
ISRAEL
THE CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EAST
ILAN PAPPÉ
ROUTLEDGE

ISRAEL

Israel is not the only 'new' state around, but it is one of the few states whose legitimacy is still questioned, and its future affects the future of the Middle East as a whole and probably the stability of the international system. The reasons for this unique reality lie in its past and the particular historical circumstances of its birth.

This book seeks to update analysis of the political history, contemporary politics, economics and foreign policy of this unique state. The first part of the book provides a general history of Israel since its inception until 2000. This general history evolves around the political development of the state, beginning with its origins in the early Zionist history (1882–1948) and ending with the turn of the century. The second part focuses on three contemporary aspects of present-day Israel: its political economy, its culture and its international relations. An epilogue describes Israel's complex international image today and its impact on the state and its future.

Providing a solid infrastructure from which readers can form their own opinions, this book offers a fresh perspective on developments both on the ground and in recent scholarship, and is essential reading for students, journalists and policy makers with an interest in Middle Eastern History, Jewish Studies and Israel Studies.

Ilan Pappé is Professor of History at the University of Exeter and Director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies.

THE CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EAST

Edited by
Professor Anoushiravan Ehteshami
Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham

For well over a century now the Middle East and North Africa countries have formed a central plank of the international system. **The Contemporary Middle East Series** provides the first systematic attempt at studying the key actors of this dynamic, complex, and strategically important region. Using an innovative common format – which in each case study provides an easily-digestible analysis of the origins of the state, its contemporary politics, economics and international relations – prominent Middle East experts have been brought together to write definitive studies of the MENA region's key countries.

For a full list of titles: www.routledge.com/middleeaststudies/series/CME

Books in the series

Morocco: Challenges to Tradition and Modernity
James N. Sater

Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb
Christopher Alexander

Libya: Continuity and Change
Ronald Bruce St John

Lebanon: The Politics of a Penetrated Society
Tom Najem

Libya: Continuity and Change 2nd Edition
Ronald Bruce St John

Morocco: Challenges to tradition and modernity 2nd Edition
James N. Sater

Tunisia: From stability to revolution in the Maghreb 2nd Edition
Christopher Alexander

The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policymaking
Kristian Coates Ulrichsen

Iran: Stuck in Transition
Anoushiravan Ehteshami

Israel
Ilan Pappé

ISRAEL

Ilan Pappé

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Names: Pappâe, Ilan, author.
Title: Israel / Ilan Pappe
Other titles: Contemporary Middle East (Routledge (Firm))
Description: Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2018. | Series: The contemporary Middle East | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017056718| ISBN 9781138887183 (hbk) | ISBN 1138887188 (hbk) | ISBN 9781138887190 (pbk) | ISBN 1138887196 (pbk) | ISBN 9781315714318 (ebk)
Subjects: LCSH: Israel--History. | Israel--Politics and government. | Israel--Civilization. | Israel--Economic conditions. | Israel--Foreign relations.
Classification: LCC DS102.95 .P36 2018 | DDC 956.94--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017056718

ISBN: 978-1-138-88718-3 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-88719-0 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-71431-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Taylor & Francis Books

CONTENTS

PREFACE

The aim of this book is to provide a new entry to the Routledge Contemporary Middle East series. The realities in Israel have changed dramatically since the last volume of this kind was produced and the historiography about and on Israel has also undergone some significant transformations. Both the developments on the ground and in the literature on the topic warrant a new book for the wider audience on the history of the state of Israel.

Israel is one of the few states in the world whose modern, indeed, contemporary history is still contested and highly charged. This history and historiography of the state are examined through its political history, its socio-economic development, culture and finally its international standing.

The book conveys two messages. The first is that one cannot understand the present realities in Israel without a historical perspective and secondly that one cannot ignore the contested and inconclusive nature of the historiographical research about the state's origins, development and present realties. This book can only provide an infrastructure on the basis of which readers and students can later form their own opinions.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is a general history of Israel since its inception until 2000. This general history evolves around the political development of the state, beginning with its origins in the early Zionist history (1882–1948) and ending with the turn of the century. The second part focuses, as is common in this series, on three contemporary aspects of present-day Israel: its political economy, its culture and its international relations. An epilogue describes Israel's complex international image today and its impact on the state and its future.

INTRODUCTION

Narrating a contested country

Quite a few states have a contested past and on-going conflicts about their borders, identity and present realties. Israel is also not the only 'new' state around, and will probably not be the last. New states are emerging out of the civil wars that engulf the nation states of Sudan, Iraq and possibly Syria. However, it is one of the few states whose legitimacy is still questioned and its future affects the future of the Middle East as a whole and probably the stability of the international system all together. The reasons for this unique reality lie in Israel's past and the particular historical circumstances of its birth.

The best way of approaching such complexities is recognising the prevalence of more than one narrative about the state's past and present realities as well as acknowledging the dynamic and dialectical relationship between the competing narratives. Thus, the pendulum keeps oscillating in favour or against the validity and acceptance of the two major competing narratives about the state's history: the Israeli Zionist one and the Palestinian one.

In such a world, the historian's own positionality is as much a factor in the story he or she tells as is the evidence itself. For this reason, modern day Israel is a challenging topic for a textbook. It is one of the few states in the world that still struggles to be fully legitimised in the international arena and one of the many areas in the world that a national and ethnic struggle still rages on. Any scholarly work on such a place will reflect, despite all the attempts at professionalism and fairness, a certain moral as well as an emotive position. An intelligent reader could easily detect within a factual presentation where a more subjective commentary is proposed.

It is not only the personal views of the historians that affect the analysis of the country's history, but also the changing balance of power between the competing narratives that plays a crucial role in the way textbooks like this one are written. This balance of power has changed in recent years. In crude terms, one could say

that textbooks around the world on Israel reflected the Zionist narrative until the 1980s and were far more critical towards this narrative ever since. Any analysis of history, politics, economy, society and international relations, as is provided here, needs to predetermine its relations with the two competing narratives in the land.

From the Israeli Zionist narrative, a book like this should begin in the biblical times, when the Jewish nation was born as a monotheistic religion on the land, which today is Israel and Palestine. It will continue with the expulsion of the Jews by the Romans and will define Jewish life ever since as life in exile. The modern history will begin with the return of the Jews to their homeland that after centuries of neglect turned into an arid, underdeveloped, country. Their return will be characterised as an act of modernisation, blooming a desert and creating a model democracy. The native people will be described as semi nomads without any sense of national or even ethnic aspirations. Their rejection of Zionism will therefore be attributed to their primitivism or to their incitement by others; namely Islamic leaders, Arab tyrants or anti-Semitic gentiles.

This would be the explanation for the attempt by the Arab world to defeat the Jewish State in 1948, after it was recognised by the international community (through the United Nations' General Assembly resolution 181 from 29 November, 1947) which accorded roughly half of the country to the local Arabs who rejected this proposal. In the Zionist narrative, the proposal was very generous towards the Palestinians and therefore its rejection indicates their unwillingness to live in peace with their Jewish neighbours.

The history of the state ever since moves, according to this narrative, between endless and hostile attempts to wipe it out by military force – in several recurring regional wars and recently Islamic terrorism – and a wish to find a solution in regards to the bits of Palestine Israel occupied in 1967 – the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. A lack of Palestinian leadership, internal Israeli debates about the future of the occupied territories and international diplomatic incompetence are provided as explanations for failing to end this conflict.

Where the narrative becomes neutral and accepted is when the history of Israel is not directly associated with the Palestine question. Then the existing scholarship highlights the technological achievements of an impressive high-tech industry, social enterprises – gathering more than a hundred different Jewish communities around the world and moulding them into one new nation – with a proud Hebrew culture.

More debatable is the claim within this narrative that the modern project of Zionism benefited at least one group of Palestinians, those who became Israeli citizens in 1948 or as they are called in the Zionist jargon, 'The Israeli Arabs'. Their occasional affiliation with other Palestinian groups is quite often described as the outcome of incitement by radical leaders and as unfortunate strategy adopted by politicians but not shared by the vast majority of this minority within the Jewish State.

The Israeli narrative admits to the existence of tensions within the Jewish society, such as between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews, or religious and secular Jews,

but they are treated as normal tensions within a Western democracy; the only one in the Middle East, according to the narrative.

This book does not reflect this narrative. It is written in a period in which this narrative was thoroughly deconstructed and challenged, not only outside Israel, but by a significant group of Israeli scholars themselves. This change is triggered by new developments in general historiography as well as new discoveries made by critical or revisionist Israeli historians. The new approach does not bow to the power of nationalism and therefore neither the Zionist nor the Palestinian national agenda dictates the way these historians tell the historical story. They are driven by more universal approaches to human life, sufferings and hopes. It is there where the Israeli narrative is encountered in a way that many Israeli Jews still find very difficult to accept and quite a few of them deem this new development as endangering the very legitimacy of the Jewish State.

Recent Palestinian historiography also contributed significantly to this swing of the pendulum. As one of the leading Palestinian historians put it, Palestinian scholarship in the 1980s returned the Palestinians back to Palestine's history, after years of absence.[1] History was written until then by the victorious Israelis and therefore the voice of the native people of Palestine was not heard.

The Palestinian narrative ascended not just as the 'other side' of the story that was silenced, but also appeared as the more universal one among the two. It became the narrative of the human rights' agenda and thus the Palestinians were depicted as victims and the Israelis the victimisers. This is work in progress and recent scholarship is not content with such a simplified dichotomous historiographical approach. As will transpire presently, this new updated look on human history, from a moral and not just factual point of view, still requires a paradigm that would help the historian to make sense of a complicated reality.

Indeed, the choice of a narrative does not influence every aspect of history. In order to grasp the Israeli story, its success and failures, it is best to fuse the Palestinian perspective on Palestine with a more scholarly and conceptual approach that will help us understand the Israeli reality beyond a dry factual analysis.

These two, on the face of it, opposing historical narratives of Israel (a state obsessed and impacted by the Palestine issue on the one hand, and a society with other concerns, achievements and agendas, on the other) have been reconciled lately by dramatic historiographical developments both in Israel and among the Palestinians.

New trends in the historiography of Israel

Ever since the late 1970s, professional Israeli scholars, and in particular historians and sociologists, began casting doubts about the validity of the Zionist narrative, or version, of events. The most significant challenge came in the late 1980s, when a small group of professional Israeli historians debunked the foundational mythologies surrounding the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. The year 1948 was, and still is in many ways, regarded in Israel as a miraculous moment in the history of the Jewish

people: the year in which the exile of the Jews that had occurred in 70 AD finally came to an end with the creation of a Jewish state in May 1948.

Moreover, in the eyes of many Israelis, this is a year in which Israel fought the most justified war of all of them. A war of survival against all odds in which the foundations were laid for everything which is pure and sacred in the new Jewish State. Thus, challenging the official version of what happened in that year and re-evaluating its significance through more neutral eyes could be seen, and was seen, as tantamount to an act of treason.

And yet, it was done, probably because the challenging voices appeared after a chain of events, which will be described in full in this book, that produced both a chance for peace with the Palestinians for the first time since 1948 and which cast doubts about the Israeli self-image (shared by many in the world) of moral superiority and military invincibility.

The historians who offered a new narrative for the 1948 war and the events surrounding it became known as 'the new historians'. They challenged several foundational mythologies in a way that nowadays, books such as this one, accept as authoritative narration, as readers of this book will find out when these events are described later on.

The first myth the 'new historians' debunked was the myth that Israel in 1948 was a David facing an Arab Goliath in the war by proving that the military balance of power in most stages of the fighting tilted in the Jewish army's favour. One of the principal reasons for this imbalance of power, was a tacit agreement between the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan (today's Jordan) and the Jewish Agency (the political body running the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine). The two sides agreed to partition post-Mandatory Palestine between themselves. This understanding, or collusion, confined the Arab Legion, the Jordanian army to the greater Jerusalem area and its limited scope of operations enabled the Jewish forces to defend the new state and defeat the other contingents sent by neighbouring Arab states.[2] Officially Jordan was as committed as the other members of the Arab League to an attempt to occupy Palestine and prevent the creation of a Jewish state according to the UN General Assembly decision of 29 November, 1947 that proposed to partition Palestine into two states: one Arab and one Jewish. The Palestinians and the Arab League rejected the idea and yet the UN decided to implement it, regardless of this rejection.

Perhaps, more importantly, the 'new historians' dramatically revised the traditional Israeli historiographical analysis of the causes of the Palestinian exodus in 1948 and the making of the Palestinian refugee problem. Three quarter of a million Palestinians became refugees after the 1948 war (half of Palestine's Arab population) and their presence in refugee camps and exilic communities enabled the Palestinian national movement to re-emerge after the 1948 war and eventually establish the Palestine Liberation Organisation (the PLO) which carries out the Palestinian struggle to this very day.

The state's narrative was that the Palestinians fled 'voluntarily' since they were asked to do so by their own leaders and the leaders of the Arab states. The 'new

historians' followed the discovery already made by the Irish journalist Erskine Childers, who had searched the airwaves of the time, finding no evidence for such a call. The 'new historians' also put forward an alternative explanation for the flight. With various degrees of conviction, they pointed to Israeli policies of expulsion and intimidation as the main cause of the transfer of half of Palestine's population from their homeland.[3]

The last myth was the claim that Israel extended its hand to the Arab side and offered peace in the immediate aftermath of the 1948 war but was reciprocated by an intransigent enemy. The 'new historians', through a thorough excavation of diplomatic files, showed an Arab and Palestinian willingness to enter into peace talks on the basis of a new UN resolution (replacing resolution 181 from 29 November, 1947, known as the partition resolution – which as mentioned was rejected at the time by the Arab side). Resolution 194 from December 11, 1948, included, among other issues, an unconditional support for the Palestinian refugees' right of return and demanded renegotiation of the borders of the future Israeli state in a way that would have endangered the territorial gains made by Israel in the war (taking over almost eighty percent of the country). Further analysis done by the 'new historians' showed it was the Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, who led his government into a rejectionist policy towards all peace proposals, including those which came from individual Arab states for bilateral agreements (from Syria and Jordan, and later in the mid-1950s, from Egypt).

Sociologists of knowledge attempted to provide explanation for this surge of self-criticism within Israeli academia. This interest stemmed from the undeniable fact that this new Israeli historiographical harvest justified, in one way or another, major claims made by the Palestinian historiography about the 1948 war (claims that hitherto were suspected as being sheer propaganda).

The consensus among these sociologists was that the Israeli Jewish society had undergone a transformation which made some sections of it more open-minded. This transformation was caused by catalytic events such as the peace with Egypt in 1979, the first Lebanon war of 1982 and the first Intifada of 1987. The political manifestation, or maybe even consequence, of this relative openness, according to this point of view, was Israel's willingness to sign a peace treaty with the PLO in 1993.[4]

The global scholarly interest in the critical historians, and not just in the new history they produced, was triggered by the extension of the revisionist Israeli impulse beyond the research on 1948. Historians and social scientists inquired about the early years of Zionism and probed the option of analysing Zionism as a colonialist movement and cast doubts on how socialist it was in essence. This was followed by revisiting the 1950s as a formative decade in which the state and the society's attitudes towards the *Mizrahim*, the Jews who came from Arab and Muslim countries, were formulated. Basic racist attitudes seemed to be influential in determining the policies towards these Jews at the time, pushing them to the society's geographical and social margins. This challenged the mainstream sociological claim that the hardships of these Jewish immigrants was caused by the objective financial and economic conditions prevailing in the young state of Israel.[5]

The new critical scholars used updated concepts of cultural studies, and quite often post-modern methodologies, to unearth this discrimination (and the racism towards the Palestinian minority in Israel) beyond the political dimension. It was found in films, literature, the media and the educational system. The reference to these two groups as Mizrahi Jews and the 'Arab minority' was criticised as well and alternative references were offered to call the former group, the 'Arab Jews' and the latter the 'Palestinians in Israel'. Later on, the term 'Palestinians in Israel' was used also by less critical academics while the term 'Arab Jews' was rejected.[6]

At that very formative period another term was born – the ethnic state. Describing a state that considered itself to be 'the only democracy in the Middle East' as an 'ethnic state', meant that it was not a democracy. In the new critical gaze, Israel was not a democracy since the state's ideology was racist towards the non-Jewish citizens in the state. A state in which full citizenship depends on national or religious identity is not defined as a democratic one (imagine if Catholics, Muslims or Jews who live in Britain were denied citizenship or full citizenship exclusively on the basis of their religious identity). This is why one critical scholar called Israel an 'ethnocracy'.[7] In both the cases of the Arab Jews and the Palestinian minority, the very inclusion for the first time of scholars from these two groups, extended the scope and depth of the critique. This was particularly evident in the case of the Palestinian minority in Israel which found its voice for the first time within the Israeli academia. The period in which this minority suffered under a harsh military rule (1948–1966) was researched thoroughly and the overall discriminative structure of the state's legislative and constitutional systems was presented in a way that led some scholars to define Israel as an apartheid state.[8]

It was very much a case of politics of identity as it was an intellectual enterprise. In a similar way, feminist studies appeared in this period of openness and pluralism in the Israeli academia – deconstructing the misogynist attitude of a militarist and chauvinist society worshiping the army and the 'security threat' as the supreme value of Israel. A more pacifist approach to history and education followed this surge of feminist scholarship in Israel.[9]

These scholarly revelations spilled out of the academia for a short period. The same critical instinct could be found in new films, novels and poems. Even the Israeli educational curriculum for a while was affected by this energy and there was an option for teachers to narrate the local history in a slightly more balanced and reflective way. Chronologically, one can say that the critical academic inputs appeared in the late 1980s and by the mid-1990s they were echoed by similar impulses in other media and aspects of life in Israel.[10]

The critical instinct was very short-lived. Its moment of peak was probably 1995 where you could not evade this critical point of view in art exhibits, academic conferences, TV talk-shows and documentaries and other media. It lingered on until the outbreak of the second Intifada in October 2000.

The collapse of the peace process, the Oslo accord, and the overall shift of the Israeli political system to the right ended the period of relative pluralism in the

Israeli production of knowledge. Critical academics either left or retracted from their previous challenges, the educational curricula were cleansed from the inputs 'new historians' injected into them in the past and the media became once more obedient and patriotic. The sense was Israel was once more at war with the Palestinians over the homeland and the muses were asked to be silent when the guns were roaring. The critical impulse was left alive mainly in the civil society among small groups of NGOs such as 'New Profile' and 'Anarchists Against the Wall'.[11]

The Israeli historiography in the 21st century

The political mood in Israel affects directly the fortunes of the critical historiography in the state. Thus, when the Israeli Jewish electorate chose Ariel Sharon for the first time as Prime Minister in 2001 it reflected a new mood in the state. Sharon, and his successors, Ehud Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu, were part of a political elite that put very little faith in the diplomatic process with the Palestinians and were strong believers in a unilateral Israeli policy of settling in those parts of the territories Israel occupied in 1967 they deemed vital for the state's national security.

They also represented a society that regarded the protection of the ethnic, namely Jewish, nature of the state as far more important than safeguarding its democratic image. The 'return' to Zionist values, as they saw it, was also reflected in the new trends in the Israeli historiography.

In terms of producing historiographical works, it meant first retracting from the critical impulse of the 1990s and returning to the hegemonic narrative. For this to happen there was a need to adopt an even firmer loyalty to the meta Zionist narrative. However, in terms of professional historiography, it was very difficult to ignore the factual infrastructure the 'new history' provided about the 1948 war or the clear picture of the discrimination ingrained in the official positions in the early years of statehood towards the Jews who came from Arab and Muslim countries.

The new political mood however affected these two major areas of inquiry at the heart of the local historiography in two diametrically opposed ways. The factual account provided by the new history of the 1948 war was acknowledged by the scholarly community. New publications appearing at the time did not repeat the myth of a voluntary Palestinian flight, the tacit alliance with the Jordanians was recognised and the international community in 1948 was depicted as far less hostile to Zionism as it had appeared in the old narrative. However, the tone was very different from the one that accompanied the 'new history' of the 1948 war. The acts performed in the war – be it expulsion, demolition of villages, arrest of civilians or massacres– were all seen as acts of self-defence.[12] One of the 'new historians', Benny Morris, who retracted from his moral judgement in his early works, now described the actions of the young state as survival in the face of a Jihadi war (whereas in his early work he accused Israel of unnecessary human rights' abuse and war crimes). The actions he once condemned, and now condoned, were the same. Their moral judgement was very different.[13]

The debate about the history of the 1948 war in Israel was never confined to the academic ivory towers. When the 'new history' appeared in the late 1980s it was discussed in public venues and in wider sections of society by people who based their opinions on memories, information from home or the educational system and quite a profound sense of patriotism mixed with the anti-Palestinian prejudices. This continued to be the case also after 2000. The public debate was initiated by a right-wing NGO, *Im Tirtzu* (if you will in Hebrew, which was the first part of a famous quote from Theodor Herzl 'If you will, it is not a dream'). This group took an active part in the scholarly historiographical debate on 1948 and other issues that were raised at the time by critical Israeli scholarship. It was one of many such NGOs that mushroomed in this century, with a direct help from right-wing parties in Israel and their supporters abroad.[14]

Im Tirtzu published a booklet 'Nakba-Harta' which more or less means 'the nonsense of the Nakba'. With very little scholarly effort or proof the booklet treats any reference to 1948 as a Palestinian catastrophe as a pure anti-Semitic fabrication.[15] Later on, in around 2010, the Israeli parliament, passed the Nakba law, regarding any reference to 1948 as a 'catastrophe' as a violation of the law that could lead to withdrawal of public money from any institute that endorses the term. Moreover, in recent years, *Im Tirtzu* despatches its members as students to enrol into Israeli university modules and courses it suspects of displaying 'post-Zionist' tendencies. Post Zionist became the generic term for describing critical Israeli historiography of the 1990s. Whereas in the 1990s, it was a term defining someone open-minded and peace seeking, it became synonymous with anti-Semitism in this century.

So, while the scholarly community challenged the 'new history' through the re-introduction of a nationalist and patriotic interpretation of the historical facts, these NGOs returned to the early allegations directed at the 'new history' when it first emerged in the late 1980s and accused it of fabricating history.

The re-examination of the discriminatory early policy towards the Mizrahi *Jews* in the post-2000 era went in a very different direction. A very important part of the right-wing electorate in Israel are Mizrahi Jews. The Likud, and its allies in Israeli politics, has a deep and solid powerbase among the Arab Jews (as noted the term Mizrahi Jews alternates with the term Arab Jews). This constituency views the Labour party as an oppressive ideological movement that discriminated against Jews who came from Arab countries and identifies this party, today in opposition, with the Ashkenazi Jews, the Jews who came from European countries. Hence, the critical re-examination of the attitude towards *Mizrahim* in the past and the present continued unhindered after 2000.

Women are also an important constituency as is the gay community. When these constituencies do not associate their struggle for equality with critique on issues at the heart of the Palestine question, their agenda is respected also by leading members of the centre and right-wing parties (Likud in 2017 had one openly gay member of Knesset).

One topic that was almost wiped out from the legitimate agenda of the pluralist research of the 1990s were the advances made in the study of the Palestinians in

Israel. A reflective research on their situation was far less welcome now and new works justifying the harsh ideological positions towards this minority re-appeared after a long period of absence.[16]

This state of affairs runs contrary to the scholarly developments elsewhere in the study of Israel and Palestine. In recent years, scholars around the world adopted a new old paradigm that enabled a view of Israel as part of Palestine's history and at the Palestinians and the Jews as a group of natives and settlers, respectively, living within geopolitical entities called Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This paradigm is settler colonialism.

Settler colonialism: the new critical historiographical trend

Settler colonialism refers to movements of white settlers who fled, or were sent as convicts, from Europe to start a new life and had no intention whatsoever of returning to a continent in which they felt unwanted or insecure. They decided to make the new places they reached their home, and even more importantly, their homeland. The main obstacle was the native population. In many cases, they genocided the natives on the way to reinventing themselves as the new natives of the newfoundland.[17]

In modern times, other means were sought for overcoming the presence of a native population. In Algeria, the French settlers who played with the idea of ceding from their mother country, eventually abided by the mother country's strategy and went back to France. In South Africa, the minority of settlers imposed itself on the native society through an Apartheid regime. This particular strategy towards the native was formalised by law in 1948. In that very year, the Zionist settler colonial strategy opted for another option: ethnically cleansing the native people while accepting the possibility of having, temporarily, only part of the coveted new homeland.

Demography and geography always interplay importantly in any settler colonial strategy and Zionism was not an exception. Whenever new territory was gained it came with more native people; thus, the options would remain the same: either give up territory or take the territory and get rid of the people. With time, this became a more complicated game when expulsions were impossible due to changes in the world's moral agenda. Then, the territory and the 'undesired' population remained in Israel's hands and a complex system, described in this book later on, was devised so as to ensure that the demographic reality (by which Jews were not the majority in Palestine) would not undermine the geographical achievement of stretching Israel's rule over the whole of historical Palestine.

In scholarly terms, what is unique about this stage in the production of knowledge about Israel is that it is a joint Palestinian and Israeli effort. At the heart of the enterprise, scholars of both sides apply, for the first time, the same paradigm to understand the past, decipher the present and predict the future.[18]

Applying the paradigm of settler colonialism to Israel is not an entirely new concept. Already in 1967, the French historian Maxime Rodinson probed the

paradigm's applicability in an article titled 'Israel: A Colonial-Settler State'.[19] Scholars such as Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini who revived the paradigm and helped turn it into an independent area of inquiry referred extensively to Palestine in their work.[20] This was followed by a very rich application of the paradigm to the case of Palestine, which continues to this very day.

There are two approaches in this exercise. The more common, and older, approach is to treat the Israeli occupation since 1967 as a colonialist project. However, the newer trend views the whole Zionist history in Palestine as a long trajectory of settler colonialism that continues to this very day not only in the occupied territories but also inside pre-1967 Israel as well. Thus, for instance the Judaisation policies of the government in the Galilee – building Jewish settlements and towns in order to disrupt the territorial continuity of the Palestinian population there and the incarceration of the Bedouin community in the south into reservations – are seen as the inevitable outcome of such an ideology.

Within the Israeli academia at first, the tendency was to ignore this new line of research. Recently Israeli academics attempted to challenge this paradigm. They claimed that the paradigm is ideological and not scholarly but failed to provide an alternative explanation apart from parroting once more the national narrative of a people who came back home after two thousand years of exile.[21]

The historiographical debate in Israel about Israel and Palestine is indeed both factual and moral. The importance of the settler colonial paradigm is not just in its reappraisal of the country's history without resorting to the distorting and unhelpful paradigm of national conflict between two equal sides. It questions not only the narrative of the past but also the language those living in, and engaged with, Israel and Palestine are employing.[22]

If the settler colonial paradigm has any validity then terms such as 'occupation' and the 'peace process' lose their relevance as a language that describes aptly the reality on the ground or the possible ways forward. Decolonisation become a scholarly, as well as a political, term which, social scientists involved in the analysis of conflict resolution will have to probe from now on. This also has implications for economic and cultural studies, as well as for jurists.

In the past, history was used as ammunition in the conflict. The two sides adhered to a historical narrative that justified in their eyes their policies, including the most violent ones. There was no bridging narrative. The best one could have hoped for was a research that 'respected' both narratives.[23] In situations of colonisation and dispossession the two narratives paradigm is a false one due to the imbalance on the ground; hence these noble efforts have failed. The settler colonial paradigm is shared by Israelis and Palestinians alike who are not captivated by national narratives on either side, as the brilliant work of Beshara Doumani has indicated for us.[24]

A third generation of Jewish settlers are part of the reality of Israel and Palestine – understanding their trajectory, motives, actions and aspirations is something the native population can accept within the settler colonial paradigm. This enabled political reconciliation in South Africa. Without it, the critical Israeli historians will

be regarded as traitors by their own society and move abroad leaving the local academia to liberal scholars too timid to challenge any significant fabrication and highly patriotic academics who would justify a priori any narrative spanned by the political elite.

Notes

1 Beshara Doumani, 'Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History' in Ilan Pappe (ed.), *The Israel/Palestine Question,* London and New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 10–35.
2 I have summarised these findings in my book *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge,* London and New York: Verso, 2014, pp. 106–126. See also Avi Shlaim's summary of these findings in Avi Shlaim, 'The Debate about 1948' in Pappe, *The Israel/Palestine Question*, pp. 150–168.
3 See Benny Morris, 'The Causes and Character of the Arab Exodus from Palestine: The Israeli Defence Forces Intelligence Service Analysis of June 1948' in Pappe, *ibid*., pp. 169–183.
4 This background is provided in Uri Ram, *The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology,* St. Albany: SUNY Press, 1995.
5 This is explored in Pappe, *The Idea of Israel*, pp. 179–196.
6 See Sami Shalom-Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews,* London and New York: Routledge, 2009.
7 Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity: Politics in Israel Palestine*, Philadelphia: Penn University Press, 2006.
8 Ilan Pappe, *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010, pp. 276–291.
9 For instance, Hagit Gur-Zeev, *Statements on Silence: The Silence of Israeli Society in the Face of the Intifada,* Tel-Aviv: The Center for Peace, 1989 (Hebrew).
10 Pappe, *The Idea of Israel*, pp. 197–216.
11 See New Profile (http://newprofile.org/english) and Anarchists Against the Wall (http://www.awalls.org/) websites.
12 Pappe, *The Idea of Israel*, pp. 275–294.
13 Benny Morris, *1948: The First Arab-Israeli War*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008.
14 *Im Tirtzu* website: https://imti.org.il.
15 *Im Tirtzu, ibid.*
16 Dan Schueftan, *Palestinians in Israel*, Tel-Aviv: Zemora and Bitan, 2010 (Hebrew).
17 Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview,* London and New York: Palgrave, 2010.
18 Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie and Sobhi Samour (eds.), 'Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine', *Settler Colonialism Studies*, Volume 2, Issue 1, 2012.
19 Maxime Rodinson, 'Israel: A Colonial-Settler State? London: Pathfinder Press, 1973.
20 Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research,* Volume 8, Issue 4, 2006, pp. 387–409.
21 See for instance, Avi Bareli, 'Forgetting Europe: Israeli Historical Revision from Left to Right' in Ilan Troen (ed.), 'De-Judaizing the Homeland: Academic Politics and Re-writing the History of Palestine', Special Volume, *Israeli Affairs,* Volume 13, Issue 4, 2007.
22 Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappe*, On Palestine*, London: Penguin, 2015.
23 Dan Bar-On, *The Other Within Us: Constructing Jewish Israeli Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
24 Doumani, 'Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine'.

1

FROM PALESTINE INTO ISRAEL, 1800–1948

Zionism began its life as a response to anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism was not a new phenomenon. The Jewish insistence on not converting into either Christianity or Islam led to policies of discrimination and animosity. The Church was particularly instrumental in adding religious imperative for these attitudes by blaming the Jewish collectively for the death of Christ. Eternal persecution was sanctioned as a rule by various popes and church leaders throughout the mediaeval times and these older attitudes fed into what one can call modern anti-Semitism.

A new wave of anti-Semitism emerged at the end of the 19th century, precisely at the time when all over Europe Jews were emancipated and were granted equal legal and political rights. Their relative affluence and the rise of romantic nationalist movements in many parts of Europe, which needed an 'enemy' from within or without, left the Jewish communities prey to policies of persecution and frequent violent attacks by their less fortunate neighbours, quite often with the complicit encouragement from the powers that be.

In the mid-19th century, the more primitive form of anti-Semitism prevalent in the Czarist Russian Empire was supported by a 'scientific' anti-Semitism inspired by Darwin's evolutionary theories of the survival of the fittest. These flourished particularly in Germany, Italy and France. The overall message to the Jews was that neither traditional life nor full assimilation were a guarantee against anti-Semitism. It seemed even that high hopes eschewed by those Jews who joined the new universal movements of socialism and communism were not a guarantee for uprooting these racist attitudes that would lead eventually to the Holocaust.

The specific wave of anti-Semitism that led to the emergence of the Zionist movement occurred between 1881 and 1917. It was woken by the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 by revolutionary forces and was orchestrated from above by his heirs, Alexander III and Nikolai II, who hoped to distract the impoverished and starved masses of the Russian people from their growing discontent. The

persecution led to violence of all kinds: pogroms, blood libels, anti-Semitic legislation and policy of expulsion and confinement. These were three extremely harsh decades for those who insisted of remaining loyal to the traditional way of Jewish life under Czarist Russia. Assimilated Jews did not fare better, as their successful integration into a more liberalised and capitalised economy was easily exploited by classical anti-Semitic intellectuals, clergymen and politicians, to stir public animosity against them.

The principal response to this wave was immigration and mainly to the United States. However, Jews in Europe at that time did not only respond to threats but also engaged with the modernisation and secularisation that developed around them. Jewish intellectuals and activists wished to modernise Jews as much as they wanted to save them from persecution. More than anything else, the idea of nationalism seemed to provide an ideal fusion of the two impulses: creating a safe nation state for Jews and a modern and secular one at that.

This led to a revival of ancient Hebrew and a new interest in the bible (the old testament) not just as a religious text, but as a history book that tells about the golden period of ancient Israel. This fusion of a search for a safe haven and modern existence did not immediately lead this new intellectual movement towards Palestine, the land of the bible. Other destinations were considered from Uganda in Africa to Azerbaijan in Russia. However, as the movement grew in numbers Palestine became the coveted destination and the first Jewish settlers arrived there in 1882. Evangelical Christians around the world also wished the movement to focus on Palestine, believing it was part of a divine scheme that would precipitate the second coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. Later on, on the eve of the First World War, European powers such as France, Germany and in particular Britain considered Jewish settlement in Palestine as a potential strategic asset. Thus by 1904, Palestine was the only destination for those who considered themselves Zionists, although they were still a very insignificant minority group among world Jewry.

The most significant wave towards Palestine was triggered in 1881 by a wave of pogroms in the Ukraine. It was a systematic series of massacres guided from above by the Czarist government. 'The Lovers of Zion' (*Hovevei Zion*) was the first formation of Zionist settlers making their way to Palestine. It included several outfits, most famous of which were the '*Biluim*', an acronym that was a call for Jewish immigration to Palestine. They were the ones who founded the first Zionist colonies in Ottoman Palestine. From an Israeli historiographical perspective, they were Israel's Mayflower pilgrims.

On the border between Poland and Germany in the city of Katowice, all the 'lovers of Zion' convened in 1884 and laid the foundations to the Zionist project in Palestine. It decided to expand the colonies through financial aid and Ottoman recognition.

With the help of philanthropists such as the bankers of Rothschild, the number of colonies grew and were based on agricultural production. The old Ottoman Jewish community viewed the settlers suspiciously and the local Ottoman representatives perceived them as being a Russian 'fifth column'. Life was thus not easy

for the newcomers, who found it at first very difficult to become farmers without any agricultural background (Jews were not allowed to cultivate land in many parts of Eastern Europe). This first wave is called in Israel the 'First *Aliyah*' (the first ascendance – from the pit of exile to the peak of redemption).

Outside of Palestine, the most significant development was the internationalisation of the Zionist project through the work of Theodor Herzl, regarded in Israel as the father of modern Zionism. A failed playwright and quite a successful journalist from Vienna, Herzl was influenced both by the romantic nationalism sweeping the Germanic states and the growing anti-Semitism, epitomised for him by the Dreyfus affair in France.

The Dreyfus affair shook France for several years. It began in December 1894 when Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a young artillery officer of Jewish descent, was sentenced for life imprisonment for allegedly communicating military secrets to the Germans. He spent five years in a prison colony before he was put on a retrial, after it became clear that evidence against him was baseless. A public campaign steered by Émile Zola led to his exoneration in 1906 (after Herzl's death).

