West Bank and therefore demanded a slowdown in the establishment of new settlements.[89] Indeed, only seventeen new settlements were constructed during the national unity cabinet era, compared to sixty-six under Likud (1977–84). This is, however, only one side of the story. The decline in the number of new settlements had no impact on the expansion of existing ones. Furthermore, the Jewish population in the West Bank grew at an unprecedented pace from 37,741 settlers in 1984 to 83,055 in 1990. In the latter year, the Likud managed to form a narrow right-wing coalition government with Ariel Sharon as minister of housing. Sharon and the settlers left their bitter past behind them, and the minister was re-embraced by the network. They had a common goal: to right the wrongs committed by earlier national unity cabinets. Sharon surrounded himself with loyalists, including central figures in the network such as Yaakov Katz, who worked in complete synchronization with Zeev Chever, the CEO of Amana. Four months after assuming his new ministerial position, Sharon made a commitment to build 15,000 new housing units in the West Bank.

From its very start, the core of the settlers' network was relatively small, socially homogeneous, and elitist. Indeed, even in the early days there were settlers who deviated from this profile. They resided mostly in Sinai, the Golan Heights, and the Jordan Valley. However, they were a minority and were never as committed to this undertaking as were the young guard of the Zionist religious movement. For many years, the settlers who were generically and mistakenly referred to as members of Gush Emunim considered themselves to be the new pioneers of the land. They were devoted to setting a new ideological course for the people of Israel as well as to settling in Eretz Yisrael.

Despite the ideological sophistication attributed to them by their own members and by scholars, the central figures in the network never developed a comprehensive ideology. They were activists. Their sophistication was manifested particularly in their ability to understand the Israeli bureaucratic maze that had always been labyrinthine but turned truly chaotic after the 1967 territorial expansion, to mobilize the state for the purpose of advancing their agendas, and to obtain such a strong hold on the state that the latter never had a chance to change course.[90] They became the ultimate puppeteers—a skill that helped them in turning their settlements in the West Bank into an extremely successful enterprise. They failed, though, to understand Israeli society. They reached out to the masses unsuccessfully and therefore condemned themselves to being a single-issue movement that two decades later fused into the new Israeli radical Right as a relatively minor element. But things looked very different in the 1970s, when the settlers were regarded as rising social revolutionaries while the prophet of the new radical Right, Rabbi Meir Kahane, was nothing more than an eccentric pariah.

|| 3 ||

The New Radical Right

Yitzhak Ben-Aharon was a member of Ahdut HaAvoda Poalei Zion, a former cabinet member, and one of the few ideologues to spring from the modern Labor Party. Despite his long political career, his image is forever etched in the Israeli collective memory due to his emotional reaction to the Likud's victory in the 1977 elections. "If this is what the people want," he allegedly said, "then the people should be replaced." With these words, he became a symbol of the extent to which the Labor's political elite had become detached from Israeli society.

During the 1950s and 1960s under the Mapai leadership, Israel absorbed large groups of Jewish immigrants, mostly from North African countries, who were called Sephardim (historically, those Jews who originated in the Iberian Peninsula but were expelled in the late 1490s; at a later stage, the term was expanded to include Jews of North African and Middle Eastern origins who were also referred to as Mizrahim (Easterners). The state settled many of these immigrants in the geographically and economically peripheral areas of the country, which contributed to the deepening of the already existing social, economic, and political cleavages. In the early 1970s Jewish society in Israel was deeply polarized between its geographical core, which was associated with the more established Israelis—most of which were secular and Ashkenazi—and the periphery, which was also referred to as Second Israel.[1]

The Peripheries

It is hard to find solid bases for arguments claiming that the state's leaders were acting maliciously with the intention of turning the residents of the peripheries into second-class citizens. After all, they were committed to absorbing Jewish immigrants from all corners of the globe, and despite Israel's dire economic situation during its formative years as an independent state, its leaders regarded immigration to Israel, also known by the Hebrew term Aliyah (Ascendance), as a vital element in the nation-building process.[2] At the same time, the political elite had to cope with the fact that Jewish

immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East differed significantly from many of their counterparts. It would be hard to say that the Ashkenazi members of the elite were politically correct or socially sensitive. They did not understand these immigrants, and they belittled and ascribed "primitive" traits to them.

The combination of the country's challenging economic situation and the immigrants' weak political status made the latter all the more malleable in the hands of the authorities. The state provided the immigrants with accommodation in temporary absorption centers, which often consisted of abandoned British military bases or Arab villages in which residents had themselves become refugees and were scattered far and wide. When their numbers increased, the immigrants were given shelter in transition camps called Ma'abarot. Later on, these camps featured prominently in the policies that directed the Jewish population to the periphery. The difficult situation this presented is depicted well by the satirist Ephraim Kishon, himself an immigrant from Hungary, who was housed in a Ma'abara upon his arrival. Kishon used his keen eye and exceptional talent to successfully capture the complex relations between the establishment and the immigrants in the movie *Sallah Shabbati*. The film's name (which was shared by its protagonist) connoted Jews of North African descent while at the same time punning on the Hebrew words "slihah shebati," which mean "sorry for coming."

The real life of the immigrants, however, was tough and humorless. Most of them were not blessed with the resourcefulness of the fictional immigrant Sallah, did not have command of modern Hebrew, and felt powerless in the face of the mushrooming Israeli bureaucracy. Residents of the periphery were dependent upon the center of the country for almost everything. Representatives of the establishment exhibited a destructive and patronizing attitude by trying to force progress upon the immigrants, strip them of their traditional lifestyle, and reshape them in the spirit of the Israeli Sabra.[3] As early as the 1950s, the discrimination against the residents of the periphery had led to a deep sense of deprivation and injustice, which periodically broke out in demonstrations and even acts of violence.[4] Toward the end of the 1960s, Second Israel reached a critical demographic mass. At the same time, the state enjoyed significant economic growth, but the fruits of this prosperity did not reach the periphery. With his sharp senses, Menachem Begin followed these developments closely.

