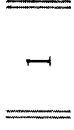


assassination of Rabin. The final gasps of the old radical Right, the reconfiguration of the network, its many successes (and occasional failures) in subverting the peace process will stand at the heart of the chapter. In chapter 6 I shift much of my attention to the domestic arena, especially to the social and political dividing lines that facilitated the rapid consolidation of the various elements comprising the new radical Right. Notwithstanding, I follow the role of the radical Right in pushing the peace process toward a cliff. In chapters 7 and 8, I cover the period between the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada and Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip. Contrary to the common belief that the second Palestinian uprising and Israel's consequent withdrawal from Gaza served a major blow to the radical Right, I argue that these events actually benefited this camp. By the end of that period, the Israeli public gave up on any hope for peace, the remnants of what used to be the Israeli peace camp were decaying rapidly, and the radical Right network enjoyed unprecedented prosperity in each and every policy arena. I structure the conclusions slightly differently. Alongside a breakdown of the recent leg of the radical Right's victorious spree, I zoom in on the policy realms in which this camp had its major achievements, as well as those in which it was less successful, and offer a cautious assessment of these developments as they relate to the future of Israel.



The Antecedents of Israel's Contemporary Radical Right

For almost one hundred years, there has been an ongoing and fierce struggle in Israel or Palestine, depending on one's viewpoint, between two young nationalistic movements: the Jewish and the Palestinian. The struggle focuses on the questions: Which is the true native group in this small strip of land that, since 1948, has been recognized as the State of Israel? Is it the Palestinians, whose origins are in the Middle East and Africa and who gathered on this territory over the course of hundreds of years? Or is it the Jews, who were sparsely scattered on this piece of land until the nineteenth century but regarded Eretz Yisrael as the historical origin of their people and the theological mainstay of their religion?¹

Modern-day Jewish nationalism appeared with the emergence of the Zionist movement, which arose in Europe during the nineteenth century and was profoundly influenced by the galvanization of European nationalism. The rapid growth of the movement can be attributed to the fear that gripped the Jews in the wake of anti-Semitism that swept across the Continent; the dominant factions of the Zionist movement searched for a course or solution that would somehow enable them to transform the Jewish Diaspora into a sovereign nation.

One hazard in the research of political history is the tendency to judge the past through the prism of the present. For example, anti-Zionist circles today commonly locate the roots of Jewish nativism in a reference made by Lord Shaftesbury and later by the British-Zionist writer Israel Zangwill, who described Palestine as a "land without a people for a people without a land."² Zangwill is accused of purposely ignoring the fact that the land had been populated with hundreds of thousands of Arabs and was bustling with the life of its local residents. Even so, it is worth remembering that, in those times, the international political order and the Middle East theater in particular were completely different than they are today. Palestine, or Eretz Yisrael, and its neighbors were under the rule of a declining Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. The concept of nationalism that sprang from Europe and left its mark so deeply on many of the continent's

Jews slowly made its way to the Middle East. Palestinian nationalism, which was removed from the pan-Arabian context, coalesced in response to the emergence of Zionism, or Jewish nationalist ideas that formed and evolved following the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century.³ It is therefore possible to understand, without justifying, the fact that many of the leaders of the Zionist movement failed to realize that the land upon which they cast their eyes and in which they sought to establish their "national home" was already home to another people.⁴

The Zionist movement accomplished its first significant achievement when the Balfour Declaration was published in 1917. Great Britain, which had captured Palestine from the Ottomans and was subsequently granted a mandate from the League of Nations to govern the territory, recognized the right of the Jews to establish a national home in Eretz Yisrael. In 1922, the British Mandate authorities ratified their commitment to the Zionist movement. Largely in the wake of the Jewish leadership's overestimates, the British believed that the post-World War I flow of Jewish immigrants to Palestine would significantly increase, and as a result they agreed to assist in the absorption of the refugees. However, these estimates proved to be inflated, and the expected flood of immigration turned out to be only a trickle. At the same time, the British gradually began retreating from their pro-Zionist policy.

The rise of Nazism in Germany opened the floodgates. Many European Jews, not all of them Zionists, searched for a country that would provide them with a safe haven, and scores of thousands of refugees left Europe for the shores of Palestine. The upsurge of Jewish immigrants was a thorn in the side of the Palestinian movement and did not conform to British policy at the time. The tension between the two national movements gradually increased and was manifested in eruptions of violence, eventually reaching a climax in the Great Arab Revolt of 1936. In response to these events, the British launched a royal commission of inquiry headed by Lord Peel. Members of the commission, who carried out a thorough job, concluded that two national movements with polarized aspirations had formed on the land of British Mandatory Palestine, and the struggle between them had become a zero-sum game.⁵ The commission recommended a division of the land between the two movements. According to their plan, the Jewish state was to extend over about 17 percent of the territory of Western Eretz Yisrael, including the Galilee, the Jezreel and Beit Shean Valleys, and the northern coastal plain. The Arab state was to include the territories of the West Bank, the Negev, the southern coastal plain, and the Gaza Strip. A relatively narrow corridor, including Jaffa, which extended across the central area eastward to Lod and from there to Jerusalem, was to have remained under international control. The mixed cities of Safed, Tiberias, and Haifa were to remain under international sovereignty as well.⁶

