phenomenon that can be observed globally today. In the preface to her major work on this theme, she points out:

Totalitarian politics—far from being simply anti-Semitic or racist or imperialist or communist—use and abuse their own ideological and political elements until the basis of factual reality, from which the ideologies originally derived their strength and their propaganda value—the reality of class struggle, for instance, or the interest conflicts between Jews and their neighbors—have all but disappeared.<sup>74</sup>

One of the important lessons we can draw from *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is that evil is not committed solely by demonic monsters, but as often by ordinary people, unable to think critically or independently. A modern executioner emerging from a totalitarian inversion is the most dangerous, for he represents a loss of conscience, or any capacity for self-reflective judgment.<sup>75</sup>

Hannah Arendt's exhaustive historical knowledge, her unrelenting pursuit of clarity and honesty in all of her writing, made her warnings about the future of Zionism and the need for Arab-Jewish cooperation all the more prescient then—and relevant today.

# THE CONSCIENCE OF ISRAEL: YESHAYAHU LEIBOWITZ

Lamenting the erosion and loss of spiritual values within the new military state, Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994) held that a nation or state should never be worshiped as holy. He advocated the separation of religion and state, and saw the occupation of Palestinian land as an abomination that was corrupting the soul of Israel.

Another dissenter from mainstream Zionism who considered himself a Zionist, Yeshayahu Leibowitz shared many of Hannah Arendt's concerns. A scholar, doctor and Orthodox Jew from Eastern Europe, he spent much of his life in Palestine and Israel.

Leibowitz was born in 1903 in Riga, Latvia, to Hassidic, Zionist parents. He grew up in a home that embraced both Judaism and the European culture around it. In 1919, when he was sixteen, his family fled the civil war in Russia. Subsequently, he studied chemistry and philosophy at the University of Berlin. After receiving his doctorate he went on to pursue medicine and biochemistry at the University of Basel, where he received his M.D.

He came to Palestine in 1934 and taught biochemistry, organic chemistry, and related subjects at the Hebrew University, while writing, broadcasting, and giving public lectures on his distinctive opinions of Judaism, ethics, and politics. An outstanding lecturer—brilliant, witty and original—he attracted huge audiences.

In the 1930s and 1940s, prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, a serious concern for Leibowitz was the inability of the rabbinical establishment to appreciate the value of the Zionist effort. As a Zionist himself, he wanted to impress the importance of Zionism on those rabbis who were suspicious of the potentially corrupting influence it could have on Judaism. Among his many early initiatives, he tried to organize the participation of devout Jews in the Israeli Defense Forces (Hagganah), despite the foreseeable difficulties over religious observance: the Sabbath, the presence of women in the military, and the preparation of food. He understood the possibility of more unforeseeable problems. Since Jews in recent history had no experience of participation in their own defense forces, it became a matter of nationalistic pride for the majority of secular Zionists to serve. But Orthodox Jews were loath to assume this modern duty.

Leibowitz anticipated the potential conflict over mandatory military service. The Orthodox community was clearly not prepared to put their young sons in the hands of a government that looked at their way of life with disdain, contempt, and outright hatred. Succumbing to pressure from this community, the government of the new state, under Ben-Gurion, amended the draft law to exclude Orthodox men who were studying full time in Yeshivot (rabbinical seminaries). However, the law stipulated that none of these men would be permitted to work legally unless they performed military service. After forcing the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) community into this situation and forbidding them to work unless they toed the secular-Zionist line, the far less religious majority accused them of being "parasites" because they didn't work.<sup>76</sup>

Leibowitz endeavored to avoid the conceivable development of a parasitic and corrupt community of Orthodox Jewish men, who would dedicate themselves exclusively to the study of religious texts, would neither work nor serve in the military, would raise huge families, and do all this on government subsidies. His efforts in this regard were unsuccessful, but he anticipated the segregated ultra-Orthodox community in Israel and the growing financial burden it has become to resentful secular taxpayers.

By the 1950s, Leibowitz recognized that many rabbis had already substituted the ideals of the new military state for spiritual Jewish values. They had become Jewish nationalists. He did not want Judaism to serve as a "cover for the nakedness of nationalism." Nor did he want it to be "used to endow nationalism with the aura of sanctity attributed to the service of God."<sup>77</sup> Reverence for the State of Israel, as a holy land, was unacceptable. In Leibowitz's understanding of Judaism, no piece of land could be holy, nor could any nation or state. Only God is holy and only His imperative is absolute. The commitments to and responsibilities of country, state, and nation may be very onerous, but they do not, on that account, acquire sanctity.

He condemned the exploitation of Jewish shrines as a way to boost tourism. "For pagan religiosity the land itself may be holy. I am aware that this paganism is spreading like wildfire today, affecting even many who, subjectively, are believing Jews."<sup>78</sup> He even cynically referred to the Western Wall as the *Discotel*, a play on the words "discothèque" and "Kotel," the word for the Wall in Hebrew. To him, the use of holy sites to attract tourists was sacrilege. Leibowitz argued that holding any state, as a value in itself was inherently *fascist* and sanctifying any piece of land—including Israel—a form of idolatry. Only God is holy.

## Separation of Religion and State

In his 1959 essay, "A Call for the Separation of Religion and State," he refers to the State of Israel that came into being in 1948 by the actions, effort, and sacrifices of both religious and non-religious Jews as an essentially secular state. This secularity he considered essential, not incidental. It is a state ruled by secular law, brought about by Jewish patriotism, which is "a secular human motive *not* imbued with sanctity. We have no right to link the emergence of the State of Israel to the religious concept of messianic redemption."<sup>79</sup>

A firm believer in the separation of religion and state, he understood that mixing the two, corrupted faith. The sole purpose of religious commandments was to obey God, and not to receive any kind of reward, in this world or in the world to come. Only by disengaging religion from the existing secular state could religion be protected from becoming a political tool, or an instrument in the hands of the government bureaucracy. Ultimately unsuccessful in this endeavor, Leibowitz encouraged religious institutions to refuse financial support from the secular state and thus avoid obtaining concessions in return for political considerations. He insisted that any legislation of religious laws conceded by the secular government would unavoidably be hypocritical and would degrade religion. To illustrate this hypocrisy, he referred to the legislated prohibition of Sabbath driving. Such a decree by the government is based on the idea that it is the function of the Sabbath to protect the Jewish people. A truly religious Jew, as Leibowitz saw it, must reject this decree since it is the mission of the Jewish people to protect the Sabbath, and this cannot be legislated.<sup>80</sup>

True religiosity "means knowing that we are *not* a holy people. If we believe we are "holy," we are permitted to do nothing." According to Leibowitz, the Judaism of Moses is hard work and involves a relentless endeavor of devotion, motivated by the sole purpose of worshipping God, with no ulterior motive.<sup>81</sup> True devotion to religion is totalitarian.<sup>82</sup> It has nothing to do with the achievement of social, political, or national ideals. The value of religion can never be measured by its contribution to some secular end—not even to the Zionist goal of statehood.

In 1977, in his essay "The Religious and Moral Significance of the Redemption of Israel," Leibowitz relates part of a conversation he had some twenty years earlier with David Ben-Gurion, whom he considered adversarial to religion. Knowing that the separation of religion and state would keep religion independent "so the political authority will be compelled to deal with it," Ben-Gurion had said, "I will never agree to the separation of religion from the state. I want the state to hold religion in the palm of its hand." This, says Leibowitz:

reflects the cast of mind of a man who entertained a bitter hatred of Judaism ... The status of Jewish religion in the state of Israel is that of a kept mistress of the secular government—therefor it is contemptible. The state of Israel does not radiate the light of Judaism to the nations, not even to the Jews.<sup>83</sup>

As a Zionist, he regarded the State of Israel as a completely secular state, which must have no authority over the Judaism of its people. As a devout Jew, he believed that the "'holiness' of Israel is not something that was given to the people as an abiding and an enduring possession, but is rather a demand, an assignment and a task with which they are charged." It is not a reality but an end that requires eternal striving which transcends reality.<sup>84</sup>

Leibowitz held that the identity of the Jewish people as a historic nation began to erode some two hundred years ago when the vast majority of Jews, still self-identifying as Jews, gradually abandoned the Jewish way of life. They were never identifiable by race, language, or territory, and only Judaism united the historic Jewish people. For Leibowitz, there is no clearly definable Jewish nation today, and Jews are hardly distinguishable from gentiles. Moreover, Jews in Israel (and outside it) are by no means a united nation. Those who do undertake the burden of faith cannot intermarry with those who have cast it off, or even dine together, unless they share the strict dietary laws of Orthodox Jewry. Leibowitz states that the national solidarity of Jews today is "merely verbal and declaratory. It reflects no living reality."<sup>85</sup>

In the same essay, "The Uniqueness of the Jewish People," written in 1975, he indicts the secular agents of Zionism. "He who empties the Jewish people of its religious content (like David Ben-Gurion)" turns the concepts of chosen and holy into expressions of *racist chauvinism*. For Leibowitz, "the uniqueness of the Jewish people is not a *fact*; it is an endeavor; the holiness of Israel is not a reality but a task. Holy is an attributer that applies exclusively to God." The Jewish people have no intrinsic uniqueness, other than the demands laid on us.<sup>86</sup>

## The Holocaust Religion

When someone told Leibowitz that he stopped believing in God after the Holocaust, Leibowitz responded, "Then you never believed in God … Those who would question, indeed those who lost their faith in God as a result of Auschwitz 'never believed in God but in God's help … [for] one who believes in God … does not relate this to belief in God's help."<sup>87</sup> For Leibowitz, humans can have no conception of God's understanding, which is beyond man's understanding. They cannot expect God to comply with their worldly needs. True faith is an entirely personal commitment to obey God and cannot be challenged by the usual philosophical problem of evil or by historical events that seemingly contradict a divine presence. God transcends the limits of human thought and language. He is not there to respond to our demands or explain his actions. We cannot even describe God or speak of God's properties or characteristics.

Although the Holocaust was an historical event that had no bearing on the relationship between humanity and God, Leibowitz was among the first Jewish intellectuals distressed that the Holocaust had, to a large extent, become a new Jewish religion. After two hundred years of the erosion of Judaism, "there is nothing that unifies the Jews around the world apart from the Holocaust," he argued.<sup>88</sup> Some dissenters who agree with Leibowitz claim that this new religion has its own priests and prophets, rituals, symbols, shrines, and temples. It even has a vast fundraising infrastructure.

Among more recent Jewish theologians and scholars, some share his discomfort about the elevation of the Holocaust to the status of religion. Most notably, Norman Finkelstein in his 2000 book *The Holocaust Industry*, presents an indictment of the Jewish establishment—in Israel and the diaspora—for seeking political, and even financial, gain from Jewish suffering.

Theologian Marc H. Ellis, perhaps more moderate than Finkelstein in his condemnation, describes three themes in Holocaust theology, which are present in dialectical tension: suffering and empowerment, innocence and redemption, specialness and normalization.<sup>89</sup> This new religion places the Jewish people—rather than God—at its center and gives Zionists an alternate secular existential purpose: to bring all the Jews in the world to Palestine, thereby saving them from eternal anti-Semitism and enabling the fulfillment of their historic mission of a Jewish state.

But well before the Holocaust-as-religion debate gained any global attention, Leibowitz presciently and vehemently objected to any form of Jewish religion devoid of God at its center. He went much further.

The Holocaust of our generation is religiously meaningless. The Holocaust belonged to the curse of the world, it merely exemplified the lot of the helpless who fall prey to the wicked. What was not done for the sake of Heaven, or was not suffered for the sake of Heaven, is indifferent from a religious point of view. Since the establishment of the State of Israel was not inspired by the Torah, nor undertaken for the sake of the Torah, religiously speaking, its existence is a matter of indifference.<sup>90</sup>

## Appropriation of the Holy for the Extremely Profane

Leibowitz was deeply troubled by an event that occurred on October 14, 1953, the assault most often referred to as the Kibiyeh Massacre or, by Israeli officials, as the Kibiyeh "incident." In retaliation for the murder of a Jewish mother and her two children in an Israeli village two days earlier,

allegedly by Arab infiltrators who tossed a hand grenade into their home, Israeli troops under the leadership of Ariel Sharon attacked the village of Kibiyeh in the West Bank. More than 69 Palestinians, two-thirds of them women and children, were killed. Forty-five houses, a school, and a mosque were destroyed.

This retaliation was widely condemned by the international community, by Jewish organizations, and by the U.N. Security Council, which passed Resolution 101, expressing the strongest possible censure. Although Prime Minister Ben-Gurion had consistently encouraged retaliation in order to demonstrate Israel's resolve to stay in the Middle East, in an official radio broadcast he denied the involvement of the IDF and blamed the incident on provoked villagers. In *The Iron Wall*, Avi Shlaim claimed that this version of the truth was not believed, but it "was not Ben-Gurion's first lie for what he saw as the good of his country, nor was it to be his last, but it was one of the most blatant."<sup>91</sup>

As a Zionist, Leibowitz understood that national liberation and political independence required military power, as did the defense of the community. But he could see no justification for mass murder, the cruel mass punishment of innocent people for the crimes of others in order to prevent any recurrence of such crimes. The Kibiyeh massacre was killing outside the direct context of warfare and self-defense, for retaliation, which was deplorable to Leibowitz. Shortly after the incident he wrote:

We must ask ourselves: what produced this generation of youth, which felt no inhibition or inner compunction in performing the atrocity when given the inner urge and external occasion for retaliation? After all, these young people were not a wild mob but youth raised and nurtured on the values of a Zionist education, upon concepts of the dignity of man and human society. The answer is that the events at Kibiyeh were a consequence of applying the religious category of holiness to social, national, and political values and interests—a usage prevalent in the education of young people, as well as in the dissemination of public information. The concept of holiness—the concept of the absolute which is beyond all categories of human thought and evaluation—is transferred to the profane.<sup>92</sup> Leibowitz considered Kibiyeh a transgression of the most stringent prohibition: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." When there ceases to be a separation between the Holy and the nation, when national security becomes a sacred mission, only then can such an abominable massacre occur.

#### The Occupation of Arab Land and Judeo-Nazism

For several years after Israel's Six-Day War of 1967, he published a series of commentaries, compiled as "The Territories," in which he discussed the prevailing question of extending Israel's sovereignty over territories it captured or relinquishing them to Arab sovereignty.

These political options are the subject of widespread public discussion which suffers from confusion of pragmatic and ideological issues. On the one hand political and economic interests and security requirements are invoked ... on the other hand an appeal is made to feelings and values—the vision of messianic redemption ... the undivided Land of Israel, the sacredness of the land.<sup>93</sup>

According to Leibowitz, during the years prior to the 1967 war there had been numerous opportunities for compromise with the Palestinians, which the Israelis squandered. In 1968, he wrote that Israel today has to rely on pressure from outside powers to prevent deterioration into a constant escalation of war. So Israel was again where it had been for thousands of years—condemned to live without peace and security. Israel's leaders may describe security in terms of wider boundaries, larger borders, and more territory under its control. Leibowitz disputes this, insisting that security is not a matter of borders. With the conquest of greater territory, "we are forced to dedicate a much greater portion of our national income and state budget to defense than in the years that preceded the Six Day War … Our security has been diminished rather than enhanced."<sup>94</sup>

In an article he wrote for *Ha'Aretz*, March 11, 1972, he claimed that the Arabs could withstand the uncertainty of "neither peace nor war" for much longer than Israel. Israel, without peace and security, will be over-burdened militarily, economically, politically, spiritually and socially. Historically, fortresses have never been able to provide complete security against hostile invasion and modern militarily fortified borders will prove equally inadequate. A heavily fortified Israel will have to increase its defense spending endlessly and it will no longer be able to afford its social, cultural or educational commitments. And Israel would lose its soul.

As for the "religious" arguments for the annexation of the territories—these are only an expression, subconsciously or perhaps even overtly hypocritical, of the transformation of the Jewish religion into a camouflage for Israeli nationalism. Counterfeit religion identifies national interests with the service of God and imputes to the state—which is only an instrument serving human needs—supreme value from a religious standpoint.<sup>95</sup>

The real problem for Israel's peace and security is not the land but the rule over a population of close to 2 million hostile Arabs, roughly 40 percent of the entire population of the state of Israel. "The Arabs would be the working people and the Jews the administrators, inspectors, officials, and police—mainly secret police." The state would have to concern itself primarily with problems of rule and administration, allowing limited resources to dedicate to the cultural and historical traditions of the Jewish people. "The only concern of the monstrosity called 'the Undivided Land of Israel' would be the maintenance of its system of rule and administration." Leibowitz predicted that this would result in Israel becoming a secret-police state and its defense forces transforming into an army of occupation. The alternative seemed clear. "Out of concern for the Jewish people and its state we have no choice but to withdraw from the territories …"<sup>96</sup>

An Israel seeking conquest and control over the Occupied Territories would ultimately face self-destruction as a Jewish state and find itself entrapped in perpetual war with its Arab neighbors. The occupation of Arab lands was an abomination. He predicted that isolationism, self-perceived victimization, and nationalism would destroy any Jewish values, and if Israel did not withdraw immediately from the Occupied Territories, all of its energy would be tied up in ruling another people against its will. If Israel's soul were not entirely destroyed, the occupation would corrupt it. In a televised interview,<sup>97</sup> Leibowitz claimed that Israel could not be considered a democracy as long as it ruled over two million people deprived of any legal or human rights. This was a dictatorship. The main target of his outrage was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court who had condoned the torture of Arab prisoners to extract information. This type of behavior was entirely consistent with Nazi mentality. None of the other judges, purportedly the best legal minds in Israel, challenged this ruling. As a result, the Supreme Court of Israel was now authorizing torture, an aberration in the modern Western world. This, claims Leibowitz, is Judeo-Nazism, a term he coined.

In 1976, he wrote "Right, Law, and Reality" debating the right of the Jewish people to the land. "No nation has a right to any country," he argued. "Right" is a legal term, derived from a legal system established by men. (He might have been progressive enough to assume that this included women.) Claims to rights are based on criteria of ownership recognized by that legal system. There are no applicable requisites for rights in the context of relations between nations and countries.

After the destruction of the temple and the exile, the Jews survived as a people and the national consciousness of many endured with the conviction that this country—Israel or Palestine—was the country of their people. However, they could not claim it as a right, since no counterclaim could deprive them of this belief, and "an analogous bond was created between the same country and another nation."<sup>98</sup> Neither claim could be considered *more* just. This impasse was created by history, and Leibowitz could perceive only one solution: the partition of the country. This was also the sole solution envisioned by Ahad Ha'am, Martin Buber, and Albert Einstein.

For Leibowitz, the establishment of the State of Israel was the realization of the Zionist dream, but with the Six-Day War, the situation changed dramatically. Israel's decision to turn that war into one of conquest changed the very foundation of its existence. In 1988, in "Forty Years After," Leibowitz explained that this substantial change was:

rooted in denial of the right to independence of the Palestinian people. Israel ceased to be the state of the Jewish people and became an apparatus of coercive rule of Jews over another people ... a Jewish regime of force. The State of Israel today is neither a democracy nor a state abiding by the rule of law since it rules over a million and a half people deprived of civil and political rights.<sup>99</sup>

Leibowitz raged against the growing savagery of Israeli society and saw the nation as entirely dependent on a thin line of support from the White House, which was destined to grow thinner as the world began to recognize its misdeeds. "Above all, the state, which was to have been the pride and glory of the Jewish people, is rapidly becoming an embarrassment to it."<sup>100</sup>

## The Conscience of Israel, Its Prophet of Wrath

Leibowitz was one of many Jewish Israeli writers and scholars who dedicated their lives to the State of Israel. He witnessed firsthand the horrible isolationism of the country he had tried to create, its moral corruption, its self-perceived victimization, and the destruction of any Jewish values, and he raged against its political leadership. He tried to deconstruct the ideological rhetoric, the spin of the nationalist narrative, but his voice along with many others was drowned out in the much louder din of military marches.

As time passes, fewer and fewer people know who Yeshayahu Leibowitz was, or if they do, may know only that he coined the term "Judeo-Nazi." His critique was not well-received in Israel. But many considered it entirely justified, and his prophecy of wrath sadly has turned out to be true in too many respects. Israel's political system today is incapable of solving some of the country's most pressing dilemmas and is unable to provide a legal system with true equality before the law, for all its citizens. To this day, Israel tolerates very little criticism of its policies, institutions, or its claim to democracy.

A collective denial of any political or moral wrongdoing prevents meaningful public political discourse. Political opponents of the established political Zionist narrative from within Israel are accused of being traitors, or worse—"leftists." As Leibowitz and Hannah Arendt predicted, nationalism and militarism have become supreme values, and any understanding of Judaism that might justify the existence of a state has been largely eclipsed. An outspoken prophet, Yeshayahu Leibowitz's views often provoked angry, if not vehement, reactions from the secular political leadership, as well as from the Jewish clerical bureaucracy. But he was an outstanding teacher and original thinker, who attracted a great many students. Although his prominence is diminished today, in 2005, many years after his death, remarkably he was ranked twentieth in an Israeli news website poll to determine whom the general public considered the two hundred greatest Israelis.

## FADING HOPES FOR THE GREAT DEMOCRATIC JEWISH PROMISE: NOAM CHOMSKY AND TANYA REINHART

Noam Chomsky (1928–) is among the most prominent Jewish intellectuals concerned with Israel and its global standing. He has written compellingly about Israel's occupation and indiscriminate use of force. A student of Chomsky's, Tanya Reinhart (1943–2007) was an Israeli academic, activist, and writer who exposed systematic efforts to break Palestinian society and destroy its infrastructures.

Although Yeshayahu Leibowitz may have been able to reconcile his Orthodox Judaism with his concept of Zionism, most early leaders of political Zionism were intensely secular and contemptuous of the "backward" Orthodox Jews. They were determined to shed the burden of their religious shackles in the new state they were creating. Since most of the early Israeli leaders came from European backgrounds (Ashkenazi), and considered that to be a source of pride, their disdain for the "medieval" Sephardic-Arab (Mizrachi) Jewish communities ran even deeper. The first prime minister of the State of Israel, David Ben-Gurion once referred to the Moroccan Jews, a more religious and observant community than the majority of their European counterparts, as "savages." Secular Zionist political aspiration for a Jewish homeland embraced a completely new definition of the Jew and the Jewish people and comprised a selective view of history. The archaic Judaism that had sustained the nation of Israel for the previous 3,400 years was to be discarded and replaced with a modernistic amalgamation of nationalism, socialism, enlightened Western culture, and a newly constructed concept of ethnic Jewish identity. Jewishness for them unambiguously excluded any notion of a theocracy.

An indisputably secular prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, nonetheless has demanded that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a "Jewish state," or as the "nation state of the Jewish people," an intrinsically

controversial designation for the allegedly democratic state of Israel. He claims this recognition is "the real key for peace," a "minimal requirement," and an "essential condition," without which there can be no agreement. On the face of it, this makes very little sense. Even seemingly reasonable would-be peacemakers such as former Secretary of State John Kerry, pressed the Arab states to accept this demand. Why is it so important to recognize Israel's right to exist? Noam Chomsky, in On Palestine, responds quite simply: "Because that's understood to be impossible."101 Chomsky, among others, argues that states don't have a "right to exist"; no other state in the world requires recognition of its right to exist. Some say that this is only because Israel is not a legitimate state and that according to international law only the Palestinians-not the United Nations-could confer on Israel and its legitimacy. Therefore, only the Palestinians could legitimize Israel's theft of their land. This is a hurdle intentionally set high in order to obstruct Palestinian acceptance and to forever suspend any resolution, while conveniently placing the blame on Palestinian intransigence.

Although the conflicts between cultural and political Zionism and between religious and secular definitions of the Jewish state continue to rankle, Israel's narrative unavoidably changed after the conquest war in 1967. During the Six-Day War Israel assumed control of territories conquered from Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. It seized the entire area west of the Jordan River, which was all of mandatory Palestine. It also conquered the entire Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria. This war permanently changed the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Zionist narrative and the criticism directed toward it.

Many of the changes in the history of dissent are reflected in the thoughts and opinions of a tirelessly prolific American scholar and activist.

## Noam Chomsky

Born in 1928 in Philadelphia, into a Zionist Jewish family, Chomsky is one of the most renowned and respected intellectuals of our time. In addition to his academic work in linguistics, philosophy, and cognitive science, he is a leading critic of U.S. foreign policy, neoliberalism, contemporary state capitalism, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and mainstream news media. His thought-provoking writings are controversial and enormously influential within the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements. They have also drawn harsh criticism, with some accusing Chomsky of anti-Americanism, alleging that he is sympathetic to terrorism and genocide denial.

As a result of his anti-war activism, Chomsky was arrested on several occasions, and among his favorite self-proclaimed credentials, he was on U.S. President Richard Nixon's Enemies List. At one point, Chomsky's wife began studying for her own doctorate in linguistics in order to support the family in the event of his imprisonment or loss of employment. Resisting pressure, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) refused to fire him, due to his prominent academic standing.

Chomsky has spent more than half a century at MIT, where he is Institute Professor Emeritus. He is the author of over one hundred books on linguistics and topics such as war, politics, and mass media; a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Science, and many other equally prestigious global academic institutions; and he is the recipient of multiple awards and honorary doctorates from close to fifty universities, including Harvard, Columbia, Cambridge, Peking University and University of Calcutta.

## Inescapable Zionist Beginnings

Well before his outstanding intellectual career began, Chomsky thought of himself as a Zionist. This early interest was probably unavoidable, as he grew up in a family that was

... very much involved with Jewish affairs, deeply Zionist and interested in Jewish culture, the revival of Hebrew and generally the cultural Zionism that had its origins in the ideas of people like Ahad Ha'am, but increasingly in mainstream Zionism. The next range of family—uncles and cousins and so on—was in part Jewish working class ... highly intellectual, very poor; a lot of people had no jobs ... but it was a rich and lively intellectual culture—Freud, Marx, the Budapest String Quartet, literature.<sup>102</sup>

In *The Chomsky Reader*, a book of articles and interviews compiled in 1987, he reflects upon his early involvement in Zionist activity and
in 1947, and I had just turned eighteen. I was deeply interested, as I had been for some years, in radical politics with an anarchist or leftwing (anti-Leninist) Marxist flavor, and even more deeply involved in Zionist affairs and activities. Or what was then called "Zionist," though the same ideas and concerns are now called "anti-Zionist." I was interested in socialist, binationalist options for Palestine, and in the kibbutzim and the whole cooperative labor system that had developed in the Jewish settlement ... The vague ideas I had at the time were to go to Palestine, perhaps to a kibbutz, to try to become involved in efforts at Arab-Jewish cooperation within a socialist framework, opposed to the deeply antidemocratic concept of a Jewish state.<sup>103</sup>

In a much later book, On Palestine (2015), he asserted more emphatically that "the idea of a Jewish state was anathema," an opinion Chomsky developed over many years of study of the Middle East and Israeli politics.<sup>104</sup> Referencing a 1907 article that appeared in the Hebrew-language periodical *HaShiloah*, Chomsky captures the essence of a long-standing debate within the Zionist movement. Founded by Ahad Ha'am in Warsaw, and first published in Berlin, then Krakow, from 1896 to 1926, this monthly publication provided a platform for Eastern European Jewish writers to express their apprehensions about Herzl's political Zionism. The comment that Chomsky cites prophetically warned in 1907 : "that Zionism should avoid a narrow limited nationalism, which sees no further than itself ... Zionism should be based on justice and law, absolute equality, and human brotherhood."

For this observation, Chomsky points out, the writer was "reprimanded for his diaspora way of thinking and told that the main thing we should be taking into account should be what is good and effective for ourselves."<sup>105</sup> This sentiment is reflected in a frequently used colloquial expression in Hebrew, "whatever is good for the Jews," to determine and prioritize national value.

With the exception of the few European Jewish thinkers who had formed the Ihud movement in 1942, to promote binationalism as an

alternative to a Jewish state, most early Zionists had abandoned their hopes for a political solution based on equality for all who resided in the land.<sup>106</sup> The Ihud Movement founders included prominent intellectuals such as Judah Magnes and Martin Buber, and numbered Albert Einstein among its supporters. But the movement disbanded in 1948, after futile attempts to establish United Nations trusteeship over Palestine ended in partition.

Three decades later, in his first book on the subject of the Middle East, Chomsky returned to the binationalist argument, advising against Israeli expansion, military occupation, settlements, and the continuous rejection of Palestinian demands. Rooted in the cultural Zionism of Ahad Ha'am, Chomsky's initial opposition to the idea of a Jewish state was strengthened after several months in an Israeli kibbutz. Although he claims to have enjoyed aspects of it, he relates, "there were many things I didn't, [like] too. In particular, the ideological conformity was appalling ... the exclusiveness and the racist institutional setting."<sup>107</sup>

At a time when few Jewish intellectuals living in the US were willing to voice any criticism of Israel, Chomsky, along with Hannah Arendt and a handful of others, denounced the defensive attitude towards the Holy State, the elevation of Zionism to the status of a state religion, and the manipulation of public opinion to cover up any act of repression or violence which that holy state committed. He opposed Israel's antidemocratic refusal to consider critical analysis, and its active suppression of any unfavorable scrutiny, which were backed by "Israel's defenders," including representatives of the US government and a preponderance of Americans. "The protective attitude ... the effort to downplay its repression and violence, to provide apologetics for it, and to interpret events of the world in terms of how they affect its interests ... Also the commitment to discredit and undermine any critical analysis ..." all this, he compared to the "Stalinist literature of the thirties."<sup>108</sup>

In a talk given in March 1969 at MIT, entitled "Nationalism and Conflict in Palestine," he quoted Amos Oz, an Israeli novelist much admired by political centrists, less so by more radical leftists: "Anyone who stands up and speaks out in these days risks being stoned in the marketplace and being accused of self-hate or of betraying the nation or desecrating the memory of the fallen."<sup>109</sup> Politically timid though he may have been, Oz articulated the dread caused by the insidious conspiracy of silence that is felt by any potential critic of Israel's policies.

