Routledge Handbook on Contemporary Israel

Edited by Guy Ben-Porat, Yariv Feniger, Dani Filc, Paula Kabalo and Julia Mirsky
This Handbook provides a comprehensive overview of contemporary Israel, accounting for changes, developments and contemporary debates. The different chapters offer both a historical background and an updated analysis of politics, economy, society and culture.

Across five sections, a multidisciplinary group of experts, including sociologists, political scientists, historians and social scientists, engage in a wide variety of topics through different perspectives and insights. The book opens with a historical section outlining the formation of Israel and Jewish nationalism. The second section examines contemporary institutions in Israel, their developments and the contemporary challenges they face in light of social, economic, political and cultural changes. The third section explores geopolitics and Israel’s foreign relations, exploring conflicts, alliances and foreign policy with neighbors and powers. The fourth section engages with Israel’s internal divisions and schisms, highlighting questions of identity and inequality while also outlining processes of integration and marginalization between groups. The final section explores matters of culture, through the social and demographic shifts in contemporary music, poetry and cuisine, along with the struggles for inclusion and the impact of globalization on Israeli culture.

The Routledge Handbook on Contemporary Israel is designed for academics along with undergraduate and postgraduate students taking courses on Israel, Israeli politics, and culture and society in modern Israel.

Guy Ben-Porat is Professor at the Department of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University, Israel. He is the author of Global Liberalism, Local Populism: Peace and Conflict in Israel/ Palestine and Northern Ireland (2006) and Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel (2012). He is also the co-author of Policing Citizens: Minority Policy in Israel (2019).

Yariv Feniger is Associate Professor in the Department of Education at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel and a fellow in the Education Policy Program at the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel. His areas of research include social and educational inequality, education policy and comparative education. His last co-authored book on education inequality and education policy was published in 2019.

Dani Filc is Professor at the Department of Politics and Government, Ben-Gurion University, Israel. His fields of research include Israeli politics, populism and the health care system. Among his publications are Hegemony and Populism in Israel, Circles of Exclusion: The Politics of Health-Care in Israel and The Political Right in Israel: The Many Faces of Israeli Populism.
Paula Kabalo is Associate Professor at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the study of Israel and Zionism, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. She is the head of the Azrieli Center for Israel Studies. Her most recent book *Israeli Community Action: Living Through the War of Independence* was awarded the AIS Shapiro Prize for 2020. Her research focus is on the history of citizen associations and civil society in Israel and the interrelations between David Ben-Gurion and the wider public.

Julia Mirsky is Professor at the Department of Social Work, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. Her research focuses on the psychological aspects of migration. She has published extensively on this subject and supervised numerous MA and PhD students. At Ben-Gurion University, she serves as the Samuel and Miriam L. Hamburger Chair in Integration of Immigrant Communities and heads the Center (in progress) for Research and Education on Migrants’ Lives.
CONTENTS

List of Figures ix
List of Tables xi
List of Contributors xii

Introduction 1

PART ONE
Historical Overview 7

1 Zionism Between Despair and Hope 9
    Arieh Saposnik

2 Mamlakhtiyut: The Zionist and Israeli Version of Republicanism 22
    Avi Bareli and Nir Kedar

3 Melting Pot and Plurality of Cultures in Early Israel 35
    Paula Kabalo

4 The Palestinian National Movement: A Short History 49
    Mustafa Kabha

5 Israel’s Foreign Policy: The Historical Mound 56
    Uri Bialer
PART TWO
Institutions

6 The Political System and Political Parties
   Gideon Rahat and Reuven Y. Hazan
   75

7 Israeli Organized Civil Society: Trends and Challenges of the Nonprofit Sector
   Michal Almog-Bar
   88

8 Major Contemporary Trends in Civil–Military Relations in Israel
   Yagil Levy
   100

9 Israel’s Legal System: Institutions, Principles and Challenges
   Tamar Hostovsky Brandes
   114

10 The Israeli Education System
    Yariv Feniger, Yossi Shavit and Shir Caller
    129

11 How the People of the Book Became the People of the Media:
   The Israeli Media Landscape
   Amit M. Schejter
   141

PART THREE
Foreign Relations and Policy

12 Israel and the Palestinians
    Salim Brake
    157

13 Israel and the Arab World: From War to Peacemaking
    Eyal Zisser
    171

14 The Special Relationship Between the United States and Israel
    Jonathan Rynhold
    183

15 The Rubik’s Cube of Israeli–European Union Relations
    Sharon Pardo and Hila Zahavi
    197

16 Israel–Russia Bilateral Relations: Market Rationality and Political Affinity
    Dina Zisserman-Brodsky
    210

17 Better Late Than Never: China–Israel Diplomatic Relations in Perspective
    Yitzhak Shichor
    225
PART FOUR
Divisions and Schisms 237

18 Leadership Legitimacy, Responsiveness and Representation in Palestinian Society in Israel 239
   Amal Jamal

19 Religious Zionism – Romantic Religious Nationalism in Israel 258
   Shlomo Fischer

20 Religion in Contemporary Israel: Haredi Varieties 274
   Lea Taragin-Zeller and Nurit Stadler

21 Israel: Between Religion and Secularism 287
   Guy Ben-Porat

22 Haredism versus Traditionism: A New Reading of Mizrahi Religious Politics at the Start of the 21st Century 299
   Nissim Leon

23 The Ethiopian Jews in Israel 311
   Sarah Abu-Rabia-Queder

24 Acculturation as a Two-Way Process: Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Israel 323
   Evgeny Knaifel

25 Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Gender Relations in Contemporary Israel 337
   Tair Karazi-Presler and Orna Sasson-Levy

26 Paradoxes of Control: Incorporating Precarious Migrants in Tel Aviv in Times of Restrictive Migration Policies 351
   Adriana Kemp and Nora Meissner

27 Demographic Trends in Israel 364
   Ahmad Hleihel

28 Israel’s Economic Development: An Overview 382
   Benjamin Bental and Avi Weiss

29 The Israeli Labor Market 404
   Tali Kristal and Alina Rozenfeld-Kiner
Contents

30  The Start-up Nation: Myths and Reality  423
    Erez Maggor and Michal Frenkel

31  Neoliberalization of Welfare and Social Protest  436
    Dani File

32  Peripheralities  448
    Erez Tzfadia and Moti Gigi

PART FIVE
Culture  461

33  Desert, Hill and Sea: Cinematic Visions and Re-Visions of War  463
    Miri Talmon

34  Bass and Silsulim: Israeli Music After Muzika Mizrahit  476
    Oded Erez

35  Who Killed Poetry? An Israeli Perspective  489
    Michael Gluzman

36  Large, Cheap and Mizrahi (“Oriental”): Israeli Cuisine  504
    Nir Avieli

Index  519
FIGURES

12.1 Negotiation and Oslo Index 1994–2014 166
12.2 Believe/Don’t Believe in Oslo Process 167
18.1 Level of Education of Arab MKs, N=259 243
18.2 Level of Religiosity According to MKs’ Party Affiliation, N=259 246
18.3 Gender of Arab MKs, N=259 247
18.4 Gender and Education of Arab MKs, N=96 248
27.1 Immigration to Israel Since 1948 by Period of Immigration and Continent of Birth (Thousands) 369
27.2 Migration in Israel by Category: 2009–18 (absolute numbers) 373
27.3 Temporary Immigrants Residing in Israel at the End of the Year: 2009–18 374
27.4 Total Fertility Rates Among Jewish Society by Religion and Religiosity: 2009–18 376
27.5 Total Fertility Rates Among Jewish Society by Origin: 2009–18 376
27.6 Total Fertility Rates Among Arab Society, Several Subgroups: 2009–18 377
27.7 Ideal Number of Children (Percentage of <=3 Children) Among Women Aged 20–49, by Population Group and Religious Level: 2009, 2018 378
28.1 GDP Per Capita, 2015 Dollars, Logarithmic Scale 383
28.2 Deficit as a Percentage of GDP 384
28.3 Average Annual Change in the Consumer Price Index 385
28.4 Debt as a Percentage of GDP 386
28.5 High-Tech Export Share of Industrial Exports (excluding diamonds) 386
28.6 Current Account Surplus as a Percentage of GDP 387
28.7 GDP Composition 388
28.8 Structure of Government Expenditures (as a percentage of GDP) 389
28.9 Government Expenditure as a Percentage of GDP in OECD Countries 389
28.10 Social Spending as a Percentage of GDP in OECD Countries 390
28.11 Employment Rates, Ages 25–64, 2018 391
28.12 Employment Rates by Population Group and Gender, Ages 25–64 392
### Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28.15</td>
<td>The Skill Level of the Israeli Population Relative to That in Other OECD Countries, Ages 16–65</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.16</td>
<td>GDP per Hour Worked, 2019</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.17</td>
<td>Share of the High-Tech Sector in Total Added Value of Production</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.18</td>
<td>Share of Employed Persons in the High-Tech Sector, 2018</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.19</td>
<td>Average Monthly Income in the High-Tech Sector, in NIS</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.20</td>
<td>Share in High-Tech Employment</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.21</td>
<td>Probability of Employment in High Tech by Skill Level, 21 OECD Countries, Ages 25–65</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.22</td>
<td>Poverty Rates, OECD, 2018</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.23</td>
<td>Post-transfer and Taxes Gini Coefficient in Israel and Select Countries</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.24</td>
<td>Average Annual Percent Change in Real Household Income</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.25</td>
<td>Gini Coefficients, OECD, Mostly 2018</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>Employed Persons by Status at Work, 1955–2018</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>The Distribution of Earnings (NIS), Workers Ages 25–64, 2010–15</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>The Distribution of Job Rewards by Earnings Quartiles, Workers Ages 25–64, 2010–16</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>Monthly Earnings by Years of Schooling and Degree, Workers Ages 25–64, 2010–15</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>Annual Compensation (NIS) by Establishment Size and Union Density in Selected Industries, 2015</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>Monthly Earnings by Employment Relations, Workers Ages 25–64, 2016</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>Monthly Earnings by Nationality, Ethnicity and Gender, Workers Ages 25–64, 2010–15</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.10</td>
<td>Earnings Inequality, Full-time (35+ hours a week) Workers Ages 25–64, 1970–2017</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.11</td>
<td>Polarization of Employment, 1990–2000</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.13</td>
<td>Union Density and Real Monthly Minimum Wage, 1955–2016</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>Potential Accessibility</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>The New Monument in “Gan Haijamisha” (Park of the Five)</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>Believe/Do Not Believe That the Oslo Process Will Conduct to Peace Between Israel and the Palestinians</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>Support/Do Not Support the Oslo Process</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>Distribution of Arab MKs according to Party Affiliation and Knesset Term</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>Participation in Elections by Palestinian Citizens of Israel, 1949–2021</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>Organizations Operating in Tel Aviv</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>Key Demographic Indicators: Israel in Comparison With Blocs of Countries, 2018</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>Population, Fertility and Life Expectancy by Society, 1948–2018</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>Jewish Society by Place of Birth, Continent of Origin and Religiosity, 1948–2018</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>Old Pensions Sums in US$</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>Maximum Period of Benefits</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTRIBUTORS

**Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder** is a senior lecturer at the Department of Education at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Her academic work focuses on the dynamics of power and agency among minority women in Israel in three primary institutions: higher education, work and the family.

**Michal Almog-Bar** is an associate professor and the head of the Institute for the Study of Civil Society and Philanthropy in Israel, the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her academic work focuses on civil society and nonprofit organizations, specifically on nonprofit organizations providing social services. Her fields of research include organizational, managerial and employment aspects of nonprofit organizations; policy toward the nonprofit sector; gender in civil society; nonprofit advocacy; and cross-sectorial partnerships.

**Nir Avieli** is an associate professor of anthropology and the Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ben-Gurion University. He is the author of *Rice Talks: Food and Community in a Vietnamese Town* (2012), a culinary ethnography of Hoi An. He conducted further ethnographic research in Thailand, India, Singapore and Israel. His book *Food and Power: A Culinary Ethnography of Israel* (2018) is based on multisited ethnographic research conducted in Israel since the late 1990s.

**Avi Bareli** is an associate professor at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and the director of the Ben-Gurion University’s Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism. He specializes in the political history of Israel and Zionism. He is the editor of the multidisciplinary Hebrew peer-reviewed journal *Iyunim: Multidisciplinary Studies in Israeli and Modern Jewish Society* and heads the research group on Ben-Gurion in the Center for Israel Studies at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute.

**Benjamin Bental** is a professor emeritus of economics at the University of Haifa. He is a principal researcher and the Economics Policy Program Chair at the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel. His research interests include macroeconomics and economic growth. In recent years, his research has focused on the impact of contractual frictions stemming from asymmetric information, especially in the labor market, on macroeconomic outcomes.
Contributors

**Guy Ben-Porat** is a professor at the Department of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University, Israel. He is the author of *Global Liberalism, Local Populism; Peace and Conflict in Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland* (2006) and *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel* (2012). He is also the coauthor of *Policing Citizens: Minority Policy in Israel* (2019).

**Uri Bialer** is a professor emeritus of international relations, holding the Maurice B. Hexter Chair in International Relations – Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University. A former visiting professor at Harvard, Oxford, Chicago, New York, Brandeis and Peking universities, he is the author of *Cross on the Star of David* (2005) and *Oil and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (1999).

**Salim Brake** is a lecturer of political science and education at the Open University of Israel. He is the coauthor (with Assad Ghanem) of *Israel in the Post Oslo Era* (Routledge, 2019).

**Shir Caller** is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Tel Aviv university. Her research interests lie in the areas of inequality, intergroup relations, immigration and social studies of knowledge. Her master’s thesis examined individual and contextual level explanations of racist views across European countries.

**Oded Erez** is a lecturer in the Department of Musicology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research combines methodologies from ethnomusicology, historical musicology and cultural studies, focusing on the interplay of aesthetics and politics in popular music and film music, in Israel and the Mediterranean. His publications include articles in the journals *Popular Music, Ethnic and Racial Studies*, and *Journal of Levantine Studies*. He is currently completing a book manuscript exploring the intertwined histories of Mediterranean pop music and ethno-class politics in Israel.

**Yariv Feniger** is associate professor in the Department of Education at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and a fellow in the Education Policy Program at the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel. His areas of research include social and educational inequality, education policy and comparative education. His last coauthored book on education inequality and education policy was published in 2019.

**Dani Filc** is a professor at the Department of Politics and Government, Ben-Gurion University. His fields of research include Israeli politics, populism and the health care system. Among his publications are *Hegemony and Populism in Israel, Circles of Exclusion: The Politics of Health-Care in Israel* and *The Political Right in Israel: The Many Faces of Israeli Populism*.

**Shlomo Fischer** taught sociology and education, until his retirement, at the School of Education in Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is a senior fellow of the Jewish People Policy Institute. His research interests include religious groups, class and politics in Israel and the relations of religion, citizenship and education. He has published extensively on religious Zionist ideology and on the Shas movement.