Uprising

Despite the fact that Begin was Ashkenazi, urban, and educated, his political affiliation and protracted and bitter rivalry with Ben-Gurion caused him to feel rejected by the inner circles in the nation's elite. In contrast to the leaders

of the Zionist left-wing parties, he had always felt comfortable with people from the periphery, perhaps because individuals in these parties often shared a common and unifying hostility upon being rejected by the more established cohort. Begin was a skilled and rousing orator—the ideal politician in an era that preceded the proliferation of the electronic media. During public speeches crowds virtually ate from his hand. Despite his distinctive East European accent, he conveyed personal experiences and authentic feelings in a way that spoke directly to his audience. Furthermore, he was emotional and did not hesitate to take advantage of this trait. Begin saw himself as no less Zionist or patriotic than the founders of the state, who replaced Jewish religion with socialism and cultivated the image of the genuine, secular Israeli Sabra. In contrast, though, Begin and his followers never cut themselves off from the Jewish traditions. His message to the peripheries was empowering. He described socialism as an empty vessel in comparison to the richness of Judaism. He explained to his followers that their lifestyles, and not those of the secular elites, embodied the real Zionism.[5] Begin's message was revolutionary, but at the same time, he was a cautious political leader and deeply committed to the nation's destiny. He also harbored a secret desire to gain the recognition of the elites. To maneuver through these obstacles, he handled the reins of his incubating political revolution carefully.

A Free Radical

Rabbi Meir Kahane was free of the inner deliberations that plagued Begin, and this was the secret of the radical rabbi's success. The late journalist Robert Friedman who wrote a biography about Kahane titled it *The False Prophet*.[6] While Friedman's title referenced Kahane's dubious and contradictory personality, the radical rabbi was in fact prophetic in the sense that, as a politician, he was very much ahead of his time.

Meir Martin Kahane was born in Brooklyn, New York, on August 1, 1932. His background was unique. Kahane's father was born in the city of Safed in Palestine and eventually moved to the United States after graduating from ultra-Orthodox yeshivas in Europe. Young Meir was raised on what some would say were peculiar and, in some cases contradictory, values; his parents were Zionists and followers of the Revisionist movement. As a teenager in New York, he joined the local chapter of Betar and later became a member of the Bnei Akiva movement. Kahane attended Brooklyn College and was simultaneously educated at Mir Yeshiva, an ultra-Orthodox Lithuanian yeshiva in Brooklyn.[7] Later in his life, this eclectic background served him very well. Kahane was able to communicate with Begin and with other Zionist right-wing leaders as easily

as he could communicate with leaders of the ultra-Orthodox Jewry. Indeed, when he eventually found himself spurned by the settlers, he reached out to the ultra-Orthodox leadership. While he had been certified as a rabbi at a Lithuanian yeshiva, Kahane became increasingly popular among ultra-Orthodox Jews of all backgrounds. He even found devout supporters among Hassidic Jews, most notably the followers of Chabad (Chochmah, Binah, VeDa'at—Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge), who were at odds with the Lithuanians over issues dating back centuries.

Kahane arrived in Israel during autumn of 1971. Following several run-ins with the authorities in the United States, he was given two options: either stand trial or leave the country. Kahane wasted no time deliberating and immigrated to Israel—a step he later portrayed as an ideological one.[8] At the time of his arrival, the name Meir Kahane was already a well-known "brand name" in Israel. Many admired him for the operations of the militant Jewish Defense League, which he had founded in New York in order to protect elderly Jews from acts of anti-Semitism. In addition, Kahane earned accolades among the Israeli public as a result of his demand for the release of Jews trapped behind the Iron Curtain by communist regimes and the attacks perpetrated by his supporters against Soviet targets in New York.[9] In short, Kahane's reputation preceded him; no one was surprised by the Israeli right-wing representatives' enthusiasm when he arrived in the country.[10] Herut and Mafdal immediately launched campaigns to persuade Kahane to join their ranks.

After realizing that the leaders of the Israeli Right thought of him mainly as reinforcement and never even considered serving up their parties' leadership positions on a silver platter, Kahane announced that his actual purpose in immigrating to Israel was spiritual and that he intended to spend his time engaged in educational activities. It soon became apparent that these stated intentions did not necessarily correspond with Kahane's actual ones. Shortly after settling down in Jerusalem, he established the Jewish Defense League in Eretz Yisrael and began preparing for the Knesset elections.[11] Although he was a new immigrant—a fact that limited his knowledge of the problems of Israeli society and his contact with the Israeli public—Kahane was almost elected to the Knesset in 1973. His party's name, Kach, was an acronym for "Kahane to Knesset" in Hebrew as well as a nod to the Etzel slogan, "rak kach," which means "the only way." Kach gained 0.8 percent of the votes in the 1973 elections, only a tenth of a percent less than the Black Panthers (HaPanterim HaShechorim), a group of first- and second-generation immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East who emerged as the most genuine representatives of the periphery's protest. Kach spent the next three election campaigns on the fringes of Israeli politics, never coming near the representation threshold again.

I remember well the Monday morning of November 5, 1990. Three months earlier, the Iraqi Army had launched a surprise attack and swept through the territory of its small neighbor, Kuwait. The U.S.-led international coalition served Saddam Hussein with an ultimatum. It demanded that he immediately pull his army out of the pro-Western, oil-rich nation. Not only did the Iraqi dictator ignore the coalition's threats, he also vowed to strike Israel in case of a U.S.-led attack on his forces. At that time, I was a conscript in the IDF's Medical Corps. In the wake of increasing tension in the Persian Gulf, we were ordered to remain on high alert. It was a generally accepted assumption that missiles with alleged chemical warheads were aimed at Israeli cities. During that time, my friends and I always left the radio on in the background and occasionally tuned in for the latest news updates.

On that November morning, we suddenly heard the signal that announced a special news flash. We immediately gathered around the radio with bated breath. Much to our surprise, the news bulletin had no connection whatsoever to the events in Kuwait. The announcer linked to a broadcast in New York, which stated that early reports indicated that Rabbi Meir Kahane had been shot to death following a rally at the Marriott Hotel. When a public figure passes away, especially under dramatic circumstances, the media airs pre-prepared obituary material. In Kahane's case, however, this procedure was not carried out, or at least not fully. The Israeli media instead responded to the assassination with great embarrassment, and the general feeling was that the news programs' producers would have preferred to withdraw the whole issue from their agenda as quickly as possible. Considering Kahane's reputation, this response was not surprising.