## **Persistent Distortions**

Chomsky connected the suppression of the truth about Israel's aggressive agenda to many subsequent erroneous yet prevailing conclusions about the so-called "peace process" in the region.

The doctrine of self-styled "supporters of Israel"... holds that the PLO and the Arab states have been undeviatingly rejectionist ... while the US and Israel have sought a peaceful settlement that will recognize the claims of all. A more recent version is that the "beautiful Israel" of earlier years, which was realizing the dream of democratic socialism and becoming "a light unto the nations," has been betrayed by Begin and his cohorts, a consequence of the refusal of the Arabs to accept the existence of Israel and the unwavering commitment of the PLO—a collection of thugs and gangsters—to the destruction of Israel, the murder of innocents, and the intimidation of all "moderate" opinion in the Occupied Territories.<sup>110</sup>

As a result of persistent distortions by interlocutors, who were presented as "reliable," Israel's image as a benevolent occupier of a land full of untrustworthy Palestinian terrorists-in-waiting has been perpetuated among its supporters. In the evolving Israeli historical narrative, the perception promoted was that Palestinians somehow felt no particular attachment to their homes or to the land on which they had lived and worked for generations. Prime Minister Golda Meir, admired by many as a grandmotherly humanitarian, clearly held and advocated this view. "It is not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine, considering itself a Palestinian people, and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist."<sup>111</sup>

Continuous repetition and reinforcement of this misrepresentation abetted Israel's rationalization and justification of its right to exist on Palestinian land. David Ben-Gurion offered his own variation on this theme. The Palestinian Arab, judged Ben-Gurion, demonstrated no "emotional involvement" in the country. "He is equally at ease, whether in Jordan, Lebanon, or a variety of places. They are as much his country as this is. And as little."<sup>112</sup> Since, presumably, the Jews had stronger emotional ties to the land of their ancestors, it must be concluded that Palestinians should just cooperatively move along to another location.

According to Simha Flapan, one of the early New Historians, Ben-Gurion was not the first, and certainly not the last, Zionist to conclude that "there is no conflict between Jewish and Palestinian nationalism, because the Jewish nation is not in Palestine and the Palestinians are not a nation."<sup>113</sup>

In his foreword to a 1999 edition of Chomsky's *Fateful Triangle*, Edward Said proposed that the book could be read "as a protracted war between fact and a series of myths—Israeli democracy, Israeli purity of arms, the benign occupation, no racism against Arabs in Israel, Palestinian terrorism, peace for Galilee." The book was written in the wake of Israel's devastating 1982 invasion of Lebanon, which was backed by the US. In the preface to the new edition of the book, Chomsky addressed the many distorted perceptions about Israel:

This book ... burst forth in the immediate aftermath of Israel's invasion of Lebanon ... The war had pretexts—all acts of aggression do ... The pretexts were so thin that they could only be echoed by true loyalists ... the goal of the invasion was political: to remove impediments to Israel's criminal settlement and development programs in the Occupied Territories.<sup>114</sup>

## Strategic Distortions

In *Middle East Illusions*, Chomsky analyzes the "peace process" as a strategic component of US global policy, one which has long been based on a particular concept of rights. "Those who contribute nothing to the system of power have no rights." In this respect, "Palestinians are not only 'insignificant people,' but are much lower in the ranking because they interfere with the plans of the world's most 'significant people': privileged Americans and Israeli Jews."<sup>115</sup>

Chomsky describes Israel's evolving role in US global policy and a peace process that has exclusively served the interests of its architects. As for the "insignificant people," they have been offered no solutions that differ significantly from the advice given them by Moshe Dayan in the early days of the Occupation. "Israel should tell the Palestinian refugees in the territories that we have no solution, you shall continue to live like dogs, and whoever wishes may leave."<sup>116</sup>

In his essay, "Prospects for Peace in the Middle East," Chomsky elaborates further on this role designed for the "refugees":

What about the Palestinians? Well they don't have any wealth. They don't have any power. It therefore follows, by the most elementary principles of statecraft, that they don't have any rights ... In fact, they have negative rights. The reason is that their dispossession and their suffering elicits protest and opposition in the rest of the region, so they do not exactly count as zero but rather as harmful.

For Chomsky, and many other scholars of the region, this flies in the face of what was once the America's venerated concern for human rights.

How are human rights assigned to various actors in the Middle East? The answer is simplicity itself: rights are assigned in accord with the contribution to maintaining the system ... Members of the Arab façade have rights as long as they manage to control their own population and ensure that the wealth flows to the West.<sup>117</sup>

Chomsky uses the term "rejectionist" to refer to those who deny the national rights of the contending groups in Palestine. Those who have long rejected the national rights of Palestinians are the US, along with Israel. But he notes a change in attitudes within the international community beginning in the 1970s. Most of the world gradually started to accept the notion of Palestinian national rights alongside of Israel. In November 1975, the UN General Assembly, by a vote of 72 to 35, passed Resolution 3379, stating that Zionism was a form of racism and racial discrimination. The resolution was revoked in 1991. In January 1976, the Security Council debated a resolution that added wording to allow Palestinian national rights in the territories from which Israel would withdraw. The US, however, vetoed it. After the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995, Israel's tenth prime minister, Ehud Barak, wrote that the goal of the Oslo negotiations was "to establish a situation of 'permanent neocolonial dependency' for the Occupied Territories."<sup>118</sup>

## **Strangulation Policy**

The Six-Day War in 1967 had a dramatic effect on Zionism. Chomsky described "a sea change in the way many Israelis saw themselves and what the state was like. Fundamentally in the pre-state period it was not a state religion."<sup>119</sup> The issues that dominated the Israeli political agenda also changed because Israel had become a very different country.

For the last ten years especially there has been a very strong shift in Israeli mentality and politics toward the right, nationalism, toward more extremism ... "The world hates us because they are all anti-Semitic so we will do what we want." Nothing is their fault; everything is somebody else's fault, a lot of brutality.<sup>120</sup>

Chomsky concludes even more harshly that: "There seems to be no room in Israel for those who try to square a universalist point of view, be it liberal or socialist, with the *racist definition of Zionism*."<sup>121</sup>

In the five decades since the 1967 war of territorial conquest, which placed millions of Palestinians under Israeli rule, there have been numerous outbreaks of hostility and brutal clashes between Palestinians living under Israeli occupation and Israeli authorities. There have been almost as many attempts at negotiating peace, mostly to secure Palestinian cooperation with plans advantageous to Israel.

Since the Palestinians may not have willingly conceded to become second-class citizens in a land they were no longer entitled to govern, they were accused of being unruly and aggressive in their demands for human rights. With Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories constantly expanding, Palestinians saw the orange-tiled roofs of luxury Israeli government sponsored villas encroaching on their land everywhere in their neighborhoods. As long as Israel "controlled electricity, water, telecommunications and other services." including travel on roads accessible to all, freedom to develop their own business—Palestinian society was being deliberately strangled. Chomsky interprets this as an extension of the original Zionist plan of "invisible transfer." If the Palestinians simply "abandon all hope and have no opportunities for meaningful existence," they will move elsewhere.<sup>122</sup>

In many ways, Israel's settlement policies and discriminatory treatment of Palestinians are comparable to the treatment of blacks in South Africa: "... a system of apartheid, in which the indigenous population was allowed to live in a tiny fraction of its own country, in self-administered 'Bantustans' with 'whites' monopolizing the supply of water and electricity...*Israel's* treatment of Arabs—flagrantly discriminating against them in housing and education spending..."<sup>123</sup>

As long as Palestinians are denied the freedom to travel without being subjected to continuous security controls and checkpoints manned by armed Israeli soldiers; cannot live in communities or study at universities of their own choice; are not entitled to keep their rightful, titled homes when Israel changes zoning regulations or declares the property to be inside a newly restricted military area, their condition is certainly no better than the blacks in apartheid South Africa. But Chomsky points out one crucial difference. "South Africa had to incorporate the Black population; Israel wants to get rid of them."<sup>124</sup> Further, he charges that the US has been complicit by providing diplomatic obfuscation over the years for Israel's agenda of "incessant and degrading humiliation, along with torture, terror, destruction of property, displacement and settlement, and takeover of basic resources, crucially water."<sup>125</sup>

## Security versus Expansion

Using "Arab terrorism" as a constant underlying justification for all its policies, Israel's Zionist mission has succeeded beyond measure. Most Israelis have held to the belief, and many still do, that their government is primarily concerned with security and survival. But as the changes in Israel's borders seem to depend less on security and more on the desire for expansion, the inherent colonialism of their policies has become harder to conceal. Chomsky describes Israel as a twentieth-century version of a seventeenth-to-nineteenth century colonialism.<sup>126</sup>

In *On Palestine*, he claims that in the 1970s, neighboring countries were clearly willing to reach a political settlement. Syria, Egypt, and Jordan proposed a two-state solution, which the US vetoed at the Security Council. To prevent any decisive negotiation, it was necessary

to raise barriers: everyone had to accept the right of Israel to exist. As Chomsky makes clear, this was never a reasonable demand: "States do not have a right to exist." They have to recognize each other, but not their right to exist. The barrier was raised to require Palestinians to accept their oppression and expulsion as somehow justified. Israel's leaders always knew that this was not something Palestinians could do, and their refusal would allow Israel's expansion strategy to continue.<sup>127</sup>

In 1971, Israel made a decision that Chomsky considers the "most fateful  $\dots$  in its history."<sup>128</sup>

There was an offer from Egypt for a full peace treaty. The Israeli government, led by Golda Meir, considered it and rejected it because they wanted to colonize the Sinai. Basically their choice at the time was between security and expansion ... Ever since then, Israel prefers expansion over security ... Step by step they are going to become isolated, a pariah state, delegitimized, very much like South Africa, they are going to be able to survive only as long as the US supports them.<sup>129</sup>

Israel's predictable choice of land over peace is discussed in *Israeli Rejectionism*, by Amit and Levit, who track the chronology of missed opportunities for peace rejected by Israel because peace was never its primary objective.<sup>130</sup>

## The "Recurring Shame" of Gaza

In *Gaza in Crisis*, cowritten by Chomsky and Ilan Pappé after the war on Gaza launched in December 2008, one essay is strikingly entitled "Exterminate all the Brutes: Gaza 2009." It lays out how the attack on Gaza was "meticulously planned" for over six months and precisely timed to inflict the greatest damage on the population.

[It began] shortly before noon when children were returning from school and crowds were milling in the streets of very densely populated Gaza City. In a few minutes the attack killed over 200 people and wounded 700, a mass slaughter of defenseless civilians trapped in a tiny cage with nowhere to flee.<sup>131</sup> The attack also targeted the Gaza police academy's closing ceremony in order to kill dozens of policemen, who had been categorized by the Israeli Defense Forces as a "resistance force in the event of an Israeli incursion into the Gaza Strip."<sup>132</sup>

Norwegian doctor Mads Gilbert, a volunteer in Gaza, described the Israeli attack "as an all-out war against the civilian population" with half the casualties women and children.<sup>133</sup>

Attacks on civilians have standard Israeli policy all along. Chomsky introduces several significant sources to illustrate the normalization of Israel's deliberate targeting of civilians in Palestine. According to Israeli journalist Zeev Schiff, writing in 1978, "The Israeli army has always struck civilian populations, purposely and consciously ... The army has never distinguished civilian from military targets ... but purposely attacked civilian targets."

This intentional targeting has been a standard, well-thought-out strategy, long employed by the Israelis, and explicitly articulated by Abba Eban in *The Jerusalem Post* on August 16, 1981. "There was a rational prospect ... that affected populations would exert pressure for the cessation of hostilities." As Chomsky and Pappé point out, Eban understood that Israel was "wantonly inflicting every possible measure of death and anguish on civilian populations." But this was justifiable, as it allowed "Israel to implement, undisturbed its programs of illegal expansion and harsh repression."<sup>134</sup>

Israeli human rights groups are enraged by Israel's strikes on civilian buildings, hospitals, refugee camps, water systems, and schools. They consider Israel's use of force on the captive residents of Gaza excessive and indiscriminate. On the other hand, officials like former Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who has been labeled a dove in the global press, assured the world that there is no "humanitarian crisis in Gaza, thanks to Israeli benevolence."<sup>135</sup>

Chomsky returns to the prison that is Gaza in his later book *On Palestine*, in a short chapter entitled "Gaza's Torment, Israel's Crimes, Our Responsibilities." The inspiration for this essay is the 2014 Gaza War, which resulted in thousands of deaths, mostly of Gazans. He refers to an UNRWA report that studied the effects of the repetitive wars on the children of Gaza. He concludes:

When Israel is on "good behavior," more than two Palestinian children are killed every week, a pattern that goes back over fourteen years. The underlying cause is the criminal occupation and the programs to reduce Palestinian life to bare survival in Gaza, while Palestinians are restricted to unviable cantons in the West Bank and Israel takes over what it wants, all in gross violation of international law and explicit Security Council resolutions, not to speak of minimal decency. And it will continue as long as it is supported by Washington and tolerated by Europe—to our everlasting shame.<sup>136</sup>

Chomsky has written about a vast array of academic and political topics, but his output on Israel and the Israel-Palestinian conflict is crucial and judicious. A committed observer of Israel's moral degeneration and its path to extreme nationalism, he has articulated his fear that these will bring about its ultimate destruction. He is outraged by the racist rhetoric of many of Israel's leaders, and even by its rabbis who encouraged the blatant asymmetrical use of force in Gaza by quoting a famous psalm that called on the Lord to seize the infants of Israel's oppressors and dash them against the rocks. This is a shameful deterioration from the Zionism he claimed to have once endorsed.

### Chomsky in Israel

In the spring of 2010, Chomsky attempted to visit Israel to give a series of lectures at BirZeit University and at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Ramallah. According to *The Guardian* and *Ha'Aretz* newspapers of May 16, 2010, he was denied entry, both into Israel and the West Bank. Chomsky said inspectors stamped "denied entry" onto his passport when he tried to cross from Jordan over the Allenby Bridge. He had arrived at Allenby Bridge at around half past one in the afternoon and was taken for questioning before being released back to Amman at half past four. When he asked for an explanation, the Israeli inspector told him that it would be sent in writing to the American embassy.

In a television interview, Chomsky said that his interrogators had told him that he had written things that the Israeli government did not like. "I suggested [the interrogator try to] find any government in the world that likes anything I say," he said. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel objected to the Interior Ministry for using extreme measures to deport a man whose opinions they did not share and called this deportation "characteristic of a totalitarian regime." Said ACRI in a statement:

A democratic country where freedom of expression is a guiding principle does not close in the face of criticism or ideas that are not comfortable and does not deny entry to guests only because it does not accept their opinions. Instead, it deals with these opinions through public discussion.

Knesset member Otniel Schneller, of the right-wing Kadima Party founded by Tzipi Livni (and labeled "centrist" in the media), sarcastically praised the measure used by the Interior Ministry saying, "It's good that Israel did not allow one of its accusers to enter its territory. I recommend [Chomsky] try one of the tunnels connecting Gaza and Egypt."<sup>137</sup>

## Tanya Reinhart

Born in Haifa, British Mandate Palestine, in 1943, Tanya Reinhart earned her doctorate in linguistics in 1976 from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she studied with Noam Chomsky. But her predilection for critical thinking and dissent clearly started well before the encounter with Chomsky and before her academic career began. Following the lead of her mother, a communist and single parent, she was for a time a member of the Communist Youth League.

Reinhart was appointed professor of linguistics and cultural studies at Tel Aviv University, a position she held for more than twenty years. Beyond linguistics, she taught and published works about art, literature, and media studies. Among her students, her courses were known to stimulate fierce debate on issues of ethics. Outside of Israel, she also taught at Columbia University, Duke, MIT, the University of Paris, and Utrecht University. Much like her MIT linguistics advisor, she wrote on the Israel-Palestine conflict and contributed articles to various Israeli and international publications.

After more than two decades, Reinhart lost her position at Tel Aviv University, but the reason was not fully disclosed. It was attributed to bureaucratic harassment, as well as to her own decision to leave Israel. That decision was influenced by Israel's 2006 attack on Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. It was also facilitated by the fact that she was offered a teaching appointment as Global Distinguished Professor at New York University. Tragically, Reinhart died of a stroke in her sleep on March 17, 2007, at the age of sixty-three, in the prime of her career as a scholar and an activist.

The day after her death, Chomsky paid tribute to an "old and cherished friend," praising both her academic work and political writing. A courageous critic of her own society, he observed that through her work she had tried to draw away "the veil that concealed criminal and outrageous actions and shone a searing light on the reality that was obscured." He celebrated both her brilliant scholarship and her uncompromising ethical activism.

She was one of the most courageous and honorable defenders of human rights whom I have ever been privileged to meet ... and she will be remembered not only as a resolute and honourable defender of the rights of Palestinians, but also as one of those who have struggled to defend the moral integrity of her own Israeli society, and its hope for decent survival.<sup>138</sup>

#### How to End the War of 1948

In the introduction to her book *Israel/Palestine: How to End the War of 1948*, Reinhart writes that Israel's founders believed that in 1948, ethnic cleansing was the only possible way to save Jews from extinction. Since she considered this to be a sincere conviction, she found within herself the ability to forgive Zionism's original sin.

This sentiment may seem an indefensible rationalization. Yet it was not uncommon among Israeli-born dissenters, who were implanted with the Zionist narrative at birth. Subsequent wars, however, taught her that conquest and occupation were no accident. Relying primarily on the Israeli press, Reinhart presented evidence of what she described as "Israel's slow ethnic cleansing" since 2000. Beyond the brutal policy of "injuring Palestinians," she depicted a "systematic effort to break Palestinian society and destroy its infrastructures." This unavoidably resulted in a total dependence of the Palestinians on a military occupier who controlled every aspect of their lives and their economy.<sup>139</sup>

*Israel/Palestine* focuses on the post-Oslo years, 1993–2002, and on the contradiction between ostensible constructive engagement for peace and actual hardening of the Israeli position. Israel's occupation of Palestine since 1967 and its insidious seizure of lands resulted in its control over three million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, surrounded by Israeli settlements built on their land.

The first Palestinian uprising, 1987 to 1993, seemed to conclude with the Oslo promise of a possibly imminent two-state solution. But Israel's negotiations with the Palestinians at Oslo were based on the concept of continued *interim* solutions, which were never implemented. And negotiations at the 2000 Camp David talks were done in bad faith. Ehud Barak kept repeating that "he had left no stone unturned" in his proposals for peace; that he offered the Palestinians incredible concessions. But these concessions were never disclosed to the public, and no one really knew what they were. Unfortunately, the same holds true many years later.

Reinhart examined the spurious details of Barak's *generous* compromises and found them to be misleading, at best, or deliberately deceptive. "In concrete matters of land and resources, (Ehud) Barak offered nothing at Camp David, except the preservation of the existing state of affairs."<sup>140</sup> As Akiva Eldar, a senior writer for *Ha'Aretz* observed about the offers: "Hardly anyone has any idea ... no one has seen the papers ... because no such paper exists."<sup>141</sup> Moreover, Barak refused to put any offer on the table unless the Palestinians signed an "end of conflict" declaration. Such an agreement would forfeit any future claims or rights the Palestinians might have based on prior United Nations resolutions.

Throughout the many peace negotiations held before and after Oslo, Israel has always been largely concerned with the language it can use to deceive and manipulate the Palestinians, Israeli public opinion, and American policy makers. On January 3, 2000, President Clinton convened a peace meeting in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, with representatives of Israel and Syria, which predictably ended with no agreement. The Israeli press quoted American sources on American frustration with Israel. Barak is not willing to give us clear answers regarding the withdrawal to the June 4<sup>th</sup> 1967 lines as Assad demands. He prefers to wrap his positions in vague statements ... and we are left to interpret his hints and convey them to Damascus.<sup>142</sup>

Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon are the most deserving of severe censure for the damage done to any prospect of peace at the time, Reinhart wrote. That censure could be said to apply as well to the incremental intractability of right-wing governments today.

## "The Second Half of 1948"

Ariel Sharon's intentionally provocative visit on September 28, 2000, to the Temple Mount, considered the third holiest site for Muslims, was one glaring example of Israel's manipulative tactics. It clearly demonstrated that Israel would never fulfill its Oslo commitments and was intended to enrage the Palestinians. It successfully resulted in the October 2000 uprising, which Reinhart described as "the second half of 1948." Palestinians were impelled to protest, and the Israeli Defense Forces reacted disproportionally, first by opening fire on, and eventually by sending tanks into, densely populated Palestinian areas. After three days, thirty Palestinians and two Israelis were dead.

Although the Palestinians had not retaliated with any attack until November 2, Israel launched its full military arsenal as early as October 5. This included the use on civilians of internationally banned weapons, including:

live bullets, high velocity bullets, dum-dum (mushrooming bullets), rubber-coated metal bullets, automatic guns, combat helicopters, tanks and armoured vehicles, missiles ( used against civilians), tear gas and rash gas, and rifles equipped with silencers used by snipers.<sup>143</sup>

Through massive propaganda, the majority of Israelis were deluded into thinking that this was justifiable self-defense. For Ariel Sharon the regional conflagration was a deliberate effort to ignite the ending of the unfinished War of Independence, as he himself admitted.<sup>144</sup> Reinhart spoke out for many of us at the time when she wrote: It is difficult ... to believe that a deception of such magnitude is possible. Deceptions and false declarations have been the standard in the politics of the powerful, and certainly are in Israel's policy toward the Palestinians from the start. Still, it looks like it would take a sick mind to intentionally conceive and execute such a plot, the type found only in absurd conspiracy theories.<sup>145</sup>

## The Duplicity of Leadership

Opinion polls taken since 1997 show that a majority of Israelis was willing to fully evacuate settlements built on Palestinian or Syrian lands.<sup>146</sup> In her book The Road Map to Nowhere, written four years later, the results of polls remained unchanged and two-thirds of Israelis continued to support withdrawal and evacuation of West Bank settlements.<sup>147</sup> However, that majority has long had no political representation. Successful propaganda, continual fear mongering, and lack of any representative alternatives combined to deprive the Israeli public of any legitimate voice. By keeping an illusion of peace alive, the political system effectively silenced opposition through a strategy of "numbing" the Israeli public. The credulous majority of Israelis had no way of determining whether or not genuine negotiations for peace were ongoing and their interests protected. And they had no reason to doubt that their leadership had been "democratically elected." But Reinhart exposed an electoral system that had been in effect since 1996 and offered a pseudo-choice among candidates with the same agenda. Ehud Barak of the ostensibly dovish Labor Party, and Ariel Sharon of the hawkish right, for example, had always been perceived as ideological opponents. But despite their competition for political power, their military pasts and their worldviews were practically identical. And all Israeli leaders promised huge concessions for peace in their election campaigns, promises they never kept.<sup>148</sup>

In 2002, Reinhart described the Israeli military establishment as "an all-powerful group of fanatical generals who keep their plans secret even from the full forum of the Israeli government." Not only are they well-connected to the most hawkish elements in the U.S. administration, eager for a U.S.-Israeli military confrontation with Iran and Syria, more terrifyingly "they are authorized to unleash Israel's nuclear arsenal."<sup>149</sup> The army in Israel has always shaped Israel's policies and, until fairly

recently, its generals always formed the government.<sup>150</sup>

At the time she wrote her first book, 150,000 Israeli settlers were concentrated in the big settlement blocks in the center of the West Bank. As of December 2015, eight years after Reinhart's death, there were 800,000 residing primarily in the West Bank and East Jerusalem neighborhoods. Simple common sense should have determined that Israel withdraw immediately from the territories occupied in 1967. However, as Reinhart points out, the fact is that:

... since Oslo, the dream of peace has been replaced by the myth of negotiations ... And until the whole deal is agreed upon, it is impossible to evacuate even one tiny settlement. This is how, despite wide support, actual withdrawal and evacuation seem further away every year.<sup>151</sup>

## Apartheid or Extinction

The only real solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was for Israel to totally abandon the West Bank and Gaza. But Reinhart certainly did not believe this was imminent. In a 2006 article, entitled "What Are They Fighting For?," she wrote:

Since ending the Occupation is the one thing Israel is not willing to consider, the option promoted by the army is breaking the Palestinians by devastating brutal force. They should be starved, bombarded, terrorized with sonic booms for months, until they understand that rebelling is futile, and accepting prison life is their only hope for staying alive. Their elected political system, institutions and police should be destroyed. In Israel's vision, Gaza should be ruled by gangs collaborating with the prison wards.<sup>152</sup>

She had much earlier come to the conclusion that Israel's policies are far worse than the apartheid of South Africa, which never had a policy of sending tanks into black towns, or using missiles. Nor did they have a policy of bringing the population to starvation levels by depriving people of their means of earning a living. What we are witnessing in the Occupied Territories—Israel's penal colonies—is the invisible and daily killing of the sick and wounded who are deprived of medical car, of the weak who cannot survive in the new poverty conditions, and of those who are approaching starvation.<sup>153</sup>

But if several decades of brutal apartheid did not end the conflict, there have always been murmurs of a more extreme option: the expulsion of populations under the cover of war. It was apparent to Reinhart then, and is to many of us today, that full withdrawal from all Occupied Territories was never a seriously considered option. Presently Israel's doves are hardly visible, and the hawks have grown more determined. In a world of increasingly glorified military generals, and unholy alliances with international partners, such as the US, who moved their embassy to Jerusalem, continued warfare seems inevitable.

In *The Road Map to Nowhere*, Reinhart discusses a period of massive ethnic cleansing under Ariel Sharon that began in 2003. She describes Sharon as "the most brutal, cynical, racist, and manipulative leader Israel has ever had," one who successfully manipulated the propaganda machine to place himself in the role of a "peace hero." Borrowing a concept from Chomsky, she writes that Sharon perfected the "manufacturing of consciousness, showing that war can be always marketed as the tireless pursuit of peace."<sup>154</sup>

To the end of her life, Reinhart fiercely fought for justice in a region so deprived of it. She firmly believed that criticism of Israel is crucial to its survival and to it moral integrity. Despite the small size of the state of Israel, it has consistently and intentionally alienated itself from the people residing in the region. Tanya Reinhart detests this artificially imposed estrangement and declares:

A small Jewish state of seven million residents (5.5 million Jews), surrounded by two hundred million Arabs, is making itself the enemy of the whole Muslim world. There is no guarantee that such a state can survive. Saving the Palestinians also means saving Israel.<sup>155</sup>

# THE INNER CONFLICT OF A "SUPER ZIONIST": ZEEV STERNHELL

Historian, political scientist, and internationally acclaimed expert on fascism, Zeev Sternhell (1935–) argues that initially the Zionist claim to the land was based on, an existential and moral rationale to allow the Jews the right to determine their own fate. However warnings of existential threat continued to be used following the 1967 War, when no such level of threat continued to exist. Today, Israel is paying a moral and political price for its deliberate obstruction of any just territorial solution to the conflict.

Born in Poland in 1935, Zeev Sternhell studied history and political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem from 1957 to 1960. In 1969, he completed his doctorate at the Institut d'études politiques de Paris. A renowned expert on fascism, in 1989 he became head of the Department of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has for many years written on the Israeli-Palestine conflict for *Ha'Aretz* and other newspapers.

In 2008, Sternhell admitted to being a Zionist:

I am not only a Zionist, I am a super-Zionist. For me, Zionism was and remains the right of the Jews to control their fate and their future. I consider the right of human beings to be their own masters a natural right. A right of which the Jews were deprived by history and which Zionism restored to them. That is its deep meaning. And as such, it is indeed a tremendous revolution that touches the lives of each of us. I felt that revolution when I immigrated to Israel alone at the age of 16. Only then, when I disembarked at Haifa from the ship Artza, did I stop being an object of others' action and became a subject. Only then did I become a person who is in control of himself and not dependent on others.<sup>156</sup>

But for Sternhell, as for other Israeli intellectuals, Zionism became dangerously nationalistic and antithetical to the core principles of democracy.

In the introduction to his seminal book on fascism, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, he states:

... the intellectual content of fascism ... is a product of the interaction of culture and politics, reflecting the inner relationship between the adoption of intellectual positions and the shift to action ... [Fascism] represents ... a rejection of the heritage of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and later the creation of a comprehensive alternative, an intellectual, moral and political framework that alone could ensure the perpetuity of a human collectivity in all strata and all classes of society would be perfectly integrated.<sup>157</sup>

This anticipates his later views on the evolution of the nationalist ideology of the State of Israel.