**Michal Frenkel** is an associate professor and the Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her studies look at the institutionalization of management practices in Israel; center–periphery relations in organization studies; and gender, religiosity, class, and ethnicity in and around organizations. Her papers appeared in journals such as the *Academy of Management Review, Organization Science, Gender & Society*;
Contributors

Human Relations; Journal of Management Studies; Gender, Work & Organization; Organization Studies; Organization; and others.

Moti Gigi is a sociologist and Chair of the Communications Department at the Sapir College. He was a visiting scholar at the Taub Center at New York University. His primary areas of interest are the sociology of center and periphery, ethnicity, the sociology of Israeli politics and mass media.

Michael Gluzman is a professor and Head of the Laura Schwartz-Kipp Center for Hebrew Literature and Culture at Tel Aviv University. His first book The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry (2002) explored the ideological forces that shaped the poetic canon. His most recent project focuses on the demise of canonicity as a literary-cultural concept.

Reuven Y. Hazan is Professor in and former Chair of the Department of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He holds the Chair in Israeli Democracy and Politics. His research interests include legislative studies, parties and party systems, elections and electoral politics.

Ahmad Hleihel obtained a PhD in demography from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and is a senior director of the Demography and Census Department at the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics.

Tamar Hostovsky Brandes is a senior lecturer at Ono Academic College’s Faculty of Law in Israel. She earned her JSD and LLM (cum laude) degrees from Columbia Law School, where she was a Finkelstein Fellow, and her LLB (magna cum laude) from Tel Aviv University. She teaches and researches in the areas of international and constitutional law, focusing on the intersection between international law and domestic law, and on the intersection of law and political theory. She has published extensively in these areas.

Amal Jamal is a faculty member of the School of Political Science, Government and International Affairs at Tel Aviv University and is the head of the Walter Lebach Institute for the Study of Jewish-Arab Coexistence at Tel Aviv University. His publications include Between National Consciousness and Civil Experience: The Political Realism of Palestinians in Israel (2020), Reconstructing the Civic: Palestinian Civil Activism in Israel (2020) and Arab Minority Nationalism: The Politics of Indigeneity (2011).

Paula Kabalo is an associate professor at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. She is the head of the Azrieli Center for Israel Studies. Her most recent book Israeli Community Action: Living through the War of Independence was awarded the AIS Shapiro Prize for 2020. Her research focus is on the history of citizen associations and civil society in Israel and the interrelations between David Ben-Gurion and the wider public.

Mustafa Kabha is full Professor in the Department of History, Philosophy and Judaic Studies and the head of the Middle Eastern studies at the Open University of Israel. He is the author of The Palestinian Press as a Shaper of Public Opinion 1929–1939: Writing Up a Storm (2007); (with D. Caspi), The Palestinian Arab In/Outsiders: Media and Conflict in Israel (2011); and The Palestinian People: Seeking Sovereignty and State (2013).
Contributors

**Tair Karazi-Presler** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Management and Economics, Open University of Israel, and a teaching fellow at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Bar-Ilan University, Israel. Karazi-Presler has published in journals such as *Sex Roles* (2018); *Gender, Work & Organization* (2020); and *Cultural Sociology* (2021).

**Nir Kedar** is a professor of law and history and the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Sapir College, Israel. His recent books are *Law and Identity in Israel: A Century of Debate*, 2019 and *David Ben-Gurion and the Foundation of Israeli Democracy*, 2021.

**Adriana Kemp** is a professor, a political sociologist and the current head of the School of Social Studies and Policy at Tel Aviv University. Her research focuses on intersections between labor and forced migration, citizenship and civil society and scholarship on the neoliberal rescaling of politics and governance.

**Evgeny Knaifel** is a social worker who works with immigrant families from the former Soviet Union. He was awarded the PhD degree by the Ben-Gurion University of Negev, Israel. His research focuses on mental health aspects of immigration and acculturation of former Soviet Union immigrants in Israel.

**Tali Kristal** is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Haifa. The central focus of her research is on how and why positions in the economy such as organizations, industries, occupations, classes, and the relations between them shape the evolution of economic inequality, and how these vary across time and countries.

**Nissim Leon** is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Bar-Ilan University. His main research focus on ethnic and religious relations in the Israeli Society. He is the coauthor of *A Flock with no Shepherd: Shas leadership the Day after Rabbi Ovadia Yossef* (2018) and a number of articles on related topics.

**Yagil Levy** is a professor of political sociology and public policy at the Open University of Israel. His field of research is the theoretical and empirical aspects of relations between society and the military. He has published eight books; the most recent one is *Whose Life Is Worth More? Hierarchies of Risk and Death in Contemporary Wars* (2019).

**Erez Maggor** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Martin Buber Society of Fellows at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research has appeared in leading academic journals, including *Socio-Economic Review*, *Politics & Society* and *Israeli Sociology*. He is also the coeditor of a book and a special issue of *Theory and Criticism*, both on the topic of the Israeli settlements project.

**Nora Meissner** is a PhD candidate and research assistant in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Tel Aviv University. Her comparative PhD research focuses on the role of context and meaning in theorizing and understanding global high-skilled migration.

**Sharon Pardo** is a professor in the Department of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He is a Jean Monnet Chair ad Personam and the Chairperson of the Simone Veil Centre for Contemporary European Studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

**Gideon Rahat** is a professor in the Department of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He holds the Gersten Family Chair. His research fields are comparative politics and
Contributors

Israeli politics. His interests include political parties, electoral reform, the personalization of politics and candidate selection methods. He is also a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute.

Alina Rozenfeld-Kiner is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Haifa. Her dissertation deals with the relation between human resource management practices and organizational level income inequality. Her previous research examined the polarization of the Israeli employment structure.


Arieh Saposnik is an associate professor at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He is the author of *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (2008) and of *Zionism’s Redemptions: Images of the Past and Visions of the Future in Jewish Nationalism* (1921). His current research explores modern efforts to reshape the Jewish relationship to space and place.

Orna Sasson-Levy is a professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and at the Program of Gender Studies at Bar-Ilan University. Her research and teaching interests include feminist theory, militarism and gender, and Israeli ethnicities. Her latest book, with Edna Lomsky-Feder, *Women Soldiers and Citizenship in Israel: Gendered Encounters with the State*, was published by Routledge in 2018. Prof. Sasson-Levy was recently nominated as the Bar-Ilan Presidential Advisor for Gender Equity.

Amit M. Schejter is Professor of communication studies currently serving as President of Oranim College. He is the former Chair of the Department of Communication Studies and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

Yossi Shavit is a professor emeritus of sociology at Tel Aviv University. He studies processes of social and educational stratification and ethnic relations. Shavit is a former president of RC28, a member of the American National Academy of Education (NAEd) and a member of the Sociological Research Association (SRA). Shavit has a strong interest in policy-oriented research and directs the Initiative on Inequality in Early Childhood at the Taub Center in Jerusalem.

Yitzhak Shichor is a professor emeritus of Asian Studies and political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the University of Haifa and formerly head of the Tel-Hai Academic College. His main research interests are China’s Middle East policy; international energy relations; Chinese defense conversion; labor export and East Asian democratization processes; and Sino-Uyghur relations and the Uyghur diaspora. His recent publications include “China and the Middle East: An Autobiographical Perspective,” in: Jonathan Fulton (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of China-Middle East Relations* (2022); “Betar China: The Impact of a Remote Jewish Youth Movement, 1929–1949,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* (2021).

Nurit Stadler is a professor of sociology and anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research interests include fundamentalism; the ultra-Orthodox community; Greek-Orthodox and Roman Catholic rituals in Jerusalem; text-based communities; the veneration of Mary in Israel/Palestine; and the study of female saint shrines, sacred nature and sacred iconography.
Miri Talmon is a scholar of cinema, television and media culture, who specializes in the research and teaching of Israeli culture and in comparative approaches to the Israeli and American film and television cultures. Talmon teaches at the Steve Tisch School of Film and Television, Faculty of Arts, Tel Aviv University. She is the author of *Israeli Graffiti: Nostalgia, Groups and Collective Identity in Israeli Cinema* (Hebrew). Talmon is the editor of the anthology *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion* (2011, with Yaron Peleg) and the anthology *Israeli Television: Global Contexts, Local Visions* (2021, with Yael Levy, Routledge).

Lea Taragin-Zeller is a lecturer in cultural studies and public policy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research is situated at the nexus of reproduction and religion and examines everyday projects of knowledge and ethical decision-making vis-à-vis state-minority relations, intersectional dynamics and transnational networks. Her field sites span medical clinics, classrooms and Jewish-Muslim grassroots organizations in Israel and the UK.

Erez Tzfadia is an associate professor of public policy and administration at the Sapir College, Israel. Erez is an alumnus of Ben-Gurion University (2002), held a Lady Davis Postdoctoral position at the Hebrew University (2003) and was an Israel Institute Visiting Scholar at the Bildner Center at Rutgers University (2015–6). His studies focus on spatial policy in Israel.

Avi Weiss is a professor of economics in Bar-Ilan University, the President of the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel and a research fellow at IZA. He served as Chief Economist and Deputy Director of the Israel Antitrust Authority and was a member of the Subcommittee on the Cost of Living and Competition of the Trajtenberg Commission on Social and Economic Change. He is coeditor of *The Economic Quarterly*, the journal of the Israel Economic Associations, and serves on the Appeals Committee for the Regulation of Prices of Goods and Services Law.

Hila Zahavi is the Director of the Simone Veil Centre for Contemporary European Studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. She is a graduate of the Department of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. She teaches European Studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and at The Open University of Israel.

Eyal Zisser is a professor and Vice Rector of Tel Aviv University (2015–). He wrote extensively on the history and the modern politics of Syria and Lebanon and the Arab–Israeli conflict. In 2020, he published his book *Syria at War: The Rise and Fall of the Syrian Revolution*.

Dina Zisserman-Brodsky received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the Moscow State University and her PhD from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She teaches in the Department of Politics and Government at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.
INTRODUCTION

The description of Israel as an “overburdened polity” was coined by Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak in their seminal book *Trouble in Utopia* (1989). More than 30 years after the book appeared, the description still holds true. In June 2021, a new government was formed in Israel, Naftali Bennett replacing Benjamin Netanyahu after 12 years in power. The new government coalition is an unlikely combination of right-wing, religious right, liberals, left-wing and even an Arab party, united by their desire to replace Netanyahu. While it remains to be seen whether this government can last, its formation and opposition exposed once again the deep cleavages and contentions – ideological, national, ethnic, religious and economic – that have made governance all but impossible.

Israeli politics is burdened with existential questions of identity, belonging and rights, as state borders and societal boundaries are constantly debated. Essentially, the concept of a “Jewish and democratic state” that often describes Israel is deeply contested. Israelis offer different interpretations of a Jewish state, debate the meaning of democracy and struggle when the two seem incompatible. The commitments to Jewish and democratic foundations are challenged constantly by demands of Arab citizens for equality, struggles over religious freedom and debates over the fate of the territories occupied in 1967. These are not the only questions that divide Israeli society as struggles over equality and recognition that pertain also to ethnicity, relation of center and periphery and to economic and demographic transformations of recent decades also make their mark on society and politics.

In Israel, these debates have been part and parcel of state- and nation-building, some since early Zionism. The role of religion in public life, economic ideologies, rights of non-Jewish citizens and non-Ashkenazi immigrants’ demands for recognition and equality were constantly debated and contested. The economic and demographic changes, however, have not only produced new tensions but also had implications for older ones. Previously, these cleavages and schisms, managed by the state and through various methods of assimilation, co-optation and coercion, did not threaten to undermine social order and political stability. However, over the past decades, pace Lissak and Horowitz’s description, instability and social tensions are more common.

Israel’s formal definition and consequent policy attributions of a “Jewish and Democratic state” entailed a differential set of policies for different groups adopted in the early state period. Jewish immigrants were to assimilate into Israeli culture and society, to shed their older “diasporic”
Introduction

identities and, if they were perceived as non-modern, to “modernize” as well. The Arab minority, regarded as a potential fifth column, was not part of assimilationist policies. Rather, various measures of control, separation and autonomy were employed to prevent it from asserting its demands. Finally, religious struggles were settled by a series of agreements known as the “status quo” that, on the one hand, provided autonomy for religious groups and, on the other hand, granted them monopoly over significant issues of public life. These “rules of the game” – religious, ethnic and national – were underscored by the hegemony of the Labor Party (Mapai), described as the “center,” whose control of the political system enabled it to enforce the rules.

In 1989, Lissak and Horowitz, like others, observed the changes and the perceived collapse of the “center.” The waning of the Labor Party’s dominance in the wake of the Yom Kippur War (in 1973) and the growing discontent of groups hitherto marginalized in Israeli society undermined the status quo. The change was reflected first and foremost in voting patterns such as the Labor Party being ousted in the 1977 elections after 29 years in power. The winning party, the right-wing Likud, under Menachem Begin, has won most elections since. Under the Likud, Israel expanded Jewish settlements in the territories occupied in the 1967 war. The debate over the future of the territories became a central divide of Israeli politics, between left and right, but not the only one. Other dividing lines that were present from the outset have intensified throughout the years. Those include a Jewish–Arab cleavage, a religious–secular cleavage, an ethnic/cultural cleavage and a class cleavage, often intersecting. Gradually, the cleavages appeared beyond the state’s control and introduced a governance crisis reflected in political instability and declining public confidence in state institutions.

Economic development and the globalization of Israeli society since the 1990s (Ben-Porat, 2006) created new opportunities but also demarcated the difference between center and peripheries and underscored debates over property rights, economic rights and the mutual obligations of citizens and the state. The mass immigration from the former Soviet Union that began in 1990 added more than a million people and was one of the factors behind the economic growth of the period and was considered by the Jewish majority as securing its dominance. But the secular tradition and the fact that many of the immigrants were not Jewish added to the ongoing debate over the Jewish character of the state and further challenged existing norms and institutions.

The conflict with the Palestinians in the occupied territories escalated in the first uprising in 1987 (the Intifada). The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians that began in 1993, under the new elected Labor government, created expectations but also opposition and resistance. The violent collapse of the process in mid-1990s, marked by the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and a cycle of violence between Israel and the Palestinians, and another cycle in 2000 have left the conflict hitherto unresolved. The conflict with the Palestinians of the territories and the wider Arab world has also significant ramifications for the status of the Palestinian Arabs within Israel. The Jewish character of the state, almost a consensus among the Jewish majority, and the salience of security questions result in a state whose symbols reflect the Jewish majority’s culture and are exclusive in nature. Beyond the symbolic issues, the preference of Jews over non-Jews is anchored in laws that deal with immigration, use of state land and semi-governmental institution as well as in Israel’s basic laws that anchor the Jewish character of the state (Rouhana, 1998). These tensions came to the fore more recently with the proposed Nationality Law that entrenches the Jewish definition of the state.

