

ISRAEL BETWEEN WESTERN DEMOCRACY AND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

From the beginning, Israel defined itself as a 'Jewish state'. After the conquest of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the course of the Six-Day War of 1967, the controversy between secular and religious Zionists as well as Orthodox Jews over the character of the State of Israel deepened. The victory of the Likud bloc in the 1977 elections brought about a turning point in the Israeli policy and showed how far the original Zionist ideology had already penetrated. The assassination of Rabin and the strategy adopted by Netanyahu following the renewed victory of the Likud in the 1996 elections were the consequences of an 'unholy alliance' between messianism and nationalism. The writer Yoram Kaniuk put it this way in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* of 31 May 1996: "Netanyahu is a prisoner of the worst element of Israeli policy, that is the old fanatic Right." These forces influence the discourse through defining everything by referring to religion and their attempts to gain political power. The more Israel orients itself according to Judaism and its fundamental variant, the more irrational is its policy, i.e., the more dangerous a threat it poses to its neighbors.

The alliance between extreme nationalism and religious fundamentalism becomes most obvious in the claim over 'Eretz Israel' that certain religious circles and political groups express rather aggressively: for the nationalistic settler movement Gush Emunim, the right-extremist groups Kahane and Kahane Chai as well as the National Religious Party (Mafdal), it is even a 'divine commandment' to conquer land that belongs to the 'Land of Israel'. The 'historical borders' are partly shifted far into the territories of the neighboring states. The secular politician Ariel Sharon proposed at a Likud Party convention in 1993 that the party should officially acquire the 'biblical borders'. Back then, such a concept was not adopted. In the meantime, however, the religious and nationalistic representatives of the Netanyahu government have supported this kind of expansionism in Eretz Israel. The scientist Israel Shahak sees in the influence of such religious fanaticism a danger that is similar in size to the one

posed by anti-Semitism and believes that both "anti-Semitism and Jewish chauvinism can only be fought simultaneously."¹

1. The Alliance Between the National Right and Religious Fundamentalism

The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin revealed to the entire world a paradox of the Israeli society: the radical Right. In Israel there is no formally institutionalized 'right-wing party' as known in certain European countries. However, a number of parties exist, all of which are represented in the Knesset, whose schools of thought would be characterized as 'right extremist' and 'nationalistic' by Western democratic standards. Nationalistic thinking is widespread and is even found in the Labor Party. Ideas that in Western democracies would be categorized as 'right' to 'right extremist' are a mass phenomenon in Israel and not discredited by the public. Among the forerunners of today's right wing was Vladimir Jabotinsky, a leading representative of the Zionist revisionist movement and the military combat or terror organizations Etzel (also known as Irgun) and the Stern Gang or Lehi (named after its founder Avraham Stern). Prior to 1948, both organizations had a considerable influence on the Israeli state-building process through their ideology and terror acts. Despite their dissolution after the foundation of the State of Israel, their social influence is still considerable; today, the extreme right finds its support base mainly among the fanatic settlers.

The Six-Day War was the most significant turning point in the history of Israel and has initiated a 're-religiousization' of large parts of the population. What was considered a political pledge became an "object of ideologically based desire."² From that point on, these religious circles no longer wanted to hear about Abba Eban's 'generous victor' who wanted to behave as a liberal and democratic ruling power. Moreover, the occupied Palestinian land was no longer the 'West Bank' but now called 'Judea and Samaria' by the nationalists. The victory was in their eyes the divine reward for the Jewish people.

On 14 October 1967, Meir Vilner, the General Secretary of the Israeli Communist Party - the only group that had condemned the war - was seriously injured in an assassination attempt. The would-be assassin worked in the printing press of the daily newspaper *Hajom*, the organ of the Gachal

¹ Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion. The Weight of Three Hundred Years*. London, Boulder, 1994, p.12.

² Moshe Zuckermann, "Die eigentliche Bewährungsprobe steht noch aus" in *Vereinte Nationen*, 45 (1997) 6, p.201.

bloc, which was the Likud's predecessor. For years Jewish terrorist groups - particularly the groups DOV (Suppression of the Betrayers) and TNT (Terror against Terror) - threatened the supporters of the Left who had criticized the actions of the Israeli military *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians. Despite the criminal activities of these two underground organizations, the police did not take them very seriously.

Abraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook has contributed a great deal to the basis on which the synthesis between Judaism and Zionism took place. In 1904, Kook took over the post of the chief rabbi of Jaffa. He referred to the writings of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (also called Rambam), a rabbi of the 12th Century from Cordoba, Spain, and reinterpreted the last book of the Jewish Law (*Halacha*), the Mishne Torah, which states that there were two messiahs. According to Kook's interpretation, the Zionists collectively were the first messiah, the forerunner of the second holy phase of redemption. In 1922, Kook founded the Yeshiva Merkasit Olamit in Jerusalem; it was intended to provide a new elite that would unite the teachings of Judaism and Zionism. Zionism was thus no longer an obstacle for the redemption, as the Haredim used to believe, but - according to Kook - an instrument that would accelerate the coming of the messiah. According to Kook, the spirit of God and the spirit of Israel were one.

Later, Kook's son Zvi Yehuda Hakohen accentuated the abstract ideas of his father and worked towards their dissemination. In contrast to his father, he believed that the impending redemption would have to be preceded by repentance. He referred to the tax collectors and soldiers of the State as agents of the 'Kingdom of Israel' and called upon the Jews to re-conquer all the lands that God had promised them. For him "the State, the government and the army [were] holy." Kook quickly developed into the spiritual mentor of the religious-Zionist youth group B'nai Akiva, and his students were among the first soldiers to arrive at the Wailing Wall when the Old City of Jerusalem was conquered in June 1967. Motta Gur, their commander, induced Kook, upon the request of the soldiers, to come to the Wailing Wall, where he declared: "We herewith announce to the Israeli people and the whole world that we have just returned home from our heavenly mission to the holy mount and our holy city. We will never leave it again." Almost 30 years later, Netanyahu told the *Jerusalem Post* (2 June 1996) on the occasion of his election in a similarly pathetic manner the following: "We will maintain Israeli sovereignty over the united Jerusalem. I am announcing tonight in Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people, that this city will never be divided again." The liberation of the original biblical land was in the eyes of Kook's students evidence of the impending redemption. They alone seemed prepared to make way

for the coming messiah; in order to accelerate his arrival, they considered settlement in the Occupied Territories.

With the euphoria over the victory, the ideology of the so-called Eretz Israel Hashlema (Greater Israel ideology) also gained acceptance, not only amongst the religious and political right wing but also amongst parts of the then ruling Labor Party. The settlement of conquered territory was supported by the Labor Party with its respective coalition partners, thus Jewish settlements emerged in the Sinai, the Jordan Valley, around Hebron, in East Jerusalem and on the Golan. The settlement concept was based on a security doctrine - which restricts the entire Israeli society until this day - serving as an instrument of power *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians and legitimizing the dominance of the ruling Ashkenazi over the Oriental Sephardim.

The policy changed dramatically after the Likud bloc took power in 1977, with an intensification of the 'Judaization' of the West Bank and the settlement policy aiming at the prevention by all means of any possibility of a future Palestinian state. The settler movement Gush Emunim, founded in 1974, increasingly gained influence. Among its first figureheads were Rabbi Moshe Levinger and Minister of Education and Environment, Zevulun Hammer, who died in mid-1998. Their spiritual mentor was no one less than Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. Among his students were Rabbi Chaim Druckman and Eliezer Waldman, who, in their Talmud schools (Hesder Yeshiva), indoctrinated thousands of pupils and soon-to-be soldiers with their militant ideology. Both have openly called for soldiers to refuse to obey orders should they ever involve overseeing the evacuation of settlements. In his writings, Waldman supported the opinion that God Himself had ordained the Holocaust as a test for the Jews; it had been a desperate attempt on the part of God to push the Jews toward 'Zion'. The Haredim, on the other hand, interpreted the Holocaust as God's punishment for the assimilation of the Jews and their dealings with worldly Zionism. According to Waldman, the victory in the War of 1948 was an 'act of God', and with the Yom Kippur War of 1973 God intended to 'shock' the Jews once more so that they would finally understand that He wants them to settle in Israel.