In an opinion piece written for *Ha'Aretz* on January 19, 2018, entitled "In Israel, Growing Fascism and a Racism Akin to Early Nazism," Sternhell appeared to be at extreme odds with his own stated "super-Zionist" allegiance. A month later, on February 18, 2018, a French version of the article was published in *Le Monde*.<sup>158</sup> Publication of the two pieces, attracted considerable attention, both inside and outside of Israel, and he was fiercely attacked for being an anti-Semite, a self-hating Jew, and worse.

This was not the first time Sternhell was assaulted for his views. Ten years earlier, on September 25, 2008, he was wounded by a pipe bomb explosion, suspected to be the work of Israeli right-wing extremists. An article in *The Milli Gazette* described the outraged response in Israel to Sternhell's comment that "Israel is a Nazi State."

The mostly jingoistic Israeli media ganged up on the man, accusing him of crossing all red lines ... In his article, Sternhell argued that non-Jews in Israel, especially Arabs, feel they are living under a monster, given the racist laws continually promulgated in order to promote and enforce "the Jewishness" of Israel and also make non-Jews, especially Arabs, feel they are unwanted.<sup>159</sup>

### A Secular Jewish and Catholic Childhood

In fact, few scholars are more qualified than Sternhell to equate Israel's policies with those of the Nazis. Zeev Sternhell was born in Poland to an affluent, secular, Jewish family with Zionist tendencies. With Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, they were sent to the ghetto, and he was seven years old when the Nazis killed his mother and older sister, Ada. An uncle with a permit to work outside the ghetto smuggled him to Lwów, and with the help of a Polish officer, he was given false Aryan papers. Sternhell lived with his aunt, uncle and cousin as a Polish Catholic, was baptized, took the Polish name Zbigniew Orolski and became an altar boy in the Cathedral of Kraków. In 1946, at the age of eleven, Sternhell was conveyed on a Red Cross children's train to France, where he learned the language and was accepted to a highly competitive school in Avignon.

In 1951, at sixteen, he came to Israel, with the support of the Youth Aliyah Movement, and boarded at a school for kids who had survived the Holocaust. Soon after, he was conscripted, along with the rest of his peers, and served as a platoon commander in the Sinai War. Later he fought as a reservist in the Six-Day War, the Yom Kippur War, and the 1982 Lebanon War.

## **Historical Urgency**

While he considers himself both a liberal and a Zionist, he has been a longtime supporter of the Israeli peace camp and has frequently written, lectured, and given interviews about the Israeli occupation and policies toward the Palestinians. His book, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State,* was published first in Hebrew (1995), in French (1996), and then in English (1998) by Princeton University Press.

Although the main moral rationale the Zionists used to justify the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 was the Jews historical right to the land, Sternhell asserted that this was a political ruse.

From the beginning, a sense of urgency gave the first Zionists the profound conviction that the task of reconquering the country had a solid moral basis. But the argument of the Jews' historical right to the land was *merely a matter of politics and propaganda for the secular* 

*founders of the country*.<sup>160</sup> In view of the catastrophic situation of the Jews at the beginning of the century, the use of this argument was justified in every way, and it is all the more legitimate because of the threat of death hanging over the Jews. Historical rights were invoked to serve the need of finding a refuge. After the Six-Day War, circumstances changed, and certain arguments persisted despite the fact that they were no longer valid.<sup>161</sup>

Sternhell acknowledges that the 1949 conquests were justifiably essential to the founding of Israel, but once the existential threat to the Jews had disappeared, he saw no moral basis for retaining further conquests. The early argument of historical rights may have been politics and propaganda, but they were warranted by the catastrophic situation of the Jews at the beginning of the century. For Sternhell, existential necessity provided the *only* moral justification of Zionism. By being the only place in the world to which European Jews could actually escape in the 1930s and 1940s, Palestine gave legitimacy to the establishment of the State of Israel beyond any historical rights to the land. Sternhell, like Tanya Reinhart and others, depended on the rationale of the existential threat to national survival to accept the creation of the state of Israel. His dissent from the Zionist narrative evolved from a sense of moral betrayal.

The conquests of 1967, however, have been retained entirely for the purpose of territorial expansion. Despite a complete reversal in the circumstances of Jews and of Israel after the Six-Day War, arguments of security that were no longer warranted were upheld. And if these seemed insufficient, historical rights to a "Greater Israel," to Judea and Samaria, were passionately invoked to vindicate territorial claims. The most specious defense of occupation used was that of security, which was primarily motivated by the nationalists' intention to extend the country's borders. Sternhell voices concern about the moral and political price Israeli society is paying and will have to continue to pay to overcome the hardcore expansionism of contemporary extreme nationalists—such as the ultra-nationalist settlers—to any just and reasonable solution to the fifty-year Occupation.

#### Founding Myths

In *The Founding Myths of Israel*, Sternhell examines the origins of "Israeliness," Jewish nationalism, and the exceptional nature of Zionist socialism. Sternhell analyzes the differing ideologies, conflicting beliefs, and numerous disputes that preceded the creation of the nation. Primarily a European historian, he challenges much of the conventional wisdom widely accepted by Israeli historians, long confined to a very restricted purview exclusive of any universal context. He attributes the unfortunately pervasive misconceptions of much of that limited scholarship to an intentional separation of Jewish history from general history in the Israeli education system. This separation was deliberately designed to prevent any serious critical comparison of Israel with other nation-building achievements. It effectively placed historians of Zionism in an "intellectual ghetto," a well-guarded one that could deflect any questioning of fundamental assumptions, and repel any new approach, or contradiction.

Broad segments of the Israeli political and cultural establishment have a great fear that any criticism of the ideas that have been commonly accepted over a long period, whether positivistic, relativistic or purely political and ideological, will undermine the basis of Zionism.<sup>162</sup>

Within Israel to this day any public debate about cultural pluralism and equal rights for minorities is taken as a threat to the concept of Israel as a Jewish state, which in turn threatens the mythology of historical right to the Land of Israel.

Sternhell confronts the absence of universal values in the Jewish national movement since its earliest days. He does not accept the protectionist conviction that the development of the state as an open, liberal, and secular society defies Zionist objectives. The early Zionist fusion of nationalism and socialism is commonly considered to be a unique motivating ideology of Labor Zionism and its pioneers. But examination of the Jewish version against the backdrop of other contemporary European nationalist movements, demonstrates that, apart from its adherence to a Jewish identity, it was hardly distinguishable from other variations of national socialist movements. Even the religious component was mostly lacking a metaphysical component. It was:

... a religion without God; in order to fulfill its function as a unifying force, religion required only external symbols, not inner content ... for the founders, the Bible was not only a tool to cement the inner unity of society but an indispensable weapon in the struggle for the land.<sup>163</sup>

Survival of the nation and safe refuge may have been the prime initial drivers for the conquest of as much land as possible. But this myopic ideology left no room for universal values. Sternhell argues that although the founders clearly accomplished the task of creating a state, they left no "conceptual framework that permitted it to move beyond the national revolution."<sup>164</sup> He argues: "Shallowness of thought and narrowness of perspective had been characteristic of the labor movement from the beginning. By the early 1930s it had become commonplace to regard the absence of a clear ideology as an accepted fact."<sup>165</sup>

After 1948, the founders had little interest in abstract principles that could restrict their freedom of action. Ben-Gurion, says Sternhell, considered "the ability to confront reality without any restricting ideological preconceptions" the most important quality for political success, and called this "independence of thought."<sup>166</sup> This is one possible explanation for Israel's lack of interest—historically, or now—in formulating a constitution, which would be a legal document with restrictive power.

Labor Zionism, the dominant movement in the foundation of Israel, did not embrace internationalism and democratic socialism, or any ideological offshoot of Marxism. It was not concerned with equal rights to all individuals living freely within its boundaries, which was the central purpose of the French Revolution. Instead, Zionism developed a socialism focused on national unity requiring all levels of society to be equally committed and ready to make personal sacrifices, using force if necessary. The nation was an evolving cultural unit based on a shared history and religion. Individuals linked by blood ties were necessary in order to ensure the future of that unit. The goal was to build the nation and have the power to protect it. This was very much the same as the tribal or organic nationalism that was engulfing Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, undermining liberalism and abandoning the ideas of the Enlightenment, a type of nationalism we see repeated today in parts of the world.

Following the "triumphant" Six-Day War in 1967, the intellectual vacuum of the Israeli leadership resulted in a moral and political paralysis. Sternhell argues:

I contend that the inability of the labor movement under the leadership of its founders and immediate successors to curb aspirations to territorial expansion, as well as its failure to build a more egalitarian society, was not due to any objective conditions or circumstances beyond its control. These developments were the result of a conscious ideological choice made at the beginning and clearly expressed in the doctrine of "constructive socialism." Constructive socialism is generally regarded as the labor movement's great social and ideological achievement ... constructive socialism was merely an Eretz Israeli version of nationalist socialism ... <sup>167</sup>

In 1929, Ben-Gurion explicitly defined democracy's subordinate role in such a state.

We have a principle even greater than democracy, and that is the building of Eretz Israel by the Jewish people. Our great fear for the fate of our undertaking, our great concern in hastening the building of Eretz Israel in the possibly short period that history has placed at our disposal, causes us to infringe on the teachings of democracy, for it is time to act.<sup>168</sup>

"Action" was the rallying cry for quite a few other late-nineteenth century ideologies.

Unlike liberal nationalism, Zionist nationalism promoted the subservience of the individual to the nation and was not concerned with democratic principle of citizenship or individual rights. Individualism could not be tolerated, as it could provoke defiance and eventually usurp the authority of the state. Critical thinking and dissent by intellectuals, writers, and artists had to be discouraged and redirected to serve the more important objectives of the nation. Since the early years of the State of Israel, a number of academics who have challenged the nationalist agenda have left the country to avoid ostracism or unemployment. Among those who remain, some still face threats and physical violence.

#### Zionists and Other Jews

For the Labor Zionist leadership, Jews were viewed in terms of immigration potential for the singular noble cause. The missionary zeal of these leaders blinded them to the possibility of other moral values. It also prevented them from considering the historical importance of Jews who were not part of the movement. For many decades, the founders and their followers disparaged Jews from the diaspora who did not plan to immigrate to Israel.

At a debate about the fate of Jews in Poland facing Hitler's forces, Ben-Gurion famously said:

For me, Zionist considerations take precedence over Jewish sentiments, and I only heed Zionist considerations in this matter—that is, what is required for Eretz Israel ... Zionism is the most profound thing in Judaism, and I think we should act according to Zionist considerations and not merely Jewish considerations, for a Jew is not automatically a Zionist.

Sternhell points out that many of the early leaders of the Zionist Revolution loathed the diaspora and its "weakling Jews." The Zionists, who left Europe regarded themselves as heroic pioneers. They despised the image of docile Jews as lambs led to the slaughter in Second-World War Europe. The Jews who had no land of their own, no language, and no country had forever been described in anti-Semitic terms as parasites. Ironically, the Zionists themselves used the same terminology to distinguish themselves from those in the diaspora.

No one was more disgusted with their people, more contemptuous of its weaknesses and its way of life, than the founders. These stern individuals, who permitted no self-indulgence, described exiled Jews in terms that at times resembled those of the most rabid anti-Semites ... due to the fact that we are a parasitic people. We have no roots in the soil; there is no ground beneath our feet. And we are parasites not only in an economic sense but in spirit, in thought, in poetry, in literature, and in our virtues, our ideals, our higher human aspirations.<sup>169</sup>

Not only was Jewish history in exile deemed to be unimportant, but the value of living Jews, Jews of flesh and blood, depended entirely on their use as raw material for national revival. The Jewish communities scattered across Central and Eastern Europe were important to the founders chiefly as a source of pioneers. They were considered to have no value in themselves.<sup>170</sup>

Zionism was not an operation to save Jews but rather to save the nation: "The masses of Jews who were not Zionists or who were not organized for immigration to Eretz Israel were of minor importance." What was required for the task was a new Jew—a fighter, a hard worker, who would defy the image of the parasite weakling. Power and strength were national goals.<sup>171</sup>

#### Other Claimants to the Land

After 1948, the entire Jewish population was recruited to the task of forming and unifying a nation and formulating a narrative that would legitimize the conquest of Arab land. Sternhell does not believe that the early Zionists were oblivious to the Arab inhabitants. They knew the land was not *empty*. However, their leaders could not concoct a policy of coexistence for the future that would be compatible with any Palestinian objective or any ingenious narrative of rightful conquest. Therefore, they largely ignored the problem since it was assumed that "the implementation of Zionism could be only at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs."<sup>172</sup>

The definitive Zionist rationale for land appropriation had already been provided as early as 1921 by the Zionist ideologue A. D. Gordon, who stated: "For Eretz Israel, we have a charter that has been valid until now and that will always be valid, and that is the Bible, and not only the Bible." Gordon then contrasted the glorious work of the Jewish Bible with what he saw as the dearth of Arab cultural production.

"And what did the Arabs produce in all the years they lived in the country? Such creations, or even the creation of the Bible alone, give us a perpetual right over the land in which we were so creative, especially since the people that came after us did not create such works in this country, or did not create anything at all."

Sternhell therefore concludes: "The dependence of the Jewish movement of national rebirth on history and religion necessarily gave it from the start a radical character that was unavoidable."<sup>173</sup>

Over the years, and especially after the 1967 Six-Day War, the official Israeli position of moral superiority and historical right to the land became more entrenched. Sternhell condemns the stubborn refusal by Israeli leaders to recognize any Palestinian national aspiration as legitimate.

Many members of the Jewish political and cultural elite, both of the Right and of the Left, considered an agreement to partition the country and the acknowledgment of a Palestinian nationality as a denial of three thousand years of history, a mortal blow to the rights of the Jewish people in the land of its fathers, and consequently an undermining of the foundations of Zionism. This view has been as destructive for Israel's policies since the Six-Day War as for the spiritual and moral climate in which Israeli society has developed in the last generation.<sup>174</sup>

Although Israeli society at large may have grown less tribal, more modern and liberal since the goals of independent statehood were attained, the concept of religious national right has developed into a belligerent, self-appointed guardianship of "true" Zionism. Prime Minister Rabin's assassination by right-wing Jewish extremists in November 1995, after his attempt to negotiate peace with the Palestinians at Oslo, was a tragic expression of the passionate tenacity of the Zionist narrative. Observes Sternhell: Rabin had become an enemy of the nation, a traitor to his people and its history ... Rabin's assassination was the work of a very small group, but it gave a tragic dimension to a fact that many people refused to acknowledge until then: Israel too has its Brownshirts, not only consisting of settlers in Judea and Samaria.

For the most uncompromising believers, Sternhell makes clear, "peace is a mortal danger to the Zionism of blood and soil, a Zionism that cannot imagine willingly returning even an inch of the sacred territory of the land of Israel."<sup>175</sup>

Even the relatively liberal Labor government, in power until 1977, could not moderate the conviction of absolute historical entitlement to conquered lands and therefore, argues Sternhell, failed to respond to the opportunity for negotiation presented by the victory of the Six-Day War. Lacking the tools to counter the extreme nationalism, the Labor government succumbed to its militant narrative and exploited the 1967 victory to further Zionist ambitions of expansion. Consistently applying the strategy that frontiers are created by facts on the ground, Israel's governments of left and right have been united since that war in pursuing a policy of fait accompli in the Occupied Territories. The injustices of occupation and consequent configuration of apartheid were subservient to the greater purpose.

## Policies of Theft and Dispossession

In a 2017 article entitled "Apartheid Under the Law,"<sup>176</sup> Sternhell decries the crude violence of policies advanced by the current minister of justice, Ayelet Shaked. She unabashedly promotes laws that legalize the theft of Palestinian land for the benefit of the settlers. These lands are confiscated to build roads that could only be used by Jews. Since most of the lawmakers in Israel accept or actively endorse the apartheid system in Israel, this policy of dispossession could not be successfully opposed. This, laments Sternhell, is what the rule of law has come to in Israel.

In a 2018 article entitled "In Israel, Growing Fascism and a Racism Akin to Early Nazism" Sternhell asks:

How would a historian in 50 or 100 years ... interpret our period. When did the state devolve into a true monstrosity for its non-Jewish inhabitants? When did some Israelis understand that their cruelty and ability to bully others, Palestinians or Africans, began eroding the moral legitimacy of their existence as a sovereign entity?<sup>177</sup>

Sternhell sees the entire Israeli nation as moving in the direction of fascism, with no opposition capable of overcoming the evolving toxic ultra-nationalism. He compares this to the early stages of Nazism. The Israeli nationalists don't wish to physically harm the Palestinians, but they feel righteous about depriving them of basic human rights and self-rule. The reasoning is simple.

The Arabs aren't Jews, so they cannot demand ownership over any part of the land that was promised to the Jewish people ... From this one may assume that even if they all converted, grew side-curls and studied Torah, it would not help. This is the situation with regard to Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers and their children, who are Israeli for all intents and purposes. This is how it was with the Nazis. Later comes apartheid, which could apply under certain circumstances to Arabs who are citizens of Israel. Most Israelis don't seem worried.<sup>178</sup>

The ultranationalists are secular as well as religious Israelis; both groups have been moving the country's political center progressively to the right. Both have been using the Bible as justification for ignoring human and equal civil rights for non-Jewish residents in the same country. They believe that the narrative used for creating the state when there was an existential threat to the Jewish people is still the best narrative to raise national fervor and eliminate the need to rethink the direction of Israel's future out of its current colonialism and moral bankruptcy.

# INSIDE THE TURMOIL SINCE 1948: URI AVNERY AND TIKVA HONIG-PARNASS

The activism of Uri Avnery (1923–2018) and Tikva Honig-Parnass (1929?–) has been lifelong. Avnery's writing reflects the history of the state of Israel and the struggle of a prominent pacifist, secular, and antiestablishment Zionist thinker in a suffocating supernationalist society. Honig-Parnass, an anti-Zionist activist, intellectual, and writer, has opposed the Occupation and Israel's blatant and systematic discrimination against the minority population of Arab citizens.

### **Taking Risks**

A tireless peace activist and prolific writer, Uri Avnery reached the age of ninety-five staunchly holding onto his own evolving version of Zionism, at odds with the conventional narrative, over many decades. The author of numerous articles and several books about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, his life story replicates the history of the state in many ways.

Born in Germany, Avnery came to Palestine with his parents in 1933 when he was ten years old. In 1937, imbued with Zionist fervor and the plucky confidence of a fourteen-year-old, he left school to join the Irgun, an underground paramilitary organization. Avnery never went back to the classroom, which is remarkable considering the later scope of his knowledge—biblical, historical, and contemporaneous—and the acuity of his writing. Over time, he became disillusioned with the Irgun's anti-Arab ideology and terrorist methods, and in 1942 left in protest. Avnery records his conflict with the organization he had joined as a teenager in his book 1948: A Soldier's Tale, the Bloody Road to Jerusalem.

Killing—the solution to all problems. If you get used to the idea of killing for the motherland, you lose all sense of limits. You start with killing Arabs—the "enemy," the "savages of the desert," "intruders,"

"bandits," "subhumans"—and then you can't see why you shouldn't kill Jews who you think are harming the motherland. In the end you are prepared to kill anyone you don't agree with.<sup>179</sup>

He was still an ardent young patriot when the 1948 War broke out and volunteered to serve in a commando unit on the Egyptian front. While participating in combat, he effectively launched his career as a journalist by submitting regular reports to *Ha'Aretz*. At the end of the war, Avnery was badly wounded, which would leave a lasting mark on his life story.

Two years earlier, in 1946, he had founded the Young Palestine Movement, Bamaavak, or "in the struggle," promoting the concept of a new Asian Hebrew community. The movement identified itself as a natural ally of Arab nationalist groups in the region and strove for a Semitic union of Arabs and Israelis, a federation of nationalists. Its plan for peace in the Middle East is described in Avnery's Israel Without Zionism, and called for the creation of a Palestinian Republic. In 1968, when the book was published, Avnery was an idealistic member of the Knesset, and he proposed that, "the two states embodying the two nations-Israel and the Republic of Palestine-should form a federation." The federal agreement would be preceded by an economic and military pact, with coordinating armies and a unified economy. He declared himself to be a Hebrew nationalist yearning for peace by joining with Arab nationalists and declared his belief in the force of nationalism as a prime mover in contemporary history. "Harness nationalism to concrete solutions of problems and you have a chance to put an end to war."180 Yet he also expressed the belief that such a peace could only be accomplished by ending the exclusively Jewish Zionist chapter of Israel and starting a new one as a state fully integrated into the region.

Over his many years of political activity and writing, Avnery's plans for peace progressed and matured, but his assessment of the intransigence of the Israeli government and the misdirection of the peace process remained consistent. Starting from participation in the Irgun, through his military service, his career as journalist and politician, the founding of Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc) to his more recent role as a dissident leader, Avnery's life-long writings chronicle his personal experiences against the background of a changing Israel. For forty years he was publisher and editor of *Ha'Olam Hazeh*, a now defunct but once widely read investigative newspaper, which was at the same time a sensational tabloid. It was a popular, and hence effective, platform to oppose Ben-Gurion's nationalistic, and ultimately theocratic vision of Israel. *Ha'Olam Hazeh* aggressively argued for a Palestinian state, for equality for Palestinians, and for social justice. It outraged many in the Zionist political establishment but inspired devotion among its dedicated nonconformist readers. The newspaper provoked such animosity among some that its publication offices were bombed on several occasions, with injuries to its employees. Avnery himself, a widely recognized figure, became the target of vicious attacks, both verbal and physical. He had both arms broken for criticizing Ariel Sharon's attack and massacre in the West Bank village of Qibiya in October 1953. As recently as 2006, a far-right extremist and settler Baruch Marzel called on the Israeli military to carry out a "targeted killing" of Avnery.

## Contacts with the PLO

Avnery founded a political party and served as a Knesset member from 1965 to 1974, and then again from 1979 to 1981. As early as 1974, well before Israel officially recognized the PLO in 1993, he had established contacts with PLO officials. Arguably one of his most dramatic achievements was his meeting in Beirut with Yassir Arafat during the first Lebanon war in July, 1982. This illegal meeting enraged many Israeli leaders who called for Avnery to be put on trial for treason. It was the first time the Palestinian leader had ever met with an Israeli, and the controversial relationship lasted until Arafat's death in 2004. Avnery recounted his history with the PLO in *My Friend, the Enemy.*<sup>181</sup>

In a 2011 article entitled "The Acts of Perfidious Traitors," Avnery placed the meeting with Arafat in the context of historical figures that may have been considered traitors by some but were guided entirely by patriotism and a desire for peace. With or without tongue in cheek, it also immodestly placed Avnery himself into a heroic tradition. The article concluded:

At times of crisis, the real patriots, those who call for peace and compromise, in short the "lefties," are considered traitors, whereas

the nationalists of all types, the warmongers, the inciters of hatred, are perceived as patriots. It is of them that the British philosopher Samuel Johnson said that "patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."<sup>182</sup>

As recently as October 2017, many years after Arafat's death in 2004, Avnery defended his secret interactions with the PLO. In responding to a review of a new biography about Yitzhak Rabin, for whom Avnery had great respect, he wrote that Rabin knew about the contacts and had not forbidden them.

After the Yom Kippur War, I started secret (and illegal) contacts with Yasser Arafat's representative Said Hammami. After a few months Hammami notified me that Arafat agreed for me to inform Rabin, by now prime minister, in secret of the existence of our contacts. I requested a private meeting with Rabin and was immediately invited to see him. We had a long conversation ... at the end of our conversation, when we were just about at the door, he said: "Uri, I don't agree with your views, but I don't forbid you from continuing with the contacts, and if you hear anything that you think the prime minister of Israel needs to know, my door is open."<sup>183</sup>

## Gush Shalom and God's Zionism

Avnery founded the activist organization Gush Shalom<sup>184</sup> in 1992 to support the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and to oppose the settlements. It has been a vibrant force of peaceful opposition within Israel for over twenty-five years and has attracted substantial international recognition. In 2001, Avnery and his wife Rachel were given the Right Livelihood Award, sometimes called the "Alternative Nobel Prize," for their unwavering endeavors to achieve a just peace and reconciliation. This international award, presented in Sweden the day before the Nobel prizes, but not offered by the Nobel Foundation, was established in 1980 to recognize achievements in areas such as environmental protection, sustainable development, human rights, peace, and education.

In addition to his Israeli devotees, Avnery attracted a sizeable international readership with his distinctive, provocative style, which usually survives translation. Cleverly challenging conventional Israeli norms, he published a weekly column for Gush Shalom and weekly political ads in *Ha'Aretz* since 1993. Most of these articles can be found on the Gush Shalom website. In "When God Despairs," he sardonically illustrates Zionist overreach.

Right after the foundation of Israel, God appeared to David Ben-Gurion and told him:

"You have done good by my people. Utter a wish and I shall grant it!"

"I wish that Israel shall be Jewish, democratic and encompass all the country between the Mediterranean and the Jordan," Ben-Gurion replied.

"That is too much even for me!" God exclaimed. "But I will grant you two of the three. You can choose between a Jewish and democratic Israel in a part of the country, a democratic state in all of the country that will not be Jewish, or a Jewish Israel in all of the country that will not be democratic."

God has not changed his mind.<sup>185</sup>

In "It Can Happen Here," Avnery created a condensed history of Zionism, from its utopian beginnings to its unacceptable present and intolerable leadership.

Zionism was a revolutionary idea. It proposed that the "Jewish people" should create a new Jewish entity in the land of Palestine.

The Zionist project was very successful indeed. By 1948 the embryo nation was strong enough to create a state. Israel was born.

When one builds a house, one needs scaffolding. When the building is finished, the scaffolding is removed. But political ideas and structures don't die easily ... political and material interests become vested in the idea and resist change. Thus "Zionism" continued to exist after its aim had already been achieved. The scaffolding became superfluous, indeed obstructive ...

Israel is officially and judicially defined as "a Jewish and democratic state." Does that mean that non-Jewish citizens of Israel, such as the Arabs, do not really belong, but are only tolerated and their civil rights are questionable? ...

Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, suggested in his fundamental book, *The Jewish State*, that in Palestine we would volunteer to serve as an outpost for European civilization against barbarism. Which barbarians did he have in mind? Some 110 years later, the prime minister of Israel, Ehud Barak, expressed the same idea in more colorful words, when he described Israel as a "villa in the jungle." Again, it is easy to guess which wild beasts he had in mind ...

"Peace with the Arabs" is a subject endlessly discussed in Israel. It is the dividing line between "Right" and "Left." The prevailing conviction is: "Peace would be nice. We all want peace. Unfortunately peace is impossible." Why impossible? "Because the Arabs don't want it. They will not accept a Jewish state in their midst. Not now, not ever."

Based on this conviction, Binyamin Netanyahu has formulated his condition for peace: "The Arabs must recognize Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People."

This is ludicrous ...

We do not recognize China as a Communist country. We do not recognize the US as a capitalist country—nor did we, in the past, recognize the US as a White, Protestant country. We do not recognize Sweden as a Swedish country. The whole thing is ridiculous. But nobody, inside Israel or outside, dares to tell Netanyahu to sleep it off ... <sup>186</sup>

#### A Soldier Reporter

In *My Friend, the Enemy*, Avnery offered a simple explanation for the root of the Palestinian Israeli conflict, attributing it to the Polish-born historian Isaac Deutscher: a man lives on the top floor of a building in which a fire breaks out. To save his life he jumps out of a window and lands on the head of a passerby, who is severely injured.

The man is convinced of his absolute justness: he only saved his life. He didn't intend to hurt anyone—he didn't even know anyone was underneath. But the passerby is not interested in what happened in the burning apartment. He only knows that a terrible injustice has been done to him through no fault of his own.<sup>187</sup>

This succinct account of the Israel-Palestine conflict also appears in the introduction to Avnery's 1948 A Soldier's Tale—The Bloody Road to Jerusalem, which compiles two earlier books: In the Fields of the Philistines and The Other Side of the Coin. In the Fields of the Philistines<sup>188</sup> records his experiences as a young soldier in the 1948 war. He continued writing his account of events to the end of the 1948 war, starting from the buildup to that war through the intense anticipation in the Jewish community on the night of the UN partition vote of November 29, 1947, the vote that essentially enabled the creation of a Jewish state.

He describes the creation of an army that had never been before—a revolutionary movement that "arose within us, from the character of a generation ... It was the coming-of-age of a whole generation; the first generation that grew up in this land, conscious of its freedom."<sup>189</sup> But the euphoria of this birth of a nation did not last. Disillusion set in for some soldiers after several hard-fought battles.