Kahanism

During his nineteen years in Israel, Rabbi Meir Kahane evolved into the ultimate scoundrel of the Israeli polity. His simplistic ideology, known today as Kahanism, is the purest and clearest embodiment of all three major defining pillars of the radical Right.[12] Like other factions of the Israeli radical Right, Kahane's agenda was first and foremost nativist. Yet, unlike the religious Zionist settlers who were ideologically and practically committed to perpetuating Israel's control over the occupied territories and to the settling of Jews in the Greater Land of Israel, Kahane's key concern was the Jews *within* Israel. He wanted to remove all foreigners from Israel—first of all Arabs, as well as other foreign influences, such as Western ideas. In this way he deviated from the notion of nativism that prevailed at the time; but Kahane was not completely disinterested in the settlements. The settlers' network,

however, presented a genuine problem for him. Despite his resolute efforts to appeal to the settlers and his yearning for their approval, the settlers were extremely suspicious of him, and unsurprisingly Kahane was rarely a welcome guest in the settlements of the West Bank.

Kahane was aware of the fact that most settlers at the time were very different from his usual audiences. The majority of them were religious Zionist, middle-class Ashkenazis who did not share his zeal on issues such as the necessity to deport the Arabs from sovereign Israel. In an attempt to market his ideas to the settlers, Kahane emphasized his commitment to the Greater Israel ideology. He also stressed his plan to turn the Jewish Law (*Halakha*) into the pillar of the Israeli legal system, a fact he actively hid from audiences that were less religiously devout.[13] Despite these efforts, Kahane experienced very limited success with the settlers in the early years. Prominent settler leaders, including Moshe Levinger and Yoel Bin-Nun, explicitly criticized Kahane, analyzing his ideas and undermining their theological validity. Kahanism was presented as an unsophisticated, incoherent phenomenon. When a group of Kahane's followers wanted to establish a settlement near Kiryat Arba, Amana made sure that the settlement would not enjoy state subsidies and thus prevented the initiative from materializing.[14]

Meir Kahane was finally elected to the Knesset in 1984. This came as a surprise to many Israelis who thought of the hyperactive and loud American rabbi who kept company with a strange-looking group of followers as no more than a pestering nuisance—one that would never strike roots in Israeli politics. They were wrong. By that time, Kahane had already positioned himself as a prominent political leader in the Israeli periphery. Over the previous years, Begin's resignation—a result of the Israeli debacle in the First Lebanon War—changed the face of Likud's leadership. The leader of the party, Yitzhak Shamir, profoundly lacked his predecessor's charisma. Shamir was a tough and ascetic politician. A veteran of Lehi Underground and later the Mossad, he was a devout hawk who was mainly concerned with the advancement of the Greater Israel agenda. Furthermore, Shamir's election followed a bitter struggle with David Levy, a Moroccan-born politician from the peripheral development town of Beit She'an.

Levy, who started his career as a construction worker, rose to the Likud's leadership after years of hard work in local government and in the Histadrut. He was considered to be a genuine representative of Second Israel. His loss to Shamir was perceived as a victory of the center over the peripheries and left many Likud voters disenchanted. At the same time, the Israeli economy was facing a crisis with a skyrocketing inflation rate of 445 percent and an external debt soaring to 212 percent of the country's GDP.[15] The uncertainty and anxiety engendered by the economic crisis fostered the need for reassurance on behalf of the Israeli

public. Shamir's government failed to deliver. Kahane, on the other hand, was much more successful and provided an explanation for the root causes of the crisis followed by a set of simple solutions. At fault, according to his account, were two of Kahane's archenemies: the Arab citizens of the state and the "Israeli left-wing elite," an amorphous entity that "collaborated" with the Arabs and sold out the Mizrahi Jews of the peripheries.

I vividly remember the rally that Kahane held in my hometown, Haifa, which had a reputation for being a serene city where Jews and Arabs coexisted in peace. A week prior to the event, streets all over the city were plastered with posters featuring the party's familiar emblem—a yellow fist embedded in a black Star of David next to the rabbi's picture. The location of the rally, Hadar HaCarmel, was chosen carefully. It was a decaying neighborhood, not far from Wadi Nisnas, one of the city's main Arab quarters. Many of Hadar HaCarmel's residents at the time were working-class Jews of North African and Middle Eastern descent. Kahane instinctively understood something that Begin had also realized years before. The Mizrahi residents of the development towns and the underprivileged neighborhoods were only partially "peripheral."[16] They adhered to the dominant Zionist ideology that advocated national unity among Jews. Israel's perpetual struggle with the Arab world pushed them even closer toward the positions of the Zionist center. The fact that they shared cultural and socio-economic traits with the Arab citizens of the state did not serve as a bridge but rather incentivized them to further attach themselves to the Israeli center. This was a significant advantage for those politicians and parties interested in mobilizing Jewish constituents by utilizing the visible cultural and economic rifts between the center and the peripheries.[17] For years Kahane tailored his messages specifically to Mizrahi constituencies. Although they felt an affinity for the Likud, the political and economic circumstances converged to open a political space. Kahane seized this opportunity, and by the middle of the 1980s, his unrelenting efforts paid off: his popularity among the Mizrahi voters soared.[18]

As a teenager with a growing interest in politics, I was captivated by the stories about this controversial politician. I wanted to see him in action, and this rally in the summer of 1984 was the perfect opportunity to do so. The experience proved overwhelming. The bus dropped me off at the site of the already crowded assembly long before it was scheduled to begin. After several attempts, I found a reasonable vantage point from which I could see a group of Kahane's adherents setting up the stage, all of them wearing yellow T-shirts with the party's logo. There was a relatively small podium at the center of the square decorated with the national flag and the party's banners. About an hour later, I noticed that the devotees had rearranged themselves

into a different formation. The tallest and strongest among them gathered closer and surrounded the podium.