The Gush replaced the legal term 'State of Israel' with the biblical term 'Land of Israel' (Eretz Israel), which justified the settlement of the territories in the name of a special alliance between God and the 'Chosen People'. According to the Gush the advent of the messiah would be delayed if the land were returned to non-Jews. Since the supporters of the Gush see themselves as the representatives of the messiah on earth they believe that they have the right to oppose an 'irreligious state'. They lead a Jewish-fundamentalist 'jihad' against the Netanyahu government, as they did

against the previous Rabin administration. Many supporters of this ideology stem from the ranks of the National Religious Party Mafdal, which has lost much of its tolerance and open-mindedness since it began to support the Gush in the mid-1970s. The party, which had previously called itself Mizrahi, has always accepted Zionism and tried to give it a religious aspect. It represents an uncompromising nationalistic line and advocates the establishment of a 'Greater Israel', necessitating the annexation of the Occupied Territories. In the elections of May 1999 the party suffered a considerable setback.

The Gush Emunim movement was only one among the many re-Judaization movements that emerged in Israel and the Diaspora whose political spearhead is the National Religious Party. Together they form Jewish fundamentalism. All of the groups demand racial discrimination and an 'iron-fist' policy *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians. In their numerous Torah and Talmud schools they spread not only their religious but also their ideological-racist opinions, and students undergo a form of brainwashing that totally contradicts Western values and the norms of Israeli society. Joseph Algazy found a similar phenomenon in the schools for the Ultra Orthodox as he describes in *Le Monde diplomatique* of 18 February 1998: "In the schools of the Ultra Orthodox the youth – and through them also their parents – literally undergo a brainwashing, but they also receive help with regard to the overcoming of their problems." The journalist Stefanie Christmann writes in the weekly newspaper *Freitag* of 6 June 1997 the following: "After 30 years of occupation, racist thinking in Israel is being displayed frankly, proudly, and boldly." The State of Israel partly finances these establishments and has shown great indulgence *vis-à-vis* such extremist groupings. In an interview with the author, Israel Shahak paid great attention to the danger of Mafdal. "It is a messianic party that believes that we live in a time of redemption. The world has changed and God will appear at any moment. Therefore we must accomplish acts that allow us to hope that God will intervene in our favor... Only Mafdal demands the foundation of a religious state in which the Talmudic Law would apply instead of the secular law. Furthermore there is a strong desire within the party to erect the Third Temple, which implies the destruction of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. This would lead to a conflict with the Islamic World and would be more dangerous than anything the Zionists have ever done before."³ The ideology of Mafdal is a mixture of political-nationalistic and religious-messianic elements. In order to prevent the isolation of the national-religious camp, the writer Abraham B. Yehoshua pleaded in an interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau* of 30 August 1997 for a dialogue with Mafdal. He argued that such a dia-

³ "Arafat ist ein Diktator" – Interview with Israel Shahak in *International* (1997) 3-4, p.17.

logue was important from a cultural point of view, because otherwise the "American CNN identity" would wipe "us" out.

Further fundamentalist streams are the Haredim (the God-fearing) who are split into two subgroups – the Ashkenazim and Sephardim – as well as into Zionists and anti-Zionists. The most anti-Zionist group is the Neturei Karta, whose members completely reject the State of Israel because for them, redemption is God's work alone. Non-Zionist groupings include Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah, which are united in the Jahdut Hatorah bloc. In the past, they were considered politically moderate, but recently, for opportunistic reasons, they have become closer to the rigid position of the pro-annexation Right. In contrast to the Ashkenazi Haredim, the Sephardi Jews from the Shas Party are for a compromise with the Palestinians, which is why they supported the Labor Party in the Knesset when the Oslo Accords were to be ratified. Shas is a 'clientele' party that originally developed out of the Ashkenazi Agudat Israel group and functions according to the principle of 'give and take'. It only supports religious Jews and has established a religious, social network with kindergartens and religious schools. According to Joseph Algazy, "All in all, the religious parties use the same recruitment techniques for new members as the Islamic movement in Israel or Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip." Politically Shas is getting closer to the Likud and the other rightist-religious parties as they all share an aversion *vis-à-vis* non-Jews as well as a belief in the ideological claim of the 'exclusivity' of the Jewish religion. Their fundamentalism is fueled by the discrimination they experienced at the hands of the Ashkenazi side, an example being, or so they believe, the conviction of corruption directed at their party chief, Aryeh Deri. Their spiritual leader is the former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who contradicted Deri with regard to the question of the return of the Palestinians, which Deri intended to vote against. For Yosef, to deny people who have been uprooted the right to return to their place of birth is not compatible with his moral and humanitarian ideals and a human life is worth more than the 'holiness of a country'. In order to achieve peace, the return of territory is unavoidable and Shas vehemently rejects terror because it claims Jewish lives. The judgement of Adel Elias that Shas belonged to the "most extremist religious parties" can only be accepted with limitations.⁴

The political class of Israel was surprised when in April 1984, the police arrested members of a Jewish terror group who were suspected of killing several students from the University of Hebron and of carrying out attacks against Palestinian mayors. The organization was making the final prepa-

⁴ Adel S. Elias, *Dieser Frieden heißt Krieg. Israel und Palästina – die feindlichen Brüder*. München, 1997, p.177.

rations to blow up the Dome of the Rock on Al-Haram Ash-Sharif. During the interrogations conducted by the domestic secret service Shin Bet (Shabak), one of the arrested revealed the satanic logic of these terrorists: "The destruction of the mosques would have enraged millions of Moslems all over the world. Most likely, their fury would have caused a war, which would have escalated and resulted in a world war. Such a war, with its enormously high death rate would have pushed the redemption process of the Jews and the Land of Israel forward for at that moment all Moslems would have vanished and thus everything would have been ready for the arrival of the messiah." With this, the Palestine problem in the 'Promised Land' would finally be settled.

Some of these terrorists were followers of the Gush. Gush activist Yehuda Etzion, for example, stressed that "the Lord" had commissioned him. Then police inspector Assaf Hefets revealed on 31 December 1997 that members of the Gush intended to destroy the holy Islamic sites in order to "re-erect Solomon's Temple in their place" because this would accelerate the "process of redemption for the Jewish people." The Israeli authorities should take the intentions of the extremist elements in Jewish society seriously. As Felicia Langer fittingly comments: "One does not have to be a prophet or a member of a secret service in order to comprehend what a potential for danger derives from the followers of such a doctrine once their belief is combined with the many and lethal weapons they possess, and when their belief is practiced by the army in an atmosphere of indulgence, benevolent understanding, and sometimes even with their direct support."⁵

The American rabbi Meir Kahane who had come to Israel in 1971 essentially promoted the Right's radicalization and readiness to engage in violence. He was the leader of the US-based 'Jewish Defense League', a racist and terrorist grouping. In 1984 he was elected a member of the Knesset, and his 'philosophy of the Jewish violence' gained increasing acceptance among religious circles. Kahane was seemingly so traumatized by the murders of Jews that he could think of nothing but revenge. He interpreted Jewish counter-violence as 'the glorification of God' and founded the racist-fascist Kach (So it Is) movement, provoked the Palestinians and introduced as a Knesset Member a draft law that was similar in spirit to the Nuremberg Race Laws. For the Kach movement, treachery, violence and terror were typical 'Arab characteristics'. Accordingly, Kahane suggested the following regarding the dispersion of all Arabs from 'Greater Israel': the forced deportation of all non-Jews who refuse to take on the second-class status of a 'foreign inhabitant'; the passing of legislation to prohibit non-Jews from living in the Jerusalem region; prison sentences of

⁵ Felicia Langer. *Wo Haß keine Grenzen kennt. Eine Anklageschrift*. Göttingen, 1995, p.87.

up to 50 years for every non-Jew who had sexual relations with a female Jew; and the dividing of Jews and non-Jews into 'separate strata'.