The slogan went: "the whole people—one army." We were told that the whole nation was fighting ... And then we discovered that this was a lie. Only part of the nation, only part of the youth went to fight. And behind their backs there arose and thrived the "headquarters" ... the self-appointed aristocrats in fine uniforms.<sup>190</sup>

The Other Side of the Coin<sup>191</sup> is based on notes he kept in hospital while recuperating from serious injuries. His intention was to portray the darker side of the victorious war that was jubilantly celebrated by Israelis. Despite some initial publication hurdles, the first book, *In the Fields of the Philistines,* achieved astonishing sales success. But the more critical reflection on the war, *The Other Side of the Coin,* faced serious condemnation and rebuke from the public, and even attempts to block it entirely from publication. Avnery attributed much of the difficulty in publication to his condemnation of the policies of David Ben-Gurion, who was then "the absolute ruler of the young state."
Ben-Gurion effectively laid down the rails on which the state of Israel has run to this day. From the direction the train was pointing I could see a collision approaching and tried to indicate an alternative: Israel as a secular republic, democratic and liberal, an ally of the Arab national movement and a partner in the construction of a regional federation.<sup>192</sup>

# Modern Israel

Avnery's unrelenting criticism of the state continued. Although his lack of affection or respect for Ben-Gurion, the man he accused of being responsible for the never-ending war with the Palestinians, is well known, Avnery actually compared Ben-Gurion favorably to his successors in an article he wrote for Israel's seventieth birthday on April 21, 2018. In "The Great Day," he wrote: "His successors in the Prime Minister's office were second rate. Not to mention the present occupant, who is a dwarf."<sup>193</sup>

In Hebrew, that is stylistically direct, unpretentious, and often humorous, he has articulated his misgivings as a secular, anti-establishment thinker and pacifist in a suffocating supernationalist society. He dreaded the increasing religiosity of the state, the replacement of universal human values by the authority of medieval Jewish clerics, and their revisionist history. In "The Hebrew State is Disappearing," an article he published in *Ha'Aretz* in 2015, he warned against the growing religious fanaticism that had been festering in Israel since the Six-Day War. "We are witnessing a mutation of Judaism, a new Judaism—fanatic, violent and now murderous as well. It is liable to bury the state, just as it buried the Second Temple."<sup>194</sup>

In response to the arrest of the young girl Ahed al-Tamimi for the atrocity she had committed of slapping a soldier, Avnery wrote an indignant article, "A Song is Born," about the creation of a modern national heroine for the Palestinians.

The Israeli public has got used to the Occupation. They believe that this is a normal situation that the occupation can go on forever. But the Occupation is not a natural situation, and some day it will come to an end ... Ten thousand British ruled hundreds of millions of Indians, until a skinny man called Gandhi went to produce salt on the seashore, contrary to the law. The Indian youth arose, and British rule fell away like a leaf from a tree in autumn.<sup>195</sup>

As the 2018 protests along the Gaza border continued, and twentynine unarmed Palestinian demonstrators were shot during the first two Fridays, Avnery spoke out to disassociate himself from the murderous army and its commanders who gave the orders. "Like the British in India and the white racists in the US, the Israeli government does not know how to deal with unarmed protest." And the war crimes were largely ignored by the press. "The sorrowful fact is that the Israeli media have reverted to what they were in the early days of the state: an instrument of the government."<sup>196</sup>

If anyone thought that the democratic world would stand up and condemn Israel, they were sadly wrong. Reactions were feeble, at most. What was revealed was the incredible hold the Israeli government and its Zionist organization has over the world's political establishments and communication outlets. With few exceptions the atrocious news was not published at all, or as minor items.<sup>197</sup>

### **Dissenters Disagree**

Avnery's disillusionment with the Zionists, with right-wing Israeli governments and with the never-ending occupation was clear. Yet, he still held out hope for an increasingly hard to imagine two-state solution: a Jewish state, side-by-side with a Palestinian state, in a peaceful regional federation.

In "Dear Salman," Avnery discusses an exchange of letters with Salman Abu Sitta, a Palestinian refugee he met at a UN conference in Paris many years earlier.<sup>198</sup> Abu Sitta had devoted his life to the cause of Palestinian refugees and was a recognized authority on the Nakba.<sup>199</sup> In one letter, Abu Sitta reminisced about Avnery's emphatically negative response to a question he had asked at a private dinner. The question had been whether Avnery would agree to Abu Sitta's return to his home in Palestine. In his letter, Abu Sitta said: I am reminded of a similar story but with a different ending. I refer to "Reflections of a Daughter of the '48 Generation" by Dr. Tikva Honig-Parnass. It is a moving account of how truth and reality faced her, as a Palmach soldier, with the grave injustice done to Palestinians. Since then she spends her energy to defend their rights, including the Right of Return.

Avnery's response at that time reflected his resistance to the right of return.

I respect the few people in Israel who, like Tikva, completely devote themselves to the moral side of the refugees' tragedy, whatever the consequence for the chances of peace. My own moral outlook tells me that peace must be the first aim, before and above everything else ... I can stand on the hilltops and shout—but it would not bring peace (and a solution) one step closer.

Uri Avnery shouted from the hilltops for many years and peace has been consistently elusive. At the same time, his distinction between the "moral" side of the tragedy and a more "practical" solution for peace was not entirely well-defined, or clearly practicable. According to Tikva Honig-Parnass, Avnery's six-decades-long commitment to the Zionist Left, to the Jewish identity of the state, and to the two-state solution lacked an essential component—it ignored Palestinian national aspirations. As a result, she considered his ideology dangerous, both morally and politically. She acknowledged that Avnery had "stood on the political barricades and faced down bulldozers to defend Palestinians from Israeli military abuse." But he had also long supported the US engineered peace negotiations, which she firmly opposed.<sup>200</sup>

# Tikva Honig-Parnass

An anti-Zionist activist, intellectual, and writer, Honig-Parnass was raised in the Jewish community during the pre-state period. Returning to Israel after earning her doctorate in sociology from Duke University, she became an outspoken critic of colonial Zionism, a tenacious opponent of the Israeli Occupation, and an advocate for other causes, such as feminism and Mizrahim, or Middle Eastern Jews. Israel's blatant and systematic racist discrimination against the minority population of Arab citizens was duplicated to a degree in its mistreatment of Jews from Arab countries, which she also decried. A staunch socialist, she has written numerous articles for international and Israeli publications. She is the author of *False Prophets of Peace* (2011) and co-editor of *Between the Lines: Readings on Israel, the Palestinians, and the US "War on Terror,"* with Toufic Haddad (2007), both published by Haymarket Books.

# A Brainwashed Generation

In "Reflections of a Daughter of the '48 Generation," (the article mentioned in the note by Salman Abu Sitta), Honig-Parnass reflects on a letter she wrote to her mother in the midst of the war in October 1948, and which her mother returned to her in 1983, thirty-five years later. Rereading the letter she herself had written so long ago was a turning point for her, confirming her lengthy process of alienation from Zionism.

The letter uncovers an advanced stage in the dehumanization process and the emotional crippling that my generation had to undergo in order to fulfill the missions which were assigned to them: conquering the land, expelling its indigenous Palestinian residents, expropriating most of their lands and turning them into "state lands," and imposing a military government on those who remained, which lasted until 1966!<sup>201</sup>

She criticizes her own unquestioning acceptance of the Zionist myth of an innocent Jewish population defending itself by military force. It took her several years to realize that her entire generation had been successfully "brainwashed, or successfully socially and culturally engineered," to achieve the Zionist project,<sup>202</sup> a project that was colonialist, nationalist, tribal, self-righteously destructive of the indigenous population, and oblivious to any notion of human rights.

A decade later, on May 16, 2008, in an interview with Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now!*, she reiterated the same exasperation with her generation, the one involved in the 1948 war, but her critique still holds for those who followed later.

We were the generation that were programmed to commit the mass expulsion. We *absorbed it* ... with the milk of our mothers. In school, the Bible , *in a secular school*, was taught five days a week as if it is an historical document. And we were already ready when '48 war broke out. We were already indifferent to the Palestinians—not even hating, just indifferent. They became for us a kind of an environmental nuisance. It is the kind of objectification which prepared us not to care about the expulsion, which we saw in front of our eyes.

In 1948, Honig-Parnass served in a unit of the Palmach, which conquered several Palestinian villages and expelled their residents. The letter she wrote to her parents in October was indifferently written on stationery taken from a gas station, whose Palestinian owner had just been expelled. Oblivious to this fact at the time of writing, she noticed it decades later: The letter describes an encounter with two Jewish-American volunteers, "liberal Zionists, who had not been brought up in the ideology of the Zionist labor movement."

They were among many American Jewish veterans of the Second World War who came to support the Yishuv (the pre-1948 Jewish community in Palestine) military forces in the 1948 War. One evening, they came from a mission shouting that they met on their way back to the base Palestinian women and children starving to death and begging to go back to their villages. They added angrily that, "if this new state cannot take care of its Palestinian inhabitants, then it has no right to exist." And me, a left Zionist, who claimed to be a Marxist and an internationalist wrote: "Dear mother and father, *I'm sick and tired of these American 'philanthropists*.'" Notice that I used the expression "philanthropists" rather than "humanists." So this is just an example of the difference between liberalism, universalism, and internationalism on the one hand, and Zionist "left" values on the other.<sup>203</sup>

### **Relinquishing Zionism**

After the 1948 war, and before she withdrew completely from Zionism in 1960, Honig-Parnass was secretary of the Radical Left Zionist Party of the

Unified Workers Party, or Mapam, in the Knesset (1951–1954). At that time Mapam was the Zionist far left. Steeped in the readings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Rosa Luxembourg, and everything socialist she could get in Hebrew translation, she grew to understand the contradiction in the conflation of Zionism and socialism and ultimately crossed over to anti-Zionism. She realized that one could not be at once a socialist and a colonialist, "participating in the great theft of the lands of the Palestinians who remained within the borders of Israel after 1948—while they were living under military rule (between 1948 and 1966)."<sup>204</sup>

Propelled by an emergent capitalist class, the Zionist labor movement was the dominant architect of the Zionist narrative before 1948. It harnessed together selected socialist concepts to capitalist enterprise, and it is that same narrative that essentially legitimizes the colonial project of Zionism to this day.

The pre-state Zionist Labor movement created the false theory of "constructive socialism," which was a local version of nationalist socialism. It called for the collaboration of labor and bourgeoisie the "productive forces of society" to contribute to the "collective" interests of state and society. This theory and ideology was easily established after 1948 as the "state-centered" system of values that lies at the center of Israeli society's culture until this day. What we are dealing with here is an ideology that sees the state and its "security" as the most important value, having priority over any individual interests.<sup>205</sup>

Leibowitz and even Sternhell may have used the provocative terms "semi-fascist" or "fascist" to describe a nationalistic, militaristic Israel, but Honig-Parnass uses it, as did Baruch Kimmerling, to refer to Israeli culture that elevated collective goals above individual or moral values. "These imagined 'collective' goals were pointed out as a justification to subdue individual aspirations and rights that, in an apparent contradiction to any liberal-democratic tradition, are regarded as 'egoistic.'"<sup>206</sup> As a socialist, she might be expected to approve of collective goals, but when it comes at the expense of a subjugated population, the moral cost is much too high.

Honig-Parnass came to doubt the socialist credentials of the early Israeli labor movement in Israel, since it never actually participated in any revolutionary class struggle and happily joined forces with the nascent bourgeoisie in its colonial effort. Ironically, the Israeli capitalist class, convinced of the righteousness of the Zionist narrative, had always supported the Israeli Labor Party and then effortlessly shifted to buoy its more right-wing successors. All Zionist Israeli governments since the establishment of the state have embraced US-Israeli peace plans to ensure continued imperial interests in the region while justifying inhumane treatment of Palestinians. Until the current US administration's total regional confusion, the US-Israeli plans for supremacy in the Middle East and the frequently extolled "war against terror," depended on crushing Islamic resistance of any kind. Zionists, along with the Zionist left, completely exploited this strategy to vindicate Israel's continued stranglehold over the Palestinians, portraying it as a fight for the survival of the Jewish state.

Honig-Parnass denounces the Israeli academy, the legal system, intellectuals, writers, and leftists for their unexamined collaboration, even endorsement, of a colonial project that has permitted violations of human rights for so long. In her view, the leftists in particular were guilty of allowing de facto Zionism to be taken over by the extreme right-wing, revisionist Jabotinsky faction.

There was never an actual schism between left and right about the central premises of Zionism ... the only difference between Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Zionist Labor movement, and Jabotinsky, the forefather of the right-wing Herut and Likud, was in the sequence of the stages that the project of an exclusivist Jewish state in the entire area of historical Palestine had to take in order to achieve its aims.<sup>207</sup>

#### Matzpen

Honig-Parnass credits the genesis of the group Matzpen with triggering a critical turning point in her thinking. "It was the founding of Matzpen, and especially the developing perspective depicting Zionism as a colonial project, which created an earthquake in my political and personal life," she acknowledges.<sup>208</sup> After the death of Akiva Orr, a very influential friend, she wrote a tribute describing the painful process toward her own eventual renunciation of Zionism. She had first met Orr in 1959 when he was a member of the Israeli Communist Party but was about to leave it, along with several others, to form Matzpen, the Israeli Socialist Organization. Matzpen's founders had concluded that the Israeli Communist Party was less concerned with real systemic change and more with serving the interests of the USSR, by forming some kind of satellite. Matzpen leaders had no interest in defending the big-power interests of the USSR but were very eager to develop a framework for a regional socialist society. The glow of the Communist Party was fading due to the brutal role it played in repressing the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the support for Abd al-Karim Qasim in the 1958 revolution in Iraq, and the lack of support for the Castros in Cuba. Stalin's denunciation was pivotal. Matzpen came into being in 1962. It was revolutionary, socialist, and anti-Zionist. It was also part of a popular international upheaval of idealistic leftists against imperialism, racism, militarism, social injustice, and civil rights abuses.

Like her fellow Radical Left Zionist Party (Mapam) colleagues, Honig-Parnass had for many years believed that the 1948 War was one of liberation from British imperialism and that Israel was genuinely seeking peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians. Her disillusionment with Mapam came with the realization that the ideology of the Zionist narrative justified a colonial enterprise under the persistent pretense of security. She wrote about the enormous psychological pressure felt by any Israelis who attempted to criticize the Zionist endeavor or, worse yet, refute its ideology. She described the 1950s as the worst years to resist the monumental intensity of Zionist consensus. Her early insights coincided with the initial adamant protests by Matzpen against the seizure of Palestinian land. Honig-Parnass was trying to differentiate the incompatibility of Zionism and socialism. At the same time, in their book Peace, Peace, When There Is No Peace, Orr and Machover were working on their seminal indictment of Israel's contrived war, with its preference for alliances with colonial powers over Arab states and the deliberate obstruction of the creation of any Palestinian state.<sup>209</sup>

Apprehension about Israel's dependence on nonregional powers for its legitimacy was not entirely new. Roughly two decades earlier, Hannah Arendt, in "The Crisis of Zionism," had also warned against the potential reliance on external great foreign powers at the expense of integration into the region.

Nationalism is bad enough when it trusts in nothing but the rude force of the nation. A nationalism that necessarily and admittedly depends upon the force of a foreign power is certainly worse ... the Zionists, if they continue to ignore the Mediterranean peoples and watch out only for the big faraway powers, will appear only as their tools, the agents of foreign and hostile interests.<sup>210</sup>

While the European Arendt did not write in Hebrew, and was not a locally recognized authority, Matzpen writers were mostly Israeli, wrote in Hebrew, and had served in some capacity in the Israeli military. They were the "true" Israelis in predetermined service to the narrative. Moreover, Arendt's works were largely ignored for several decades after the 1963 publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which was not translated into Hebrew until 2000.

Three months after the conquests of the Six-Day War, on September 22, 1967, members of Matzpen placed a political ad in *Ha'Aretz*, explaining their opposition to occupation.

Our right to defend ourselves against annihilation does not grant us the right to oppress others. Conquest brings in its wake foreign rule. Foreign rule brings in its wake resistance. Resistance brings in its wake oppression. Oppression brings in its wake terrorism and counterterrorism. The victims of terrorism are usually innocent people. Holding onto the territories will turn us into a nation of murderers and murder victims. *Let us leave the Occupied Territories now.*<sup>211</sup>

Matzpen's membership included Arab and Jewish left-wing activists and intellectuals, who aspired to a socialist federation of the entire Middle East. The organization sought a regional solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a democratic union with the Arab East that would grant Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews equal national and individual rights. It supported the right of the Israeli people to self-determination but in the context of a joint struggle of Arabs and Jews in the region for a common future. The members categorically dismissed the Zionist "fairy tale" of Israel as an enlightened, democratic, and ethical haven for the persecuted Jews of the world. Israel was, they claimed, a violent colonialist aggressor, an ally of Western imperialism, seeking the expulsion and destruction of Palestinian Arabs.

Matzpen's anti-Zionist stance was viciously attacked by the state and by media within Israel and the organization was identified as a national security threat. Many of the most hostile attacks came from those who considered themselves enlightened liberals, the "Zionist Left," who were now outflanked on the left by socialists demanding equal human rights for all.

Matzpen was active as a cohesive organization until the 1980s, although it had undergone some upheavals along the way. Most of its members joined other ideological groups dedicated to fighting against the Occupation, and defending human rights and Palestinian rights to self-determination, which had emerged by this time. These were more contemporaneous, possibly more issue-focused associations. Unlike Honig-Parnass, some members of Matzpen lost their socialist zeal, and others had come to the sad conclusion that revolution for the "working class" was a less attainable goal: "As long as Zionism is politically and ideologically dominant within that society, and forms the accepted framework of politics, there is no chance whatsoever of the Israeli working class becoming a revolutionary class."<sup>212</sup>

# Left and More Left

The Left and the Right in Israel designate political, rather than economic orientations. In the spectrum of political opinions on the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Left refers to doves, who prefer diplomatic political solutions, and the Right to the hawks, who call for military responses and further contraction of Palestinian autonomy. Some on the extreme right, firmly entrenched in their claim of historic rights to the land, call for outright evacuation or transfer of Palestinians. Anti-Zionists, however, are entirely off the spectrum, as they are considered traitors to the state who challenge its existence. While they actually may be challenging the concept of a segregated Jewish state, and not the existence of its Jewish citizens, the perception fostered is that Israeli anti-Zionists endanger Israel's security by confronting Israel's core foundation myth.

In "The Limitations of the Israeli Left," written in 2002 for the *New Socialist Magazine*, Honig-Parnass asserts that the Israeli Left does not contest Zionism as a colonial project. Most Leftist organizations, including Gush Shalom, consider the conflict to be between "two national movements which compete over the same territory." They unquestioningly accepted the 1993 Oslo agreements, having no appreciation for the aggravated apartheid effect any such two-state agreement would produce, and has in fact produced.

The ideological limitations of the Israeli Left create a situation in which those in Israeli society who want to adopt a genuine democratic approach to Israel, Palestine and the conflict, have no place within Israeli social and political structures to turn to.<sup>213</sup>

The Israeli media and the government have depicted any Palestinian insurrection protesting Israeli domination as irrefutable proof that Palestinians are prone to violence. Therefore the repeated call to end the violence on both sides by returning to the negotiation table is hypocritical at best. As she accurately points out, "Giving equal weight to the oppression of the occupier and the uprising of the conquered, while suggesting that resuming the talks would achieve a just peace, is misleading, to say the least."<sup>214</sup>

### A Democratic State

With few exceptions, most Israeli historians accept the Zionist narrative and its biblical claims with little consideration for its colonialist or racist dominance of an entire minority population. Many, if not most, have no misgivings about the basic concept of an exclusively Jewish state on occupied land in the region. Although it is generally understood that the 1967 Occupation—followed by de facto annexation—are steps toward the creation of a Greater Israel, this process is intentionally obscured. By limiting access to basic resources such as water, confiscating land, and creating new Jewish settlements as "facts on the ground," Israel has made life for Palestinian increasingly intolerable. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, approximately one and a half million Palestinians within Israel's Green Line are citizens with voting rights, but their citizenship does not include civil rights and grants them no equality. If Gaza is included in the calculation of Israeli occupied territory, one in every three people residing in Israel has no voting rights and hence no political representation. Although a minority may nominally be Israeli citizens, Palestinians cannot live in Jewish settlements or in any land held by Jewish national institutions, most of which had been confiscated from them. This denial of rights is justified in the name of "security," which is the secular god Israelis have long been worshipping. And yet, Israel brazenly calls itself a democracy—even "the only democracy in the Middle East." In *False Prophets of Peace*, Honig-Parnass explains, "The occupation is considered irrelevant to the debate on the definition of Israel as a democracy."<sup>215</sup>

The concept of democracy that Israel clings to depends on maintaining a Jewish majority within the expanding borders of the state. This has been a fundamental value guiding policy and legal decisions, such as basing immigration and citizenship rights on religion. Jews anywhere in the world are automatically granted such rights under the Law of Return, but Palestinians wishing to return to their own lands are denied. And, in the attempt to circumvent further demographic threats to the Jewish majority, laws have been enacted to prevent Palestinians from freely choosing their place of residence and to block their freedom to travel through a comprehensive network of checkpoints.

Nothing, however, has prevented the growth of the non-Jewish population under Israeli domination since the 1967 war. How can the Zionist narrative continue to be the expression of the majority, assuming equal human and civil rights? Israel was never intended to be a state for all its citizens. This was openly acknowledged by then Israel's justice minister Ayelet Shaked in February 2018 in her speech to the Knesset, on Judaism and democracy, when she said: "There is a place to maintain a Jewish majority even at the price of violation of rights."<sup>216</sup>

In recent years, the once abhorrent idea of "transfer" has returned to the political discourse as a possible solution to the demographic upset. In 2001, at the prestigious Herzliyah Conference attended by over three hundred academics, economists and policymakers, the following proposal was submitted: "It will be necessary to find some place for resettlement outside the state of Israel ... for the Palestinian population of the territories." At the 2004 conference, a land swap was proposed as a "fair deal," but it would, if enacted, abolish the citizenship status of all Palestinians in Israel.

The "fair deal" offered to the Palestinian citizens in the future peace settlement actually makes them pay twice: they are transferred from their homeland through the revocation of their citizenship and denied the right as citizens to fight or change the nature of the Jewish-Zionist state in order to obtain equal rights.<sup>217</sup>

# The Right of Israel to Exist

According to Honig-Parnass, if the right of Israel to exist essentially means the right of an apartheid state to eliminate a significant percentage of its population and deny them human rights, that goal is certainly undeserving. She believes that Israel, its leaders, its intellectuals, and its people must escape the stranglehold of the Zionist narrative that has long prevented any possibility for peace; that Israel must terminate the role it has played and continues to play in serving narrow Western geopolitical interests. But as long as Israel intensifies its aggressive military activity against stone-throwing children, unabashedly imposes on Palestinians, and supports the US call for a total war "against Islamic terrorism," Honig-Parnass and a small, albeit growing number of dissenters from Zionism, sense clearly that Israel will be on the wrong side of history. In the meantime, it faces increasing isolation, if not far greater insecurity.

# THE QUESTION OF JUDAISM VERSUS THE NARRATIVE: Shlomo sand and tom segev

His struggles with Jewish identity have led controversial academic historian Shlomo Sand (1946–) to identify as a "post-Zionist" or "non-Zionist." He believes that Israel should continue to exist, but not because it has an historically justifiable claim to the land.

Tom Segev (1945–), a prolific historian and journalist, sees no existential threat to Israel. He has written critically of Israel's military strategies and its self-defeating, unbending justification of Occupation and manipulation of the history of the 1967 War to promote a false narrative.

Emeritus professor of history at Tel Aviv University, Shlomo Sand has been both profusely applauded and harshly denounced for his perspective on his country and on Judaism, a perspective he admits might be considered illegitimate.<sup>218</sup> In three provocative books that have outraged a significant number of respected Jewish scholars—*The Invention of the Jewish People* (2008), *The Invention of the Land of Israel* (2012), *How I Stopped Being a Jew* (2014)—he has argued that Zionism and its devoted historians have retroactively constructed a myth of a Jewish nation.

Prior to the nineteenth century, the few written histories of the Jews drew connections between the Old Testament and the early Hebrews, but they were not methodical studies by trained historians. And none established direct continuity between the ancient Judeans and the present Jews. Sand contends that neither ancient connection to the Bible nor religious affinity to the biblical land of Israel grant any historical right.

Arguing that the Zionist narrative is based on false historical premises, he refutes many fundamental tenets of accepted Jewish historiography. He asserts that there was no exile in 70 CE; that the Roman Empire did not expel the Judean population; and that most Jews are descended from generations of converts rather than from one ancient ethnic or religious community. Despite the rising popularity of genetic studies, Sand observes that no scientific attempt made to identify a unique Jewish DNA has been successful. This failure is further proof of the diversity of Jewish origins.

With an impressive profusion of historical documents, he searches all the literature available about the Jews through the centuries. He cites documents that record proselytism and conversion, from Flavius Josephus of the late first century CE, to the early Christianized Roman communities, to various Arab tribes, to the Berbers in North Africa, and later to the tenth-century Khazar kingdom.

His research establishes that Jews lived outside the Holy Land for centuries, regardless of their faith and often by choice, as members of the communities in which they lived, whether in Babylonia or Persia or Europe. Jewish Zionism emerged along with strident European nationalism in the late nineteenth century and spurred the political nationalization of the Bible. Zionist leaders used a mythical past, the Kingdom of David and Solomon, to galvanize members of the movement. They purposefully appropriated concepts and symbols from other cultures to build their national narrative. The ubiquitous Jewish Star of David itself is not a Jewish symbol but one originating from the Indian subcontinent.<sup>219</sup>

The Bible was recategorized from theology to history and reinterpreted as a reliable record of past events. Sand quotes Ben-Gurion who, for a politician, was unusually involved in the manipulative revision of history. He repeatedly claimed that "the Bible is the identity card of the Jewish people, as well as the proof of its claim to the Land of Israel."<sup>220</sup> If the Bible records the birth of a Jewish *nation* then history must be shown to illustrate its continuity. The belief in a unified Jewish people was essential to justify the creation of the modern state of Israel. But Sand sees this as extremely problematic and as the root of Israel's irresolvable contemporary and future tragedy.

# Testimony or Tenure

On April 18, 2013, Sand gave a talk in Tel Aviv that was filmed for Israel Social TV just before the launch of *How I Stopped Being a Jew.*<sup>221</sup>

In his talk he confessed that he had waited to obtain tenure at Tel Aviv University before publishing the two "invention" books, because he correctly anticipated the storm of controversy and the attacks on his credibility that would result.

Ironically, until he became an academic historian, Sand had never doubted the axiom that the Jewish nation existed for four thousand years. Through his research, he found the legitimacy of this and other aspects of the Zionist narrative problematic, and he felt compelled to probe more deeply. That resulted in two books, which he recognized were iconoclastic and would be objectionable to many readers. When he wrote the third book How I Stopped Being A Jew, he knew that the title itself was as inflammatory as his intended argument. He contends that the definition of Jewish in Israel is "deeply deceptive, imbued with bad faith and arrogance"222 and that Jewish society in Israel has become intolerably ethnocentric and racist. It has evolved into a closed exclusive caste, which Sand abhors. Jews in Israel today have greater privileges than others living in the same country. Even Jews living in the diaspora, who never set foot in Israel, have more rights and privileges within Israel than non-Jewish Israelis. In this televised talk he asked his audience to imagine the global reaction to a France that decided only Gallic Catholics could be French.

Less historical and more political than the earlier books, *How I* stopped Being A Jew declares his refusal to be a Jew, while fully acknowledging his Jewish ancestry.

The State of Israel defines me as a Jew, not because I express myself in a Jewish language, hum Jewish songs, eat Jewish food, write Jewish books or carry out any Jewish activity. I am classified as a Jew because this state, after having researched my origins, has decided that I was born of a Jewish mother, herself Jewish because my grandmother was likewise, thanks to (or because of) my great-grandmother, and so on through the chain of generations until the dawn of time ... Moreover, and no matter how paradoxical it might appear, according to Israeli law just as according to Judaic law (Halakhah), I cannot stop being a Jew. This is not within my power of free choice. My nationality could be changed in the records of the Jewish state only in the exceptional case of my conversion to another religion.<sup>223</sup> But as an atheist he rejects conversion outright as a possibility because he categorically does not believe in any supreme being.

In deconstructing its nationalist myth, Sand considers Israel a fait accompli that is justified by its de facto existence. Israel's destruction would cause more human tragedy. Although morally indignant at Israel's religious and political nationalism, he cannot cease being a secular Israeli for cultural and linguistic reasons. He grew up in Israel, speaks, reads and writes the language, enjoys its music, art, humor and food, and he cannot undo this identity. That is why, after a turbulent early relationship with his homeland and its politics, after troubling experiences in the military, and a lengthy study sojourn in France, he returned to live there. He regards himself a post-Zionist or a non-Zionist, but not an anti-Zionist.

# **Burdens of Memory**

In the introduction to *The Invention of the Jewish People*, in a section entitled "Burdens of Memory," Sand tells a story about Shulek who was born in Poland in 1910. When Shulek's father died at the end of the First World War, his impoverished mother had to work as a laborer, and their diminished social status effectively deprived them of membership in the synagogue and of any standing in their religious community. Shulek became an enthusiastic revolutionary activist in the Communist Party, which got him thrown in prison, where he spent six years for political sedition. His troubles, however, did not end there.

In 1939 he had to flee Poland, along with his family and so many others, first to the USSR then to Uzbekistan and at some point to Bavaria, Marseilles, and ultimately to Haifa. In Israel he took the Hebrew name Shaul but continued to prefer Yiddish to Hebrew. "He was always much more of a Communist than a Jew, and more of a Yiddishist than a Pole ... In Israel he felt he was stealing other people's land ... at his graveside his old comrades sang 'The Internationale.'"<sup>224</sup> The story of Shulek was the story of Shlomo Sand's father.

Shlomo Sand was born in Austria, in 1946, to holocaust survivors, and spent his first two years in a displaced persons camp near Munich. His family arrived in Israel in 1948 where his father worked in the Jaffa headquarters of the local Communist party as a night janitor. Sand's childhood could not have typically foretold his future as an Israeli scholar. Expelled from high school, he studied electronics by night and worked in a radio repair business and at various odd jobs throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. He was twenty- five years old when he completed high school.