The uproar intensified as the rabbi exited his car. Protesters from left-wing movements watched the event from a nearby balcony and started chanting "Fascism will not prevail," while Kahane's supporters greeted him with songs of praise. The rabbi himself seemed to enjoy the commotion. He smiled and paced slowly toward the microphone stand, where he waited for a few long minutes until the loud noise faded away. I cannot recall his exact words, but I remember the electricity in the air. Kahane made large gestures with his hands, altered his tone and facial expressions frequently, and successfully fired up his enthusiastic followers. Near the end of the event, he suddenly burst out into song: he stepped off the podium with a microphone in his hand while his ecstatic followers surrounded him, all of them singing "Our Father Lives On" ("Od Avinu Chai"). Kahane was the actor, and the small podium was his stage.

Arabs

Years later I came across a partial transcript of Kahane's speech that day.[19] It was a simplistic, disorganized, and venomous attack against Arabs and the "traitors from the Left." Kahane referred to the Arabs using terms that I had never heard prior to that day. He called them the "worst animals" and "cockroaches." In other events he preferred to use the term "dogs."[20] Kahane vowed that once his party had gained enough seats in the Knesset, he would use his political clout as leverage and pose a non-negotiable demand to be appointed minister of defense. Then, Kahane promised, he would immediately carry out his plan to transfer all Arabs out of Israel. Those who tried to resist would be subject to harsh treatment or, in his graphic terminology, "their throats would be slashed."[21]

It was during these rallies that Kahane felt most comfortable. In such settings he could speak his mind freely while expounding upon the "conniving nature of the Arabs." He reveled in describing how young Arabs stole the jobs of Jewish men while the latter risked their lives serving in the Israel Defense Forces. Kahane drew a metaphorical straight line between this far-fetched scenario and the economic distress felt by many working-class Jewish families. In many cases, he went even farther. The same young Arab men, Kahane maintained, took advantage of what the rabbi proclaimed was their unfair economic advantage. With their pockets always filled with money, they lured pure, innocent Jewish women of Mizrahi origin into their villages. They would do this by disguising themselves as Jews, enticing the unsuspecting girls, and sweeping them off their feet. Once their deceitful mission was accomplished, everything changed. They would hold the women hostage, force them to cut ties with their families, and abuse them. According to

Kahane, no one but he and his followers cared about the fate of these poor, fictitious women. As soon as the members of Kach heard about such a case, they came up with a sophisticated plan, rescued the girl, and returned her to her family.[22] According to Kahane, by the mid-1980s, 3,500 Jewish women were married to Arabs and thousands more were living out of wedlock. They gave birth to tens of thousands of children who were Jewish by religion (by virtue of their Jewish mothers) but were raised as Arabs.[23] Generally speaking, Kahane was not known for being terribly concerned with facts. I attempted to find the sources for Kahane's data, but my search yielded no results. It is safe to assume that his statements were not based on any reliable source. The degree of segregation between Jews and Arabs, especially in the 1980s, impeded such interfaith relationships. However, his listeners were not too concerned with the exact facts either. Kahane skillfully manipulated his crowd and generated fierce emotional reactions; in doing so he tapped into a well of primordial tribal sentiments among his followers almost at will.[24]

Kahane's willingness to exploit the emotions of his audiences was matched only by his skill at adapting his messages to whatever *crise du jour* arose. If one of these Kahane rallies happened to take place shortly after a terrorist attack against Jews, he shifted the focus of his speech to security issues. Kahane emphasized the threat that the Arab citizens of Israel ("the fifth column" in his words) posed to the Jews and blamed the government for being incompetent in its struggle against terrorism. He praised vigilante Jews who perpetrated retaliatory attacks against Arabs. He pleaded with the riled-up crowd to entrust him with the power to "take care" of the Arabs once and for all. Although Palestinian citizens of Israel were hardly ever involved in these acts of terrorism, this fact had very little effect on Kahane's argument.[25]

Lefties

The Arabs always served as the primary target in Kahane's rhetoric. Yet, the Israeli political Left came in as a close second. Kahane's fiery attacks on the old elite exuded the very essence of populism. He developed his own narrative to explain the failed absorption of immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East in the 1950s, pointing an accusing finger at the Mapai Party. According to his version, the secular and socialist elite deliberately broke down the fabric of the Mizrahi patriarchal family. The secular socialists also stripped the immigrants of the Jewish values and way of life that they had preserved for centuries in the Diaspora. Kahane argued that the master plan of the Left was to impoverish the immigrants and turn them into a powerless and disoriented group that would become fully dependent on the mercies of the Ashkenazi elite. The immigrants

were forced to take any job that was offered simply to put bread on the table. This enabled the kibbutzim, who were the darlings of the Labor movements, to exploit them for the sole purpose of enriching their own communities.[26] Kahane's ability to convey messages of nativism and populism were the keys to his political success.

Although few knew it, the rabbi was a prolific writer, publishing books in both English and Hebrew. Based on his public addresses, Kahanism cannot be regarded as a profound ideology.[27] However, Kahane's writings provide a clearer picture of the main pillars of his belief system.[28]

Theocracy

The most significant indication of the gap between Kahane the speaker and Kahane the writer is manifested by the issue of religious authoritarianism. Although it seems that this part of his worldview was very important for Kahane, it concerned the rabbi that by advancing an explicit agenda in which he advocated turning Israel into a Jewish theocracy, he would alienate his main target audiences.[29] His decision to tone it down in most of his public addresses was strategic and indeed, he was walking a very fine line. Most Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox voters were committed to their own parties. The ultra-Orthodox voters were unlikely to disobey the direct orders of their rabbis, who regularly told them which party to support. The religious Zionist constituents were loyal to the Mafdal and/ or to the settlers' network, which denounced Kahane and instructed its followers to cast their votes for parties that were consistent with the settlers' own interests. Thus, Kahane depended on the support of more independent voters. This specific set of voters was strongly attached to Jewish tradition and showed tremendous respect for religious leaders. But in their everyday lives they did not practice Judaism in its most stringent form.[30]

Kahane managed to convey an empowering message of Jewish moral superiority over every other religion or ideology. Most prominently, he pitched Judaism as an alternative to Israeli nationalism. The rabbi rarely mentioned the term "Halakhic state" (theocracy) in an explicit manner; he instead reiterated practices that had been institutionalized in Israel for years and presented them in new packaging. For example, he promised further enforcement of the laws that prevented the desecration of the Shabbat. He condemned the small communities of Conservative and Reform Jews in Israel and made a commitment to end their activities. He offered to outlaw abortion and disqualify marriages that were not approved by the rabbinical courts. As I indicated earlier, according to marriage laws in Israel, Jews must be married through the Orthodox chief rabbinate of Israel. Marriage through other Jewish denominations is not recognized by the state. Israeli citizens can be

registered as married by a civilian authority only if the ceremony took place beyond the boundaries of the state. Nothing in the rabbi's pledges was a major departure from the status quo agreement. Hence, the message seemed very reasonable to many Jews who defined themselves as traditional.