The affair consolidated Herzl's conviction of the need to secure international support for the Zionist colonisation of Palestine. He wrote a utopian novel on this, *Altneuland*, met world leaders and even tried to find money to purchase Palestine from the Ottomans. Most of his endeavours ended in failure. However, he did manage to create a movement with an international profile and in 1897 he convened the first Zionist congress in the city of Basel, Switzerland. The congress ended with the establishment of several institutions that proved essential later on for the growth and triumph of the Zionist project of colonisation in Palestine and the creation of the state of Israel. The most important of them was the Jewish National Fund (which formally came into being in 1902), channelling money from Jewish communities around the world for the purchase of land for further colonisation; a body that still exists today but is mostly preoccupied with managing the green lungs of the state, built mainly on the ruins of Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948.

Despite Herzl's enthusiasm for the idea of a mass Jewish immigration to Palestine and the creation of a republic there (while as he put it, 'spiriting the penniless [Arabs] out of the country'),[1] he was willing to consider other destinations as a haven for the Jews of Europe. One such destination he negotiated with the British Empire in 1903 was Uganda in Africa. His support for this option nearly tore the Zionist movement apart, but he died in 1904, before the debate could be concluded. After his death, Palestine became the exclusive destination for Zionist colonisation.

In 1905, a second wave of Jewish settlers followed after the defeat of Russia in the war with Japan and the failed first Bolshevik revolution. Thus, they came with a strong socialist motivation. They were not only keen on colonising Palestine, but wished to create there a socialist haven for the Jewish people and even for the world at large, and thus influence the march of global socialism.

The socialist impulse created communal settlements, some would say even communist ones. The *moshav, moshavah* and the most famous of them the Kibbutz

explored all kinds of collective life in the hope of both implementing socialist ideals and the most effective way of cheap, and secure, colonisation. The Kibbutzim played, until recently, a very important part in the society: especially as a core group from which leaders of the dominant labour movement were recruited as well as the senior officers of the IDF. In fact, the second wave as a whole (1905–1914) was the core group from which the elites of Israel came from as long as the labour movement was in power, and in some sections even later.

There were various socialist streams and ideologues and under their influence, several parties sprang. Later on, most of them integrated into two major parties: *Mapai* (founded in 1930) and *Mapam* (founded in 1948). Alongside the hegemonic presence of *Mapai* in pre-Israel Mandatory Palestine there emerged a national religious group (most religious outfits, movements and rabbis regarded Zionism as an aberration and tampering with the will of God; they were present in Palestine but declared themselves as non-Zionist). The national religious rabbis and activists developed a dogma that regarded Zionism as a testament to the will of god and saw the colonisation of Palestine as a religious, and not just national, imperative. They resigned to live in a secular state provided the public space would respect their interpretation of the Jewish doctrine and law. Their movement was called *Hapoel Hamizrahi* (Mizrahi here does not mean oriental as in the case of the Jews who came from Arab counties. Here it is a squeeze of the phrase, spiritual centre, *Merkaz Rouhani*, into an acronym).

The third movement, and all three are with us in one form or another today, is the Revisionist movement. This was founded in 1923 by Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, one of the leaders of the Zionist movement. He decided to cede from the main movement after the final declaration of the British mandate over Palestine in 1922. This charter left Transjordan (today's Jordan) out of Palestine. Jabotinsky, and like-minded Zionists, regarded the future Jewish state as comprising both Palestine and Transjordan. They created their own Zionist organisation, before joining the mainstream Zionist institutions as a party and founding their own youth movement, *Beitar*. *Beitar* is still active today and on its flag 'Israel' appears as a country comprising of both Jordan and Israel.

During the days of the second wave the colonisation project expanded its presence in Palestine with the establishment of more colonies in the Galilee in the north of Palestine. The takeover of land there, purchasing it from landlords, many of whom resided outside Palestine, pushed out Palestinian tenants who lived on it. The frequent clashes, and the romantic national ideology, led the leaders of the community to build a para-military power – the first famous outfit was called *Hashomer* (The Guardian). The outfits were instrumental later on in dispossessing the Palestinians from the Galilee and other parts of Palestine.

Lastly, the second wave is cherished in Israel as a period in which the war of languages was decided. The Hebrew language was revived both in Europe and among the old Jewish community in Palestine in the mid-19th century. Herzl for one wished the new community to parlay in German, others wanted Yiddish (the German Jewish dialect spoken by most religious and traditional Jews) to prevail.

However, most of the *Haluzim,* the pioneers as they called themselves, wished Hebrew to be imposed as the new national language and succeeded in creating a whole culture around it (I will return in more details to this 'war' in the chapter on the Israeli culture).

The cultural centre slowly also became the political and financial centre – the city of Tel-Aviv. Built near the town of Jaffa circa 1904, this new town replaced the collective settlements as the motor of the Zionist colonisation of the land. With time, it proved more attractive to the next wave of settlers, who came from European middle-class and urban backgrounds.

The First World War

The main task of the Zionist movement was to secure international recognition and the First World War proved to be the ripe historical moment for such a move. Several leaders of the settler community aligned themselves secretly with the British army on the eve of the war, while in London, the political leadership of the Zionist movement strengthened its ties with the British Empire.

This alliance bred the Balfour Declaration given on November 2, 1917. This was a letter read in the House of Commons by Lord Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary and addressed to Lord Rothschild (who was considered to be one of the leaders of the Anglo-Jewish community), in which the British government pledged its support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The letter also promised to ensure that this pledge would not undermine the aspirations of the native population of Palestine.

Even today in hindsight it is hard to assess how binding this promise was. However, what mattered was not its international standing, but the fact that on the power of British bayonets, the Zionist project developed and consolidated, once Britain occupied the country in 1918 and stayed there until 1948. By and large, Britain remained loyal to the pledge but found it hard to keep the part which promised to protect the rights of the indigenous people. During all its thirty years of rule, the British government was preoccupied with the attempts to reconcile the two contradictory pledges made in the declaration, but to no avail.

The British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, who was a pious Christian, epitomised what one would call today Christian Zionism and was motivated by this dogma when deciding on the future of Palestine. For evangelical Christians like himself, the 'return' of the Jews to Palestine was part of a divine scheme that could precipitate the second coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. This millenialist and apocalyptic view still informs an important support group for Israel, on both sides of the Atlantic, among Christian Zionists. Lloyd George also expressed a wish to see a non-Muslim 'sedentary' as he put it on the way to Britain's most precious possession in the Arab world in those days: Egypt.

Other considerations played a role here too. The Bolshevik revolution threatened to take Russia out of the war effort against the axis powers, and the large number of Jews in the revolutionary movement erroneously led the British policy makers

to believe that satisfying the Zionist movement would gain them influence in the Bolshevik one. Similarly, but with more foresight, the British strategists believed the Jewish voice was crucial in determining American policy. The United States only entered the overall military effort in April 1917 and there was a wish to secure its further involvement in the attempt to defeat Germany and its allies. It was premature at that time to assume such a powerful Jewish hold on American policy, but there was the potential for this, as we know.

Some scholars suspect that anti-Semitism also played a role in this strategy. The persecution of Jews in central and Eastern Europe prompted a mass immigration to the United Kingdom. Lord Balfour himself was known to hold some negative views about this immigration and it is quite likely that re-directing them to Palestine was a favourable solution in his eyes.[2] More important was the fact that, compared to other problems in the British Empire at the time, Palestine did not seem a huge issue and therefore not much thought was put into the declaration. For the Zionist movement, however, the practical implications were huge once Palestine became a League of Nations mandate.

It took another six years before this vague British pledge became a new reality in Palestine. By 1923, after trials and tribulations, Palestine became a mandate committed to the Balfour Declaration with clear political boundaries (which resemble Israel's borders today, including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but without the Golan Heights).

The British Empire had to take into consideration the American insistence on principles such as the right for self-determination and hence the new international body, the League of Nations, gave Britain a mandate over Palestine with the view of allowing it independence after twenty-five years of foreign rule. However, the Balfour Declaration was included in the mandate and therefore it was clear that before independence could be granted a political settlement between the settler community and the natives of Palestine would have to be reached.

The Zionist leadership, although engaged in these attempts, was far more preoccupied with two other aspects of life in Mandatory Palestine. The first was building an infrastructure for a Jewish state and the other contemplating how to overcome the demographic majority of the Palestinians in the country they deemed as their exclusive homeland. Israel today, in fact, still is concerned with these two issues.

The first British High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel (1919–1925), was crucial in translating the British pledge in the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate Charter into new reality in Palestine. He allowed the community to receive in open hands a third wave of immigration, the Third *Aliyah*, to build a significant para-military power and other necessary institutions, which turned the community in effect into 'a state within a state'. This included, for example, the opening of the Hebrew University, while refusing adamantly to open a Palestinian one.

For the future development of the settler community, the most important institution that emerged in that period was the *Histadrut*, the general trade union that found jobs for the masses who began to immigrate to Palestine penniless and

with few qualifications for the hard work demanded of them in the agricultural collectives or in building more settlements and neighbourhoods. It is not coincidental that the secretary general of the *Histadrut,* David Ben-Gurion, became the undeniable leader of the community and later of the state of Israel. The trade union covered through its various outfits all aspects of life: health, education and welfare.

Herbert Samuel's successors were more careful in their policies and more involved in trying to reconcile the conflicting aspirations of the settler community and the native population. Their efforts ended in failure and it became more and more difficult for the British Empire to maintain Palestine as peaceful possession.

Successive British governments tried to curb Jewish colonisation and therefore encountered a two-fold resistance movement against them (the Palestinian and the Zionist ones), fighting also each other. However, while they were there, they allowed the Jewish community to grow into a significant number – through two additional waves of immigration; adding to the mix the Jewish Central European middle-class with its capital and industrious approach to life.

Before the mandate ended, the community of settlers strengthened its military power, through its underground movement, the *Haganah* and its offshoots, the Irgun and the Stern Gang. The Irgun was close to the Revisionist movement led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky (however before he died in 1942, he was replaced by Menachem Begin).

In the last years of the mandate, the Jewish community lived under the shadow of the Holocaust. The Israeli historiography debates how much the Jewish community knew about the genocide in Europe and how much it did and could have done to save the Jewish communities there.[3] For our case, what is more relevant is the impact that the Holocaust had on the international perception of the Zionist project in Palestine. This became evident during the deliberations of the Anglo-American inquiry commission on Palestine convened in 1946. This was almost the last international attempt during the Mandatory period to find a solution to the conflict between the native Palestinians and the Jewish settler community. The difference between this attempt and those preceding it was that the members of the committee also visited the refugee camps in Europe where the holocaust survivors were housed pending their decision where to move to.

The Zionist policy was very clear. The survivors should come to Palestine (although recent research showed most of them preferred to immigrate to the USA)[4] and their fate, as that of the rest of the Jews in the world, should be directly linked to the future of post-Mandatory Palestine. That future laid in the hands of the British, the UN, the Arab world and the parties themselves.

Notes

1 Theodor Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, Volume 1, New York: Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960, pp. 88.
2 Jonathan Schneer, 'How Anti-Semitism Helped Create Israel', *Foreign Policy*, 8 September, 2010.
3 See Pappe, *the Idea of Israel*, pp. 153–178.
4 Yosef Grodzinsky, *Good Human Material*, Or Yeuhda: Hed Artzi, 1998 (Hebrew).

2

THE 'SMALL ISRAEL', 1948–1967

The British cabinet decided to leave Palestine on February 1, 1947. It was in the midst of a particularly bad winter, not only weather-wise, but also economically. The need to repay the USA debts from the Second World War and the impoverishment of the country, which became a second-rate power and was no more the global empire of yesteryear, brought the Labour party to an impressive victory against the Conservatives. The electorate did not return to power the war hero, Winston Churchill, and preferred the dull and socially democratic Clement Attlee. The Empire for his party was a burden and one of its first ambitions was to remove the jewel in the Imperial Crown, India. Without India, many of the Middle Eastern possessions became redundant, including Palestine.

Palestine proved to be a costly business after the Second World War. The Empire was able to contain the Palestinian resistance movement, but it was worried about employing the same brutal means to suppress a new threat: a Zionist resistance movement. The Zionist leadership believed it now had the power to take over Palestine and the British presence was an obstacle and hence a campaign of terror against the British soldiers in the land began (the most famous landmark of this campaign is the blowing up of the British headquarters in Jerusalem at the King David Hotel in 1946). The terrorist campaign included the hanging of two British sergeants – an operation that increased the voices inside Britain calling upon it to leave Palestine. However, it was mainly the inability to solve the conflict, they themselves had caused, which convinced the decision makers in London to leave.

The British government referred the issue of Palestine to the United Nations. The international organisation was two years old. It lacked experience and the Palestine conflict was its first major challenge. It was guided by two concerns in its year and a half long deliberations on the future of Palestine. The first was not to turn the issue into a cold war point of friction. Therefore, the USA and the USSR were not part of the inquiry committee the UN appointed to look into the matter.

At the end of the day, both super powers were content with the solution this committee, The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), proposed. The second concern was to satisfy the Zionist movement's minimal demands. This was easy as the Palestinian leadership and the Arab league decided to boycott UNSCOP and the only deliberations about the future of Palestine were conducted between the UN and the Zionist movement. The Zionist movement suggested partitioning post-Mandatory Palestine and demanded eighty percent of the land, with Jerusalem as the capital of the future Jewish State.

UNSCOP was willing to accord only fifty-six percent of the land to the Jewish community and demanded that Jerusalem be an international enclave. The rest was to be a state for the Arabs in Palestine. Both states were to be united economically and citizens had the right to vote in whichever state they chose, regardless of the place of habitation. In the prospective Jewish State, almost half of the citizens were supposed to be Arab Palestinians.

The Arab and Palestinian rejection of the partition offer and the demographic reality it offered provided a golden opportunity for the Zionist leadership to undermine the UN peace plan in practice while adhere to it in public. The new proposed Jewish State faced two dangers: one was from the neighbouring Arab states that threatened to use force against the partition, and the second was that in whatever borders it would have, the Jewish community would not constitute a majority over the native Palestinians. In the event, the leadership prepared itself well: it mastered enough military power to confront a very disorganised contingent from the neighbouring Arab world which entered Palestine on May 15, 1948 when the British Mandate ended and ethnically cleansed before and after that date almost half of the native Palestinian population.[1]

The eventual military success in implementing the partition map in accordance with the Zionist vision, while defeating the Arab armies sent to Palestine on May 15, 1948 and at the same time ethnically cleansing half of the Palestinian population was due first and foremost to the extraordinary capabilities of David Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Jewish community and the first Prime Minister of Israel. His first achievement was creating a modern army.

The making of the IDF

In 1948, Ben-Gurion led the young state into taking over almost eighty percent of Palestine while wiping out half of its Palestinian villages and most of its towns. He oversaw personally the transformation of these Palestinian areas into Jewish ones through planting forests on them and building Jewish settlements over their ruins.[2]

David Ben-Gurion remained in power until 1963. Domestically, his focus was on several fronts. The first was building Israel's military capacity. He was concerned that another round of war with the neighbouring Arab states was imminent. As the years went by, and long after his death, Israel, due to its colonial settler characteristics, would be far more troubled by the unsolved question of Palestine than by potential threats from neighbouring or hostile Middle Eastern countries. In fact, the Jewish

State always managed to create official and informal alliances with enough Arab states to thwart any real danger on that front. However, the Palestine issue was at the very heart of the country and remained the main security and existential issue for the new state.

For the sake of building a proper army, Ben-Gurion had, already in 1948, to dismantle the para-military groups such as the *Palmach* (a Hebrew acronym for storm troopers) which was the commando elite of the main Jewish para-military group during the Mandatory period, the *Haganah*, mentioned before. The *Haganah* became the backbone of the army, which was the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) together with veterans who served in the British army during the Second World War.

Dismantling the *Palmach* was not easy because it belonged to the left Kibbutz movement, *Hashomer Hatzair*, and the political party that it established after 1948, *Mapam*. It was a socialist, Zionist, ideological movement leaning strongly in those days towards the USSR. Many of its male members donned Stalin-like moustaches and there was genuine mourning when this leader passed away. Their socialist and even communist affiliations did not prevent them from taking over abandoned Palestinian land for building more Kibbutzim nor did it lead them to accept Palestinians, or even Jews who came from Arab countries, as members of these new collectives.[3]

In the first year of statehood, *Mapam* was the second strongest political force in the Jewish community and therefore reluctant to give up military power. However, Ben-Gurion had his way. It was no doubt even harder to act in a similar way towards the right-wing, revisionist para-military groups, the *Irgun* and the Stern Gang. Ben-Gurion was able to dismantle the smaller one of them, the Stern Gang, since he succeeded in implicating it in the murder of Folke Bernadotte, the UN mediator sent to Palestine in May 1948 to seek a solution. In September 1948, members of the Stern Gang assassinated Bernadotte, among them a future personal bodyguard of Ben-Gurion and the team was headed by a future Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir.[4] This was the cue for Ben-Gurion to delegitimise the Stern Gang and outlaw it.

The last group, the *Irgun*, headed at the time by Menachem Begin, was a formidable foe. While Ben-Gurion demanded that it be fused into the IDF, Begin imported weapons for his own units and conducted his own military operations against the Palestinian population throughout 1948. Things came to a direct clash when a ship belonging to the *Irgun, Altalena*, loaded with weapons was attacked by the IDF near Tel-Aviv. The incident in fact helped to accelerate the process of finalising the preparations for the creation of a modern Israeli army; an army based on compulsory recruitment (around three years for men and two years for women).

Two groups were not included in this compulsory approach. The ultra-Orthodox Jews and the Palestinian citizens in Israel. The arrangement with the ultra-Orthodox Jews was part of a wider consensus known in Israeli jargon as 'The Status Quo'. The agreement was to keep intact the religious public manifestations that were observed within the Jewish community during the Mandatory period (thus for

instance, on Saturday, there was only public transport in Haifa – as was customary during the Mandatory period – and this is why until today such transport operates in Haifa alone). The ruling Labour movement agreed to preserve these Jewish features in statehood in return for an alliance with Orthodox parties that would keep them in power until the 1970s.

Thus, under this tacit agreement young *Haredim* (as these ultra-Orthodox Jews were called, literally meaning anxious or pious) were exempted from the compulsory military service. This was not given as a law, but was approved annually as an executive order.

The last issue to be resolved on the way of creating a national army was the exemption of the Palestinian citizens in Israel. When the fighting subsided about 150,000 Palestinians, out of a million, remained in what became Israel. They were put under military rule, which lasted until 1966, which robbed them of their most basic human and civil rights. They were however allowed to vote and to be elected to the Israeli Knesset. They were represented there by the communist party, which Israel decided not to outlaw for two reasons. It served as a bridge to the Soviet Union (which was needed despite the clear association of Israel with the Western Bloc in the Cold War). Israeli policy makers hoped to induce the Soviet Union to allow massive Jewish immigration to Israel – which only happened in the early 1970s for the first time, and then an even larger wave arrived after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Secondly, the Israeli authorities preferred to see the Palestinian national sentiment being framed with an internationalist discourse of communism and therefore banned any attempt by Palestinians to form national parties (in 1959, the most notable attempt, to create a party named *al-Ard*, the homeland, was outlawed by the Israeli government and legal system. Only in the late 1970s, would Israel begin to tolerate the existence of purely national Palestinian parties).[5]

Against this background, one can understand the headache the question of recruitment caused the Israeli policy makers. They made one wrong assumption: the Palestinians themselves would not want to join the Israeli army. However, they did not want to legislate an exemption, as this would recognise the Palestinians as a national minority. So instead, they decided to invite the first alumni of young Palestinians to the recruitment process, assuming they would not show up and this would become a future ritual with a kind of a win-win situation.

To the great surprise of the Israeli authorities, and in particular the Israeli Secret Service, almost all those called arrived in the recruiting grounds. Not only this, they were supported by the communist party who turned the day into a celebratory one. In their despair, the secret services urged their agents to find out why they failed in their prediction. What they learned was that the Palestinian youth, especially in the countryside, were bored and looked for some adventure. In any case, they were not called again for completing the process of recruitment.

There was another more sinister reason for not wishing to include the Palestinians in the compulsory service. The alleged refusal of the Palestinians to fulfil the duty of national military service enabled institutional discrimination against the Palestinian minority in Israel, without legalising the discrimination. Thus, for instance, welfare

benefits, studentships, employment in general and prestige in society was closely associated with military service. Not serving would deny you access to any of these benefits and rights. A fine example of how it works can be seen in contemporary Israel: businesses who do not want to employ Palestinian citizens or property owners who do not want to have Palestinian tenants can avoid this by publicising that they are interested only in people who served in the army – a clear code for Jewish only employment or tenancy.

The making of an immigrant society

The second challenge facing the new state was the massive immigration of Jews from Europe and Arab countries. The immigration became a national scheme because of the leadership's constant worry that within the borders of the Jewish state, Jews would not always be a demographic majority. For some it was also the fulfilment of their understanding of the Zionist ideals: gathering all the Jews around the world in a Jewish state in Palestine.

Recent critical scholarship reveals, with the help of declassified documentation, that the early leaders of the state dreaded the possible consequences of a non-selective massive Jewish immigration. They preferred to bring the Jews who survived the Holocaust in Europe and to persuade American and British Jews to follow suit. However, the first choice of European Jews after the Second World War were to start new life in the Anglo-Saxon world.

It was there and then that the policy makers decided to arrange massive immigration of Jews from the Arab world. The debates leading to this decision expose racist attitudes towards people who were regarded as Arabs, but nonetheless were needed to secure the demographic majority of Jews in the new state. This attitude was accompanied by a set of decisions of how to absorb almost one million people into a state that was itself barely one million people.

What unfolded was quite a harsh system of absorption, which also affected Jews coming from European countries at the same time. The immigrants were hosted in transit camps, *Ma'abrot* in Hebrew, and stayed there far longer than intended or hoped for. The first people to leave these camps to more reasonable housing were Jews who came from European countries; those who came from Arab countries lingered on for a longer time in these uninhabitable huts on the margins of cities and towns while other Israelis were conducting normal life.

The sense of injustice, as living and collective memory, was augmented by recollections about the ways Jews who arrived from Arab countries were treated on arrival. They were sprayed with disinfectant, for no other reason than being suspected of being primitive. Those affected included Iraq's Jewish elite, far more cultured, sophisticated and modern than those spraying them. Until today this attitude and the years of discrimination by the Labour party, which was in power between 1948 and 1977, are an open wound inside the Jewish society.

Even outside the *Ma'abrot* for many Jews who came from the Arab world in general, and North Africa in particular, in the period under discussion here, life was

quite miserable. They were pushed to the geographical margins of the country, hosted in development towns and settlements, which other Israelis would be less interested in inhabiting. Their presence there was meant to Judaise areas such as the Galilee in the north and the Negev in the south, as Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion (in power until 1963) was obsessed with what he deemed an exceeding high number of Palestinians in Israel in general, and in the Galilee in particular. Some of the settlements were also built on the volatile borders Israel had with its Arab neighbours to serve as a security belt. Economically, they relied on one factory, usually a textile or food one, and when these were later moved elsewhere due to the globalised economy, unemployment soared.[6]

For those who were on the lower socio-economic echelons of the Israeli society, mostly Palestinians and Arab Jews, life became even more difficult during the *Zena* (Austerity) period. For ten years (1949–1959), Israelis were limited in their shopping (they needed to use coupons, similar to the British point book system that allowed purchasing only according to quotas) and in the amount of money they could take abroad (towards the early part of the 1960s there was a first wave of emigration, of Arab Jews, to the USA in particular which explains the relatively large contingent of Israelis there today).

Ambitious projects

The new immigrants were also a relatively cheap and unskilled labour force for a very ambitious young state.[7] Among the many national projects they were involved in, two catch the eyes even today in hindsight. The first turned out to be an ecological disaster – the drainage of the Hula Lake and the second is a success story: the national water carrier.

The Hula Lake or wetland is located north of the lake of Galilee along the flow of the Jordan River from the Lebanese mountains towards the south. It was regarded by the Zionist colonisers as a pure swamp area that had to be conquered and, in the 1950s, much of it was drained and the plan was to turn it into fertile agricultural land. However, the land was not of the quality expected and a whole ecological cycle was destroyed as a result of this project. In the 1990s, parts of the lake were re-flooded in an attempt to revive the lake, with little success.[8] It is at least today a very fascinating natural reserve park worth visiting if you are ever there.

The national carrier was a long web of pipes, small artificial lakes and tunnels that carried fresh waters from the north of Israel to the desert area of the Negev. The Negev is the arid south of the country, and in relative terms it covers a huge chunk of the state; hence the obsession of Israeli leaders, especially David Ben-Gurion, to bloom it. This was not entirely successful but also not an absolute failure. With the help of fresh water, Kibbutzim and other forms of settlements had eventually surrounded themselves with green belts in the middle of the desert, which probably made the area more hospitable and habitable for the European colonisers. Later on, the water was even used to forest part of the arid area.

These projects required finance. There was little tax to be extracted from, by and large, an impoverished society and the money coming at the time from Jewish communities and the USA was not enough; neither was the money confiscated from rich Palestinians who had already hurriedly left Palestine in January 1948.

An important potential source was Western Germany. The negotiations of compensation to the Jewish people, represented by the state of Israel, tore the Israeli society apart in 1952. The reparation agreement, also known as the Luxembourg agreement, was concluded during that year. The German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer and the Israeli Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett signed it. In between 1953 and 1965, Israel received 3 billion marks for the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust. Individual compensation was also agreed upon. The decision stirred an internal political storm that some historians depicted at the time as almost a civil war. On the day the debate on compensation from Germany unfolded in the Knesset, a huge demonstration gathered near the parliament building in western Jerusalem. Menachem Begin, the leader of the *Herut* opposition party, called for a civilian revolt and refusal to pay taxes unless the agreement with Germany was abolished. The Knesset was stormed with stones and several members of the parliament were injured as well as one hundred policemen. Today, it has been long forgotten, as other issues feed the political drama and Germany has been totally absolved by most Israeli Jews.

Building the educational system

Other formative decisions taken during the period of small Israel, which would have a more enduring impact on the society, concerned the nature of the Israeli educational system. It was decided to establish different streams of education. A general Jewish one, an Arab one and a religious national one. The politicians also decided to allow an autonomous ultra-Orthodox school system to develop. A close examination of these streams is a good introduction to present-day Israel.

The mainstream was very loyal to the consensual Zionist narrative and its heads try constantly to navigate between injecting nationalist values and fusing them with more universal and democratic ones. Critical historians in Israel noted that within this system there was a division between technological and more academic schools. It seemed the second generation of Mizrahi Jews were encouraged to join the less prestigious and more limited technological schools which offered fewer choices later on in the labour market.[9] The Israeli broadsheet, *Haaretz*, looked at these issues years later and on September 1, 2017 (when school term begins in Israel) concluded that this reality is still prevalent today: namely the so-called technological schools produce Mizrahi Jew graduates with limited options of employability and career.

The Arab educational structure was quite bizarre. Jewish officials prepared its curriculum and it was closely monitored by the Ministry of Education and the Secret Service. Both governmental agencies used the school system to keep an eye on possible political activity and, at the same time, it was employed as means of

de-Palestinising the Arab citizens, whose loyalty to the Jewish State, then and today, is questioned. In hindsight, we can say there was no need for the monitoring, because the Palestinian minority has strategically decided to struggle for more equality and did it through a non-violent campaign.[10] An informal system of education slowly developed which planted the Palestinian narrative and preserved it. The struggle between the policy from above and the national aspiration from below, continues to this very day. The informal education has been reinforced by the emergence of an assertive civil society among the Palestinians in Israel which is working through a large number of NGOs that are devoted to education and information.

The national religious schools expunged any democratic teaching and it is not surprising that the graduates of this system spearhead the settlement project in the occupied territories, fusing nationalism with religion and undermining the effort to maintain a democratic regime in Israel.

The second War: the 1956 Suez War

The Israeli political map as we know it today was shaped in the early years of statehood. The period can be divided into two, with the year 1956 serving as a water-shed. Until 1956, this was a state run by quite a homogenous political system, but after that it was far more divided and fragmented. The dramatic event was the Sinai 1956 campaign, which in Israeli historiography is depicted as the second war of independence that turned the society into a more mature, but also cynical, one.

The principal political rift was between two powerful personalities at the top of the Labour movement: David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett. Ben-Gurion lost his absolute grip on the ruling party, *Mapai,* and had to resign at the end of 1953 and decided to exile himself to a Kibbutz in the Negev. It was a short exile and he returned at the end of 1955, after undermining, through his allies in the army and the Ministry of Defence, his successor, Moshe Sharett's, attempt to pursue a more restrained and peaceful policy both vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugees and the neighbouring Arab states. Some scholars see the difference in attitude as stemming from a different biography: Ben-Gurion arrived in the Second *Aliyah* from Eastern Europe and was quite determined to use force in order to establish a permanent Jewish presence in Palestine; Sharett was born in an Arab village, spoke Arabic and felt he knew the Arab neighbours better and how to reconcile with them.[11]

Their main bone of contention was how do deal with two issues concerning two different Palestinian groups. The first were the Palestinian citizens of Israel who were under a military rule, which will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. This was a harsh and non-democratic policy to which Sharett objected and Ben-Gurion insisted on maintaining.

The second group were the Palestinian refugees who were seeking a way of redeeming at least part of their lost land, property and harvest from their destroyed villages. These infiltrations were more organised with time and became part of a guerrilla warfare conducted by a group of activists who revived the Palestinian

national movement. Ben-Gurion demanded harsh retaliation – executed mainly by a commando unit, 101, under a young officer named Ariel Sharon – which included attacking Jordanian and Egyptian military bases, whom he suspected of providing the infrastructure for this kind of action.[12]

For Ben-Gurion, the Palestinian effort was part of an overall scheme led by the new leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, to defeat Israel. Sharett, on the other hand, attempted to reconcile with Nasser, and may have succeeded in it, had he not been deposed by Ben-Gurion in 1955. When Ben-Gurion became Prime Minister once more, he colluded with Britain and France to try and topple the Egyptian leader. Britain regarded Nasser as an enemy following his decision to nationalise the Suez Canal and eradicate the special status Britain had enjoyed in the country since the late 19th century. The French saw Nasser as the main ally of the Algerian national liberation movement, the FLN. It was the backdrop to a collusion between the two declining colonial empires and the new emerging state.[13]

Before the military operation commenced at the end of October 1956, Israel attempted to induce Britain and the USA to take hostile actions against Nasser. The Israeli Mossad recruited Egyptian Jews to try and plant bombs in several buildings associated with Western interests in order to deteriorate the relationship of the new regime in Egypt with the West. The plot was discovered and the fiasco, or the 'Affair' as it was called in Israeli politics, would return to haunt Ben-Gurion later on and in fact would cause his political demise in the early 1960s.

The debacle in Egypt resurfaced in 1960 when the Minister of Defence at the time of the events in 1956, Pinhas Lavon, demanded that his name be cleared by a governmental committee and that he should be exonerated from any blame for the fiasco in Egypt (the execution of the Egyptian Jews who took part in it brought the affair to the attention of the Israeli public, who demanded the heads of those who gave the orders for this botched operation). Lavon argued he was not in the know and carried no responsibility for the operations. The committee agreed with him, but not David Ben-Gurion. He succeeded, during 1961, in deposing Lavon from any official rank (Lavon was at the time the general secretary of the *Histadrut,* the Israeli TUC; a very powerful position). However, the public in Israel concluded that Ben-Gurion was conducting a personal crusade against a decent politician. Ben-Gurion, leading the Zionist project since the 1920s until 1963, was deposed and replaced by non-charismatic and technocratic politician, Levi Eshkol. In 1965, after two years of a relentless effort to open the file on the affair, Ben-Gurion gave up and decided to create his own political party, the Israeli Workers' List (*Rafi*) joined by personalities such as Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres. The party was not a success story and eventually, after Ben-Gurion's total removal from political life, would re-join the Labour party.[14]

However, in 1956, Ben-Gurion was still the master of Israeli politics and he was colluding closely with Britain and France on how to defeat what they all deemed to be the hub of Arab radicalism – Egypt. In preparation for D-Day, a joint military assault on Egyptian soil by French and British air forces and Israeli land invasion into the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula, Ben-Gurion ordered his security forces

to impose curfew on the Palestinian communities inside Israel, fearing their possible violent reaction against the Israeli aggression. This was of course only a figment of his imagination. The Palestinian community in Israel was sufficiently disempowered that nobody in the Israeli Secret Service really apprehended such a scenario. Nonetheless, curfew was imposed with horrific consequences in one village, east of Tel-Aviv, Kafr Qassem. On the night of the invasion to the Sinai, the villagers of this small community failed to return on time from their fields. The Israeli soldiers and border police opened fired and massacred forty-seven of them, including women and children. The perpetrators were let off with ridiculously small fines afterwards and the event scarred the already strained relationship between the Jewish state and its Palestinian minority.[15]

Ben-Gurion was able to galvanise his government for such an adventure due to the Egyptian closure of the Tiran Straits that connected the Red Sea with the Indian Ocean; this was not a vital maritime route for Israel, but nonetheless accentuated the sense of siege among Israelis (a second closure in 1967 would be one of the *casus bellis* for the 1967 war).

Israel occupied the Gaza Strip and entered the Sinai Peninsula and stopped its invasion sixteen kilometres from the Suez Canal, as previously agreed with Britain and France. The United Sates was furious. The American policy makers still hoped to incorporate Nasser's Egypt into the pro-Western alliance in the Middle East. The Soviet Union went even further, threatening Israel with military action. In March 1957, the operation that raised euphoric and messianic ambitions in Israel of creating a much larger mini Jewish empire from the Suez Canal to the Jordan River, came to an abrupt end and the Israeli forces withdrew.

There was one important by-product of the collusion with France. It enabled Israel to develop its nuclear capacity and in 1958 the Dimona nuclear plant was built and with the help of one its later employees, Mordechai Vanunu, the world has learned, what I suppose everyone already suspected at the time, that Israel became a nuclear power with an estimated arsenal of hundreds of nuclear warheads. Vanunu who leaked the news to *The Sunday Times* was abducted in Europe by the Israeli Mossad agents and spent a long time in prison before he was released under restricting conditions.

Social unrest and fragmentation, 1956–1967

As will recur quite often in modern day Israel, once the guns of war subside the social issues emerge and bring into question the solidarity and integrity of the society. The Jewish immigrants who came from North Africa still felt in the 1950s that they were discriminated against and marginalised. They usually seemed to reconcile without any protest to their condition. However, there was one noted exception in downtown Haifa in a former Palestinian neighbourhood called Wadi Salib.

Wadi Salib, the Valley of the Cross, is a neighbourhood in downtown Haifa that the Israeli forces cleansed after occupying the city in April 1948. The beautiful

houses were taken over by Jewish immigrants from North Africa and turned into slums as the newcomers overpopulated them. Moreover, they may have had ready-made homes for themselves but no employment or chances of getting out of poverty. Frustrated by continued social immobility, which was attributed by them solely to racist discrimination, a large group of inhabitants staged a huge demonstration that ended with an outburst of violence in the summer of 1959. It began with the police shooting a dweller named Yacov Karif, who was rumoured to die later on in the hospital. A decade of neglect and oppression erupted and hundreds of the inhabitants, including new Palestinian residents, rioted first in the neighbourhood nearby and then began climbing up on the slopes to Mount Carmel towards the more affluent parts of the city. The riots spread to other areas, engulfing large Mizrahi population around the country.[16]

The events prompted the government to convene an inquiry commission (a typical official response that usually covers inactivity). The Etzioni committee saw no fault in the authorities' behaviour but concurred with the protesters that there was a policy of discrimination against Mizrahi Jews. The recommendation to rectify it was not implemented in any meaningful way and this anger was skilfully absorbed and exploited by Menachem Begin, the leader of the only meaningful opposition to the Labour movement, and led him, along with other factors that will be discussed later, to victory in the 1977 elections.