Like all his contemporaries, he spent three years in the military, where his experiences during and after the Six-Day War disturbed him to the point of his briefly joining the revolutionary socialist, anti-Zionist Matzpen in 1968.<sup>225</sup> He received a bachelor's degree in history from Tel Aviv University in 1975 and then continued his studies in France. From 1975 to 1985, he studied and taught French history, and obtained his doctorate for his thesis on Georges Sorel and Marxism at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris. For over three decades, Sand taught at Tel Aviv University, at the University of California, Berkeley, and at the École des hautes études in Paris.

# Deconstructing the Zionist Myth

In his book *The Invention of the Land of Israel*, Sand attempts to analyze the overriding myth of longing for a Jewish homeland over thousands of years. Although a valuable propaganda tool for Zionists—whom he calls the "secular agents of culture"—this narrative was a myth. Throughout their history, Jews have shared nothing other than religion, with diverse linguistic and cultural traditions developed in a variety of host countries. The longing for the Promised Land was part of that shared Jewish religion, and through literature, prayer, and ritual, it became a part of Jewish collective memory. But nowhere in the holy literature was there any aspiration for collective ownership of a territorial national homeland. In religious terms, the Holy Land was intangible and exalted, attainable only after the arrival of the Messiah. "Only then would the living and the dead gather together in eternal Jerusalem"<sup>226</sup> Any attempt to turn it into a physical site was considered a grave transgression.

Lacking a nation, culture, or language, European Jewish nationalists developed Zionism. They needed to turn the biblical theological concept of the Promised Land into an actual and political place, and the Bible was made to serve as a nationalist geography book. The Promised Land was enlisted as an object of Jewish longing and collective memory, but for true believers it eternally belongs to God and therefore the children of Israel were never granted ownership. The "traditional Jewish connection to the area never assumed the form of a mass aspiration for collective ownership of a national homeland."227 The authors of the Bible and the scholars of the Mishnah and Talmud had never been patriots of any place, and religious Jews were never prompted to migrate to the Land of Israel. There were strict rabbinical prohibitions at different times over the ages against settlement in the Holy Land because Jews had to abide by God's ruling of exile. The diaspora as destiny was a prevalent opinion among European rabbis as the Zionist movement was forming. Sand claims that since the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem, there was no historical evidence of any attempts by the Jewish faithful to migrate to that part of the world. Even during periods of great strife and persecution, as in the Babylonian exile, the Spanish expulsion, or the Russian pogroms, Jewish communities did not return to that longed for homeland. While Christians and Muslims had elaborate traditions of pilgrimage, until the emergence of Zionism, there was no institutional encouragement of Jewish pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Promised Land was eternally a spiritual, allegorical place, and any physical ingathering of Jews from exile would be an attempt to hasten the Messiah, against the will of God.

As previously discussed in this book, most of the early Zionists were, in fact, not religious Jews and defied the majority of European rabbis to create a movement. In the late- nineteenth and early twentieth century, the return of a significant number of Jews to Palestine had more to do with Western geopolitics than with any popular spiritual awakening. A multitude of political and colonial considerations motivated the British to accept the concept of a Jewish state, perhaps to foster a strategic asset to their empire. Several other countries, distraught by the prospect of a large number of unassimilated Jews fleeing into Western Europe to escape the Russian pogroms in the 1880s, viewed the prospect of a place for the Jews as a preferable solution. The most critical factor that turned Zionist ideology into a pragmatic reality was the horrifying concurrence of undeniable Jewish persecution in Europe and the refusal of progressive nations to accept Jewish refugees. At the end of the Second World War, available data shows that most Jews apparently preferred migration to America. But this would not serve the interests of the Jewish nationalists in Palestine. Determined to draw more Jews to Palestine, and allegedly

oblivious of the cruel consequences of their actions, Zionist leaders conspired with the US government to refuse their entry. It was not longing for an ancient homeland or biblical promises made to the Chosen People that made Palestine a significant destination for fleeing Jews who could not enter the United States. "Only when the American borders closed in the 1920s, and again after the horrendous Nazi massacres, did significant numbers migrate to Mandatory Palestine," Sand points out.<sup>228</sup>

# A Secular Theocracy

Since its inception, Israel has never been a state for all its citizens. It has excluded much of its population from the culture it has created. "A policy like that of Israel's toward its minority groups who do not belong to the dominant ethnos is rarely found today outside the post-Communist countries of Eastern Europe, where there exists a nationalist right-wing that is significant if not hegemonic," he notes.<sup>229</sup> Sand strongly condemns the idea of Jewish supremacy and the occupation of Palestinian land. He believes that the creation of Israel sought to destroy Palestinian identity, and he advocates equal rights for all citizens. While he does not absolve the Palestinians entirely for their fate, and places blame on Arab states for perpetuating the refugee problem that Israel created, he emphatically does not want to belong to any exclusive club privileged by a supposed Jewish identity.

The Zionist founders were primarily secular and wanted to create a secular state. Yet Israel increasingly considers itself, and demands global recognition as, a Jewish state. A substantial secular Israeli culture developed over the years in the absence of religion, often in opposition to religious constraints. This required a continual balancing act between the secular government, the majority of the citizens who are secular and the increasing political pressure of religious institutions. Outside of Israel it seems that Jewishness is largely defined by one's attitude to Israel: support or repudiation. Sand denounces the idea that Israel must be recognized as Jewish rather than Israeli despite the "maturity of cultural Israelization."<sup>230</sup>

The problem of emphasizing Jewishness over *Israeliness*, which could embrace all citizens of the land and which Sand advocates, is a historically interminable debate over the definition of a Jew. "Since the founding of the State of Israel, secular Zionism has had to confront a

fundamental question to which not even its supporters abroad have so far found an answer: Who is a Jew?"<sup>231</sup> Sand limits the scope of such a question by contemplating the local implication of Jewishness:

To be a Jew in the State of Israel does not mean that you have to respect the commandments or believe in the God of the Jews. You are allowed, like David Ben-Gurion, to dabble in Buddhist beliefs. You may, like Ariel Sharon, eat locusts while keeping a kosher household. You may keep your head uncovered, as do the majority of Israeli political and military leaders. In most Israeli towns, public transport does not operate on the Shabbat, but you should feel free to use your own car as much as you like ... Even on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, children freely play on their bicycles in every courtyard in the city. As long as they do not come from Arabs, anti-Jewish abominations remain legitimate in the state of the Jews.<sup>232</sup>

This is not a satisfying portrayal of religious identity. Therefore, Sand asks, "[How] can individuals who are not religious believers but are simply humanists, democrats and liberals, and endowed with a minimum of honesty, continue to define themselves as Jews?"<sup>233</sup> Israel is not a theocracy, but in seeking to be a "Jewish" state, what is a secular Jew? Can an atheist be a Jew? Can Judaism be secular?

# Tom Segev: New or First Historian?

A prolific historian, author, and journalist whose books have been widely translated and received international admiration, Tom Segev was born in Jerusalem in 1945 to parents who fled Nazi Germany in 1933. He studied history and political science at Hebrew University of Jerusalem and received his doctorate in history at Boston University in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Israel declassified a large number of historical documents, including diaries and letters of prominent leaders and minutes of cabinet meetings. Segev was one of the academic historians who studied these papers, a group known as the "New Historians." But Segev prefers the term "First Historians," as they were the first to write history based on research of actual records of the period, rather than on idealistic propaganda. An important characteristic of the New Historians is illustrated in his book *Elvis in Jerusalem* (2002), in a passage where Segev shares an important auto-biographical inspiration for his historical curiosity.

My father, a Communist who came to Palestine as a refugee from Nazi Germany, was killed in Israel's War of Independence. Each year, on the memorial day commemorating soldiers who died, my mother received a letter from the defense minister.

Regardless of the government in power, a practically identical letter arrived year after year to reassure the families of the fallen that Israel's wars had not been in vain and that Israel was doing everything possible toward peace in the region. But over time, these identical letters began to sound hollow, and he became suspicious of government assurances. He was not alone in his mistrust.

This skepticism characterizes the group of people who have been called, mistakenly to my mind, "the new historians." It would be more precise to call them "the first historians." Because during Israel's early years there was no historiography; there was mythology, there was ideology. There was a lot of indoctrination. When, at the beginning of the 1980s, the first historians were allowed to examine newly declassified documents, they found themselves time and again clutching their heads in amazement.<sup>234</sup>

This was not the history they had been taught. The national myths they had grown up with were being shattered, and it was "unpatriotic" to shatter those myths.

# The First year of Statehood: 1949

Segev and several other Israeli historians,<sup>235</sup> who were given the opportunity to re-evaluate the prevailing national mythology and historical narrative through the declassified material, reached conclusions that initially shocked the Zionist establishment. Much of their work continues to be controversial. The book *1949: The First Israelis* (1986) was the first result of Segev's research. The book concentrates on Israel's difficult transition into statehood one year after its independent status as a nation was granted by the United Nations in 1948.

As in the writings of most Israeli dissenters, the reputation of Ben-Gurion, the uncontested Zionist leader, does not emerge unscathed. The glory of many other mythological heroes of the fledgling state is also moderated. Segev provides several firsthand insights into the thinking of Ben-Gurion and his associates, which guided many questionable future policies. In January 1949, Ben-Gurion is reported to have said: "As for setting the borders-it's an open ended matter. In the bible as well as in our history there are all kinds of definitions of the country's borders, so there is no real limit. No border is absolute." More explicitly, in his diary, he wrote: "Peace is vital-but not at any price."236 This aversion to any geographic limitation being set on the incipient Jewish state by defining clear borders continues to determine Israeli policy to this very day and makes Israel a country not limited by agreed-upon borders. Facts on the ground, such as new Jewish settlements on Arab lands, can and do change the map of Israel without great fanfare or international outrage. After the UN voted on the Partition Plan on November 29, 1947, Ben-Gurion conveyed the idea that the Jewish state of Israel would be realized when the Arabs left. Since many did flee in the violent period between the UN vote and the Declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948, he could cynically proclaim: "Now history has shown who is really attached to this country, and for whom this country is a luxury which is easily given up."237 This was an example of the argument for Zionist gerrymandering that Ben-Gurion and his followers could use to justify their efforts toward demographic purity or, in other words, toward a dependable Jewish majority.

The declassified documents expose predictable turmoil in Israel's first year, the inconsistencies in policies and actions, the multitude of opinions, and the lack of clarity about the national identity of the new state. Segev reflects on previously undisclosed considerations that guided decisions. Some leaders were hoping for integration of Arabs into the state, while others, convinced that the main problems of the future were entirely due to "too many Arabs," were categorically opposed to any such notion.<sup>238</sup>

Ben-Gurion had little concern for the human tragedy of the Palestinians and firmly believed that those who fled should not be allowed to return. He and his associates imposed martial rule to keep those who once fled from returning and sometimes, arbitrarily, to drive others out. This effectively isolated the remaining Arab population from any access to social, political, or administrative support systems that were not channeled through the military, "so that each and every Arab felt his daily dependence upon the military government who was in charge of his area."<sup>239</sup>

Properties abandoned as a result of Arab flight in 1948 were another matter for much debate among the early Zionist leaders. Some proposed that Jewish immigrants be resettled in abandoned villages, others objected to any appropriation. There were those who objected to any measures taken to intentionally damage Palestinian villages. However, as Segev reports, the ultimate winning argument then, as it continues to be today, was that of military security. The destruction of Arab villages had to be carried out to prevent the return of their original residents, who they suspected would undermine the as-yet undetermined essence of the Jewish state.

# Don't Talk About the Holocaust

In another myth-shattering book, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (1993), Segev investigates the relationship between the leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine and Jews fleeing Nazi Europe, before and immediately after the Holocaust. During the early years of the state, public discussions about the Holocaust were not encouraged; it was a highly controversial topic that the Israeli establishment never wanted to air publicly. Thousands of documents and interviews reveal that neither the Jews escaping Europe before World War II, nor the survivors of the Holocaust who arrived later, were entirely welcomed in the new Jewish homeland. Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, in a book review that he wrote for *The Los Angeles Times* on May 23, 1993, acknowledged that while many disturbing truths were revealed, "the chapter about the Israelis' attitude toward survivors is the most painful." The favorable review is aptly entitled "The Land that Broke Its Promise."

Just as the new Israelis were creating an image of a heroic, athletic, defiant Jew, they did not want to come face to face with a weak and pitiful survivor and did not want to claim him as their own. They wanted heroes, not the embarrassing reminder of Jews being proverbially "led like lambs to the slaughter." Segev provides evidence of the shameful scorn directed at Jews who fled persecution and even escaped the death camps, because they waited to leave Europe to the very last moment. They did not come as ideological pioneers to build the country and therefore could not be considered equals in the fight for a Jewish nation. But the silence imposed on the topic of the Holocaust until the mid 1950s was not exclusively due to confronting the shame of their European past; it was also because much of the truth about their policies contradicted Israel's developing Zionist narrative of becoming a welcome refuge for all Jews, a humanitarian democracy, and a light unto the world. In Wiesel's words:

Segev goes on to show, supported by devastating evidence, that later, even as Germany carried out its Final Solution—liquidating one ghetto after another, one community after another—the Jewish leaders of Palestine never made the rescue of European Jews into an overwhelming national priority. We know that Zionist leader Itzhak Gruenbaum, a future Minister of the Interior in David Ben-Gurion's first cabinet, considered creating new settlements more urgent than saving Jews from being sent to Treblinka and Birkenau.<sup>240</sup>

### "Post-Zionism"

*Hatsionim Hachadashim*, which literally means "The New Zionists," was translated into English as *Elvis in Jerusalem* (2002). In it Segev argues that although Zionism achieved many of its goals, it is no longer relevant for a modern, Americanized Israel. He introduces the term "post-Zionism."

As an evaluation of Zionism itself: it means that Zionism has done its job, with notable success, and that Israel must now move on to the next stage. Some see this as a goal and others see it as a threat. There is no easy agreement on who is a "post-Zionist" because there's no easy agreement on who is a Zionist. It's probably even harder to define who is a Zionist than it is to define who is a Jew."<sup>241</sup>

The early Zionist pioneers, who sacrificed their independent aspirations for their idea of the national good, have been altered over

time through persistent cultural friction with American culture in every aspect of life. In the Israel of the twenty-first century, the ideal of collective social solidarity has been replaced by individualism. The first election of Benjamin Netanyahu in 1996 demonstrated the impact of Americanization extending into politics. Segev observes that Bibi "based his career on his television appearances. In this, his election symbolized not only the Americanization of politics but also of the Israeli media."<sup>242</sup> Segev considers the two greatest and often-conflicting influences on post-Zionist Israel to be America and Judaism, the former pushing toward modernization, prosperity and individualism, the latter toward several differing directions of an exclusive and spiritual community. According to Segev in this 2002 book, Israel will find it increasingly difficult to reconcile Judaism with the concept of a modern democracy.

# The Questionable Necessity of War

In his book 1967: Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East (2006), Segev examines the circumstances that led to the pivotal Six-Day War and its political consequences. This was the war that, according to many scholars, completely undermined the argument of security. Like Zeev Sternhell, Segev believes that Israel was not facing any existential threat, however the accepted narrative developed over many years suggests otherwise. The history of that war, he claims, was deliberately exploited to serve the Zionist narrative and justify a never-ending Occupation. "There was indeed no justification for the panic that preceded the war, nor for the euphoria that took hold after it, which is what makes the story of Israel in 1967 so difficult to comprehend."<sup>243</sup>

The build-up to the Six-Day War begins with persistent friction after the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, with many border incidents involving Israel's Arab neighbors. In 1956, Israel, in collaboration with Britain and France, launched its first military attack on Egypt to regain control of the Suez Canal and thwart the shipment of Soviet arms into Egypt. During the 1960s, the Palestine National Liberation Movement, or Fatah, engaged in sporadic attacks against military and civilian targets in Israel. The country was undergoing a severe economic recession; there was a sharp drop in Jewish immigration from European countries and an increase in Jews arriving from Arab countries. A perceptible number of Israelis, mostly well-educated and Ashkenazi Jews, were leaving the country for a better future elsewhere. As more Mizrahi's (Jews from Arab countries) started to arrive, those who considered themselves the core of Zionist Israel were concerned there would be further distortion of the cultural and social imbalances that already existed between the Jewish Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities. The Ashkenazi Israelis didn't want to lose their majority status, their political authority, and their newly formed traditions. Despair and disillusionment with the Zionist dream seemed to be pervasive. "Soldiers home for weekend spoke of dejection and low morale in the army."<sup>244</sup> Rumors abounded of imminent and catastrophic threats to Israel from the surrounding enemies, and even from the Soviet Union. Many Israelis, stoked by a rumor-inflating media, were fearful that the Egyptians and Syrians were planning to destroy the country.

In the eighteen months before the 1967 War, there were about 120 acts, or attempted acts, of sabotage, mostly by Fatah fighters from Syria. Some also came from Jordan. Their targets were "pipelines, water pumps, warehouses, and power plants ... mines on roads, highways and railroad tracks ... The number of incidents rose steadily, doubling between 1966 and 1967."<sup>245</sup> The incidents that resulted in Israeli casualties unsurprisingly incited public calls for retaliatory action, but government response was halted by a consistent impasse between the military and the politicians: The generals always argued for "large scale operations against Syria and Jordan. The Prime Minister and many of his ministers believed in defensive mechanisms, such as fences, ambushes and various electronic devices."<sup>246</sup>

Serious political and strategic deliberations about a response to aggravating tension in the region apparently began in November 1966. But disagreements within the Israeli leadership were, according to Segev, not merely ideological. They were also generational. Most of the military leaders were Israeli-born and younger than the politicians, whom they viewed as "old guard," as Eastern Europeans with a "diaspora mentality." Rabin, the young chief of staff, was concerned that they would "turn Israel into another ghetto" with their fences.<sup>247</sup> The engagement of military force against neighboring Arab countries to defeat terrorism appealed to the action-oriented generals, while the politicians urged restraint. The latter wanted to avoid war or at least to ensure that there was international support for their course of action. They all realized that further expansion of Israel's borders would necessarily involve occupation and annexation of areas with a hostile population. And some believed that would become "a cancer that would gnaw at Israel from the inside."<sup>248</sup> And there was one portentous issue that could only be discussed by the leaders in the strictest confidence: Israel's nuclear capabilities. Shimon Peres, a young but neither military nor Israeli-born budding politician, apparently considered the possibility that Israel could use nuclear deterrence to make border expansion irrelevant.<sup>249</sup>

An upsurge in hostilities between the IDF and the Syrian forces in the months before April 1967 drew attention to the plight of farmers at the border who were prevented by Syrian shelling from working the land in Israeli territory, as well as in the demilitarized zones. On April 7, 1967 the Syrians opened fire on two armored tractors that Israel had purposefully directed to a contested area and that had previously provoked Syrian fire. The Israeli air force responded to the expected Syrian hostility and by the end of the day had shot down six Syrian MiGs. First the media and then the entire country were elated with "the glorious accomplishment," the "Six in One Blow," as expressed by the newspaper *Yediot Aharonot*.<sup>250</sup> Israelis felt invincible.

In May 1967 Egypt expelled UN peacekeepers in the Sinai, amassed its own troops along the border and announced that it would obstruct Israeli access to the Red Sea. Israelis reverted to their former state of extreme anxiety over what they perceived would be an unavoidable war with Egypt. The leaders feared an attack on Israel's nuclear reactor. The government and the military oscillated between prevarication and frenzy and the majority of Israelis, oblivious to most of the internal strife among their leaders, were hopelessly convinced there would never be peace. They were also unaware of the real possibility of a mutiny, of a military coup, by the generals against their vacillating prime minister, Levi Eshkol, who was waiting for approval from the US before taking any action.

On June 4, Israel made the formal decision to go to war. The US goahead was given with one condition: Israel had to appear to be defending itself. The night before the attack, the military censor silenced the Israeli media: the radio only reported enemy action from Cairo, which claimed that Tel Aviv was burning. The rationale for that was: "As long as the world thought Israel was defending itself and fighting for its life, there would be no pressure from the outside to stop the attack.<sup>251</sup> However, once the news of Israel's victory got out, there was unmistakable jubilation throughout the country. They had triumphed over the Egyptian air force and seized the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza. The enthusiastic public response motivated the military leaders to keep fighting against the Syrians and the Jordanians.

Segev follows, in great detail, all the internal negotiations and events that occurred in the days leading to, and in each day of, the Six-Day War. His story reveals a country going through a manic cycle of winning in order to restore hope and purpose to a depressed country. The general euphoria of victory was expressed in statements like: "Not since the state was founded had Israelis been swept up in such a wave of excitement" or "The people are drunk with joy."<sup>252</sup> The Israeli Defense Forces came to represent not merely military strength but heroism, spiritual strength, and moral superiority. One famous Israeli writer, Aharon Megged praised Rabin and his army, which was like no other army in the world: "It is the voice of the true Israeli, a race that has sprung from this country, and it is that race, more than anything, that brought about this victory."<sup>253</sup>

# "They Thought They Had Won"

But then came the reckoning with the cost of the war, which Segev considers in the fourth part of his book. "The military and civilian presence in the territories rapidly mutated into an endless labyrinth of headquarters, commands, branches, departments, units, wings, bureaus, authorities, administrations and outposts...<sup>254</sup> And with the need for separate systems for Sinai, Gaza, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights an extravagant number of civil servants became necessary. Totally unqualified people were lured into positions they were not in the least qualified to fill. The military and civilian entanglement was paralyzing: "Military commanders need to be deployed so that factories producing soap, cigarettes, and arak can get back to work."<sup>255</sup> Economic, financial, security, and administrative problems in the territories had to be worked out. Originally the plans considered were to be short-term, until Israel would decide what it wanted to do with the territories. The possibility of annexing Gaza, as one option under discussion, implied the absorption of 300,000 people. On the other hand giving the Strip back to Egypt was risky because it could be turned into a terrorist base. The territorial commitment that resulted from Israel's grand and swift victory was a prodigious undertaking for which the Israeli leadership could not have been fully prepared.

In the records of various meetings about the situation in the territories after the war, one of the item in the minutes was "events in the Occupied Territories." In a corrected version the same item appeared as "events in the liberated territories." Segev uses this to illustrate the conceptual and pragmatic difficulty the country had created for itself. Once the war was won, most Israelis initially assumed that the territories would be returned for a peace agreement. But at the same time, most believed that the Arabs were not ready for a true peace, which, as Segev concludes "absolved Israel from having to make any decisions."<sup>256</sup> That is the root of the paralysis that continues to grip Israel today.

# **Repeated Mistakes in Gaza**

On December 29, 2008, he wrote an article for the *Ha'Aretz* newspaper entitled "Trying to Teach Hamas a Lesson is Fundamentally Wrong." The assault on Gaza that began on December 27 of that year was, according to Segev, "a replay of the same basic assumptions that have proven wrong time after time. Yet Israel still pulls them out of its hat again and again, in one war after another." Not only does the assault on Gaza deserve moral condemnation, it is also entirely misguided. On the one hand, Israel believes that it can impose a moderate leadership on the Palestinians, which could lead them to abandon their national aspirations. On the other hand, Israel has also always believed that causing suffering to Palestinian civilians would make them rebel against their national leaders. Both of these assumptions have been proven wrong over and over again. "But there is another historical truth worth recalling in this context," Segev reminds us. "Since the dawn of the Zionist presence in the Land of Israel, no military operation has ever advanced dialogue with the Palestinians."

All of Israel's wars have been justified by the claim that we are only defending ourselves, sanitizing the reality that Gaza endures a siege that has destroyed an entire generation's chances of living lives worth living.

Segev recalls for us in that article the plans prepared after the

Six-Day War, which would relocate thousands of families from Gaza to the West Bank. "Those plans were never implemented because the West Bank was slated to be used for Jewish settlement. And that was the most damaging working assumption of all."

# THE NEW HISTORIANS: SIMHA FLAPAN, BARUCH KIMMERLING, BENNY MORRIS, AND AVI SHLAIM

In the 1980s, three decades after the State of Israel was founded, a number of historical documents were declassified. A group of scholars emerged—social and political scientists, historians, anthropologists and economists—who studied these documents, using research methods in their diverse disciplines to reexamine Israel's established history. Their conclusions were not in line with Israel's narrative of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The term "New Historians" was coined in 1988 by Benny Morris to describe the work of these scholars.

Simha Flapan (1911–1987), one of the early members identified in the group, was posthumously included among the New Historians for his lifelong political activism and research. Baruch Kimmerling (1939–2007) was a prolific writer and professor of sociology.
Benny Morris (1948–), the most controversial member of the group, is a professor of history. Avi Shlaim (1945–) is an internationally acclaimed scholar of the Middle East, whose work would not have been possible within the confines of the Israeli academy.

Although the Israeli academic community is overwhelmingly deferential to the Zionist narrative, not a few highly respected scholars have emerged who have been reassessing Israel's official narrative of history or policies. The term "New Historian" is now widely—often disparagingly—applied to refer to any scholar critical of the state of Israel or its policies.<sup>257</sup>

#### Simha Flapan

Born in Poland in 1911, Simha Flapan died in 1987, the year before the term New Historians came into use. But his lifelong work as a writer; researcher, and political activist determined his posthumous membership in this group. Flapan, along with quite a few other Zionist myth busters, began his political activism in the left-wing political party Mapam, of which he was national secretary and director of its Arab Affairs department from 1954 to 1981. In 1957, he founded, edited, and wrote for *New Outlook: Middle East Monthly* in English. Flapan's political growth over time is reflected in his writings. In a *New Outlook* article from 1969 entitled *Zionism, Racism, and the Arabs: A Debate over De-Zionization,* Flapan and Jibran Majdelany, a Lebanese-Syrian socialist, discuss inherent racism in both anti-Semitism and in Zionism. Flapan defends the historical attachment of Jews to their homeland. Although he expresses regret for Palestinian humiliation and misery, he is still captive to the Zionist narrative: "It is no secret that they (Palestinians) want to achieve their own national liberation by destroying Israel and denying the Jew's right to national sovereignty."<sup>258</sup> At the time he wrote this, he thought that a two-state solution, whereby both peoples have a prolonged period of being masters of their own house, is the only way to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In November 1974, as a panelist among prominent Israeli opponents of Israel's inflexible hawkish policies, he was more receptive to the notion of a binational state with shared power. He no longer appeared to fear that the Palestinians would attempt territorial expansion, even if granted the right to self-determination: "the balance of forces-physical, economic and military—is such that it is absurd to fear that expansionist designs will determine the policies of the Palestinian state." Moreover, "there would not be a military danger that Israel could not overcome."259 Flapan went so far as to support the membership of the PLO in the United Nations Assembly and recognition by the Arab league. He believed that such alliances would necessitate greater participation on many levels among nations and make it more difficult for the PLO to remain an outcast terrorist organization. He recommended a foreign policy based on "the idea of neutrality, of integrating in the Third World and in the region, of creating a common market with the countries of the region..."260 This was not a totally new idea but rather a variant of several earlier proposals for regional federation, including that of Avnery's.

# Moral Justification and Historical Necessity

In the preface to his book Zionism and the Palestinians (1979), Flapan defended the original "moral justification and historical necessity of

Zionism ... the urge to create a new society, embodying the universal values of democracy and social justice." However he had come to realize:

Israel's problem today lies in the *disintegration of these values, due largely to the intoxication with military success and the belief that military superiority is a substitute for peace.* Unless the liberal and progressive values of Zionism are restored and Palestinian rights to self-determination within a framework of peaceful coexistence are recognized, Israel's search for peace is doomed to failure. I firmly believe that these trends will ultimately become the deciding force in Israel.<sup>261</sup>

The attitudes of the Zionist leadership toward the Arabs and the Palestinians from 1917–1948 underpinned crucial policy decisions made after 1948 by Israeli leaders who failed to recognize the enduring national aspirations of the Palestinians. This was a major mistake because the tenacious Palestinians "without a state, an army or an economy, are the most important factor among the powerful Arab states … they alone hold the key to real peace in the Middle East." They have become the most vital participant in the search for a solution to the regional conflict.<sup>262</sup>

# Shattering the Mythology

Flapan is best known today for *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*, published in 1987, the year of his death. After the Israeli ministry of defense released Ben-Gurion's *War Diaries*, along with the thousands of other newly declassified documents, Flapan reexamined commonly held opinions about the roots of the Israeli-Arab-Palestinian conflict. He also used unpublished material from Arab sources, including material from Arab friends who had been assassinated for their political activism. He wanted to understand the "propaganda structures that have so long obstructed the growth of the peace forces in my country."<sup>263</sup> The first myth that Flapan debunks is that Israel sacrificed the concept of a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine for the purpose of peace when it accepted the UN Partition Resolution of 1947. His research revealed that it was "only a tactical move in an overall strategy"<sup>264</sup> to thwart the creation of a Palestinian state through a secret agreement with King Abdullah I of Jordan. Hoping to rule over all the lands of Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and

Jordan, Abdullah intended to annex territory allocated to Palestinians in pursuit of his dream of a Greater Syria. The King conspired with the Zionists against the right of the Palestinians to have their own state.