The Palestinian leadership completely rejected the Peel Commission's recommendations. The mainstream of the Zionist leadership adopted the principle of division with several reservations, and the Jewish Agency presented the concept to the Woodhead Commission, which was established in April 1938. The Jewish community living in Palestine since the late nineteenth century, known as the Yishuv (settlement), was in turmoil and gave no rest to its leadership. The hawkish faction of the Labor movement (led by Menachem Ussishkin, Yitzhak Tabenkin, and Berl Katznelson), the Revisionist movement (led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky), and representatives from the religious Zionists all joined the Palestinian position and rejected the Peel Commission's recommendations. Although it was never implemented, partitioning the land between the nations became the main point of departure for the Jewish community's policy in the following period and served as the basis for most of the proposed solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By introducing the concept of partition, the Peel Commission helped extricate the Jews and the Palestinians from the dead-end, zero-sum game in which they were trapped.⁷

In the absence of a willingness on behalf of the Palestinians to accept the partition arrangement, the heads of the Jewish Agency interpreted the partition proposal in accord with their own interests and explained it on the basis of two operative principles. The first principle was the drawing of defensible borders for the Jewish state. The second was to ensure that the state's territory would be occupied by a Jewish demographic majority. As a result, it was decided that the settlement of the country's borders, which was a central component of the Zionist movement's activities, would continue, even at the cost of a confrontation with the Mandate authorities.⁸ The White Paper, published in 1939 and initiated by the British colonial secretary Malcolm MacDonald, was a low point as far as the Jewish community was concerned. The document overwrote the British commitment to establish a Jewish state and promoted the notion of a binational state instead. Furthermore, the White Paper included new regulations that imposed severe restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine and the purchase of lands by the Zionist movement.⁹

However, the dramatic events taking place in Europe at that time made it difficult for the British to implement their policies. The persecution of the Jews and the Nazis' systematic annihilation of them increased the pressure on the leadership of the Jewish community in Palestine to absorb the steadily increasing numbers of immigrants. Most of the Zionist organizations within Eretz Yisrael took an active part in both the illegal immigration of 80,000 refugees to Palestine and their rapid assimilation into the Jewish community, despite the danger of a head-on confrontation with the Mandate authorities.¹⁰ From the time the initial immigrants arrived in Palestine in the late nineteenth century until the expiration

of the British Mandate government, the Jewish community grew from 20,000 to 650,000 men and women.

On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, delivered a speech in which he declared Israel's independence: it was the last day of the British Mandate in Palestine. The speech reflected the guidelines formulated by the Zionist leadership following the partitioning idea. The Jewish leadership had begun to stray from the original guiding principles outlined by the Peel Commission as early as 1947, when the Jews and Palestinians had disagreed over the UN partition plan. The Haganah's (Defense) Plan D, which was never officially adopted, laid out the strategic infrastructure for the activities of its fighting forces. Military operations initiated by the Jewish community's leadership were designed to ensure full control of the areas that were apportioned to the Jewish state in the UN partition plan, to protect Jewish settlements that were not included in the plan, and to create territorial continuity among all Jewish settlements.¹¹

For a number of years, the events of 1948 were at the center of an ardent debate between historians from the Zionist mainstream and researchers from a more critical school of thought.¹² Today, however, it is hard to find scholars who have reservations about a number of basic developments. Despite the fact that the Zionist leadership had not laid down clear-cut guidelines regarding the expulsion of Palestinian citizens, local commanders from the Haganah and the Palmach were granted a large degree of freedom to devise an expulsion policy and immediately execute it. Subsequent to the declaration of independence and after the armies of neighboring Arab countries joined the campaign, the threat hovering over the Jewish community significantly increased, and the nascent Israeli army received clear orders to take firmer action.¹³ This time the decisions were not left to commanders in the field. The deportation of 50,000 residents of Lod and Ramle in July 1948 was apparently carried out in full knowledge of David Ben-Gurion.¹⁴ In the later stages of the war, when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had gained the upper hand and were operative in border settlements in the Galilee and the Negev, military commanders regained the authority to formulate policy regarding the Palestinian population. As the fighting subsided, the State of Israel was in control of the territories allocated to the Jewish state by the Peel Commission, the territories that were intended to be under the authority of the international community, and most of the territories apportioned to the Arabs (excluding the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip).

The first provisional cabinet of the State of Israel was based on the Minhelet HaAm, or HaMemshela HaZmanit (the provisional government of Israel), which included representatives from most political camps. Among them were David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett who represented the Labor movements,

Peretz Bernstein (the Liberals), Moshe Shapira (the religious Zionists), and Yitzhak-Meir Levin (the ultra-Orthodox or Haredim). These leaders, most of whom believed in political pragmatism, were a far cry ideologically from what could be then defined as the radical Right. Nevertheless, they did not express misgivings at the fact that the State of Israel's new borders were much more extensive than those that were originally allocated.¹⁵

The Roots of Israel's Secular Nativism

The emergent spirit of Israeli nativism was prevalent among the commanding echelons of the Israel Defense Force, which was established two weeks after the declaration of independence and was principally founded on the previously existing Palmach forces. Officers in the IDF reflected the gap between the veteran political leadership and the first generation of Sabras—those native-born Israeli Jews for whom modern Hebrew was their native tongue. These young and self-assured fighters, among them Moshe Dayan and Yigal Allon, served as role models for the youth of the new state. Dayan and Allon represented a secular and socialist but at the same time nationalist and militant elite. They knew the history of the Jewish people very well and roamed the trails of Eretz Yisrael with the Bible as their guide. In their worldview, which over the course of years became the core of Israeli policy-making procedure, the Jewish people's renewed sovereignty in their ancient homeland was intertwined with immediate security considerations.¹⁶