The Supreme Court prohibited Kahane from running for the Knesset a second time on the grounds that his party was fascist. After his assassination in 1990 in New York, his son Benyamin Kahane founded the group Kahane Chai (Kahane Lives). Both Kach and Kahane Chai agitate against the peace process, provoke violence, and organize deadly attacks on Palestinians. After the mass murder of Goldstein, both groups were outlawed but have continued their activities practically undisturbed. Other parties that spread extremist and racist thinking are Tsomet (Crossroads) of the former General Chief of Staff and former Minister for Agriculture and Environment, Rafael Eitan, and Moledet (Fatherland) of General Rekhan Zeevi who pursues a program that calls for the transfer of the Palestinians. For Zeevi, Arafat is "not a neo-Nazi. He is obviously and clearly a Nazi," as he put it in a Knesset debate on 22 January 1998.

Another group that developed out of the Kach and Kahane Chai environment is Eyal, the organization from which the assassin of Rabin, Yigal Amir originated. All these organizations are hiding behind the rightist politicians from the Likud and Mafdal. Some right-oriented politicians tried to prevent the television report of Michael Carpin from being shown because he revealed some of the shady connections, but the Supreme Court turned the petition down. These parties cover up at least indirectly the activities of groups such as the Gush or Zu Arzeno (This is Our Land), whose call for civil resistance comes close to an open rebellion. For them, both the Camp David Accords and the Oslo Agreement were a catastrophe because they implied that the Israeli Government was willing to return land and thus directly endanger the Jews. Such a return of land is in their opinion a 'religious rebellion against God', while the agreement between Rabin and Arafat was a signal that God's indulgence has come to an end and the apocalyptic sufferings are about to start. That such viewpoints are not only common amongst religious 'outsiders' was demonstrated in the joint appearance of former Knesset Member Eliyakim Ha'etzni and Ariel Sharon before Israeli soldiers. According to Ha'etzni, even in Hitler's Germany there had been soldiers who understood that the government was about to lead their people to a disaster, and now the Israeli Government was about to do the same. "They want to steal the land from under our feet, the land of the Bible, the Holy Land, without which the State of Israel is completely meaningless." Sharon agreed and promised to take remedial action. According to him, it was not the Palestinians but the Rabin government that was the actual enemy of peace and "the first action of another, Jewish-national government that, with God's help, will succeed the current one, will be to push the development of the set-

lements ahead." This wish of Sharon has somewhat been fulfilled until the elections in May 1999 in which the Likud was heavily defeated.

Ha'etzni accused Peres of "the betrayal of the Jews" and swore at him, calling him a *'rehabeam'* – one of the worst insults for a Jew. A *'rehabeam'* instigates a civil war so that Jews will fight Jews. Therefore it was the task and even the 'divine duty' of every Jew to work against this government's policy and to use any form of resistance if it made territorial compromises *vis-à-vis* the Arabs as any territorial violation was like a sacrilege. Ha'etzni rejected the decision of the democratic majority, which he compared to the majority that had once danced around the 'golden calf'. For the fundamentalist settler newspaper *Nekuda* there is no room left for dialogue with the government because it encourages the creation of a Palestinian state; the Labor Party has become a party of 'cowards' and 'nervous people' that defend the rights of the Palestinians in Eretz Israel. This way of perceiving things is not only unrealistic but also pure demagoguery. Ha'etzni, Moshe Levinger, Gush Emunim, the Yesha Settler's Council, and other extremist groups belonged to the sharpest critics of the policies of Rabin.

The logic of the Right is conclusive: Ha'etzni asks why the Israelis would claim Tel Aviv but sacrifice Hebron. If Israel did not claim Eretz Israel in its entirety, it would lose the justification for its existence within the 1948 borders, and if the Israelis do not raise claims over the entire country they are nothing but ordinary land thieves, quasi intruders that have become guilty of the dispersion of the indigenous population. Within the religious system this argumentation is stringent. On an international level, however, it should be irrelevant because religious-mythical 'legal creations' have no validity there. The extremists established themselves as the guardians of the true legitimacy of Israel and of the Bible. As Dan Diner put it in the *FAZ* of 19 October 1996: "Whilst completely ignoring the majorities, they take the Israeli policy hostage."

The extremist settlers began to clash with the Israeli authorities, and they called Rabin a 'betrayal' and sent him death threats. Especially after the murder of Chaim Mizrahi from the Bet El settlement, who had been stabbed to death and then set on fire by three Palestinians, the anger of the settlers was directed against the Prime Minister who had pushed the extremist settlers toward Hamas. In the town Or Akiva a sticker appeared, which read as follows: "Rabin must be assassinated!" Fundamentalists from Hamas and from among the settlers cooperated and strove to bring about the downfall of the agreement, as described by Armin Wertz on 3 November 1993 in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*.

Gershon Salomon, head of the Temple Mount Faithful and Hamas officials reportedly assured each other of mutual sympathy with regard to their common struggle. Another initiative of some 105 prominent right-wing personalities was the signing of an "ethnic behavioral codex against a government of collaborators," which had entered "an alliance with the enemy." The signatories rejected the Oslo Agreements and denied the "terrorist Rabin government" any legitimacy because it also leaned on the votes of the Arabs. Redeployment from the settlements was labeled as a 'crime' that ought to be resisted, and an evacuation of the settlements as something that should be met with armed resistance. This 'codex' demanded the monitoring and registering of the 'peace crimes' of the Rabin government for a later trial.⁶ All this shows that there was indeed spiritually fertile soil for the assassination.

The assassin of Rabin, Yigal Amir was a law student at the renowned Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, a center for religious fundamentalists and those with extreme attitudes. Before the court Amir explained that in accordance with the *Halacha* any Jew who "leaves his people and his land to the enemy, as Rabin did, must be killed. I have studied the *Halacha* all my life and I know what I am talking about." According to Amir, Rabin personally bore the responsibility for the murder of Jews at the hands of Palestinian terrorists because he was an ally of the Palestinians (Rabin-Jewish Council). "When I aimed at him it was as if I aimed at a terrorist," said Amir, adding that what he had done had been done in the name of his people, the land and Torah Israel. Amir had a deep hatred of Arabs and of all those who have anything to do with them, which was why, in his eyes, the Rabin government had lost all its legitimacy. When he saw the crowd gathering at the 'Place of the Kings' he remarked the following: "Look at the audience, half of them are Arabs." During the interrogation the officials tried in vain to elicit from Amir information concerning the men behind him or the rabbis who had given him the religious excuse for the murder, without which, he admitted, he would not have committed it. It should be noted here that had the assassin been an Arab, 'moderate physical force' - i.e., torture - would have been on the agenda. "The colleagues from the Shin Bet do not refrain from using this permitted means when it comes to Palestinians."⁷

During the questioning Amir revealed that two rabbis had called Rabin a *rodef* and a *mosser*. A *rodef* is a persecutor who puts Jews in moral danger. If there is no other possibility such a persecutor must be killed in order to

⁶ See Peretz Kidron, "Right-wing Hysteria" in *MEI*, 7 July 1995, p.6.