Shattering the most pernicious of seven major myths, Flapan determined that the 1948 War was neither unavoidable, nor imposed upon a vulnerable Israel. The war was senseless in terms of "security," since the Arabs were never "unified in their determination to destroy the newborn Jewish state"<sup>265</sup> but sought to prevent Abdullah's Greater Syria plans and would have preferred to reach an agreement with the Zionists about territory and the future of the Palestinians. The threat to Israel of a massive attack by numerous hostile Arab forces was short-lived, and it quickly became apparent that the Israeli forces were better trained, better equipped, and by far superior. Israel, however, was deliberately portrayed to the world as a little David to the giant Arab Goliath. In order to avoid any responsibility for the ongoing conflict since the 1948 War, Israeli policy makers created mythologies, or "spin," that Israel always acted out of self-defense and was thus entirely blameless.

Ben-Gurion was explicitly complicit in this historical revision and is exposed by the documents to have consistently preferred territorial expansion to any compromise with the Palestinians. Very early in the history of Israel the predominant socialist Zionist aspiration was for a demographically homogeneous Jewish state, with borders extended as far as the nationalist affiliation of the leaders could dictate: The more right-wing the leader, the greater the territory required. Regardless of the ultimate size of the state, the demographic concern necessitated the expulsion of Palestinian Arabs.

The 1948 War resulted in a massive flight of 85 percent of the Palestinians, an estimated 700,000 people, from their lands in what would become Israeli territory. The myth was that all these people left their homes voluntarily, obeying the commands of the Arab leadership who were about to send in the imminently victorious Arab armies. Flapan's research contradicts this myth. He blames the Israeli leaders for encouraging the Palestinian exodus with "aggressive defense" measures, psychological warfare, and intimidation.

The seventh myth continues to reverberate whenever Israel is castigated for any unjustifiable aggression. The myth of Israel's unwavering pursuit of peace is a hypocritical distortion of truth that many historians and academics have since attempted, albeit with no great success, to refute and disprove. The Zionist narrative further posits that the Arabs refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist. Flapan, Chomsky, Reinhart, Avnery, Honig-Parnass, and Tom Segev are just some of the serious scholars who fiercely break with this misleading seventy-year-old justification of the persistent conflict.

Flapan died on April 13, 1987, just as *The Birth of Israel: Myths And Realities* was going to press. In one review of the book "Cleansing the Galilee," which appeared in *The London Review of Books*, David Gilmour writes:

[It is] an old man's mea culpa on behalf of his country and the movement to which he dedicated his life. Realising in old age that he "had always been under the influence of certain myths that had become accepted as historical truth," he decided to investigate them. His book examines the myths that have sustained Zionist propaganda for forty years and destroys each one in turn.<sup>266</sup>

### **Baruch Kimmerling**

Baruch Kimmerling was a scholar and professor of sociology at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, He wrote nine books, hundreds of essays and numerous newspaper articles, for *Ha'Aretz, The Nation* and others. He was also a distinguished research professor in sociology at the University of Toronto.

Born in 1939 in Romania, he arrived in Israel with his family in 1952 after narrowly avoiding the Holocaust by fleeing in a Romani wagon, hiding in the Carpathian Mountains and then spending several years under an oppressive communist regime. His first years in Israel were spent at Shaar Haaliya, a fenced-off, isolated, and crowded absorption center in which immigrants from more than thirty different countries, often traumatized and with cultural and language barriers, were processed.

The camp opened merely fours years after the end of the Second World War and was fiercely debated by policy makers. Surrounded by barbed wire and patrolled by police guards, it was a reminder of internment camps in less friendly locations and profoundly offensive. In the
autobiographical preface to his posthumously published work, *Clash of Identities*, Kimmerling wrote only two terse sentences about the period.

My parents' lengthy "absorption process" into what was then a very poor state brutalized them, but they never complained and never regretted coming to Israel. In spite of their difficulties, they sent both of their children to university and positioned them in the country's upper-middle class.<sup>267</sup>

A mere ten years after his arrival in Israel and despite severe physical challenges caused by cerebral palsy, Kimmerling was accepted into the prestigious Hebrew University's Department of Sociology. Like Zeev Sternhell, Kimmerling objected to the Israeli academic policy of excluding any universal context from the study of Israeli society, which was done to intentionally prevent serious critical comparison with other nation-building achievements. The consequence of this policy was a limitation on both the scope of the research and its validity.

He worked for several years in sociological research on Africa, on the basis of which he earned his master's degree in sociology. During work on his doctoral thesis, he switched focus from agricultural modernization in sub-Saharan Africa to a sociocultural analysis of the Jewish-Arab conflict, a topic that was overly political and considered problematic for the sociology department in those days. Overcoming the hurdles to the academic approval of his chosen area of research, his doctorate was granted in 1975.

When he restarted the exploration of issues that had interested him since high school, he acknowledged the benefit of the global perspective he had gained as a result of his earlier focus on Africa. At that time there was little, if any, academic material available outside the official narrative: "Issues concerning the Arabs of Israel were conceptually excluded from the syllabi of the Israeli Society courses and hardly mentioned in textbooks." He had long relied almost exclusively on Uri Avnery's publications for any critical thinking or contradictory opinions. Over time, his own research:

... raised doubts and concerns about the ability of the mainstream Israeli social sciences and historiography to free themselves of

Zionist ideologies, the nation-building mindset, and their degree of Jewish ethnocentrism when dealing conceptually and theoretically with "the other" and "the conflict," within the social and conceptual boundaries of "Israeli society," however defined.<sup>268</sup>

# The Making of the Palestinian People

In 1993, the year of the Oslo peace accords, Kimmerling and Joel Migdal co-wrote *Palestinians: The Making of a People*<sup>269</sup> contending that the Palestinians acquired national self-awareness over an extended course of contact first with Europeans and later with Zionists. The authors trace the beginnings of political unity in Palestine to the 1834 collective armed uprising of Arab peasant classes against restrictive policies imposed by the ruling regional dynasty. Beginning in the twentieth century, the effective Zionist colonization of the region reignited the concept of a shared Palestinian existential and national identity. Kimmerling and Migdal disprove the stock Israeli claim that the Palestinians were never a unified nation and defy Golda Meir's fatuous declaration that "the Palestinians did not exist." The coauthors' second book, *The Palestinian People*, concludes::

The making of a people is not a volcanic experience coming out of a singular critical moment ... Palestinians faced extraordinary hurdles in fashioning their national story ... lack of a state framework, the statelessness that became their mark ... the lack of clear boundaries ... Israeli rule and the continued dispersal of many Palestinians outside Palestine.<sup>270</sup>

#### Land Acquisition

Kimmerling's earliest book, Zionism and Territory: The Socioterritorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics,<sup>271</sup> analyzed land acquisition by the Jewish settlement in Palestine pre-1948 until the 1960s. Using only Israeli sources, he discovered that a "purification" of the land, or "ethnic cleansing," had for a long time been committed by Jewish military and paramilitary sources.

About 350 Arab villages were "abandoned" and their 3.25 million dunams of rural land confiscated ... from 1882 to 1948, all of the

Jewish companies and private individuals in Palestine, including the Jewish National Fund, an organ of the World Zionist Organization, had succeeded in buying only about 7 percent of the total land in British Palestine. All of the rest was taken by sword and nationalized during the 1948 war and after ... Israel is the only democracy in the world that nationalized almost all of its land and prohibited even the leasing of most agricultural lands to non-Jews, a situation made possible by a complex framework of legal arrangements.<sup>272</sup>

This established what Kimmerling calls Israel's massive colonization enterprise, which effectively began at the end of the nineteenth century with the initial dispossession of Arab land.<sup>273</sup> Kimmerling underscores a clear pronouncement of the strategy that was famously made by Israel's soon-to-be-first president: "At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, Chaim Weizmann, the president of the World Zionist Organization, stated that the Zionist goal was to make sure that 'Palestine becomes as Jewish as England is English.'"<sup>274</sup>

A 1980 United Nations report, *Acquisition of Land in Palestine*, corroborates that incremental seizures of Palestinian land had been going on for decades. Purchase of land was:

... replaced by less orthodox methods and the Palestinians' abandoned land and other property was simply seized by the Jews ... The Land Acquisition Law also authorized the State of Israel to take over abandoned land and property, which had not been the practice before this law was enacted ... the methods and practices of the occupying power are harsh and excessive ... they sometimes go as far as systematic repression. And the Israeli authorities who continue to be the occupying power in the Arab and Palestinian territories are also guilty of this practice, which is that of all colonial and occupying powers. By its very nature, occupation involves repression.<sup>275</sup>

Jewish ownership of the land of Mandatory Palestine increased from 7 percent in 1948 to 78 percent by 1967, according to multiple Jewish and international sources. According to Kimmerling, the land strategy of the state of Israel aspired to unimpeded growth of illegal settlements and was bolstered by discriminatory practices. Whereas Jewish settlers were granted preferential access to water, land, and security arrangements, Palestinians were manifestly treated as second-class citizens under a military rule that deprived them of most citizen and human rights, and stole their lands. This undemocratic dichotomy continues today.

## Asymmetrical Interdependence

In the chapter entitled "Nationalism, Identity and Citizenship" of *Clash of Identities*, Kimmerling relates an exchange between A.B. Yehoshua, an Israeli writer and at that time a self-proclaimed leftist, and Anton Shammas, a Christian-Israeli-Arab writer who in 1985 accused Israel of excluding Palestinians from participation in the "political, cultural and collective identity and nationality:"

"I am suggesting to you," shouted Yehoshua, "that if you want to exercise your full identity, if you want to live in a state that has a Palestinian character with a genuine Palestinian culture, arise, take your chattels, and move yourself one hundred yards eastward, into the independent Palestinian state, that will be established alongside Israel"... Shammas angrily responded that "I have no any intention to leave my motherland and my father's home, for the country Yehoshua will show me."

The same argument between the two writers resumed in 1992 when they debated the concept of an Israeli state. Shammas argued:

Judaism and Israeliness is a different matter. That's why I advocate the de-Judaization and de-Zionization of Israel ... I'm asking you for a new definition of the term "Israeli," so that it will include me as well, a definition in territorial terms that you distort, because you're looking at it from the Jewish point of view ... You want me to vote for the Knesset so you can show off your democracy to the enlightened world. I'm not willing to be a party to that. I know that all I can do here is to vote and nothing else. I know that my mother would never be able to see me become Israel's Minister of Education.<sup>276</sup> As good a novelist as he might be, Yehoshua has not been known to seriously contest the Zionist narrative.

The Palestinians have accepted discrimination and the denial of most of their human, civil and political rights for many decades. They have been deprived of the basic right to self-determination. "A relative passivity toward, and even cooperation with, the occupation on the part of a generation of Palestinians created a long and unique period of *permanent temporariness.*"<sup>277</sup> Although both Palestinian and Israeli societies grew to perceive the asymmetrical reality as normal, a genuine popular insurgency began on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1987, and challenged this complacency. Kimmerling writes that this First Intifada "was mainly characterized by mass demonstrations and stone throwing by youths at Israeli troops stationed in Palestinian cities and refugee camps."<sup>278</sup>

#### **Power Culture**

A sociologist by training, Kimmerling describes Israel political culture as a power-oriented culture mixed with existential anxiety.

A sense of permanent siege and potential annihilation in a hostile, gentile world of anti-Semites ... along with an awareness of their country's status as a military power, with one of the best-equipped and trained armed forces in the region ... The new Israeli—as opposed to the Jew of exile, shaped and disdained by Zionist ideology and mythology—is first and foremost a warrior.<sup>279</sup>

The 1967 War, which practically every historian of Israel agrees is pivotal in the regional conflict, reinforced the warrior image. This war proved Israel's military superiority and more importantly, according to many critics of the Zionist narrative, also advanced the creation of a militarized, neoconservative, crypto-fascist Israel and fortified religious extremism. "The scope, the ease, and the speed of the 1967 victory were perceived even by secular persons as a sign of divine grace and the supremacy of the Jewish presence in the region."<sup>280</sup> Jewish Israeli political right nationalists and their affiliated settler movements proclaimed religious entitlement to the land of Israel's post-1967 boundaries, which included the entire area of colonial Palestine and the Golan Heights. Arabs residing inside the extended borders, however, were a major problem: if the conquered land was to be formally annexed, the demographic majority of Jews would be threatened. Ariel Sharon, Israel's eleventh prime minister from 2001 to 2006, was a perfectly timed agent of destruction, according to Kimmerling.

What before Sharon was considered unthinkable ... has now become even in the post Sharon era an explicit and respectable issue in mainstream Israeli political discourse—the removal of Arab citizens from the state as a legitimate solution to Israel's "demographic problem."<sup>281</sup>

Sharon had one major goal: the dissolution of the Palestinians as "a legitimate social, political and economic entity." But such a goal could not be attained without the destruction of the "Jewish entity as well, because the two are so completely interdependent..."<sup>282</sup> Kimmerling observes that, since 1967, Israel has [ruled] "over millions of Arabs lacking all civil and most basic human rights" It did not annex the territories because that would require granting the population the rights of a citizen to vote or be elected. Nevertheless, "Israel has freely used all the material and human resources of the territories as if they belonged to the Jewish state ... The laws of Israel have become the laws of a master people and the mortality that of lords of the land."<sup>283</sup>

The Israeli government had no clear plans for the territories but Sharon began establishing "facts on the ground," in contravention of the 1907 Hague Convention which states: "occupying powers will act as temporary managers ... the creation of permanent facts on the ground is not permitted."<sup>284</sup>

Kimmerling describes Sharon as a power-oriented megalomaniac who bullied his way through the military and political ranks by repeatedly manipulating the cabinets he served. Manipulation was "a skill he had developed into an art form during his active military career, using false reports about the battlefield and taking advantage of the Cabinet members' inability to read maps."<sup>285</sup>

Sharon's infamy began in 1953 when, as an officer on Jordanian territory, he and his soldiers massacred 69 Arabs, including 46 women and children. The most dishonorable and horrific chapter of Sharon's military career was the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, in which hundreds of Palestinians in refugee camps were murdered by Lebanese militiamen, with Israeli connivance. The Israeli government initially attempted to downplay both the gravity of, and its own culpability in, this dreadful episode. A commissioned inquiry concluded that Sharon bore a major part of the responsibility, and he "was considered to be politically dead wood from a moral and even a legal point of view."<sup>286</sup>

# Sharon Rises Again

A deeply divisive and polarizing figure, Sharon manipulated the political and demographic changes in Israel to rise again and become prime minister. Kimmerling attributes Sharon's implausible landslide political victories in the 2001 and 2003 elections to extreme tribal developments and a power vacuum. Israel's collective identity is composed of two parts in perpetual and irresolvable conflict: the primordial or tribal part is a mixture of religious and nationalistic orientations, and the civil part is based on concepts of universal and human rights. The tribal momentum on the right had no counterbalance from a fragmented left. In 2000, before he became prime minister, Sharon provoked the Second Intifada by brazenly walking into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, among the holiest sites in Islam. Palestinians became increasingly bitter as the consequent number of military raids increased, and the curfews, closures, and targeted killings by Israelis continued relentlessly.

In an interview with *Ha'Aretz* on August 30, 2002, Sharon's chief of staff, Moshe Ya'alon compared the existential threat from the Palestinians to cancer: "There are all kinds of solutions to cancerous manifestations. Some will say it is necessary to amputate organs. But at the moment I am applying chemotherapy."<sup>287</sup>

"Politicide is a multilevel process," which Kimmerling believes "is not necessarily anchored to a coherent socio-military doctrine." Sharon and his followers have been aiming for the destruction of the Palestinian public sphere, its leadership and social and material infrastructure ... "to make everyday life for the Palestinians increasingly unbearable by destroying the private sphere and any possibility of normalcy and stability."<sup>288</sup> His conclusion is unavoidably bleak: "Without a reconciliation between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the contemporary Jewish state will become a mere footnote in world history."289

#### **Benny Morris**

The most controversial of the New Historians, Benny Morris' story is crucial to the collective narrative of dissent. Born in a Kibbutz in 1948 to immigrants from England, Morris served in the military from 1967 to 1969. He studied history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and received his doctorate from Cambridge, eventually becoming a professor of history at Ben-Gurion University. As a journalist for over a decade, he covered the war in Lebanon in 1982 and was an active reservist during the siege of Beirut.

His investigation into the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem began when, as a correspondent in the 1980s with access to Israeli government archives, he collected data from the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the PMO, the Defense Ministry and the IDF. He also studied documents in British, American and United Nations archives. He found evidence of undisclosed expulsions and atrocities that had been committed by Jewish soldiers before, during, and after the 1948 War, and revealed his findings in: *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*, published in 1987.<sup>290</sup> The book was a momentous cornerstone work of the New Historians and definitively contradicted the official Zionist narrative.

Morris claimed that 600,000–760,000 Palestinians, or Are we using numbers? Make consistent throughout text. 60 percent of the population, fled their homes to escape Israeli military assaults or out of fear of impending attacks and expulsions. The book provides detailed chronological accounts of the Arab exodus from Jewish-held parts of Palestine during the nineteen-month period from December 1947 to July 1949. Shattering the myth of the most moral military force in the world, the book meticulously describes brutalities such as documented rapes by Israelis and about two dozen massacres and executions committed by Jewish forces during this period.

The book includes a map of 228 abandoned Palestinian villages, from the upper Galilee to the Negev, along with the relevant reasons for the residents' flight from each. Morris contested the claim that there was a "centralized expulsion policy" or any official plan of transfer but conceded that the Israeli high command did order expulsions on an ad hoc basis, as they considered necessary.

## Patriot or Renegade?

In 1988, in a defiant demonstration of support for the Intifada caused by what he perceived at that time to be deplorable injustices to the Palestinians, he refused to comply with the call for further reserve duty and spent three weeks in jail. Because of his insubordination to the military and public challenge of the established Zionist narrative, he was fired from his position as a journalist at *The Jerusalem Post* and not offered any university position.

When the New Historians first began publishing their findings, they were denounced and attacked by mainstream Israeli intellectuals and by the media as being anti-Semites or worse—"Arab Lovers." Morris had attained some international prominence—and notoriety within Israel—as a controversial, albeit meticulous, historian when he declared in a 1996 news interview his intention to leave the country. The idea of any Israeli, let alone a person of some acclaim, leaving the country permanently was considered appalling. Such a public declaration was unheard of, and at that time any Israeli planning to forsake his country did so in shameful secrecy. The verb used to describe such a departure is "*yerida*," or descent. To prevent this from happening, and after confirming that Morris was in fact a patriot, Ezer Weizman, the president of Israel, reportedly intervened to secure his current position at Ben-Gurion University.

1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians<sup>291</sup> is a collection of —essays about Israel's policies during and after the mass Arab exodus from Palestine in 1948. Morris used the extensive data he had collected to analyze the exodus and the policies to deport inhabitants of Arab villages, such as Al-Majdal, which was bulldozed by the Israelis after its people had been transported. Morris also examined initial attitudes to Palestinians who became refugees in Arab countries. The first essay, "The New Historiography: Israel and its Past," questions the legitimacy of the old, official, and ideologically motivated historical narrative and considers the differing historical perspectives between the "old" and the "new" historians. It is a strong response to the general disparagement of the New Israeli Historians by the Israeli academy.

#### **Righteous Victims**

Morris' ambivalence toward the conclusions he himself had come to in his earlier scholarship surfaces in his massive tome, Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001.292 This book was provocative for the "old" as well as for the "new" historians. Most readers presumed that the book intended historical objectivity by attempting to equally allocate victimhood, presenting both sides as interchangeably culpable for the ongoing suffering of their people and for their inability to reach any resolution. But a few years after the book was published, in an interview with Ha'Aretz on January 8, 2004, Morris dispelled this presumption by announcing that he no longer gave equal weight to two "righteous victims." While not denying Jewish anti-Arab racism, hostility and sense of superiority toward the Arabs, in this book Morris seemed reluctant to condemn the early Zionists who, after centuries of persecution, were justifiably desperate to create a homeland. He also attempted to vindicate the Israeli government's subsequent policies of aggression as primarily retaliatory or defensive. In the chapter entitled "1949-1956: The Missed Peace and the Sinai War," Morris described the nightmare Israel faced at the end of the 1948 War, which it won: "It was surrounded by hostile states ... The Arab minority, 150,000 out of a total population of 850,000-900,000, was justly regarded by the Jews as, at best, an unknown quantity, and at worst a potential fifth column."293 The invasion of Egypt by Israel during the 1956 Sinai War, supported by the United Kingdom and France, instigated a change in Arab policy:

If the destruction of Israel was not the Arab policy before, after 1956 it most certainly was ... the political will to belligerence had vastly increased in the Arab world as a result of Israel's collusion with the ex-imperialist powers and the onslaught against Egypt.<sup>294</sup>

For the New Historians and other contemporary scholars of the Middle East, the ending to Morris' *Righteous Victims* was contentious and baffling: high praise for the Zionists.

So far the Zionists have been the winners in this conflict ... the success of the Zionist enterprise has been nothing short of miraculous ... in defiance of increasing Arab opposition and violence?

And condemnation of the Palestinians ... the Palestinian rejection of the far-reaching Israeli-American peace proposals of December 2000 and January 2001 and their unleashing of the second "al-Aqsa" Intifadah ... bode ill for the prospect of an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement anytime soon ... If there is one thing that the past teaches, it is this: That Palestinian violence has repeatedly helped trigger full-scale Israeli-Arab wars; and that the region is prone to slide into these wars despite the wishes of its states' leaders.<sup>295</sup>

# A Major Reversal

At the beginning of 2004, Morris was preparing a revised version of *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* and a Hebrew version of *Righteous Victims.* He published several articles in the *Guardian* and gave an extensive interview to *Ha'Aretz* Magazine.<sup>296</sup> Morris claimed that his readers had completely failed to understand his book on the Palestinian exodus. He declared that his commitment to Zionism had always been unwavering and that he had been misinterpreted. He had written the books as a historian and had never condemned the actions of the Zionists. And yet in the *Ha'Aretz* interview, he reaffirmed the veracity of the historical details in his books and even added to the compendium of brutality he had previously reported: the rapes, the massacres and arbitrary killings, and the deportations. When the interviewer Ari Shavit asked him explicitly about one incident of expulsion he responded:

There is no doubt in my mind that this order originated with Ben-Gurion ... Of course. Ben-Gurion was a transferist ... Ben-Gurion was right. But he should have completed the job: my feeling is that this place would be quieter and know less suffering if the matter had been resolved once and for all. If Ben-Gurion had carried out a large expulsion and cleansed the whole country—the whole Land of Israel, as far as the Jordan River.

The most shocking comment from this interview is:

There are circumstances in history that justify ethnic cleansing. I know that this term is completely negative in the discourse of

the 21st century, but when the choice is between ethnic cleansing and genocide—the annihilation of your people—I prefer ethnic cleansing..

Did Morris awaken to sudden patriotic guilt, succumb to a lifetime of Zionist pressure, or to professional university policy constraints, or did he perhaps want to stand out from the growing albeit minute crowd of intellectual dissenters, we cannot know. We do know that he never refuted his own earlier conclusions, but put a completely different and outrageous spin on them.

In a follow-up article he wrote a few weeks later for *Ha'Aretz*,<sup>297</sup> Morris confessed that his pro-Zionist transformation began in 2000 with Arafat's "rejection" of the Ehud Barak-Clinton peace proposals: Arafat "rejected the proposals because he and his people want the entire country." Morris identified the Palestinian struggle as "part of the global struggle being waged by jihadist Islam against the 'Western Satan,' with Israel being a vulnerable extension of Western culture in our region." These jihadists deserved the name "barbarians" and should be locked up in a cage. Morris seems to have allowed the demons of his own and nationalist prejudices to take precedence over his scholarship.

## The Last Words?

After *Righteous Victims*, Morris continued to write about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and increasingly aligned himself with the traditional Zionist narrative. In three decades he published an impressive total of nine books. In 2012, in another interview with *Ha'Aretz*, he proclaimed that he would write no more about the conflict. He also conceded that in some of his harsh denunciations against the Palestinians:

I may have gone a little overboard. I think that I wasn't careful enough in choosing my words, although I still stand behind what I said. I said that the Palestinians should be put in a cage so they won't be able to get here to place bombs in buses and restaurants. The word "cage" did not go over well and perhaps it was the wrong word to use ... Massacres are always reprehensible, but the Jews behaved much better than other nations in similar circumstances.<sup>298</sup> Benny Morris' turnaround became a conundrum for many historians and intellectuals. In the *The Electronic Intifada* in January 2004, Baruch Kimmerling concluded:

Benny Morris turns to his own prejudices and stereotypes of the Islamic and Arabic culture that happen to be fashionable and well fit the present moods of the Israeli-Jewish and some parts of Western political culture since the September 11 calamity. But the historian is not just a part of the collective mood and expresses it, he also provide historical and intellectual legitimacy to the most primitive and self-destructive impulse of a very troubled society.

New Historian Avi Shlaim wrote:

Where no evidence is available to sustain the argument of Arab intransigence, Benny makes it up by drawing on his fertile imagination ... His post-conversion interpretation of history is old history with a vengeance. It is indistinguishable from the propaganda of the victors.<sup>299</sup>

Shlaim dedicates a chapter in his book *Israel and Palestine* to examine "Benny Morris and the Betrayal of History." Shlaim writes that after the 1993 Oslo accords, he was cautiously optimistic, as was Benny Morris. Subsequently, their interpretations of the collapse of this historic compromise differed.

For Benny the principal reason ... is Palestinian mendacity; for me it is Israeli expansionism. Israel's protests of peaceful intentions were vitiated by its policy of expropriating more and more Palestinian land and building more Jewish settlements on this land.<sup>300</sup>

Ilan Pappé argued that Morris has held "racist views about the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular" since the late 1980s.<sup>301</sup>

Scholars of the Middle East conflict who were not affiliated with the New Historians also commented. Some criticized: "Morris's contradiction of himself ... is not unusual. His "objective" analysis falls victim to his need to justify Zionism."<sup>302</sup> Some praised: "In *Righteous Victims*, Benny Morris writes with clinical dispassion. While that makes for a less lively narrative, it also makes for a more responsible and credible one."<sup>303</sup>

Many were baffled: Ari Shavit, the *Ha'Aretz* journalist who interviewed Morris in 2004, said: "At times citizen Morris and historian Morris worked as though there is no connection between them, as though one was trying to save what the other insists on eradicating."<sup>304</sup>

#### Maybe Not Quite the Last Words from Benny Morris

In a new study entitled *The Thirty-Year Genocide*, Morris and coauthor Dror Ze'evi, deal with a genocide that lasted from 1894 to 1924 in Turkey. Harvard University Press will publish the book in April, but an interview with reporter Ofer Aderet appeared in *Ha'Aretz* on January 18, 2019. Despite having left the "Jew and Arabs nonsense" behind, Morris had some salient comments about the Israeli leadership and the future of Israel.

Speaking about Netanyahu, and "...the public corruption that he backs or even embodies," Morris added, "I also do not accept his antidemocratic remarks about Israel's Arabs. His actions in the area of religion, the expansion of the settlements and the definition of Jewish nationality are alienating American Jewry, most of whom scorn Orthodoxy and extreme nationalism."<sup>305</sup>

Morris predicts a weakening of the relationship between the US and Israel because he expects Trump's downfall, and because of "Bibi's total identification with that fool and scoundrel."

There's no need to say that many Jews in America point to a similarity between Trump and Bibi in terms of their attitude toward the law and the gatekeepers. Unintentionally, Netanyahu is working at several levels to bring about the collapse of the ties between Israel and American Jewry and to subvert U.S.-Israeli relations.<sup>306</sup>

Morris' dystopian vision of Israel's future might shed some light on the turnaround spin on his original findings. It also reflects the widespread fears of a brainwashed society that encourage militant leadership and see no other possible solutions. Morris is a historian and cannot be expected to provide a revolutionary solution to end the brutal cycle of Israeli policy. He can only derive his conclusions from the past and from the reality of the society he inhabits.

This place will decline like a Middle Eastern state with an Arab majority. The violence between the different populations, within the state, will increase. The Arabs will demand the return of the refugees. The Jews will remain a small minority within a large Arab sea of Palestinians, a persecuted or slaughtered minority, as they were when they lived in Arab countries. Those among the Jews who can, will flee to America and the West.<sup>307</sup>

#### Avi Shlaim

Born in Iraqi in 1945, British-Israeli historian, Avi Shlaim is emeritus professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford and a fellow of the British Academy. He studied history at Jesus College, Cambridge, earned his master's in international relations from the London School of Economics, and his doctorate from the University of Reading. In 1987 he moved to Oxford has lived in England ever since.

Shlaim has written extensively about the Middle East<sup>308</sup> and in 2006 he was elected Fellow of the British Academy (FBA), the United Kingdom's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. In 2017, he was awarded the British Academy Medal "for lifetime achievement."

#### From Magic Carpets to Mules

Shlaim was born in Baghdad into an affluent Jewish family with strong ties to the Iraqi leadership including the pro-British prime minister, Nuri al-Said. Before he was born, in May 1941 Churchill sent British forces to invade Iraq and subsequently depose the Iraqi government. Iraqi Jews were suspected of colluding with the British and became targets of nationalist riots.