The most important ideological representative of this secular nativism was the Kibbutz Hameuhad (United Kibbutz) movement;¹⁷ Yigal Allon was raised on its ideology. In 1936 Yitzhak Tabenkin and members of this movement had already integrated Jewish nativism with international socialism, ideas that have often come into conflict with one another. The Bible, Jewish history, and archaeology all served as "proof" that the Jewish-Israeli community in Eretz Yisrael was the newest link in the chain of Jewish sovereignty that had been severed by the Romans some two thousand years earlier. The lands of Eretz Yisrael, as they saw it, stretched far beyond the eastern bank of the Jordan River.¹⁸ The members of this movement came from a particularly activist faction. Tabenkin's followers enthusiastically supported the establishment of Jewish settlements in areas of strategic importance, even at the cost of confrontation with the British authorities. In 1946 Tabenkin was among the founders of the political party Ahdut HaAvoda Poalei Zion, which was committed to the notion of the Greater Land of Israel and strongly opposed the partition plan. At the same time, this new branch advocated the establishment of a revolutionary international workers'

movement, showed sympathy for the Soviet Union, and harbored a deep hostility toward the Revisionist movement whose nativism was not much different from theirs.¹⁹

The Origins of Israel's Populism

Twenty-three years earlier, Zeev Jabotinsky, Zionist activist, intellectual, and publicist, withdrew from the World Zionist Organization (Histadrut HaZionit). Jabotinsky's experience in the WZO was fraught with obstacles and clashes with the dominant socialist factions. The straw that broke the camel's back for Jabotinsky was the weakness demonstrated by the Zionist leadership in the face of what he perceived as the British authorities' pro-Arab policy. In his article "The Iron Wall," which was written as early as 1923 and became one of the founding texts of the revisionist movement, Jabotinsky said that Jewish and Arab nationalist movements were on a collision course, with the struggle for Eretz Yisrael the central issue. He concluded that the conciliatory approach adopted by the leadership of the Jewish community in Palestine toward the Mandate authorities, as well as their reliance on British forces to provide protection for the Jewish community, was fundamentally flawed. In light of this conclusion he demanded the immediate establishment of an effective Jewish defense force or, in his words, an "iron wall, which the native population cannot breach."²⁰

In 1925 Jabotinsky established the Alliance of Revisionists Zionists (Zahar). The creation of this alliance was a milestone marking the ideological fault line that, in due course, would draw the boundary between Left and Right in the State of Israel. Many in the Zionist movement regarded the Revisionists as a radical, right-wing faction. The main ideological reason was that Jabotinsky was an advocate of "monism,"²¹ in his case meaning a commitment to pure ethnic nationalism. In this version of the monistic ideology, the ethnic community is a unit greater than the sum amount of its individuals; thus, the individual's life becomes meaningless in the absence of the community.²² This approach diametrically contradicted the tendency of most Zionist factions to integrate nationalism and other ideas, primarily socialism, and hence accounted for much of Hakhibbutz Hameuhad's hostility toward the Revisionist ideology. Another reason for the hostile attitude toward the Alliance of Revisionist Zionists lay in the militaristic characteristics of the Betar youth movement, which was founded in Eastern Europe and was deeply influenced by Jabotinsky's views. For many of the Zionist leaders, the military parades and brown uniforms of the Betar members evoked images that were somewhat reminiscent of the Fascist movements that flourished in Europe.²³

In the following two decades, the relationship between the Yishuv's leadership and the Revisionist Zionists deteriorated markedly. Hatred simmered below

the surface and often resulted in violent outbursts. The Revisionists repeatedly stated their deep revulsion toward the ideas of socialism and communism that were so dear to the Labor parties, and they demanded that a liberal economy be established in the future Jewish state. Furthermore, many Revisionists continued to describe Great Britain as the enemy of the Jewish people and insisted on continuing the fight against it, despite the position of the Yishuv leaders, who agreed to put their differences with the British aside during World War II when they joined the campaign against their mutual Nazi enemy. Ironically, on the subject of nativism, and more specifically on the question of the entitlement of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael, the Revisionist Right had quite a lot in common with a considerable number of left-wing socialists. Both the Revisionists and the heads of Ahdut HaAvoda Poalei Zion believed that the borders of Eretz Yisrael should lie on both sides of the Jordan River.²⁴

Jabotinsky's bleak 1923 forecast did in fact materialize as the violent clashes between the Jews and the Palestinians escalated. The Irgun Underground—also known by its Hebrew acronym Etzel (HaIrgun HaTzvai HaLeumi BeEretz Yisrael) and throughout this book referred to as Etzel, split from the Haganah on the grounds that the latter was not willing to take a more aggressive stance against the Arabs. They adopted Jabotinsky's views, making them the main party line. In 1933 the tension in the Jewish community reached a peak with the assassination of Haim Arlozoroff, head of the political arm of the Jewish Agency. The Arlozoroff murder was preceded by sharp criticism on behalf of the Union of Zionist Rebels (Brit Habirionim), the extremist faction of the Revisionist movement. Arlozoroff was denounced as a traitor for his involvement in the negotiations with the Nazi Germany over the Transfer Agreements (Heskevei HaHavara), which allowed the emigration of Jews from Germany together with their property. The British police arrested leaders of Brit Habirionim for their alleged involvement in the murder, and the fact that Ben-Gurion pointed an accusing finger at the Revisionists did not make their situation any easier. Even the absence of substantial evidence linking the Revisionists to the crime did not help them to extract themselves from the defensive position into which they had been pushed. Ironically, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, leader of the religious Zionist movement and the first Ashkenazi rabbi of Eretz Yisrael, was among the most prominent Zionist leaders who came to their defense. This was an important intersection for the Revisionist and the religious Zionist blocs. However, it would be another four decades before these two movements would eventually strike their alliance and change the course of Israeli history.