⁷ Amnon Kapeliuk, *Rabin. Ein Politischer Mord – Nationalismus und Rechte Gewalt in Israel*, Heidelberg 1997, p.44.

save other human lives; this is not seen as a punishment but as redemption. A *mosser*, meanwhile, is a spy or someone who extradites someone else, especially Jews and/or gives their possessions to non-Jews. Like a *rodef* a *mosser* can be killed without a court ruling. Thus, the assassination was like an order from above, which no one could have prevented, as Yigal Amir's brother Haggai explained. According to Jewish Law, Amir's act was not a murder but rather an urgent necessity, something that needed to be done in order to divert danger from the Jewish people. Aron Ronald Bodenheimer, for many years the medical superintendent of the psychiatric department of the university hospital Tel Hashomer in Tel Aviv, sees God as the only guilty one. "He who judges Amir, judges God... The perpetrator lives in heaven. If it is the same God that carried the biblical books of the two testaments into the world, then it is He who is guilty."⁸

Amir, who had attended a paramilitary Talmud school, originates from Herzliya in the Israeli heartland. The campus rabbi of the Bar Ilan University where he studied is Israel Hess, who at the beginning of the 1980s had published a tractate entitled "The Commandment to Commit Genocide in the Torah." According to Hess, all those who declared war on 'God's people' are 'Amalecites' (archenemies of Israel), and God declared the counter-jihad in which the 'Amalecites', right down to the last woman and child, must be exterminated. Hess is still teaching at Bar Ilan, where the followers of Meir Kahane were allowed to put up racist placards that showed Rabin washing blood from his hands.

Rabbis had a leading role in the inflammatory actions against the legitimately elected government that finances them. With their speeches and 'religious-legalistic' decisions they have contributed to the denial of the government's legitimacy. They argued, for example, that the government had 'no mandate' and was not based on a Jewish majority; even worse, they said, was the fact that in the Knesset, the government was dependent on the votes of the Arab delegates, i.e., the "non-Jewish Knesset Members," who received their orders directly from Arafat. Such statements ignore the fact that the Arab Knesset Members are Israeli citizens.

Former Prime Minister Netanyahu also contributed to the poisoning of the atmosphere that led to the assassination of Rabin. He, Sharon and Ehud Olmert spoke at rallies during which placards that declared Rabin 'fair game' were displayed without distancing themselves from such propagandist material. David Levy and other Likud politicians warned Netanyahu that he should not allow the Likud to become 'the tail of the extremist parties'.

⁸ Aron Ronald Bodenheimer, *Rabins Tod. Ein Essay*. Zürich, 1996, p.35.

On the placards Rabin was displayed as a 'betrayal', 'murderer', or the 'Rabin-Jewish Council', which is one of the worst accusations as it suggests collaboration between Rabin and the Palestinians that could lead to the destruction of Israel. There were demonstrations during which a Rabin puppet was displayed wearing a Palestinian *keffiyeh*, an SS uniform with a swastika, dangling from a gallows or lying in a coffin with the words 'Rabin - Murderer of Zionism' on it. During one rally, right-extremists shouted: "With blood and fire will we disperse Rabin." The speakers hammered their hostile message into the audience. They compared Rabin with Marshall Pétain and presented an indictment for a future high treason trial. In another incident, a group of 'mystics' - mainly rabbis - organized a spooky ceremony in front of Rabin's apartment, which is considered one of the worst possible forms of stigmatization. They exorcised 'avenging angels', which were to kill Rabin with 'whipping fire lashes' (*pulsa denura*): "and against him, Yitzhak, son of Rosa, who is known as Rabin, we are permitted to ask the Angel of Destruction to raise the sword and kill this bad human being; for he hands the Land of Israel to our enemies, to the sons of Ismail." One participant stated the following in front of a television camera: "The betrayer Rabin will be condemned. This judgement is the strongest and whenever applied, it brings results." Three days after this religious mummery Rabin was dead. Such actions certainly belong to the political and moral low points in the history of Israel. Leah Rabin is convinced that the Likud bloc had launched this campaign against her husband for political and ideological reasons.⁹ It speaks for itself that since the election of Netanyahu and the beginning of the stalemate in the peace process, the debates concerning the seeking of adequate answers concerning the 'betrayal on the Jewish people' have become completely silent.

The scientist Haim Gordon was harsh in his criticism of the behavior and statements of rabbis. At a conference that was held in Beersheva in June 1997 he put it this way: "The uniqueness of this idolatry is that it is determined by nationalistic, political opinions and comes from Jews who call themselves religious." This idolatry spread like a 'cancerous ulcer' and became the norm. None of the leading rabbis or politicians spoke out against this idolatry. "The rabbis are not 'spiritual leaders'. They are swindlers... hundreds of rabbis in Israel are idolaters because they do not ask their followers to live a life of justice in accordance with the Commandments - instead these rabbis encourage their followers to disregard the Commandments and to worship the Land of Israel." This kind of Judaism has become a "fanatic and insane religion, that is completely de-

⁹ Leah Rabin, "Vorwort" in Richard Haim Schneider, *Israel am Wendepunkt. Von der Demokratie zum Fundamentalismus?* München, 1998.

void of the spirituality of the Bible." Many Israelis had 'sinned' against their neighbors, which would have to lead to reparation measures.¹⁰ Stefanie Christmann wrote in the *Freitag* of 6 June 1997 that the religious forces not only block the return of the territory "but also fight and undermine the secular constitutional state in order to establish in its stead a fundamentalist Jewish state."

Parts of the Left and of the Labor Party called the act that of a "crazy settler" (Ehud Barak) or a "foreign implant" (Amos Oz). "These killings might be madness, but the ideology on which they are based is not an alien implant, nothing that is external of Israel political culture. Rather, their spiritual roots trace back deep into the history of Zionism."¹¹ Amir and Goldstein are terrorists but they were not insane. It is therefore difficult to follow the assessment of Amos Elon who characterized Amir as the good boy from next door who had grown up in the country and Goldstein as an American cowboy searching for the Wild West.¹² This argument completely bypasses the theological tradition both identified with. The acts were not perpetrated by political scatterbrains or lunatics, "but by rationally acting intellectuals."¹³

For the Labor Party, Meretz and other liberal and leftist groupings it was clearly the Right that bore the responsibility for the assassination. The Left made Yitzhak Rabin a 'saint' and 'peace politician', while Leah Rabin referred to him as a 'memorial'.¹⁴

After the assassination of Rabin, the Left took to making the most curious statements such as: "Yitzhak, you look down on us from above" or "Rabin, tell God, to whom you are so close now, to get rid of Netanyahu." However, Rabin does not really live up to his 'memorial' image, taking into consideration the fact that for the greater part of his life, he was a man of war. Along with others he participated in the dispersion of the Palestinians in 1948 and then again in 1967. Only in 1993 and due to strategic necessities was he ready to come to terms with the Palestinians. If one looks at the agreements he negotiated it is difficult to comprehend

¹⁰ Ludwig Watzal, "Thirty Years Since the Six-Day War: Economic and Social Perspectives, 8-9 June 1997, Beersheva", in *Orient*, 38 (1997) 3, p. 450.

¹¹ Roger Friedland/Richard Hecht, "Zuviel Liebe zum Land", in *Lettre Internationale* (Spring 1996), p.20.

¹² See Amos Elon, "Israel's Demons", in *The New York Review of Books*, 21 December 1995.

¹³ Ludwig Watzal, "Die Rechte in Israel und ihr extremistisches Umfeld", in *Vorgänge*, 35 (1996) 4, p.16; and L. Watzal, "Mit peitschenden Feuerhieben - Israels Rechte gewinnt an Boden", in *Lutherische Monatshefte*, (1997) 9, p.22-25.