Kahane was also successful in linking the theocratic agenda to his nativist and populist ideas. For example, he promised to eliminate the Christian mission in Israel, and to deny other religions, most notably Islam, any official status in the Jewish state. Kahane made a clear reference to the Bible and vowed to change the state's name from "Israel" to "Judea." By suggesting that Israel be renamed Judea, the rabbi was reaching back to the period of the First Temple. At that time, Judea was the southern Israelite kingdom. Unlike its northern neighbor, the Kingdom of Israel, Judea remained loyal to the Davidic lineage, kept its religious center in Jerusalem, and maintained a stringent, orthodox interpretation and practice of Judaism. By making this reference, Kahane once again revealed his plan to restructure the state apparatus on the purest foundations of Judaism and to reject all foreign influences. Another reference favored by Kahane was the heroic tale of the Hashmonayim (Hasmoneans).[31] This group led the Jewish rebellion against the Seleucid dynasty and the Hellenistic Jews, who adopted the customs of the Gentiles during the second century BCE. The story of the rebellion served the Zionist movement in its effort to shape the new image of the deep-rooted and independent Jew. Over the years this event, celebrated every year during the holiday of Hanukah, has become increasingly popular among Israelis from all walks of life. Kahane adopted the popular story and updated it. He portrayed himself as a modern Hasmonean who led the rebellion against the corrupt Jews, whom he deemed "Hellenistic." Like their predecessors, these corrupt Jews adopted foreign ideas, including democracy and secularism, which posed an existential threat to Judaism.[32]

Knesset Member

Kahane lived up to his word. Shortly after he was sworn in to the Knesset, Kahane made his first media-oriented provocation by announcing his plan to open an emigration office in the large Arab village of Umm al-Fahm. He stated that his plan was to offer residents of the village generous financial incentives to leave their homes and the country.[33] This was the first in a long chain of provocations from Kahane's parliamentary chamber. He showered the speaker of the Knesset with a barrage of legislative initiatives, mostly relating to the "Arab problem" in Israel.[34] Among other initiatives, these proposed acts included a demand to separate Jews and Arabs in public swimming pools, a legal ban on romantic relations between Arabs and Jews, and stripping the Arabs of their Israeli citizenship,

thereby depriving them of any political rights. One bill that caused particular out-rage was an amendment to the penal code that would impose a mandatory death penalty on any non-Jew who harmed or attempted to harm a Jew, as well as the automatic deportation of the perpetrator's family and neighbors from Israel or the West Bank. Kahane also endorsed the legalization of vigilantism and wanted the state to demonstrate extreme leniency to Jews who physically attacked Arabs.[35] Many Israelis were alarmed by these proposed bills, and they had a good reason: it reminded them of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935.[36] Kahane's activities also made him increasingly unpopular in the Knesset. Parliamentarians from most parties kept their distance and made sure not to be seen anywhere near him. However, there were a few exceptions to the rule, and a small number of Knesset members from the ultra-Orthodox parties saw nothing particularly wrong with Kahane's agenda.

A Holy Alliance

The 1984 elections, which drew attention from around the world due to Kahane's provocative campaign, were marked by another development that generated much less attention. A new ultra-Orthodox party, Shas (Sepharadim Shomrei Torah, a Hebrew acronym for the Sephardic Torah Guardians) managed to win four Knesset seats. The party was formed two years earlier, as a local initiative, by a group of young, Mizrahi, ultra-Orthodox activists from Jerusalem.[37] In its early days, it was led by Nissim Zeev and Shlomo Dayan. They first mobilized in an attempt to gain representation in the Jerusalem city council.

The Haredi ultra-Orthodox society was an intensified microcosm of the tense ethnic relations in Israeli Jewish society. The Haredi subculture had always been dominated by the Ashkenazi rabbinical elite who perceived ultra-Orthodox Jews of Mizrahi descent as inferior. Sephardic theological and political leaders were expected to follow the dictates of the Ashkenazis. Even their most brilliant students were generally prevented from studying in prestigious Ashkenazi yeshivas, and those who were admitted had to learn Yiddish and to follow the dress code and prayer style espoused by their Ashkenazi counterparts. Ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazim and Mizrahim did not reside in the same neighborhood. They traveled in segregated social circles and hardly ever married members outside their respective groups. Politically, the ultra-Orthodox Mizrahim were traditionally represented by the ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi party, Agudat Yisrael. Mizrahi leaders were at times added to this party's Knesset faction, but they were usually marginalized.

Rabbi Elazar Shach was one of the most significant theological authorities in Israel. He led the highly conservative Lithuanian bloc and was head of the prestigious Ponevezh Yeshiva in the city of Bnei Brak. For years he was unhappy

because the Hassidic leaders of Agudat Yisrael mistreated his own Ashkenazi followers as well as the Mizrahi Haredis. This dissatisfaction generated a new political alliance between Rabbi Shach and the former Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel, Ovadia Yosef. With the blessing of these two important leaders, the Shas party catalyzed a revolution in Israeli politics.[38]

Shach and Yosef had another thing in common: they were both completely misunderstood by the Israeli Left. Both were thought of as dovish as they were known for their objection to the settlements and their willingness to accept an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. The leaders of the Labor Party failed to understand that Shach and Yosef's attitudes were anchored in a world-view very different from their own. Shach followed the Talmudic Midrash of the Three Oaths, an old survival code that prohibited the Jews from provoking the nations of the world and from any attempt to expedite the redemption process or the coming of the Messiah. Many ultra-Orthodox believed that the establish-ment of Israel as a Jewish state *and* the later creation of the settlements (which the religious Zionist rabbinical establishment saw as part of the redemption of the Jewish People) violated the Oaths. Furthermore, it constituted a risky and arrogant intervention by humans in a divine process. Rabbi Yosef followed a similar line of reasoning. He formed an opinion based on the "pikuach nefesh" rule, which places importance upon the saving of human life even above any religious command. Yosef argued that settling the territories put Jewish lives at stake. In so doing, he limited the rule by giving precedence to people belonging specifically to the Jewish ethnicity. However, this important specification was either intentionally or unintentionally disregarded by the leaders of the Labor party. The latter refused to accept the fact that both Shach and Yosef's philoso-phies stood in sharp contradiction to theirs.