In a comparative perspective, the questions and debates that occupy Israel can also be found elsewhere. Cultural diversity and ethno-national politics are common to most contemporary states that, contrary to their image of the homogeneity, must contend with a multicultural and at times multinational reality (Connor, 1994; Tully, 2001; Walker, 1994). The growing reality of multinational and/or multicultural democracies, composed of cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities who struggle for and against distinctive forms of recognition and accommodation,
Introduction

creates new challenges for the democratic regime (Tully, 2001). The demands of ethnic minorities present an especially acute dilemma for “ethnic states” like Israel, states that provide a national home to a dominant ethnic group “trapped” between commitment to the dominant nation and to democracy (Rouhana, 1998) but also to liberal democracies where dominant majorities are challenged by new demands of immigrant and indigenous groups to change the existing order.

Nationalism, religion and ethnicity remain the central fault lines in Israeli society, but while stable, they are also dynamic and overlap in different ways. They contain both material and symbolic aspects as they relate to struggles over resource allocation and recognition and to attempts of groups to shape public life or to protect their own way of life. The divides translate into questions of identity and to political demands and struggles. Combined, they challenge previous arrangements that no longer seem fit to resolve the debates, while new arrangements are yet to resolve the problem of the “overburdened polity.”

This collection of essays provides a description and analysis of Israeli society, its history, external relations, internal divisions, political institutions and cultural life. The first part of the book explores Israel’s history. Arieh Saposnik offers an overview of Zionism as an ideology and a national movement of the Jewish people. Avi Bareli and Nir Kedar explore the concept of mamlakhitiyyut, the concept of the nation-state based on political participation and the rule of law, an important (and contested) common conceptual ground for all the major political powers in Israel’s first decade. In Chapter 3, Paula Kabalo traces the formation of an Israeli identity during the country’s first decades and the struggle between Jewish unity, a melting-pot approach, and the adherence to group distinctness among Jewish immigrants and Arab minority citizens. In the following chapter, Mustafa Kabha describes the Palestinian national movement that developed alongside Zionism, competing for the same territory. Finally, Uri Bialer lays a foundation for understanding the principal objectives of Israel foreign policy formed in the pre-statehood and early years of statehood.

Chapters in the second part of the book offer an overview of Israel’s institutions. Gideon Rahat and Reuven Y. Hazan explain Israel’s parliamentary democracy and its extreme multiparty system that produces governments based on multiparty coalitions and its consequences. Michal Almog-Bar presents and analyzes the Israeli nonprofit sector in recent decades. Major changes in Israeli social policy have led to a tremendous growth of its nonprofit sector manifested in the large number of civil society organizations. Yagil Levy describes the changes in the military and the crises in civil–military relations that affected military resources, changed the model of recruitment and generated a social realignment of the military’s make-up and, in turn, shaped major trends in civil–military relations. Tamar Hostovsky Brandes presents and analyzes Israel’s legal system, its history and development, current controversies regarding the legal system in Israel and the normative framework that applies in the occupied territories. In Chapter 10, Yariv Feniger, Yossi Shavit and Shir Caller engage with Israel’s education system, its inequality, segregation and the autonomy allowed for different groups—ethnic, religious or national—and its implications. Finally, Amit M. Schejter’s chapter studies Israeli media, its expansion, attempts to regulate the media, political intervention and its freedom.

The third part of the book explores Israel’s foreign relations and policy. Salim Brake offers a dismal picture of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, its collapse into what appears a dead-end. While a breakthrough in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has not occurred, relations with the wider Arab world witnessed a sweeping transformation. Eyal Zisser analyzes the transformation where Arab states have moved from a position of hatred and hostility toward Israel, to acceptance and cooperative relations almost up to the point of concluding a strategic security alliance. Jonathan Rynhold outlines the major historical developments in the US–Israeli relationship, its core foundations of shared strategic interests and Israel’s resonance in American political culture and domestic American politics. Sharon Pardo and Hila Zahavi summarize the key developments in
Introduction

Israeli–European Community/EU relations, a highly problematic and volatile relationship. This relationship is characterized by a strong network of economic, cultural and personal ties but also marked, at the political level, by disappointment, bitterness and anger.

Dina Zissserman-Brodsky addresses the current “golden-age” of Israel and Russia relations. This can be attributed, she argues, to economic and security interests, a Russian-speaking community in Israel but also, more importantly, neoliberal rationality and political affinities of Russia’s and Israel’s self-serving right-wing populist leaders, Netanyahu and Putin. Finally, Yitzhak Shichor examines Israel’s relations with China. While during the first 30 years, Israel’s attempts to form diplomatic relations were rejected by China, informal relations began in the late 1970s leading to the establishment of official relations (in 1992) that expanded dramatically, despite China’s support of the Palestinians and the tensions with the US.

In the fourth part of the book, we turn to Israel’s internal divisions and questions of identity and inequality. Relations between the Palestinian-Arab minority and the state representing the Jewish majority became especially tense in recent years. Amal Jamal explores the relationship between the transformations and developments taking place in the Palestinian society in Israel and the representativeness of its political leadership. Religion is another dividing issue in Israel. Shlomo Fischer’s chapter examines the rise of national religion, its rise and establishment as a leading force in Israeli politics and society. Lea Taragin-Zeller and Nurit Stadler’s chapter on the Haredi examines the radical changes in a wide array of social and cultural spheres among them. Three trends of religious revival – fundamentalism, charismatic manifestations and ritualization – are studied and feminist and critical studies are to offer a more nuanced look at fundamentalism, charisma and group worship. Finally, Guy Ben-Porat’s chapter studies the tensions between secularization and religion, and the struggles that take place in different spheres.

Ethnicity is another point of division among Jewish Israelis, relating to questions of identity, recognition and equality. Nissim Leon addresses the terms “Mizrahim” (a Hebrew term denoting Jews of Middle Eastern or North African origin) and “Mizrahiut” (Mizrahi identity) in the sphere of religious life and the bottom-up consolidation of two new elites seeking relevance and recognition in the molding of Mizrachi identity in Israel. Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder analyzes the status of the Ethiopian Jews community in Israel and the question or racism manifested in hesitant immigration policies, questioning their Jewish-religious roots, and the daily racism they experience in the fields of housing, education, employment and more. Evgeny Knaifel reviews the empirical and theoretical literature on the historical and sociocultural characteristics of FSU immigrants as well as on their adjustment in the Israeli society. Specifically, the chapter describes how 1.5 generations of FSU immigrants had been affected by the multicultural Israeli society and how they in turn affected Israel on the economic, social and cultural levels.

Tair Karazi-Presler and Orna Sasson-Levy engage with the question of gender and four main gendered conflicts in contemporary Israel, as represented in public discourse: (1) assaults on women’s body and sexuality; (2) the implications of the neoliberal economy for marginalized women and counter-struggles; (3) women trapped between church and state; and (4) the negotiation of women’s roles in the military. These four points of contention reflect both the need for and the struggles toward social change. Adriana Kemp and Nora Meissner study the presence of labor and forced migrants in Israel, governmental policies of control and securitization and local-municipal responses. Contrary to official national policies aimed at preventing their settlement and keeping their precarious status, local actors in Tel Aviv have opened public services to migrants regardless of their status, aiding their communities and facilitating their integration as partial “urban citizens.” Ahmad Hleihel’s chapter provides an overview of the demographic trends in Israel. A review of the growth of Jewish and Arab nationalities shows that the average growth in each of the populations was rapid, with different sources of growth.
Benjamin Bental and Avi Weiss provide an overview of the Israeli economy. Israel’s development has placed it among the richest nations on earth but also with serious problems that threaten its future prosperity. Specifically, these challenges stem from different education and employment patterns across Israel’s social, ethnic and religious groups, affecting income distribution and welfare. Tali Kristal and Alina Rozenfeld-Kiner’s following chapter examines Israel’s labor market, contemporary transformations in work and employment in the Israeli economy and their impact on the earning structure. The authors explore the trend toward polarization of the Israeli labor market, questioning the roles of rising returns to skill, declining labor market protections and organizational economic restructuring in rising earnings inequality. Erez Maggor and Michal Frenkel describe the myth and reality behind the “Start Up Nation” and attribute the rise of Israel’s high-tech sector, in contrast to existing narratives, to state involvement that proved crucial to the development and eventual success of Israel’s technological sector. This was the outcome of a corporatist-like arrangement in which Israeli state elites coordinated policies with representatives of both the private and labor-owned (Histadrut) industrial sectors. They also argue that high-tech eventually transformed the very political-economic regime that previously supported its early success, both increasing income inequality and integrating individuals from marginalized social groups.

Dani Filc offers a critical account of the Israeli economy, analyzing the neoliberal transformation of the Israeli welfare state, and the social protest against the commodification of welfare. Cuts of transfer payments, privatization of social services and the overall shrinking of the welfare state explain the massive social protest that took place in 2011, as a reaction to the neoliberalization of the welfare system. Finally, Erez Tzfadia and Moti Gigi discuss the meanings of “periphery” and “peripherality” as it relates in Israel to both remoteness and socioeconomic status. Examining the history of development towns (Ayarot Pitu’ah) – new towns built in Israel during the 1950s for immigrants – reveals a juxtaposition of marginalized identities with histories of discriminations.

The final part of this book is devoted to Israeli culture, as it relates to economic, social and demographic transformations described in earlier parts of the book. Miri Talmon’s article studies visions and re-visions of war in Israeli cinema, and the changing narratives of wars. Autobiographic accounts are portrayed on screen as envisioned in the time of the traumatic war experience and in the posttraumatic, guilt-ridden, never-ending horror of the mornings after. Oded Erez explains the momentous shift in the meaning and value assigned to Middle Eastern and Mediterranean sounds, transposing the local genre of muzika Mizrahit (Mizrahi or “Oriental” Music) and its stylistic heirs from the margins to the very center of Israel’s popular culture. In a similar vein, Michael Gluzman’s chapter on Israeli poetry looks at the downfall of canonicity in an era of post-nationalism and identity politics. Particularly, the emergence of Ars Poetica, a group of Mizrahi Jewish poets, in the early 2010s serves as a test case for the larger tectonic shifts that came to define the way we view contemporary Israeli literature. Finally, Nir Avieli examines the change of Israeli cuisine. Departing from the conventional definition of the Israeli cuisine as an amalgam of diasporic cuisines brought about by repeated waves of immigrant Jews, enhanced by the local produce and mixed with the local Palestinian cuisine, he argues instead that Israelis like their portions large and cheap, pay little attention to quality, and opt for Mizrahi (Oriental) food.

Bibliography
Ben-Porat, Guy, 2006, Global Liberalism, Local Populism: Peace and Conflict in Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press).
Introduction

Zionism was from its outset a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon, with many different, and sometimes competing, ideas and at times widely divergent programs. Indeed, it is almost misleading to speak of “Zionism” in the singular at all, and in many senses, it would be preferable to think in terms of multiple Zionisms. As the Israeli author Amos Oz wrote, “Zionism” was never a first name but rather a “family name.” Many different people, he explained, could sing the words “we have come to the Land to build and to be rebuilt,” as a once-popular song would have it, “but by this they pointed to differing master plans” (Oz, 1998).

Recognizing this diversity, however, it is also clear that something brought these disparate ideas and social groups under the same general heading, into a single family fold. And indeed, two fundamental elements, it seems to me, were shared by virtually all who saw themselves historically as Zionists.

Crisis and Exile

The first of these was a sense of profound, even existential, crisis that seemed to have afflicted Jewish life. Zionist thinkers of differing orientations and currents might stress distinct aspects of that crisis – the destabilization of the social and political structures of Jewish society; closely related to this, the undermining of traditional sources of authority in the Jewish world, and competition between disparate groups now contending to fill the leadership vacuum; the collapse of traditional Jewish culture; the intellectual and spiritual challenges posed with the advent of Enlightenment thought and its Jewish variant, known as Haskalah; the crisis of traditional religious beliefs and practices, brought upon first by rationalism’s questioning of traditional faiths, and later by romantic notions and particularly Nietzschean ideas regarding the “death of God”; the challenge to Jewish values and ideals with the penetration and increasingly powerful influence of tenets and ethical standards adopted from surrounding societies from which traditional Jewish society had previously been comparatively insulated; the palpable manifestation of this in changing social mores and practices, and in ideals of leadership and of social conduct; the dramatic and traumatic shift in Jews’ political and legal position, brought about first by emancipation (perceived in many ways as a blessing, but as one that bore with it tremendous challenges to Jewish collective identity), and then by the reaction to it that often took the form of modern political anti-Semitism; the no less overwhelming transformation of the Jews’ social position, and...
their relations with their surrounding societies, with the 19th century’s unprecedented levels of integration (and, of course, reactions against that as well); the undermining of Jews’ traditional sense of place and belonging – first by the unprecedented prospect of inclusion in the nations and bodies-politic of the societies in which they lived, and later by increasingly violent efforts to exclude them. In short, as this (partial) list indicates, the crisis was felt as an all-encompassing one, shattering the foundations of Jewish life in virtually all aspects.

Zionists were not alone in diagnosing this crisis of Jewish life. Virtually every current of modern Jewish political, social and cultural thought shared the sense of crisis, even if the nature of that crisis was understood in differing terms. What characterized Zionist diagnoses – indeed, what to a large degree made them Zionist – was, first, the key term which for Zionists seemed to encapsulate the full conglomeration of crises and, second, the consequent prescription for remedy. This combination of diagnosis and prescription was the second fundamental element that was shared by virtually every member of the Zionist family. For Zionists, the entire array of existential crises previously enumerated could be characterized by the single word Exile, or the Hebrew Galut. The term was by no means a Zionist invention, of course, but was rather adopted from its central position in centuries of traditional Jewish thought and writing, in which it had at least two dimensions. The first of these was the physical, this-worldly fact of being away from, or out of, one’s place; the concrete, historical fact, in other words, of having been exiled from the Land of Israel and living scattered among other nations. The second was a metaphysical dimension, perhaps no more eloquently stated than in the Talmudic notion that with the exile of the Jewish people from their land, the Shekhinah, or divine presence, had been exiled along with them. Exile in our world, according to this notion, later elaborated on with particular force in Jewish mystical thought that pointed to a rich array of theological implications, was paralleled by an exile of the divine itself, a cosmic exile (Eisen, 1986; Baer, 1980).

Disparate Zionist currents of thought shared not only this focus on the problem of exile, but also the fundamental basis for the range of remedies they proposed. Virtually all currents of Zionism shared the basic assumption that for the problem of exile to be remedied and for Jewish life to continue and to be viable in the conditions of the modern world, the territorial dimension of exile would have to be addressed as a basis for all else. What Zionists of divergent stripes shared, in other words, was the notion that the solution to “the Jewish problem” could only be found when the Jews would regain a territorial base, which they had been lacking for centuries. After 1905, it would become the Zionist consensus that that base could only be in Palestine, or the Land of Israel, as it was traditionally known in Hebrew and in Jewish literature.

It would by no means be hyperbole to state that, as understood by its proponents, Zionism was a rescue mission of sorts. This may in itself seem almost self-evident given the pervasive notion that Zionism set out to establish a refuge for persecuted Jews. As can be gleaned from the previous discussion, however, this was in fact only a small (if not unimportant) part of the story. Although the rise of modern political and violent anti-Semitism posed a very real and imminent threat to the lives and livelihoods of many Jews, the deeper crisis to which many Zionists pointed was not one that was posed by external forces, but rather by the internal-Jewish social, cultural, and spiritual crisis; in a word, once again, by exile.1 Physical refuge, in other words, was a prerequisite – hardly any Zionist would have quarreled with that. But it was but a first step on the path to the much more ambitious goal of undoing exile.