¹⁴ See Leah Rabin, *Ich gehe weiter auf seinem Weg. Erinnerungen an Yitzhak Rabin*. München, 1997. Much more diverse is the stand of the writers of the *Jerusalem Report: Yitzhak Rabin - Feldherr und Friedensmacher: Die Biographie*. Berlin, 1996.

why the Western public has called him a 'peace politician'. The author wrote about Leah Rabin's book in the *FAZ* of 26 August 1997: "To remember Rabin means, among other things, to recall that he was against a sovereign Palestinian state, against the dissolution of the settlements, against the Palestinians' right of return, and against East Jerusalem as a capital for the Palestinians." One should not forget that it was Rabin who initiated the closure policy at the end of March 1993, which is in force until today, and who led in July 1993, while the secret talks were underway in Oslo, a short war in Lebanon that involved the dispersion of some 500,000 people.

After the assassination of Rabin, the Right in Israel appeared to be paralyzed. All of a sudden no one was admitting that they had ever been involved in giving inflammatory speeches or in participating in anti-government demonstrations. The Left made the mistake of defending the secret services, which resulted in the Right using that - after the taking over of the government by Netanyahu - and accusing the Left as well as the Shin Bet. The Right spread two accounts of the assassination of Rabin: an extreme one and a moderate one.

According to the extreme scenario - published on 31 October 1997 by *Hazofe*, the newspaper of the National Religious Party, and reprinted by *Ha'aretz* on 2 November - the secret service knew about the assassination plan of Amir and had informed the Prime Minister, who had approved the attack but instructed the secret service to exchange the bullets with blank cartridges. Furthermore, a leading Shin Bet agent supposedly informed Peres, and both decided that the bullets should not be exchanged. Almost all Israeli personalities, including Netanyahu and Peres, have rejected these speculations. However, on 9 November 1997, *Ha'aretz* reported that a considerable number of moderate synagogue-goers believed in this theory. Yitzhak Ben Nun, for example, stated the following: "Is it not a shame that the Left accuses half the Israeli population of the murder? Am I a murderer? If you want to know who the murderer is you should ask Shimon Peres... I believe that the Shabak killed Rabin in order to replace him with Peres." And Ya'acov Malka said: "If it wasn't the Shabak that killed Rabin, why would it then have hired Avishai Raviv to instigate against him? ... I am against Bibi but for how long am I supposed to mourn about Rabin on the order of the Left? I am no longer ready to be treated like a dog!" Israel Shahak assumes that approximately 20 percent of Israelis believe the thesis concerning Peres and the secret service.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Israel Shahak, "The Renewed Debate about Rabin's Assassination" in *From the Hebrew Press*, IX (1997) 12, p.18.

The moderate version also claims that Peres was involved and accuses the secret service of either having helped in the murder or having arranged it. These claims are based on the following two arguments: the activities of Raviv and his connection to Amir on the one hand and the neglectful protection of Rabin on the other. The Shin Bet is further accused of not having taken any precautions that could have prevented the assassination.

With the new findings the secret service appeared in an increasingly bad light, having seemingly neglected its elementary duties so badly. This failure of the Shin Bet has caused immense damage to the otherwise excellent reputation of the secret services. The Shin Bet is a prized Israeli export; in Africa alone some 20,000 Israelis are said to pursue security-related activities. The investigation report, which was compiled under the guidance of the former president of the Supreme Court, Meir Shamgar, came to the conclusion that the Shin Bet had not functioned properly. It did not, however, mention a single word about the environment, religious and otherwise, in which people like Amir were able to thrive.

Raviv has worked for the Shin Bet ever since 1987. He was known to have an obsessive hate of Arabs and 'leftist betrayers' and at the young age of 14 he had become a member of the fascist Kach. He stems from a non-religious family; thus, in order to convince the settlers of his 'religiosity' he beat up and mishandled Palestinians in a terrible manner, particularly children and elderly people. He also destroyed their possessions, for which he was arrested but immediately released following the intervention of the secret service. Because of his hedonistic lifestyle and his casual clothes he never gained the trust of the religious extremists and had only very little influence within the rightist-religious circles, especially in Hebron. Amir had intended to accept Raviv in the inner circle of Eyal, but his brother Haggai fought against it.

Raviv got the attention of the press because of his 'eccentric' actions; for example, it was Raviv who had produced the poster of Rabin wearing a SS uniform and who had initiated a bizarre scene when he made youth swear 'loyalty to Eretz Israel' while they drank the blood of newly slaughtered cocks. The latter action was to characterize the rightist scene; something the Right considered a major insult. In this context, the following comment of journalist Elie Elitzur, made in the 9 November 1997 edition of *Yediot Aharonot*, deserves attention. After a local newspaper in Jerusalem revealed that Raviv had traveled on the order of the secret service to Gaza and met there with Hamas leaders to arrange for joint terror attacks, Elitzur wrote: "No one can tell me that a Shin Bet agent goes to Gaza to meet Hamas leaders without having been sent by the Shin

Bet." Is it possible that the Shin Bet was also behind the terrible actions against Palestinians in Hebron?

There are indeed numerous questions that remain unanswered in relation to the death of Rabin. For example, it is hard to believe that the Shin Bet did not know anything about the planned attack as Amir had publicly spoken about the necessity of killing Rabin and had been repeatedly encouraged to do it by Raviv. It is similarly difficult to comprehend why there had been no picture of Amir or at least a description of him in police circles. Why, furthermore, was Rabin on the evening of his assassination only accompanied by one bodyguard, even though there had been rumors concerning an 'Islamic terror attack'? Even this bodyguard was not present when Amir pulled the trigger as Rabin had allegedly sent him to his wife. It is also unclear who shouted "blank cartridges, blank cartridges," as heard by Lean Rabin and other standers-by. Raviv, who was not at the scene of the crime, released the news that this time the attempt had failed but that next time it would work. The only explanation for this is that an informant had told Raviv that blank cartridges were being used. This contradiction remains unsolved because Raviv could not be interrogated by an independent state attorney. It is worth noting that Raviv is until today on the payroll, apparently without doing anything.

Does all this not sound like a 'conspiracy theory'? The Israeli Knesset should pass a law that sets limits for the activities of the Shin Bet, which is directly involved in almost every event in Israeli politics and influences – if not makes – decisions. The public should not justify its unlawful actions with the security argument and should no longer accept its determining role within the society.

What are the spiritual foundations the nationalistic-right and the religious camp in Israel refer to? Baruch Goldstein, Amir Yigal, and thousands of others who support or belong to groups such as Gush Enumim, Kach, Kahane Chai, or Zu Arzeno have had a religious education without which neither the killings perpetrated by these two men nor the latent ethnocentrism evident throughout Israeli society can be understood. Although the extreme nationalistic right wing in Israel had continuously drummed into their followers' heads that it was not allowed to kill a member of their own 'tribe', this taboo was broken as a result of the radicalization of the society. Since the Israelis have always been preoccupied with dealing with their external enemies, their internal enemies remained hidden. Shocking is the fact that for decades the killing of Palestinians had apparently been accepted as a 'gentlemen's crime' and was only in the rarest cases formally punished. Settlers who committed crimes were in the majority of cases punished only very lightly, and both the leftist and rightist government

camps have given in to their illegal activities far too often. The government has also for far too long ignored the fact that the religious and the nationalists have repeatedly referred to 'divine' law which is in clear contradiction to secular, constitutional law.

The idolization of extremists has manifested itself in strange ways within Israeli society. For example, an elaborate grave was erected for the mass murderer Baruch Goldstein in the Meir Kahane Park of the extremist settlement of Kiryat Arba and has since turned into the site of a place of pilgrimage for all religious extremists and nationalists in Israel. The assassination of Rabin has also become an idol, and on 9 August 1997 Israeli television reported on three girls of roughly 17 years of age who had founded a Yigal Amir fan club. The girls said that their parents and teachers tolerated, justified and even actively promoted the initiative. In front of the camera they passed around photos of their 'hero' and praised his courage and the smile he had kept on his face throughout the entire trial. The girls attend religious schools and belong to the Orthodox wing of Israeli society. Their headmistresses spoke of 'confused' ideas of misled juveniles, but on the walls of the schools one could read graffiti expressing a wish that Shimon Peres would die.