Despite the fact that the hostility between the higher ranks of the Haganah and the Etzel did not abate during the 1930s, the German invasion of Poland in 1939 and the onset of World War II provided a window of opportunity for

cooperation. The generally inflexible Etzel showed a pragmatic side, declared a cease-fire in its operations against the British, and joined in the struggle against the common enemy: Nazi Germany. The decision to collaborate with the British was received with severe disapproval by many of the Revisionists. Internal conflict intensified during 1940, the year of Jabotinsky's death, and eventually led to the Etzel's division and the founding of a new underground: the Stern Gang or Lehi (Lehi Lohamei Herut Israel), led by Avraham Stern.²⁵

The Lehi espoused a more dogmatic worldview than the Etzel. Members of the former demanded that the struggle against British imperialism be pursued and believed that Greater Israel, which belonged in its entirety to the Jewish people, must be conquered by force. Israel Eldad (Scheib), one of the more prominent ideologues of the movement, was also among the first to suggest the idea of transfer, which later became a recurring premise of the Israeli radical Right. In Eldad's opinion, there was no reason why the Palestinian minority should remain within the borders of Eretz Yisrael after its liberation. The Lehi's ideology, which had been deeply influenced by the spirit of Jabotinsky, was not uniform among all members of the underground group. The dominant faction espoused a nativist outlook with a strong affinity for religious authoritarianism. For this reason, the Lehi became appealing to the youths of Brit HahaShmonaim, an activist youth movement from the religious Zionist bloc. At the other end of the spectrum, there were also those who represented the Canaanite ideology; these activists rejected the Diaspora and were interested in strengthening the link between the early people who lived in Palestine and the Jews that populated it in the twentieth century. They rejected the notion that Judaism should serve as a basis for nationalism and supported the integration of the new Israeli community into the region by creating a common culture with the Arabs. They hoped that this would unite the people of the area around their common origins in the ancient land of Canaan. Nevertheless, the combination between nationalism and religion proved to be a natural fit and gained dominance in the movement. Decades later, the Lehi legacy would become a model to be imitated by Rabbi Meir Kahane and his followers. Lehi's burning hostility toward the Mandate authorities led the underground to engage in questionable actions that ultimately led to its undoing; there were even members of the Lehi who believed that the Nazis and Jews had common interests. In exchange for the transfer of European Jews to Palestine, members of the Lehi tried to forge connections with Nazi Germany and assist in their struggle against Britain. These actions stunned the leaders of the Yishuv and reinforced their belief that the Lehi was a Fascist movement.²⁶

Toward the end of World War II, Menachem Begin, formerly the commissioner of Beitar in Poland, was appointed the commander of Etzel. Begin's appointment was a turning point for the Etzel, which had evolved from the

Haganah organization. Begin brought the Etzel even closer to its Revisionist ideological core. Unlike previous leaders of the organization who fought alongside the British, he took a hard line against the Mandate authorities, a fact that marked him as a nuisance in the eyes of the Haganah's leadership. This was not the first time that Begin was thought of as problematic; since his first days in the Beitar movement, Begin showed that he was an independent thinker and could display a strong oppositional streak.²⁷ In 1935, when he was only twenty-two years old, Begin confronted Jabotinsky, whom he admired, when he thought that a Jabotinsky-led Beitar was not militant enough. Furthermore, Begin's theatrical flair and charisma made him a popular speaker. To his many opponents, who had reservations regarding his sentimental and pathos-filled speeches, Begin was a populist.²⁸ His promotion to commander of the Etzel fueled Ben-Gurion's hatred for him and engendered one of the most difficult relationships in Israeli politics. It was to last for many decades.

The hostility between the Haganah and right-wing underground movements peaked in the "Hunting Season" (or Saison) events of 1944. Under directions from its senior leaders, the Haganah formed a special task force, which initiated operations against members of the Etzel and even handed many of them over to the British secret police.²⁹ During the final years of the British Mandate in Palestine, several attempts were made to reconcile the hawkish movements, but the few cases that concluded in some degree of cooperation were short lived. The Jewish Resistance Movement (Thuat HaMeri Halvri), which was established in 1945 and was a union of the three underground movements, fell apart after many civilians were killed in the bombing of the Jerusalem King David Hotel on July 22, 1946. Although the bombing was a joint operation of the various underground movements, the Etzel was considered directly responsible for the action.³⁰ Three years later, in 1948, a month after the declaration of independence and at the height of the consolidation of the various resistance movements into a national army, the country seemed to be standing on the brink of a civil war when the *Altalena* was sunk. Ben-Gurion and Begin were the main actors in this tragedy, and the event proved to be a dramatic final chord in the struggle between the Haganah and the Etzel. The *Altalena* was a weapons ship that had been acquired by the Etzel in 1947 before the resistance movements had agreed to converge into the Israel Defense Forces. Begin agreed to divide the weapons that were in the hold of the ship among the different IDF units but requested that a share be set aside for the Etzel members that still fought together in Jerusalem. Ben-Gurion strongly opposed even limited autonomy for combat units with distinct ideological qualities that differed from those of the sovereign state in whose army they served. He demanded that all resistance fighters become fully integrated in the IDF and that the military's commanders resolve the question of the distribution of weapons. But the tense negotiations with Begin ran aground and

finally Ben-Gurion gave the order to sink the ship off the beach of Tel Aviv. In an emotional speech, Begin instructed his people to surrender and ultimately prevented the further escalation of violence. Etzel members were placed under arrest, and the organization underwent a rapid conversion into a political party—Herut, which promptly earned itself the reputation of a radical right-wing party.³¹ A statement published soon after in the *New York Times* in December 1948 argued that Herut was reminiscent of Fascist and Nazi parties. The manifesto generated significant impact because of its signers, including Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt.³²