By overlooking this divide, secular left-wing leaders failed to understand that the most significant ultra-Orthodox communities loathed Israeli secularism and viewed it as a misguided deviation from the Jewish People's historical trajectory. Like their counterparts around the world, the ultra-Orthodox communities in Israel were reclusive. They believed in "Dina Demalchuta Dina" or adherence to the "law of the land."[39] For many of them, the secular Zionist law was on the same level as the laws of the Gentiles. To this day, few Jewish groups are as committed to the literal meaning of the "Chosen People" concept and the notion of Jewish superiority as are the ultra-Orthodox (and to a certain degree the Orthodox).[40] One example of this sentiment is their morning prayer, which includes the fol-lowing: "Blessed art Thou, Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, who did not make me a Gentile [non-Jew] . . . a slave . . . and a woman"—in that particular order.[41] Another feature of the ultra-Orthodox, which was mentioned earlier, has been their commitment to maintaining their autonomy and way of life. Members of the community who sought the help of state authorities in resolving

intracommunal disputes were ousted. Even worse, anyone who filed charges against a member of his own community was considered a "moser" ("traitor," literally, "informer") who should be punished severely, even by death.[42]

Kahane was well aware of these nuances. He had much more in common with the ultra-Orthodox Knesset members than with any other group of legislators. Indeed, Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, who led the Shas Party in the 1984 elections, responded to Kahane's election very positively. Unlike other political leaders, including those from the right wing, who made every effort to distance themselves from Kahane, Peretz indicated that although he had never met Kahane, he was very pleased that another Jewish patriot was elected to the Knesset to "balance out the picture there."[43] This was not surprising. Throughout the following decades it became clear that the leaders of Shas shared many of Kahane's ideas, especially his deep sense of nativism and his insistence that Israel be turned into a theocracy.[44]

A Short-Lived Parliamentary Career

The turmoil caused by Kahane's parliamentary hyperactivism generated harsh reactions in the Knesset and beyond. Shortly after his highly publicized attempt to visit Umm al-Fahm for the purpose of "promoting his emigration agenda," the Knesset directorate downgraded his parliamentary immunity. This step enabled the police to prevent him from entering Arab population centers and provoking their residents. Aware of Kahane's dependence on media exposure, Israel's state-run broadcasting authority, which in the absence of other outlets had a monopoly over the electronic media at the time, took an unprecedented step and decided to deprive him of all media coverage. Kahane, who resented democratic ideas and practices and vowed to abolish them, did not hesitate to resort to them when it suited his purposes. He appealed the decision to the Supreme Court and won.[45] This was only the first in a long list of legal battles. Shlomo Hillel, the Speaker of the Knesset, was embarrassed by the nature of Kahane's proposed bills and prevented them from being brought to the plenum. Kach returned to the court and argued that the speaker had deprived the party of its basic democratic right to freedom of speech.[46]

Surprisingly, despite his political savvy, Kahane overlooked the warning signs that repeatedly appeared. Prior to both the 1981 and the 1984 elections, the Central Elections Committee was approached by parties and individuals who demanded the disqualification of the Kach Party on the grounds of its racist and anti-democratic agenda. In both cases the High Court of Justice allowed Kahane to stand for election in the absence of a law that stipulated concrete conditions under which a political party could be disqualified from running for office. These past experiences with the Court had provided Kahane with an apparent

false sense of confidence. He overlooked the fact that the justices explicitly stated that in the case that such legal framework existed, the outcome could have been different.

A year after Kahane first occupied a seat in the Israeli legislature, the Knesset decided to step up to the challenge presented by the Court. It introduced a significant amendment to the Knesset's basic law in which they specified the contingencies of Israel's electoral processes (found in chap. 7a of the basic law—Knesset). The Knesset voted in favor of adopting a "defending democracy" doctrine. This new clause enabled Israeli citizens to bring parties to a hearing before the Central Elections Committee if their platforms openly called for the abolishment of Israeli democracy, advocated racism, or both. The purpose of the hearing was to determine whether the party's ideology indeed violated the constitutional and moral principles of the State of Israel.[47]

The amendment responded directly to Kahane's provocations. However, several right-wing parliamentarians agreed to give their support to the amendment on the condition that it include a third basis for disqualification: those parties that rejected the principle that Israel was a "Jewish state" would be ineligible to run for office. This additional basis was aimed at protecting the Jewish character of the state rather than its democratic one. This was a signal to Arab Knesset members not to take their right to freedom of speech for granted. Unlike radical right-wing parties, Arab parties had traditionally been excluded from the policy-making process and thus posed no real threat to the Jewish state. Hence, in practical terms, the addition to the amendment was redundant. It did, however, serve another purpose. It allowed politicians from the Right, who chose not to stand up in defense of Kahane's freedoms, to show that they were equally tough on Arab and left-wing elements. By doing so, they essentially hoped to mobilize some of Kahane's voters in the event that Kach was indeed disqualified. In retrospect, this amendment proved to be a dangerous slippery slope.[48] In the following decades members of the Knesset altered the law and chose to ignore its original purpose, elaborating and distorting the amendment. It became a vehicle for restricting the Palestinian citizens' political freedoms while allowing the radical Right to act freely and advance its agenda without interference.