“Love of Zion” and Leo Pinsker’s “Autoemancipation”

Consider the diagnosis, and consequent solution, as it appears in Leo Pinsker’s 1882 pamphlet Autoemancipation – one of the foundational texts of Hibbat Zion – the “Love of Zion,” the precursor to Theodor Herzl’s political Zionism and his establishment of the World Zionist
Zionism Between Despair and Hope

Organization. To be sure, an initial reading of Pinsker's text may suggest that the fundamental problem that he identified was what he termed “Judeophobia” – fear, or hatred of Jews. After all, prior to 1881, Pinsker had called for Jews to adopt Russian culture and seek integration into Russian society until he was shaken by the outbreak of a wave of violent anti-Jewish pogroms that swept across parts of the Russian Empire beginning in 1881, in the immediate wake of the assassination of Czar Alexander II. Indeed, Autoemancipation opens by pointing to “the misery caused by bloody deeds of violence” and with expressions of concern for those Jews who had been made refugees by the attacks. Pinsker goes so far as to express concern even for Jews in the seemingly more enlightened and emancipated Western European lands, where political anti-Semitism was becoming a discernible force in the final decades of the 19th century (Pinsker in Hertzberg, 1997, 181–2). Judeophobia, Pinsker writes, was a hereditary “psychic aberration” (Pinsker in Hertzberg, 1997, 185). Much of Jewish thought and cultural life until this point, certainly among the more educated and acculturated Jews, had been focused on adapting to local cultural and social norms, based on the understanding that hostility to Jews was a remnant of dark, medieval times and would disappear as Jews transformed themselves and as non-Jews became more educated. Pinsker now suggested otherwise – that Judeophobia and its manifestations were in fact gaining momentum and were a fundamental feature of modern life.

Animosity toward Jews, then, was both a catalyst and a core problem for Pinsker. And yet, “the essence of the problem,” as he understood it, was within Jewish life rather than outside it. It lies, he writes, “in the fact that, in the midst of the nations among whom the Jews reside, they form a distinctive element which cannot be assimilated, which cannot be readily digested by any nation” (emphasis added) (Pinsker in Hertzberg, 1997, 182). The fundamental problem, in other words – the cause of Judeophobia itself, as Pinsker understood it – was the Jews’ abnormal condition. They were everywhere a distinct nation yet seemed in many respects not a nation at all, since they lacked the most fundamental attributes of nationhood. The Jew, moreover, was “everywhere a guest, and nowhere at home” (Pinsker in Hertzberg, 1997, 183). Perpetual, intrinsic, Jewish homelessness, then, was fundamental to the problem – a first layer of meaning to the key term “exile.”

The problem, however, as Pinsker diagnosed it, ran deeper yet. The homelessness of the Jews was compounded by the fact that they had themselves lost their sense of nationhood, they had “persuaded themselves” that they had shed their national existence. As Pinsker (a physician) now identified the problem, the Jews were in the “unhappy condition” of a “sick man,” for whom “the absence of desire for food and drink is a very serious symptom” (Pinsker in Hertzberg, 1997, 183). The Jewish nation, as he saw it, was on its deathbed. And if this were not enough, he would go on to explain that the problem was in fact yet more severe: in spite of their loss of their homeland and national center of gravity, Pinsker writes, and notwithstanding their often-willful renunciation of their own national attributes, the Jews continued to exist among other nations as a “spiritual nation.” “Among the living nations of the earth,” he wrote, “the Jews occupy the position of a nation long since dead.” Not only on their deathbed, then, but in fact already dead – and yet, at the same time, still alive. Thus, Pinsker is able to provide an explanation for the puzzling phenomenon of Judeophobia and its persistence, which resonated not only with the medicalized language that characterized a great deal of social analysis in the 19th century, but also with the prevalent fascination with the liminal zone between life and death that saw the publication of such novels as Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and Bram Stoker’s Dracula, alongside a widespread cultural interest in spiritualism and the occult (Kontou and Willburn, 2012; Oppenheim, 1985; Jay and Neve, 1999). “The world,” Pinsker writes, “saw in this people the frightening form of one of the dead walking among the living.” The Jews appeared to others as a “ghostlike apparition” (Pinsker in Hertzberg 1997, 184). What wonder was it, then, that
they were feared? While Judeophobia, in other words, may be a hereditary condition, its roots are in fact to be found in the abnormal existential condition in which the Jews had been living for centuries. Although Pinsker himself did not use the term (preferring to stick with his quasi-medical diagnoses), “exile,” or “galut” seems almost to shout out from among his pages, with profound and multifaceted reverberations.

Complex though this diagnosis was, the solution Pinsker envisioned was clear. Since the Jews were “nowhere at home,” the inevitable conclusion was that “we finally must have a home, if not a country of our own” (Pinsker in Hertzberg, 1997, 193). Homelessness, however understood, could only be rectified by providing the homeless people with a home.

That this was the fundamental prerequisite to any kind of healing was a sense shared by many writers and thinkers who tended to lay even greater stress on the internal crisis of culture and identity that lay at the basis of their turn to Zionism. Jewish life – individual and collective – had become impossible, less as a result of the external attacks by anti-Semites, as many would argue, and more as a result of what writer Michah Yosef Berdiczewsky called “the fissure in the heart” of the modern Jew. Jews in the modern world, in other words, were in exile even from their very selves. The solutions proposed and envisioned by much of Zionist thought, consequently, laid far greater stress on the social and cultural renaissance that the Jews must undergo rather than on the political goal of the establishment of a state as an end in itself. It was that “fissure in the heart” that had to be mended on both the individual and collective levels. Pinsker had likened the Jews to a patient on his deathbed, so ill as to lack any desire for food and water. Such ideas were ubiquitous in early Zionist writings. With similar imagery, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, one of the earliest proto-Zionist immigrants to Palestine and the individual most closely associated with the revival of Hebrew as a spoken tongue, would write in 1903 that the Jews are people toward whom “the angel of national death has already turned his terrible gaze . . . [a people whose] blood has already begun to drip from the sword of death hanging over their head” (Ben-Yehuda, 1903; Saposnik, 2005, 2008).

Pinsker’s pamphlet, written at the very dawn of modern Zionist thought, already evinced one of the key tensions that would characterize Zionism during its first quarter century. Once reawakened, Pinsker cautioned, the Jewish nation ought to steer clear from any romantic notions of “restoring ancient Judea.” The goal, he added, “must not be the ‘Holy Land,’ but a land of our own” (Pinsker in Hertzberg, 1997, 194). Was the budding national movement focused, then, on a return of the Jews to their ancient homeland in Palestine/Land of Israel (as its name, Hibbat Zion, or “Love of Zion,” certainly seemed to indicate), or was it about providing some territory as a remedy for an ailing, homeless nation? Shortly after the publication of his pamphlet, a somewhat reluctant Leo Pinsker was chosen to stand at the helm of Hibbat Zion in its early efforts to organize. In this capacity, he would encounter a majority for whom the Land of Israel was the exclusive territorial goal. Only there, according to this view, could redemption from exile be accomplished. Hibbat Zion would thus become a Palestine-focused movement and would later play an influential role in moving the Zionist Organization in the same direction – but not before a bitter struggle.

Theodor Herzl, the Zionist Organization and the Uganda Controversy

In 1896, nearly a decade and a half after the appearance of Pinsker’s Autoemancipation, and with no knowledge of that precedent, a Jewish-Viennese journalist by the name of Theodor Herzl would publish a pamphlet of his own, titled Der Judenstaat, or The State of the Jews. Herzl’s ideas landed on fertile soil, and he combined them with a personal drive to engage in intensive diplomatic and organizational activity. He immediately embarked on a feverish endeavor to secure
what he called a “charter” for Palestine or some other territory, and one year after the publication of his pamphlet, he convened the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland (in the summer of 1897). Zionism had now been fully conceived as an idea and as a movement with an array of international organizational bodies.

Like Pinsker, Herzl was convinced that the prerequisite for any solution to the problems faced by Jews was the establishment of a territorial base with a degree of political independence. Also like Pinsker, Herzl was not initially committed to the idea that that territorial solution could be found only in Palestine. Argentina, where there was already an established network of Jewish agricultural settlements, seemed to him a prospect no less viable. And yet again like Pinsker, Herzl would move closer to a Palestinocentric position, in large measure through his encounter with the Eastern European *Hovevi Zion*, by now recruits to his Zionist Organization. Ironically, this move would take place just as Herzl would present the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903 with a British Proposal for Jewish settlement in East Africa (the so-called Uganda Plan).

Indeed, by the time Herzl had spent close to seven years in what had proved to be all but futile diplomatic efforts to secure his charter for Palestine, with a renewed and more violent wave of anti-Jewish pogroms sweeping across the Russian Empire beginning in the spring of 1903, he would come to the sixth Zionist Congress that summer with a fresh proposal from the British Government for settlement on a tract of land in East Africa (much of which is in fact in present-day Kenya). This was effectively Herzl’s one significant diplomatic achievement – a recognition by the largest and most powerful empire of the time of Jewish nationhood, of the Zionist Organization’s claim to represent that nation, and a piece of land for a now ever-more persecuted and threatened Jewish community in Eastern Europe. It was an offer he would have been hard-pressed to refuse out of hand, and he proposed to the Congress that an expedition be sent to explore this land. As at least some historians have argued, by this point even the East Africa proposal was in fact understood by Herzl as a means to pressure the Ottomans into a Palestine concession (Friedman, 1997). But that did not prevent the inherent tension between what would soon be known as the “territorialists” – those who believed any territorial base might remedy Jewish exile – and the so-called Zion-Zionists (or Palestinocentrics) from exploding. The bitter dispute between the two camps continued for two years and would see the emergence of deep divisions, including the first assassination attempt in Zionist history, when Chaim Zelig Luban, a Russian-Jewish student, fired two (poorly aimed) shots at Max Nordau for his alleged support for the East Africa plan. This would not be the last time that ostensible betrayal of the Land of Israel would serve as the ideological basis for political violence. In this case, Nordau emerged unscathed.

At root, what was at stake in this bitter struggle were two competing notions of the meaning of exile and the ways in which it might be undone. After two years of strife, in the middle of which (in the summer of 1904) Theodor Herzl died at the age of 44, the Zionist Congress reconvened in 1905, with decisions that now made it a decidedly Land-of-Israel movement. Some, who thought that the Jews might yet “work out their own salvation”2 in other territories, seceded and formed a rival Jewish national movement known as the Jewish Territorial Organization, which continued to search for alternative territories for the next two decades.

Creating a Hebrew Culture

In the meantime, however, in the years following the Uganda controversy, the Jewish Yishuv (pre-state community) in Palestine was beginning to show signs of actually becoming the kernel of a budding national entity, with its own distinct national culture, based in the newly revived (or as some would argue, reinvented) Hebrew language (Saposnik, 2008). Based on the grave
Arieh Saposnik

diagnosis of impending national death, activists of diverse orientations set out to transform Jewish culture and social frameworks in the interest of giving them a new lease on life. Hebrew poet Haim Nachman Bialik, considered Israel’s “national poet,” explained this transition from destruction to rebirth at the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1925 – one of the flagships and achievements of Zionist cultural efforts. “Ladies and Gentlemen!”, he proclaimed,

You all know what has become of our old spiritual strongholds in the Diaspora in recent times. . . . For all their inner strength, and for all the energy the nation had expended upon creating and preserving these centers, they stood not firm on the day of wrath; by the decree of history they are crumbled and razed to the foundations and our people is left standing empty-handed upon their ruins.

(Bialik in Hertzberg, 1997, 281–8)

“This,” Bialik declared, “is the very curse of the Galut.” As a result, he explained, “we have slowly arrived at the realization that without a tangible homeland, without private national premises that are entirely ours, we can have no sort of a life, either material or spiritual.” The new university – and it is difficult today to recapture and evoke the sense of drama and momentousness that accompanied its establishment – was, for Bialik, the equivalent of a Third Temple. It was this rebuilding of a home for the Jewish spirit that was, to him, the pinnacle of Zionist achievement. It would be the task of his generation, and that of the generation younger than himself, “to kindle . . . a holy fire within the walls of the house which has just been opened upon Mount Scopus.” Much as the young and idealistic Labor Zionist pioneers were elevating their simple manual labor “to the level of the highest sanctity,” he continued, and in so doing building the “Earthly Jerusalem,” “let those who work within these walls build the Heavenly Jerusalem” (Bialik in Hertzberg, 1997, 281–8). For Bialik, redemption from Galut entailed the earthly and the heavenly as a unified whole – the this-worldly Zionist undertakings of politics, diplomacy, immigration and settlement, together with the cultural work that alone could give it true meaning.

Lest one suspect that such sentiments were limited to poets and their circles, David Ben-Gurion – the individual most directly responsible for the creation of the State of Israel and a quintessentially political leader – would make a similar point years later. Writing shortly after the establishment of the state, Ben-Gurion would often argue that statehood itself must be seen not as an end in itself, but rather as a means to the ultimate end – a revolution in Jewish life and culture and their revitalization. Although the creation of the state, as he would put it, had been “a miracle,” he could nevertheless declare unequivocally that even that miraculous event “does not mean that the vision has been fulfilled.” To be sure, the state was a necessary and indispensable means to the end. It was nevertheless, as he put it, a “vehicle,” whose purpose was to lead to “the fulfillment of the redemptive vision” (Ben-Gurion in Diamant, 1998, 45–9). Redemption, or Ge’ula in Hebrew (the name, not coincidentally, that Ben-Gurion would give his first-born daughter) meant the undoing of galut.

Perhaps the most eloquent articulation of this understanding of Zionism as aimed at redemption – not only of the Jewish individual and collective but entailing human and even cosmic redemptions – can be found in the writings of Aharon David Gordon. Gordon arrived in Palestine in 1904 at the age of 48 – an old man, as he was seen by the young pioneers of the wave of immigration known as “the Second Aliya,” on whom he would have a profound influence as an icon of the fledgling Labor Zionist movements. For Gordon, labor was not a mere means to an end. Laboring on the land, in the Land of Israel, was part of the redemption from exile that the Jews so desperately needed as a remedy for their alienation from nature, from their land,
from a connection to the cosmos itself. Redemption from this all-encompassing exile, Gordon declared, must come from within, from the rediscovery and recreation of an authentic individual and national self, both connected to their source and core.

These, then, were the fundamental ideas that lay in some form at the basis of virtually every current of Zionist thought, notwithstanding divergences in emphasis and hue. Zionism, however, was more than an idea or an intellectual undertaking. It was, rather, a this-worldly ideology or collection of related ideologies – “an action-oriented set of ideas,” as Gideon Shimoni has characterized it (Shimoni, 1995, xii). It had set out to effect very tangible change in a very concrete world. How, then, did Zionists take these ideas, some quite abstract, and attempt to implement them in such a way as to have a palpable impact on the actual lives of living Jews (and others)?