Creating a new legacy

Whereas there was very little interest in the heritage or history of the Jews coming from Arab countries, constituting half of the population, the European Jewish legacy was nourished and manipulated for contemporary political goals. The most important part of this legacy was of course the Holocaust. The message was very clear: the foundation of the state of Israel was the only redemption of the Holocaust and its horrors and therefore the Jewish State was the sole safeguard against another Holocaust. This connection was made clear to the public at large, when the most senior Nazi official alive, Adolf Eichmann, was caught by the Mossad in South America (where quite a few senior Nazis found refuge) and brought to trial in Israel in 1962. Eichmann's trial took place throughout 1962 and was conducted on the stage of the largest congress hall in the country, Binyanei HaUma (Nation's Buildings in Hebrew). Eichmann was executed at the end of the trial; an event that led the famous Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt to ponder critically on the manipulation of the Holocaust memory by the Jewish State (although her main interest was about Eichmann's responsibility and what she called 'the banality of evil'). Later critics would expand on this complex relationship between a state that alleged to represent the victims of the greatest crime in the 20th century and that state's own victims, the Palestinians.[17] Until recently, official Israel has been keen in stressing past connection between the Nazis and the Palestinians and also to associate Palestinian and overall Arab threats to Israel with classical and Nazi anti-Semitism. In October 2015, the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, went

as far as alleging, baselessly one should say, that the Palestinian leader of the Mandatory period, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, planted the idea of the extermination of the Jews in Hitler's mind. Al-Husayni, who was the grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the President of the Supreme Muslim Council in Mandatory Palestine, had to leave Palestine in 1938 since the British government wanted his head (due to the role he play in the Palestinian revolt in 1936 against the Mandate and its policies). In his search for allies he associated himself with Italy and then Germany, serving them as news anchor-man on their radio stations broadcasting to the Arab world.

However, modern Israel wanted to dissociate itself from what it deemed as exilic and unhealthy Jewish life in the European 'diaspora'. The making of the new Jew, who it was insinuated would not have gone as 'lambs to the slaughter house' was the principal project of the new state. As this was mainly a cultural project, I will discuss in greater detail in the chapter covering the cultural history of the state.

Distancing the 'New Israeli Jew' from the 'exile' was only one means of solidifying the presence of Jewish settlers as a modern state in Palestine. Other means included building a democratic infrastructure and modern economy so as to be recognised as part of the developed and civilised world. There was only one hurdle for creating both a Jewish and a democratic state – the presence of a sizeable Palestinian minority in the state.

The Israeli policy towards the Palestinian minority was dominated in those years by David Ben-Gurion's thoughts and actions. His main obsession was demographic – even after the 1948 ethnic cleansing, Israel was left with a sizeable Palestinian minority in it. This demographic reality troubled Ben-Gurion, as it had done throughout the Mandatory years. He therefore imposed a harsh military rule on the minority, based on mandatory emergency regulations, which robbed the Palestinian citizens of any basic human and civil right. He compounded this policy with a vast project of Judaisation in densely Arab populated areas. Jewish towns and settlements were built so as to disrupt territorial continuity in the north and south of the country (a similar tactic would be implemented in the occupied territories after 1967 and is executed today in the midst of Palestinian areas inside Israel in the north and the east of the state).

This harsh policy (as mentioned based on British colonialist emergency regulations), allowed soldiers in the military rule to be absolute rulers in their little kingdoms. It has left a scar on the Palestinian community that still has not healed today. When Ben-Gurion ended his last term in office, in 1963, a new process to abolish the military rule began and it was finally removed in 1966 (although it remained intact in a handful of places). It should be noted that both right-wing leaders, such as Menachem Begin, and left-wing philosophers, such as Martin Buber, collaborated in this campaign to end the military rule.

Thus, the Jewish State Ben-Gurion wished to mould was an antithesis to the Holocaust and at the same time as anti-Arab as possible. It was also, in his vision, a modern state. Ben-Gurion took a personal interest in a swift modernisation of the Jewish State through technology, spreading the population all over the country and accelerated industrialisation. The result was, as mentioned before, the appearance of

the development towns closely associated with one line of industry, in many cases textiles, all over the country. Another symbol of this ambition was the construction of a huge petrochemical complex in the gulf of Haifa and the establishment of a highly developed powerful military industry. The spread of the Jewish population to the north and south failed, and only immigrants from Arab countries who were in a way forced to settle in the periphery inhabited the development towns, with a poor infrastructure that until today inhibits their successful integration to the mainstream society. Long after Ben-Gurion's death a 'stronger' socio-economic group of people moved, albeit in small numbers, into a new built suburbia and exclusively gated Jewish communities in both corners of the state.

Ben-Gurion also had regional ambitions. His main vision was a solid alliance between the three non-Arab states in the region: Iran, Turkey and Israel. For a while, he even succeeded in interesting NATO in such a strategic alliance, but the West eventually declined the idea, not wishing to alienate its allies in the Arab world, neither was Turkey willing to sanction officially such a treaty. Bilaterally, Ben-Gurion was able to develop strong security ties with Iran, but not much beyond that. The search for these alliances was highly important for him as he predicted, rightly in hindsight, that the young state would be involved in yet another cycle of fighting with its neighbours. This indeed happened in 1967 and, although there was another cycle in 1973, the 1967 one transformed dramatically the fortunes and future of the Jewish State.

On the road to war, 1958–1967

The Israeli political and military elite regarded the 1948 war as a missed opportunity: a historical moment in which Israel could, and should, have occupied the whole of historical Palestine from the river Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea. The only reason they did not do it was because of an agreement they had with neighbouring Jordan. This collusion was negotiated in the last days of the British Mandate and when finalised it limited the military participation of the Jordanian army in the general Arab war effort in 1948. In return, Jordan was allowed to annex areas in Palestine that became the West Bank.[18] David Ben-Gurion, who kept the pre-1948 agreement intact, called the decision to allow Jordan to take the West Bank *Bechiya ledorot*, which literally means that future generations would lament this decision; a more metaphorical translation would choose to translate this statement 'a fatal historical mistake'.[19]

Ever since 1948, important sections among the Jewish cultural, military and political elites in Israel had been looking for an opportunity to rectify this. From the mid-1960s and onwards, they planned actively and carefully how to find a remedy and create a greater Israel that would include the West Bank.[20] There were several historical junctures in which the Israelis nearly executed such a plan but eventually retracted at the very last moment. The most famous are 1958 and 1960, when David Ben-Gurion in the last moment aborted the plans due to fears of international reaction in the first instance and a demographic fear (thinking

that Israel could not incorporate such a large number of Palestinians) in the second.

The year of 1958 is described in the scholarly literature on the modern Middle East as the revolutionary year. In that year, the progressive and radical ideas that brought the Egyptian Free Officers to power in Cairo began to make an impact all over the Arab world. This trend was supported by the Soviet Union and almost inevitably was challenged by the United States. This 'playing out' of the Cold War in the Middle East opened opportunities for those in Israel who looked for a pretext to correct the 'fatal historical mistake' of 1948. This was driven by a powerful lobby within the Israeli government and army, led by the war heroes of 1948, Moshe Dayan and Yigal Alon. When a consensus developed in the West that the 'radicalism' that emerged in Egypt might engulf other countries, including Jordan, this lobby recommended that the Prime Minister, Ben-Gurion, approach NATO and promote the idea for an Israeli pre-emptive takeover of the West Bank.[21]

This became an even more plausible scenario after Iraq fell into the hands of progressive, even radical, officers. On July 14, 1958, a group of Iraqi officers staged a military coup that toppled the Hashemite dynasty there. The Hashemites were brought by the British in 1921 from the Hejaz and kept Iraq within the Western sphere of influence. Economic recession, nationalism and strong connection to Egypt and the USSR triggered a protest movement that brought the officers to power. It was led by a group calling itself the Free Officers, headed by Abd al-Karim Qasim who emulated the same group that overthrew the monarchy in Egypt six years earlier, and replaced the monarchy with republic of Iraq.

At the time, it was also feared in the West that Lebanon could be the next region to be taken over by revolutionary forces. NATO decided to pre-empt this scenario by dispatching its own forces (American Marines to Lebanon and British Special Forces to Jordan). There was no need, and no wish, to involve Israel in this developing cold war in the Arab world.[22] When the Israeli idea of 'saving' at least the West Bank was voiced, it was firmly rejected by Washington. It seems, however, that Ben-Gurion was quite pleased to be warned off at this stage. He had no wish to undermine the demographic achievement of 1948 – he did not want to change the balance between Jews and Arabs in a new 'greater' Israel by incorporating the Palestinians living in the West Bank.[23]

This was the reason Ben-Gurion pre-empted another attempt by the more hawkish lobby in exploiting a new crisis two years later in 1960. As long as he was in power, the lobby, so brilliantly described in Tom Segev's book, *1967* [24] was not effective and there was no danger of an Israeli attack on the West Bank. Although by 1960, it had become much more difficult to restrain the lobby. In fact, in that year, all the ingredients that would later mark the crisis of 1967 were in place and possessed the same threat to erupt into a war, as it did seven years later. But war was averted, or at least, delayed.

In 1960, the first important actor on the scene was Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian President, who conducted a dangerous policy of brinkmanship as he would six years later. Nasser heightened the war rhetoric against Israel, threatened

to move troops into the demilitarised Sinai Peninsula and block the passage of ships into the southern city of Eilat. His motives for doing so were the same in 1960 as they were in 1967. He feared that Israel would attack Syria which, between 1958 and 1962, was in formal union with Egypt called the United Arab Republic. Ever since Israel and Syria concluded an armistice agreement in the summer of 1949, they had left quite a few issues unsolved. Among them were pieces of land, which were called 'no-man's land' by the UN, which both sides coveted. Every now and then, Israel encouraged the members of the Kibbutzim and settlements adjacent to these lands to go and cultivate them, knowing fully that this would trigger a Syrian response from the Golan Heights above them. This is exactly what happened that year and the predicted cycle of escalating tit for tat then followed: the Israeli air force was then employed to gain some real war experience and show its supremacy over the Russian jets employed by the Syrian air force. Dog fights ensued, artillery was exchanged, complaints were submitted to the armistice committee and an uneasy lull reigned until violence erupted once more.[25]

A second source of friction between Israel and Syria was found in the Israeli construction of a national water carrier, already mentioned earlier in this chapter between the estuaries of the Jordan River and the south of the state. The works on the project began in 1953 and included siphoning off some of the water resources that were desperately needed both in Syria and in Lebanon. In response, the leaders of Syria succeeded in convincing their Egyptian allies in the UAR that Israel might launch an all-out military campaign against Syria in order to secure the strategic Golan Heights, and the sources of the River Jordan. In 1960, the tension on the Israeli-Syrian border grew once more and there was no progress whatsoever on the diplomatic front. This time, Gamal Abdel Nasser probed a new strategy, which I named earlier as 'brinkmanship'. The purpose of this exercise was to test constantly the boundaries of possibilities. In this case, to examine how far military preparations and threats could change the reality, without actually going to war.

The success of someone who embarks on brinkmanship depends not only on the person who initiates it, but also on the unforeseen responses of those against whom this policy is directed. And that is where it can go terribly wrong as it did in 1967. Nasser implemented this strategy for the first time in 1960 and repeated it in a similar way in 1967. He sent the Egyptian forces to the Sinai Peninsula – which was supposed to be a demilitarised zone per the agreement that ended the 1956 war. The Israeli government and the UN acted very sensibly in 1960 in face of this threat. The UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld, took a firm position demanding the immediate withdrawal of the Egyptian forces. The Israeli government recruited its reserves but sent a clear message it would not open war.[26]

On the eve of the 1967 war, all these factors played a role in the outbreak of violence. Two personalities, however, were not there in 1967: David Ben-Gurion and Dag Hammarskjöld. Ben-Gurion left the political scene in 1963. Ironically, it was only after his removal that the lobby of greater Israel could plan their next step. Until then, Ben-Gurion's demographic obsession prevented the takeover of the West Bank, but also produced the, by now, familiar iron-clad military rule

Israel imposed on different Palestinian groups. The opportunity for moving this apparatus from one Palestinian group – the Palestinian minority in Israel – to another – the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – came in 1967, when Nasser played the same moves in a long established game. This time he was encouraged by the Soviet leadership who believed strongly that an Israeli attack on Syria was imminent in the last days of 1966.[27] In the summer of that year, a new group of officers and ideologues had staged a military coup and taken the Syrian state (known as the new 'Ba'ath'). One of the first acts of the new regime was to deal more firmly with the Israeli plans to exploit the waters of the River Jordan and its estuaries. They began building their own national carrier and diverted the water of the river for their own needs. The Israeli army bombarded the new project, which led to frequent and gradually more intensified dog fights in the air between the two armies. The new regime in Syria also looked favourably at the attempt of the newly formed Palestinian National Liberation Movement. This in turn encouraged the Fatah to stage a guerrilla warfare against Israel, the Golan Heights and Lebanon used as a launching pad for attacks. This only added to the tension between the two states.

It seems that until April 1967, Nasser still hoped that his histrionics would be enough to force a change in the status quo, without the recourse of going to war. He signed a defence alliance with Syria in November 1966, declaring his intention to come to Syria's aid should Israel attack it. Yet the deterioration on the Israeli-Syrian border ebbed to a new low in April 1967. Israel staged a military attack on Syrian forces in the Golan Heights in that month and the tensions rose. It was only then that Nasser felt compelled to repeat his gambit of 1960 – dispatching troops into the Sinai Peninsula and closing the Tiran Straits – a narrow passage that connected the Gulf of Aqaba with the Red Sea and hence could stop, or hinder, the maritime traffic into Israel's most southern port, Eilat. As in 1960, Nasser waited to see how the UN would react. Dag Hammarskjöld was not impressed in 1960 and had not removed the UN troops who had been there since 1956. The new Secretary General, U Thant, was less assertive and, instead, withdrew the UN forces immediately when the Egyptian troops entered the Peninsula. This had the effect of escalating tension further.

The Israeli leadership was this time much more eager to exploit the new crisis for expanding the state's boundaries. There was a debate between groups that would be later called 'the Doves' (politicians seeking peace with the Arab world) and 'the Hawks' (advocating harsh policies towards the Arab world) about how to respond to the new developments. For a while, 'the Doves' convinced the government to allow the international community to look for a peaceful resolution. But most of the Israeli leaders were in a 'hawkish' mood and ignored the diplomatic effort led by the USA. These efforts were still intact when Israel launched its attack on all its Arab neighbours on June 5, 1967. There was no intention in the Israeli cabinet to provide the necessary time to the peace brokers. This was a golden opportunity not to be missed.

The war began on June 5 early in the morning with an attack by Israel on the Egyptian air force which nearly destroyed it. This was followed on the same day by similar assaults on the air forces of Syria, Jordan and Iraq. On the first day of the fighting, Israeli forces invaded the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula and in the next few days reached the Suez Canal and occupied the whole of the Peninsula. Within three days, and after fierce fighting, the Israeli army captured East Jerusalem (on June 7) and two days later drove the Jordanian army out of the West Bank. By June 11, 1967, Israel became a mini-Empire controlling the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula.

Notes

1 Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine,* (Oxford and New York, 2006), pp. 86–178.
2 *Ibid*., pp. 225–235.
3 Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There? Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948–1965,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
4 Amitzur Ilan, *Bernadotte in Palestine*, New York: Palgrave, 1989.
5 Pappe, *The Forgotten Palestinians*.
6 Oren Yiftachel, 'Social Control, Urban Planning and Ethno-Class Relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel's "Development Towns"', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Volume 24, Issue 2, June 2000, pp. 418–438.
7 Michael Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy of Israel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
8 Edna Gorney, '(Un)natural Selection: The Drainage of the Hula Wetlands, A Ecofeminist Reading', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Volume 9, Issue 4, 2009, pp. 465–474.
9 Yossi Dahan and Gal Levy, 'Multicultural Education in the Zionist State – the Mizrahi Challenge', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, Volume 19, Issue 5–6, 2000, pp. 423–444.
10 Azmi Beshara 'On the Question of the Palestinian Minority in Israel', *Theory and Critique*, Volume 3, 1993, pp. 7–20 (Hebrew).
11 Avi Shlaim, 'Conflict Approaches to Israel's Relations with the Arabs: Ben-Gurion and Sharett, 1953–1956', *Middle East Journal*, Volume 37, Issue 2, Spring 1983, pp. 180–201.
12 Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949–1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
13 Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), *A Revolutionary Year: The Middle East in 1958*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002.
14 Joel Beinin, 'Egyptian Jewish Identities: Communitarianisms, Nationalisms, Nostalgias', *Stanford Humanities Review*, Volume 5, Issue 1, 1996.
15 Shira Robinson, 'Local Struggle, National Struggle: Palestinian Responses to the Kafr Qasim Massacre and its Aftermath, 1956–66', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Volume 35, Issue 3, 2003, 393–416.
16 Yfaat Weiss, *A Confiscated Memory: Wadi Salib and Haifa's Lost Heritage*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
17 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil,* London: Penguin, 2006 and see also Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
18 Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, The Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
19 *Ibid*.
20 You can read more on this lobby and its work in Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year That Transformed the Middle East,* New York: Holt and Company, 2008 and in Ilan Pappe, 'The Junior Partner: Israel's Role in the 1958 Crisis' in Louis and Owen, *A Revolutionary Year*, pp. 245–274.

21 Pappe, *ibid*.
22 *Ibid*.
23 *Ibid*.
24 Segev, *1967*.
25 There is very honest version of all these events in David Shaham, *Israel: the First Forty Years*, Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1991, pp. 239–247 (Hebrew).
26 Ami Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War: Government, Armed Forces and Defence Policy, 1963–1967*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 121–122.
27 In his typical way Norman Finkelstein takes the official narrative of Israel as presented by one of its best articulators, Abba Eban and demolishes it. See Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict,* London and New York: Verso Books, 2003, pp. 135–145.

3

THE GREATER ISRAEL, 1967–2000

The small Israel disappeared within six days in June 1967. The war dramatically and fundamentally changed the face of Israel for years to come. I will list some of these changes; all of them in my mind are equally significant and therefore their location in this analysis is not a matter of importance, but just an arbitrary list of major developments triggered by this catalytic event.

Initial impacts

The first new phenomenon was the emergence of a messianic movement, *Gush Emunim*, which was intent on settling Jews in the areas Israel occupied in the war. This was an outgrowth of the youth movement, *Bnei Akiva*, affiliated with the main religious national party, the *Mafdal*. The party was quite on the left before the war, but the occupation of what was deemed to be the heart of the ancient homeland, ignited the imagination and zeal of its younger generation. They were eager to settle in places, which were mentioned in the bible and did not wish to wait for a governmental decree to do so. Archaeologists helped them by providing allegedly scientific proof that the biblical map and the current map were the same and therefore they regarded their mission as divine and sanctioned by religion.

The government took a more cautions and strategic approach. Its map of Jewish settlement in the occupied territories was informed by demographic considerations: there was no wish to settle amid dense Palestinian population centres. The biblical map targeted precisely these populated areas as destinations for colonisation. The result was friction with both the government and the local population in years to come. The messianic movement was only founded officially in 1974, but already in April 1968, settlers arrived in the West Bank. First settling in hotels, buying a flat here or a plot of land there and then building more expanded settlements. The Labour government that replaced the Unity government and ruled until 1977 still

attempted to contain this energy and channel the colonisation into less populated areas in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. There was much more coordinated colonisation on the Golan Heights, where most of the local natives were ethnically cleansed by the Israeli army during the war, and in the Sinai which had plenty of empty space for Jewish settlements.[1]

The settlements offered unimaginable bonanzas for constructors and real estate dealers and the economy as a whole took off. Before 1967, and in particular in 1966, the Israeli economy underwent a recess forcing the government to impose austerity measures. The sense before the war was encapsulated by a famous joke in 1966 Israel that the last person leaving the state should not forget to turn off the light. This was now replaced by affluence and a growing prosperity, if not for all, then definitely for the Israeli middle-class and for the first time one could talk about tycoons and billionaires in the Jewish State (I will return shortly to this period in the next chapter on Israel's economic history).

However, not everyone benefitted from this economic surge. There were two groups that were left behind by this economic boom; the Mizrahi Jews and the Palestinian community. These two groups did not enjoy the benefits of growth and development. The exclusion of these communities from the new prosperity triggered waves of unrest in the 1970s. Their sense of neglect was reinforced by growing awareness that they were also alienated by the hegemonic European Jewish culture in which Arab culture (whether Jewish or not) is perceived as primitive and inferior. Each community responded differently to this cultural challenge. The Mizrahi Jews chose to de-Arabise themselves so as to become legitimated members of the Jewish society; the Palestinians began a civil struggle demanding both their rights as a national minority and as citizens of a state claiming to be a democracy.

Mizrahi Jews dwelled in development towns and in the urban slums: most of them came from North Africa. These communities, whose elites chose to immigrate to France or Canada, were easily manipulated into settling either in the new towns built for political purposes – in the midst of densely populated Arab areas or near the borders. [2] The towns, called the development towns, were built around one mega factory, usually in the textile business and their educational system provided mostly technological rather than general curriculum. Worse were the conditions in the slums built on demolished 1948 Palestinian neighbourhoods (we have already mentioned them when discussing the Wadi Salib riots of 1959). In those neighbourhoods, a new social movement emerged, emulating the Black Panther movement in the United States and carrying the same name.[3] The movement began to be active in 1972 in the poor neighbourhoods of Jerusalem acting in a Robin Hood fashion – stealing food commodities for the needy, while demonstrating and demanding a larger share of the national cake. In one of their demonstrations, they stepped over the Knesset's lawn which prompted the then Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir, to famously declare: 'Hem Lo Nechmandim' (They are not nice).[4] The movement might have had more effect but the attention to its needs and what it represented were disrupted by the outbreak of the 1973 war; a war that also postponed, but just for a while, the other spot of social unrest to come: the one

bubbling inside the Palestinian community in Israel. Therefore, we will come back to the North African Jews and the Palestinian minority after dwelling a bit on the 1973 war and its significance.

The government that faced both these social challenges and the 1973 war was still a Labour government. More precisely it was, since January 1968, a new Labour party that had brought back home offshoots that left it before, such as Ben-Gurion's party, *Rafi*, mentioned before and *Ahdut HaAvoda*, a Kibbutz movement whose leader was another legendary 1948 general Yigal Allon. In fact, the name the Labour party (*Mifleget Havoda*) was used for the first time in January 1968.

The Golda Meir government, 1968–1974

Levi Eshkol passed away in February 1969 and was replaced by Israel's first ever, and so far only, woman Prime Minister, Golda Meir. She had a distinct American accent and dressed in an old-fashioned way that disguised her political power in the party which led to her election. She was born in Russia, but as a young child moved with her family to the USA and came to Palestine towards the end of the First World War, making her mark as an organizer of women's trade unions. During the 1930s she was already part of the leadership, playing an important role in the diplomatic life of the Zionist movement before the creation of the state. She held two ministerial jobs, Labour and Foreign ministries, before becoming a Prime Minister.

The government of Golda Meir was the first one to work under the television limelight. Israel opened a television channel in 1968 when it was realised that quite a few citizens were viewing neighbouring Arab stations who had English, and later Hebrew, news bulletin. The first display on that channel was broadcasting the military parade celebrating, a year late, the victory in the 1967 war. However, when a less successful war broke out in 1973, this medium, as happened with the American involvement in Vietnam, brought into the Israeli living room more troubling scenes and glimpses into the ugly reality of war. The presence of the television also changed the tactics of the PLO in its liberation struggle and in 1972 quite daring guerrilla and terror attacks against Israel were carried out; the most famous of them was the abduction of the Israeli sport delegation in the 1972 Munich Olympics, which ended tragically in the death of many members of the delegation. These and other operations were reciprocated by Israeli retaliation against Palestinian groups, the most famous of which was the attack on Beirut airport and Palestinian headquarters in that city also in 1972.

Meir's government was quite preoccupied with retaliation policies and with other pressing issues, such as attempting to secure massive immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel in 1972 and 1973. A relative open policy on behalf of the Soviet regime allowed Jews to leave the USSR en masse. The problem for Israel was that their preferred destination was the USA. The first destination of these immigrants was Vienna in Austria and a special transition camp was established for them within the compound of the Schönau Palace. On the eve of the October

1973 war, Golda Meir's government focused its attention on a train carrying Soviet Jews that was hijacked by Palestinian guerrillas. The Austrian government agreed to close the camp in return for the safe release of the hijacked train. Meir came to Vienna and famously clashed with the local Chancellor ('he did not offer me even a glass of water', she told the Israeli press).[5] Meir expected the Jewish Chancellor to be more loyal to Israel, but Bruno Kreisky was impressed by Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO, and believed that there was a fair chance of peace, if Israel amended its policy of non-recognition of the Palestinian national movement. Historians later claimed that Meir was unnecessarily engaged with this clash and therefore unable to appreciate the many signals in the coming from Israel's various intelligence communities, indicating an imminent Egyptian-Syrian assault on Israel, which was launched a few days later. Some even suspected that the guerrilla operation against the train was an intentional diversion meant to blind Israel to the preparations made in both Arab countries for a mega military attack that was supposed to redeem the areas Israel occupied in 1967.[6]

One of the most important signals ignored by the Israeli policy makers was the failure of both Egypt and Syria to redeem the territories they lost through diplomatic efforts. Both a special envoy of the UN, Gunnar Jarring and two American Secretaries of State, William Rogers and Henry Kissinger, tried in vain to negotiate a deal of bilateral peace between Israel and these two countries for the return of the occupied territories (a similar effort on the same principle failed also in the negotiations of the peace brokers with Jordan). The Egyptian leader, Anwar Sadat, was quite clear in his threat to Israel that if diplomacy would not work, Egypt would resort to other means.[7]

However, it seems more than anything else what blinded the policy makers in Israel was 'the misconception' as it was referred to later in the Israeli mythology. The misconception was that of the Minister of Defence, Moshe Dayan and his generals. They were mesmerised by the success of the 1967 war and were convinced of Israel's invincibility on the one hand, and the impotence of the Arab armies on the other. On every possible private, public or hidden stage, Dayan repeated this misconception. He was confident that the bunkers line built on the Suez Canal which were called the Bar-Lev line (Haim Barlev was the chief of the southern command and the initiator of this defence line) and Israel's technical and 'cultural' superiority would deter the Arab neighbours from attempting another conventional war against Israel.[8] The power of the 'misconception' was that when clear intelligence came for various sources of an imminent Egyptian-Syrian joint attack (information that was very accurate about when and where) it was dismissed by the heads of the military intelligence and this attitude slipped through to the Prime Minister herself, Golda Meir.[9]

By October 5, 1973, the policy makers in Israel accepted that they were facing an imminent attack, but they decided to pre-empt it only on the next day in the afternoon. They were also not sure how widespread it would be and hoped that a partial recruitment of reserve soldiers would persuade the Egyptians and Syrians to jettison the idea. However, this did not help and the Egyptian and Syrian forces

surprised the Israeli army on October 6, 1973. In the early days, the Arab armies were so successful that Israeli leaders seriously considered employing a nuclear option and there was an apocalyptic mood among some of the state's leaders predicting this might lead to the end of the state. However, few days later, with the help of an American military aid lift, Israel tipped the military scale and when the UN declared a final ceasefire on October 24, 1973, Israel retrained most of the territories it occupied in 1967 and even added some more. However, the cost was high. Around 2,300 soldiers were killed, 7,000 wounded and hundreds were captured. This human cost triggered an angry protest movement in Israel that demanded an official inquiry into the military fiasco. The government had to heed and in mid-November 1973 agreed to appoint an official inquiry commission headed by a Supreme Court Justice. The Agranat Inquiry Committee took a while and before it completed its findings the state went to another national election campaign. On the last day of 1973, Labour won elections once more, be it with a narrow margin and Golda Meir was re-elected as Prime Minister. However, when the Agranat Inquiry Committee published its interim report in 1974, the popular protest movement grew and she had to resign and was replaced by Yitzhak Rabin. The report itself blamed mainly the army and the secret services for the failures and less the politicians.[10]

The first Rabin government, 1974–1977

Yitzhak Rabin was the chief of the general staff in the June 1967 war and was very popular in the late 1960s. When Golda Meir had to resign, he served as Israel's ambassador to Washington. He had to compete for the succession with Shimon Peres, who'd had a rich political career since the 1940s in the Labour movement. First as a protégé of David Ben-Gurion and then after the 1967 war with his ambition and connections Peres climbed to the top of the Labour party. He became Rabin's nemesis and the rivalry between the two weakened and fragmented the Labour party. The clash between these two leaders disabled the party at times from becoming an effective opposition to the right-wing Likud Party, headed by Menachem Begin. The Likud (the bloc in Hebrew) was formed after the 1967 war as a union between the old Revisionist party, *Herut*, and the Liberal party. When it was joined by the 1973 war hero, ex-General Ariel Sharon, it gained even more popularity and political clout. This opposition party benefitted from the internal dissent in the Labour party which worsened by the day.

Rabin won the first round in the internal elections within the Labour party, but had to allow Peres to hold the second most senior position after the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence. They had both to share the glory of a particular daring salvage operation: the Entebbe Operation. In June 1976, Palestinians guerrillas aided by German members of the Baader-Meinhof gang hijacked an Air France flight and landed it at Entebbe in Idi Amin's Uganda. Israel commandos, headed by Yoni Netanyahu, Benjamin Netanyahu's brother, liberated the passengers and flew them back home. Yoni was killed in the operation and his

brother Bibi (Benjamin Netanyahu) would cleverly use this tragedy to enhance his political career later.

Three months before, however, a much less heroic Rabin was exposed, when a journalist from *Haaretz* revealed that his wife kept an American bank account after he left his position in Washington (which was illegal at the time per the Israeli law). Rabin had to resign and Shimon Peres now had a chance to lead the way. But his historical moment did not come. In the May 1977 elections, he was defeated by the Likud. A new Hebrew word was used then to describe such dramatic political earthquakes – *Hamahapch*, the Turnover – it was the first time that Israel was not led by a member of the Labour movement.

The Begin government, 1977–1983

Although the world expected to encounter a far more intransigent and war-mongering Israel, the new Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, went at first in a very different direction at least in his policies towards the Arab world. Soon after his election, he commenced peace talks with Egypt and two years later, the two states concluded a peace treaty, which won Begin and the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat the Nobel Peace Prize. The agreement forced Israel to evict the settlements it had built in the Sinai Peninsula since 1967. These settlements included two towns and the Israeli decision to dismantle them, rather than transfer them intact, triggered quite dramatic scenes on the day they were due to be evicted. The withdrawal caused a rift in the Likud ruling party and another party, committed to preventing any further withdrawals in the future, *Tehiya* (Renaissance in Hebrew), was formed as a result (it would metamorphose in the future into other right-wing parties which would move from the margins to become important actors on the domestic scene).

The opposition Labour party helped Begin's government to pass the peace agreement with Egypt in the Knesset. Under the pressure of the American president, Jimmy Carter, both sides also agreed to negotiate with the Jordanians over the fate of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The different parties attempted to push forward the creation of a Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as the best solution for the Israel/Palestine conflict. This idea was conceived by Menachem Begin and won the support of the other parties. However, there was no Palestinian partner for this kind of a solution, and the negotiations faltered and ended without any significant move forward. They were replaced by President Ronald Regan's initiative to revive an old idea of the Labour party, called the Jordanian option, to allow some sort of functional and territorial division of the territories between Israel and Jordan. This was the main topic of the diplomatic effort until the outbreak of the first Palestinian uprising, the Intifada, at the end of 1987, which led, among other things, to a unilateral Jordanian decision to cede any interest in the future of the West Bank.

Begin's 'moderate' spell in government ended in 1981. He relied in his first term as Prime Minister, 1977–1981, on veteran politicians from other parties, such as the legendary Moshe Dayan, to help him navigate the state affairs. They had an

apparent impact on his policy towards the Arab world in general and the Palestinians in particular. Nonetheless, Begin struggled to win the 1981 elections, competing with the non-charismatic Shimon Peres. He probably won these elections by a populist decision to attack the Iraqi nuclear plant, Tamuz, near the town of Osiris. Even conservative Israeli historians believe that the aerial assault was meant to raise Begin's popularity among the voters.[11] Three weeks after the operation in June 1981, Begin won the elections, although the polls predicted a Labour victory (the party changed its name once more for those elections calling itself the *Maarch*, the Formation or Constellation, since it was an alliance between the veteran *Mapai* party and its left sister party, *Mapam*).

The second Likud government continued the 'Autonomy Talks' seeking a solution for the fate of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but with no real intention to get anywhere. While the various attempts to negotiate were probed, the government expanded the Jewish settlement project in both occupied territories. It was still facing a more assertive PLO, which had not given up the armed struggle option and carried out some daring operations to maintain the Palestine issue in the global agenda. Already in 1978, a group of guerrillas hijacked a bus on the northern outskirts of Tel-Aviv, as happened often, the salvage operation went sour and most of the hostages were killed. Israel reacted by a widespread military operation. The Israeli army invaded Southern Lebanon and occupied it as far as the Litani River (hence in local jargon it was called 'The Litani Operation'). In that year, Lebanon was already embroiled in a civil war (which erupted in 1976). The Israeli invasion played a role in deteriorating the violence and mayhem even deeper. The principal antagonists in Lebanon were various Christian and Muslim factions. The PLO sided with the Muslim side (which itself divided into Shiite and Sunni militias) and the war provided Syria with a pretext of invading parts of Lebanon in the name of an all Arab peace mission. The Israeli presence in southern Lebanon enhanced the power of one Christian (Maronite) military group, the South Lebanese Army, led by a former major in the Lebanese army who collaborated with Israel and created a controlled zone south of the Litani River The Israeli presence, in various forms, continued until Israel invaded Lebanon as far north as Beirut in 1982.

The Israel–PLO wars

While the 'Litani Operation' was a retaliatory operation, the next assault on Lebanon derived from new strategic thinking at the top of Israel. This takes us back to 1976. In that year, municipal elections took place in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Until that moment, Israel, as the occupying force, could rely on traditional leadership that was in the past loyal to Jordan in the West Bank and Egypt in the Gaza Strip. This policy was complemented by clamping down on anyone affiliated with the PLO. The Israeli authorities were convinced that these measures would be enough to ensure that the same old traditional pro-Hashemite elite in the West Bank and the one loyal to Egypt in the Gaza Strip would remain in control. To their great surprise, new candidates linked with the PLO won in

most locations and Israel was faced with an occupation that had to be policed daily and at great cost.

It was left to the new Likud government to deal with the ascendance in the popularity and influence of the PLO in the occupied territories. When Likud came to power, and Ariel Sharon became the Minister of Defence, he devoted much of his energy to two projects in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The first was to expand the Jewish colonies, in particular in the West Bank, and the second was the crack down on the pro-PLO leaders and support base. A familiar image in those days, late 1970s and early 1980s, was Ariel Sharon hopping on a helicopter with huge maps under his armpit, designating new territory, often confiscated from Palestinians, for new Jewish colonies. He was less successful in his second ambition to obliterate the power of the PLO. He attempted several methods, from creating a collaborative and alternative leadership, the Villages League, to mass arrest of the 'Orientation Committee' (*Lajnat al-Tawjih* in Arabic) that co-ordinated the pro-PLO activity in the occupied territories, and finally by directing the Israeli might against the PLO power base in Lebanon in the summer of 1982.[12]

By 1982, Syria already had a considerable presence in Lebanon and this meant that any Israeli operation against the PLO in the south of Lebanon could lead to a clash with the Syrian army, which is what happened in the summer of 1982. Fortunately, the war between the two sides did not spill over into the Golan Heights. The pretext for the assault on the PLO in Lebanon was an assassination attempt of the Israeli ambassador in London, Shlomo Argov, in June 1982. Already in January 1982, Ariel Sharon met secretly with the leaders of the Phalangists in Lebanon, a faction of Maronite Christians who shared Israel's enmity with both the Palestinian and Syrian presence in Lebanon, and it was agreed that the Israeli army would occupy Beirut and hand Lebanon to a Maronite government, which is indeed what unfolded.[13]

On June 6, the Israeli army began a war that was euphemistically called by Israel the 'Peace of the Galilee' operation. Between June and September 1982, after heavy fighting with PLO and Syrian units, Israel controlled the Shuf Mountains, Beirut and everything that lay south of that area. From September, Israel began an incremental withdrawal and redeployed its forces in Southern Lebanon where they stayed until 2000. In those years, 1982–2000, Israel lost nearly 2,000 soldiers. The operation undermined the PLO presence in Lebanon and forced the PLO head-quarters to move to Tunis in 1983. A new Shiite guerrilla movement, Hezbollah – still today Israel's nemesis on its northern borders – conducted the main struggle against the Israeli presence.