The transition from underground activities to parliamentary politics did not reduce the intensity of Ben-Gurion's animosity toward Begin. When Ben-Gurion announced that the first government was formed "without Herut and Maki [HaMiflega HaKomunistit HaYisraelit, the Israeli Communist Party]," he marked the boundaries of the political consensus in Israel.³³ But this was an unbalanced equation. On the left side of the political spectrum, Ben-Gurion removed the most extreme signs of communism, but at the same time he kept an opening for other pro-Soviet parties such as Mapam (Miflegat HaPoalim HaMeuhedet, or the United Workers Party). On the right, Begin excluded the Herut Party. The party's ideology was right wing, but it is doubtful whether it could have been defined as radical at the time.³⁴

Continuing along the same lines as Jabotinsky, Begin extolled the virtues of Jewish nativism. He also reiterated the rights of the Jewish people to the lands of Eretz Yisrael on both sides of the Jordan River.³⁵ These two principles largely coincided with the conceptions of the activist faction of the Mapam Party, which was not a partner in Ben-Gurion's coalition but was an integral part of the family of Labor parties. Radical aspects could not be detected in either Begin's support for a liberal economy or in his firm opposition to socialism and communism. Furthermore, and unlike the Labor leaders, Begin showed a deep commitment to democratic values and the principle of the rule of law. Thus, contrary to the claim that populism was a key element in Begin's ideology, it was essentially a political style.³⁶

As a politician, Begin improved his charisma and rhetorical skills, and elevated them to the level of an art. He delivered his most effective opposition speeches in public squares rather than in the Knesset. One of the most dramatic manifestations of this took place on January 7, 1952, during a protest rally against a reparations agreement that the Israeli government was trying to negotiate with Germany. The country's leadership regarded the normalization of relations with Germany as a necessary evil; for Ben-Gurion, this was a price worth paying for the stabilization of a weak Israeli economy. Begin, on the other hand, viewed this as subservience to a nation that less than a decade earlier had been engaged in the systematic annihilation of the Jewish people. During the demonstration, he

urged his excited audience to action when he called for civil disobedience against the "evil government" that had sold the trampled dignity of the Jewish people for money. At the end of his speech, he led a large group of protesters toward the Knesset building.³⁷ The volatile march concluded in a violent clash between protesters and security forces, and in yet another speech, in which Begin mocked Ben-Gurion with the epithet "hooligan." Ben-Gurion, who feared that this might be an indication of a coming rebellion, considered deploying military forces to restore order. As he perceived it, Begin was capable of doing anything to further his worldview.³⁸

Although the personal hostility between the two leaders persisted, the number of political disputes between them declined during the mid-1950s to the late 1960s. While conflicts such as these had at one time provoked struggles between the Left and the Right, the Israeli political system had undergone a rapid process of institutionalization that helped restrict political debates to the confines of the Knesset. It was with good reason that Ehud Sprinzak referred to this period as "the golden era of Israeli parliamentarism."³⁹ From many scholars' perspectives, though, a critical fact with far-reaching effects on Israeli society and politics had simply receded from view. During those years, most of the Zionist parties were actively fusing the principle of Jewish nativism in the institutions and laws of the State of Israel.

The Institutionalization of Jewish Nativism

Jewish nativism became a formative element in Israel's laws and policies since the early days of sovereignty. In 1950 the Knesset passed the significant Law of Return, which granted a clear preference to Jewish immigrants to Israel over non-Jewish ones. It is hard to argue with the rationale of this law, which remains in effect today. The state's intended goal was to provide a haven for the Jews who for centuries had been subjected to anti-Semitism and persecutions. However, the law created an almost impassable series of obstacles for members of other ethnicities wishing to immigrate to Israel. Particularly problematic was the issue of the status of Palestinian refugees.⁴⁰ The Law of Citizenship, passed two years after the Law of Return, only perpetuated the problem. Although the law granted Israeli citizenship to the non-Jewish citizens of the British Mandate, this right was based on the condition that these newly appointed citizens remained within the country's borders at the end of the 1948 war. In this, Palestinian refugees were denied Israeli citizenship after being expelled or fleeing from their homes during the fighting or when the Israeli borders closed, thereby preventing them from returning to their homes.⁴¹ In addition, Palestinians who were accorded Israeli citizenship were not made into citizens with equal rights

in a democratic state; to this day, the gaps between the civil statuses of Jews and Arabs are considerable.⁴²