The journalists Ariel Weiss and Avi Segal reported on 6 December 1996 in *Yerushalayim* that one quarter of the Jewish national-religious public supported the act of Yigal Amir. The director of the religious school 'Dugma Uziel' refused to officially commemorate the assassination of Rabin in his school because doing so could have resulted in unrest in light of the fact that a considerable number of his students belong to families that welcomed the murder. A commission of inquiry assigned by the Ministry of Education with the goal of cleansing the religious schools came to the conclusion that there was an alarming minority "which has either an indifferent position *vis-à-vis* the assassination, or which, in several cases, even identifies with it." At a related press conference the Minister of Education, Zevulun Hammer, made the following statement: "Should there be teachers who consistently support such a position, then they have no place in our education system."

As a 'Jewish' state Israel discriminates *qua definitionem* against all non-Jews. Orthodox Jews consider non-Jews 'unequal'. A discourse on this fact will eventually provide the key to understanding the events that unfold in the country. Religious fundamentalists and extremist nationalists always refer to the Jewish-Orthodox law that proclaims the soil of the Land of Israel to be holier than a human life and that states that this soil must be liberated from the *goyim* (non-Jews).

Professor Israel Shahak wrote the following about this subject on 8 April 1994 in the newspaper *Davar*: "After the revelation of the murderous attacks of the Jewish underground no attempt was made to understand the *Halachic* roots of these acts. In my opinion these are the main reason why the murderer Goldstein was able to execute his plan and gain the sympathy and the understanding of such wide circles. I hope that for the public, which does not want us to reach a situation similar to that in Khomeini's Iran, the one-time experience in ignoring fundamental problems will be enough and that it will use the dreadful assassination to clarify its ideological roots.

"Let us begin with the fact that the *Halacha* generally forbids a Jew - even if he is a doctor - to save the life of a *goyim*. Accordingly, the Rambam states: 'But non-Jews that are not at war with us, and herdsman and similar people, those we do not save from death and it is forbidden to rescue them if they are in deadly peril. For example, if one sees one of them falling into the sea then we will not pull him up because it is said: 'One does not stand inactive by the blood of one's neighbor, i.e., this is not one's neighbor' (*Halacha* on the murder and the protection of the soul, 4.11) ... At one place Rambam adds to this law: 'From this you learn that it is forbidden to heal non-Jews even for payment; if one is afraid of a [non-Jew] or is suspected of hostility, then he heals for payment - to heal free of charge, however, is forbidden' (*Halacha* on idolatry, 10.2).

"If a religious Jew had prevented Goldstein from killing non-Jews he had been driven only - according to the *Halacha* - by concerns regarding whether this killing was 'for the good of the Jews' or 'for the good of the Jewish settlements', as we indeed hear from certain religious spokesmen. The basic rule that the life of a non-Jew from the point of view of the *Halacha* is without any value is even clearer in a topic dealt with in great detail in the *Halacha*, namely the problem of the desecration of the Sabbath in the case of treating a sick *goyim*. If a Jew is concerned then the law concerning the 'salvation from mortal danger' applies, which invalidates the Sabbath Law. According to the *Halacha* (and *Kabbala*) non-Jews have no soul and therefore the *Halacha* determines that a Jew, including a Jewish doctor, would not want to desecrate the Sabbath in order to rescue or treat a *goyim*, unless it is a matter of the above-mentioned 'salvation from mortal danger' or perceived 'hostility', i.e., of the fear of a potential danger to Jews....

"Without doubt these are the religious laws, which most of the national-religious follow in practice and all Orthodox in theory, and it is upon these that they base their standpoint regarding the killing of Arabs by Jews, as was the case with the 'Jewish underground'. There is also no

doubt that these laws not only influence the entire religious public but also all those secular circles that have not completely liberated themselves from religion, especially as their behavior *vis-à-vis* non-Jews is concerned.”

Since the latent racism of Jewish Israelis is nurtured by the fact that they are ‘the Chosen People’, as laid down in the religion, Israel Shahak stresses the following: “Although the struggle against anti-Semitism (and of all other forms of racism) should never cease, the struggle against Jewish chauvinism and exclusivism, which must include a critique of classical Judaism, is now of equal or even greater importance.”¹⁶

Rabbi David Hartman pointed indirectly to this problem when he wrote in the *Jewish Week* the following: “I think that if we look at all this as something strange to us, as some sort of an accident, then we cannot really be very aware of ourselves. This was not an accident. It is unambiguously something that grows in this country (Israel), something that arises from our tradition... There is no doubt whatsoever that there are things in the Jewish religion that can generate such a racist understanding.... What Goldstein did reminds me how dangerous it is to fail to contradict the speeches pertaining to Amalec. Goldstein has challenged me to recognize the sort of crime one can commit against humanity and morality under the pretext that there is only one value, which excludes everything else, namely the land (Israel), and that sovereignty over the whole land is the ultimate goal... This is by no means only crazy decoration. This is a sick component that is able to infiltrate the Jewish self-perception.”

It was due to such religious reasons that Goldstein always refused to treat non-Jews. According to the *Yediot Aharonot* of 1 March 1994 he told the High Military Rabbi Gad Navon the following: “As a doctor I am not ready to treat anyone who is not a Jew. I only recognize the Rambam and Kahane.” Shahak explains: “In fact, the *Halacha* instructs Jews to behave exactly like this. If there is a risk that the authorities will be notified about the refusal of a pious Jewish doctor to treat non-Jews then he is allowed to treat them but only in order to spare himself or other Jews any trouble. There is good reason to assume that whenever pious doctors – and Goldstein was such a pious doctor – are forced, due to certain circumstances, to ‘treat’ Arabs, they will in fact not try to heal them. Even if they are not explicitly wishing for the death of a patient, they will do nothing effective to improve their condition.”

It is only logical that Rabbi Dov Lior from Kiryat Arab calls a mass murderer a ‘righteous man’: “Since Goldstein did what he did in the name of

¹⁶ Israel Shahak, op.cit. (footnote 1), p.103.

God, he must be viewed as a ‘righteous man’.” Goldstein was afforded a pompous funeral with a funeral procession in Jerusalem and the burial in Kiryat Arab. Miriam Goldstein, who is a Kach activist, became a heroine overnight and will never have to worry about how she or her four children will live. She has not expressed any word of regret but rather demanded the punishment of her husband’s murderers. The religious world of delusion in which the inhabitants of Kiryat Arba live is clearly reflected in the following notes in the diary of June Leavitt: “Baruch Goldstein has changed the consciousness of all of us... (He) confronts each one of us anew with the principle of ‘martyrdom’... (He) has acted like the Jews in the Bible... If it is our basis then Baruch’s behavior was in conformity.”¹⁷ In Hebron several zealots warned other Jews not to abandon the city of the Patriarchs because this would be a ‘perversion of Zionist ideals’.

The nationalistic and religious-fundamentalist Jews questioned the secularity of the state. After the Six-Day War, even the military establishment increasingly identified with the religious variant of Zionism. The higher-ranking officers still feel obligated to secular Zionism *à la* Labor Party but Colonel Mikha Regev – a deputy battalion commander – pointed in an interview with the *Davar* newspaper of 23 November 1995 to the growing number of soldiers who came from Hesder Yeshiva, who were educated by their rabbis in the messianic tradition and who “held the secular regime in Israel in deep disdain.” He added: “Within this national-religious trend there is a not unremarkable number of very dangerous [people]. They consider Zionism a process of cosmic redemption. They define secular Zionism as a collective messiah.” The elite units of the Israeli army in particular are infiltrated by such extremists on the instruction of the rabbis. According to Moshe Zimmermann, “These yeshivot personify *par excellence* a combination of Torah studies and military service.”¹⁸ Their motivation to fight has religious roots. They increasingly substitute the worldly oriented soldiers and silently undermine the Israeli army.