The 1982 war was different from all those that preceded it. There was no public consensus around it – the Jewish society in Israel was fundamentally divided on the justification for this war. It became a dividing issue between left and right in Israeli society. This was the first war in which there was a relatively large number of soldiers and officers who refused to continue their military service. Since its inception, Israel has had compulsory military service. Young men serve three years and women two years. Then men, until the age of fifty-five, serve in reserve

capacity several weeks a year. In times of emergency, such as the 1982 war, reserve service is extended until the end of that emergency. As the war lingered on and the sense among soldiers, including officers, was that they were deliberately misinformed of the nature of the military operation the first refusals to serve, almost an unprecedented phenomenon in Israeli history, appeared. The troops were told they were sent to a limited operation that would entail temporary occupation of a narrow strip of forty kilometres into Lebanon. It turned out that the aim was to take over Lebanon and hand it over to the Gemayal family, the leading Maronite family in the country. The most known 'refusenik' was a colonel, Eli Geva, and his protest promoted quite a few others to follow suit, organised in a new NGO called 'Yesh Gvul' (There is a Limit/Border). The movement later on would encourage soldiers to refuse to serve in the occupied territories.[14]

What added to the concern of many Israelis was the Israeli army's involvement in the massacre of Sabra and Shatila. On September 16, 1982, Israel's military allies, the Maronite Phalangist militias began a two-day massacre of hundreds of Palestinians in the refugee camps Sabra and Shatila in southern Beirut. After the Israeli army reached the gates of Beirut in the summer of that year, it collaborated with the Phalangists in the cleansing operation of west Beirut, where most of the Palestinian population lived. The Israelis delegated the operation to the Phalangists, after their leader and the President of Lebanon (installed with the help of Israel) Bashir Gemayel was assassinated. It was clear that the Phalangists were in a very vindictive mood and the inevitable result was the massacre.[15] Israel was widely condemned for its role in the massacre. Inside Israel too, one could feel the shockwaves. Four hundred thousand protested in Tel-Aviv in one of the state's biggest ever demonstrations. The demonstration promoted the President of the state (a titular president who usually had only symbolic power), Yitzhak Navon, to pressure the government of Begin to appoint an official inquiry commission. The committee was established and was headed by Supreme Court Judge, Yitzhak Kahn.

In the beginning of February 1983, the commission published its findings. They concluded that the IDF did not collude in the massacre but could have stopped it once it began. The main culprit in the committee's eyes was the Minister of Defence, Ariel Sharon. The committee demanded his resignation and a commitment that he would never serve again as a Minister of Defence. Sharon refused to resign but resurfaced as a minister without a portfolio. Other senior politicians and generals were let off the hook, but were reprimanded for their role in the tragedy. Ironically, Sharon would come back with vengeance to the centre of Israeli politics as Prime Minister in 2001 and 2003.

The Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, did not need an official committee to judge him. He must have felt that all in all the fiasco in Lebanon was a bitter mistake. Constant demonstrations near his home told him that the hundreds of Israeli soldiers killed, died in vain. In 1983, he'd had enough and resigned (some commentators attribute this to the death of his wife).[16] His resignation dragged the country into another national election in 1984. It seems that the pervious enthusiasm for the Likud had waned, while Labour was unable to regain its old power.

The result was in football terms, a draw (similar to a hung parliament in Britain). The Likud was led by Yitzhak Shamir and the Labour party (still named the *Maarch* in those days) by Shimon Peres. Shamir was a leader in the Stern Gang – a para-military group during the Mandatory period that assassinated, among others, the UN Mediator Folke Bernadotte. Peres was, as mentioned before, rivalling with Yitzhak Rabin, for the Labour party leadership. The political draw required both parties to cooperate in a national Unity government, which they did until 1988.

The government was based on a rotation agreement. The first half (Israeli governments are elected nominally for four years) saw Peres as Prime Minister and Shamir as Foreign Minister, while Rabin was the Minister of Defence for the whole duration. It was the first government in Israel that was faced not with a huge military challenge but an economic one. It encountered an inflation of 435 percent and there was a need to issue a 10,000 shekel note (for Jews who came from Germany this reminded them of the Weimer Republic economic crisis). That meant that within one year, the price index was tripled and in the early months of 1985 it increased even further. At the same time, the economic index grew by 100 percent and it seems that the liberalisation economy, preached by one of the gurus of 20th century capitalism, Professor Milton Friedman of the University of Chicago, and implemented at the same time in Britain and the USA, had disastrous consequences and had to be halted.

In essence, the Unity government had to rectify fundamental mistakes made by successive Likud governments since 1977. One of them was an irresponsible policy that dropped prices of cars and electric equipment to absurd levels and encouraged everyone, including the banks, to go wild in their speculative purchase of stocks and dubious investments. The big banks regulated the trading in the stock exchange to their own benefit. They produced an artificial demand for their stocks using, among other things, pension funds of the public. In mid-1983, the public lost its confidence and wanted to sell the stocks and bonds it bought as a 'solid investment' (as the banks promised them). The public wanted to buy dollars instead and wanted to sell the stocks. The banks did not have the money to pay. The only way to save the banks was for the government to pay the banks' debt and in a way namely nationalise them temporarily (in a similar way as the British government saved some of the local banks in 2008). It was too late for one Israeli iconic way of life – the collective Kibbutz. The Kibbutzim were lured by the banks to invest in the stock exchange and suffered probably more than anyone else from the collapse. It became a turning point and gradually they were privatised and became normal Israeli suburbia. The state was waiting for a saviour ('Waiting for the Messiah' was the most popular pop song from 1985 capturing beautifully the whole crisis, composed and sung by one of Israel's foremost performers, Shalom Hanoch). The Unity Government indeed was such a saviour. It stopped the inflation, created a new currency and saved the banks.[17] I will return to this episode once more in the next chapter when discussing the political economy of Israel.

Also on other fronts, the Unity government had a stabilising affect. It withdrew from many parts of Lebanon and concentrated the Israeli army in the southern part

of the occupied country. However, there were still several stumbling blocks they could not easily overcome. The most important one was the peace process with the Palestinians; there the divergence of opinions within the government was deep and unbridgeable. The Labour party, or more precisely Shimon Peres, attempted to reach an agreement over the fate of the occupied territories with Jordan. In 1987, he concluded a secret and principled agreement with King Hussein in a London meeting. However, his partner, and rival in the government, Shamir, leaked the agreement prematurely and foiled the whole move. The lack of progress on this front is one of the main reasons for the eruption of the First Intifada, the uprising in the occupied territories in the end of 1987.[18]

Until that moment, it seemed that the conflict with the Palestinians was on the margins of public interest. Occasionally, Palestinian guerrilla efforts penetrated through the wall of indifference and oblivion. One such an event was an operation led by Ahmed Jibril (who ceded from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – the PFLP – and created his own guerrilla movement) in which a group of guerrillas captured six Israeli soldiers in the occupied Southern Lebanon. This ended in a huge prisoners' swap, which saw the release of more than 1,000 Palestinian political prisoners. However, this was not enough for Israel and the world at large to be attentive to the plight of the Palestinians in the occupied territories; what was needed was a more fundamental shake up (intifada in Arabic) and it came in December 1987.

The First Intifada and its aftermath

Nineteen years after being occupied by Israel, it seemed the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had enough and their uprising began in December 1987. It was triggered by an accident in the Gaza Strip in which Palestinians were killed in what was deemed by the local population as an intentional run down. The reasons for the uprising were of course much more profound. Primarily, the Palestinians were under a harsh military rule, based on emergency regulations and run by a military regime that controlled every aspect of their lives. Arrests without trial, confiscation of land, demolition of houses, expulsions and total denial of basic human and civil rights pushed the Palestinians into despair. The diplomacy focused on a futile attempt to reach a tripartite Israeli-Egyptian-Jordanian arrangement for the territories, which failed dismally and did not include any contact with the main representative body of the Palestinians: the PLO.

There was very little hope for any help from the Arab world. An Arab League summit, convened in 1987, hardly paid any attention to the plight of the Palestinians. Their own leadership, the PLO, was stranded in Tunis, after being expelled by Israel from Lebanon in 1982. The uprising was planned and executed by a local leadership and consisted of demonstrations, temporary liberation of villages and strikes. The Israeli reaction was harsh and brutal but the uprising convinced the US and the rest of the world to be more deeply involved in the peace process. It led first to the Madrid Conference and then to the Oslo Accord, two developments that will be discussed in full later on in this chapter.

Already in the first year into the Intifada two new factors emerged that would further integrate Israel's own history with that of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The first was the emergence of strong political Islamic movements on both sides of the Green Line, led by the Hamas (there was also an Islamic awakening inside Israel among the Palestinian citizens centred around a new movement called the 'Islamic Movement'). Quite a few scholars assert that in the 1970s Israel initially helped the Hamas to become a prominent power as it hoped it would balance the secular national movement led by the Fatah.[19] If this is indeed the case, this was a grave mistake as Israel found out that the Hamas was a tough and brave opponent and one that complicated further the Jewish State's attempt to control the Palestinians in the occupied territories peacefully.

The second development was the Jordanian decision to cede any connection with the West Bank. In an emotional speech on television, the Jordanian ruler, King Hussein, announced the cessation. Israel was now alone controlling both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, occupying millions of people against their will and aspirations. This explains why quite a few among the Israeli policy makers were willing to divert from their total refusal to negotiate the future of these territories with the PLO and laid the ground for a direct Israeli-PLO dialogue which will be discussed a bit later in this chapter.

The two other territories Israel occupied in 1967, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights, seemed to cause less concern and consternation. The Sinai was gradually returned to Egypt, as mentioned causing a rift within the Israeli right and required eviction by force of the two towns Israel built in the Peninsula: Yamit in the north and Ofira in the south. However, the story here was over; done and dusted. As for the northern front not much happened there The Rabin government was interested in probing the possibility of a bilateral negotiation with Syria but there was not much hope for a solution since Israel officially annexed the Golan Heights in 1981. On the other hand, both sides were religiously adhering to the terms and stipulations of the 'disengagement agreement'[20] brokered after the end of the 1973 October war, and until today, despite Israeli clashes with Syrian forces in Lebanon, and Israeli bombing of Syrian targets since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the Golan Heights has not become, as yet, a military front.

A year into the Intifada, on November 1988, the Unity government was dissolved and Israel went for yet another campaign of national elections. Israeli historiography attributes the results of these elections, yet another victory for the Likud, to a terrorist attack in which a mother and three of her children were killed near Jericho.[21] It seemed, however, that Labour had only a chance to win elections if it had a war hero, or a tough general as its leader. The person who led the party in 1988, Shimon Peres, was not such a person and he lost to one of Israel's greyest and least charismatic politicians, Shamir. This was bound to be Rabin's second chance but he had to wait until Shamir's government ran its course.

The Shamir government, 1989–1992

Although Shamir's victory was with a small margin, he could have established a right-wing government, with the help of the religious parties in Israel. He eventually opted for another composition, which was another version of a Unity government. It may be a good moment, to break shortly from the narrative and say something about the religious parties in Israel at that time as they played a major role in the making and unmaking of this government. The biggest party was *Mafdal*, the Hebrew acronym for the national religious party. It was officially established in 1956 as an alliance between older religious Zionist movements. The party was fundamentally transformed after the June 1967 war and became a right-wing messianic party forming a crucial role in the lobby for a greater Israel. The other religious political group came from the ultra-Orthodox religious community. It was represented by several parties whose tactics kept changing since their inception, at times joining forces, at times fighting each other according to a narrow factional interest. The principal party among them was *Agudat Israel* (the Association of Israel in Hebrew). The party had already been established in 1912 in Europe and was an important partner to 'The Status Quo' agreement of 1947, I have mentioned earlier, regulating the relationship between the secular and religious Jewish societies in Israel. Until the early 1980s, *Agudat Israel* was the only parliamentary party of the ultra-Orthodox Jews (a community which included streams that objected totally to any association with the Jewish State and therefore did not partake in the democratic process – the most famous among them are *Neturei Karta* – the Gatekeepers – who also have a sizeable presence in the USA and the UK).

The political constellation of these parties changed dramatically with the establishment of a Mizrahi ultra-Orthodox party, *Shas* (*Shin* and *Samech* are two letters from the Hebrew alphabet – parties are represented in the Israeli ballot box with letters on small paper slips in both the municipal and national elections). The impulse behind this party was a strong sense of deprivation and discrimination felt by Mizrahi Jews who were ultra-Orthodox or just more traditional then the Ashkenazi Jews. Ironically, it was first an Ashkenazi Rabbi, Rabbi Shach, who founded the party for them. Soon after, a Mizrahi Rabbi, Ovadia Yossef, became the party's guru and spiritual leader. Rabi Shach, established his own Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox party, called *Degel HaTora* (the Tora's Flag) in 1988. The final accord came in 1992 when *Degel HaTora* and the old *Agudat Israel* united into a new party, *Yahadut HaTora* (the Tora's Jews). Not only will the readers be confused by this proliferation, but also Israeli commentators find it hard to follow. To simplify the picture, we can say since then and until today ultra-Orthodox Jews have two parties: one Mizrahi, *Shas,* and one Ashkenazi, *Yahadut HaTora*. There were then and today, profound disagreements and mutual suspicion between the two parties. The main bone of contention is education, which is highly subsidised by the state and controlled by the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox educational institutions. *Shas* often accuses the Ashkenazi institutions, with justification, of racism and discriminatory policies towards their Mizrahi students.

Back to 1989 and Shamir's decision to call upon his nemesis, the Labour party, to help him form a more consensual government. However, this time, he did not offer rotation and remained the Prime Minister. A year and a half into the government, Shimon Peres, the leader of the Labour party tried a manipulation that would cost him temporarily (until 1995) his party's confidence and leadership. It is known in Israeli popular recollection as the 'The Dirty Trick' (*hatargil hamasriah*) – nicknamed so originally by Peres' nemesis, Yitzhak Rabin. Peres colluded with *Shas*, the Mizrahi Orthodox party, to topple the government in which he was a minister in a non-confidence vote in the Knesset. On March 15, 1990, *Shas* and the *Maarach* (the Labour party) toppled the government but Shamir succeeded in reverting their decision by persuading *Shas* to retract and re-build the old alliance between the right and the ultra-Orthodox parties. The new government had a very narrow base in the parliament but enough to sustain it for a few years.[22]

It is quite typical of Israel's history that in the two years in which Shamir was a Prime Minister (Labour came to power in 1992) dramatic developments occurred in almost every aspect of life. The most eventful among them was the first Gulf War of 1991. The decision of the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, to retaliate against the American military operation to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, by launching missiles into Israel, was a new experience for the Israeli society. The primitive old Soviet-made *Scud* missiles, lost much of their lethality on the long way from Iraq, hence the only casualty inflicted was by a panicked citizen who was unable to fit his gas mask properly. Israelis were asked to cover their faces with gas masks as it was feared that the intercontinental ballistic missiles would be armed with biological or chemical weapons, which proved to be an unfounded fear. Nonetheless, thousands of flats and houses were hit by the missiles and masses of people fled from the greater Tel-Aviv area, which was mainly targeted, to the relatively safe north and south of the state. The military spokesperson at the time, Nachman Shay, became the voice of calm and reason (through the air) and kind of a nanny figure directing the citizens through the mask fitting and running to shelters. It won him a political career later.

Quite possibly, the low number of casualties was also due to the American anti-missile defence system, 'the Patriot' (although the Israeli army regarded it as inefficient and produced its own system, the Arrow and Iron Dome, which was much more effective). As often is the case in the history of Israeli technological history, military need breeds innovations. The military know-how in the field of missiles has also led to breakthroughs in the realm of space science. In September 1988, Israel launched its first independent satellite, *Ofek* (horizon in Hebrew) to space.

The war led to the Madrid peace conference in 1991. This conference was convened by the American President, George Bush Sr. in the wake of the first Gulf War who wished to associate in the public mind the American liberation of Kuwait with wider issues that concerned the Arab world, first and foremost, the Palestine Question. The conference was an American reward for its Arab allies

in the coalition against Iraq. However, it was much more than that. It was quite an exceptional American effort as it related to both sides of the conflict in a more neutral way, something American administrations have not done before or after.

It was also unique as the conveners adopted a multilateral approach to the conflict in Israel and Palestine and analysed it within the context of other problems of the Middle East. This too was not attempted again since and would give way to the preference of bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. This author disagrees with most of his colleagues who see the direct bilateral approach as the more productive and promising one. I think the Madrid formula was much more relevant and helpful, but I have to advise the readers that this is not a common view. The approach was actually conceived already during the days of the Reagan administration by the then Secretary of State, George Shultz. The Prime Minister, Shamir, rejected then the idea claiming Israel only believed in direct, bilateral, dialogue, which he hoped would never occur. The Bush Sr. administration was more insistent on such an approach, because it promised it as a reward to the various Arab states that joined the USA in pushing Iraqi forces out of Kuwait in 1991. It was mostly the work done by the new Secretary of State, James Baker, which enabled an international conference in Madrid to probe the new paradigm for peace. He agreed to only one Israeli condition that the Palestinians would not send a separate delegation but would be part of a Jordanian-Palestinian negotiation team (and that the Palestinians would not be directly associated with the PLO and would come exclusively from the occupied territories). The US also declared openly that it would not recognise the PLO or be in direct contact with the organisation (although the USA had already begun direct negotiations with the PLO in 1988, after years of declaring the organisation to be a terrorist one).

In truth, the Palestinians who arrived were part of the PLO in one way or another. However, this was a charade everyone was willing to play. Russia, the United States, the EU and the UN sent their most senior representatives to the conference. George Bush Sr., Mikhail Gorbachev and the Spanish King were among the guests. The other parties were asked to send foreign ministers. Shamir insisted he should head the Israeli delegation. Henry Kissinger said famously Israel has no foreign policy, only a domestic one: the composition of the Israeli delegation was more proof for the validity of this observation. Shamir invited his Foreign Minister, David Levy, to join him. But this Moroccan Jew from a deprived development town in the east, who had risen to power through Menachem Begin after starting life in Israel on a construction site, saw the whole affair as a typical racist Ashkenazi snub. Instead, Shamir invited the Deputy Foreign Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and through that opened a career for the young man that would later bring him to dominate Israeli politics in the next century.

The measured approach of the Americans and their relative impartiality has allowed some progress in at least putting on the table, for the first time, all the outstanding issues between Israel and the Palestinians (there was less need to push forward Israel's bilateral negotiations with neighbouring Arab states as Israel had already established effective channels of communication).

Two Israeli governments participated in this venture: the Shamir government (1989–1992) and the second Rabin government (1992–1995). Shamir had no wish whatsoever to help the Americans find a solution, as he was determined to retain the status quo which he asserted could persist for a hundred years, to Israel's advantage. Rabin opted eventually for a direct dialogue with the PLO, under the Oslo Accord and by that ended the process that began in Madrid.

It seems that also the Palestinian leadership in exile wanted a more direct approach – contrary to the wish of the Palestinian leadership in the occupied territories – and abandoned this conference's paradigm for what became known as the Oslo Accord, of which more will be said a bit later on. The events in Madrid were ignored by the Israeli society, both the Jewish and the Palestinian one. It seemed like a continuation of the charade of peace that followed the bilateral peace agreement with Egypt named as the 'autonomy talks' – a peace process to nowhere. They were more concerned by a demographic development that occurred around the days of the Madrid conference, and which would have an enormous effect on the Jewish society and Israel as a whole: the massive immigration from the former Soviet bloc.

The Russian influx

The relative liberal policies of Mikhail Gorbachev opened the gates to masses of Jews and non-Jews who wished to try life elsewhere. The main destination for all of them was Europe and the USA. However, not everyone could go westward (in 1990 the USA made it very difficult by law for immigrants from the Soviet Union to immigrate to its shores) while Israel offered a very tempting absorption package which included housing and employment. No wonder that many did choose to go to Israel (one million had already arrived by 2000). Quite a few of them were not Jewish, but were admitted mainly because they were not Arabs and they were deemed as a demographic antidote to the Palestinian society inside and outside the 1967 border.[23] Later, these Christian communities, making up at least forty percent of the overall immigrant waves, would disrobe their phony Jewish cover and live full Christian lives. However, there was a shortage of clergy that could serve them and therefore, ironically, the Palestinian Christian community was asked to help find what Palestinian leaders jokingly referred to as Christian rabbis. Some of the more extreme members of these communities shortly after the arrival ganged up as neo-Nazi and even anti-Semitic groups – although this particular phenomenon has since been in decline.

Whether Jewish or not, the Russian community became a cultural ghetto. It has its own newspapers, TV and radio station, theatre and places of congregation.[24] It also has a successful sectarian party – *Israel Betienu* (Israel is Our Home). Individually, however, there are some impressive success stories of Russian Jews who made it to the top as generals, ministers and even as a speaker of the house. When they are not acting collectively as a distinct immigrant group, their politics by and large are right-wing – full support for harsh and 'hawkish' policies towards the Arab world

in general and the Palestinians, including those inside Israel, in particular. Their socio-economic worldview, with the risk of reasonable generalisation, can be defined as an extreme support for neo-liberal capitalism. They are also largely secular which made it hard to define them in terms of left-right politics in Israel. The left in Israel is associated with a strong secular point of view but also a 'dovish' attitude towards the Palestinians (manifested in a support for the two-state solution). The latter position is rejected by most of the Russian electorate, hence the confusion in locating this group politically within the existing map.

Incidentally, just before Russian immigration made its impact on the Israeli society, and on the eve of the 1992 elections, the last, so far at least, attempt was made by conscientious legislators in Israel to protect human and civil rights. This could have been a crucial development in a state that became blinder and less caring for these rights (a trend to which the Russian immigration has contributed). In 1991, the basic law of human rights was passed in the Israeli Knesset (Israel does not have a constitution and a basic law is as close as it comes to constitutional laws which can only be abolished by a decisive majority in the Knesset). The law had little impact on the society that moved to the next century with less interest in these rights than ever before.

The legislation was part of an overall, but momentary now we know in hindsight, attempt to prevent Israel from deteriorating into the path charted for it by the right-wing nationalist parties. The Labour party received another chance to lead in the 1992 elections.

The second Rabin government, 1992–1995

The perennial problem facing the Labour party was the ongoing rivalry between Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin. This time it was decided that leadership would be determined through a more democratic process that involved all the members of the party. Peres' popularity was quite low and Rabin easily won the day. He had a tougher task vis-à-vis Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud but despite a very ugly attempt of character assassination, he won the general elections as well. However, in parliament he needed to rely on the Palestinian members of Knesset, who were not invited to join his coalition but gave him a 'blocking front' (in British politics, this is called a 'confidence and supply' agreement as the one concluded between Jim Callaghan's Labour party and the Liberal party in 1977 and in 2017 between the Conservative party and the DUP of Northern Ireland). This front guaranteed that the opposition could not topple Rabin's government, despite the low number of members in the coalition (only half of the Knesset members, sixty out of one hundred and twenty, supported it, but a draw in the Knesset is not enough to bring a government down).

On the face of it, the second Rabin government seemed to re-orientate Israel to the left. The first act of the government, however, did not broadcast a more dovish or reconciliatory attitude towards the Palestinians. The government decided to expel 415 Palestinian Hamas activists to Southern Lebanon. It is noteworthy that

no international law, or for that matter Israeli law, allows such an act of deportation. Banishment had been employed by Israel before during the days of the military rule the state imposed on the Palestinian citizens between 1948 and 1967, and against individuals since 1967 in the occupied territories. The American administration exerted strong pressure on Israel and the banished Palestinians returned after a year or so. Historians of the Palestinian resistance claim that this short spell, in which the expelled Palestinians were hosted by Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon, prepared the Hamas for a more focused and militarised campaign, including suicide bombs, which commenced in the mid-1990s.[25]

However, it was at the end of the day, a government seeking peace on all fronts. It began by an attempt to reach a peace treaty with Syria over the fate of the Golan Heights. The negotiations were quite advanced but two conflicting agendas inside the government shifted the focus from peace with Syria to peace with the PLO. This was the agenda of the two eternal rivals the Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres. Rabin thought that conducing two parallel peace negotiations with the Syrians and the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would put pressure on both sides to advance. As one of the Palestinians negotiating with Rabin's team in Washington recalled, it was Peres' team that advised them not to take this route seriously and promised to open a direct line with the PLO, and bypass the leadership in the occupied territories.[26]

Peres sent his deputy, Yossi Beilin, to secret talks with the PLO first in London and then in Oslo, under the auspices of FAFO, the Norwegian Institute for Peace Studies, in search of a bilateral agreement. This initiative was hidden from Rabin and his team. When Peres reported to Rabin about the significant advance the team had made in its negotiations with the PLO, at first Rabin tried to stop this connection but eventually consented to allow it to continue and gave it his blessing.

At that stage, in the summer of 1993 the Americans were also brought into the picture and the agreement was signed as a declaration of principles on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993. The agreement, or the accord as it is referred to in most sources, had several components in it. The first a historical mutual recognition of the PLO and Israel. This is probably the only enduring legacy of this otherwise failed process.

The second component was a formula which suggested that if within five years the PLO, through a new body – the Palestinian Authority – would safeguard Israel's security needs in the occupied territories, Israel would allow it to extend its sovereignty and independence, eventually permitting it to turn the occupied territories into a state (although this promise was never articulated clearly in the accord's documents themselves).

The stress on Israel's security turned the new governing body, the Palestinian Authority, into a sub-contractor, through several newly founded security forces, for Israel's security, at the expanse of its other ambition to run the Palestinian territories as an autonomous entity. The independence of the new governing body was hindered further by an economic agreement from 1994 that accompanied the Oslo

Accord. That agreement robbed the Palestinians of any economic independence: Israel remained the tax collector. Other sources of income were to be very generous future donations of hundreds of millions of dollars per year from the EU and USA. This financial injection did not improve the economic situation as it was impossible under occupation to develop a thriving economy, nor did it help that some of the money was embezzled or inefficiently utilised.

Thus, 'good' Palestinian behaviour was associated with the promise for independence and sovereignty. The formula was simple: proof of 'better' behaviour would trigger Israeli withdrawal from more parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. At first the Palestinian Authority was offered control of the narrow strip, alongside the Jordan River (around the city of Jericho) and in parts of the Gaza Strip (hence the reference to first Oslo agreement as the Gaza-Jericho Agreement).

When this first stage was successfully implemented, the two sides met in the Egyptian resort city of Sharm El Sheikh to discuss the next steps. The agreement became known as the Oslo II agreement. The ceremony of that agreement is engraved in public memory because of an embarrassing scene during the final signing of the agreement. Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader and then the President of the Palestinian Authority, had serious second thoughts and regrets about Oslo II and found it hard to put the final signature on the agreement. He therefore refused to sign it in front of millions of viewers who watched the ceremony live on their screens. The Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, who hosted the negotiations, was seen pushing Arafat back to the desk and almost physically forcing him to sign the document.

Arafat was right in hesitating. The document he signed divided the West Bank into three areas and the Gaza Strip into two areas: a carving up that would make life miserable for the Palestinians, to the extent that most of them regarded life before Oslo as much better than life after it. The West Bank was divided to area A (where the PA had full authority), B (where the PA shared authority with Israel) and C (where Israel had exclusive authority). In the Gaza Strip a bloc of Jewish colonies, Gush Qatif, was excluded from the PA's control (while possessing most of the water sources for the Strip). The Strip was also cordoned off by a barbed wire in 1994.

When translated on the ground, the carving up was complemented by hundreds of checkpoints, expropriation of land and the destruction of the Palestinian countryside. The frustration was exploited by those who opposed the Oslo agreement on both sides. On the Palestinian side, this strengthened the popularity and boldness of the political Islamic groups, such as the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, to stage attacks on Israelis: suicide bombers were the more common method and it hit Israelis hard in their shopping malls and public transportation. The harsh Israeli reaction only deteriorated the reality further and obliterated any remaining support for the peace process on both sides.

The frequent Palestinian suicide bombing in shopping malls and on buses, resulting in a high number of causalities, also strengthened the right-wing in Israel that blamed the Rabin government for betraying the nation. The more religious

elements in this opposition sought their rabbis' approval for indicting the government, and in particular Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, as traitors according to the biblical Jewish law.

Delegitimising Jewish citizens who were deemed traitors continued into the 1990s. The heart of such incitement was in the Jewish colonies in the West Bank. Guided by fanatic rabbis and enthused by daily frictions with local Palestinians a sub-culture of hate and racism built up at the heart of the community in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This was the political territory of the national religious parties, once regarded in Israel as left of centre and natural allies of the Labour party, but since 1967 dominated by messianic movements which regarded the creation of the greater Israel and Jewish religious rule as sacred visions for which they were willing to kill and die. One such person was Yigal Amir, who pulled the trigger that killed Rabin in Tel-Aviv on November 4, 1995 during a peace rally.

Ever since Rabin had supported the Oslo process he was demonised by the Likud party and its allies on the right of Israeli politics. The demonisation intensified after Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish settler from the Jewish colony, Kiryat Arba, in February 1994 massacred twenty-nine worshippers in the Ibrahimi Mosque and wounded 125 of them. This sparked a wave of suicide bombers despatched by all the Palestinian factions all over Israel. The targets were mainly buses and shopping malls and the incidents caused dozens of deaths which shocked the Israeli public.

The heads of the opposition, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, blamed the government's pro-Oslo policy as the reason for the wave of terror. Netanyahu took part in a demonstration where Rabin was donned in SS Nazi officer uniform and several rabbis issued a religious verdict allowing the assassination of the Prime Minister. [27]

The end of century Israel

At the time, the assassination of Rabin was depicted as a huge and dramatic event that would transform Israel forever. From our vantage point today, it seems the society digested the event and in a way moved on but without absorbing the main lessons about the danger of internal political violence. Although, Israeli politics are still relatively non-violent compared to other non-Western states and societies (excluding the daily violence inflicted on the Palestinians).

In hindsight, we can also see today that the warning signs were there for everyone to see already in the early 1980s. In 1982, a right-wing activist threw a grenade into a Peace Now demonstration that called on Israel to leave Lebanon in 1982 and a Jewish demonstrator, Emil Greenzwieg, was killed and nine others were wounded. Political violence had become part of the local scene.

The assassination triggered several processes some short-term and some with a longer impact which are still hard to assess fully as we do not possess the necessary historical distance.

The short-term impact was a genuine trauma among the more moderate settler and national religious communities, which produced an industry of workshops and

projects for reconciliation with the more secular and leftist groups within the society; an impulse that petered out in the next century and has no recognisable remnants today.

The second impact was on domestic politics and was quite surprising. One would have thought that the reaction to Rabin's assassination would be an electoral triumph for the Labour party, headed by Shimon Peres who replaced Rabin as Prime Minister until the 1996 elections. However, this did not happen.

Peres attempted to build his image before the election as someone who could also be trusted on security issues, despite his non-military career. He did it through an unnecessarily huge military operation against Hezbollah in Lebanon in April 1996. Since Israel occupied parts of Lebanon in 1982, the Shiite organisation, Hezbollah, fought a successful war of attrition against the IDF that eventually would force it to leave Lebanon all together in 2000. For three years, between 1993 and 1996, the attrition war raged on and reached a climax in the spring of 1996. In April 1996, Hezbollah launched *Qatyusha* rockets into Israel, and Israel retaliated in an operation codenamed, 'Grapes of Wrath'. Israel attacked Southern Lebanon by sea, air and land. It went terribly wrong when on April 11, 1996, the army bombarded a refugee camp near the village of al-Qana. Tens of refugees were killed, among them women and children. During the operation, Hezbollah launched more than 700 rockets into Israel.

At the same time, all the suicide bombing inside Israel intensified and this may explain why Peres was unable to win the 1996 elections. These elections were unique in Israeli history: it was the first time that a Prime Minister was elected directly by the electorate (and not by his party members). Benjamin Netanyahu won, striking an alliance with *Shas,* mentioned before, which did particularly well in the elections carrying the banner of the champions of equality for the discriminated Mizrahi Jews.

At first, Netanyahu sought confrontation with the Palestinian Authority, by provocatively authorising excavation of tunnels below Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount where the holy al-Aqsa Mosque stands). This triggered clashes between the Israeli army and armed police officers of the Palestinian Authority. However, this was forgotten when Netanyahu succumbed to American pressure to show some progress in the peace process and concluded an agreement with the PA, the Wye Agreement. This agreement did not focus on Jerusalem but on another point of friction – the city of Khalil or Hebron. At the heart of this Palestinian city, few hundred Jewish extremists settled, with government blessing, terrorising their Palestinian neighbours. The Wye Agreement divided the old city of Hebron between the Jewish settlers colonising its heart and the rest of the city that was given to the PA.

The right-wing turned against Netanyahu because of this agreement and the temporary fragmentation in the right-wing parties in Israel allowed, so far for the last time, Labour to come back. As in 1992, they needed a war hero again to lead them. This time it was Ehud Barak, a fierce commando officer, who became the chief of the general staff and won easily the internal elections in the defeated and deflated Labour party. He went on to win the general elections in 1999.

The political scene in the 21st century

One of Ehud Barak's immediate assignments was to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon. He was helped by a popular movement that demanded unilateral Israeli withdrawal (led by mothers of soldiers there and aptly called 'the Four Mothers' movement) and by twin tragic accidents: a commando operation that failed and caused many causalities and more importantly an aerial collision between two military helicopters carrying troops to Lebanon that resulted in the death of more than seventy soldiers.

Barak tried first to reach an agreement with Syria over control in Southern Lebanon, but failed, and neither were the Lebanese willing to redraw the northern border of Israel. Israel negotiated with the UN and annexed a small part of Southern Lebanon in the process of withdrawal – this caused further clashes with Hezbollah culminating in the second Lebanon war in 2006 – a war of mainly mutual bombardment of civilian populations on both sides, with the highest number of the causalities on the Lebanese side (due to the lethal power of the Israeli air force). Today this area is still a bone of contention that has the potential of igniting Israel's northern border once more.

The hastened, and somewhat panicked, withdrawal commenced on May 24, 2000. With the retreating Israeli soldiers came the members of the South Lebanese Army (the Maronite para-military group that assisted Israel in the occupation since 1978). They have tried to integrate into their new home, with partial success.

With the withdrawal, Barak could turn his attention once more to the Palestinian question. By the year 2000, it was clear that Israel's main security issue, control over the Palestinians, would not be solved by the Oslo peace process that was concluded seven years earlier. In hindsight, it seems that it was doomed to fail.

Western and Israeli scholarship claim that the failure was caused by the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat's refusal to respect the Palestinian pledges made in the 1993 accord.[28] However, this allegation does not bear scrutiny. He could not enforce pledges that were impossible to keep. For example, the Palestinian authorities was called upon to act as Israel's security sub-contractor inside the occupied territories and ensure that there would be no resistance activity. More implicitly, Arafat was expected to accept the Israeli interpretation of the final settlement emerging from this accord without debate. The Israelis presented this *fait accompli* interpretation to the PLO leader in the summer of 2000 at the Camp David summit, where the Palestinian leader negotiated the final agreement with the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, and the American President, Bill Clinton.