The Implausibility of Zionism

The weight of this question cannot be overemphasized. Zionism’s most central ideas could appear (and to many, did appear) utterly implausible. In the cultured circles of 1896 Vienna (Herzl’s own social circle), Herzl’s pamphlet was met with considerable ridicule and derision, and with concern by some of his associates that he had gone mad. “If Herzl should be taken to the lunatic asylum,” one colleague quipped, “I shall be glad to put my carriage at his disposal” (Elon, 1975, 177). Herzl himself would note that “not everyone who is first considered insane is correct thirty years later. But in order to be proved right in thirty years, one has to be prepared in the first few weeks to be considered a madman” (Elon, 1975, 165).

The central motivating idea of “cultural Zionism” – the creation of a new culture, based on the Hebrew language as a spoken tongue – appeared no less outlandish. Although small pockets of Hebrew speech existed in limited circumstances and for specific purposes, and although Hebrew had never ceased to be a literary language, not a single child had been raised with Hebrew as a mother tongue in two millennia or more. When Herzl published his seminal pamphlet, he had famously rejected the possibility of Hebrew as the language of the state he envisioned. “We cannot converse with one another in Hebrew,” he wrote. “Who amongst us has a sufficient acquaintance with Hebrew to ask for a railway ticket in that language? Such a thing cannot be done.”

To be sure, Herzl himself had rather scanty familiarity with the language. But many others, including prominent Hebrew writers – those responsible, in other words, for the literary revival of Hebrew (which predated Zionism itself) – considered spoken Hebrew to be an unlikely prospect at best. Ahad Ha’am (Asher Zvi Ginsberg), the father-figure of “cultural Zionism” and one of the individuals considered to be most responsible for the creation of a modern Hebrew prose style, was among them. Following a visit to Palestine in 1901 (he would immigrate only in 1920), he voiced grave skepticism regarding this prospect. In surveying the small and struggling Hebrew schools that had begun to be established in the country, he wrote that the students were admittedly able to converse in Hebrew to some degree, but only in a very limited manner, and “so long as they speak of simple and common matters.” Ask even the older students any slightly more complicated question, however, and “they begin to stutter . . . and seek aid in hand gestures and mimicry” (Ha’am, 1901). True Hebrew speech, he concluded, was at best a matter for a very distant future. Only a decade later, however, in the wake of another visit to Palestine, his estimation would change dramatically, and he would write that “when one comes to a Jewish colony, one is immediately struck by the recognition that it is saturated with a national Hebrew atmosphere. All aspects of life . . . are stamped with the stamp of Hebrew” (Ha’am, 1912, 279). By the eve of the First World War, spoken Hebrew, and a budding national culture
that was founded on that language, were becoming a palpable reality in Palestine (Saposnik, 2008). A little over three decades later, the other implausible prospect – a Jewish state with that Hebrew-speaking population – would also become a reality. How two such unlikely scenarios were played out is a question that cannot but raise the historian’s curiosity.

Implementing the Implausible

How then were these implausibilities undertaken? Since the most basic meaning of the notion of exile is its physical, geographic dimension, the prerequisite for Zionist efforts was, naturally, a geographic transformation – the removal of large numbers of Jews from the places in which they lived and their relocation to Palestine. This, of course, was in itself a herculean task. The largest concentration of the world’s Jews in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was in Eastern Europe, with significant populations in the west, in North African countries and in other parts of the Muslim world. In Zionism’s early days, only a very small minority of the Jews lived in Palestine, and there too, they constituted a small percentage of the overall population.

Indeed, the need for the physical relocation of so many people was an additional factor that made Zionism seem to many a pipe dream. Simon Dubnow, the father of “autonomism,” a Jewish national ideology that held that Jews ought to seek cultural autonomy in their current diaspora homes, was not unsympathetic to many Zionist ideas. A personal and in many respects, ideological, friend of Ahad Ha’am, Dubnow would write that “It is self-evident that if we had the world-power to transfer the entire Galuth to the ‘Jewish state’ we would gladly do this.” However, he added, “historical necessity” mandated that “we make peace with the Galuth,” where “we strive to preserve and develop [Jewish] national existence.” This was necessary, he argued, because “the greater part of our people . . . will remain in the Galuth” (Dubnow, 1937, 99). Dubnow’s friend Ahad Ha’am also believed that even with the establishment of what he envisioned as a “spiritual center” in Palestine, most Jews were likely to remain in diaspora. What set Zionists apart from Dubnow’s view, ultimately – including Zionists such as Ahad Ha’am – was their sense that without the transfer of a significant number of Jews to Palestine and the establishment there of a national base, Jewish life in the diaspora was all but doomed. Some Zionists expected it would disappear entirely, through some combination of assimilation and immigration. Others, as noted, expected it to persist in a renewed form, under the impact of the revived center.

Interestingly, however, with all the weight that Zionism attributed to this geographical shift, only late in the game did Zionist organizations become substantially involved in attempting to organize and actively promote immigration. In its early decades, immigration was a haphazard affair, left to individuals and families. It remained at virtually all times an extremely challenging prospect, with the numbers of emigrants leaving Palestine often competing with numbers of those immigrants arriving (and in some years, exceeding it). Nevertheless, beginning in the 1880s, Palestine began to be the focus for a new kind of Jewish immigration. Zionist historiography tends to demarcate distinct waves of immigration: the “First Aliya,” dating from about 1881–2 to around 1900; the “Second Aliya,” from late 1903 or 1904 to the outbreak of the First World War; the “Third Aliya” from the end of the Great War to around 1923; a fourth, from about 1924 to 1930; and a fifth from 1933 to 1939. The numbering ends here, with a further wave (and a heroic mythology) attached to the immigration that began in the wake of the Second World War and the Holocaust (often in breach of British regulations), and then a period of mass immigration in the first years of statehood, after 1948.

Each of these so-called waves is understood as having been characterized by a particular profile of immigrant and distinct ideological orientations. These are imprecise, to be sure, but are
helpful in broad brushstrokes as portraits of these waves of immigration. Overall, a combination of ideological commitment by some of the immigrants, and economic and political necessity faced by many, led to substantial increases in the Jewish population of Palestine between the outset of Hibbat Zion immigration in the 1880s and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. If the Jews of Palestine numbered roughly 24,000 in 1882, constituting no more than 8% of the country’s overall population, by 1948, there were some 600,000 Jews living in the country, constituting approximately 30% of the population. If in 1880, moreover, the Jewish population of Palestine was centered in what were known as the four holy cities – Tiberias, Safed, Hebron and Jerusalem – and focused on study of scripture and a life of religious devotion, many of the immigrants who began arriving in the 1880s changed the contours of Jewish society, with an increasing number informed by Zionist ideas and involved in the cultural transformation that Zionism envisioned. By the turn of the 20th century, some 25 new Jewish agricultural colonies had been established, and the Jewish population in some key cities – Jaffa, Jerusalem, Haifa – was growing. By 1909, a new Jewish neighborhood just to the north of Jaffa was established. It would soon grow into the city of Tel Aviv. The overall character of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine changed dramatically during these decades. By the interwar period, it had been stamped unmistakably with a Zionist and Hebraist cultural seal.

The demographic increase was significant, to be sure, but it is also evident that even by 1948, Zionism had fallen short of its goal of establishing a Jewish majority in Palestine. What made it possible by that year for the United Nations to propose partition of the country and the establishment of two states – one Jewish, the other Arab – and then for the Jewish state to declare its independence in May of 1948, was the fact that alongside immigration, Zionist bodies had undertaken a wide range of projects designed to create the new society, the new culture and the representative political institutions that would be its basis.

If Hebrew was to constitute the foundation for the new culture that most Zionists envisioned, one key focus of work from an early stage was the creation of educational and cultural institutions designed to enable Hebrew speech and to construct a national culture around it. Although the linguistic landscape of Palestine would remain polyphonic for many decades yet to come, already with the “First Aliya” in the 1880s, efforts were made to establish schools based in the Hebrew language. These were the schools that Ahad Ha’am would criticize in 1901. But they would also become key kernels of the nascent Hebrew-speaking society that he would recognize a decade later. The Herzlia Gymnasium, whose beginnings date to 1905, was the first Hebrew high school and would become a flagship of Hebrew-Zionist education and culture-making. It was followed by Hebrew high schools in Jerusalem and then in Haifa in the prewar years, and a network of schools that would grow after the war, during the British Mandate period. Accompanying these, the Hebrew Teachers’ Association, established as early as 1903, would emerge not only as a resource for Hebrew education, but as a cultural nationalizing tool of prime importance. Alongside primary and secondary education, two institutions of higher learning – the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Technion in Haifa – were conceived and initiated at early stages in the development of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine. Both were originated before the First World War, although they would have to weather the disruption of the Great War and await the postwar years to be established.

Alongside these educational institutions, the decades prior to the First World War saw the growth of cultural institutions of a wide range of kinds. In 1906, Boris Schatz established the Bezalel Art Museum and School with the aim of creating a national art, rooted in the soil of Palestine, for a people who had often been criticized for ostensibly being artless and lacking in aesthetic sensibility (Bland, 2001; Olin, 2001; Manor, 2005; Saposnik, 2008; Schatz, 1906). That same year, Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, a pioneer in the then-emerging field of ethnomusicology,
also immigrated to Palestine and established his “Institute of Jewish Song” in Jerusalem – the musical equivalent of Schatz’s artistic undertaking. Idelsohn accepted German composer Richard Wagner’s contention that Jews were foreign to the European musical (and cultural) tradition. In rediscovering and reinventing itself, he wrote, Jewish culture “must strip away the outer shell [kelipah] that it has grown in past generations, and . . . the foreign spirit with which it has been impregnated.” The effort to recapture an authentic Jewish national sound, according to Idelsohn, would have to be directed toward the music of the Jews of the Orient, and of Yemenite Jews in particular – “the only shining star in the darkness of a millennia-long night” (Idelsohn, 1908, 3).

Both these initiatives, and others like them, undertook to revolutionize Jewish civilization and create an authentic national culture. They would do so – tacitly or explicitly – in dialogue with the traditional Jewish culture that they deemed to be in crisis. As Bialik would put it in his 1925 Hebrew University speech, even as the Jewish people found itself standing on a cultural pile of rubble, it was crucial to remember that “amid the ruins of those hallowed structures there are many sound and beautiful stones that can and ought to be foundation stones for our new edifice” (Bialik in Hertzberg, 1997, 285).

These cultural undertakings – the remaking of the Jewish spirit – were accompanied and abetted by very this-worldly undertakings, such as the establishment of Jewish paramilitary organizations, the first of which, “Bar-Giora,” later to become “Ha-Shomer,” was established in 1907; a wide range of political institutions, chief among them the World Zionist Congress, which together would eventually create the basis for Israeli governing institutions; financial and economic mechanisms – the first of which were the Jewish Colonial Trust, the Anglo-Palestine Company (the Zionist bank) and the Jewish National Fund, a key land purchasing agency; and of course, the establishment of settlements and new settlement models, such as the kibbutz and the moshav.

Undergirding virtually all these undertakings was the idea that every aspect of Jewish life – indeed, the Jews themselves – had to be transformed to counter the ills of exile. Thus, a key image motivating and catalyzing Zionist activity was that of the “new Jew,” or “Hebrew,” who would be radically different from the image of the Jew in exile. “The Jew” in a great deal of European imagery was imagined as old, weak, conniving, alienated from nature and the soil. The Hebrews of Palestine, by contrast, would be youthful, strong, connected to the land, engaged in manual and agricultural labor; determined to defend themselves; and culturally, artistically and musically creative. The goal of many of the Zionist organizations and efforts was to create these new Jews and the new Hebrew culture that would be theirs (Gilman, 1991; Gilman, 1993; Hyman, 1995; Efron, 1994; Almog, 2000; Shapira, 1996; Bartal, 1998).

**Confronting Challenges**

The fusion of these disparate avenues of activity, ranging from the very this-worldly to the more spiritual and cultural, is arguably the key to understanding how Zionism was able to move from a seemingly preposterous idea to a very tangible reality. None of this took place easily, however. From its outset, Zionism faced a range of challenges – both internal and external. The ways in which it contended with them would shape not only the implementation of the ideas but would in fact have a role in the development of the ideas themselves, the contours of Hebrew culture as it evolved and the self-image of the Jewish society of Palestine, and what would later become Israeli society.

If one of the major challenges with which Zionism had to contend was the geographical removal of millions of Jews from one place to another, that difficulty was compounded by the fact that the land to which Zionists sought to transfer those Jews was not unpopulated.
Zionism Between Despair and Hope

Around 1880, on the eve of Zionist immigration, approximately half a million people lived in Palestine, the vast majority of them Muslim Arabs. A smaller group was composed of Christian Arabs, and there were small numbers of others who belonged to neither of these categories. Jews constituted a small fraction of the population – no more than 8% by most estimates. Every Jewish immigrant who arrived in Palestine would have been taken from boat to shore by Arab port workers at the Jaffa port and would have landed immediately thereafter in the largely Arab city of Jaffa. Even if they hadn’t been aware of the Arab population of Palestine prior to immigrating, arrival in Palestine would have made them immediately aware of it.

There is a vast body of literature on the encounter between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and on the developments that would transform that encounter into the bloody and seemingly intractable Israeli–Arab conflict that is so familiar a feature of nearly every day’s news headlines. Naturally, there are vast areas of disagreement over key issues pertaining to how that history unfolded. To understand the impact of the encounter on Zionism itself in this context, I will limit myself to consideration of some of its key features and turning points.

From Zionism’s earliest days, divergent perceptions of the East and of “Oriental” culture, interwoven with differing views of Europe and European civilization would have a formative impact on the ways in which the national culture was envisioned. To be sure, Theodor Herzl would famously write that the state of Jews that he envisioned, if established in Palestine, might “from a part of a wall of defense for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism” (Herzl in Hertzberg, 1997, 222). And indeed, this was one line of thinking within the Zionist context, which has received considerable attention in the historiography of the conflict. There was another line of thought, however, which has received far less attention, although at the time it seems to have been no less pervasive.