In 1948 Israel declared the establishment of a military government in densely Arab-populated areas. Acting under the "Emergency Defense Regulations of 1945," regional military governors restricted the freedom of movement of Palestinian citizens. The martial law also enabled the government and security services to closely monitor them and control their daily lives.⁴³ In addition, both refugees and the Palestinian citizens of Israel were the main casualties of massive land expropriations. Along with the Israel Land Administration, Jewish groups outside of Israel who were active in land acquisition during the settlement period became owners of more than 90 percent of the country's territory. In 1960 the Knesset passed the Israeli Lands Law, one of the Basic Laws, which provided the legal infrastructure for the nationalization of land.⁴⁴

The institutionalization of Jewish nativism was not restricted solely to the legal sphere: it had also more subtle manifestations. In 1951 the Israeli government adopted the population dispersal policy. The country's leadership, which was required to absorb large waves of immigrants within a short time, believed that settling the newcomers in the outlying areas was an important national duty. By establishing agricultural settlements along its borders, the state intended to create an alternative solution for the many immigrants who converged upon the already densely populated cities and at the same time provide the country with a security buffer zone. Another objective of this policy was to induce a change in the demographic balance in these frontier areas that, at the time of the declaration of independence, had an Arab majority. The goal was to "Judaize" the periphery and prevent Palestinian communities from potentially attaching their villages to neighboring Arab countries or thwart future demands for the independence of these regions.⁴⁵ Many Jews, mostly immigrants from North Africa, were settled in the Negev, the Galilee, and the Beit Shean Valley—without ever being asked for their opinion. Decades later these peripheral settlements served as the starting point for Israel's right-wing parties' successful race to power.⁴⁶

Another, more elusive, expression of the ideological cross-party agreement to maintain a Jewish majority was the development of an unwritten rule that excluded Arab parties from governmental coalitions. This was an adaptation and extension of the principle "without Herut and Maki." Written evidence of this agreement, which is in force even today, cannot be found, but facts speak in the absence of such a document. Throughout the history of the State of Israel, no Arab political party has ever been invited to be part of the coalition, even if the latter were led by left-wing parties.⁴⁷ The main consequence of this unwritten rule is that any ballot cast for an Arab party in parliamentary elections is in effect a wasted vote because these parties never have the opportunity to join the policy-making processes of the executive branch.⁴⁸ Furthermore, even in the

Knesset these parties have been excluded from legislative procedures regarding issues that are critical to Israel's future.

These laws and practices, and many others as well, have led scholars with a critical orientation to the conclusion that the State of Israel does not fit the liberal democracy model, despite its wish to be recognized as such. According to these researchers, the models that most aptly describe the Israeli regime are the "ethnic democracy"⁴⁹ or "ethnocracy."⁵⁰ Although these models are not fully analogous, both underscore the fact that the state has committed to perpetuating the dominance of the Jewish majority and granting it a framework of institutional benefits, which ensures its superiority over other ethnic groups, most notably the Arabs. A consequent argument made by Sammy Smooha holds that since the official position of all the Zionist parties in Israel is essentially nativist, no political space was left for the emergence of a radical Right such as the one that emerged in Europe in recent decades.⁵¹ However, on this point I disagree. Unlike other variants of democratic regimes, the "ethnic democracy" serves as an ideal habitat for the growth of such right-wing radicalism. In Western European democracies, radical ideas stray to various degrees from the dominant political culture.⁵² In many cases, attempts to anchor them in policies and even to introduce them into the political discourse provoke broad disapproval among the public. In ethnic regimes, on the other hand, such ideas are fully embedded in the dominant political culture and are manifested on a daily basis in governmental practices. Smooha's argument lies in the assumption that the ideological spectrum in every regime is identical and static. His sole focus on Jewish-Arab relations leads him to conclude that while radical movements and political parties in liberal democracies fill the ideological void on the right side of the political map, in ethnic regimes this same space is already occupied by the state. In reality, the ideological spectrum is multidimensional and reflects a large variety of issues. It is also highly elastic and varies from country to country and from one time period to another.⁵³ Therefore, in ethnic or nativistic regimes, the ideology of the radical Right is more radical than in liberal democracies. Furthermore, elements of the ideology are embedded in the institutions and practices of the regime and perpetuate a radical right-wing political culture.

The Consolidation of Religious Authoritarianism

The central role played by the issue of ethnic relations in the defining of the Israeli regime sidlined the question of the role of religion in the state's evolution and its effect on the nature of the regime.⁵⁴ There is not and has never been a separation of religion and state in Israel. The considerable clout wielded by Orthodox Jewry in state institutions has had a significant impact on the development of religious

authoritarianism, on the departure of Israel from the family of liberal democracies, and also, in no small part, on the growth of the radical Right.⁵⁵ Religious nativism in Israel—which is characterized by a theological justification for settling every part of the Promised Land—is identified mainly with religious Zionism. This is synonymous to religious nationalism, which is an activist faction of Zionism that combines nationalism and Jewish religious faith. Those who adhere to this ideology are modern Orthodox Jews; they combine Orthodox Jewish values and a modern way of life. It is from ultra-Orthodox Judaism, however, that the roots of religious authoritarianism derive. Ultra-Orthodox Jews, or Haredim, are groups that adhere to the strictest interpretation of Orthodox Judaism.⁵⁶ Despite the existence of sundry ultra-Orthodox factions, the ultra-Orthodox sector on the whole can be characterized as a society that rejects modernity. Ultra-Orthodox communities feature a hierarchical structure in which each group has a rabbi or a council of rabbis to which it looks and whose rulings it follows.⁵⁷