Barak demanded a demilitarised Palestinian state, with a capital in a village near Jerusalem, Abu-Dis, and without parts of the West Bank such as the Jordan Valley, the big Jewish settlement blocs and areas in Greater Jerusalem. The future state would not have an independent economic and foreign policy and would be autonomous only in certain domestic aspects (such as running the educational system, tax collection, municipalities, policing and maintaining the infrastructures on the ground). The formalisation of this arrangement would signify the end of the

conflict and terminate any future Palestinian demands in the future (such as the right of the 1948 Palestinian refugees to return).

After the Palestinians rejected the deal, there was an informal attempt by the Deputy Israeli Foreign Minister, Yossi Beilin, to offer a more reasonable one. The most important Israeli gesture was on the issue of refugees: Beilin agreed to their return to a future Palestinian state and symbolic repatriation to Israel. Yet these informal terms were never ratified by the state. And yet, as negotiations collapsed, it was the Palestinian leadership, rather than the Israeli politicians, who were accused of being intransigent, leading to the collapse of Oslo.

The American and Israeli allegation that the peace process ended due to Palestinian intransigence infuriated both the Palestinian leadership and public. This Palestinian anger was initially translated into non-violent protest that was crushed by brutal force by Israel. The callous repression of these demonstrations led to a more desperate response – the suicide bombs that appeared as the last resort in the face of the strongest military power in the region. There is telling evidence by Israeli newspaper correspondents how their reports on the early stages of the Intifada – as a non-violent movement that was crushed violently by the Israeli army – were shelved by the editors so as to fit the narrative of the government. One of them was a deputy editor of *Yediot Aharonot* , the main daily in the state, who wrote a book about the misinformation produced by the Israeli media in the early days of the Second Intifada.[29] At the same time, official Israeli propagandists claimed this behaviour reaffirmed the famous saying of the veteran Israeli super diplomat, Abba Eban, that the Palestinians do not miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity for peace.

We have a better understanding today of what triggered such a furious Israeli reaction. The book, *Boomerang*, by two senior Israeli journalists, Ofer Shelah and Raviv Drucker, included interviews with the Israeli General Chief of Staff and strategists in the Ministry of Defence and offers inside knowledge on the way these officials and generals were thinking about the issue.[30] Their conclusion was that in the summer of 2000 the Israeli army was a frustrated outfit due to its humiliating defeat at the hands of Hezbollah in Lebanon which forced the army to withdraw totally from Lebanon. There was a fear that this retreat made the IDF look weak. And thus a show of force was much needed.

The re-assertion of dominance within the occupied Palestinian territories was just the kind of display of sheer power the 'invincible' Israeli army needed. The army was ordered to respond with all its might, and so it did. When Israel retaliated against a terror attack on a hotel in the seaside resort city of Netanya in April 2002 (where thirty people were killed) it was the first time the army used airplanes to bomb the dense Palestinian towns and refugee camps in the West Bank. Instead of hunting down individuals who carried out these attacks the most lethal and heavy weapons were brought to bear.

In May 2001, President George Bush Jr. appointed Senator George J. Mitchell as a special envoy to the Middle East conflict. Mitchell produced a report about the causes for the Second Intifada. He concluded that:

> We have no basis on which to conclude that there was a deliberate plan by the PA to initiate a campaign of violence at the first opportunity; or to conclude that there was a deliberate plan by the [Government of Israel] to respond with lethal force.[31]

On the other hand, he blamed Ariel Sharon for provoking unrest by visiting and violating the sacredness of the al-Aqsa mosque and the holy places for Islam.

In short, even the disempowered Arafat realised that the Israeli interpretation of Oslo in 2000 meant the end of any hope for normal Palestinian life and doomed the Palestinians to more suffering in the future. This scenario was not only morally wrong in his eyes, but also would have strengthened, as he knew too well, those who regarded the armed struggle against Israel as the exclusive way to liberate Palestine. At any given moment, Israel could have stopped the Second Intifada, but the army needed a 'success' and only when this was achieved through the very cruel operation of 'Defensive Shield' in 2002 and the building of the infamous 'apartheid wall', did the Israelis succeed temporarily in quelling the Second Intifada.

Ever since 2003, and maybe partly due to the wall built around Palestinian areas and in between them, the West Bank has not been an issue for most Israelis any more. It seemed more or less a resolved issue for the time being. It was the Gaza Strip that now attracted the attention of Israelis, as it still does today.

The Gaza Strip and Israel, 2000–2017

The Gaza Strip is a little bit more than two percent of the land mass of Palestine. It did not exist as a separate region in the past. Before 1948, Gaza's history was not unique or different from the rest of Palestine and had always been connected administratively and politically to the rest of the country. As one of Palestine's principal land and sea gates to the world, it tended to develop a more flexible and cosmopolitan way of life; not dissimilar to other gateway societies in the Eastern Mediterranean in the modern era. This location near the sea and on the Via Maris from Egypt up to Lebanon brought with it prosperity and stability until this life was disrupted and nearly destroyed by the Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948.

The Strip was created in the last days of the 1948 war. It was a zone into which the Israeli forces pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from the city of Jaffa and its southern regions down to the town of Bir-Saba (Beersheba of today). Others were expelled to the zone from towns such as Majdal (Ashkelon) as late as 1950, in the final phases of ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Thus, a small pastoral part of Palestine became the biggest refugee camp on earth.

This huge refugee camp, between 1948 and 1967, was delineated and restricted severely by respective Israeli and Egyptian policies. Both states disallowed any movement out of the Strip and as a result, living conditions became ever harsher as the number of inhabitants doubled. On the eve of the Israeli occupation in 1967,

the catastrophic nature of this enforced demographic transformation was evident across the Strip. This once pastoral coastal part of southern Palestine became within two decades one of the world's densest areas of habitation; without any adequate economic and occupational infrastructure to support it.

The first twenty years of Israeli occupation did allow some movement outside the area, which was cordoned off with a fence. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were permitted to join the Israeli labour market as unskilled and underpaid workers. This was sustained until the Oslo Accord which led to the end of free movement for labourers and created an economic crisis in the Strip.

In 1994, the Gaza Strip became part of the area under the control of the Palestinian Authority, after years of direct Israeli occupation. Within the Strip was a bloc of Jewish settlements, known as Gush Qatif, which was excluded from the PA's rule and was enclaved by military bases, fences and other means to maintain it as a gated community.

This reality changed in 2005. The local Palestinian resistance against the occupation in general, and against the settlers in the Gaza Strip in particular, intensified in this year (as part of the on-going Second Intifada).

The struggle was spearheaded by the Hamas movement. Its name is the Arabic acronym for the Islamic resistance movement and it also means literally enthusiasm. In the second half of the 1980s, it grew out of a local branch of the Islamic fundamentalist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt. It began as a charity and educational organisation that transformed into a political movement during the 1987 Palestinian uprising, the First Intifada. It published a charter in 1988 that asserted that only political Islamic dogmas had a chance of liberating Palestine. How to implement these dogmas, or what they really mean, was never fully explained or demonstrated as the movement, since its inception and until today, is involved in an existential struggle against the West, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt.

When it surfaced as a political movement in the late 1980s, its main rival in the Gaza Strip was the Fatah movement. The Fatah is the main organisation within the PLO, which it took over from the Arab League in 1968. It lost some of the support of the Palestinian people when it negotiated the Oslo agreement and founded the Palestinian Authority (hence the chair of the PLO is also the President of the Palestinian Authority and the head of Fatah). The Fatah is a secular national movement, with a strong left-wing outfit in it, inspired by Third World liberation ideologies of the 1950s and 1960s and in essence still committed to the creation in Palestine, as a final vision, a democratic and secular state for all. Strategically, however, the Fatah is committed to the two-state solution since the 1970s and is still so today.

Hamas challenged the Fatah's pro-Oslo policy, its lack of attention to social and economic welfare and its basic failure to end the occupation. This challenge became significant when Hamas decided to run at the beginning of this century as a political party in municipal and national elections. Hamas' popularity both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip rose because of the prominent role it played in the

2000 second uprising, *Intifada al-Quds*, in which its members were willing to become human bombs, or at least take a more active role in resisting the occupation, as part of the struggle against the occupation (one should say that during that Intifada the young members of the Fatah also showed the same resilience and commitment; one of its iconic leaders of that trend, Marwan Barghouti, is still in Israeli jail for his role in that uprising).

After Yasser Arafat's death in November 2004, there was political vacuum in the leadership and the Palestinian Authority according to its own constitution had to conduct presidential elections. Hamas boycotted these elections as it asserted the process would be too closely associated with the Oslo process and less with democracy. It did, however, participate in the same year, 2005, in municipal elections and did very well (it took control over one third of the municipalities in the occupied territories) and did even better in the elections in 2006 to the parliament (the legislative assembly of the PA as it is called). It had a comfortable majority there and therefore had the right to form the government, which it did for a short while, before finding itself in a clash with both the Fatah and Israel. In the ensuing struggle, it was ousted from any official political power in the West Bank, but took over the Gaza Strip.

This was possible because the Israeli government decided to evict the Gaza Strip in 2005. The decision to leave the Strip was part of a strategy that was meant to strengthen the Israeli hold over the West Bank and to control the Gaza Strip from the outside without worrying about the settlers who used to live there.

The operation included a very dramatic forced eviction of thousands of Jewish settlers the government had sent there to settle in 1969. The pull out of the settlers was followed by elections in the occupied territories to the National Assembly, the Palestinian parliament, and as mentioned the Hamas did very well both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli unilateral withdrawal was followed by internal clashes between the Hamas and the Fatah over the Strip's control. The clash evolved around the question of whose military power would reign in the Strip. In the wake of the parliamentary elections a kind of a Unity government was established. The government had included a Hamas Minister of Interior, responsible for the security forces. The President, Mahmoud Abbas, Abu Mazen, in an attempt to weaken the Hamas, transferred the responsibility for the security forces to the head of the Palestinian Secret Service (a Fatah member). The Hamas responded by creating its own security forces in the Gaza Strip.

This was the backdrop to the onset of what one may call a civil war in the Gaza Strip in December 2006. It was triggered by a violent clash in the Rafah Crossing, connecting the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, involving the Presidential Guard (loyal to the Fatah and the PA) and the Hamas security forces. The clashes continued until the summer of 2007.[32]

Even before this internal civil war came to an end, the relationship between Israel and the Hamas deteriorated and led to the first serious military confrontation between the two sides in 2006 (which coincided with a second Lebanon war

between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006). A similar daring act of abducting Israeli soldiers triggered the two clashes in the south and the north; Israel using both abductions as a pretext for launching large-scale operations against the two movements.

In the north, Hezbollah's capture of three soldiers began a few weeks of intensive mutual bombardment of Lebanon's Shiite strongholds and the country's infrastructure by Israel and of the Galilee by Hezbollah, including the city of Haifa. Israel despatched forces into Southern Lebanon which were bitterly opposed by Hezbollah fighters. It ended with an agreement that holds on until today of a permanent ceasefire, but a precarious one.

In the south, the Hamas abducted an Israeli soldier, whose name became familiar around the world because of the long negotiations that ensued to swap him with Palestinian political prisoners (whereas the three Israeli soldiers in the north were badly wounded and died soon after and hence were 'forgotten'). His name was Gilad Shalit.

Shalit was captured in June 2006 and Israel retaliated by a military operation named 'Summer Rain' followed by a large-scale operation 'Autumn Clouds' in November that year. Here too, the Israeli army despatched forces into the Strip. Unlike in the north, the Israeli army did not incur heavy casualties, but the Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza paid a high price. In the end of both operations almost 200 of them were killed, half of them women and children. Unfortunately, this was not the end of their suffering.

The next round came soon after as the main bones of contention were not resolved. In reaction to the Hamas victory in the election and in pushing out the Palestinian Authority from the Strip, Israel imposed a siege on the Strip. The military operations by Hamas were mainly an attempt to bring an end to the siege. Israel defined Hamas as a terrorist organisation and continued its collective punishment of the Strip as a whole. Thus, the next round was inevitable.

Several clashes in 2008 ended with a shaky ceasefire. When it was violated (both sides blaming each other for it) it triggered another violent round that as before ended with few casualties for the Israeli army, damage and fear to Israeli towns and settlements hit by primitive missiles launched form the Strip, called Qassam[33] missiles, and a high death toll among the Palestinian inhabitants of the Gaza Strip.

Israel broke the ceasefire on November 4, 2008, under the pretext that it exposed a tunnel excavated by the Hamas – allegedly in place for another abduction operation. Within a few years, the Hamas was building tunnels out of the besieged Gaza Strip in order to bring food, move people and indeed as part of its resistance. The Hamas officials claimed that this specific tunnel was built for defensive reasons.

Hamas responded to an Israeli assault by a barrage of missiles that injured no one and killed no one. Israel stopped its attack for a short period demanding for Hamas to agree to a ceasefire under its conditions, namely, maintaining the status quo. The Hamas' refusal led to the biggest Israeli operation yet, codenamed 'Cast Lead' at the end of 2008.

The Israeli bombardment was relentless and targeted the civilian infrastructure – nothing was spared, hospitals, schools and mosques – everything was hit and destroyed. Hamas responded for the first time by launching missiles into Israeli towns not targeted before such as Beersheba and Ashdod. There were few civilian deaths, but most of the Israeli casualties, thirteen in number, were soldiers killed by friendly fire. 1,500 Palestinians lost their lives in that operation.[34]

The next round came in 2012 with two operations. 'Returning Echo' which was smaller in comparison to the previous ones and deteriorated from a clash on the border and more significantly 'Pillar of Defence' in July 2012 that ended the social protest movement in the summer inside Israel – of which more will be said in the next chapter – which had the potential to bring down the government due to its economic and social policies. There is nothing like a war in the south to convince young Israelis to stop their protest and go and defend the homeland. It worked before, and it worked this time as well.

In 2012, for the first time Hamas reached Tel-Aviv – with missiles that caused little damage and no casualties while, as the typical imbalance was, 200 Palestinians were killed, including many children.

The next, and so far the last Israeli operation against the Gaza Strip, 'Protective Edge' took place in the summer of 2014. The abduction and killing of three settlers in the West Bank provided the pretext for a destructive operation that killed 2,200 Palestinians. Israel itself was paralysed for a while, as Hamas rockets even reached Ben-Gurion airport.

For the first time, the Israeli army tried to fight face to face with the Palestinian guerrillas in the Strip and lost sixty-six soldiers in the confrontation. In this battle between desperate Palestinians, with their back to their wall, enraged by a long and cruel siege, and the Israeli soldiers, the former seemed to have the upper hand; however, the population at large was thrown into an abyss of despair and destruction.

The civil war that erupted in Syria in 2011 and subsequent refugee crisis did not leave much space for international action or interest. However, it seems everything is poised for yet another round between the Hamas and Israel. The most worrying vision is that provided by the UN. The organisation predicted that, at the current rate of destruction, by 2020 the Strip will become uninhabitable. This would be caused not only by military force, but by what the UN called 'de-development' – a process where development is reversed to a degree that puts the whole population under severe existential danger.

Three Israeli military operations in the past six years, in addition to eight years of economic blockade, have ravaged the already debilitated infrastructure of Gaza, shattered its productive base, left no time for meaningful reconstruction or economic recovery and impoverished the Palestinian population in Gaza, rendering their economic wellbeing worse than the level of two decades previous.[35]

This grim reality is not helped by the Egyptian policy. The government there occasionally closes its border with the Gaza Strip, which adds to the strangulation of the people. As I will show in the last chapter in this book, the realities in the

Strip have galvanised the global civil society to try and help the besieged people and to embark on a campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against the state of Israel. The Israeli government defines this campaign as new anti-Semitic de-legitimisation of the Jewish State. This point will be discussed in depth in the last chapter.

I finish this chapter on the political history with the story of Gaza, before moving to Israel's economic and cultural realties, not because it is the only current issue that troubles the state and the society at this moment in time. Far from it, in fact, most Israelis do not seem to take too much interest in the realities of the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. They are far more concerned about their standard of living, the struggle between religious and secular interpretations of Judaism and their general continued sense of insecurity in a volatile area of the world.

The situation in these Palestinian territories concludes this chapter because this is the main difference between the internal perception of Israelis' priorities and concerns and the external perception of the state and the society. The new few chapters, I hope, will present the Israelis' own aspirations and concerns and the last chapter will bring us back to this gap between external and internal images and perceptions, which will remain the main point of attraction and contention for future interest, scholarly or otherwise, in Israel.

Notes

1 On the relationship between the movement and the government on the issue of settlement see Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the Land: The War for Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967–2007*, Washington: Nation Books, 2009.
2 Avi Pikar, *Selective Immigration: The Israeli Policy towards the Jews Immigrating from North Africa, 1956–1961,* Beer-Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2015 (Hebrew).
3 Shalom Cohen and Kokhavi Shemesh, 'The Origin and Development of the Israeli Black Panther Movement', *MERIP Reports*, No. 49, 1976, pp. 19–22.
4 Rafi Mann, *Unthinkable – Quotes; Phrases and Coinages (of Israel)_*, Or Yehuda: Hed Artzi, 1998, p. 85 (Hebrew).
5 Yehuda Avner, 'The Schoenau Ultimatum', *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 February, 2011.
6 John Hughes-Wilson, *Military Intelligence Blunders*, Washington: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2000, p. 248.
7 Mohamed Abdel Ghani El-Gamasy, *The October War: Memoirs of Field Marshal El-Gamasy of Egypt*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1993, p. 181.
8 Dina Rezk, 'Re-evaluating the Yom Kippur "Intelligence Failure": The Cultural Lens in Crisis', *International History Review,* Volume 39, Issue 3, 2017, pp. 470–495.
9 Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Angel: The Egyptian Spy Who Saved Israel*, New York: Harper, 2016.
10 Yoram Peri, *Between Battle and Ballots: Israeli Military in Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 118
11 Dan Perry, *Israel and the Quest for Permanence*, London: McFarland & Co Inc., 1999, p. 46.
12 Yehuda Litani, '"Village Leagues": What Kind of Carrot?', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Volume 11, Issue 3, Spring 1982, pp. 174–178.
13 Mark A. Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p.591.
14 Alek D. Epstein, 'The Freedom of Conscience and Sociological Perspectives on Dilemmas of Collective Secular Disobedience: the Case of Israel', *Journal of Human Rights,* Volume 1, Issue 3, September 2002, pp. 305–320.

15 Bayan Nuwayhed al-Hout, *Sabra and Shatila*, Beirut: PLO Publications, 2004.
16 See James Feron's obituary on Begin in *The New York Times*, 10 March, 1992. http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0816.html.
17 A more 'economic' analysis of this episode will be provided in the next chapter.
18 Madiha Rashid al-Madafi, *Jordan, the United States and the Middle East Peace Process, 1974–1991*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 23
19 Ishaan Tharoor, 'How Israel Helped Create Hamas', *The Washington Post*, 30 July, 2014.
20 This agreement was signed with the help of the American Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger in April 1974 and left almost all of the Golan Heights in Israel's hands, apart from its main town Quneitra that was returned to the Syrians.
21 Joel Brinkley, 'Campaign in Israel Eclipsed by Deaths in Attacks by Arabs', *The New York Times,* 1 November, 1988.
22 Ofer Koenig, 'Twenty Years Later: "The Dirty Trick" in Hindsight', The Israel Democracy Institute, 13 March, 2010 (Hebrew).
23 Smadar Lavi, 'Arrival of the New Cultured Tenants', *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 June, 1991.
24 Olga Gershenson, *Gesher: Russian Theatre in Israel – A Study of Cultural Colonization*, New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
25 See the text of the condemnation in Clyde Haberman, 'Israel Expels 400 from Occupied Lands; Lebanese Deploy to Bar Entry of Palestinians', *The New York Times*, 18 December, 1992.
26 Adam Raz, 'What Israelis Weren't Told About the Alternatives to the Oslo Accords', *Haaretz*, 7 February, 2016.
27 'Israeli Filmmaker: Netanyahu as Much to Blame for Rabin's Death as Yigal Amir', *Haaretz,* 30 January, 2013.
28 See for instance, Gilead Sher, *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999–2001,* London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
29 Daniel Dor, *The Suppression of Guilt: The Israeli Media and the Reoccupation of the West Bank,* London: Pluto Press, 2005.
30 Raviv Drucker and Ofer Shelah, *Boomerang*, Jerusalem: Keter, 2005 (Hebrew)
31 See full text: http://eeas.europa.eu/mepp/docs/mitchell_report_2001_en.pdf
32 'Hamas Accuses Fatah over Attack', *al-Jazeera*, 15 December, 2006.
33 Izz al-Din al-Qassam as mentioned was a revolutionary preacher who was killed in 1935 by the British for his role in leading a Palestinian guerrilla warfare against the Mandate.
34 B'Tselem report: http://www.btselem.org/statistics/fatalities/during-cast-lead/by-date-of-event
35 'Gaza could become uninhabitable in less than five years due to ongoing "de-development" – UN report', *UN News Centre*, 1 September, 2015. See: www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51770

4

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ISRAEL

The political economy of any country is an analysis that transcends the dry data and figures of a conventional economic survey. It includes the relationship between the economy and the society as two integral parts of the same picture. It is a far more judgemental way of looking at a country's economy and it juxtaposes openly the social injustices against the economic achievements. This chapter, which is based on the work of local Israeli political economists, follows the development of the Israeli economy in such vein, and focuses on the realities of the present century.

A short economic history, 1948–2016

The early years of statehood were a time of hard economic realities. Israelis of a certain age and leaning to the left, today look nostalgically at the period when they and their leaders were content with less, or at least this is how it seems from our vantage point. It was also a period when the state functioned as a welfare state, with strong trade unions and a nationalised economy.

In the 1950s and early 1960s Israel, in fact, enjoyed a booming economy. Germany provided Israel with generous compensation money that reached by 1964 around 850 million dollars. However, this period ended with a deep recession that set in during 1966. We now know in hindsight that Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's government deliberately created an economic recession in 1966–1967, but hid that fact from the public so as not to lose its popularity among the voters. Eshkol adopted this strategy already in 1964, with the help of his Finance Minister, Pinchas Sapir. Politicians such as Eshkol and Sapir hoped to build the Israeli economy around expanded heavy industry but faced workers who had different ideas and preferred other ways of making a living. These other sectors at that time contributed very little to the Israeli economy. In 1964, Israel was thus a country relying too heavily on generous German reparations (that decreased significantly after 1964) and

support from the US and the Jewish world. Eskhol and Sapir, with the help of the Director General of the Central Bank, The Bank of Israel, David Horowitz, artificially 'slowed down' the economy; hoping it would limit the choices of workers in the future.

In a speech to the Israeli Knesset, on February 14, 1966, Sapir, when presenting the annual state budget spelled out clearly what 'slowing down' meant: 'We have 100,000 superfluous workers'. They were superfluous since their employment allegedly contributed nothing to the country's output. The solution was unemployment and raising prices. By the time the recession ended, 108,000 people had lost their jobs – twelve percent of the labour force in a country whose population was then 2.6 million. The main sector hit was the construction industry that nearly went bankrupt (it fell by thirty percent), and it was followed by sharp rises in prices. These developments hit mainly the Mizrahi dominated development towns. It was also characterised by emigration out of the country and a decrease in Jewish immigration into the state.[1]

Every economic parameter described here changed dramatically for the better after, and because of, the 1967 war. Was this the reason Israel went to war? We can never fully answer these questions, but like many other historians I do suspect it played a role in the final decision to go to war.[2]

In the post 1967 era, an important watershed was the victory of the Likud in the national elections of May 1977. Until then, the Israeli economy was centralised with only a small private sector. Most of the industry, services and banking sectors were in governmental hands. Israeli economists call this 'the period of the corporative economy', which started in fact in the late 1960s and continued in various degrees until the early 1980s.[3] It was characterised by a growing share of the workers in the national income in relation to the employers' profits. This was mainly the achievement of the strong trade unions and the result of a series of successful industrial actions taken by the unions within the public sector.

The Likud transformed the economy, opened the closed financial and banking markets to competition and supply and demand forces and began privatising public sectors of the economy. Liberalisation included reducing the sales', income and import taxes. It also led to the weakening of the trade unions, which were unable, unlike before, to defend the workers' labour conditions. Thus, the disparity in salaries grew in the 1980s and as neo-liberalism set in as the main ideology inspiring policy makers in Israel, not only did the disparity grow, but also the employers' profits at the expanse of the workers' share in the national income.[4]

The consequences of this policy were quite disastrous. Israel suffered from hyperinflation between 1980 and 1985, before it underwent some reversals back to government regulations to stop the deterioration. There are two explanations economists in Israel give for this particular bad spell. Mainstream economists cast the blame on the surplus of demand and the shortage of raw material. More critical economists claim the militarisation of the economy and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of few financial giants, limited the investments in the public sphere and regulated the growth in the value of assets in the market. The new Likud

government did not have the power in the face of these forces and allowed them to spiral the economy out of control. By militarisation they mean that much of the expenditure went to build a new, huge and modern army.[5]

As mentioned before, this economic calamity in the first half of the 1980s hit the stock exchange market. In 1983, the big banks in the state regulated jointly their joint under-valued stocks. This intervention in the stock exchange's prices and values led to the financial destruction of individuals and companies, including the Kibbutzim movements, which were deeply invested in banks' shares. Eventually the banks themselves collapsed and had to be saved by nationalisation.

In 1985, under the guidance of Shimon Peres, then the Prime Minister of a Unity government the economy was stabilised. Peres had enjoyed a cooperative general trade union (the *Histadrut)* that was willing to cut workers' wages and also secured a very generous American aid package. The foreign currency and budgetary deficits were balanced and a new currency was introduced (1,000 old shekels to one new shekel – the NIS is still Israel's currency today). Thus, under Peres' leadership, by the end of the 1980s, Israel went from a period of rampant privatisation and hyperinflation to a more a balanced economy.

The First Intifada in the occupied territories, which erupted at the end of 1987, nearly caused a new recession and crisis but the arrival of the immigrants from the ex-Soviet bloc energised the economy and, together with tough policies against inflation, the economy was back on track. It was still one of the most capitalist-orientated economies in the world. In fact, the influx of immigrants helped to increase the GDP by about twenty percent. Because of this influx, the population of Israel grew in the 1990s from 4.6 million to 6 million (4.9 million Jews, 1.1 million Palestinian citizens of Israel and about three million Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip).[6]

While the new immigrants were willing to work in areas shunned by most Israelis, and by that contributing to the economy, they pushed out, with the encouragement of the government, the Palestinian workers and employees in Israel (it affected mainly the Palestinian citizens of Israel, but it also hurt the Palestinian workers from the occupied territories who were allowed to enter and seek work in the Israeli labour market).

The ability of the government to deal successfully with large immigration and continue to steady the economy in the 1990s was helped by two factors. The first was the Oslo 1993 peace accord and in particular the bilateral peace agreement with Jordan in 1994, which opened new markets for Israel in the Arab world and probably, and more importantly, eased the all-Arab boycott – an old Arab League decision exerting pressure on countries around the globe not to trade with Israel, if they wished to trade with the Arab world. The second was the entry of international and multinational companies into business in Israel. From this moment onwards, the Bank of Israel, the central bank of the state, began to play an important role in the political economy of the state. It subscribed to a neo-liberal economic view of the world, an ideology that was fully endorsed by the very influential senior civil servants in the Treasury (more about them later on). Both groups, the state bankers and the

management of the Treasury, navigated Israel into the 21st century as a neo-liberal economy.[7]

In the mid-1990s, Israel returned to a harsh version of capitalism. Essential services were privatised. For the first time in the state's economic history previous state monopolies, such as the media and parts of the education system, were handed over to private ownership and interests. As in the mid-1980s, this proved to be one step too far and created another, temporary setback. The new crisis was a local version of the global high-tech crisis which undermined the Israeli economy further. Israel as a state does not enjoy a wealth of natural resources and imports many of its raw materials but had developed impressive high-tech, diamond and military industries. Hence, a global high-tech crisis will always have a huge impact on the Israeli economy. In the period I am covering here, the main manifestation of this crisis was the lay-off of a large number of high-tech employees in big companies and the disappearance of small companies which went bust. Israel was in danger of losing its image as the 'start-up' nation of the Middle East.

The captains of the Israeli economy did not lose hope and one way out of the new precarious situation was to try and reap further dividends from the peace process. The peace with Egypt was holding on, there was still optimism around the Oslo Accord that a solution to the Palestine question was around the corner and it was hoped that Israel was move into an economy of peace. In the second half of the 1990s, pundits noted that several recognised features of what political economists called 'a permanent war economy' were diminishing. These included the downsizing of huge military budgets, limiting further governmental intervention in the local market and an attempt to rely less on American financial aid.

There was also hope, nourished by economists in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD) world, that typical neo-liberal policies would enable economic growth despite the high-tech crisis. These policies are familiar to readers in the West: less interventionist policies by the government in the overall investments in the economy, cuts in direct taxes and of the social services budgets, selling the government's assets and an intentional instigation of austerity in the public space, even to the point of declaring it an official policy.

To complement it all as a successful move towards the future what was missing was a peace settlement with the Palestinians, or at least substantial progress towards its implementation. However, this did not happen. On the contrary, the outbreak of the second uprising in the occupied territories (in October 2000), made things even worse. Israel entered the 21st century, facing a volatile situation in the occupied territories which caused a decline in tourism and in foreign investments and affected the economic activity. The inevitable recession, one of the worst in the state's history, started in 2002.

However, as the readers may guess by now, these recessions in the economic history of Israel are short-lived. Either its own politicians, American money or the volatility of the region always provide a way out. This time too Israel proved to have a resilient economy and if 'peace' petered out as the engine that could propel the economy, the state adapted a softer version of a 'war economy' in its stead. We

define it as softer as it kept the neo-liberal economy on track. What it meant in practice was that the state pushed once more for militarisation, due to the so-called 'Israel's war on terror', which coincided with the 'Western war on terror' launched after 9/11 and hence, once again, arms sales soared and indeed high-tech was back on course as this 'war' required the cutting edge technology that this sector could produce. There was a growing need in the world, in particular in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India for the high-tech's inventive capacity to upgrade counter-insurgence and the war against guerrillas and imaginary or real individual terrorists (later on this knowledge was exported also to the Latin American regime to help fight opposition or crime and even to the American police force).[8]

At the beginning of this century, the Israeli economy was still based on governmental involvement and ownership in crucial industries and financial institutions, but as the century progressed we can note a growing tendency to privatise the governmental share of even the most essential services and public companies (even the checkpoints that are principal means for ruling the West Bank are sourced out and handed over to private security companies).

In the last two decades of the 20th century Israel turned into a developed economy. The great success was achieved through policies of social and economic injustice that left quite a few members of the society behind and unable to reap the fruits of the economic take-off. The success of a state is usually estimated according to its GDP; namely the value of all the commodities and services that particular economy has accumulated annually, divided by the number of population. So, we compare economies according to the GDP of one person within that economy. In 1980, the GDP in Israel was 5,612 dollars per person and in 1999, it rose to 16,531 dollars (the EU GDP in 1999 was 22,321 dollars per person).[9]

The extraction from the crises of the early 1990s and early years of this century is credited to Benjamin Netanyahu in his capacity as Finance Minister, who was appointed in 2003 (as part of Ariel Sharon's government). His good connections, in those days, with the USA, enabled Israel to receive guarantees that gave the final push for a successful end to the temporary recession caused by the Second Intifada.

His main policy was to reduce dramatically the governmental involvement in the economy. He also initiated a very extreme version of an open market policy. As expected while the economy grew in certain macro parameters, such as GDP, reduction of unemployment and increase in stock exchange activity, it augmented the inequalities in the society. Under Netanyahu (who had even more power when elected several times as Prime Minister since 2009), Israel had, and still has today, the widest gaps between rich and poor in the OECD and it also heads the poverty indexes and has the lowest level of reported wellbeing and welfare of the OECD societies.[10]

This relative surge in economic activity and growth was halted once more when Israel was embroiled with yet another war in Lebanon in 2006. However, it seems that this was too short a setback to really warrant a deep analysis. Neither that war nor the never-ending embroilment in the military confrontation with

the Hamas in Gaza seems to be potent enough to drag the Israeli economy into another recession.

That Israel had a stable economy was shown clearly in the way it sailed smoothly through the rough waters of the 2008 world financial crisis. All Israel needed to do to get out safely from the crisis was to lower the interest rate (and for instance did not have to channel more money and currency into its own economy as the USA and Britain had to do). In 2009, Israel was the only state with positive growth in the West. It was left with the problem of a strong local currency against foreign currencies, which caused the national bank every now and then to intervene and redress the balance for the sake of the exporters.

The 2011 protest movement

As noted several times in this chapter, Israeli economic success in this century comes at a price and without solving certain structural problems that are likely to affect it in years to come, this success may prove to be temporary. In macro-economical terms, Israel did better than other economics at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, with its high-tech, military and stable banking system. The price was a struggling middle-class and impoverished communities, mainly the Palestinians in Israel and the ultra-Orthodox Jews. However, its moment of crisis, so far, arrived when the more affluent middle-class felt it could not cope anymore and in the second decade of this century cracks appeared in this picture of success. The middle-class felt it could hardly survive in this new environment and it all erupted in 2011 in a mass socio-economic protest movement, referred to by Israelis as *Ha-Mehaha Hahevratit* (the Social Protest).

One young woman, Daphne Leif, who could not find the means for paying the high rent as a tenant in Tel-Aviv, decided to erect a tent at the centre of the city and began with this a mass movement of protest across the whole country. The recruitment was done through the Facebook network and was inspired by the Arab Spring demonstrations in Cairo and Tunis. At its peak, the movement erected hundreds of tents at the centre of Tel-Aviv and in other parts of the country.

Almost half a million Israelis participated in several big demonstrations, quite unprecedented in the history of Israel. The government responded eventually with creating a committee that had suggestions for facilitating cheaper housing and improving other standard of living aspects: in particular the demonstrators were enraged by the fact that the locally produced food was cheaper abroad than in Israel itself and this is why the protest is also referred to as the 'Cottage Protest'. Cottage is the trade name of a popular soft cheese produced locally and sold at a high, monopolised, price. The producers have reduced the price of the cheese since then, but this seemed to be the only tangible achievement of the protest movement. The Trajtenberg Committee, appointed by the government to respond to the protesters' demands, made some significant recommendations for a change in the economy but most of them have not yet been implemented (Manuel Trajtenberg was the Chairman of the Higher Education Council's Planning and Budget Committee).[11]

One new party, *Yesh Atid* (There is a Future), led by a former TV chat show presenter, Yair Lapid, benefitted most from the protest as it was committed, as a new party, to respond solely to the protesters' demands. Lapid was successful enough to be invited after the national elections in 2013 to join Netanyahu's third government as a Finance Minister, with little success. A year later, Netanyahu fired Lapid, as it was the case, as it often is in Israel, that this appointment was about power, not ideology. Lapid ignored his elections' manifesto and focused on one particular issue that his core group of voters, liberal secular Jews, were interested in: abolishing the ultra-Orthodox Jews' exemption from military service and encouraging their integration into the economy. The natural grown in the ultra-Orthodox community turned them into a young and significant part of the working force in Israel. For many of them work is not an option: they study in their Yeshiva and learning centres and women are not encouraged to work. However, in recent years, the trend has changed and Orthodox women go to the labour market in growing numbers as do the young men and very recently some of them even joined the universities. In any case, Lapid's demands in this respect alienated the ultra-Orthodox parties on which Netanyahu relied for his 2013 government and simple parliamentary arithmetic led the Prime Minister to prefer his old ultra-Orthodox allies over his new secular political partners. Lapid was sent to the opposition benches in the Knesset.