The Jews, according to this way of thinking, were in any case leaving a Europe that had violently vomited them from within it, and returning to their true home, the font of their true cultural origins in “the East.” Jews in 19th- and 20th-century Europe were often labeled as “half-Asian,” and rather than rejecting this accusation, many Zionists chose instead to embrace it. Jewish culture, according to this view, had emerged in the Orient; Jews had for centuries been facing eastward in their prayers, and in the process of healing the Jews and re-creating their civilization, this was the place to which they must return. In so doing, it was not sufficient that they remove themselves from the foreign soils on which they resided; they must also extricate Europe from within themselves and merge once again with their eastern essence. The “new Jew” for which many Zionists longed, according to this view, would be fundamentally rooted in “the Orient,” having shed his or her personal, and especially cultural, connections to Europe. “Life in The Land,” as author Meir Wilkansky explained, had already transformed those who had been there for some time, and who were now “vigorous and healthy” young Jews. Palestine “had erased the semblance of Europeanness from their faces, their manners and their clothing.” Jews in Palestine were healthy and authentic – in sharp contradistinction to those of the European diaspora – precisely because they integrated the easternness of the land itself and the eastern culture of the Arabs into the very core of their newly easternized selves. Within the renewed encounter in Palestine, Wilkansky wrote, one could hear “songs of the Qur’an” blended with “the Hebrew trills [that] attract the hearts of Israel, gather in the courtyards and ascend to the roofs.” The eastern harmony resonated for Wilkansky with the physical and spiritual encounter. “The choir lowers its head and body,” he wrote, “breathing ‘Allah,’ or ‘Eloheinu’” (Wilkansky, 1911, 18–22). The East, and the renewed connection with the Arab “racial brothers,” as the terminology of the time often put it, offered the prospect and an image of complete self-transformation. Hebrew-speaking children in Palestine, as another author put it with a laudatory and...
ironic reversal of imagery borrowed from Europe, were “fundamentally different from . . . the children of exile,” precisely because they were “little Arabs, nice savages” (Ben-Avi, 1907, 2).

In the process of reuniting with their true eastern origins and brethren, as a prevalent synthesis would have it, the Jews would import the best of European civilization, which they had adopted over the years of their extended exile, and as a result of which they were in a unique position to act as a bridge between East and West, to the mutual benefit of the Jews themselves and the peoples of the Orient. Space is too limited to attempt an explanation as to why such visions did not quite come to pass (Saposnik, 2006). I would suggest, however, that to effectively undertake an explanation, there remains much in the combined histories of Jews and Arabs that must be closely studied.

The conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine would heighten another of the core tensions that was inherent in Zionism from its outset – the sometimes uneasy balance between the particularistic stress on the Jewish nation, and the universal orientation, the desire that Jews might become members of a worldwide community of redeemed and liberated nations. As in the history of so many nationalisms, the inherent national and particularistic aspect always stood at risk of being brought to the point of extremism, xenophobia and exclusivism. And yet a great deal of Zionist thought laid considerable stress on a universalist vision that was no less inherent to it, and which understood the revival of the Jewish nation as part of the 19th and 20th centuries’ broader movement for national revival and human liberation.

Conclusion: What Might the History of Zionism Teach Us?

There is much, of course, in the history of Zionism that a brief chapter such as this cannot cover. There are, in addition, virtually endless historiographical debates and conflicting interpretations of the course of Zionism’s history, and there are diverging and conflicting assessments of its merits and value. What one can hope to demonstrate in a brief survey such as this is the core element of the story – Zionism’s translation of improbable ideas into palpable realities that were aimed at transforming a situation perceived as one of grave crisis into what was at least imagined as a social, political and cultural renaissance. It is in this sense a veritable playground for historians, tasked with attempting to explain change over time. Indeed, if the study of history is in the final analysis one way to try to understand the human spirit – its dreams and its realities, its achievements and failings, its apexes and nadirs – Zionism’s story has much to teach about all these, about the transformative potency of human imagination and efforts and about the power of sometimes audacious visions, even in the face of crisis and despair.

Notes

1 Indeed, it is hardly accidental that even to this day, in what is in many respects a post-ideological Israeli society (or at least one that is considerably less ideologically charged), the epithet “exilic” (“Galutī”) remains a term of derision in multiple contexts.
2 The text that appeared regularly on publications and statement by the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO).

Bibliography

Baer, Yitzhak. Galut (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1980).
Zionism Between Despair and Hope


Ha’am, Ahad. “Batei ha-Sefer be-Yafo”, Ha-Shilo’ah, vol. 7, no. 1–3 (March–April 1901).

Idelsohn, Abraham Zvi. “Negginot ha-Sephardim” [Sephardic Music], Hashkafá, vol. 9, no. 69 (18 Iyar 5668/May 19, 1908).


Wilkansky, Meir. “Mi-Yemei ha-Aliya”, Ha-Po’el Ha-Tza’ir, vol. 4, no. 23–24 (September 20, 1911), 18–22.
2

MAMLAKHTIYUT

The Zionist and Israeli Version of Republicanism

Avi Bareli and Nir Kedar

Although the term *mamlakhtiyut* is associated with David Ben-Gurion, it symbolizes a republican civic ideology and a set of concepts shared by most Israelis. The current essay will clarify the term and address the dominance of civic ideas in Zionist and Israeli political thought and deed. It comprises five sections: first, we shall see that civic ideas were a central part of Zionist ideology from its inception, as Zionism was a modern national movement that emerged in Europe in the last decades of the 19th century and sought to actualize modernist civic ideas, and in particular the concept of the nation-state based on political participation and the rule of law. Second, we will argue that this civic perspective, which dominated Zionist thought and action, was a republican perspective. Third, we will describe the Zionist manifestation of republican thought, which—following Ben-Gurion—we term *mamlakhtiyut*. Fourth, we will describe the emergence of a progressive and developed Jewish political community in the country even before independence, guided by modernist civic political principles that served as its guiding light. This was a nonindependent community, ruled by a foreign sovereign, yet it achieved a great degree of autonomy and succeeded in establishing a central political authority based on democratic consent and widespread national recognition, which operated within a vibrant republican-democratic political culture. Fifth, in the concluding section, we will analyze Israeli *mamlakhtiyut* as an important common conceptual ground for all the major political powers in Israel’s first decade, and yet an arena of controversies and struggles between left-wing and right-wing republicanism and between consociational and majoritarian aspects of republicanism.

We understand here the Israeli political concept of *mamlakhtiyut* as an Israeli version of republicanism. We perceive republicanism as a broad and complex political norm focused on the idea that the good society is the one that maximizes the agency of its citizens by way of their political participation. Civic participation, according to this conception, is based on the principle that a polity is owned by its citizens and they, in turn, belong to it in a reciprocal relation that constitutes a democracy in a nation-state.

This complex political norm can be expressed in four main demands. The first is a demand that the ultimate loyalty of the citizens would be given to the general political collective, that is, the pre-state polity or the state. The second is a demand that the state would be the ultimate center for decision-making in normative questions and in issues of appropriation of resources, based on a democratic process encompassing all citizens. The third requires that citizens obey the laws of democracy and the order they impose. The fourth is the demand that the relations
between citizens and their polity be direct, egalitarian and impersonal and that basic services such as employment, housing, education and health should not be tied to sectorial affiliation or made conditional upon other relationships and acquaintances in civil society.

1 Civics, Nationalism, Zionism

As was the case with other modern national movements, Zionism gave center stage to civic and political questions, and it viewed the establishment of a Jewish state not only as a national-cultural goal but also as a genuine civic-political revolution entailing the formation of a progressive society. Even when the establishment of a state (or other sovereign entity) still appeared to be a distant and unattainable objective, Zionists were already debating the nature of the Jewish political community. These debates influenced the political institutionalization of the World Zionist Organization and the emerging Jewish Yishuv.

Because modern political theory focuses on the individual and individual sovereignty, it views the state as a valuable means that is essentially intended to ensure the lives and sovereignty of its citizens as individuals and as a collective. Social contract theories (from which liberalism, modern republicanism and socialism emerged) emphasize that the state’s power of sovereignty derives from popular sovereignty; that is, the state and public sphere are owned by and are under the responsibility of the individual citizens who comprise the state. Individual sovereignty is the foundation for state sovereignty, and it is the ultimate purpose of the state. For this reason, modern state theory was based on the concepts of social contract and rule of law, and later on the principle of democracy and cultivating the public sphere as well, all of which stress the reason and freedom of sovereign individuals, their agreement in theory to be annexed to the sovereign political entity and their active participation in shaping their lives and future (e.g. Rawls 1971; Habermas 1962, trans. 1989). Moreover, in the modern worldview, the state is not only a governing framework; it also has important political value, as its purpose is to ensure liberty, equality and participation. For this reason, a strong correlation has emerged in the modern era between political-national struggles aimed at establishing a nation-state, and political and modernist revolutions (Gelner 1983).

Zionism was no exception in this regard. As a Jewish national liberation movement, it sought a political framework for the Jewish people that would allow Jews to live as individuals and as a collective with a high degree of sovereignty. From the outset, Zionism based the demand for sovereignty on the scientific-educational and civic-political concepts of the Enlightenment. These progressive concepts are an important part of the ideological roots of Zionism, and they have continued to fuel and guide the Zionist movement and Israeli society since the 1950s.

For these reasons, questions about civics and politics in relation to the nature of the future Jewish state and its civil society were already foremost in the minds of early Zionists and the first Zionist thinkers (such as Alkalai 1857). Bitter internal debates took place within the Zionist movement regarding the nature of the envisioned national home, and they continued to dominate Zionist writings up until the founding of the state. However, internal arguments within Zionism should not obscure the fact that Zionism as a whole was a modernist national movement guided, from its outset, by civic-democratic concepts stemming from the school of thought of the modern Enlightenment, at the center of which was the concept of sovereignty.

Thus, the mainstream of Zionism from its early days was that of political Zionism (in its various forms), which adhered to the nation-state solution. In contrast, spiritual-cultural Zionism managed to capture the imagination of a few Jewish intellectuals, but it did not take root in the hearts of the Jewish masses or even among its elite sectors. Anyone who reads Herzl’s writings can find therein detailed sketches of the character of the state and its civil society, ruling
institutions and judiciary system. Herzl’s Zionist ideology, as expressed for example through his diaries and books, is testament of a humanist universal–national vision and a civic consciousness that brings to mind the vision and consciousness toward which Israeli republicanism aspired during its early years of statehood (Herzl 1896: 75–89).

Pre-state republicanism is also characteristic of Herzl’s primary political activity: popular politicization of the Jewish masses through representative democracy in frequently convened Jewish congresses and a wide distribution of Zionist political branches and clubs. After Herzl’s death, political Zionism continued to be the orthodox version of Zionism. The main Zionist debate would henceforth be an internal discussion within political Zionism between Chaim Weizmann and his supporters, who constituted a majority within the Zionist movement after the Balfour Declaration, and revisionist Zionists, who were also followers of political Zionism but demanded that political activities be accelerated to reach the “ultimate goal” of an independent Jewish state.

This internal debate, which largely revolved around the question of how to carry on Herzl’s political-democratic legacy of pre-state republicanism, no doubt was ever cast on the democratic essence of the Zionist institutions and government of the future state or on the need for a republican civil society. Indeed, both the majority under Weizmann’s leadership, alongside the Labor Zionist movement, and the Revisionist minority supported these concepts. Democratic standards and civic-republican values took root in Zionist thought and were manifested in the modes of operation of the organized Jewish Yishuv that was established and administered by the Zionist movement in Eretz Israel.

2 What Is Republicanism?

Mamlakhtiyut can be well explained using modern republican-democratic political theory. Ancient Republicans like Aristotle and Cicero or early republican modernists like Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hobbes or Rousseau did not call themselves republicans. Republicanism is an interpretive-synthetic concept developed within the academic research literature of the English-speaking world during the 1960s (Pocock 1975; Skinner 1978; Haakonssen 1993: 568–574; Pettit 1997; Viroli 2002; Rodgers 1992). We use the concept “republicanism” as such an interpretive-synthetic concept. It follows, therefore, that the thinkers and leaders of Zionism were not consciously republican in the 1960s sense of the concept: they did not know the theory of republicanism or seek to implement it in practice in Eretz Israel. Yet their thought and policy can be cogently explained using this interpretive concept.

Republicanism highlights the importance of the collective interest, the common good and the public sphere and seeks to protect them from being taken over by groups or sectors that would take advantage of them for their own narrow gains while undermining the collective interest. For that purpose, republicanism has developed two main requirements: active citizenship, that is, participation in the public-political sphere; and the cultivation of a commitment to the collective interest and of civic consciousness and a sense of civic duty.

In the first place, republicans believe that the existence of a functioning state is a matter that concerns all members of society, and therefore all members of the political community should be active citizens who are involved in public and political life. For that purpose, modern democratic republicanism seeks to imbue members of society with a civic consciousness, the essence of which is recognition of the need to foster a developed public sphere, democracy and law and order. This requirement of citizen participation was an important foundational element of the new Jewish society in Eretz Israel, and this fact explains the consolidation of democracy in the country and the impressive mobilization on the part of Israelis in the service of the collective.
Most republican theorists have emphasized two additional requirements: appropriate institutionalization and economic equality. The existence of appropriate institutions, laws and processes is a necessary condition for the existence of a functional and just political community. And indeed, well-developed political institutionalization and cultivation of a civic consciousness and of the concept of a central authority were already discernable in the early days of the Zionist movement and Yishuv.

Basic economic equality among citizens is considered to be an important precondition for citizen participation in republican writings (Harrington 1977: 199; Rousseau 1959–69). Equality reinforces mutual relations among all citizens because it is a condition for political stability and because it immunizes citizens against poverty and regression, both of which undermine the individual’s ability to participate fully in public life or maintain a life of sovereignty and responsibility.

This requirement indicates the affinity between republicanism and moderate social-democratic or social-liberal positions, and it explains the widespread acceptance of mamlakhtiyut in Israeli society. The Zionist left as well as right supported republicanism because they viewed Zionism as a collective national and civil endeavor that required a directed joint effort. For this reason, among others, even the Zionist right insisted on deep state intervention in management of the economy during the early days of independence.

3 Mamlakhtiyut as Zionist Republicanism

Anyone who explores Zionist civic thought and its implementation will find that these can be clearly explained using the theory of republicanism. Zionist thinkers and Yishuv leaders were, unwittingly, republicans. One of the most prominent among them, David Ben-Gurion, sought to express his views on civic issues but had no name for them in the political lexicon of the time, neither in Hebrew nor in any foreign language (as noted, the foreign term “republicanism” was only introduced into academic research literature in the 1960s). Accordingly, he coined the term mamlakhtiyut and turned it into it a key word in the political jargon of the Yishuv and, later, the state. Although the words mamlakhtiyut and mamlakhti (republican) are associated, for better or worse, with Ben-Gurion and his policy, nonetheless they represent a worldview shared by the leadership of Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel.

The Zionist version of republicanism was centered on the perspective that every society – even an ideologically varied and vibrant society such as the Yishuv and Israeli society – must develop around a central political and cultural authority that takes decisions with respect to societal values, and to which members of society pledge direct, unmediated loyalty. The existence of such a central authority is a necessary condition for the existence of a stable and secure political community and for its ability to preserve order, security and public peace and to develop a framework that will protect the lives and sovereignty of its citizens. At the same time, as is characteristic of republican perspectives, mamlakhtiyut also emphasized individual sovereignty and the concept of democracy that derives from it, and it therefore also demanded the formation of a civic relationship between the individual and the political community, as well as the active participation of the individual in public life. This is a distinctly republican perspective that defines a relationship of belonging and ownership between the individual and society in the process of nation-building that the Zionist movement instigated in Eretz Israel.