Prior to the 1940s, most Iraqi Jews were uninterested in Zionism, and considered themselves Arabs of Jewish heritage. Iraqi-Arab suspicions of a Zionist-British conspiratorial connection were fueled by the emergence of Israel in 1948 and the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. As of the mid 1940s, Iraqi Jews began to lose their civil service positions but were restricted from emigrating to Israel for fear they would further encourage anti-Arab policies. There was, however, counter pressure within Iraq to force the Jews out and an escalation of attacks against them to encourage their departure. Some historians claim that Zionists were among those interested in forcing the Jews to flee. By 1953, 120,000 Iraqi Jews departed, leaving only ten thousand in the country.

Shlaim's father was among many thousands of Jews who registered to leave the country in 1951. They were then required to surrender their Iraqi citizenship and forfeit all their rights, including property rights. His father, purportedly, crossed the border illegally on a mule, while Shlaim, his mother, and sisters flew to Cyprus. The family reunited in Israel, but at sixteen Shlaim was sent to a Jewish school in England. After serving in the Israel Defense Forces in the mid-1960s he moved back to England in 1966.

## The Iron Wall

In his 2001 book, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, Shlaim refutes the overriding Israeli ideology of right-wing Zionism that has pressed upon Israel's policies since the creation of Israel. This ideology, as well as the book's title, originates in an essay about the colonization of Palestine and agreement with Arabs written in 1923, in Russian, by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the founder of the extreme right-wing Zionist Revisionist Party. The essay begins with Jabotinsky's firm commitment to the principle of equal rights and a binding oath to eject no one from Palestine. But then the author turns his assurance on its head by asking "whether it is always possible to realize a peaceful aim by peaceful means." He claims that "the answer to this question does not depend on our attitude to the Arabs; but entirely on the attitude of the Arabs to us and to Zionism."<sup>309</sup> The essay attempts to prove:

There can be no voluntary agreement between ourselves and the Palestine Arabs. Not now, nor in the prospective future. I say this with such conviction, not because I want to hurt the moderate Zionists. I do not believe that they will be hurt. Except for those who were born blind, they realised long ago that it is utterly impossible to obtain the voluntary consent of the Palestine Arabs for converting "Palestine" from an Arab country into a country with a Jewish majority.

## Jabotinsky therefore concludes that:

Zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population—behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach ... The only way to obtain such an agreement, is the iron wall, which is to say a strong power in Palestine that is not amenable to any Arab pressure. In other words, the only way to reach an agreement in the future is to abandon all idea of seeking an agreement at present.<sup>310</sup>

Jabotinsky and his followers were not interested in forging agreements or peaceful solutions; they believed that the only way to build a Jewish majority in Palestine was by demonstrating unremitting military superiority to provide, at best, deterrence power.

Shlaim completely disagrees with the creed of an iron wall, which has reemerged as the guiding doctrine of Israel's increasingly hawkish political leadership. Over the past seven decades extreme militant thinking sporadically transitioned into the mainstream but has ultimately produced a leadership intractably dedicated to fortifying the country militarily at the expense of serious negotiation toward peace. Shlaim tracks the obstacles created by Israeli politicians who opposed every measure that might limit Israel to definite boundaries. To avoid any compromise, they had to indefinitely delay practicable efforts for peaceful resolution indefinitely and foster a façade of earnest determination to achieve peace. To this end, they indulged in obfuscation, machination and outright deception.

In the Epilogue to *The Iron Wall*, Shlaim claims that Benjamin Netanyahu, among other leaders of Revisionist Zionism, actually bypassed the intended legacy of the founder of their movement from the right. Jabotinsky's strategy of the Iron Wall was to provoke despair among Palestinians at the prospect of driving the Jews out of Palestine and thereby force them to negotiate from a position of weakness. According to Shlaim, writing in 2001, Netanyahu's leadership undermined much of any good work done by his more moderate predecessors—such as Rabin—and took Israel into confusion and disarray "that was without parallel in the country's history."<sup>311</sup>

# The Shot that Shattered Reconciliation

The most persistent and broadly disseminated narrative of the right wing had been that a fragile Israel was vulnerable to the masses of hostile Arabs surrounding them. Rabin challenged this myth in 1992 when he won the election by declaring: "No longer are we necessarily a people that dwells alone ... and no longer is it true that the whole world is against us."312 The Declaration of Principles for Palestinian self-government in Gaza and Jericho negotiated in Oslo and signed in the US in 1993, with the historic handshake between Rabin and Arafat, might have led to a genuine breakthrough that would change the course of history. The more comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement, or Oslo II, was signed in 1995 despite opposition and protests. But extremists on both sides, says Shlaim, did everything to undermine the agreement, and negotiations toward implementation of the Oslo Accord were obstructed by irreconcilable visions of the future: Rabin proposed a gradual withdrawal from parts of the Occupied Territories to ultimately permit the establishment of some undetermined Palestinian entity, while Arafat clearly aspired to a sovereign state with East Jerusalem as its capital. And the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank prevented any substantial progress toward resolution.

The shots fired at a peace rally on November 4, 1995<sup>313</sup> by an Israeli right-wing messianic extremist ended the life of Itzhak Rabin, and his ill-fated vision. Shimon Peres became prime minister for six turbulent months of uncontrolled political blows: of a targeted assassination of a Hamas leader by Israel, of Palestinian elections, of several Palestinian suicide bombings, and of an anti-terrorist campaign against Hizbullah. This campaign in southern Lebanon became known as Operation Grapes of Wrath and spiraled into a political, military, and moral calamity. It was a sophisticated high-tech overreach of Israeli air and artillery assaults against Hizbullah that resulted in the flight of 400,000 Lebanese refugees from southern Lebanon and the dreadful killing of 102 refugees at a UN base in Qana.<sup>314</sup> Since this happened under his leadership, Peres lost any legitimate claim to the position of a peace promoter. He also had the distinct disadvantage of being older and much less energetic than his political rival, Benjamin Netanyahu, and inevitably lost the election to the Likud in May 1966.

## On Netanyahu

According to Shlaim's analysis: "Binyamin Netanyahu was not as bad as he seemed when he stood for the election to the top post in Israeli politics on 29 May 1996. He was much worse."<sup>315</sup> Years later, in 2018, Shlaim observed:

Netanyahu has radically reconfigured Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, rather than a Jewish and a democratic state. As long as the government that introduced this law stays in power, any voluntary agreement between Israel and the Palestinians will remain a pipe dream.

What is striking about Netanyahu is that in the course of his long political career, his views have hardly evolved at all. Yitzhak Shamir, the hardline Likud leader and prime minister, described Netanyahu as "shallow, vain, self-destructive, and prone to pressure." Shamir maintained that peace is an illusion because whatever the Arabs may say in public, their real aim will always be to throw the Jews into the sea. His favourite saying was "the Arabs are the same Arabs and the sea is the same sea." Less well known is his remark that "the sea is the same sea and Netanyahu is the same Netanyahu."<sup>316</sup>

## Legitimacy of the State

In the introduction to his book Israel and Palestine, Shlaim states:

The [1948] UN resolution provided an international charter of legitimacy for the Jewish state. True the Arabs were not responsible for the barbaric treatment of the Jews ... most Arabs consequently felt that the gift of part of Palestine to the Jews was illegal. However, a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly by a large majority cannot be illegal. It may be unjust but not illegal ... what is legal is not necessarily just.<sup>317</sup>

Many argue that international law today would not accept the legality of the UN giving Israel the land of the Palestinians. And Israel has not made meaningful diplomatic efforts to ascertain the minimum conditions for peaceful coexistence. It has consistently depended on military force to establish its superiority and uphold the mantra of "might is right." Therefore the Middle East has for many decades been held hostage to the vagaries of Israel's internal politics. On the world stage, says Shlaim, public debate about Israel is fierce and partisan, leaving little space for the dignity of difference.<sup>318</sup>

# BATTLES IN ACADEMIA, THE PRESS, AND THE COURTS: ILAN PAPPÉ, GIDEON LEVY, AMIRA HASS, MICHAEL SFARD AND ALLIES

Ilan Pappé (1954–), a "new historian" activist, and prolific writer, asserts that Israel's policies toward the Palestinians constitute "ethnic cleansing" and argues that Zionism is more dangerous than Islamic militancy. He has collaborated on many publications with Noam Chomsky.

Journalists Gideon Levy (1953–) and Amira Hass (1956–), both of whom have been reporting on the conflict for several decades, are widely recognized for their unrelentingly brave voices. They have been reviled by the Israeli Right for humanizing the "enemy." Michael Sfard (1972–) is one of Israel's most highly recognized and respected human rights lawyers.

#### Activism in Academia: Ilan Pappé

Arguably the most relentless current New Historian, Ilan Pappé graduated from Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1978. In 1984 he received his doctorate in history from the University of Oxford, working with Albert Hourani and Roger Owen. His doctoral thesis became his first book, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, one of close to twenty works published since 1988.<sup>319</sup> Pappé was a senior lecturer in political science at the University of Haifa from 1984 to 2007, a member of Hadash, Israel's Communist Party, and a candidate on that party's list for the 1996 and 1999 Knesset elections. He left Israel for a professorship at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom and became the director of the university's European Centre for Palestine Studies, and co-director of the Exeter Centre for Ethno-Political Studies.

In 2017 he published two books: *Ten Myths About Israel* and *The Biggest Prison on Earth*, which he dedicated to Palestinian children, killed, wounded, and traumatized by living in the biggest prison on earth.<sup>320</sup>

#### Leaving the Country

An outspoken Israeli academic with views contradictory to the mainstream Zionist narrative, Pappé drew unwelcome public attention in Israel. Before he left the country in 2008, he had been condemned in the Knesset for his research; a minister of education argued that he should be fired for his unacceptable opinions; his photograph appeared in a newspaper at the center of a bull's eye target; and he received several death threats. At one point Pappé was in the foreground of a very public feud between the University of Haifa and an MA student named Teddy Katz.<sup>321</sup>

Relying primarily on oral testimony by over one hundred survivors, Katz had presented his thesis to the university in 1998. The work documented killings that occurred in the Arab villages of Ein Razal, Um el Zeinat, and Tantura in 1948. The veterans of the military unit alleged to have committed this killing sued to have the thesis disqualified. Although Pappé was not Katz's thesis supervisor, he became prominent in defending Katz after court proceedings that led to a suspension of Katz's approved and granted degree, were initiated in 2000. In an interview with Meron Rapoport, Pappé explained his intervention in the case: "No one in Israeli academia came to my aid. So then I turned to the outside."

No one came to his aid. Why should they? He's a master's student. They're professors. What do they care? After I sat here and transcribed the tapes—I sat here for 60 hours transcribing, and I know Arabic two or three colleagues changed their mind and helped. But they didn't endanger their careers. I knew that when I went to help Katz, I would get it in return. But I didn't know how much ... Teddy Katz suffered a stroke because of this university. He almost died. And a master's degree student shouldn't almost die because of a university. So it will be a little uncomfortable for the university. So what?<sup>322</sup>

Pappé was sufficiently incensed by the treatment of Katz to write the following email:

Sent: Monday, November 19, 2001, 11:26 PM To the president of the American Historical Society To the president of the British Middle Eastern Society To the president of the American Middle Eastern Association Dear madam\sir,

I appeal to you as a member and as a colleague, to voice your opinion and protest against a shameful decision taken by Haifa University on November 18, 2001. On that date, the university decided to disqualify an MA thesis that has originally passed cum laude in the department of Middle Eastern History. I attach my article in the Journal of Palestine Studies that describes the chronicles of this sad affair, and I beseech you to read it so that you can be updated with the events surrounding this thesis.

The article describes how the student revealed in his thesis the occurrence of a terrible massacre a Jewish military unit committed in the Palestinian village of Tantura on the night between the 22ed [sic] and the 23rd of May. This was probably one of the worst massacres in the war. The veterans of this unit have exerted pressure on the university to disqualify the thesis and succeeded in doing so, by that trampling the very elementary freedoms of academic research and expression. This may not come to you as a surprise given the present atmosphere in Israel, a consensual nationalist and jingoist mood, and yet the Israeli academia depends very much on the opinion of your members and association (if not for anything else, you are badly needed for the completion of promotion and tenure procedures). You can not possibly allow them to evade the basic rules of decency and honesty even when the issue at hand is the Palestinian catastrophe, the history of which has bearings on the present conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Your intervention and assistance would be most welcome and appreciated at these dark hours when Israeli academics can not find in themselves the courage to remain loyal to the basics rules of academic research and freedom.

Yours sincerely, Dr. Ilan Pappé Department of Political Science Haifa University Haifa 31905 Israel<sup>323</sup> The Tantura thesis incident was neither the first nor the last associated with Ilan Pappé to exasperate the academic establishment in Israel. Along with several other anti-nationalist Israeli academics, he endorsed the international cultural and academic boycott of Israel. In 2002, during the Second Intifada, Palestinian organizations and academic institutions, supported by similar groups in Europe, Australia, United States, and United Kingdom, called for a boycott that would force a change in Israel's oppressive policies toward the Palestinians and grant Palestinians academic freedom. Pappé has long recommended a reevaluation by international tribunals of Israel's conduct in 1948 because he believes that no reconciliation is possible without recognition of war crimes and collective atrocities. This cannot be done from within Israel, as the Israeli press overwhelmingly avoids references to expulsions, massacres, or crimes of any kind committed in 1948. The Israeli media, academia, the educational system, and political circles deny publication to critical analysis to prevent what they perceive as self-hate and service to the enemy in times of war. Therefore Pappé hoped the international boycott movement would confront the silence of Israeli institutions and provide the Israeli public with a more complex understanding of their own history.

The boycott gained momentum as Israel began construction of the West Bank Barrier Wall in 2004 and governments of "enlightened" countries refused to condemn Israel's unending occupation. The movement grew and evolved into the current Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS). In *Ten Myths About Israel*, Pappé states that "the popularity of the BDS movement reflects the frustrations of those societies with their governments' policies toward Israel."<sup>324</sup> Before Pappé made this observation, Tanya Reinhart in 2005 had written an article about the crucial role of the grassroots in the boycott movement. Since Israel ignored or defied the ruling by the International Court of Justice in The Hague in 2004 to immediately dismantle parts of the wall built on Palestinian land, Reinhart asked: "What can be done when the relevant institutions do not succeed in enforcing international law? The boycott model is drawn from the past: South Africa … [the] boycott began as a grass-roots movement …

Pappé left the University of Haifa in 2007 when his known support of international resistance to the Israeli Occupation, led the president of the university to call for his resignation. As a guest at the Qatar Foundation in Doha in March 2007, Pappé gave an interview to Qatar's leading English-language newspaper, *The Peninsula*, and a few days later Israel's *The Jerusalem Post* reviewed the interview about his imminent exile and reported his critical comments. Pappé asserted that it had become "increasingly difficult to live in Israel" with his "unwelcome views and convictions." He explained:

I was boycotted in my university and there had been attempts to expel me from my job. I am getting threatening calls from people every day. I am not being viewed as a threat to the Israeli society but my people think that I am either insane or my views are irrelevant. Many Israelis also believe that I am working as a mercenary for the Arabs.<sup>326</sup>

Pappé had come to the conclusion that it was not possible for two independent states to coexist in Palestine and the only solution was the creation of a single state to be shared equally by all who live there, a binational state for Palestinians and Israelis. But, with an increasingly oppressive Israeli government, such a solution was far from imminent.

Long before Pappé, Zionists and non-Zionist Jews were searching for a solution that would have, in effect, created a single state: Ahad Ha'am, Martin Buber, Albert Einstein, and even Hannah Arendt. Pappé elaborated on his contemporary, but similar, response to this persistent problem in an interview conducted in 2015 by Khalil Bendib on *Status Hour*.

This is a struggle between a settler-colonialist movement, which arrived in the late nineteenth century in Palestine and still tries today to colonize Palestine by having most of the land with as few of the native people on it as possible. And the struggle of the native people is an anti-colonialist struggle ... If you would suggest today as a progressive person that you should divide South Africa between the white population and the African population, you would be regarded at best as insane, and at worst as someone who is insincere and a fascist. I think the fact that this logic—which is so clear to many people on any other place in the world—somehow fails to work in the case of Palestine.  $^{\rm 327}$ 

## Bastion of Academic Freedom or Marketing Tool?

In the introduction to *The Idea of Israel*, Pappé refers to a debate held at Tel Aviv University in July 1994 that drew an unanticipated crowd of around seven hundred. The question discussed: "Was the Israeli academy an ideological tool in the hands of Zionism or a bastion of free thought?" Many of those attending the event had already been questioning the freedom of the academy to address the moral consequences of Zionism and were eager to challenge the confining narrative of Israeli historians. This debate apparently provided the impetus for the book in which, Pappé claims, he is primarily concerned with "those Israelis who share the critical view and harbor doubts about the idea of their state … Doubting Israeli Jews have displayed their concern mainly through academic work, but also through movies, poems, novels, and the plastic arts."<sup>328</sup>

As more research done by the New Historians initially was published and became known, there were reverberations inside and outside of academia; critical views of Zionism seemed to appear more frequently in the Israeli cultural domain, in literature, in the theatre, and in the spatial arts. As Pappé says, "Collective memory and moral self-perception are closely linked, and it is no wonder that the ... critique on the past triggered a public debate." The open dissent, however, goaded retaliation from the mainstream who vehemently attacked Israeli critics of Zionism as being Holocaust deniers, Nazi collaborators and haters of Israel. Their work was condemned as "typical intellectual maneuver by self-hating Jews in the service of the enemy."<sup>329</sup>

Public debate by Israeli historians over Israel's ethical history was muted after the "glorious victory" of 1967, which produced a nationwide euphoria and an overwhelming conviction that Israel was divinely blessed. Although several persistent historians continued to protest the occupation of Palestine and the government's blatant colonial endeavors, the classical Zionist gatekeepers in universities and the media successfully thwarted their objections. And, as successively more extreme right-wing governments took power, an even harsher, more militant, and self-righteous Zionism appeared endorsing the settler movement and the dogma of what Pappé calls "neo-Zionism."<sup>330</sup> He explains this as a simple and coherent ideology that could unify a polarized Israeli society by a vision of a religious and nationalist Jewish society; a society that would exclude all non-Jews.

## Zionism as More Dangerous than Islamic Militancy

In *The Biggest Prison on Earth*, Pappé asserts that Israel's military and political leaders had already been concerned about how to govern occupied Arab areas since 1948. This preoccupation surfaced again in 1956 following the attempt to depose Egyptian President Nasser, in cooperation with France and Britain. It rose to become a pivotal issue following the conquests of 1967. Potential military governors and legal administrators of Occupied Territories were provided with comprehensive instructions about governing, information about the Geneva and Hague conventions, and documents in Hebrew and Arabic explaining emergency regulations. Among these were: Regulation 109, allowing the governor to expel the population; and Regulation110, giving the right to summon any citizen to a police station whenever the governor saw fit. Another infamous regulation was Regulation 111, which sanctioned administrative arrest for an unlimited period, with neither explanation nor trial.

The policies Israel decided to impose on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967 have remained the same to this day and resulted in the expulsion of half of the native population; the destruction of villages and towns; and the appropriation of 80 percent of Mandatory Palestine by the Jewish state. These were considered survival policies for the State of Israel and based on two principles: (1) the Jewish state must control as much land of historic Palestine as possible; and (2) Israel must reduce the number of Palestinian Arabs residing in it. In The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, Pappé writes that the population problem had already been recognized as a major issue for the early Zionists in the late- nineteenth century. As early as 1895, Herzl had proposed a solution: "We shall endeavor to expel the poor population across the border unnoticed." And in 1947, Ben-Gurion reaffirmed the underlying principle: "There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent." In 2003, Netanyahu reaffirmed: "If the Arabs in Israel form 40 percent of the population, this is the end of the Jewish state

 $\ldots$  But 20 percent is also a problem  $\ldots$  the state is entitled to employ extreme measures."  $^{\rm 331}$ 

Pappé argues that the expulsions of Palestinians since 1948 constituted the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Contrary to the Zionist narrative, this strategy was not decided on an *ad hoc* basis, when security considerations required strong measures, but in accordance with a plan explicitly drawn up in 1947 by Israel's future leaders. Plan Dalet provided directions for the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians from the areas the Zionists wanted for the Jewish state. The inability to achieve peace in the Middle East is attributable to policies that violate international humanitarian law and that were conceived by the leaders of Israel, commencing with "the heroes of the Jewish War of Independence … with the indisputable leader of Zionist movement, David Ben-Gurion."<sup>332</sup> For Pappé, Zionism is more dangerous than Islamic militancy, and its sinister objectives were conceived before the state of Israel was established.

#### The Holocaust

Given that the Holocaust is an extremely sensitive and provocative topic, few Israeli academics have chosen to dispute the state-sanctioned narrative of it. Pappé, nevertheless, tackles it boldly. In *The Idea of Israel*, an entire chapter, "Touching the Raw Nerves of Society: Holocaust Memory in Israel," is dedicated to analysis of this inviolable topic.

As he states at the outset: "The protection of the Holocaust memory in Israel from any critique is consensual and widespread." But Israel cannot really be understood without an examination of the connection between the state's narrative of this collective memory and the unjustifiable treatment of the Palestinians. Pappé discusses several prominent Zionists who have questioned the cynical exploitation of the Holocaust by Israel for domestic and international political purposes. Among them Nahum Goldmann, founder and president of the World Jewish Congress, in the 1970s, and Avraham Burg, a religious former Speaker of the Knesset (1999–2003) who unambiguously expressed his concern in the title of his 2008 book, *The Holocaust Is Over: We Must Rise from its Ashes.*<sup>333</sup>

Pappé references Jews outside the mainstream of Israeli Zionism who have attempted scholarly analysis of the incongruity of the Holocaust as justification for injustice. One important voice is that of Norman Finkelstein, who studies the deliberate use of the Holocaust by Israel. Finkelstein, a Jew born in New York to parents who were Holocaust survivors, wrote The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering.<sup>334</sup> He claims that the representation of the Holocaust was "fraudulently devised ad marketed to the American public ... to justify criminal policies of the Israeli state and US support for these policies." Finkelstein finds it repulsive that despite being a formidable military power, Israel "casts itself as a victim state and thus garners 'immunity to criticism.""335 Pappé also cites Idith Zertal, who wrote Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood, about Israel's illegitimate use of the Holocaust for its political ends and simultaneous consecration of the Holocaust as a narrative that conformed to Zionist ideology. The introduction to Zertal's book pays homage to Hanna Arendt for understanding the danger of extreme nationalism and for predicting the distortions that would ensue from a manipulative use of the Holocaust. Zertal condemns the Israeli establishment for nearly four decades of delay in translating into Hebrew Arendt's incisive book on the Eichmann trial.<sup>336</sup>

Among the scholars who have attempted to expose the disingenuous use of the tragedies of the Second World War, Pappé includes Tom Segev and his book *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust.*<sup>337</sup> Segev presented the fervent early Zionist leadership as interested exclusively in those Jews from Europe who were willing and able to move to Palestine. In the 1930s, the leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine were either naively blind to the perils of Hitler's rise or consumed entirely by their enthusiasm for Zionism. Ben-Gurion said: "Zionism bears the obligation of a state; it therefore cannot initiate an irresponsible battle against Hitler."<sup>338</sup> The Jewish community in Palestine struck an agreement with the Gestapo not to support a worldwide boycott of German goods so that Jews of Germany could bring their possessions into Palestine. Ben-Gurion is quoted as explaining:

If I knew that it was possible to save all the children in Germany by transporting them to England but only half by transporting them to Palestine, I would choose the second—because we face not only the reckoning of those children, but the historical reckoning of the Jewish people<sup>339</sup>

# Ten Myths About Israel

In one of his most recent books, *Ten Myths About Israel*, Pappé deconstructs the Zionist narrative that he believes prevents Israel from facing the realities of the regional conflict. Many of the other dissenters in this book have also rebuffed the same claims and the endless repetition of historical distortions and disinformation that thwart any possibility of resolution. The title of each chapter in Pappé's book is a myth fully accepted and promoted by Israel and its Zionist supporters but completely unreliable and largely disingenuous:

- 1 Palestine was an empty land.
- 2 The Jews were a people without a land. In this section Pappé reflects on the question raised by Shlomo Sand (Chapter 8), namely whether the Jews in Israel are "authentic descendants of those who lived in the Roman era" and whether Israel "represents all the Jews in the world."<sup>340</sup>
- 3 Zionism is Judaism: A complex relationship developed between the Jews and the Zionists. "The early Zionist wanted both to secularize the Jews and to use the bible as their justification for colonizing Palestine."<sup>341</sup>
- 4 Zionism is not colonialism.
- 5 The Palestinians voluntarily left their homeland.
- 6 The June 1967 War was a war of "no choice": In the Israeli narrative, the Arab world was on the point of going to war, and Israel's attack was justifiable self-defense.
- 7 Israel is the only Democracy in the Middle East.
- 8 The Oslo mythologies: It was a genuine peace process, and Arafat intentionally undermined it.<sup>342</sup>
- 9 The Gaza mythologies: Hamas is a terrorist organization, and the "war" on Gaza was justifiable self-defense.
- 10 The two-state solution is the only way forward.

# The Biggest Prison

In *The Biggest Prison on Earth*, Pappé deals with the system Israeli leaders created for Gaza in June 1967, and that still exists today. It has become an entrenched reality that is practically impossible to dismantle. Since Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, these areas could not

be recognized as part of the state of Israel, by international law. The population could not be expelled, and Israel would not consider them equal citizens of the Jewish state. In Pappé's words:

There was a need to keep the territories, not to expel the people in them, but at the same time not to grant them citizenship. These three parameters or presumptions have remained unchanged to this day. They remain the unholy trinity of the consensual Zionist catechism.<sup>343</sup>

So Israel turned Gaza into a prison, stripping its citizens of basic human and civil rights. It used the pretext of security to convince the world that strict military control was required to prevent terrorist attacks by the violent Gazans. Even non-extremist Israelis became convinced of this reiterated misrepresentation.

The second article of the UN 1945 Charter states: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations." Israel violated this by acquiring land for the flagrant purpose of annexation. Its aggressive actions against the residents of the Occupied Territories were rarely criticized by other governments or institutions, and continued unimpeded because they were conducted under the ludicrous pretense of Israel's right to defend itself. Pappé claims that ethnic cleansing, or in more sanitized terms, "downsizing the population," of the Occupied Territories was an unswerving objective of successive governments after 1967. The Israelis characterized the first decade of the occupation as a decade of opportunities for peace destroyed by the Palestinians. The reality was quite different: a decade of occupation and military rule that imprisoned them and turned them into lawbreakers and offenders, regardless of their actions.

The Israeli courts, including the Supreme Court, participated in the violation of international law by legalizing the continuous expropriation of land without offering any compensation to the victims. Pappé calls this "the charade of an enlightened occupation." For the Palestinians, resistance has not been an option. Any individual defiance invariable resulted

in more punitive imprisonment. A variety of decrees and regulations that impaired the lives of the Palestinians and further limited their space were frequently imposed. The "Bureaucracy of Occupation" systematically flexed its muscles to prove its power and control, by employing measures as brutal as:

[House demolitions], the destruction of their rural infrastructure the uprooting of olive trees and the ruination of crops; and probably the most sinister of all in this list of evils, the redirection of water away from their towns and villages, in many cases to the benefit of Jewish settlements (which, after the Intifada, sold that water for a higher price back to the Palestinians from whom the water had been stolen in the first place).<sup>344</sup>

It also put in place an intricate arrangement of checkpoints that prevented freedom of movement, placing the lives of Palestinians entirely at its mercy. At a talk Pappé gave entitled "Viewing Israel-Palestine through the Lens of Settler Colonialism," he stressed the importance of:

... analyzing what's happening in Israel as settler colonialism that can sometimes resort to genocide, sometimes resorts to ethnic cleansing, and quite often resorts to a charade of peace that provides it a shield of immunity from any genuine rebuke and condemnation in the global community. <sup>345</sup>

## The Real Victims

Israelis are competitive victims and like to claim that designation entirely for themselves; Pappé has never accepted that misappropriation. He has described the Israel-Palestinian conflict as: "The story of a victim and a victimizer. And the victim is the Palestinians."

The situation in the Gaza Strip as it is currently administrated is clearly unsustainable, but Israel has no apparent plan or intention to change the unendurable reality it has created. In the 2019 leadership race, there has been no demonstrated inclination to change course. No potential leader emerged with ideas about how to end the elaborate and monstrous institutionalized cruelty Israel has maintained in Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian areas since 1967. Israel's foremost ally, the US, along with other Western governments, is more alarmed that any criticism of Israel be regarded anti-Semitic than about righting some of the wrongs committed by Israel's policies. Pappé, with his distinguished academic credentials and platform outside of Israel is among the few dissenters who can draw attention to the urgent needs of the Palestinians.

## Activism in the Press: Gideon Levy and Amira Hass

Within Israel perhaps the best-known and widely read writers about the Palestinian plight are two journalists, Gideon Levy and Amira Hass, who are either admired or reviled, and have attained international recognition for their work. Both write for *Ha'Aretz* on subjects related to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, on the abuses of human rights inflicted on the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and on conflict-related politics of the region.

# Gideon Levy

Born in 1953, Levy joined *Ha'Aretz* in 1982. He became a writer of political editorials for the newspaper and author of the weekly "Twilight Zone" feature, which has covered the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza since 1988. His book *The Punishment of Gaza* was published in 2010, seven years before Ilan Pappé wrote *The Biggest Prison on Earth*. The intense military attack named "Operation Cast Lead," launched in December 2008, was the immediate catalyst for Levy's book, but he had traveled to Gaza many times before then for his reports about the occupation.