Back in 1985, Kahane chose to ignore the amendment to the law. He did not even take notice of the subsequent adjustment of the penal code, which turned racist slurs into criminal acts.[49] When the first Palestinian Intifada broke out in December of 1987, Kahane was presented with an irresistible temptation; it seemed like a golden opportunity for expanding his support base. Flattering public opinion polls indicated that Kach had the potential to increase its parliamentary representation from one seat in 1984 to seven seats in 1988.[50] Kahane grew smug. He ignored the legal counsel of his lawyers. Rather than toning down

his message, he intensified it and increased his provocations. By escalating his rhetoric, he launched his party over a cliff.[51] The High Court of Justice, which finally had legal grounds for critically assessing the party's ideas, did not come to its aid. It rejected Kach's appeal and thus sealed its fate.[52]

Moledet

In 1988, as Election Day approached, observers of Israeli politics speculated that Kahane's frustrated constituents would shift their support to the newly established 'Homeland' Party known in Hebrew as Moledet, which was headed by the retired and decorated General Rehavam "Gandhi" Zeevi.[53] At first glance, Moledet seemed like Kach's logical heir. Like Kahane, Zeevi also championed the policy of transferring the Arabs. Yet, under closer scrutiny, a wide gap became apparent between the two parties.

Kahane, whose main agenda was the removal of all foreign elements from the Jewish state, advocated the forceful expulsion of Arabs from Israel and the occupied territories. Zeevi's reasoning and consequent plan was different. At that point, the radical Right parties, which supported the formal annexation of the West Bank to Israel, were divided by an ongoing debate. The question at hand was what status Israel should grant to the 1.25 million Palestinians who lived in the West Bank. Zeevi argued that the only option for a successful annexation was an Arab-free West Bank. Hence, he promoted the idea of population transfer, either by way of an agreement between Israel and its neighbors or through a state-run system that would offer West Bank Palestinians financial incentives to emigrate.[54] In his televised campaign advertisements, Zeevi tried to blur the lines between his and Kahane's "transfer" concepts in an attempt to appeal to the latter's supporters.[55] His attempt was unsuccessful. When the ballots were counted, the numbers simply did not match his expectations. Moledet gained only two seats in the Knesset, and exit polls indicated that its votes did not come from Kahane's constituents.[56]

This surprisingly meager outcome had little to do with the exact type of transfer policy that Zeevi vowed to implement. It had much deeper roots. Zeevi, a Sabra of Ashkenazi origin, was the ultimate insider, the exact opposite of Kahane. His hawkish worldview was rooted in the secular ideology of Ahdut HaAvoda Poalei Zion. As a teenager Zeevi joined a socialist youth movement, Mahanot Haolim, and at a later stage he joined the Haganah. Then he signed up with the Palmach and, following the state's declaration of independence, he rose to the rank of general in the IDF. After he was honorably discharged from the military, Zeevi assumed various official roles, including the one of counterterrorism advisor to Yitzhak Rabin during his first tenure as

prime minister. Zeevi's background meant that he had no affinity to Kahane's constituents. In the late 1960s, he even referred to Mizrahi Jews as "Levantines," which has a derogatory connotation in Hebrew.[57] He failed to understand that Kahane had reshaped the ideology of the radical Right and had offered his followers, most of whom were outsiders like him, an empowering message. Rather than climbing the slippery "Sabra-Israeli ladder," he presented them with a superior one: the "Jewish ladder." Kahane's message was inclusive and exclusive at the same time—inclusive for the Orthodox as well as the Mizrahi and underprivileged Jews, and exclusive for non-Jews and the secular Sabra elite to which Zeevi belonged.

Passing the Torch: Kahane's True Successors

Yoav Peled analyzed the voting patterns demonstrated by Kahane's former supporters in development towns in the 1988 elections. His conclusion came as a surprise. Peled discovered that many of Kach's supporters gave their votes to one of two ultra-Orthodox parties: the well established Ashkenazi Agudat Yisrael or the emerging Mizrahi force of Shas. Neither party was considered a member of the radical right-wing camp at the time.[58] Together, the two parties boosted their political power when they acquired five additional seats in the Knesset.[59] A third ultra-Orthodox, Ashkenazi party, Rabbi Shach's Degel Hatora appeared on the political scene just prior to the elections and secured two more seats. The ultra-Orthodox parties' unprecedented electoral success in the 1988 elections turned out to be a significant milestone for the Israeli political system. These parties, which traditionally relied on the votes of their well-defined constituencies and made little effort to expand their bases, suddenly increased their power by more than 100 percent. Even so, this fact generated only mild interest among the general Israeli public at the time.[60]

In 1988, a year after the beginning of the Intifada, the Israeli parliament was still at a standstill due to the continuous draw between right- and left-wing camps. The ultra-Orthodox parties were still perceived as parochial and pragmatic. The common belief was that they would join a left-wing-led coalition as easily as they would join one led by the right wing. The prevalent worldview was that their support was up for grabs and could be bought by the highest bidder. In actuality, this could not have been farther from the truth. The expanding ultra-Orthodox constituencies had already sent clear signals to their leaders that the days of political pragmatism were over.

Meanwhile, the disqualification of his party did not deter the tireless Kahane. Once again, he either deliberately ignored or was aloof to the fact that his days as a parliamentarian were over and that the torch had been passed to new political

actors. Kahane continued to tour the country and the world, spreading his gospel and raising funds.

On the evening of November 5, 1990, Kahane was wrapping up his speech at the Marriot Hotel in Manhattan. The title of the talk was "The Jewish Idea." Only sixty people attended the lecture, a far smaller audience than he was used to; but this did nothing to stop Kahane from making fiery comments concerning the tide of anti-Semitism that was supposedly looming over American Jewry. He urged his listeners to immigrate to Israel in order to save themselves. A man dressed as an Orthodox Jew approached Kahane at the end of the talk and most likely caused him no sense of alarm; Kahane was accustomed to engaging in conversations with his followers. However, this person was not a Kahane adherent. He was thirty-six-year-old El Sayyid Nosair, an Egyptian-born, American citizen and a radical Islamic activist. According to eyewitnesses, he was smiling at the rabbi when he pulled out his gun and shot Kahane in the neck and chest. The wounds were mortal. The rabbi, who for years championed the use of violence against Arabs, fell victim to what was later identified as the one of the first jihadi attacks in the West.[61]

Kahane's Legacy

Shortly after his assassination, the fate of Kahane's legacy seemed grim. In the absence of its leader, the Kach Party fell to pieces, suffering from a lack of charisma and political skills among his disciples. The remaining party activists struggled with Kahane's son, Binyamin Zeev, over the party's leadership, legacy, and assets. Eventually the crippled party split into two factions: Kach, which was led by three of Kahane's aides,[62] and Kahane Chai (Kahane Lives), which Binyamin Zeev had established. Both parties were banned from taking part in the 1992 elections.[63]