There was, of course, a difference between the demand for authority on the part of Zionist and Yishuv institutions preceding independence, on the one hand, and the demand of the state that subordinate social institutions recognize its sovereignty, on the other. The state’s demand was significantly more emphatic, and it had more effective means to enforce compliance. It
Avi Bareli and Nir Kedar

relied of course also on popular consent, because a democratic state is the only way a public can realize its sovereignty. But even before independence, the democratic institutions of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv demanded recognition of their authority and displayed impatience toward signs of noncompliance with their authority.

The requirement that citizens be directly loyal to the central authority and the requirement that they identify with it as representative of society were not trivial, given the reality of the Yishuv and early Israel. Since the early 20th century, Zionist sentiments have been mixed with political ideology or religious sentiments and moderated by ideological movements. Many Zionists within and outside of the country saw themselves as religious, socialist, Revisionist or other forms of Zionists, rather than “just Zionists.” Their affiliation with the Zionist movement was, therefore, moderated and indirect. This pluralistic political culture, which emerged under unique historical circumstances, was in tension with the republican requirement of direct loyalty to the central authority, especially when the latter became sovereign after the founding of the state.4

Many points of friction that appear to reflect opposition to republicanism do not actually signify opposition to the existence of a political Zionist or Israeli central authority, but rather nonacceptance of the concrete political power that controlled the central authority, that is, the representative of the republic. Tension of this sort surfaced, for example, in the dispute between Jabotinsky and the Revisionist movement, on the one hand, and the Zionist movement under the leadership of Weizmann and, later, Ben-Gurion, on the other hand. It also surfaced, in full force, in arguments between the government and left- or right-wing or opposition groups after the founding of the state.

The intolerance of the Zionist and later Israeli leadership toward those who questioned its political authority should not distract attention from the fact that this leadership based its political authority on a consensus grounded in democratic elections and state policies focused on uniform and equitable treatment of the entire population.

It is not possible to understand the impressive political institutionalization of the Zionist movement and Jewish Yishuv, the effective authority it attained within a voluntary democratic society, or the establishment of an advanced legal system in Israel without considering the republican consciousness that links advanced processes and institutions with the existence of a well-developed public sphere.

One of the great achievements of the Yishuv and the State of Israel is reflected in their success in imbuing the Yishuv and Israeli populace with the imperative of a civic duty toward the population as a whole and toward other citizens, and with a sense of the importance of participating in communal life. In addition to attentive democratic participation on the part of members of the Yishuv and citizens of the new state, alongside the widespread and partially voluntary taxation system of the Yishuv institutions, it is worth noting the pioneering ethos (halutziyut), which is an extreme example of civic participation — in part voluntary or movement-based and in part organized by the central political authority. The Zionist movement and, later, the State of Israel succeeded in motivating myriads of people to contribute to the greater good, even when such contribution required living under difficult conditions for long periods of time. Often, they were organized in ideological movements, but the phenomenon of pioneering was not restricted to those movements.

This ethos, and the willingness of many to live the life of a pioneer, had an influence on the masses — hundreds of thousands — of immigrants who arrived in Eretz Israel beginning in the second half of the 1920s, in the 1930s and the 1950s. Thus, Zionist republicanism was not only the purview of small elite circles; rather, it had an influence — albeit a weaker one, but a very meaningful one politically — on the masses in the Jewish society that began to develop at the
time in Eretz Israel and on the Israeli population during the 1950s. This fact helps to explain the successful establishment of a well-developed civil society in the country, including vibrant political parties, as it began to emerge in the 1930s.

4 The Zionist-Republican Heritage of the Jewish Yishuv

The civic concepts contained in Zionism did not remain only on paper but were manifested as well in the sophisticated political institutionalization of the Zionist movement from its inception: through the establishment of the World Zionist Organization in 1897 and of its affiliated democratic political, operational and economic bodies, and through efforts to institutionalize the activities of the Jewish Yishuv in the country, which began as far back as the early 20th century.

Since their inception, the institutions of the Zionist Organization were elected through general democratic elections (from the outset, elections to the Zionist Congress included men and women), and from the early 20th century, the Yishuv leadership was based on a network of civil society organizations and parties. With the assistance of the Eretz Israel office of the Zionist movement, important civic institutions such as local authorities and the Jewish court of arbitration were established in the country during the first decade of the 20th century. This network of civic organizations was established toward the end of Ottoman rule and served as the first foundation for political organizing during the early days of British rule (Rubenstein 1979: 32–3, 151–6).

After World War I and the British conquest of the country, the Zionist movement under the leadership of Chaim Weizmann, motivated by the republican objective of establishing Jewish sovereignty, began organizing the new community of Jewish immigrants in Eretz Israel through institutions for self-management: the Jewish Agency of the Zionist movement, and the Jewish National Council, whose authority derived from an assembly elected by Jewish residents of Eretz Israel. They were based on regular elections and served as an arena for competition among political parties and for collective political and cultural consolidation.

This process shifted to a higher gear in 1933, when a definitive political power was placed at the head of the emerging political system of representation after Mapai (Workers’ Party of Eretz Israel) won the elections to the Zionist Congress. Its leader, David Ben-Gurion, would henceforth lead the Jewish Yishuv in Eretz Israel, and he stood alongside Weizmann at the head of the Zionist movement from 1935 until 1946.

The unique political consolidation created a platform for a conflictual political culture. As early as the 1920s, there emerged a consolidated opposition to Weizmann’s leadership, headed by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, and this opposition crystallized into the Revisionist Party around the middle of the decade, which succeeded in becoming the largest political party within right-wing Zionism. Toward the end of the decade and during the 1930s, a distinct and occasionally violent political rivalry developed between the Revisionists and the Labor Zionist movement and its main political party, Mapai, an ally of Weizmann and his General Zionist supporters. This rivalry culminated with the Revisionists withdrawing from the World Zionist Organization in 1935, participating as a key driving force in splitting the underground militia Haganah and eventually establishing the underground groups Irgun Zva’I Leumi (“Etzel” or “the Irgun”) and Lohamei Herut Israel (“Lehi”).

Other important actors in the political arena of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement were the religious Zionist parties – Mizrahi, the first Zionist party in the framework of Herzl’s Zionist Organization (established as early as 1902), and HaPo’el HaMizrachi, established in Eretz Israel in 1922. The two religious parties became important partners in the political coalitions that led the
institutions of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv. They played an important role in reducing the gaps between religious and secular Jews in the new society. Finally, we should mention the 

haredi (ultra-Orthodox) groups in Eretz Israel and the world, which did not participate in the institutions of the Zionist movement, although beginning in the 1930s, they started gradually cooperating with them.

In light of the deep ideological division between Zionist political parties regarding the objectives of Zionism and the proper way to achieve those objectives, the political systems of the Zionist movement and Yishuv took shape in the form of consociational (power-sharing) democratic coalitions (Horowitz & Lissak 1977: 305–6, 317–34; Horowitz & Lissak 1995: 200–5; Lijphart 1969; Daalder 1971: 355–70, Daalder 1974: 604–21; Lijphart 1994). In such democratic coalitions, groups are divided among themselves – in the Yishuv, the dispute related to the proper way to actualize Zionism – but at the same time most of them cooperate with one another because they recognize the need for collective political action. The political system that emerges in such a reality usually takes shape on the basis of coalition agreements that in turn are based on the strong interest in political cooperation that most of the players share, and on flexible ideological principles that are shared by all groups.

The leaders of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv succeeded in establishing a central democratic authority based on voluntary popular support in Eretz Israel and the diaspora and on regular elections to the Zionist congresses and representative assemblies of the Yishuv – a political center that was also able to function effectively in a difficult reality and exert effective authority in a conflictual society despite lacking tools of sovereignty such as a legal system and policing power.

Undoubtedly, the national institutions of the voluntary democratic society would not have succeeded in exerting political authority without the “foundation” of a well-developed republican consciousness on the part of the Jewish public, that is, accepting the requirement of participation in the public sphere, and one’s duty toward other citizens and the political community in general. This civic-republican consciousness was naturally fueled by national-Zionist sentiments and collective aspiration to establish a Jewish national homeland. Without the ability to envision a broad national collective – an extended national family – one would not demand universal equality and could not feel a sense of partnership with strangers or internalize the abstract concepts of modern civics, democracy, the state and the rule of law.

Given that Yishuv leaders rested their authority on the popular support of an informed citizenry and on democratic elections, national institutions were able to insist that their political authority be respected despite the lack of sovereign means of enforcement. This was particularly the case from the 1930s onwards, when the Yishuv was led by Mapai headed by Ben-Gurion. Mapai leaders did not hesitate to employ economic coercion or even physical force against attempts within the Labor movement to challenge their authority (Goldstein 1994; Avizohar 1990). At the national level, Ben-Gurion and his colleagues fought forcefully against underground secessionists (Eliav 1990: 134–45; Brener 1978: 24–31; Shavit 1976: 91–100; Pa’il & Yurman 2003: 140–1).

The elected leadership of the Yishuv was a coalition based on the outcome of elections, and it opposed any agreement that would circumvent this outcome. The rare exceptions to this rule resulted as well from rationales based on republicanism. For example, from 1931, the Jewish Agency and the National Jewish Council governed the paramilitary organization Haganah through a body that comprised an equal number of representatives from the Labor movement and from the political center-right. Although this convoluted system of governance deviated from the accepted democratic approach, it was used to ensure the authority of national institutions over the local militia given the lack of a state enforcement capability.
Parity in civilian oversight granted legitimacy to the Haganah as a state militia of sorts and minimized the risks of noncompliance with or withdrawal from the authority of national institutions.

Even this parity did not ultimately prevent dissident withdrawal from the Haganah or the establishment of militias that did not accept the authority of the organized Yishuv (IZL – Etzel and Lehi). The Revisionist secessionists from the Haganah disobeyed the orders of its General Headquarters through Etzel's engagement in counter-terrorist operations against the Arab population in 1938, through the “revolt” of Menachem Begin in the midst of World War II (1944–5) and through their refusal to obey the orders of the Jewish Agency’s executive in the context of 1947 policymaking.

This position on the part of Revisionists contains a serious flaw in the Yishuv pre-state republicanism. However, the Revisionist split did not take place because of an anti-republican perspective; it was based on a rejection of the democratic legitimacy of Yishuv and Zionist institutions and on a “claim to the throne” that was more faithful to the aims of Zionism.

Both the Zionist majority and minority – even the dissident minority – believed in democratic republicanism. For example, Jabotinsky’s opposition to Weizmann was based on an uncompromising perception of democratic authority. For this reason, he rejected Weizmann’s efforts to establish a broad-based Jewish Agency whose management would include unelected members and which would neutralize the elected Zionist executive. Jabotinsky and his followers argued that the combination of philanthropic and nonpolitical elements in the executive of the Jewish Agency would undermine the democratic politicization endeavor undertaken initially by Herzl (Eilam 1990: 48–71; Goldstein 1975: 42–51). The disagreement between Weizmann and Jabotinsky may be portrayed from Jabotinsky’s viewpoint, and perhaps also from Weizmann’s and later from Ben-Gurion’s, as a disagreement between claimants to Herzl’s political legacy of republicanism.

Accordingly, from the time of Herzl until the establishment of the state, Zionism was a republican-democratic project, in terms of both its fundamental principles and its practical implementation. The political and civic concepts of modernism were, for Zionism, a foundational element of its perspective as a national liberation movement seeking to establish a state and its political institutions on the basis of democratic elections and widespread public support among a citizenry that has been educated in matters of civic participation and life in an organized political community. This was an essential aspect of the ideological legacy of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv when they founded the State of Israel on May 14, 1948.

5 Early Israeli Republicanism: Structural Aspects

During the early days of statehood, Israeli society was an extremely multicultural immigrant society, exceptionally varied in terms of lifestyle, culture, language and social and political customs. Its members were new immigrants or immigrants who arrived during the 1930s and the 1920s, and its Jewish culture was tenuous. The relatively successful politicization of the Jewish community in Mandatory Eretz Israel and the continuity between the latter and the initial political structures of the State of Israel are, undoubtedly, key factors in explaining how it was that the acute crises during and after 1948–52 did not lead to sociopolitical disintegration, or at least to the establishment of an authoritarian regime. Indeed, Zionist politicization and its conceptual and institutional continuity are also an essential factor in explaining the overall differentiation between the stability and endurance of the State of Israel and its democratic regime, on the one hand, and the lack of stability and emergence of a dictatorial regime that are characteristic of most decolonized states, on the other hand.
To a large extent, the success of politicization processes and their continuity from the 1920s through the 1960s, and even later, were the outcome of a fundamental agreement regarding the principles of a republican perspective as previously described. This was an agreement among the main political powers in the government or opposition: center-left (Mapai, the Progressives), Religious Zionists, center-right (General Zionists), left (Mapam, and after it split, its two divisions) and right (Herut).

This assertion seemingly contradicts the fact that republicanism in itself was the subject of confrontations between Ben-Gurion’s Mapai, clearly the ruling party during the early period of independence, and the main political forces surrounding it, in the coalition as well as opposition. For indeed, it was Mapai that flew the banner of republicanism in its struggles with the other parties on various and conflicting issues: Mapai versus Mapam and Herut on questions of the elected government’s monopoly over security; Mapai versus Mapam and the religious parties on questions of nationalization or sectionalism in important social issues such as education, settlement and employment; Mapai versus the General Zionists and Herut on the question of the role of the state and the public sector in economic and social life; Mapai versus Herut, Mapam and Ahdut HaAvodah on the question of the elected government’s authority regarding matters of foreign relations with countries such as West Germany, the Soviet Union and the United States or questions of political and defense strategy (the alliance with France and the nuclear option).

Our principal argument is that these and other confrontations did not essentially revolve on the substance of the republican perspective or the fact of its implementation but, rather, on the shape it was to take, in two important respects: first, would it be left-wing or right-wing republicanism in socioeconomic terms? Second, would it be majoritarian or consociational, that is, would it be based on unequivocal decision-making between majority and minority positions, or on an internal compromise mechanism, with firm decision-making only when there was no other alternative?

Mapai was identified with the republican perspective because it was the undisputed ruling party during the first three decades of statehood. The model of republicanism that took shape in practice, for all its advantages and faults, is rightly attributed to Mapai. But for this reason, criticism of the chosen republican model is often, yet erroneously, associated with criticism of the republican perspective per se. Consequently, an important fundamental element of the broad-based republican agreement that enabled a stable Israeli democracy to emerge in the early days of statehood is overlooked (Kedar 2009: chap. 3).

The well-known security and foreign-relations crises that shook the young state – such as the confrontations with the right-wing undergrounds, the disbanding of the left-leaning Palmach headquarters and the reparations agreement with West Germany – indeed appear to be crises centered on a substantive principle of republicanism: the monopoly of a democratic government over the use of force, and majoritarian politics by parliament or vote rather than street demonstrations or “arm twisting” within the political leadership. But from the viewpoint of those who challenged the government on these and other matters, they were presenting a challenge based on a consociational republican perspective, which restricts the power of the majority on matters such as civilian oversight of the military, relations with Germany, and issues such as the place of religious faith in state education or the communal independence of the kibbutz movements.