Over the years, ultra-Orthodox Jewry has been ambivalent toward secular Zionism and the state it created. According to their point of view, and in sharp contradiction to the ideology of the religious Zionist movement, the emergence of secular Zionism was not a part of a larger Jewish redemption process but rather a deviation from it. They also feared that the emergence of Jewish nationalism would alienate the nations of the world. This fear was embedded in the belief that the failed revolt against the Romans led to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and consequently brought about the deportation of the Jews from Israel. Hence, they concluded that Jewish communities should always find ways to live in peace with the nations of the world in order to guarantee their own survival. The establishment of the secular State of Israel was perceived by most ultra-Orthodox communities as a provocation, and they therefore looked at it with a substantial amount of suspicion.⁵⁸

Despite the tendency of the ultra-Orthodox communities to live in segregated neighborhoods and their initial reluctance to take an active role in the state's formation, it should not be concluded that they did not have an interest in shaping various aspects of Israel's public sphere. The ultra-Orthodox have a dogmatic worldview. They regard their way of life as the only virtuous path and believe that all Jewish people of Israel should adhere to their beliefs and practices. Therefore, even before the state was established, they tried to influence the public space in accordance with their worldview.⁵⁹ The socialist Zionist leadership's willingness to accept dictates from the small ultra-Orthodox minority can be explained by both emotional and practical motives. Most of the country's founding fathers had ultra-Orthodox roots. The Holocaust, which destroyed Jewish life in Europe, led them to the conclusion that the

State of Israel was the only place where rebuilding the theological center of the Jewish people was possible. Such sentiments were not their only considerations. Before the vote on the UN partition plan, Ben-Gurion made efforts to ensure that the disputes that threatened to tear apart the Jewish community would not lead UN member states to fear that the Jewish state would be shrouded in constant chaos. He was concerned that such an image would lead those countries that leaned toward supporting of the establishment of the Jewish state to reconsider their position. Therefore, it was important to placate the ultra-Orthodox Jewish leadership (many of whom were represented by the Agudat Yisrael—Union of Israel—Party) and to ensure that when the UN investigation committee, which solicited the views of all of the Yishuv's political camps, approached the leaders of the party, they would express their unconditional support for the founding of a Jewish state.⁶⁰

Unlike his attitude toward other political factions at that time, Ben-Gurion demonstrated an atypical degree of flexibility toward the ultra-Orthodox. In a document that defined what would later be known as the status quo arrangement, the Zionist leadership agreed to meet the following four commitments: declaring that Saturday would be the country's official sabbatical and a day on which Jews were forbidden to work; guaranteeing that only kosher food would be served at state institutions; determining matrimonial laws in accordance with the values of Orthodox Judaism; and certifying an autonomy that would allow the ultra-Orthodox to maintain independent educational frameworks for their children (where the state's authority would be limited). Approximately two years later, the Haredim strongly opposed the adoption of a constitution in Israel since they believed that such a charter must reflect the laws of the Torah. Once again, Ben-Gurion revealed a great degree of flexibility and agreed to postpone the drafting of such a constitution indefinitely.⁶¹

Despite the ultra-Orthodox's inherent hostility toward democracy, they became well versed in its workings.⁶² They recognized that their ability to mobilize electoral support outside the boundaries of their communities was quite limited. Therefore, the Haredim resorted to three main methods. First, they perpetuated their control over bureaucratic institutions that were responsible for ensuring the dominance of Jewish Orthodoxy in the country. They did this by joining the religious Zionists in the struggle for the establishment and continued existence of an extensive network of religious bureaucratic bodies, which included, among others, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the chief rabbinate, the rabbinical courts, the Unit for the Enforcement of Shabbat Laws in the Ministry of Labor, and religious councils in local municipalities. Second, they engaged in a shrewd exploitation of the fact that, despite their modest size, ultra-Orthodox Knesset factions were often crucial in the formation of coalitions and guaranteeing their stability. Over the course of many years, they

routinely avoided fully embracing any one of the political blocs in Israel and were thus able to maintain their bargaining power. Their third *modus operandi* has been deterrence. Whenever ultra-Orthodox leaders feared that despite their strong political standing, the state was formulating a policy not to their liking, young Haredim took to the streets in violent demonstrations that often shook Israeli society.⁶³

In this manner, a small minority was able to influence policy making on two levels. First, they secured extensive autonomy in all aspects of the administration of their community life. In order to protect themselves from the external damaging effects of modernity, leaders of the ultra-Orthodox Jewry instructed their communities to completely withdraw and thus isolate themselves in their neighborhoods and communities, a policy that persists today. This includes taking care that their children are educated only in independent self-managed institutions and refraining from reading secular newspapers or watching television. Ultra-Orthodox Jews receive the resources necessary for their autonomous existence from the state, which provides them with land for the establishment of separate neighborhoods, subsidized housing, and the necessary budgets for running their education system. This ongoing seclusion has been remarkably successful. The ultra-Orthodox sector in Israel has been able to raise generations of Israeli citizens who have hardly been exposed to people or ideas that did not pass the strict censorship of its leaders. The belief that their way is the right way and the only way, together with their primal fear of the world around them, has turned the Haredim into the Israeli group with the most hostility toward unfamiliar individuals and ideas.⁶⁴ Over the course of many years, they have also prevented their youths from being drafted into the IDF. In their view, military service, which the overwhelming majority of Jews in Israel used to consider as almost sacred, is a waste of time that should be devoted to religious studies. Furthermore, the very idea of a military service completed in cooperation with secular Jews and women creates serious displeasure among the ultra-Orthodox Jews.