Shahak believes that the interconnection between the military and religion will in the long run threaten the security of Israel. “The number of religiously oriented officers and soldiers is increasing because the messianic Jews are the strongest militarists in Israel. They encourage their children to willingly extend their military service after completing the compulsory three years, and they run schools with a military curriculum in which the students are brought up with the goal of becoming officers in elite units. Some 30 percent of those in officer classes are messianic Jews. They are

¹⁷ June Leavitt, *Hebron, Westjordanland: Im Labyrinth des Terrors. Tagebuch einer jüdischen Siedlerin*. Hildesheim, 1996, p.24.

¹⁸ Moshe Zimmermann, *Wende in Israel. Zwischen Nation und Religion*. Berlin, 1996, p.110.

excellent soldiers, and the army favors them. They could be tempted to organize a *coup d'état*, which, from their point of view, is becoming more and more of a possibility."¹⁹

The attack on Rabin helped reveal the extent to which the social consensus in Israel has been shaken. The State-religion conflict has reached critical proportions because of the increased power of the nationalists and the religious fundamentalists. This conflict is based on the question of whether Israel wants to continue to perceive itself as a secular state or develops into a 'God state'. Not only the *Ma'ariv* newspaper, which publishes on a daily basis one to two pages of mutual accusations between the religious and secular camps, bears witness to this.

Against the State-religion conflict the Israeli-Palestinian conflict retreats to the background. The religious fundamentalists have not yet achieved the spiritual hegemony over the society they are striving for but they act in an increasingly offensive manner, and secular Israelis are determinedly pushed out of religious residential quarters. In the Israeli settlement of Ramot in East Jerusalem extremists wrote on walls that they intended to turn a swimming pool into a religious bath (*mikve*). More and more often the swearing-in of army recruits takes place in front of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and less often at the former fortress of Masada. The fundamentalists also demand their own Holocaust memorial because the exhibition rooms of Yad Vashem display photos of naked people being pushed into the gas chambers, in contradiction of Jewish Law, which prohibits any form of nakedness.

That the anger of the fundamentalists can even turn against Netanyahu was clear from the reaction that followed the signing of the Hebron Protocol. The nationalist camp around the outlawed Kach movement labeled him a 'betrayal', while the Habad movement threatened to bring Netanyahu before a Torah court on charges of broken promises; during the election campaign, the Habad Hasedim had played the drum for Netanyahu with the slogan "Netanyahu is good for the Jews." Israel Shahak even prophesized in a conversation with the author an attack on the Prime Minister. Nationalists and religious fundamentalists have extended the scope of their power to such a degree that it could become very difficult for the secular and Western-oriented to maintain their role in the long run.

The next power struggle the government will face has to do with the Conversion Law that shall regulate who is a Jew or how one can convert to Judaism. This law is a first-class policy issue that has the potential to

¹⁹ "Arafat ist ein Diktator", op.cit., (footnote 3), p.18f.

cause a serious crisis within the government. For the Orthodox the problem of conversion is far more important than the peace process or the economic policy. They insist that only conversions that have been executed by rabbis who are recognized by the Supreme Rabbinat can be accepted. These conversions automatically guarantee the right of citizenship. What this means in concrete terms is that those Jews who believe in Liberal and Conservative Judaism would fall through the Orthodox sieve and consequently be excluded from institutionalized religious life in Israel. So far only Orthodox Jews sit on the religious councils of the cities; they control the Higher Rabbinat in Jerusalem and demand that Netanyahu fixes the current *status quo*. In doing so they refer to a coalition agreement of June 1996. This claim of sole representation, which invalidates the different streams of Judaism that emerged over the past 200 years, has resulted in heavy resistance from the American Jewry. Approximately 90 percent of the six million Jewish Americans belong to the liberal and conservative streams of Judaism, and as a consequence of the Conversion Law, the vast majority of these American Jews would no longer be recognized as Jews. This religious dispute is also connected to money and power: on the one hand the distribution of US\$70 million for the construction of synagogues and the maintenance of the kosher laws etc. and on the other, the attempts by liberal Jews to strive for a clear separation between religion and State. This, of course, is not in the interest of the Orthodox because it would mean the end of their power base.

It was not so much the loss of the Jewish donations that Netanyahu feared but the loss of the political lobbying in the United States, which, however, is rather unlikely. At the end of 1997 the government had asked for some time for reflection as it is keen to find a compromise. The conflict is not only about conversion but also about the legal aspects of marriage, rites, the role of women, and the right to pray at the Wailing Wall.

All groups wanted to avoid the division of the nation. On 23 January 1998, Finance Minister Ya'acov Neeman suggested the establishment of a central institute for religious conversions for all three streams of Judaism. His plan further suggested that those willing to convert could study with a rabbi of their choice but would have to convert under the supervision of an Orthodox rabbi. The final recognition would be reserved for the Orthodox Rabbinat. However, it should be possible for wedding ceremonies to be conducted by non-Orthodox Rabbis although in the presence of two witnesses from the Supreme Rabbinat. This does not conform to the ideas of the Liberal and Conservative Jews but it would open the door to institutionalized religious life in Israel for them.

The Reform rabbis have not signed the plan and the Orthodox also rejected this compromise and refused to attend a meeting with their Reform colleagues, whom they do not recognize. In *The Guardian Weekly* of 2 November 1997 Rabbi David Yossef described the attitude of Orthodox rabbis *vis-à-vis* their non-Orthodox colleagues as follows: "The Reform and the Conservative movements have created a new religion that has nothing in common with Judaism. If they return to Judaism they must give up the bizarre religion they have created." Other Orthodox go as far as to call the Reform rabbis 'terrorists' and their Reform Judaism a 'despicable farce.'

In January 1998, a commission convened under the General Secretary of the Jewish Agency, Avraham Burg to discuss the question of how the religion of converts should be indicated on their Israeli identity cards. Burg suggested the adding of the letter 'J' and the year of birth or of the conversion to the document. Details of the kind of conversion – Orthodox, Conservative or Reform – should only be made accessible to recognized religious circles. This ominous letter stands for 'Jewish' or 'Israeli' but awakens bad memories; in addition, the procedure would contradict the principle of equality.

In mid-September 1997 it came to confrontations between Orthodox and Conservative Jews at the Wailing Wall on the occasion of the prayer of Tisha Be'au. On the order of the Ministry of Religion and with the use of force, Conservative Jews were dispersed from the plaza in front of the Wailing Wall and from the Old City of Jerusalem. This was the first time ever that the government had forbidden Conservative Jews to pray at the Wailing Wall. The prayer, in which men and women were not separated, took place in front of the area that is usually reserved for prayers, i.e., at a place where indecently dressed tourists hang around, which obviously, was of little concern to the Orthodox in their designated prayer area. The ministry is directed by an Orthodox Jew.