Indeed, Mapai’s extensive power during the state’s founding years did not serve it in implementing a model of “majoritarian politics” along the lines to which its leaders aspired. Republicanism as it developed during the years of Mapai’s rule remained consociational, not majoritarian, even though in some of the previously mentioned examples, a decisive determination was made in favor of the position of the ruling party. This consociational nature of Israeli republicanism, as
established at the very outset, also greatly influenced the way Israeli politics dealt with deep divisions such as the political dispute that has divided it since the start of its third decade, after 1967.

Overall, Mapai under the leadership of Ben-Gurion flew the flag of left-wing republicanism, in relative terms of course, and the flag of majoritarian republicanism.

Mapai was attacked from various and even opposing directions for its majoritarian or left-wing form of republicanism. It was attacked from the right for the policy of economic austerity, for extending the public sector, for restricting the power or income of employees and merchants in the upper middle class, and for its attempts to prevent wage gaps in the public sector (Bareli 2003; Bareli & Cohen 2017). It was attacked from the left with the aim of preventing government influence over the spheres of activity of the unions and of the kibbutz movements. And it was attacked by Religious Zionists and ultra-Orthodox Jews on the grounds of their claim that it was using the state to secularize the immigrant masses of the 1950s. They demanded that for this reason they be considered as a separate religious sector in the educational system.

The 1954 decision of Mapai to employ a regional-majoritarian system of elections was thwarted after the 1955 elections in light of the concerns of the other political forces regarding “tyranny of the majority” or unrestricted control by Mapai. Consequently, an extreme proportional system of election was adopted (Rahat 2001), and this determined that Israeli republicanism would be consociational rather than majoritarian, despite the opposite leanings of most Mapai leaders.

The Mandate years were thus a period of latency for two alternative political models (of unequal importance) – a blatantly consociational model of negotiations among leaders, characteristic of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv Representative Assembly, which manifested itself even in the way security affairs were handled; and “majoritarian politics” or a multiparty pluralistic but majoritarian political system in a format characteristic of Histadrut HaOvdim. During the 1950s, it again had to come to terms with a model of republicanism that was essentially consociational, which stemmed from the Knesset’s electoral system of proportional representation.

Mapai’s aversion to the formulation of a written constitution during the early 1950s largely resulted from its concerns regarding the consociational democratic model. We are not necessarily referring to concerns about the extreme electoral system of proportional representation, but rather to concerns that the consociational nature of Israeli democracy, which did not succeed in moderating ideological divisions within society, would prevent any agreement regarding the content of a constitution and turn the legal debate into a cultural war or all-inclusive political struggle that would threaten republicanism itself (Kedar 2015).

Mapai’s acceptance in principle of this situation, as well as the other ways in which it retreated from previously held positions, reflect the limitations of its power even during its years of dominance. Under Mapai’s leadership, therefore, Israeli republicanism was not “Mapai-style” or strictly “Ben-Gurion-style” republicanism, but rather the result of a considered balance of powers, in the context of which Ben-Gurion’s Mapai was one of the important, but not the only, factor.

Sociopolitical debates about republicanism during the 1950s can be divided into four basic categories of criticism: first, the allegedly “anti-republican” criticism leveled by Mapam against Mapai; second, internal criticism within Mapai against hierarchical political structure, criticism stemming from an explicit obligation on the part of republicanism and left-wing democratic norms that strongly value political equality; third, criticism that Mapai was not republican enough in shaping the politics and society of Israel; and fourth, criticism of Mapai’s cultivation of the public economic sector and restriction of the private sector – that is, critiques of Israeli republicanism as left-wing in socioeconomic terms. These last two critiques both came from the right, the General Zionists Party and the Herut movement.
The discourse surrounding these four critiques can be classified in terms of two basic disputes. The first is a dispute we have already addressed between supporters of consociational republicanism and supporters of majoritarian republicanism. The second dispute is a socioeconomic dispute between supporters of left-wing versions of republicanism and supporters of right-wing versions. This dispute played out along three axes: between Mapam and Mapai within the Labor movement; between the right and the left within Mapai; and between the Labor movement and the right-wing parties.

As to Mapam-Mapai dispute, in socioeconomic matters, Mapam’s fundamental stance was essentially republican. Its clashes with the Mapai government – as harsh as they were in rhetorical terms – were no more than a defense of certain sectoral interests and, in fact, were based on a perspective of consociational republicanism. They did not challenge the essence of the republican perspective regarding the centrality of the state and its institutions in organizing the security system, society and the economy (Bareli 1999). They demanded, for example, that the state would grant educational autonomy to the schools of the Kibbutz movement and would maintain the schools of Histadrut HaOvdim in the cities.

The debate that took place in Mapai during the early years of statehood was between participatory republicanism, supported by an internal opposition, and hierarchical republicanism, supported by the party’s leadership headed by Ben-Gurion. The internal opposition proposed to combine certain elements of direct democracy with the system of representative democracy. They demanded, for example, a thorough democratization of Mapai, and then democratization of the other main political parties, to bind political representation to popular interests. From a point of view of political power distribution, this was a radical participatory left-wing version of the socialist-majoritarian and republican perspective of Mapai as a whole. Mapai, however, did not adopt it. To be precise: in socioeconomic terms, it did implement a model of left-wing republicanism with respect to its near- and mid-term socioeconomic effects up until the early 1960s. It aimed, for example, to limit the growing wage gaps between the new Oriental immigrants and the emerging middle class (Bareli & Cohen 2017, introduction). But in all matters related to political power distribution, it implemented elitist republicanism.

The debate between the Labor movement headed by Mapai and the two right-wing parties Herut and the General Zionists was the most important debate on the socioeconomic future perspectives of Israeli republicanism. The right – across both its parties – adhered to consociational democratic republicanism, with no hint of participatory democracy, and adhered to rightist republicanism in economic terms.

The General Zionists and Herut did support “big government,” but the main function of it was to build a capitalist economy, after which it would be politically possible to reduce it to the appropriate size in terms of their free-market ideology. They leveled criticism against Mapai for not completing the state’s takeover of social services in place of civil society organizations dominated by the Labor movement (especially the health services), and for cultivating the trade unions and economic enterprises of Histadrut HaOvdim, which rivaled private enterprises and curtailed their activities. This was the negative aspect of the right-wing republican criticism. The affirmative aspect of their perception of republicanism was reflected in the demand that the state would engage exclusively in building a strong and independent private sector and in constructing and cultivating the social classes that underpin the private sector. Remarkably, this critique became the policy of the Israeli right-wing governments after 1977.

The republican civic-political ideology and its Zionist version of mamlakhitiyut are thus an important focus to understand Zionism and Israel’s patterns as a democratic nation-state from its establishment to present times.
Notes

1 This was shared also by most of the Marxists, on the condition that the state would be run by the working class and the party that represents it.
2 We use the term “civil society” as a term also applicable to the political system outside the arms of the government.
3 And not monarchism or monarchical, as one might translate literally from Hebrew.
4 This requirement of direct loyalty is a recurring theme in the writings of the major early republican thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza and Rousseau. There were intensive discussions, of course, within this school of thought as to the proper boundary of that required loyalty.
5 Some argue that women already participated in the first congressional elections in 1897, though others claim that women voted for the first time during the third Zionist congress in 1899. In any event, in this respect Zionism was more advanced than American and European societies, and this fact is an important indicator of its clearly modernist character.
6 Seemingly, this split contradicts the republican principle of loyalty to one elected political authority that holds a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. But the Yishuv and the Zionist organization did not constitute “a state in the making” in the eyes of the leaders of the Zionist opposition. They saw them rather as agencies subordinated to the British rule. Therefore, despite the revisionists’ republican conception, they did not see themseleves obliged to accept their authority.

Bibliography

Alkalai, Yehudah, A Lot for the Lord (Vienna: Baumritter, 1857) [Hebrew].
Avi Bareli, “A Crisis of Norms in Mapai During the ’50s,” Zion 68, no. 1 (2003), 69–104 [Hebrew].
Avizohar, Meir, Social and National Ideals in Mapai’s Ethos (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1990) [Hebrew].
Ben-Gurion, David, “The Authority of the General Public,” (Speech at Conference of Mapai Party Members and Politically Unaffiliated in HaKibbutz HaMe’uhad, Tel Yosef, 24–25 September, 1943) [Hebrew].
Brener, Uri, Altalena: State and Military Inquiry (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1978) [Hebrew].
Eilam, Yigal, The Jewish Agency: The Early Years, 1919–1931 (Jerusalem: HaSifriyah HaTzionit, 1990) [Hebrew].
Eliav (Lubotsky), Binyamin, Memories of the Right (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1990) [Hebrew].
Goldstein, Ya’akov, Bar Giora and HaShomer, 1907–1935 (Tel-Aviv: Defense Ministry Press, 1994) [Hebrew].
Goldstein, Ya’akov, The Po’alei Eretz Israel Party: The Reasons for Its Establishment (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975) [Hebrew].
Herzl, Theodeor, Der Judenstaat [The Jewish State] (Leipzig & Vienna: Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1896) [German].
Horowitz, Dan & Moshe Lisak, From Yishuv to State: The Jews of Eretz Israel during the British Mandate Era as a Political Community (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1977) [Hebrew].
Horowitz, Dan & Moshe Lissak, Trouble in Utopia (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1995) [Hebrew].
Kedar, Nir, David Ben-Gurion and the Constitution (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2015).
Kedar, Nir, Mamlakhtiyut: Ben-Gurion’s Civic Conception (Sde-Boker: Ben-Gurion Institute, 2009).
Pa‘il, Meir & Pinhas Yurman, The Test of the Zionist Movement, 1931–1948: The Authority of the Political Leadership versus the Secessionists (Tel Aviv: Cherikover, 2003) [Hebrew].
Shavit, Yaacov, Hunting Season: The Saison (Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1976), 91–100 [Hebrew].
Israeli historiography tends to distinguish between two eras: the “young” Israel, a mobilized country that aspires to social and cultural cohesion, and the “adult” or “adolescent” Israel that admits that the melting pot has failed, accepts cultural fragmentation and tribalism and forgoes the aspiration to economic equality and narrowing of disparities. The early period, sometimes titled the *mamlakhtiyut* (“stateness”) era, is typified by collectivistic values (among Jewish citizens) and expectations of a high level of personal mobilization for the public good. This stage in Israeli history is typified by top-down initiatives that strove for unity and cultural uniformity to minimize differences among the society’s Jewish constituents while excluding and marginalizing the population of Arab citizens, which were not perceived as partners in the collective nation-building process. The immediate stimulus for the indicators of fragmentation in the second period is attributed to the Six-Day War (1967), and a series of events in its aftermath at the levels of state, politics and the economy that widened the schisms and demonstrated with emphasis that various sectors within the Jewish majority and the Arab minority were adhering to their distinct identities.

In fact, deep and thorough observation of the so-called melting-pot era shows that even at that time of “mobilization” and “collectivism,” Jewish collectivities in Israel remained committed to their prior and distinct “original identities” despite the establishment’s systematic efforts to create an alternative national common denominator. Evidence also shows that the Arab citizens, who were not included in the melting-pot project from the outset and were systematically excluded by the state authorities anyway, also insisted on voicing their claims and organize around particular local, cultural and social identities, thus challenging the government’s attempt to unify them under a sectorial umbrella in disregard of their plurality of cultures and identities. In this chapter, I trace the formation of an Israeli identity during the country’s first decades as the product of a dialectic relationship between two forces – the call to Jewish unity and the marginalization and sectorialization of Arab citizens, on the one hand, and the adamant adherence to cultural and group distinctness among Jewish immigrants and Arab local communities, on the other hand.

During the pre-sovereignty era, the leaders of the Yishuv (the organized Jewish collectivity in British Mandate Palestine, precursor to the State of Israel) assumed the essentiality of a centralized political model for mobilizing the resources that the national mission would entail. They embraced a collectivistic ideology in the expectation that it would nourish and secure this
desired political structure, which, in the absence of sovereignty and state coercion, based itself on voluntary willingness. The situation changed, of course, when independence was declared and the path to state authority over individuals was paved. Now the sovereign, the State of Israel, expected that its citizens participate in the collective national effort also by force of administrative orders and statutes (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989: 100).

Behind these outlooks stood two goals that Israel’s policymakers considered crucial for the survival of the state. First, the reception, integration and acculturation of masses of Jewish immigrants into the “veteran” Jewish society were seen as a prerequisite for the formation of an “Israeli society.” Second, sparsely populated geographical areas had to be settled and developed to ensure their long-term inclusion within the country’s boundaries. Both national tasks were known by specific terms in the rhetoric of the time — “integration of exiles” (mizug galuyot, in distinction from the “ingathering of exiles” — kibbutz galuyot referring to act of return itself) and “making the wilderness bloom” (hafrahat ha-shemama) — and both were perceived as national objectives that Israel’s Jewish citizens should shoulder upon themselves (Kabalo, 2009a: 97).

Sociological and historical research tends to focus on this top-down collective dimension of the formation of Israeli society, in disregard of another dimension that was no less extant and that represented a collectivistic ethos of a totally different kind: circles of social and cultural belonging found in grassroots organizational settings that are usually called “associations,” “committees” or “clubs.” These associative initiatives reflected additional needs, identities and interests of Israeli citizens — Jewish and Arab, newly arrived or not.

Voluntary civil association in Palestine/Eretz Israel was anchored in the 1909 Ottoman Law on Associations, which applied to all areas of the Ottoman Empire. This underpinning endured and even gathered strength when the territory went over to British Mandate rule and remained in effect in Jewish and Arab public life, notwithstanding the collective ethos that fostered both communities’ expectations of mobilizing for the national commonwealth and its shared goals. When the State of Israel came into being, the Ottoman statute remained in effect as the main frame of associative activity; on its basis, Israelis continued to establish particularistic organizations that maintained their sundry cultural identities and pursued their interests (Kabalo, 2009b: 9, 12).

This article tracks the coalescence over the years of the Israeli identity that emerged from these two ostensibly contrasting forces — the collectivistic outlook, which gave primacy to the value of mobilization and blurring of differences, a melting-pot philosophy that trains its sights solely on the Jewish population and, particularly, that of the immigrants, and alongside with it, a mosaic Israeli identity composed of distinct identities, one that Kimmerling calls a “plurality of cultures,” referring to the presence of competing cultures and the process of institution building by different cultures, without the development of an ideology that legitimized multiculturalism (Kimmerling, 2001: 71, 127).

After an introduction in which I present the melting-pot idea in its Israeli context and describe its rationale and its failures, I elaborate on three goals that the leaders and implementers of this outlook sought to attain: establishing a territorial identity, shaping the Israeli citizen and nurturing a modern individual. In Part 2 of the article, I center on initiatives among Jewish immigrants from Islamic countries who formed voluntary associations based on countries of origin and on associative initiatives among Arab citizens. In both cases, the associators’ goals combined motivation to improve their status in society against acts of discrimination and the wish to enable their communities to maintain and develop their own sense of identity by creating self-organized entities.

Finally, I attempt to bridge these two ostensibly clashing but coexistent intentions — the centralized melting-pot policy, which targeted the Jewish collective only, and citizens’ adherence to particular cultures and identities.