In the introduction to his book, he partially explains his decades-long compulsion as a journalist to focus on the Israeli occupation and its consequent cruelty: "When a paralyzed Palestinian mother lost her only child to an Israeli missile ... this is when I'm ashamed to be Israeli. This horrible missile was launched in my name too."<sup>346</sup> Despite the ban imposed by Israel in November 2006 on live reporting from Gaza, denying Israeli reporters access to Gaza, Levy kept in touch with his contacts there and continued to record the tragic saga of the world's greatest unofficial prison as it unfolded.

Levy has been the recipient of many honors, predominantly international but several also within Israel, for his heroic critical writing that is independent of the restrictive Zionist narrative. Among his awards: he shared the Swedish Olaf Palme Prize in 2016 with Palestinian pastor Mitri Raheb for their "fight against occupation and violence"; in 2012 he received the Peace through Media Award given in London by the International Council for Press and Broadcasting to celebrate high standards of Middle East Journalism; in 2008 the Euro-Med Journalist Prize; in 2001 the Leipzig Freedom Prize; in 1997 the Israeli Journalists' Union Prize; and in 1996 The Association of Human Rights in Israel Award.

## A Country with no Moral Compass

In one of his many televised interviews, Levy said that when he started covering the West Bank for Ha'Aretz he was a young and brainwashed Zionist. In those days, when he saw settlers cutting down olive trees or soldiers mistreating Palestinian women at the checkpoints, he considered these incidents as exceptions, rather than deliberate government policy. Eventually he had to accept that he was witnessing a punishing persistent reality. Although he has received multiple death threats and has been accused of being a propagandist for Hamas, Levy defines himself as a "patriotic Israeli" who is ashamed of Israel's mistreatment of Palestinians. As Levy sees it, Israel has lost its moral compass and become impervious to the injury it continues to inflict by its policies. He describes Israel as a violent, unrestrained country that blatantly ignores international law and repeatedly defies UN Security Council resolutions. He has warned Israel of becoming occupation-addicted, calling the country's fifty-year-old illegal military occupation of Palestinian land "criminal," "brutal," and "rotten." As well, he has criticized US politicians and lawmakers for their ignorant support.

In an article entitled "AIPAC is Destroying Israel," he harshly condemned the so-called "lovers of Israel" for the damage they have inflicted on Israel.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee may be the organization that has caused the greatest damage to Israel. It corrupted Israel, taught it that everything is permissible to it. It made sure America would cover up and restrain itself over everything. That it would never demand anything in exchange. That Uncle Sam would pay—and keep mum. That the supply of intoxicating drugs would continue. America is the dealer, and AIPAC the pusher.<sup>347</sup>

One recommendation he made was giving US politicians a tour of the Palestinian Occupied Territories, especially Hebron. He proposes that anyone who doubts that Israel oppresses the indigenous Arab population should spend just a few hours in Hebron, an occupied city in the West Bank. No honest human being could visit Hebron without being shocked and disgusted. Armed Israeli settlers live in the center of the city and Palestinians must travel on separate roads, which are patrolled by Israeli soldiers. Many of these roads are covered by large nets, above which the settlers and their families live. The gratuitous humiliation includes settlers dropping objects such as dirty diapers—even urinating—from their windows above.

Levy's powerful, intense descriptions of Israel's illegitimate activities reverberate throughout his writing. In one chapter of *The Punishment* of Gaza, entitled "Quiet: We're Shooting," he rails against deplorable policies enacted in 2006: "It is not legitimate to cut off electricity to 750,000 people ... It is not legitimate to kidnap half of a government and a quarter of a parliament. A state that takes such steps is no longer distinguishable from a terror organization."<sup>348</sup>

Levy describes the construction of Jewish settlements on seized private Palestinian land as the most criminal enterprise in Israel's history, and he supports unilateral withdrawal from the Occupied Territories without concessions. This cannot be negotiated because Israel is not being asked to give anything to the Palestinians. It is only being asked to return stolen land and restore dignity, self-respect, and fundamental human rights to people who have for too long been deplorably treated. In an article entitled *The Sadists Who Destroyed a Decades-old Palestinian Olive Grove Can Rest Easy*, Levy denounces the nasty vandalism perpetrated frequently by Israeli settlers on a defenseless population.

Who are the human scum who last Friday drove all-terrain vehicles down to the magnificent olive grove owned by Abed al Hai Na'asan, in the West Bank village of Al-Mughayyir, chose the oldest and biggest row, and with electric saws felled 25 trees, one after another? Who are the human scum who are capable of fomenting such an
outrage on the soil, the earth, the trees and of course on the farmer, who's been working his land for decades? Who are the human scum who fled like cowards, knowing that no one would bring them to justice for the evil they had wrought?...No one will be arrested, no one will be interrogated, no one will be punished. That's the lesson of past experience in this violent, lawless, settlers' country.<sup>349</sup>

## One State or Two?

When he started his reporting career Levy supported the two-state solution, but now he believes it is untenable. Like so many of his compatriot dissenters who challenge the Zionist narrative, he now adamantly supports a one-state solution for all who live there. In response to the elections that were to be held in 2019, he wrote:

Fifty years of continuous failure and it's like nothing. Nothing has been learned, nothing has been forgotten. Israel is going under and going crazy, proceeding toward its own demise, and nothing changes ... How is it that no politician has been weaned from this nonsense? How come these good old boys never grow up? How is it that a supposedly courageous army chief of staff is too cowardly to suggest or even hint at anything new, something else, something that hasn't yet been tried? Something that would truly inspire hope?<sup>350</sup>

He later added that: "At a time when the two-state solution has become irrelevant, no one has arisen in either party to propose an alternative."<sup>351</sup> For Levy, an alternative is clear.

The breaking point is the point at which it becomes clear that the two-state solution is dead. One can argue over whether that moment has already arrived or whether it's merely approaching rapidly, but there's no doubt that this solution is in terminal condition, either dying or dead ... The conclusion is unavoidable. If there's no longer any chance for two nation-states, there's no longer any room for the left to talk about Zionism. There are only two alternatives to two states—an apartheid state or a democratic state, which would be binational. Zionism bears no relation to either of them.<sup>352</sup>

Levy despairs that Zionism "has reached the end of the road. It's

no longer an ideology, but a fanatical religion, and religions permit no heretics. A non-Zionist is a traitor—soon to be enacted in legislation."<sup>353</sup>

## A Public Argument with a Former New Historian

In January 2019 in a series of articles in *Ha'Aretz*, Gideon Levy and Benny Morris debated "the past, the present and the future" of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Morris remonstrated with Levy that, regardless of the violence inflicted on Jews throughout their history in the region, Levy always casts the Jew as the aggressor and the Arab as the victim. Morris accused him of "buying" the Arab narrative; of ignoring the historical connection of the Jews to the land of Zion and the imperative of a safe haven for Jews escaping brutality. Morris conceded:

It is true that the current Israeli leadership has rejected the idea of two states for two peoples, and therefore it is increasing settlement in the territories—and that is one of the reasons that I would be happy to see the government of Benjamin Netanyahu fall ... I never supported Netanyahu, whose habits only disgust me.

Yet Morris objected to the description of the Israeli occupation as a military dictatorship, one of the cruelest in the world. By comparison to Syria, Iran, and other Islamic regimes, according to Morris, Israel's treatment of its enemies is practically benevolent. Echoing the official government narrative, he maintains that the Palestine Liberation Organization refused to make peace and threatened to wipe Israel out. Morris still believes in the two-state solution, with territorial partition, "the only basis for a solution that would provide a measure of justice to the two peoples." But he adds:

I have always had my doubts over the degree of realism of a partition of the British Mandate-ruled Land of Israel in such a way that the Jews get 78 to 80 percent of the territory while the Arabs make do with 20 to 22 percent. Even if there would be Palestinians who would sign such an agreement, the Palestinian people, led by Hamas and Fatah, would roundly reject such an agreement, and it would not be long for this world.<sup>354</sup> But then Morris disagrees strongly with Levy's idea of a one-state solution because we are not sitting in a café in Paris or London:

We live in the jungle of the Middle East, surrounded by such successful countries as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Saudi Arabia; in short, by Muslim Arab countries that are far from embracing the values of democracy and tolerance and liberalism.<sup>355</sup>

Morris demonstrates the inherent bigotry that underlies so much of the Zionist narrative when he declares that the Palestinians are Arab, and not Norwegian. Therefore, a one-state solution would end up in anarchy and chaos, and ultimately, an Arab majority eager to chase the Jews out. Since the Jews are more prosperous, hostility against them is inevitable, according to Morris. As millions more Palestinian refugees will seek to return, Jews will be increasingly marginalized and eventually kicked out. The dystopia he presents leads to only one possible outcome.

The occupation regime will continue to function. The Arabs will suffer and the Jews will also suffer (although a bit less). And maybe Levy is right and this could go on for another 100 years, although I have my doubts. At the end of the process, the one state will take shape. The Jews will control it until international sanctions and Arab rebellion and pressure from the neighbors overcome them. Then there will be a state with an Arab government and a shrinking Jewish minority...This 24<sup>th</sup> Arab state will join the Arab League. The State of Palestine will slowly sink into the Middle Eastern sand alongside its neighbours after the oil reserves in the Arabian Peninsula have been consumed.<sup>356</sup>

Gideon Levy's rebuttal appeared in the English version of *Ha'Aretz* on the same day. Levy persists in describing the Israeli occupation as intentionally cruel. "Where else are there, for over fifty years, nightly raids on homes in which citizens, including children, are snatched from their beds? In what other democratic country are there millions of people without citizenship?" Levy's response to Morris' rationale for a doomed two-state solution calls out the racist bias of his assumptions.

But when you are an ultranationalist racist, certain that you are facing inferior savages, there is nothing to talk about...and the conclusion is that the apocalypse awaits. How convenient: There's no hope, so there's no need to fight for anything. We can continue to abuse and to wait for the bitter, unavoidable end ...

True, they're not Norwegians. And we, Benny Morris? Are we Norwegians? Is our corruption Norwegian? The religious rule? The ignorance? The roads? The occupation? The day we become Norwegians, when we treat the Palestinians equally and justly, you might be surprised. They too may become Norwegians, if that's what you wish for.<sup>357</sup>

### Harmony as Possibility?

In an opinion piece about Israel's recent election choices, Levy elaborated on this theme of imaginable coexistence.

... The Palestinian Israelis are among the most loyal of minorities. Most of their representatives in the Knesset are excellent lawmakers. They're not acting to "destroy" the state, it's the right wing that's doing this. There is virtually no political violence among Israeli Arabs, immeasurably less than the violence of the Jewish settlers. Despite a past of military rule and a present of discrimination, unending abuse against their brethren and racism against them, most continue to believe in coexistence.<sup>358</sup>

Any optimism about an imminent resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is elusive and unsustainable for most Israelis, particularly for those whose lives are dedicated to documenting its reality. But Gideon Levy continues his thankless and relentless mission of jarring the conscience of his fellow citizens.

### Amira Hass

Amira Hass began reporting from the Occupied Territories in 1991. A journalist and author, she has won enormous credibility among many Israelis because she is the only Jewish Israeli journalist who has actually lived full-time among Palestinians, in Gaza from 1993 and in Ramallah from 1997. Writing for *Ha'Aretz* on Palestinian affairs in the West Bank and Gaza, she has published two books on life in the Occupied Territories: *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*<sup>359</sup> and *Reporting from Ramallah*.<sup>360</sup> She has received many prestigious international awards including the World Press Freedom Hero award in 2000, the Bruno Kreisky Human Rights Award in 2002, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Woman's Media Foundation in 2009, and the Reporters Without Borders Prize for Press Freedom, also in 2009.

Hass was born in Jerusalem in 1956, the daughter of two Holocaust survivors, a fact that played a major role in her academic and political choices. She studied the history of Nazism and the Holocaust at Hebrew University of Jerusalem and despite the Zionist bias of such studies and the potential blowback over her use of the term , she determinedly describes Gaza as a huge "concentration camp," Hass uncompromisingly challenges Israel's policies that have forced unwitting and too rarely unwilling Israelis to be collaborators in crimes of apartheid and human rights abuse.

Sadly, not many Israelis know much beyond the official narrative and too few care to know anything about the people they have uprooted or constricted. In the introduction to *Drinking the Sea of Gaza*, Hass explains the connection between her parents' experiences and her own motivations to understand the truth about those who live next door, deprived of the comforts of Israeli society and pilloried by the Zionist narrative. One day in 1944, at Bergen-Belsen, her mother was being "herded from a cattle car along with the rest of its human cargo."

[She] saw a group of German women ... watch with indifferent curiosity ... For me these women became a loathsome symbol of watching from the sidelines ... my desire to live in Gaza stemmed neither from adventurism nor from insanity but from that dread of being a bystander, from my need to understand ... a world that is ... a profoundly Israeli creation. To me Gaza embodies the entire saga of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict: it represents the central contradiction of the State of Israel ... democracy for some, dispossession for others.<sup>361</sup>

## Accomplices to Israel's Crimes

Hass warns diaspora Jews not to become accomplices; not to accept the rights of return to a country that refuses those same rights to its native born population. Zionism has long advocated for the immigration of diaspora Jews to Israel. But everything Israel would provide diaspora Jews, it denies the diaspora Palestinians, many of whom were forced to flee and are not allowed to visit the lands of their parents. Those who are permitted entry are subject to severe restrictions on travel and duration of visit. "Israel uses Jewish immigration to excuse and deepen the dispossession. Immigrants to Israel become conscious collaborators with the increasingly extreme apartheid policy."<sup>362</sup>

Hass reminds Israelis that apartheid is considered a crime. It is the moral duty of Israelis born in this country "to use our privileges to fight the regime of privileges and, as much as possible, reduce the level of our collaboration with the dispossession." The Gaza Strip is roughly 362 square kilometers, with over 1.8 million people. It is ranked as the third most densely populated area in the world. And, according to Levy, Hass and many others who have been or lived there, it is one huge prison: "It is an Israel-meditated, pre-meditated, pre-planned and planned project to separate Gaza from the West Bank." Gazans have no freedom of movement, no control over their own lives and no power to shape their own future.<sup>363</sup>

In a 2019 article, Hass writes about the supply of water to twelve Palestinian villages in the West Bank. After six months of clean running water, representatives of the Israeli Civil Administration, soldiers, border police, and bulldozers arrived to put an end to this basic service. "The troops dug up the pipes, cut and sawed them apart and watched the jets of water that spurted out. About 350 cubic meters of water were wasted." This was done despite the critical scarcity of water in the region. As the Civil Administration diligently destroys water lines for many Palestinian villages, it immediately connects illegal Jewish settlements and outposts to water and electricity and even paves the roads lading to them. Although these villagers had managed to construct a water line and widen the roads to facilitate the delivery of water, a right wing Israeli group pressured the Civil Administration to destroy the infrastructure under an inhumane law that prohibits Palestinians from hooking up to existing water systems. The chairman of the council of villages, Nidal Younes, asked why they demolished the water lines and "one of the Border Police officers answered him, in English, telling him it was done 'to replace Arabs with Jews.'"<sup>364</sup>

## From Appalling Secret to Political Platform

Amira Hass ties the untouchable history of the Holocaust to the tragic irony of a role reversal in modern Israel. In these tumultuous political times, Zionism's original secret sin, of hoping to rid of Arabs the expanding territory of the state of Israel, has now emerged as a rallying cry for those seeking power. In his quest to keep the reins on government in the 2019 elections, and on the verge of indictment for corruption, Netanyahu invited the Kahanists to join his party. The Kahanists have been an extremist fanatic fringe, outlawed in Israel in 1985 for theological racism. They have always embraced Jewish supremacy and endorsed the necessary hatred of the Arab enemies of Israel. The current battle is not about morals or just solutions for the seventy-year-old conflict created by the state of Israel but for the military might and supremacy of the Jewish leadership. With eloquence and courage, Amira Hass, gives voice to the moral resistance that uncounted Israelis, and Jews in the diaspora, feel toward policies that have continued for too long to deprive others of their basic human rights.

# Activism in the Courts: Michael Sfard and Other Lawyers

Michael Sfard practices international human rights law, representing people who have been deprived of basic rights for over fifty years. In a January 28, 2019, interview with David B. Green in *Ha'Aretz*, he wrestled with the definition of Zionism.

If Zionism is the belief or the desire that the Jewish people will have a place where they can exercise their right of self-determination as a nation, and that place is here, then I'm a Zionist. If being a Zionist means thinking that this should come at the expense of other people who live here, and they should become second-class citizens, then I'm not a Zionist.<sup>365</sup>

### What are The Laws of Occupation?

Article 42 of The Hague Regulations of 1907 defines occupation as follows: "Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised."

Under occupation law, the occupying power does not acquire sovereignty over the occupied territory and is required to respect the existing laws and institutions of the occupied territory as far as possible. It is presumed that occupation will be temporary and that the occupying power shall preserve the status quo ante in the occupied territory.

Occupation law is intended to protect the welfare of civilians living in Occupied Territories, to ensure humane treatment, to respect private property, and the functioning of educational establishments and medical services, to allow humanitarian organizations to carry out their missions and also allow the occupying power the right to ensure its own security.<sup>366</sup>

## **Collective Responsibility**

Sfard expresses the conviction that all Israelis are responsible for the Occupation, even if not all Israelis are guilty of it, and that responsibility creates a collective moral duty to end its injustices. Sadly, this responsibility has been abdicated by Israel's governments or courts to this day. He believes:

Regimes that are fundamentally subjugating people, stripping them of rights, especially groups of people, are regimes that by definition are not sustainable. And a regime of this kind has to keep on nurturing and investing in the domination practices in order to keep things from exploding.<sup>367</sup>

The Supreme Court of Israel, often portrayed as leftist or pro-Palestinian, is predominantly concerned with the security establishment and has been the main champion for the success and stability of the settlement and occupation project. Sfard remarks:

The Supreme Court has gone ahead and approved almost every harmful policy and practice pursued by the military in the Occupied Territories ... as a rule there were very few cases in which the judicial system granted relief that blocked a significant policy (such as administrative detention, deportation of activists, house demolitions, land seizures and settlement building) ... we sadly concluded that in its judgments, the High Court of Justice had helped deepen and strengthen the hold of the occupation and its core enterprise, Israel's settlements.<sup>368</sup>

Sfard wonders if, as a human rights lawyer, he is a mere pawn in the great fifty year-long "swindle" of the occupation: "by helping to prop up the illusion of a regime that has mechanisms and laws in place to prevent arbitrary acts, contain state violence, and thwart injustice?"<sup>369</sup> But the reality of the legal system is a labyrinthine scheme of permits, protocols, forms and restrictions intended to close areas, seal boundaries, and restrict freedom of movement, "thousands of military ordinances, a sea of administrative orders, tens of thousands of petitions and criminal trials ..."<sup>370</sup>

Israel uses its civil rights lawyers to project and reinforce a widely accepted deceptive image of judicial fairness. In this respect they are pawns. Although Israel's Supreme Court assumes the role of a prestigious democratic institution, it has been a major factor in legitimizing the occupation and has lost much of its international prestige. These lawyers are, in fact, part of a political struggle to end a regime that is inherently a human rights violation in itself. They will not be able to win the political struggle in the courts. They might be able, over time, to contribute to a changing narrative.

### The Wall and the Gate

In Sfard's book, *The Wall and the Gate: Israel, Palestine, and the Legal Battle for Human Rights*, he describes his struggles as one of a small group of lawyers fighting a Sisyphean battle to defend those rights against the arbitrary laws of occupation.<sup>371</sup> These lawyers include:

Felicia Langer (1930–2018), a Polish-born lawyer and Holocaust survivor, defended Palestinian political prisoners and wrote about human rights violations by Israeli authorities. In 1900, she moved to Germany after twenty-four years of fighting land confiscations, house demolitions, and expulsions. She closed her office in Israel, claiming that justice for Palestinians was not possible. In a tribute to Langer in the online magazine +972, Michael Sfard noted:

Langer was a human rights and peace activist, a communist, and one of the first attorneys to represent Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories in Israeli courts. In Israel's Supreme Court, she pioneered legal practices that today seem natural and obvious but were once considered outrageous. She was the first to challenge the expulsion of Palestinian political leaders from the West Bank, the first to challenge the army's practice of demolishing the homes of Palestinians suspected of militant activities, the first to accuse the Shin Bet of torturing detainees, and the first to fight the practice of administrative detention.<sup>372</sup>

**Avigdor Feldman**, born in 1948, has been a member of the Israeli bar since the early 1970s. He is the founder of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and a founding member of B'Tselem. Sfard interned with him from 1999 to 2004, and considers him "a trailblazer when it came to representing Palestinians in cases against the occupation."<sup>373</sup>

Lea Tsemel, born in 1945, has been a vocal and political opponent of Israel's occupation, who has tried to protect and defend the rights of Palestinians since 1967. In a recent interview on *Democracy Now!* she said:

I was studying law in 1967 when the war broke ... once the war broke, I realized that we were—we, the students, the people, were misled before the war to believe that this is a war for peace. Israel didn't think of creating peace. And I found myself having to decide whether my humanity prevails when I saw what happened to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, or my Israeli loyalty would prevail. And I chose my humanity. Therefore, when I became a lawyer, it was only natural that I ..... try to defend the underdogs, the Palestinians ... most of the people that I represent are Palestinians who are acting against the occupation, in this way or another, or that have been tackled with problems that the occupation created. Like, if we talk about Jerusalem, the Jerusalemite Palestinians have difficulties in getting a position, in getting their rights, in getting their identification cards, in getting family reunification, for instance. So, these are the civil aspects of the occupation that I'm also dealing with, beside, of course, people who have committed security offenses, as they call it. And I believe that I'm obliged to defend them. I believe they have the right to act against the occupation. And I don't try to condemn them. I try to be near them and [use]—my ability as a lawyer and recruit the Israeli law to defend them.<sup>374</sup>

**Gaby Lasky**, born in 1966, is another formidable member of the small group of Israeli human rights attorneys who handle cases of torture, false imprisonment, and police brutality in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. She has defended Palestinian civilians arrested by the Israeli security forces, as well as Israeli conscientious objectors who refuse to register for compulsory military service. Among her recent high-profile cases are the defense of Dareen Tatour, a Palestinian poet prosecuted by Israel and imprisoned for nearly three years for publishing a poem on Facebook; and Ahed Tamimi, a Palestinian teen-ager imprisoned for slapping an armed soldier who entered her yard. Lasky is legal adviser to protest and social change organizations, including the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel and Breaking the Silence, and was formerly chairperson of the Human Rights Legislation Committee of the Israeli Bar Association.

## Three Layers of Purpose

In the concluding chapter of his book, Sfard refers to three potential layers of purpose in human rights law: (1) Remedy for the client, if achieved, prevents harm to the client or provides compensation; (2) Challenging the policy, which is the wider objective for social change; and (3) Regime change, the broadest and most ambitious goal is never, or very rarely satisfied in the courts.

None of these have seen much success in the past, and all three layers are predictably destined for major disappointments in Israel's immediate future. Sfard sees the strengthening of dangerous nationalist government control, which denies individual liberties even within Jewish Israeli society today. Opposition to government policy is increasingly condemned as treasonous and political witch hunts in academia and elsewhere are legitimized, if not encouraged. Freedom of expression is stifled and public figures, artists, lawyers, journalists and academics who criticize the treatment of Palestinians are rebuked, slandered, or threatened with the withdrawal of any potential public funding.

Nevertheless, says Sfard, they must hold their heads high and know that they have a role in the appearance of cracks in the occupation. They "are forcing a gate in its wall by upholding the greatest idea in human history: that all humans are equal and all are deserving of rights because they are human."

## EPILOGUE

During the 1990s, when I was active in a number of Israeli organizations opposing the Occupation, I witnessed many incidents that kept me awake at night. One such incident forever will haunt me. At a border checkpoint manned by young soldiers, a terrified, wide-eyed little boy, no older than eight, was desperately clinging to his mother's hand. He was bleeding profusely through a towel wrapped round his head. His mother was screaming uncontrollably, her face distorted with emotion, and yelling at the soldiers in Arabic, a language that none of them seemed to understand. In her free hand she held an unrecognizable red blob. It was her son's dismembered ear. She was frantically trying to get into an ambulance with him, but wasn't permitted to; only the patient was allowed in the vehicle. She was told to walk or find other transportation to cross the checkpoint to the hospital. After a storm of frantic gestures and pleas, a ride was found, and the boy and his mother were driven together to the hospital in a car belonging to an Israeli demonstrator at the crossing. This time, surgery was successful and tragedy averted.

Can this incident be included among the legends of heroic battle against the insidious enemies of the Jewish state, a battle for which every Jewish-born Israeli is trained? Or should it simply be erased, to help maintain the purity of the myth? In any case, I always will remember it.

No account of dissent from Zionism can be complete as long as the Occupation continues and the current official Zionist narrative prevails. There will be persistent resistance to unethical policies enacted by one Israeli government after another, exploiting its power to gain more power by inciting fear, misappropriating the Holocaust, or expanding military dominance in the region. Negotiation in good faith and compromise cast as weak, futile strategies—have long been abandoned by militant and increasingly nationalistic leaders. I do not dispute that the future of the State of Israel is precarious, but this has more to do with Israel's own belligerence and unrelenting conviction in myths of its own making, and less to do with Palestinians. Palestinians have always held the weaker hand in this asymmetrical conflict between a strong military and a civilian population under military occupation. But Palestinian acts of resistance to oppression—vilified as "obstacles to peace" thrown up by the "other side" of the conflict—are not part of this study, or the responsibility of this Israeli-born writer.

This book was not intended to be a comprehensive history of opposition to the moral bankruptcy of militant nationalism, for that would require a much longer work. Instead it presents the evolution of dissent since the time that the quest for national Jewish identity and independence in nineteenth-century Europe grew into the Zionist movement. In doing so, it uncovers a legacy not only of perspectives and ideas, but of moral courage, commitment, and imagination.

I hope the views expressed in this account will be useful in prying apart the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, a deliberate blurring of reality habitually used by governments and organizations to silence legitimate criticism of entirely secular policies.

There are so many individuals and organizations whose voices are drowned out by the clamor of more strident nationalists with extreme ideologies, whether truly held or merely politically expedient. Among the organizations that have inspired me over the years, some of which I myself have been involved with and believe deserve to be heard and recognized are:

Adalah Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) B'tzelem Breaking the Silence Gush Shalom. Human Rights Watch Israel Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) Machsom Watch Not in My Name Physicians for Human Rights in Israel Rabbis for Human Rights Taayush Among the many individuals not included in this study, whose works, thoughts, and actions have also inspired and given me hope, are:

Meron Benvenisti Jeff Halper Haim Henegbi Adam Keller Moshe Machover Akiva Orr Yakov Rabkin Michael Warshawski Idith Zertal Beate Zilversmidt

I was indoctrinated to believe that the country in which I was born was dedicated solely to a higher purpose. I would probably not have been inspired to think more critically about my country of birth, nor would I have questioned its political or judicial legitimacy, had it not been for two Palestinians—Mahmoud Darwish and Edward Said, whose writings every Zionist should read.

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# A CHRONOLOGY OF VOICES, FROM THE BIRTH OF ZIONISM UNTIL TODAY

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Portrayals of Israel in mainstream Western media as the "homeland of the Jews" and "the only democracy in the Middle East" are commonplace. Since the realities behind them are rarely shown, these truisms have become habitual assumptions underlying news coverage, public policy, and ordinary conversation. At the same time, while criticism of a government's policies is considered an essential right and safeguard of democracy, criticism of Israeli policy is persistently attacked as anti-Zionist—or even anti-Semitic—by a majority of Israelis and by those outside the country who claim to be Israel's friends. The views of independent Israelis and Jews who examine, challenge, or oppose extreme Israeli governments and policies are rarely heard. This book attempts to recover a history of dissent.

In Wrestling with Zionism: Jewish Voices of Dissent, Daphna Levit amplifies the voices of twenty-one Jewish and Israeli thinkers—scholars, theologians, journalists, lawyers, activists—who have grappled with the evolution of Zionism since its inception on political, religious, cultural, ethical, or philosophical grounds. Beginning in the late-nineteenth century, well before the founding of the State of Israel, and surveying pioneering figures up until the present, she introduces, examines, and brings together a range of contrasting viewpoints into a single historical conversation. As well, with these portraits she honors a tradition of courageous intellectual inquiry and activism, rooted in Jewish ethical imperatives. Drawing on her own lifetime of activism and research, Levit has assembled a foundational text, enabling us to consider the relationship of modern political Zionism and Judaism today, in revealing historical light.

**Daphna Levit** was born in Israel, served in the army, and received undergraduate degrees from Tel Aviv, and then graduate degrees from Indiana and Cornell Universities. She has contributed numerous articles in both Hebrew and English to various publications such as Ha'aretz and The Other Israel and is coauthor of Israeli Rejectionism: A Hidden Agenda in the Middle East Peace Process. She was also active in Gush Shalom, B'tselem, Windows, Physicians for Human Rights, Makhsom Watch, Ta'ayush, and other peace organizations. She lives and teaches courses at academic institutions in Nova Scotia.

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