The cause of the social protest was usurped from Lapid in 2014. Moshe Kahlon, a very successful minister in the 2013 Likud government, left his original party and established a new one, *Kulanu* (All together). He replaced Lapid as Finance Minister in the fourth Netanyahu government (elected in 2014) with a very attractive agenda that was meant to address the issues of housing, social welfare and other topics on the list of demands of the social protest movement. As this book is being written he still struggles to show that he is able to satisfy at least some of these demands. Readers will by now understand that Benjamin Netanyahu offers the portfolio of Finance Minister to anyone pretending to represent the social protest, knowing too well that to satisfy these demands there needs to be a fundamental and structural change in the local economy which can be unpopular and, electorally speaking, dangerous.

In hindsight, it seems that the protest was caused by a drastic increase in the cost of living that began in 2007, in particular in the housing market. The Israeli dream is to own a house, and house prices are constantly on the rise. Since 2007, house prices rose almost forty percent; more than the average growth in salaries.[12]

Housing is affected also by a growing involvement of speculates and real estate investors in the housing market, which means that construction is not always pushed forward in order to satisfy the high demand, especially among young people for their first home. In 2011, 138 average monthly salaries were needed to buy a flat (very high compared to the rest of the Western world, and we are talking about small flats in the case of Israel).[13]

Thus, to sum up, one can say that the 2011 social protest focused on standards of living among the Israeli middle-class, with particular focus on the issue of housing.

Hence, the most vivid recollection from this demonstration were huge camps of tents all over Israel's cities that were there until eventually the local authorities dismantled them. At first there was some political activity within the tents in an attempt to form a more cohesive social movement, but eventually it became a refuge for people without accommodation, before it disappeared (still today there is a small camp near one of Tel-Aviv's railway stations). In the wake of the protest, in 2012, there were more violent and desperate smaller protests, ending in one case tragically when one of the protesters set fire to himself (he died later in the hospital).

However, this tragedy did not generate a significant change in the economic realities in Israel. The government found it difficult to respond favourably to the demands of the protests as they were asked to deal with endemic problems of the Israeli economy, something politicians rarely do. In the second part of this chapter, I will enumerate the most important of them.

The political economy of Israel: endemic problems

There are several structural features of the Israeli economy that survived the years and are going to affect the economy in years to come. Here are the most important among them.

Inequality and poverty

Since 2008, Israel has been credited as successful neo-liberal economy with a positive balance of payments and a strong currency. Despite its volatile security conditions, it is still an attractive site for foreign investments (although they have been on the decline in recent years). The price for this relative success are the incremental cuts every year since then in the public services in the areas of health, social welfare and education. As a result, and as noted above, Israel has the worst level of social and economic polarisation in the OECD.

This inequality was already transparent in the beginning of the century. Any analysis of the standard of living, the governmental allocations and the civil services' infrastructure indicated that certain groups in the society would find it difficult to climb the socio-economic ladder. On the lowest rung stood the Jews who came from Ethiopia, Arab countries, Mizrahi Jews and the Palestinian citizens in Israel. The monthly income of these groups was half of that of the groups above them and this gap existed in the other parameters – of investment, labour market, prospects and employability.

Thus, the macroeconomic political achievements are misleading. A very small class of Israelis enjoys a sharp rise in their standard of living, income, education and housing. Two thirds of Israeli employees' salaries are below the average and two thirds of the youth are not eligible for matriculation (equivalent to A level or GSCE in the UK).

There have been other manifestations of this inequality throughout the years. In 1990, the upper decile of the population had nine times more in its share of the

overall income than the lower decile and in 1999, it grew to twelve times more. This disparity was evident in every parameter and as the years go by the gap is constantly growing.[14]

There are some disparities that are prevalent all over the Western neo-liberal system, but seem to be more extreme in the local Israeli version. Such is the incomprehensible disparity between the salaries of senior management in the public and banking sectors and those of their employees. Already, in 1994, these salaries were thirty times more than the minimum wage and thirteen times more than the average salary. In 2000, it was forty times more and seventeen times more respectively. [15]

The worst aspect of such polarisation is poverty. Since 2000 Israeli economists have argued about how to define poverty, or what they call 'the famine line' or 'poverty line'. Annual reports in this century show a constant rise in the number of children who live below this imaginary line, namely in dire poverty. The situation of other members of the family in certain areas and groups is dismally the same. However one defines poverty, more and more people can hardly survive in the Jewish State. Most of them are children, Palestinian citizens and ultra-Orthodox Jews.

The inequalities have also geographical features. The periphery fails in producing university graduates or providing an adequate educational infrastructure. The periphery is still made of Mizrahi Jews, Ethiopian Jews and Palestinian citizens. The gap in the health services is also quite evident between periphery and centre.

The monopoly of the few

There are two kinds of monopoly in Israel – one is exercised in the market and the other over the budget. The private sector is monopolised through few strong families, who have multi-layered companies that control most of the economic activity in the state. Holding companies (companies which do not have a real economic activity, but are running other real companies) and holding pyramids control the Israeli economy and usually they are owned by the same families. These pyramids allow them to control varied aspects of the economy such as the heavy and high-tech industries, insurance, media, investments, banking and construction and tourist companies.

The main drawback of this reality is that since many of these companies hold the pension funds and other investments of the public, any misjudgement they make can affect, and has affected, millions of people. Additionally, whenever these mega companies run into trouble the state rushes to cover their losses as their bankruptcy would be even worse for the public. In recent years, a few of these individuals were sent to jail for rigging the system too much; but they are still very powerful in the economy. When in 2014, Israel began to plan how best to exploit its newly discovered gas fields in the sea, these individuals were quick to take the lion's share despite public outcry and the attempt by others to limit the damage. The failed coalition included politicians of the Labour party, notably the leader of the party, Shelly Yehmivotiz (whose reign was very short lived), some other members of the

Knesset and some media personalities such as the socially conscious radio show host, Keren Neubach.

Another kind of monopoly is held by civil servants. The running of the Israeli economy is concentrated in the hands of one body, within the executive power: the Budget Wing of the Ministry of Finance. This body is the sole authority that determines the macroeconomic parameters in the Israeli economy. It also regulates to a certain extent the overall expenditure by the government. Each ministerial budget is fixed by this body and the Wing also influences budgetary decisions of other governmental bodies. Finally, it possesses a crucial monopoly over the information and intelligence needed for national fiscal and economic policies.

There are historical reasons for this state of affairs. Economic strategy in the first forty years of statehood was in the hands of the government. This included economic development, which became the principal executive tool in the hands of the state. This unit was also regulating and determining the huge amounts of money Israel received in foreign aid in those first forty years. The Treasury, or Ministry of Finance, was always held, at least earlier on, by very senior politicians, which increased the omnipotence of the Budget Wing over the society.

Powerful politicians at the head of the Treasury's pyramid means that civil servants controlling the budget enjoy a direct line to the most senior politicians such as the Finance Minister and the Prime Minister. In this respect, the Treasury was not only an executor of a policy but also its conceiver and formulator. In the West, bodies like this recommend a policy or translate policies formulated higher above. In Israel, this is where policy is made in the economic sphere.

The Budget Wing also determines social policies. Critics of this body such as *Adva*, the socialist-orientated NGO on whose reports this summary is based, claim that the external image of this body as a professional and unbiased unit, absolves it from any public scrutiny either about its basic assumptions or general policies.[16]

Its activity attracted attention among social reform and justice movements in Israel when it became clear in this century that it is constantly cutting budgets for social services while decreasing taxes for companies. It is also showed great generosity towards the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories and a much less generous attitude towards the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The internal examination of how the economy is run emerged forcefully in the 1990s, during the time of the Oslo Accord, when it seemed for a while that issues of defence and security could rest and more focus could be directed to social and economic policies. This decade, as pointed out in the previous chapter, saw the emergence of the post-Zionist intellectual movement and allowed overall openness and willingness to examine the basic truisms underlying life in the Jewish State.

These critical Israeli academics claim that the Budget Wing is running the economy of the state instead of the elected politicians. This is not only a violation of the principles of democracy it also means that they have taken upon themselves a workload which is beyond their capacity.[17]

They were solely responsible for the crucial economic decisions in Israel in the 1980s. The officials in the Wing were obsessed with budget deficit that caused a

recession in the Israeli economy. This Wing also took it upon itself to prepare the Israeli economy for the influx of more than one million immigrants from the former Soviet bloc in the 1990s, which in hindsight indicated that these experts failed to understand the longer term impacts such an immigration would have on the economy. As some Israeli scholars pointed out in the 1990s, these failures are the result of the fact that the Wing does not have any accountability to the society about it policies.[18]

The grey economy: the politicians' playground

An important feature of the political economy of Israel is the tendency for politicians to skip and subvert proper legislation in order to satisfy sectorial lobbies and interests. This method is called *Hok Ha-Hesderim*, the law of the 'arrangements'. Shimon Peres initiated it for the first time in 1985 as Prime Minister to tackle the economic crisis then, and it remains intact until today. In essence, this law is a parliamentary procedure that allows members of the Knesset to pass budgetary laws without going through the regular parliamentary voting and vetting processes, where most of these laws would have no chance of passing. This procedure also allows members of the Knesset to annul laws that have already been adopted. The government is using this method in order to abolish laws that members of the Knesset with a more social conscience have passed (for instance for increasing the budgets for social services or the subsidies for the underprivileged sectors in the society).

Let us take the year 2002 as an example of how the 'arrangement' law works. The Treasury used this law in order to annul laws that increased the security of low income families as well as restrict the laws that upped the unemployment fees. In a similar way, the procedure was used to cut pensions that are given through the national security system. Finally, laws that were meant to ease life for those poorer families owning a cheap or low cost car were annulled through the procedure (this affected mainly single mothers). Other social welfare initiatives were axed such as those expanding public housing, senior citizens' allowances, compensations for accidents at work, help with books for underprivileged pupils, free education for sick children, subsidies for widowed husbands, increase of subsidised medicines and more help for public defenders (pro bono) services.

The procedure also allowed members of the Knesset and ministers to circumvent possible external scrutiny and criticism of their strategic planning for the future. Thus, for instance, they could block and upset any urban and rural development or issue and initiate planning with no regard for potential ecological or environmental collateral damages. In normal procedures the public, as well as members of the Knesset, can oppose such governmental infrastructural expansions. However, in Israel there are ways of ignoring this mechanism of critique and revision.

Polarisation in the labour market

The share of Israel's population in the labour market is one of the lowest in the world's emerging and developed economies as three important sectors do not take

part in it (although this has slightly improved recently). In 2010, eighty percent of the women among the Palestinians of Israel, sixty-five percent of the males among the ultra-Orthodox Jews and almost half of people with disabilities were unemployed.[19]

These communities had something in common, in the past they relied on low-tech industry that could also be performed from home. The neo-liberal culture of Israel has destroyed the low-tech industry in the country and thus, for instance, the textile industry's production lines, which were once an important part of this sector, have been moved abroad.

The exclusion from the labour market also created huge problems for these sections of the society – the worst of which was uncertainty about their future. At the beginning of the 21st century more than a million workers in a population of seven million, had no pensionary arrangement (or put differently, half of the working force in Israel had no such arrangement).

The burden of catering for these communities has shifted in recent years from the government to the municipalities. The reality there is quite tricky. Israel has the highest number of local heads of councils and mayors in jail at the time this book was completed. The neo-liberal policy in 2006 generated a huge crisis in the local municipalities and councils, as the government either interfered directly in running them or did not allow a due democratic process and appointed the council and its head itself.[20] One hundred such municipalities were created. This was a severe violation of basic civil rights and worked against the employees as well as the citizens. In the case of the former, it allowed councils to withhold salaries and in the case of the latter, it ended up providing only minimal services to the community (as there was no fear of not being re-elected).

The militarisation of the economy

When we speak about a militarised society in the context of present-day Israel, there are two major aspects to consider. The first is the benefits Israel draws from being regularly involved in military actions in terms of its arms' production and sales. In a way, in times of peace, there is a 'danger' that this important part of the Israeli GDP will decrease and potentially cause unemployment in the huge, indeed mammoth, Israeli military industrial complex, which includes among other things: the aircraft industry (*Hatasiyah Havirit),* the development of weapons (*Rafael*), space agency and the production of arms (*Hatasiya Hazvait*).

As we shall see, so far this 'danger' has not materialised. The arms trade is still a very important factor in the Israeli economy today. Israel is the fourth largest arms' exporter in the world. The revenues from this industry are needed to cover the high military expenditures Israel has.[21]

This brings us to the second aspect of militarisation; the price the Israeli society as a whole pays for it. Whenever the military and security expenses are particularly high, as happened in the beginning of this century due to the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the Israeli Treasury reacts by cutting the budget of the social services even further in order to increase that of the Ministry of Defence.

However, the last few years proved that Israel has managed to maintain such a system without peace with the Palestinians. It is quite possible to say – without being conclusive as we are still in the phase whilst this book is being written – that quite a few neo-liberal economies maintain some sort of militarisation since 2001 due to the so called 'war on terror' and are 'willing to the pay the price' of cutting the national budgets elsewhere.

One could add to these twin principal aspects another one, quite often hidden from the research on the Israeli economy. The Israeli economy is wedded with the interests of the petrol and arms coalition, which directs American policy in the Middle East. This began to develop under the Reagan administration with the full blessing of the then Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin. After the fall of the Shah in Iran, Israel's arms' industry, and in particular its distribution and sales sections, played a crucial role in ensuring the circulation of American weapons and arms' deals. As the political economists Shimshon Bichler and Jonathan Nitzan correctly identify, this Israeli contribution is often absent from the analysis that tries to explain why Israel is the America's blue-eyed boy in the region. The conventional explanations for this special relationship are summarised in a later chapter in this book. This important service Israel provided for the USA, under the Reagan administration, was rewarded by granting Israel a special status in the arms' deals world. The rewards included immunity from any American pressure on Israel's development of nuclear capacity and allowing Israel to tightly control the entrance of American goods to the Israeli market.[22]

So war economy was still possible during a time of peace. Moreover, the continued occupation of the West Bank and the siege on the Gaza Strip justified further militarisation of the economy. Towards the end of this chapter, I would like to look more closely at the impact of the occupation on the economy.

The mixed economic blessings of the continued occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip began to unfold in this century. Until the end of the 20th century, the Palestinians in the occupied territories served as a cheap labour force in construction and unskilled work, robbed of the social securities provided to workers in Israel. From Israel's point of view, before the two Palestinian uprisings in 1987 and 2000, the occupied territories were a goldmine of cheap labour and opportunities for export and dumping of Israeli commodities on the local population. After the first uprising, the territories became an economic liability. Under the Oslo Accord, Europe and the USA began to take upon themselves some of the heavy expenditures there (as did some rich Arab countries), but corruption on the one hand, and the Israeli policies that disabled turning this investment into a propeller of growth on the other, prevented the territories from taking off economically. Successive right-wing Israeli governments added to the economic cost of maintaining the occupation, by increasing the investments in the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

The economic situation of the Palestinians in the occupied territories was a mirror image of the economic value they had for Israel. Before the uprisings, the

Palestinians at least could find employment in, and trade with, Israel. After the first uprising, Israel decided to replace them as a working force with cheap, underpaid guest workers from Thailand and Romania. This was a result of liberalisation of the market, employers looking for a cheaper workforce and ideology; an Israeli wish to enclave the Palestinians within the occupied territories.

However, even with the finance coming from outside, the occupation is a burden on the local economy. Israel tried to ease the burden by taxing the occupied people and relying on foreign aid, especially after the peace process began. Local Israeli industries continue to dump their products and gain from a ready-made market and, at times, a gateway to the Arab markets, which officially boycotted Israel.

Since the beginning of this century, Israel quite often found itself in a military operation, which is part of its policing of the occupation. This led to drastic cuts in social services and welfare budgets. Such cuts meant less money for education (which officially is still a free education, but parents are asked to pay more and more for the basic needs of their children within the system) and the hidden and informal privatisation of the health services. In recent years, new companies emerged that specialise in approaching the National Insurance for the insured rights in case of an accident or illness. They charge a hefty percentage for a service that should be easy and accessible to the citizens. In short, militarisation was one of the common justifications for transmitting the yoke of funding from the government to the public.

Sami Peretz until recently was the editor of the *The Marker,* the economic supplement of *Haaretz*. In June 2017, he summarised very well one of the major conundrums that both students of the topic and Israelis try to solve: is Israel an economic success story in the 21st century?[23]

He gives a complex answer, the gist of which is that in macroeconomic terms it is a success. Unemployment is low, the high-tech industry is on the rise, there has been a new discovery of rich gas fields, a very successful export industry and an excellent balance of foreign currency reserves in the central bank (Bank of Israel).

However, these macro achievements hide crucial negative aspects that in the future could have a devastating effect on the economy. Peretz calls it a dual economy. The darker side of this duality is a significant deterioration in the level of education in Israel, low workforce productivity, huge gaps in salaries, pension and occupational security between different sectors, low state investment in professional training relevant to the local labour market, high cost of living and red-tape bureaucracy that does not encourage investment.

Time will tell which forces will determine the economic future of Israel. As we began the chapter with political economy, let me finish by adding to Peretz' analysis the political developments that could drag the economy into recession and crisis. These include the possibility of another Palestinian uprising, a war in the north with Hezbollah or the spill-over of the wars in the Arab world into Israel.

Notes

1 Arnon Lafrom, 'The Last Person to Leave will Put out the Light', Fifty Years to the 1966–1967 Recession, Documents released by the Israeli State Archive, see summary in Ofer Aderet, 'How Levi Eshkol's Government "Engineered" Israel's 1966–1967's Recession', *Haaretz*, 16 February, 2016.
2 See Tom Segev, *1967*, pp. 250–260 and see Yoav Peled, 'Profits or Glory? The 28th Elul of Arik Sharon', *The New Left Review,* Issue 29, September-October 2004, pp. 47–70.
3 Abraham Daniel, *Labor Enterprises in Israel: The Institutional Economy*, Volume 2, Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1976.
4 Tali Kristal, 'The Political Economy of Israel and the Increase in the Income Inequality, 1970–2010', *Israeli Sociology*, Volume 2, 2010, pp. 285–311 (Hebrew).
5 Yagil Levy, 'From the Citizen's Army to the Market Army: Israel as a Case Study' in Stuart Cohen (ed.), *Israel's Armed Forces in Comparative Perspective*, London and New York: Routledge. 2010, p. 169.
6 Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, see http://www.cbs.gov.il/statistical/population.htm.
7 Daniel Maman and Zeev Rosenhek, *The Bank of Israel: Political Economy in the Neo-Liberal Age*, Jerusalem: Van Leer, 2009 (Hebrew).
8 Neve Gordon 'The Political Economy of Israel's Homeland Security/Surveillance Industry', *New Transparency*, Working Paper III, April 28, 2009, see: http://www.sscqueens.org/sites/default/files/The%20Political%20Economy%20of%20Israel%E2%80%99s%20Homeland%20Security.pdf
9 Shlomo Sivrski *et al., The Israeli Budget for 2000: An Update*, (information on equality and social justice in Israel), Tel Aviv: Adva Center, 2000, pp. 3–6 (Hebrew).
10 *Ibid*.
11 The Recommendations of the Trajtenberg Committee, Press Release, 27 December, 2011 (Hebrew).
12 According to the Israeli Statistical Bureau as reported in *Yediot Aharonot,* 6 October, 2013 (Hebrew).
13 According to Nimrod Bousso in *The Marker* (*Haaretz'* economic supplement), 29 September, 2015 (Hebrew).
14 See 'The Bureau of Statistics Report' *in Yediot Aharonot*, 26 February, 2015 (Hebrew).
15 Shlomo Swirski and Etty Konor-Attias, *The Social Reality in Israel*, Tel-Aviv: Adva Center, 2000, pp. 2–5 (Hebrew).
16 Shlomo Swirski *et al*., 'A View on the Budget Law and Arrangement Law for 2000', *Adva Centre,* 11 November, 2002 (Hebrew).
17 Shlomo Swirski and Ami Frankel, 'The Position of the Knesset in the process of Formulating the Budget and its Confirmation: A Critical Review and a Proposal for Reform', *Adva Centre*, September 2000 (Hebrew).
18 *Ibid*.
19 Yousef Jabain, 'Arab Employment in Israel', *The Israeli Institute for Democracy*, 31 October, 2011 (Hebrew).
20 Momi Dahan and Avi Ben-Bassat, *The Political Economy of the Local Councils,* Tel-Aviv: The Democratic Library, 2009 (Hebrew).
21 See http://www.upi.com/News_Photos/Features/Worlds-Top-5-arms-exporters/fp/3105/?spt=su
22 Shimshon Bichler and Jonathan Nitzan, *The Global Political Economy of Israel*, London: Pluto, 2002.
23 Sami Peretz, 'A Personal Column', *The Marker, Haaretz*, 23 June, 2017, p. 10 (Hebrew).

5

CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN 21ST CENTURY ISRAEL

When referring to culture in his *Culture and Imperialism*, the late Edward Said presented two definitions of culture (relying on previous reifications by Walter Benjamin and Matthew Arnold): a narrow and an expanded one.[1] The narrow definition relates to the aesthetic and literary assets of a society:

> Culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s.

In comparison, the latter depicts culture as the theatre of life that quite often is monopolised by ethnicity, religion and nationalism:

> In this second sense culture is a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another. Far from being a placid realm of Apollonian gentility, culture can even be a battleground on which causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with one another, making it apparent that, for instance, American, French, or Indian students who are taught to read their national classics before they read others are expected to appreciate and belong loyally, often uncritically, to their nations and traditions while denigrating or fighting against others.

This chapter has both approaches in mind when analysing and presenting Israeli culture.

The making of Israeli culture

The formative year for the making of what can be called Israeli culture is the period between the end of the 19th century and 1948. The settlers who came to

Palestine in that period arrived mainly from European countries and constructed a mixture of their original heritages with some influence of the local Arab culture. The culture they produced remained hegemonic and intact until the mid-1960s.

This was in many ways a project of human engineering from above. The World Zionist Organisation was leading the way up to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, in providing the guidelines for what can be called the new Hebrew culture in the land of Palestine, or *Eretz Israel* as the Zionist movement saw it. The revival of the dormant and ancient Hebrew language was of course a crucial part of the project.

Such a revival had to be moulded in a struggle against the rich Jewish heritage of the townships of Eastern Europe. The constructors of the new culture went through a process that critical Israeli historians and sociologists called 'the denial of exile'. Denying the Jewish culture of Europe was seen as the safest way of returning to a normal and healthy existence of nationhood, as it had been during the biblical time. This kind of approach is typical to romantic nationalist movements in Germany, Italy and France, and indeed the ideologues of these movements had influenced the project of the construction of a 'New Jew' in Palestine.

Another crucial aspect of this project was the adoption of a very hostile attitude towards the language or dialect of Yiddish and the rich culture it produced over the centuries.[2] This Yiddish culture was seen as representing an unhealthy, weak and introverted Jewish life, which the settlers wished to leave behind them. One means of obtaining such a break from the past was by fighting against the prevalent use of Yiddish by the community in Palestine. In Israeli historiography this Zionist campaign is recalled as 'the languages' war', which included some violent action against publicists and journalists who insisted on continuing using that ancient dialect. This was a successful campaign to a certain extent as it diminished the presence of Yiddish in the local culture; but modern versions of this campaign were less successful. When the state of Israel was trying to uproot other mother tongues in favour of Hebrew later on the results were less promising. In the second half the last century, certain Jewish groups arrived in Israel and insisted on maintaining both their mother tongues and cultural identity. The Russian and Ethiopian immigrants drew a far more multicultural linguistic landscape in the state (which included also the Arabic language and culture of the Palestinian minority in Israel).

However, in the main, the dynamic expansion of Hebrew as a living language is one of the greatest achievements of the Zionist movement. This is particularly evident in the way the Hebrew vernacular developed, influenced by a variety of languages, including Arabic. The high priests of the King's Hebrew were fighting a lost battle against the dynamic language that is also highly militarised (and would be used sometimes in this militarised form even by Palestinian citizens. *Ahi,* my brother, was an army slang word for a mate, which is used commonly by all sections of society).

Nonetheless, in the early years of the statehood some of the Jewish European tradition was still manifest in the Israeli culture, especially in folklore and theatre. The more general Eastern European heritage, rather than the Jewish one, made its

impact. In particular the rich Russian heritage had an immense influence on literature, poetry, song writing and theatre. The literature included the Russian classics of the 19th century as well as the writers of the Soviet era. In music, it was mainly the communist repertoire that was popular and became a pillar of the musical scene in the young state. When Russian Jews immigrated to Israel in the 1990s, they were surprised to hear the songs that they associated with the hated communist era were part of the canonical inventory of the Israeli singsong. Russian music was fitted with Hebrew lyrics and is referred to in Israel as 'the Song of the Beautiful *Eretz Israel*'. Other songs that became popular were more orientalist in nature: adopting elements in Arabic music to songs that praised the homeland, and ironically its transformation from an Arab country into a Jewish one.

This mixture of Russian influence and some engagement with the local Arab Palestinian culture dominated the popular culture for a while, but later on a stronger Western, and in particular American, influence reshaped this local Israeli culture once more. There was, and still is, an audience for Western classical music that was big enough to induce the state to create a national philharmonic orchestra, regional and local orchestras, national opera and an impressive infrastructure of conservatoriums, music and dance schools as this emphasised the cultural link to, and identification with, Europe. This is why at the end of century 'The Voice of Music', akin to Classic FM or Radio 3 in Britain, was established. As readers of this book may know Israel produced a number of leading classical musicians over the years, and together with the relatively high number of Nobel Prize winners in various fields they are paraded as part of Israel's ambition to be regarded as a European island within an Arab world.

European cultural influence was evident in other areas as well. The emerging Israeli bourgeoisie wished to recreate a small urban European scene in its towns and cities. The architecture of the new Israeli town centres was devised by architects who had worked previously with the German Bauhaus movement in the 1930s. They built cubic houses and painted them in white, hence Tel-Aviv was known as the 'White City', and these houses are today recognised by UNESCO as sites of world heritage.[3] Less inspiring were the Eastern European models of mass habitation that donned the development towns hosting the immigrants from North Africa and later on Russia and Ethiopia.

Before the age of television, and definitely before the age of the internet, modern literature and poetry constituted the main backbone of the Israeli Hebrew culture. What was common to most of the Israeli poets and writers (some of them are renowned internationally today such as Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua and a somewhat younger David Grossman), was that they were born in Israel (Grossman won the the Man Booker International Prize of 2017). They were the *Sabra*, the Hebrew word for the Palestinian cactus that epitomises in the local discourse the newly born Israeli Jews, the antithesis to the exilic Jew who lived away from their homeland.[4] The cactus's fruit has a prickly surface but is soft and sweet on the inside. Some of these writers were not just revered for their literary capabilities but

were also regarded in high esteem as the intellectual gurus of the secular Jewish society later on (and still are viewed as such today).

The *Sabra* also symbolised the Israeli admiration for a brusque, forthright attitude to life, with little attention to courtesy or good manners and a great ability to improvise; or as sociologists would put it an anti-intellectual preference for actions over words. This attitude is called in Hebrew *Dugriut* (taken from the Arabic word *Dughri* that can be translated as direct or forthright). With time, Israeli experts were less convinced of the benefits of having such a national symbol, but many still regard it as an affirmation of the collective traits of the 'New Jew' in Israel that brought, in the main, success and survival.[5] Some scholars also called it the search for local indigeneity – which of course included the denial of the existence of the genuine indigenous population of Palestine, the Palestinians.

This cultural model had a bearing on perceptions of gender relations as well. This kind of relationship is exemplified in a novel that became a cult reading for generations of young Israelis (and also a film in which the hero was played by Assi Dayan, the son of the famous general, who later on became quite a progressive and radical filmmaker). The novel was *He Walked Through the Fields* and it tells the story of a young officer who preferred the army life over his girlfriend. The *Sabra* is unashamedly portrayed as a womaniser as can be seen also by another local cult film that was very popular in the late 1970s directed by a famous Israeli cultural hero, Uri Zohar (an actor, singer and stand-up comedian, who worked closely with Israel's most known troubadour, Arik Einstein) called *Mezizim* (Peeping Tom). This is a story of a lifeguard on the beach of Tel-Aviv and I leave to the imagination of the reader to surmise from the title of the film what the plot is. Zohar in the meantime chose a different life as an Orthodox rabbi (substituting promiscuity with piety).

Within such premises, the women were most highly regarded when they could perform the same heroism as men (fighting like a man even became the desired objective of some light feminist movements later on in Israel), but were always there to adore and admire the male protagonist as we shall see, the intellectual and cultural movement of post-Zionism discussed later in this chapter included a strong feminist component that helped to change these attitudes and practices through legislation and public education).

Part of the cultural transformation from the exilic Jew to the new one was Hebrewising the European names. First came the Hebrewising of geographical locations and then that of family names. This was demanded from anyone working in official capacity in the state. Quite a few Ashkenazi Jews felt comfortable leaving their European surnames. The same cannot be said about the Jews who came from Arab countries, the Mizrahi Jews, who were disturbed by the fact that their original names were an obstacle for social mobility and even employability due to Ashkenazi racism within the Jewish society.

Although they came in their hundreds of thousands, the Jews from the Arab countries had very little impact on what can be called the high Israeli culture. They were however able to create a counter-culture of Arabic music with Hebrew lyrics

and created their own space as the years went by. However, despite efforts by some cultural ministers, including the infamous Miri Regev in 2016 (who targeted the Palestinian community in Israel like no minister did before but tried to promote Arab Jewish culture) the hegemonic voice in the Israeli culture remained Ashkenazi, namely of European origin.

In the early 1960s, the Israeli government did not allow a visit by the Beatles – fearing that it would corrupt the young! However, the pop scene in Israel really took off after 1967. Rock, punk and any other fashionable trends in Western music had a local version and improvisation. A bridging musical fusion between the Mizrahi music, mentioned before, and the Ashkenazi one, was found surprisingly in Greek music. Again, as with the Arabic music, Hebrew lyrics were attached to popular Greek songs from all ages (although the most famous singer who did it came from a Greek Jewish family – Yehuda Poliker translated some of the songs faithfully).

In the cinema and on stage, the Mizrahi Jews were portrayed as the primitive members of the society who could only hope to be redeemed by being Westernised. These films are known in Israel as the *Bureka*s (a Bulgarian pastry – as Bulgarian Jews are also considered to be Mizrahi) films and many of them are directed by Ashkenazi film directors and makers. Mizrahi Jews were also portrayed in a similar way in the most popular cabaret-like, stand-up comedy trio, *Hagashah Ha-Hiver* (The Pale Scout), which is still very popular today, years after they have ended their public performances.

The one positive feature of the pre-1967 Israeli culture was its deep interest in books. Before the age of internet and television, this was a reading nation. This feature was also proudly paraded when politicians kept referring to the Jewish society as *'Am Ha-Sefer'* (the people of the book) – this notion was produced by secularising a religious term that referred to the Jews as the people of the bible into the Jews as the people of the novel. Radio shows, dramatised documentaries, plays and early signs of authentic original films also made their appearances in the pre-1967 period. Radio was the main venue for satire that became popular in the early years of statehood.

Satire was already popular, especially the writings of Ephraim Kishon, a Hungarian Jew who never properly assimilated in the *Sabre* culture, but nonetheless was able to describe with great humour the life of the burgeoning bourgeoisie in the state. He was like all the other writers Euro-centric and one of his sketches that became a film, *Sallah Shabati,* a tale of the absorption of a Yemenite family in modern Israel, contained the same prejudiced and racist depictions of the non-European Jew.

With the advent of television and the internet, books and radio sketches lost their popularity as did other features of cultural life such as the cabaret. The cabarets were usually not very political, with one exception and this was the works of one satirist, Hanoch Levin. After the 1967 war he wrote a satirical cabaret, 'You, Me and the Next War', followed by 'The Queen of the Bath' and completed the trilogy with a play on a similar topic, 'The Patriot'. In all these three scripts, the

futility of war and militarism was brilliantly displayed. However, angry crowds brought down the shows and the government eventually succeeded in persuading the theatres not to show his plays. Later on, he moved to less political themes and became probably Israel's most famous playwright and theatre director.[6]

Another feature of cultural life that disappeared were the military musical troupes (each central command and major units had a troupe that dominated not only the musical life of the soldiers but also that of the public at large). Their repertoire was mainly a list of patriotic songs, reminiscent of songs of such genre during the two world wars in Europe. Some key male and female pop stars made their early steps in these bands and most famous among them, the troubadour Arik Einstein, became the pillar of popular music in Israel until his recent death a few years ago.

Until the late 1960s, culture was thus very patriotic and guided from above. This included the printed press, with few exceptions. One of them was a weekly magazine, *Ha-olam Hazeh*, (This World) edited by a 1948 war veteran, Uri Avineri. Using soft pornography to attract readers as well as gossip, the paper criticised severely the non-democratic features of Israel and quite often was censored by the government as were the dailies *Itihad* (in Arabic) and *Zo Haderech* (in Hebrew) of the Israeli Communist Party.

Post-Zionist culture

In the 1990s, Israeli culture underwent a short and intriguing chapter of what many scholars call the period of post-Zionism. It began in the Israeli academia, where scholars of various disciplines, in particular history and sociology, challenged major chapters in the Zionist historical narrative of the land (I have referred to this academic debate in the opening pages of this book).

This critical instinct in the academia spilled over into the media and the cultural scene. Traditionally, the printed and electronic media in Israel behaved like a state press in a non-democratic environment, imposing restrictions on itself to an extent unparalleled in democratic countries.

Legally, the press operates according to the emergency laws enacted by the British in 1945, and subsequently adopted by Israel. Although these regulations have been used almost exclusively against the Palestinian citizens of Israel, they have also been used on rare occasions against the press itself to an extent (notably the closure of the Hebrew communist daily *Qol Ha'Am* in 1953 and of the daily *Hadashot*). In addition, the press devised its own code of conduct, which subordinates the 'right to know' to 'security considerations' in times of national emergency. Furthermore, the freedom of the press has no legal basis in Israel in that there is no law guaranteeing its freedom to operate.

Until 1977, the press accepted the state's guidance in matters concerning foreign policy and defence. Thus, 'sacred cow' topics such as Israel's 'retaliatory' policy against the Arab states in the 1950s, its atomic policy in the late 1960s or its arms trade during the 1970s were never dealt with. This consensual approach to 'security' meant there was no need for the state to impose sanctions on any of the main

newspapers. The same situation applied to the broadcast media. Indeed, until 1965 Radio Israel was part of the Prime Minister's Office; since 1965 both radio and television have been operated by a public firm that has an advisory board with representatives from several political parties. One of the main reasons for the smooth cooperation between the government and the press during Israel's first decades was the affiliation of most journalists to the Labour Movement, which was in power from the creation of the state until 1977.

The ascension of the Likud to power created a schism between the more leftist press and the right-wing government. The press, for instance, did not accept, generally speaking, the Likud's aggressive settlement policy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and was not enthusiastic about the 1982 Lebanon war. However, this more vigorous criticism of government policy did not lead to any change in the basic approach to the 'sacred cows' of defence and foreign policy. The press continues to be guided by a self-appointed committee of editors-in-chief that meets regularly with the military censor, accepting his advice on matters concerning his interpretation of state security. The committee, established in 1948, reviews every piece of information the press wants to publish concerning the army or the security services.