Two years later, another nail seemed to have been added to the coffin of Kahane's legacy. On Friday, February 2, 1994, at 5:00 a.m., the city of Hebron was dark and quiet. While most of the city's residents were sound asleep, thirteen Jews and eight hundred Muslims congregated for morning prayers in two separate halls at the Cave of the Patriarchs. The Jews, who were celebrating the holiday of Purim, were confined to the synagogue in the Abraham Hall. The Muslims commemorated the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan and gathered in the mosque at Isaac Hall. Baruch Goldstein, a military physician in the IDF reserves, entered the building wearing his IDF uniform and carrying a Galil assault rifle. A native of New York City, Goldstein was a devout student of Kahane and a party activist who had represented Kach in the Kiryat Arba city council. On that morning, though, he had no intentions of praying. He paced

quickly through the ancient halls and entered the mosque from the exit door in the back. The Muslim worshipers, who were facing the opposite direction, did not even notice him. Goldstein positioned himself and started spraying the room with automatic fire. He calmly continued to shoot and change magazines until a group of worshipers managed to hit him with a fire extinguisher. The results were devastating. Twenty-nine Palestinians died and 125 were wounded.[64]

The attack took place less than six months after the signing of the Oslo Accords and threatened the fragile peace process. The Israeli cabinet was taken by complete surprise. Prime Minister Rabin and his aides were infuriated. They looked for a response that would appease the Palestinians and the rest of the world, and briefly entertained the idea of removing the Jewish settlers from Hebron. However, the settlers' network was already too strong and the cabinet decided on other options that carried substantially fewer political risks. They formed a formal committee to investigate the events led by Chief Justice Meir Shamgar and added the already declining Kach and Kahane Chai to the list of terrorist groups under the Prevention of Terror Ordinance. This step banned both groups from any political activity. Their offices were closed, and simple acts such as wearing a Kach T-shirt or praising Kahane's ideas became criminal offenses that could carry a sentence of up to three years in prison.

At first glance, the highly sophisticated settlers' network had prevailed, while Kach seemed to have been on the path to oblivion; but this was not the case. Neither the death of Kahane nor the outlawing of his party had eradicated Kahanism.[65] Kahane's ideas formed the missing link that could unify the Israeli peripheries, parts of the religious Zionist camp, and many ultra-Orthodox communities into a much larger and formidable, albeit less cohesive, political network. His all-encompassing yet simple message appealed to more segments of Israeli Jewish society than any other radical right-wing ideology.[66] In the days following Kahane's assassination, Yossi Sarid, who at the time was a Knesset member of the Ratz Party (HaTnuaa LeZkhuyot HaEzrah VeLeShalom—The Movement for Civil Rights and Peace) and one of Kahane's fiercest foes, waxed prophetic. He told the Israeli journalist Nahum Barnea, "Kahanism is now a way of life . . . Kahanism is moving towards the center while Kahane remained on the outside."[67] In this way, then, Kahane's tireless activism was not in vain.

By the early 1990s, the Israeli radical Right seemed to be progressing on two parallel yet separate paths. The first of these was forged by the settlers' network, which was committed to one central objective: settling as many Jews as possible in the West Bank and thus perpetuating Israeli control over this territory. Interestingly, and despite the fact that they had a different reasoning for their settlement activities, this group adopted the strategies employed by the mostly socialist pioneers of the pre-state era. The settlers had already realized that most Israelis had little interest in their mission and that the exclusive reliance on the

electoral process would actually undermine their objectives. Hence, they diverted their efforts toward the state, gaining a significant degree of control over governmental ministries and state agencies that were in charge of allocating vital resources to the settlement enterprise.[68]

The settlers' network seemed to be unaware of or reluctant to acknowledge the other, much wider path that the public followed. Together, the Likud, Shas, and Kach parties offered a vague yet powerful message, which embraced the peripheries and rejected the center. The powerful message of the new Right portrayed traditional Jewish values as a superior alternative to the secular Israeli culture. It offered a pure divide between right and wrong. The old Labor elite was accused of deliberately marginalizing Jewish values in the state, taking advantage of the pure and innocent Mizrahi immigrants, and being far too sympathetic toward the Arabs. This perspective was a breath of fresh air for the bitter constituents on the Jewish periphery. It enabled them to reassess their social standing in the Israeli society and claim the status they felt they deserved.[69]

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The Radical Right in Jerusalem and Beyond

On December 15, 1987, the Minister of industry and trade Ariel Sharon inaugurated his new home in a ceremony that was crowded to capacity. The event took place just one week after the outbreak of the First Intifada. Sharon's housewarming drew worldwide attention because his apartment was located in the Wittenberg House in the heart of the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. In the twenty years that had elapsed since the 1967 conquest of the East Jerusalem, Israel acted cautiously when Jews who were associated with the growing settlers' network tried to expand their reach to the Muslim Quarter. This quarter has always been considered one of the most sensitive points of friction between Jews and Arabs.[1] However, Sharon didn't appear to be bothered by the riots that spread like wildfire in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the preceding week. Furthermore, he did not seem to be losing any sleep over the fact that East Jerusalem vendors had declared a commercial strike in protest of his decision to reside in the Old City.

On the contrary, Sharon enjoyed the considerable attention showered on him by the media. In mock innocence, he explained that residency in the Old City was an ideal solution for him since the daily trips from his home in Sycamore Ranch (Havat Shikmim) in the Negev to his Jerusalem office and back were taxing him. And when critics complained of the high costs associated with securing Sharon's home, he scorned them, saying that he was not the only Jew who chose to live in the Muslim Quarter. As a case in point, he noted that the Crown of the Priests Yeshiva (Ateret Cohanim) was located quite close to his home.[2] However, behind this seemingly casual mention of the yeshiva lay a more complex story. Ateret Cohanim was a clique within the settlers' network. It emerged as one of the two main religious Zionist groups that settled—and continue to settle—Jews in densely populated Palestinian areas located in East Jerusalem and the surrounding villages. Sharon was one of Ateret Cohanim's most enthusiastic and active supporters.