As mentioned earlier, the autonomy sought by the ultra-Orthodox Jews has been one-sided. They demand autonomy from the state but refuse to grant the state autonomy from their own ultra-Orthodox agenda. Indeed, the second level on which this sector has made significant achievements is the institutionalization and enforcement of the principles of the status quo. By means of its representatives in the various branches of the public administration, Orthodox leaders have been able to enforce laws and regulations that relate to the everyday life of *all* Jewish citizens of the state. They are exclusively responsible for matrimonial laws. The marriages of Jews in Israel that are conducted outside of the Orthodox framework are not fully recognized by the state, and burials in secular cemeteries are not subsidized by the government.⁶⁵ For many decades, they had full control of conversion procedures in Israel and in this fashion have made the

adoption of the strict Orthodox Jewish method the primary path of entry into the Jewish faith. While their exclusive hold over conversion procedures have loosened over the years, the ultra-Orthodox are still in charge of enforcing "kashrut" (kosher) laws, which prohibit Jews from working on Shabbat and holidays, selling bread to Jews during Passover, or selling nonkosher meat in communities with religious character. In state institutions such as the military, hospitals, and governmental offices, there is a careful observance of kosher laws in the spirit of ultra-Orthodox Judaism; and these entities are expected to provide only kosher food. The Orthodox chief rabbinate of Israel is the sole official allowed to provide a kosher certificate and kosher supervisors are appointed by the state to ensure that these laws are upheld.⁶⁶

Israel's Radical Prelude

We can conclude that, during the formative period of the State of Israel, the institutional and cultural seeds were sown that gave rise to the contemporary radical right-wing ideology, which strongly resembles similar manifestations of the phenomena around the world—and even takes it one step further.⁶⁷ The importance of this period lies in the consensus among the Zionist parties in regard to the first element of Jewish nativism: the complete integration of the Jewish nation and the State of Israel. This cross-partisan agreement created conditions that institutionalized a preferred status of the Jewish majority. The most prominent example of this situation is the immigration issue. For the Jews of the world, qualifying for Israeli citizenship is a very simple matter. All they need to do is to set off for Israel and ask for citizenship upon their arrival. Non-Jews are not eligible for this right. The second component of nativism—the exclusive right of members of the Jewish people to settle in all parts of Eretz Yisrael—has not garnered such broad support, although it has not been restricted to one political camp. Maximalist territorial aspirations have crossed the lines between Left and Right, bringing together the Revisionists on the Right, the activist factions of the Labor parties on the Left, and the religious Zionists. This brings us to the third element: a complete rejection of all challenges to the Zionist consensus. The institutionalization of Jewish nativism is entirely consistent with the political culture that evolved in Israel; it is fueled by this culture and in turn nurtures it. The vast majority of Israeli Jewish citizens adhere to the state's ethnic bias in favor of the majority group. They perceive it as a natural condition, which does not deviate from the principles of democracy. Occasionally, objections are raised about the ambiguous definition of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, but they are received with much anger and are rejected outright.

The authoritarian building block, which promoted the agenda of integrating Orthodox Jewish religious practices into the state apparatus, also took shape

during Israel's formative period, and like Jewish nativism, it has become a basic element in Israeli politics, even though it never enjoyed consensus among the various Zionist factions. This has been a success for the ultra-Orthodox, who were never part of the Zionist movement. They were able to establish autonomous enclaves and secure the right to cast a veto against anything related to the shaping of the policy of their communities. Furthermore, their tenacity and bargaining power in the absence of a constitution have made Israel into a country whose public sphere has been fashioned to a large extent in the spirit of Orthodox Jewish law. Finally, although populism as an ideology was generally absent from the political culture in Israel at that time, Menachem Begin's populist style blazed the way for the next generation of right-wing leaders who succeeded in turning it into a full-fledged ideology.

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The Old Radical Right

The most significant development in Israel's contemporary history was the settlement of more than half a million Jews in the territories occupied during the blitz war of 1967 (the Six-Day War), mostly in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The settlement of these occupied territories created an issue that has since torn Israeli society apart. Many Israelis initially believed that the settlements served as a buffer zone between Israel and its hostile Arab neighboring countries. But the two intifadas that followed have disabused them of this idea. For decades, until the events of the Arab Spring of 2011, the peace accords with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) alleviated much of the fear that was caused by the possibility of war with neighboring countries. Meanwhile, the occupied territories themselves became a major source of security concerns. Consequently, the settlers that in the past were perceived by many Jews in Israel as pioneers lost much of the popular support they enjoyed.

Furthermore, during the first two decades of its sovereignty, Israel was considered by citizens and leaders around the world—who were still shocked and in some cases even felt guilt over the Holocaust—as a small David, protecting himself from the mighty Arab Goliath. The settlement operation in the occupied territories, which was initiated during the “Summer of Love” in 1967 and coincided with the end of the global decolonization era, stood in sharp contradiction to ideas that were being proliferated in Western Europe and North America at the time. Gradually, Israel moved from the position of victim to victimizer, and the Palestinians were cast as the victims. The expansion of the settlements correlated with a gradual decline in Israel's popularity around the world. By the first decade of the new millennium, Israel gained a notorious reputation as one of the most unloved countries worldwide, and its very legitimacy as a sovereign entity was challenged. Even so, the settling enterprise was never halted. In this chapter, I introduce the seeds that fertilized the political ground and turned the settlements into such successful endeavors.