It should be noted that this self-censorship has wide public support: opinion polls have shown that the majority of the Jewish Israelis questioned favour limiting the media's freedom to report on 'national security' issues.[7] Overall, then, the press does not deviate from the Zionist consensus either in the tone of its reports or in the orientation of its lead articles. Nor does the press, in its by and large dismissive presentation of Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular, deviate from the public consensus in Israel, where a decisive majority continues to regard the Israeli Palestinians as a 'fifth column'. The press still uses the term 'Israeli Arabs', or even *Beni Miutim* ('members of minority groups'), the latter term having been coined in the early years of the state. When dealing with Jewish and Palestinian fatalities, whether caused by accident or an act of terrorism, the press employs different font sizes and places the items in more or less prominent sections of the newspaper, giving extended and careful detail where Jews are concerned and only brief and general references where Palestinian casualties are reported – thus even tragedy or loss have a different scale. Indeed, the very presence on all the local Hebrew newspaper staffs of 'our special reporter on Arab affairs' who covers – albeit in a very limited and infrequent fashion – Arab politics within Israel underscores the general representation of Israel's Palestinian citizens in the local press.

In the decade of relative openness, the 1990s, which we described as the post-Zionist decade there were hopeful signs for a freer press. However, in the case of the media, it was less a willingness to challenge the hegemonic culture that led to new voices; it was triggered by neo-liberalism and privatisation of the print and electronic media since the early 1990s. The three leading dailies, *Haaretz, Ma'ariv*, and *Yediot Aharonot* , are now owned by three families, and they, and other tycoons, have shares in the more commercial TV channels. Privatisation of this kind at times can liberate journalists from fears of chastising the government, but

tie their hands when criticising the economic elite that feeds them. However, for a while, this development allowed a fair share of free speech and opinion compared to the reticent press of the past. Journalists took more courageous positions against human rights abuses within Israel, which concerned mainly the treatment of the Palestinians wherever they were.

Another factor contributing to the change as of the late 1980s was the cumulative effect on the Israeli media and public of the non-consensual 1982 war in Lebanon and the First Intifada. Although the intifada was launched at the end of 1987, it was not until 1989 that Israeli journalists, especially in the print media, began to report systematically what the national television and radio avoided presenting: the daily brutalities inflicted on the population in the occupied territories during the intifada. There were several reasons for this delay. As long as the national Unity government was still in power (1984–1988), the press, with its pro-Labour orientation, was hesitant to criticise the IDF's actions in the territories; the right-wing coalition under Yitzhak Shamir that took over in 1989 was an easier target. Secondly, after being exposed mainly to the official version of events, Israelis gradually were exposed to reports by the international media and for a while it expanded their knowledge and provided more information on topics that were censored hitherto. However, by and large, when this period of openness came to an end the international press was suspected as being hostile and even anti-Semitic.

Few Israeli reporters remained steadfast in their adherence to a human and civil rights agenda as superseding any other considerations. Among them two stand out for their coverage of events that offer an alternative way of seeing Israel's reality and they are Gideon Levy and Amira Hass of *Haaretz*. Gideon Levy brought to the Israeli reader the human tragedies arising from the continuing closures of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and their moral implications. In the same paper, columnist Amira Hass, who lived for three years in Gaza, made Israelis aware of life under occupation and has graphically conveyed the illusions and disappointment that the Oslo Accord generated there.[8]

In recent years, a few newspapers have also stood up to the military censor. *Haaretz,* for example, has chosen on many occasions since the early 1990s not to cooperate with the censor. The now-defunct daily *Hadashot* had taken the lead in this respect, and as early as 1984 was closed for four days for disobeying a direct instruction not to publish a photograph of two captive Palestinian guerrillas who had hijacked an Israeli bus. The Israeli secret service, the *Shin Bet,* had objected to the photograph because it was the only evidence showing that the Palestinians, who were killed by brutal beating by the secret service immediately after the photograph was taken, had been captured alive.[9]

In general, the print media in the 1990s were more advanced in their presentation of diverse views than the electronic media, particularly television, being less concerned about the ratings.[10] The very division of the print media's information services into news sections, editorial and commentary sections by in-house and guest contributors, as well as cultural and weekend supplements, offers more scope for unconventional thinking, especially in the commentary and editorial sections. It

was in the cultural supplements that the debates of the 'new historians' and later of 'post-Zionist' scholarship first appeared. In 1996, echoes of the debate were reflected in the editorial section, thereby enlarging the number of readers exposed to post-Zionist views. At one point, be it for a short moment, the debate has reached the cultural programs on television, which, despite their relatively low ratings, still reached a wider and more diverse audience. As we learned in this century, printed media is gradually losing its impact on society, and similarly here the more liberal media has had no impact on the Israeli society, that moved in this century more to the right and away from the values the liberal media represented. Moreover, quite a few of the more liberal voices have disappeared lately and they can only be found in *Haaretz,* which is not read by many in Israel.

But while Israel was shortly under the spell of a post-Zionist culture, the very inclusion of debates on post-Zionism in the print media and both television channels (albeit on cultural programs) was quite unprecedented compared with the past.

Nowadays, more than ever before, the 'factual' news reports – on radio, television, and in print – continue to reflect an overall national agenda and employ a nationalistic discourse. Interviewers of Palestinians or Arab personalities, on TV and radio, continue to act as if they represent the government, or at least the consensual point of view. The approach of the press to conflicting versions is well illustrated in the coverage of the various clashes with the Palestinians. The government's version is never questioned.

The state of affairs characteristic of the Israeli media – a self-imposed national censorship on the one hand and an attempt to act as liberal market place of ideas on the other – produces a reality wherein the press serves two masters that are sometimes, and indeed often, at odds with one another: the 'nation' and 'freedom of speech'. This reality feeds the self-image of the Israeli press as being a liberal organ without seeming unpatriotic. It is an intentional ambivalence, probably based on the reasonable assumption that the news sections are read more widely and are more influential than the columns and commentaries.

Since Benjamin Netanyahu returned to government in 2009, his successive governments desired to have their own mouthpiece, funded by the American billionaire Sheldon Erikson. It is called *Israel Hayom* (Israel Today) and is distributed freely and daily. Its success forced one of the popular dailies, with similar views, *Maariv*, to discontinue its printed issues and appear only on the internet.

It should be noted that attempts have been made to found newspapers that would project a different approach that entails not simply presenting a wide spectrum of views, as is now the case in the liberal mainstream press, but a different, integrated way of presenting the news – in short, a 'post-Zionist' or 'non-Zionist' approach to the way the news itself is covered and commented on. Most of these attempts have failed. Uri Avineri tried it with *Ha'olam Hazeh*, but even his use of succulent gossip and unclad females did not help the paper survive. It was closed after many years in the early 1980s as a financial failure. The idea of a tabloid press with an ideological, non-Zionist edge was then experimented with by *Hadashot*. As

a daily paper, it presented a different discourse, more neutral and at times even radical – but it, too, was forced to close after four years because of financial problems.

The alternative press or culture has moved to the internet in this century. It became the venue for voicing politics of identity of the various cultural groups that comprise the Israeli society as well as a stage for bold anti-Zionist views and of course extreme neo-Zionist perspectives. The web is full with sites that have mushroomed recently. The Israeli government still believes it can control and censor this outpouring that includes serious challenges to the dominant and hegemonic culture, but so far has not seriously acted on its wishes.

In the 21st century there was a distinct gap between elitist urban culture and a more popular one. The more elite culture still has streaks of post-Zionism in it. In the beginning of this period it was possible to trace post-Zionist challenges filtering into the popular culture: a significant number of writers, playwrights and filmmakers share the basic assumptions of the 'post-Zionist' scholars.

Post-Zionist poetry, pop music and literature.

There is a clear distinction in Israel between fiction and poetry when it comes to post-Zionist ideas. Very few prose writers have crossed the consensual lines or have been willing even to acknowledge that they work within the constraints of an ideological orientation imposed by Zionism. Poets, on the other hand, have found it easier to experiment with alternative viewpoints. The first Lebanon War of 1982 led some of the leading poets to write pacifist or at least anti-war poetry[11], and the tendency to decry the evils of the Israeli occupation in poetry continued throughout the two intifadas. These poems have never been collected in accessible form, but in any case, poetry is not widely read in Israel. One trend worth noting during the 'post-Zionist' decade (the 1990s) was a wave of translation of Iraqi, Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian poetry into Hebrew (alas in this century the interest in such poetry waned and hardly exists).

Even during the 1990s, there was no political scene among pop singers. Most of them even if they sounded as if they followed in the footsteps of the more revolutionary singers in the West, did not wish to risk their relationship with the wider public by being 'political'. In that period, musically, the pop scene in Israel was enriched not just be emulation of Western pop music trending, but also by the production of original fusion between regional musical influences of the scores and either patriotic or romantic verses in the lyrics. From alternative music to popular competitions like Eurovision, Israeli culture can be quite comfortably defined as being Western (with few individuals who are globally recognised).

It is this distinction between the scores and the lyrics which is the key to understanding Israeli music in the 21st century, when the settler community of Jews had already been in Palestine for more than one hundred years. You can hear Arabic music in Israel everywhere – in a pure form, or infused with other influences, but the lyrics, unless they are love songs, reflect the state's ideology.

Unfortunately, music by itself, like food and folklore, cannot be said to be a bridge between Jewish society and the Arab world. The popularity of Arabic music demonstrates a process of appropriation by the political elite of Arab cultural artefacts appealing to a large segment of the population – i.e., the Mizrahi Jews. The music has no political or substantial cultural implication for the identity and behaviour of the society or state, and the most right-wing parties play it at the very rallies where they preach anti-Arab rhetoric. Even *Gush Emunim,* the settler messianic movement in the West Bank energetically broadcast songs with Arabic music on the radio stations *Arutz* (channel) 7 and *Kol Lehai*.

In the realm of literature, during the post-Zionist decade there was an interest, that in this century petered out, in works written by Arabs – mainly Palestinian and Egyptian short stories – which were translated from Arabic. Even mainstream publishing houses began a project that could have, but did not, link the Jewish State to the region in which it is located. The Palestinian stories, which tend to carry a political message, were not bought or distributed widely, however. On the other hand, the translation into Hebrew of the late Emile Habibi's novels (a Palestinian Israeli writer who was a member of the Communist Party and one of its leading journalists, and who lived all his life until his death in his hometown of Haifa), which reconstruct the evil days of the military regime imposed on the Palestinians of Israel until 1966, to an extent exposed the more avant-garde Israeli readers to how Palestinians in Israel view their past and dream about their future.

As for works originally written in Hebrew, so far only a handful have provided anything approaching a new view of Palestinian and Israeli societies. The writers who have are mainly outside the mainstream. Shimon Ballas, for example, was quite famous in Iraq where he had grown up as a communist but is either neglected by mainstream critics in Israel or denigrated as representing a primitive form of literature. Needless to say, publishing houses follow suit, and Ballas's works, which criticise Zionist or Western orientalism as well as the willingness of Arabs in general to internalise this orientalism, are rejected as unprofitable or as having inadequate cultural value.

In that period, Mizrahi Jews also began to have an impact on Israeli culture. Some even went as far as declaring themselves Arab Jews, although the majority would still insist their agenda was a particular brand of Judaism, and not an ethnic connection to Arabism. It is unfortunately true that in contemporary Israel, a self-declared Arab-Jewish identity is bound to be perceived by genuine or cynical upholders of Zionism in Israel as betrayal.

However, there were exceptions. Albert Swisa, of North African origin, can also be said to represent an Arab-Jewish counter-narrative. The most influential writer of this trend is Sami Michael, better known in Israel than Ballas and Swisa and widely read. His main contribution lies in his ability to open the local Palestinian perception of the Israeli reality for Hebrew readers. A different kind of counter-narrative has been provided by the poet Yitzhak Laor in his recent *The People, Food Fit for a King*, a novel that uses every possible literary device, from the names and the language of the heroes to the way the plot evolves, to question basic truisms

about Israeli society. This story of an army unit about to enter the 1967 war has several endings and butchers more than one sacred Israeli cow. Laor ridicules the sanctity of the army and its heroism on the battlefield and rejects common Israeli notions about genuine friendships forged in wars.

From Zionist to post-Zionist theatre and films and back

Before the creation of the state it was in the new town of Tel-Aviv that some of Israel's veteran theatres were born. The most famous among them was *Habima* (the stage) founded in 1925 and which had, and still has, a rich repertoire of original and translated plays. In the 1950s, the repertoire focused on Zionist ethos and Jewish history, and was very much an obedient tool in the engineering of a new nation.

The early 1960s were particularly rich in terms of the history of the Israeli theatre. It was also the time of the big musicals, many of them versions of originals that became hits in the West (such as *Fiddler on the Roof*). The last decade of Labour in power (1967–1977) saw the emergence of far more critical theatre. A younger generation of playwrights and directors introduced pacifist ideas into their works.

This meant that a voice and space was given also to the 'other', especially the other Palestinian. However, it seems that often there was less stress on the Palestinian suffering and much more focus on the negative implications for the Israeli Jewish society. Thus, the Palestinians in the plays of playwrights known for their critical positions, such as Yehoshua Sobol or Benny Barabash, remain enigmatic and cardboard figures playing secondary roles, while the fully developed Jewish heroes shoot, kill and torture but then regret their actions.[12]

There is a non-Zionist approach in the theatre, but it is marginal both in commercial terms and political effect. It appears either in translated Palestinian works or in original non-Zionist Israeli plays. One of the translated works was a Hebrew adaptation of Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*. [13] The play, which appeared on the local stage in 1989, was a commercial disaster but hinted at possible things to come. Original Hebrew works were more popular. For example, some of Sami Michael's stories were adapted for the stage, becoming the first plays to humanise Palestinians, endowing the traditionally shadowy figures with names, histories and ambitions. In this context, one can also mention the appearance in the fringe theatre of plays written by Palestinian Israelis depicting the occupation and the lives of Palestinians in Israel, as well as a 1994 binational coproduction in Jerusalem of a contemporary version of *Romeo and Juliet*. [14] In the last few years, Palestinian theatres opened and staged their own repertoire and found themselves in a direct confrontation with the Ministry of Culture, some surviving the encounter, some not.

Yitzhak Laor, who was mentioned before, although primarily a poet, is one of the few Israelis who contributed to the stage in a direct non-Zionist fashion with his general critique of Israeli militarism. His 1989 play *Ephraim Hozer La-Zava* (Ephrahim Returns to the Army), which includes realistic descriptions of Shin Bet

interrogation and torture, was censored for a time because it made a connection between Nazi behaviour and Israeli occupation policies. Another playwright I have mentioned, Yehoshua Sobol, had made the same connection in a satirical fashion in a 1984 cabaret called *The Hanging Tree*. A few other plays followed suit, but the Israeli public became more aware of the brutalisation of Israeli military behaviour only when the press was bold enough to expose the ugly side – for that matter the only side – of life in the *shetahim*, the Hebrew term for 'territories' that is, significantly, a-geographical and beyond a defined existence.

The film industry in Israel has gone through a similar process, but in many respects it has gone further than any other medium in presenting fundamental challenges to the Zionist historical narrative and discourse. Moreover, any change in approach to reality is far more significant in cinema insofar as it is one of the most popular pastimes in Israel, especially when one considers that Israel has an elaborate and expanding cable system that broadcasts commercial films on television about a year after they have been shown in movie houses.

It is interesting to note that the first changes in approach took place not on commercial movie screens but in television studios. This may be because national television directors in the 1970s, unlike their colleagues in the commercial or private film world, tended to be given a budget with which to work, and once they had it could give vent to the more radical views disproportionately represented in Israel's artistic community. Moreover, as long as there was only one state-owned television channel, considerable effort was invested in creating local drama, much of which is highly politicised. One of the first attempts to convey in film a different perception of reality was the director Ram Levi's 1976 screen adaptation of a famous story written by S. Yizhar, *Hirbet Hiza*. It describes the maltreatment of the inhabitants of a Palestinian village after it was occupied during the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Yizhar situated the tragedy in an undefined fictional place and this must have made it easier for his readers and even for himself to digest the possibility of Israeli soldiers committing atrocities. Levi made the story concrete, guiding viewers to its relevance for Israeli behaviour towards Palestinians in the occupied territories. But the channel's executives, who apparently did not wish to shed an unpleasant light on the 1948 war, prevented the screening of this innovative film, even though the book in which the story appeared is considered part of the canonical literature. Levi continued to produce TV drama that would be shown in the 1980s, such as the 1986 *Ani Ahmad* (I am Ahmad), which criticised the Israeli state's treatment of Israeli Palestinians.

Until the early 1970s, the film industry followed the nationalist agenda more closely than any other cultural agency except for children's books. It was thus that Arabs were depicted on the screen as pathetic stereotypical figures – evil, cruel, and stupid – who end up yielding to the superior Israeli hero. A common plot is one in which Jewish school children single-handedly capture armed Arab terrorists or invaders. The Lebanon War had a catalytic effect on the cinema. Israeli filmmakers began to give a voice to underprivileged and deprived individuals and groups in Israel. However, none of the films deviated from the Zionist metanarrative or from

the major chapters in the mythical historiography taught in the schools, but limited themselves to Israel's post-1967 Palestinian dilemma. Even so, and despite the fact that the filmmakers prefer to tell the story of the conflict through romance, this was an impressive development compared to the 1960s. The Palestinians became real human beings and, at times, even heroes on the screen.[15]

Romance and sex sell, and romance has been the main sweetener for the new views offered to the filmgoers. Most of these films are modelled on a Romeo-and-Juliet-type plot: a Jewish woman falls in love with a Palestinian man against the wishes of their respective families and societies.[16] Such films can generate sensual identification with the heroes. As with Hollywood's films about deprived minorities, so in the 'enlightened' Israeli film industry, the 'Arabs' are exceptionally handsome or beautiful. The focus on sex and beauty permits what psychologists call displacement: instead of identifying with the cause or the general suffering inflicted on the other side, the viewer identifies with the broken heart of an attractive hero.

Still, these films, where Jews appear as villains and Palestinians as heroes, may have an effect in the future. Switching conventional roles challenges the image of the Arab in the Zionist metanarrative. No academic work could reach such a broad audience or produce such a clear message. One of these films, the 1989 *Esh Zolvet* (Crossfire), went beyond the gender subject and presented, in a way that has never again been seen in Israeli fictional film, a Palestinian perspective of the 1948 war. For example, the film, which proved to be a commercial failure, showed the despair and bewilderment of the Palestinians when they learned about the 1947 partition resolution, whereas usually the Palestinian reaction to the vote shows them rejoicing at the opportunity to shed blood.[17] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the film industry underwent a genuine process of radicalisation. Films have become avant-garde in the local Jewish attempt to reassess the essence of Zionism. The background for this radicalisation, as in academia, is socio-political: The cumulative impact of the intifadas and Israel's relative isolation before the 1992 elections brought Labour back to centre stage. Selling is the key-word for cinema, as it is for culture in general, and it seems that critiques of Zionism can sell. Although the political messages are shaped and at times constrained by commercial considerations, it is precisely the fact that a film with a radical message can be relatively profitable that shows that, at least in the arts, being a non- Zionist is possible and hence more than a passing fashion.

In this century, the socio-political reality changed once more and with it quite possibly the public taste and expectations. In the meantime, however, there is a gap and the more extreme and national culture that engulfed Israel has not as yet been manifested in the reorientation of the film industry in Israel.

Today in Israel, compared to the academics, the filmmakers appear to be more open about their own ethnic, gender or national 'agendas', which they discuss in interviews and seminars following film screenings as well as in some of the dialogues or scripts. Films for the first time represent the world of Israel's Mizrahi Jews, whose socio-economic status has improved in only limited fashion since 1948. The films portray their growing frustration with the prospering Ashkenazi upper classes,

their geographical and social marginality in the development towns and peripheral slums, their limited access to financial resources and their distorted image in the national narrative.[18]

Some of the filmmakers who portray Mizrahi life have also dealt with Palestinians. Ram Levi, for example, whose above-mentioned films *Hirbet Hiza* and *Ani Ahmad* are concerned with Palestinians, deals with the development towns in a 1985 film called *Lehem* (Bread). For all the radicalism in this new wave cinema, Ashkenazi predominance is still apparent.

Notwithstanding these impressive forays into other perspectives, the treatment of the 'other' in films and plays is inhibited by the projection of an Israeli image onto the Palestinian – it is as if the other side can be understood only if its heroes act like Israelis or subscribe to an Israeli concept of reality. For instance, in the film *Avanti Popolo*, an Egyptian soldier quotes Shakespeare's Shylock, which can hardly be part of an Egyptian heritage. Still, Israel's fictional film industry has proven to be the boldest medium in exposing sensitive dilemmas and taboos. A few films went so far as to take on the manipulation of the Holocaust in Israeli politics and discourse. Ilan Moshenson's 1979 movie *Roveh Huliot* (A Toy Gun), for example, conveys the Israeli uneasiness over the possible link between the Nazi wish to annihilate the Jews in Europe and the Zionist desire to see the expulsion of Jews from Europe for the sake of the Jewish community in Palestine. Some of these same themes have been treated in television docudramas. Motti Lerner's 1995 made-for-television movie *Kastner*, for example, is based on the true story of a Zionist activist, Israel Kastner, who saved Hungarian Jews by bribing Nazis and was later brought to trial in Israel; the film highlighted the uneasy connection between the Jewish leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust and conveyed the idea that the survival of the community in Palestine always came first. A docudrama by Benny Brunner based on Tom Segev's book *The Seventh Million*, shown in 1995, focused on the Jewish leadership's decision not to become involved in operations to save Jews that did not bring survivors to Palestine and to concentrate on efforts to save Jews who were physically and mentally fit and likely to contribute to nation building.

Most documentary films, on the other hand, tend to be more inhibited. Made mainly for national television, they tend to be particularly faithful to the official line: although documentaries shown on television require scholarly consultation, most of the consultants are mainstream. The lack of empathy for the other side is evident when pictures of Palestinian refugees are shown: the running commentary does not disclose even a modicum of compassion, and the word 'refugee' is hardly ever mentioned.[19] A few documentary filmmakers, both Jewish and Palestinian Israelis, have explored issues that contradict the main Zionist narrative. Among these, Amos Gitai stands out as exceptional. His 1980 film *Bayt (*House) tells the story of a house in Jerusalem undergoing restoration. The house had belonged to a Palestinian doctor in 1948 but was confiscated by the Israelis and sold to Jewish immigrants from Algiers. The house, usually a symbol of security, becomes a symbol of conflict. Although Gitai's film does not question the Algerian family's

legitimacy, it fully recognises the legitimacy of the Palestinian claim. Similar themes can be discerned in Gitai's later films.

Among Palestinian filmmakers, Nizar Hasan effectively conveys the national identity of Arabs living in Israel. His *Istiqlal* (Independence in Arabic) film is a film spoken in Arabic with Hebrew subtitles that tells the story of a village in Israel that has remained Palestinian despite coercion, denial, co-optation and confiscation. For the Israeli Jewish public, however, it is the 'discovery' of past Israeli 'sins' that potentially has the greatest impact on attitudes. One powerful film is David Ben Shitrit's 1992 documentary, *Meb'ad le-Re'alat Ha-Galut* (Behind the Veil of Exile), which follows the lives of three Palestinian women from a perspective totally based on the Palestinian historical narrative. It may be the only time Israeli trucks loaded with expelled Palestinians have ever been shown on Israeli television.

Looking back at the 1990s from our vantage point it is hard to detect any meaningful impact on the society. Although one should say it may be too premature to make a final judgment on this question. Tentatively one can say that the extensive debate in the media about Zionism and the Palestinian issue had not influenced the political orientations of the local society. Poetry and literature, as we have noted, probably reach only a limited group of people. In contrast, the film industry is the most popular cultural medium in Israel. Whether made for cinema or television, films have the greatest potential for influencing public opinion towards a more critical view of Zionism and in conveying more positive images of the other (Arabs). In general, it would be fair to say that the novels, plays and films that have seriously transcended the Zionist narrative and its negative portrayal of Arabs have not been accepted as part of the Israeli canon. They do not represent a dominant cultural position, and their producers are not among the leaders of the Israeli cultural scene.

In the late 1990s, it seemed that the 'new historians', poets, writers, filmmakers and playwrights who were within the system that produces and shapes the cultural identity, had some effect, albeit limited. However, in this century the scholarly debate died as did the critique from other cultural producers.

Nonetheless this is an ongoing process. The debate signals not only a scholarly rift, but an identity crisis in a society that was exposed to the possibility of peace in 1993. Peace has the potential of undermining the national consensus based on the need to act jointly against common enemies. Relative economic success and security has already led deprived groups to demand their share, just as it has encouraged the Palestinians in Israel to lay bare the insoluble tension between the country's pretension to be a democracy and its insistence on remaining a Jewish state. Genuine peace demands a radical change in the Israeli mentality and in basic Jewish views about Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular. The significance of the phenomena described above is that a small number of people with access to the public via the universities, schools, press and movie screens attempted to offer starting points for such a transformation. The point of departure is acknowledgment that reality can be interpreted in a non-Zionist way, or at least that Israel's cultural identity must be more pluralistic.

The cultural identity of a society is shaped by historical and contemporary reality on the one hand and by how this reality is interpreted by those who control socio-political power on the other. Israel's cultural identity in the 21st century can be summed up as a cultural product shaped by the heritage and human geography of the land of Palestine and by the conscious national (i.e., Zionist) attempt to change the identity of that land. From the very beginning, Zionism rejected the Palestinian identity of Palestine and successfully used forceful means to Judaise it. However, there are challengers to the Zionist identity: Palestinians, some of the Jews brought from Arab countries and a small number of individuals who were born in the country after the state's establishment and now voice dissent. The Zionist identity of the land and society is undermined not because of 'new historians' or anti-Zionist novelists. The political demands of deprived groups, the continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the frozen peace process all contribute to a process that will turn Zionism either into an anachronism or a concept that can be implemented only through an aggressive policy such as the one adopted by the settlers.

These processes began in 1977 when the hegemony of the Ashkenazi political elite was challenged, continued with the 1982 Lebanon War and the intifada, and culminated with Rabin's assassination and the May 1996 elections. Even before these dramas occurred, however, the influx of Jews from Arab countries gave society a 'Middle Eastern' cultural identity. Forceful efforts were made in the name of cultural homogenisation to eradicate this culture from the first generation of Mizrahi Jews: it was thus that all elements of Arab culture, including language, were portrayed in the schools as inferior, and the young generation was encouraged to forget their mother tongue and become 'Israeli', i.e., Ashkenazi. Still, these buried roots come to the fore in a longing for Arab things and in the Arabic music heard in the development towns, in literature, poetry and politics – though this longing often coexists with anti-Arab racism in an absurd mix that is nourished by the Ashkenazi-dominated political parties in power. If these urges for an authentic cultural identity are ever freed from the nationalist interpretation of reality, they could serve as a potent facilitator for integrating Israel more fully in the culture of the region in which it is located.

A neo-Zionist culture?

However, as the last bit of this book shows, through an examination of Israel's international image and place in the world, the possible influences have not yet materialised. In fact, it seems that most of the post-Zionist cultural phenomena disappeared.

It was replaced by an attempt from above to recreate a more patriotic and Zionist culture. It began by the expungement in this century of any revisions introduced by 'new historians' from the educational textbooks and curricula. The old version of an assertive claim to the land of Palestine that is both sacred and scientifically proven has returned to the school programs. The old version of the 1948 war, of

Palestinians the country voluntarily in 1948 was re-inserted and the demonisation of the Palestinian liberation struggle as purely terrorist re-asserted.

This was also reflected is some of TV programs, and it was necessary for the government (which since 2000 is dominated by right-wing parties) to open their own TV channels and use their own websites to convey these messages beyond the educational system.

At the end of the introduction to this book, I already mentioned the legal clamp-down on the Palestinians in Israel, including censoring their commemoration of 1948 as a catastrophe (Nakba). This was followed in 2016 and 2017 by an attempt by the Minister of Culture, Miri Regev, to prevent Palestinian theatres in the country from including in their repertoire plays that represent the Palestinian narrative. This minister also tried to ban cultural performances that include nudity or were too promiscuous for her taste.

She has been partly successful in threatening Palestinian theatres, but less on other aspects. In 2017, Tel-Aviv is Israel's cultural capital with free expression for a variety of cultures and sub-cultures (quite an attractive destination for gay tourism for instance). Tel-Aviv, nonetheless, is Zionist enough not to challenge the government on issues that concern the relationship with the Palestinians or the ideological identity of the state (apart for cultural manifestations of such views on the very extreme fringes of the local scene).

Another new cultural phenomenon in Israel in this century is the emergence of religion as a dominant influence on the local scene: both as a patriotic spectre as well as a counter-culture to the westernised and secular forms of mainstream Israeli culture. In many ways, what we call here neo-Zionism is a cultural identity based on a very rigid, extreme, racist interpretation of Judaism. This new interpretation gives more power to theocratic tendencies than ever before in Israel: the public space succumbs to demands of religious lobbies (closing down businesses and shops operating on Saturday, limiting further the public transport option on the Sabah and total shut-down of the public space during *Yom Kippur*, the day of atonement).

However, it might just be a campaign and a phase in a cultural war and it is impossible in a book like this to conclude who will have the upper hand. It seems that much depends on the international context, one I will discuss in the last chapter of this book.

Multiculturalism versus nationalism

Another factor that will determine the cultural orientation of Israel is the gap between a wish to mould a unified cultural identity from above and the multicultural society from below. The grip from above was eased after 1967 and Israel in the 1980s became a more multicultural society. This was the main break with the past, when one-dimensional cultural identity was coveted. In fact, the engagement with a unified cultural identity was still dealt with obsessively by politicians, who cynically or genuinely, regarded multiculturalism as a weakness. However, despite their efforts even the Jewish society – and this is not even taking into account the

Arab society – is not made of one identity. This multiculturalism manifested itself in two ways. The first was a new willingness by culture producers to challenge basic truisms in the Israeli society. Thus, filmmakers, playwrights and artists of all sorts, were using their respective media to highlight dark chapters in the state history, salvaging silent voices from the past and suggesting different, one can say post-Zionist, scenarios for the future.

Mizrahi artists began to call themselves Arab Jews and re-discovered their Arab roots and Palestinian artists were able to express more openly their engagement with the catastrophe of 1948, the *Nakba*, and their overall troubled relationship with a state that never accepted them as equal citizens.[20]

Multiculturalism was also manifested in atomisation of the culture into tribal spaces. Different groups produced culture that catered only for their groups, be it in music, satire or theatre. The one exception was probably the Israeli cinema – and the original drama departments of the various TV stations, that catered for a wider audience (and in fact, were able to convey a universal message as well, hence some of them made it to international accolade and prizes).

However, it was is the three main TV channels, 1, 2 and 10, that keep the Israeli culture unified on the basis of the lowest common denominator. Israeli pundits refer to the television chat shows and news bulletins as the 'tribal bonfire' (*medurat ha-shevet*), where the consensus is maintained in what I would call a neo-Zionist fashion. It is noteworthy that Israel today has a multi-channel system (like in the UK there is also a free view that covers the main three channels, 1, 2 and 10). However, even this multiplicity does not undermine the neo-Zioinst cultural message carried in the air. The message framed and conveyed in these venues is quite clear and is still there in the 21st century. It is transmitting a very simplified version of the Zionist narrative of the past and interpretation of the present; a very patriotic message, quite anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian and very Americanised. There is also a sense of righteousness and defiance of a world that became more and more critical against Israel's policy in the occupied territories. '*Ha'olam kulo negdenu*' – 'the Whole World is Against Us', is a famous song that represents this insular common denominator of the local culture.

Television also produced, and still does, brilliant piece of dramas, satire and documentaries, but they are consumed by a smaller number of viewers compared to the more public chat shows. In recent years, a new factor diminished the power of the chat show and this was reality TV. The programs are familiar to readers from the West, and whether they are 'survivors' or 'Big Brother' kind of programs, like the chat show, they convey the same sort of popular culture message.

In more esoteric aspects of culture, such as plastic art, the impact was mostly American. More original was the creative energy that informed the ballet scene that, together with the Israeli opera and classical music orchestras, have made Israel quite a power to reckon with in these fields (locally there is quite a hungry audience for this in the major cities).

In this century, the more progressive and daring aspects of these media are being censored by the religious quarters (thus, for instance, the renowned chorographer,

Ohad Nahrain directing the national ballet troupe, *Batsheva*, was disallowed from displaying a dance performed by dancers wearing only their underwear at the national celebrations of the state's jubilee).

There is another way of charting the Israeli culture in this century. Popular culture tends to be more traditionally orientated, catering for Mizrahi and Russian Jews whereas what will count as high culture by its own producers will cater for Ashkenazi Jews. Palestinian citizens, as in so many other aspects of life in 21st century Israel, are out of this equation and marginalised culturally as well politically. The above divide can also be charted as it often is by Israeli pundits as a cultural war between Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem. Tel-Aviv being the capital of secular, open, space while Jerusalem represents precisely the opposite. In each of these metropolises dwell one million people respectively and hence they have a large impact on the society as a whole.

As with the economic system as a whole, culture in this century is also hardly subsidised by the government (whereas it was heavily aided at the beginning of statehood). The state still supports the archaeological discovery of the ancient past, but is less interested in the nearer Arab or Islamic past, in order to strengthen the Jewish nature of the state and its Hebrew culture.

The absence of state investment in culture that does not mean that the project of national human engineering has ceased in the 21st century. The two principal vehicles for maintaining the project are the army and the educational system.

The army used even its own radio station and musical groups and troupes to mould the canonical Israeli popular culture. Until the end of the 20th century, the cultural dimension of life in the army (military service is compulsory apart from the ultra-Orthodox Jews and the Palestinian citizens) was handled by the secular labour movement. In recent years, the impact comes from the religious national quarters, and in particular form the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Thus, cultural indoctrination in the Israeli army is more nationalist than ever before.

The educational system, again which does not engage directly with the ultra-Orthodox and the Palestinian minority, in recent years carried out a similar message and moulds the next generation of Israeli Jews as introverted and highly nationalist graduates.

Officially, the Israeli Ministry of Culture, as well as the army and the educational system, is committed to multiculturalism (after years in which the main concept defining the cultural project in Israel was the 'melting pot' – the idea that everyone can be moulded in the same Zionist pot). However, this multiculturalism is limited to certain areas and does not include the Palestinian citizens in Israel.

Finally, it is important to highlight the role of bereavement and death in the Israeli culture. The civic religion of Israel is made up of commemoration, loss and heroism of Israel's youth in wars and military operations. It creates quite a striking contrast with the neo-liberal consumer economy's hedonistic character and adoration for egotism and lack of solidarity. Thus, on Memorial Day, *Yom Hazikaron,* when restaurants and amusement establishments are closed, one can see long queues in the Palestinian shopping areas, which do not abide by this

closure, of Jews hurrying to buy food for their picnics for the next day, the day of independence.

All in all, the outside observer can be excused for being bewildered by this impossible mixture of theocracy, nationalism, secularism and multiculturalism. However, there seems to be one aspect of the Israeli reality that in this century does not generate any confusion among the onlookers and those interested in the country's future and its impact on the region as a whole. The Israeli policy towards the Palestinians is clear and unambiguous and has led to Israel's isolation in the international arena. This process will be discussed and evaluated in the next and final chapter of this book.

Notes

1 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1993, p. xiv.
2 Unfortunately, there is no good source in English on this topic. For Hebrew readers there are few sources. One of these is Margalit Shilo, 'The Language Wars as a Popular Movement', *Cathedra*, 74, December 1994, pp. 87–119.
3 See http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1096
4 Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
5 Tamar Katriel, *Talking Straight: Dugri Speech in Israeli Sabra Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
6 Shoshana Weitz, *The Works of Hanoch Levin, 1969–1976*, Miami: Florida University Press, 1981.
7 This information and some other details on the legal status of the media have been taken from Dina Goren, 'The Media in Israel', *Skira Hodshit*, nos. 8–9, August–September 1984, pp. 57–65 (in Hebrew). See also Pnina Lahav, 'The Press and National Security' in Avner Yaniv (ed.), *National Security and Democracy in Israel*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993, pp. 173–95.
8 Her book, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza: Days and Nights in a Land Under Siege?*, was published in Hebrew in 1996 (Tel-Aviv: Hakibutz Ha-meuhad).
9 It was this incident, known as 'The 300 Affair' in reference to the hijacked bus no. 300, that eventually brought to light Shin Bet's practice of killing guerrillas taken captive and of lying to the Prime Minister and the judiciary when accused of acting against the law of the state. The event, which became the basis of a TV series shown on the first channel in January 1997, is described in the book by Yechiel Gutman, An Earthquake in the Shin Beth, Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1995 (Hebrew).
10 Radio programmes, likewise, are less dependent on ratings and are more open to a post-Zionist viewpoint.
11 Dalia Ravikovitch's poem, 'To Leave Beirut', described the war from the Lebanese point of view.
12 Benny Barabash, *Ehad Meshelanu (*One of us), 1988, and Yehoshua Sobol*, HaFalestinait (*The Palestinian Woman), 1985.
13 For an analysis of this adaptation and other plays based on Kanafani's work, see Ilan Pappe, 'A Text in the Eyes of the Beholder: Four Theatrical Interpretations of Kanafani's Men in the Sun', *Contemporary Theatre Review,* Volume 3, Issue 2, 1995, pp. 157–74.
14 Fouad Awad and Eran Baniel codirected *Romeo and Juliet* for Han (an Israeli Jerusalemite theatre) and al-Qasaba (a Palestinian Jerusalemite theatre).
15 The most successful commercial film which used this exchange of roles is Uri Barabash's 1984 *Meahorei – Hasoragim* (Behind the Bars), in which a Palestinian political prisoner leads a prison revolt. Starting from the 1980s, a number of films have featured Arabs as heroes.

16 *Hamsin*, about a love affair between a Palestinian day labourer and the daughter of his employer, was the most famous of this genre.
17 *Esh Zolvet* was directed by Gideon Ganani, with screenplay by Benny Barabash.
18 See further, Jad Ne'eman, 'The Empty Tomb in the Postmodern Pyramid: Israeli Cinema in the 1980s and 1990s' in Charles Berlin (ed.), *Documenting Israel*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 1–20.
19 It is interesting to note that in 1988, mainstream historians assisted in producing a propaganda version of the 1948 war called *Ohalei Hapalmach* (The Tents of the Palmach), directed by Gil Sadan. A year later a more critical director, Nissim Dayan, used more revisionist consultants and produced a more balanced film with the same title.
20 See Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

6

ISRAEL'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

The young state

Immediately after its foundation, the young state of Israel enjoyed a wide international recognition. Although this recognition did not extend to the Arab or Muslim worlds, nonetheless in Asia and Africa, Israel was regarded as a young successful state that could help with the process of decolonisation and modernisation. As for the Western world, Israel enjoyed support from governments, and a high level of popularity among the common people, as its creation was seen as the moral and just response to the horrors of the Holocaust.

Turkey was the only Muslim country that established diplomatic ties with Israel and the one exception in Europe that did not was Franco's Spain, which Israel shunned due to the dictator's past connections to Nazi Germany. On the other hand, Israel was quick to recognise West Germany as the new and legitimate Germany. It was highly important to the West, and West Germany, to obtain an Israeli legitimisation after the Holocaust. If the Jewish State recognised a 'new Germany' then it was easy to justify West Germany's swift return to the family of civilised nations. The Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, in return secured a huge amount of German reparations that helped to put the new economy (and army) on a solid foundation as I have described in the relevant chapter on Israel's political economy.[1]

Until 1967, Israel had cordial relationship with the Soviet Union until the outbreak of the June 1967 war. There were also tense periods before that, but Israel maintained contact with the USSR through the Israeli Communist Party. However, after the 1967 war and throughout the Cold War, Israel was identified as one of the West's most loyal allies in the region. This led to full cessation of diplomatic relations with almost all the Eastern bloc countries following the Soviet suit; apart from Romania and Yugoslavia (the former allowed to pursue its own foreign policies, the latter,

insisting on doing so more defiantly under the leadership of Marshal Tito who regarded himself as one of the leaders of a non-aligned bloc of states which wished to be neutral in the Cold War between the East and the West).

The fall of the USSR in the 1980s opened a new chapter in the relationship between Israel and Russia and the former ex-Soviet bloc countries. The Russian decision to allow its Jewish population to immigrate to Israel created an important electorate for Moscow inside Israel. As for the ex-Soviet bloc countries, many of them proved to be quite pro-Israeli in this century, when Israel's international image was seriously damaged and eroded.

Some countries in the early years of statehood obeyed the Arab League's call for boycotting Israel. Its impact on the Israeli economy was not significant as most countries refused to abide by the request and the American aid balanced any potential damage such a boycott could have inflicted. In the collective memory of Israelis of an older generation, the decision of U Nom, the Burmese Prime Minister, to establish formal relations with Israel in 1955 is celebrated as a brave violation of the boycott since quite a few countries in South-East Asia were reluctant to do so.

The 1967 war transformed Israel into a regional power and a mini-empire also in the state's own self-image. Much of the international sympathy dwindled, and the on-going conflict with the Palestinians led to complicated relationships with the political elites around the world that hitherto were unconditionally pro-Israeli.

The mini empire

The first sign that something had changed in Israel's international image appeared in the aftermath of the 1973 war. Technically, the Israeli forces occupied part of Africa when they crossed the Suez Canal into Egypt proper during the last days of the fighting in this war. Although they did not stay for long there, their presence deteriorated Israel's relations with the continent. Moreover, Israel's unconditional support for Apartheid South Africa further complicated relations with many African nations and they remained on a very low-key until the fall of the South African regime in the late 1980s. The African member states in the UN were behind a General Assembly resolution in 1975 that equated Zionism with racism (Resolution 3379, November 1975). In this century, most of these countries re-established their diplomatic relations with Israel. Arms trade, Israeli economic aid and the disappearance of the more progressive leaderships reopened the way for Israel into Africa. The exception was post-Apartheid South Africa led by the ANC, which has traditionally supported the Palestinians in their struggle against Israel.

In the last decades of the 20th century, Israel established strong strategic and economic ties with many countries in the world. Its main problem, however, lay in its diminishing international image; a process that commenced in earnest in the wake of the 1982 war in Lebanon (which official Israel calls 'The Peace of the Galilee Operation' and more popularly is referred to as the First Lebanon War). The images of that war reached every TV screen in the world and accentuated the sense of Israel as a victimiser and the Palestinians as victims. Since that year, Israel

finds it difficult to maintain a positive image in world public opinion. There are two caveats to this statement: the first is that it enjoys a special status in the American global policy, and secondly that this eroded moral image does not always affect political elites' attitudes, and even less economic and strategic ties between Israel and the rest of the world.

These two factors, the special relationship with the USA and the strategic alliances with other countries deserve a closer look, which is presented below before I attempt to evaluate the impact and importance of the more popular image of Israel in world public opinion.

The special US–Israeli relationship

Contrary to common perceptions of this relationship, it was not always a honeymoon and a friendly affair between the super power and its most loyal ally in the Middle East. Therefore, one should not adopt a teleological or determinist approach towards this relationship.

The beginning was very promising. The US did not wait long before recognising Israel, soon after the state was declared on May 15, 1948 (as did the USSR a few days later). It was in fact the first country to recognise Israel.

For a short moment, during the first year of statehood, it seemed that the Truman administration had grave concerns about Israel's conduct and policies towards the Palestinian refugees (as noted before, 750,000 Palestinians became refugees in the wake of the 1948 war). During 1949, the USA expected Israel to allow the Palestinian refugees to return and when Israel refused, Washington's indignation was translated to the imposition of sanctions on the Jewish State. However, a few years later, as the pressure eased and the Cold War intensified, the USA lost interest in the question and was more concerned with assuring Israel's loyalty in the bipolar global and regional struggle and accordingly the relationship between the two states improved considerably.[2]

The significant turning point was the appointment of Lyndon B. Johnson as President in 1963 in the wake of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Until then, the US did not wish Israel to be associated with American policy in the Arab world and some of Israel's operations and intentions were severely criticised by Washington. A famous manifestation of such a clash of interest was the American policy during the 1956 Suez crisis, when the US forced Israel to withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula it occupied in a joint attack with Britain and France. Another was the Middle East crisis of 1958, caused by a chain of successful revolutions in the Arab world. Israel wanted to exploit the tensions for a pre-emptive takeover of the West Bank, claiming that there was a danger that the Hashemite Kingdom in Jordan would fall into 'radical' hands. It was the firm American rejection of the plan that foiled it.[3]

The uneasy relationship led also to an American refusal to supply arms to Israel, and the Israeli army had to rely on France and Britain. This all changed when Johnson came to the White House. The weapons were delivered and ever since

the mid-1960s, Israel enjoyed unconditional American support in the international arenas (it was particularly needed in the UN from the 1970s onwards, when many member states tried to pass resolutions condemning Israel's policy in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip).

After the 1967 war, and under the Johnson administration, the bilateral relations improved enormously and have all the features which are recognised today: huge military assistance, generous financial aid, unconditional support in the international arenas and a close cultural relationship. It has not always been a smooth ride: there were (and will be) moments when the US felt it needed to pressure Israel and persuade it to agree to certain actions the US deemed in its own interests. One such strained moment came during the bilateral negotiations between Egypt and Israel that concluded the 1973 October war. Israel was slow to accept the deal of total withdrawal from the 1967 occupied Sinai Peninsula in return for long armistice (which in the end led to peace).[4] American pressure was quite heavy and effective. However, overall, ever since 1967, Israel's special status in the USA was consolidated and reached new heights.

One possible way of looking at this special relationship is to view the American policy towards Israel as leaning on a three-legged stool. Each leg represents a lobby and together it seems that since 1967, these three lobbies work on behalf of Israel in Washington and ensure that American policy does not deviate from its traditional support.

The first leg is the AIPAC, the pro-Israeli lobby (its full name is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee). It was founded during the 1950s by a joint initiative of Israeli diplomats working in the UN (such as the ambassador Abba Eban) and Jewish trade unionists who were apprehensive about the direction American policy was taking in those days under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations.

Its method was very simple. It targeted politicians in the beginning of their career, promised them help, and if turned down, the lobby would support their rivals. In such a way, it had a powerful alliance of members in both houses of Congress, in both parties. A clear proof of Israel's omnipotent presence in Washington is the fact that incumbent presidents and candidates will always attend AIPAC's annual conference together with the economic and political elite of the nation. Quite often these politicians will heed the advice given to them by the lobby. In recent years, a very important book by two highly respected American political scientists, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, attributed even more power to the lobby than previously thought.[5] Not everyone agrees with their analysis, however very few dispute AIPAC's enormous influence or its ability to continuously maintain Israel's unique status as America's best ally in the Middle East.

However, this lobby lost some of its influence and power during the days of the Obama administration (President Barack Obama's term lasted between 2008 and 2016). AIPAC failed in obtaining one of its major targets during Obama's second term when it attempted to prevent a deal with Iran. The Iran nuclear deal

framework, as it was officially named, was a preliminary framework between Iran and a group of world powers, all of them permanent members of the UN Security Council, headed by the USA. In the agreement, Iran consented to redesign, convert and reduce its nuclear facilities and in return the West would lift it economic sanctions on Iran.

Israel recruited AIPAC to try and foil the deal through Capitol Hill but failed. AIPAC is still nonetheless a powerful actor, maybe destined to have new life under the Trump administration, but an overview shows a decline in its capacity to impact on American policy. The appearance of a more liberal Jewish lobby group, J Street, leaning more towards the left-wing parties in Israeli politics, undermined AIPAC's influence even further.

The second leg of the stool is the Christian Zionist lobby. Christian Zionism is a relatively old phenomenon and dates back to the early 19th century. It was endorsed as a theological dogma by evangelical churches on both sides of the Atlantic.[6]

The dogma was and still is quite simplistic and straightforward. It is incumbent on Christians to promote 'the return' of the Jews to Palestine and assist them in creating a Jewish State there. The 'return' of the Jews is seen as part of a divine scheme that would precipitate the second coming of the Messiah and resurrection of the dead.[7]

At first, official Israel was reluctant to employ them as allies in the USA. In the divine scheme, in the end of the days, Jews were expected to convert to Christianity or roast in hell. Moreover, these churches did not wait to doomsday for this conversion and were quite active in their attempt to proselyte Jews in Israel.

In 1992, when Benjamin Netanyahu was the Israeli ambassador to the UN, he cultivated good relationship with these groups and they became a very important factor in maintaining the pro-Israeli policies of the USA, ever since. In the 21st century, in many ways this Christian Zionist lobby became more important for Israel than AIPAC. Israel allowed it also for the first time free space in the Jewish State (where according to the law of the land proselytising actions are prohibited).

The third leg of the stool is the military industrial complex and its various lobbies on Capitol Hill and which has its own ideological powerhouses in the neo-conservative think-tanks. Israel receives more than 3 billion dollars a year from the USA for military aid and other expenditures.[8] Part of the money is meant to go back to the USA for purchase of American arms. Therefore, the military industry has an interest in keeping Israel as a close ally and collaborates with the highly developed Israeli military industry. Lately, another sector in this lobby, the Home Security branch of the government, cultivated close ties with Israeli experts on how to manage security in airports and how to counter insurgency in places where American troops were stationed since 2003. However, this same arms industry also has important clients in the Arab world, which sometimes can turn it into a less pro-Israeli factor in the overall matrix that produces American policy towards Israel.

These three lobbies provided Israel with essential material aid and protected it in times of crisis. Until recently, the American support was also crucial in Israel's diplomatic battles. However, notwithstanding this robust American support, Israel's

international image and standing began to deteriorate and for a while had influenced also the official American policy.

This deterioration was triggered by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. The invasion was televised and reported worldwide. In that year, the UN convened a special inquiry commission to look into the Israeli actions on the ground, chaired by the renowned Irish human rights lawyer, Seán MacBride. The commission's report accused Israel of a series of war crimes in Lebanon. The UN did not discuss the report eventually, due to American pressure, and there were no real repercussions for Israel. However, it tilted public opinion in the world against Israel. This negative view was reinforced by a global media consensus that Israel was responsible for the massacre of the refugees in Sabra and Shatila, perpetrated by their Phalangist allies.

The outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987 aggravated matters even more. The image of unarmed children facing with stones soldiers armed with lethal weapons caused a change in public opinion perceptions even in the USA. It is possible that the First Intifada led to the most significant change in the PLO's international standing that had a direct impact on Israel's position in the international system. In 1988, the USA began direct negotiations with the PLO that led to its inclusion in the peace talks about a solution in Palestine and, through that, de-terrorising the organisation's image as a terror group.

This was backdrop for a short-lived dent imprinted in the otherwise rosy picture of Israel's relationship with the USA. The concurrence of the first Gulf War in 1991 (when Saddam Hussein led his army into Kuwait and was repelled by an international coalition led by the USA) with the new determination of the George Bush Sr. administration to find a breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict, produced an unprecedented crisis in Israel's relations with the USA. The American administration coerced Israel to take part in a peace conference in Madrid in that year, alongside other Arab countries and a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation. The Yitzhak Shamir government, a right-wing coalition, reluctantly took part in the conference without any desire to change the status quo in the occupied territories. The conference thus failed but the administration regarded the Israeli Judaisation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as the main obstacle for progress in the peace process. Thus, when the conference ended in total failure, the American administration cast the blame on Israel and its settlement policies.

The fences were mended during the days of the Oslo Accord and the new President, Bill Clinton, did not show the same willingness as his Republican counterpart to pressure Israel into a more accommodating policy. He could do this because, among other things, the Oslo process created the impression that this time a new government in Israel, the Rabin government, was seriously making an effort to find a solution to the Palestine question.

Short-term dividends: the Oslo process

Israel recognised the PLO in 1993; until then it regarded the organisation as an illegitimate terrorist organisation. The international recognition of the PLO as the

legitimate representative of the Palestinian people meant that there was now a Palestinian body that could demand the creation of a Palestinian state over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (while putting on hold, or jettisoning (time will tell), the aspiration to liberate Palestine as a whole).

For a short moment, Israel's international image was slightly repaired and this was due to the Oslo process that commenced in 1993. The mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, which led to more full-blown negotiations over a final settlement for the conflict, brought many dividends to Israel, as long as the process was alive.

Israel opened legations in some of the Arab countries, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994 and foreign investments grew as peace looked like a real option. This was, however, a short-lived honeymoon with the Arab world. After the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in November 1995 and in the wake of another desperate Palestinian wave of terror, the peace process collapsed.

After Rabin's assassination, the Labour government was replaced by right-wing Likud party head, Benjamin Netanyahu, whose policies could have led to further deterioration in Israel's international image had it not been for the events of 9/11 in the United States. World public opinion, and this time also friendly governments, pressured Israel to stop building settlements in the occupied territories and allow the peace process to be revitalised. The pressure was ineffective since the growing frequency and threat of what was deemed as 'Islamic terror', created for a short while an association in the perceptions of various sections in the American and Western political systems between the Palestinian struggle and these fundamentalist groups such as al-Qaeda that perpetrated the attacks on US soil in 9/11.

Israel's international image was further improved under the Sharon governments (2001 and 2003). While Sharon was associated with harsh, inflexible policies towards the Palestinians in the past, he emerged in the 21st century as a reborn peace advocate; in particular in his second term in office when he even created a new party, *Kadima*, to dissociate himself from the right-wing Likud. He was still pursuing a very harsh policy towards the Palestinians during the Second Intifada until Arafat's death in 2004, but his image changed due to his decision to evict the Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip and he was engaged in what we now know was quite a futile, renewed diplomatic effort led by the George Bush Jr. administration.

This effort continued also in the days of Sharon's successor, Ehud Olmert, after Sharon fell into a coma. Some historians believe that during the years 2007 and 2008 there was a real, and maybe a last, chance for reaching an Israeli-Palestinian understanding over the two-state solution (namely the establishment of a Palestinian state over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip next to Israel), had it not been for the entanglement of Olmert in a corruption trial that saw him eventually sent to jail.

However, this assessment ignores what happened in the Gaza Strip in the days following the eviction of the Jewish settlers from there. The chain of events this eviction triggered contributed more than anything else to a further deterioration in Israel's international image. In essence, looking back at the whole decade between

2005 and 2015, it becomes quite obvious that the diplomatic effort was totally detached from the reality on the ground. While the diplomats were negotiating, Israel continued to settle Jews in the West Bank and maintained its iron and ruthless grip over the Palestinian population there with a matrix of checkpoints, arrests without trial, collective punishment and demolition of houses. The eviction of the settlers from the Gaza Strip did not seem to ease life in either the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, in fact it made it worse for the Palestinians living there.

Indeed, the eviction, or the disengagement as it was named, was a grand Israeli gesture towards peace with the Palestinians. In hindsight, it seems quite clear that this was meant to strengthen the Israeli hold over the West Bank, while easing the pressure on the army who found it almost impossible to defend the small settlers' enclave, *Gush Qatif*, at the heart of the Gaza Strip.

However, at the time there was a sense that the engagement was part of a re-awakening of Israel's peace camp. The eviction in 2005 was accompanied by violent resistance from the settlers and was fully supported by the Israeli peace camp. It was hailed in the world as an important move towards peace. What happened next, is not something Sharon anticipated and when it occurred Israel's international image sunk once more to an ebb in which it remains, at least among the civil society in the world, if not necessarily among governments.

The Israeli government, as well as the Western governments, hoped that after the Israeli eviction the Palestinian Authority would take over the rule of the Gaza Strip. However, the elections there have brought the Hamas to power and the Israeli reaction was to impose a land siege and naval blockade on the Strip.

The Hamas reacted with launching rockets into Israel in 2006 (this coincided more or less with the abduction of three Israeli soldiers in South Lebanon that triggered the second Lebanon war between Hezbollah and Israel). Israel reacted to both assaults with unprecedented brutality and it was a downhill story ever since.

In 2009, 2012 and 2014 Israel instigated attacks on the Gaza Strip in retaliation for the firing of missiles from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Thousands of Palestinian citizens were killed in these attacks and many more were wounded and lost their homes. The attacks coupled with the continued siege created a situation described by the UN as leading to a human catastrophe in the near future.[9]

The recurrent attacks on Gaza, televised worldwide, reinforced the criticism on Israel about its treatment of the Palestinians not only there but also in the West Bank. An International Solidarity Movement (ISM) has despatched to Palestine large groups of young Europeans and Americans who watch, report and act on the behalf of the occupied Palestinians. This solidarity movement was one of the major indicators of the change of the attitude to Israel in the Western civil societies. In the 1960s and 1970s, young people such as these, came to volunteer in Israel's Kibbutzim seeing it as one of the only havens of egalitarianism and socialism. In this century, the younger generation is coming to volunteer in the resistance to the Israeli occupation.

The peak of this non-governmental and social support for the Palestinians came with the inception of the BDS movement. This movement of Boycott,

Divestment and Sanctions is a citizens' network targeting official ties between local academy, economy and cultural institutions with Israel. It scored some success when churches, trade unions and some companies withdrew their investments from Israel, artists cancelled their shows and local cultural centres shunned inviting Israelis.

This approach is still resisted by most of the governments worldwide, in some countries such as France, even an anti-BDS legislation was attempted. At first, also the Palestinian Authority did not support this line of action; although recently it sponsored some of its actions.

Israel reacted by alleging that this is a new anti-Semitism; an allegation that resonated with some but did not convince, for instance, the EU that imposed for the first time sanctions on goods produced in, and exported from, the Jewish colonies in the occupied territories.

The Obama administration in the USA, towards the end of its term, took a very harsh view towards Israel's settlement policy and did not veto, as it usually does, a strong anti-Israeli Security Council condemnation of the Israeli settlement policy in December 2016. However, at the moment the incumbent President Donald Trump promised to reverse this new critical attitude. Time will tell whether indeed this is the case.

What offset this erosion in the international standing of Israel are strong ties with other important new actors on the international scene, such as India and China. These two new rising powers have a very functional approach towards Israel and seek to strengthen their economic and military ties with the Jewish State. Israel has also enjoyed so far almost unconditional support from the new member states of the EU in Central and Eastern Europe (countries such as Poland, Hungary and Lithuania to mention but three); a bizarre turn of events as the populations in these countries had a very dismal record during the Holocaust, or maybe this is the explanation for their support. However, the relationships with China and India are far more important in the grand scheme of things.

Looking towards the East: relations with China and India

Out of the two countries, China is the most important one for Israel. In this century, the two countries developed strong strategic and in particular economic ties. Israel is seeking markets for it high-tech economy and Chinese businessmen and companies see Israel as a place in which they can buy companies and shares. China is Israel's second top export destination after the USA and the top market for its export policies in Asia.[10] There are more than 1,000 Israeli start-up companies operating in China today.

Recently, China's industrial capabilities, particularly in manufacturing and construction, has enabled Chinese firms to take over some of Israel's iconic industries (such as the dairy company *Tnuva* and the cosmetic company *Ahava*) and national projects (such as connecting the two sides of the city of Haifa with a long tunnel). Chinese investments in Israel are estimated at 15 billion US dollars by 2011. Major

Chinese firms such as *Bright Food* and *Fosun* invested in a variety of Israeli industries and the trend continues today. The economic ties are also strengthened by joint academic ventures and Chinese institutions have donated over the years to Israeli universities.[11]

This relationship was boosted by an official economic trade agreement signed in July 2011. This opened the door for imaginative joint projects still to be materialised such as a high-speed rail link between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea to ease Chinese maritime export to Europe through the Gulf of Aqaba. By 2013, the trade between the two countries rose to 10 billion dollars and it is still growing. In March 2015, Israel joined China's newly constituted Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), becoming a founding member of the institution and suggesting that Israel may become a major economic ally of China.[12]

India used to be identified with non-alignment policies in the 1950s and the 1960s and thus was a supporter of liberation struggles around the world, including in Palestine. This has changed in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1997, for the first time an Israeli president officially visited India indicating the onset of a new kind of relationship between the two states.

The relationship with India centred more around military cooperation than economic or trade ties. The defence industry in Israel is a strategic ally of the Indian army, selling it advanced technology and weapons (estimated at 600 million dollars in 2016), making Israel the second largest source of defence equipment for India, after Russia. Both countries share intelligence ventures (based on Islamophobia and counter insurgency operations connected to the Palestinian struggle in the occupied territories and the liberation struggle in Kashmir, respectively).[13]

Such successes mean that materially the Jewish State is quite secure. However, it does not help to stop the erosion in its moral image. The fact that Israel invests huge sums of money to improve the image, indicates how important this aspect is in the eyes of its politicians. However, all and all, the huge investment Israel puts into its external image cannot change the fact that its protracted occupation of the West Bank and its siege of the Gaza Strip will continue to undermine its international standing and the state will, at least diplomatically, rely mainly on the backing of the USA.

However, there were warning signs that even American support is not always secured. The tense relations between the Israeli government and President Barack Obama were caused not only by tactical issues but exposed potential deeper disagreements. As this book goes to print, the new Trump administration begins with promises to be the most pro-Israeli administration in years. Time will tell if indeed this is the case. In the meantime, Israel's international image continues to deteriorate.

I would like to finish this book by focusing on this image, as it is the main cause for such a big interest in this state's history. I chose to do it through the struggle over the state's international reputation as has been conceived on the ground by the Israeli policy makers themselves, which I hope will highlight how significant images and perceptions are for a state like Israel, beyond the more objective

features of a state's sustainability which is secured by military power, economic stability and natural resources.

Notes

1 Michael Wolffsohn, *Eternal Guilt?: Forty Years of German-Jewish Relations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
2 I have discussed in Ilan Pappe, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947–1951,* London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998.
3 See Ilan Pappe, 'The Junior Partner: Israel's Role in the 1958 Crisis' in Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), *A Revolutionary Year; the Middle East in 1958*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002, pp. 245–274..
4 Others are mentioned in the first and second chapters of this book.
5 John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006.
6 Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon*?, London: IVP Press, 2004.
7 *Ibid*.
8 In September 2016, the US gave Israel a 38 billion dollar package see 'US 38B$ Military Aid to Israel Package Sends a Message', *USA Today*, 14 September, 2016.
9 UN News Centre, 'Gaza Could Become Uninhabitable in less than Five Years Due to On-going De-development', 1 September, 2015.
10 David Isenberg, 'Israel's Role in China's New Warplane', *Asia Times*, 4 December, 2002.
11 Maya Yarowsky, 'With Strong Tech Ties, Is Israel's China's New Best Friend?', *No Camels.com* (a website boasting Israel as a start-up nation), 3 May, 2015.
12 *Ibid*.
13 Martin Sherman, 'India and Israel Forge a Solid Strategic Alliance', *The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs*, 7 November, 2006.

EPILOGUE

Israel's place in the world today

In 2005, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister's Office began a campaign under the title 'Brand Israel'. The reason these three important agencies embarked on this program was the sense in Israel that the state's international image and standing were deteriorating into a new low ebb.[1]

The preparations for the campaign had commenced three years earlier. The main worry was the transformation of Israel's image from the perspective of the American public. The two Palestinian uprisings in 1987 and 2000 took their toll, and in the age of television and internet the Israeli narrative of why it had to use such brutal force against the Palestinians did not seem to hold water (this would become even more the case after 2006 with the successive attacks on the Gaza Strip).

'Brand Israel' was devised by the three ministries with the help of leading American marketing executives and was defined as a campaign to recast and rebrand the country's image so as to appear relevant and modern instead of militaristic and religious. Huge sums of money (the sums would be revealed some years later) were allocated for marketing Israel abroad in order to combat what the political and academic elite in Israel regarded as a global campaign to delegitimise the Jewish state. It was to be a gigantic effort, and the team appointed to see it through was accordingly called BIG (the Brand Israel Group).

The first unit of the regime thrust into this campaign was the Foreign Ministry and its diplomatic service. But it needed an academic team, especially in the areas of political science, international relations and history. Using lessons developed in the study of anti-Semitism, they provided a narrative of the origins of this new challenge to Israel, a challenge that called for 'boycott, divestment and sanctions'. The initial attempt to define the origins was more descriptive than analytical, but it did succeed allegedly in locating the moment of birth of this 'new antisemitism': the UN's World Conference against Racism, which took place in Durban, South

Africa, in the late summer of 2001. According to the initial academic narrative, this meeting, with its obvious interest in Palestine, marked the launch of the delegitimisation campaign against Israel. The fact that it culminated on 8 September, three days before 9/11, did not escape the Brand Israel team, and thus the two events were directly linked as being two sides of the same assault against the free world.

This connection between 9/11 and the so-called delegitimisation campaign was made very openly by Benjamin Netanyahu on various occasions. During a speech in the Knesset on 23 June, 2011, for instance, he referred to an unholy alliance between radical Islam and the radical left in the West against the free democratic world, of which Israel was the ultimate symbol. In addition to the UN meeting in Durban and 9/11, the International Court of Justice in The Hague was added as part of the delegitimisation coalition against Israel. The ICJ ruled against Israel's apartheid wall in 2004 and by that earned its place as part of the new anti-Semitism.

The main task of Brand Israel was to depict the country as a heaven on earth, a dream come true. Israel would now be identified with beauty, fun and technological achievements. This was the new version of Israel, and the messengers were newly created front organisations. One of them was the David Project in North America, which became very active in articulating the campaign among college students. One of its many actions was to try to counter the view of Israel as one of the most hated states in the world, together with such countries as Iran and North Korea, instead of being among the top twenty-five states whose citizens were glad to be part of them. The project's purpose was to convince everyone that Israel was one of the happiest places on earth because of its high-tech achievements. What this meant in practice was that any PR campaign for Israel should avoid any association with the conflict or the Palestinian issue.[2]

After two years, the discreet efforts of the various organisations and individuals were put under one management. This was an operational decision taken by the Foreign Ministry's first ever Brand Israel Conference, convened in Tel-Aviv in 2007, which officially kicked off the campaign. The Foreign Ministry accorded a four million dollar budget for Brand Israel campaigns (its annual expenditure on *hasbara* – propaganda – was three million dollars). A special budget of eleven million dollars was given to the Ministry of Tourism's promotional efforts in North America. Funding was also earmarked for work in Europe. It is noteworthy that the politicians in Israel decided to focus on the United States, where they sensed that delegitimisation had become particularly ripe and successful. One might have thought that the Israelis saw the US as a safe, long-time bastion of pro-Israeli bias, but apparently not.

The Israelis recruited top people in the advertising world. It included the Saatchi brothers (reportedly they did the work for free) and other well-known PR experts.[3] At the centre of the team were members of Brand Asset Valuator, or BAV, the world's largest brand database, working alongside the best publicists and marketing people. BAV specialised in exposing the target community's emotional attachments to brands.[4]

Brand Israel intended to change Israel's negative images by selecting aspects of Israeli society to highlight, and then bringing Americans directly to them. They started off with a free trip for journalists and pundits who write about architecture, food and wine – branding the image of a dreamland for connoisseurs. This was followed by invitations for free rides, with plenty of freebies for American football and Hollywood stars.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked every Israeli artist, acting troupe, and dance company to include a Brand Israel component in their shows. The Ministry of Tourism went a step further. It was not enough to present an image of the most relaxed, groovy, fun country in the world. In 2009, the Ministry's updated maps of a greater, border-free Israel, which were shown worldwide in ads and posters, including on London's Underground, indicated no Golan Heights or Palestinian areas. Hundreds of protests caused the removal of the posters from the Underground.[5]

By 2010 the Israeli financial daily *Globes* reported that the Foreign Ministry had allocated 100 million shekels (more than twenty-six million dollars) to branding for the coming years. This money was mainly destined to help fight the delegitimisation that was becoming increasingly evident in social networks and cyberspace generally. The Ministry was optimistic about the chances of such a campaign, since its research unit had determined that web surfers relate well to content that interests them, regardless of the identity or political affiliation of the source.[6]

Despite all the activity, the reports of success did not even convince those who published them. A new actor, the Reut Institute, was asked to join the crew to find out why success was still elusive and what else could be done. The Jewish Agency works with several think-tanks; one of these was the Reut Institute. The Institute claimed in 2010 that the threat to the state of Israel in the areas of diplomacy and international relations was on the rise. It described the 2009 report of the UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, headed by Justice Richard Goldstone of South Africa, as epitomising the delegitimisation campaign, its origins, logic and possible consequences.[7]

What became known as the Goldstone Report gently accused Israel and Hamas of committing war crimes during the Israeli assault on Gaza that began at the end of 2008. Later, under Israeli pressure, Goldstone, who is Jewish, partly retracted the mission's findings. In early 2010, Reut connected the Goldstone Report to the overall international condemnation directed towards Israel for its treatment of the Palestinians. That condemnation, according to Reut, is the product of a radical Islamist ideology emanating from Iran, assisted by Hezbollah and the Hamas.

The problem, the report suggested was that Israel had failed to market itself as a peace-seeking Jewish and democratic state, hence the great success of the vicious delegitimisation campaign. If this campaign continued, warned the Reut Institute, Israel would become a pariah state and there would be no solution for the Palestinian question, bringing a one-state solution to the fore. When Zionist bodies warn against the danger of a one-state solution, what they mean is what Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert warned against in 2007: that Israel would necessarily end up as an apartheid state under such a scenario.

In other words, at least according to the Reut Institute/Jewish Agency, all the money and experts in the world could not help rebrand Israel as a peaceful, fun country. One might have thought a less violent policy would help, but no. Instead, Reut wanted the government to seek ways of pressuring the Western elites to broadcast a different image of Israel and to hope that Jewish communities could deliver the goods.

The Arab Spring and its subsequent unfortunate consequences, and especially the civil war in Syria, eased a bit the pressure on Israel and diverted world public opinion to the human disasters of the Middle East. The Iranian involvement in Syria (Iran despatched considerable military might to try and help save Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria and also used the Hezbollah in Lebanon for that purpose) was seen by Israeli politicians and strategists as a new danger, or at least as a pretext to create a new sense of urgency inside and outside of Israel around an existential issue of survival (time will tell whether this will work to divert attention from both social and economic problems from within and the pressure from without).

However, even in this most chaotic and violent moments in the history of the Middle East, world public opinion has not absolved Israel from its continued oppression of the Palestinians. While political and economic elites still regard Israel as part of the Western democratic world, their societies seem to depict it as a colonialist state that survived the 20th century but is maintained because of its usefulness to the United States and its effective role in the global capitalist economy. There is no longer any moral dimension for the global support, and when the more functional side of this support starts to weaken, the scenarios shared, for better or for worse, by post- and neo-Zionists alike – of life in a pariah state that maintains an apartheid regime – may come true.

In the meantime, most people from the West can come and visit and see from themselves, although anyone suspected of being involved in a solidarity activity of any kind with the Palestinian struggle will be barred from entering. Students and readers of this book, if they can, should go and visit, and include if they can a tour in the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip and can make up their own mind on the future of this intriguing and complex state.

Notes

1 Sarah Schulman, 'A Documentary Guide to "Brand Israel" and the Art of Pinkwashing', *Mondoweiss*, 30 November, 2011.
2 See the website of the David Project, www.davidproject.org.
3 *Yeidot Achronot*, 27 July, 2011.
4 Gary Rosenblatt, 'Marketing a New Image', *Jewish Week*, 20 January, 2005.
5 'Calls to Boycott Batsheva in the Edinburgh Festival', *Haaretz*, 17 July, 2012.
6 Schulman, 'A Documentary Guide to "Brand Israel" and the Art of Pinkwashing'.
7 'The Delegitimization Challenge: Creating a Political Firewall', *The Reut Institute*, 14 February, 2010, www.reut-institute.org.

INDEX