Due to the increase in the number of religious Jews, the Arab population and the foreign workers the Israeli secular elite reacts more and more neurotically. Their fears are not groundless because the average birth rate in Israel is 2.9 while that amongst the Orthodox stands at 5.9. However, if one takes into consideration all the other aspects of daily life, it becomes clear that the Israeli society was never as secular as it is today. Thus it seems as if there is primarily an identity crisis among the secular Israelis that revealed itself as a result of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

Although the Israeli society is still secular, it is undergoing a creeping re-orientation process. According to a poll conducted by the *Yediot Aharonot*

newspaper on 15 October 1997, some 17 percent of the Israelis have built a close relation with religion over the past six years. For example, 13,000 non-religious Jews had become Haredim, 24,000 practicing believers, and 130,000 traditionalists. At the same time, 175,000 traditionalists had turned into practicing believers and 24,000 practicing believers into Haredim. In the same poll, 44 percent of those questioned said that they were closer to religion than their parents, 33 percent said that they were as religious/non-religious as their parents, and only 22 percent that they were less religious than their parents.

According to Israel Shahak, the conflict between religious and secular Israelis primarily concerns their respective attitude *vis-à-vis* non-Jews. "The real issue is whether Israeli Jews should continue the attitude of hatred, contempt and the wish to separate themselves from non-Jews that has characterized (with relative few exceptions) the Jewish attitude to non-Jews about 400 AD until the 19th Century and still are being continued by Orthodox Jews."²⁰ This thesis of Shahak was confirmed by Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Halberstam, who is close to the Labor Party, in the *Ha'aretz* of 15 August 1997: "The danger for Israel that derives from the Reform Jews is bigger than any other because it is not only a material but also a spiritual danger. The non-Jews who converted from the Reform movement to Judaism and who are considered Jews by Israel maintain after all a non-Jewish mentality. As such they continue to hate Jews because non-Jews always hate Jews. Therefore these Jews form a fifth column and this is why the Reform Jews in Tel Aviv and Netanya must be feared more than the Arabs in Ramallah."

The accusation of too little hating sounds unbelievable to Western ears. Moshe Zuckermann also confirmed the component of hatred in the Israeli society in an interview with the author. He spoke of pupils who travel to Auschwitz and who no longer connect the Holocaust with Germany or the Germans, but who, feeling a need to hate someone, hate the Polish instead. A young Israeli journalist said bluntly that she hated Germans because of their being German. This hatred is also directed against the Palestinians. Instead of differentiating, certain groups of Jews are creating a universal Amalec. From here it is only a small step to calling Saddam Hussein a 'new Hitler' or a 'new Pharaoh'. More important is the turning away from hatred. If emotions are involved, then they should be used in an emancipating manner; for instance, with regard to the Holocaust, by making a collective decision to never again be victims.²¹

²⁰ Israel Shahak, "The Basic Reasons for the Secular-Religious Struggle in Israel", in *From the Hebrew Press*, IX (1997) 9, p.24.

²¹ See "Mit Schuldgefühlen ist gar nichts getan - Ludwig Watzal im Gespräch mit Moshe Zuckermann" in *Universitas*, 52 (1997) 616, p.964.

2. Ashkenazim versus Sephardim/Mizrahim

The conflict between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews as well as the conflict over the definition monopoly of the Orthodox Jews suggests the thesis that there is in principle a contrast between Judaism (religion) and nation (Israel). The life spheres of these two streams of Judaism, which are based on utterly different cultural fundamentals, are completely distinct; Jews from various countries of origin can only become one nation if they are assimilated into the 'Israelism'. The question is whether 'ethnocentric Zionism' still has anything to do with 'Israelism', the latter being a product of secular Zionism.

The contrasts in Zionism that prevailed from the beginning are maintained until this day. The Ashkenazi hegemony in the political, military, economic and cultural spheres is still valid despite demographic shifts in favor of the Sephardim. In this respect, the impetus of the Western claim of progress *vis-à-vis* the 'backward' Orientals might have played a role.

The original Zionism has always understood itself as an emancipation movement for all Jews. The movement has spared no effort in using the terms 'Jewish' and 'Zionist' as synonyms. Initially Zionism was actually some kind of a 'liberation movement' involving a small European minority of Jews, but when it became obvious that the European Jews did not represent an unlimited source of cheap labor, Sephardim from the Arab states were brought 'home'. As Tom Segev has made evident, there was strong resistance against such a policy among Israel's Zionist elite. A 'First World' elite created a nation within the nation by bringing in a Third World people – the Sephardim. Behind a façade of rhetorical egalitarianism the Sephardim were in fact discriminated against and only because they were, after all, Jews, were they treated slightly better than the Palestinians. This latent discrimination is the underlying reason for the widespread antipathy within Israel's Sephardi population *vis-à-vis* the Ashkenazim.

The vast majority of the Sephardim support right wing and religious parties. In general, they are considered in Israel as being traditional, emotional, nationalistic, intolerant, extremist, and Arab-haters, and thus, uncompromising in any question related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the media always covers attacks involving the Sephardim, they appear extreme, while the Ashkenazim are portrayed as rational and pragmatic, ready for compromises, supporters of the Left and friends of peace.

Among the common Ashkenazi interpretations of such stereotypes are the following:

- The Sephardim have a much stronger anti-Arab attitude because they were persecuted in their countries of origin. In Israel, however, there is a possibility for them to take their revenge. Their lower level of education and their religious traditionalism contribute to their overall irrationality and intolerance. In order to liberate themselves from their Arab origins they need to have and display an extreme anti-Arab attitude.
- The Sephardim benefit more from the occupation than the Ashkenazim do because the Palestinian workers substitute them in doing the worst jobs. The suppression of the Palestinians is thus in their interest.
- The hatred of the Sephardim vis-à-vis the Palestinians is a result of the frictions that evolved due to the competition in a restricted labor market. The contradicting declarations of some Sephardi intellectuals can be summarized under the following slogan: "The Ashkenazim as an obstacle to peace."
- The Ashkenazim caused the conflict with the Arabs when they founded a Zionist movement that understood itself as separatist and ethnocentric. They behaved in the country like European colonialists and created their own state – separate from the Arabs. Until today they scorn the Arabs and their culture and reject any kind of integration. There will be no peace as long as the Ashkenazim do not change their attitude *vis-à-vis* the Arabs, respect their culture, understand themselves as part of the region, and give up their Euro-Centrism.
- The Ashkenazim see the Sephardim as Arabs and therefore reject them. The Sephardim are hurt by this and accuse the Ashkenazim of not having a genuine desire to achieve peace, of dishonesty, and of not being interested in leveling the class differences. Thus they cannot consider the Sephardim as allies in the struggle for peace.

The mutual stigmatization contains a certain core truth and illustrates the complexity of the mutual relations. A society in which the Ashkenazim dominate all the spheres will confirm the viewpoints of the Sephardim only to a certain extent. Although there are no clear polls it is generally believed that the majority of the 20 percent 'Greater Israel ideologists' in the society are Sephardim, who follow the tradition of Jabotinsky, Kook, and Yitzhak Tabenkin and who form the social base of the political Right in Israel. While the Sephardim used to vote left in the 1950s and 1960s, they - disappointed by the establishment of the Labor Party - turned right in the 1970s. They hoped that the Likud would work toward an improvement of their standard of living and toward recognition of their culture and tradition. Sami Smoocha interprets their decision to vote for the Right

as an expression of aspirations concerning social mobility rather than an endorsement of the supporters of the Greater Israel ideology.²²

In the extremist-racist groupings such as Gush Emunim, Kach, Kahane Chai, Zu Arzeno, the secular right-wing parties Tzomet and Moledet, or the religious-nationalistic Mafdal and the right wing of Likud it is the Ashkenazim who set the tone and who make up the majority of the members. They were also predominantly involved in the wicked anti-Rabin demonstrations and in the Jewish-terrorist underground, which launched terror acts against the Arabs. Therefore they see the Sephardim as a threat to Israel's European culture.

Accordingly, the various integration attempts failed. The integration or first liberation began with David Ben Gurion's idea of introducing 'a Yemenite general chief-of-staff' as an expression of equality between the two population groups. The efforts to pretend that this equality existed were helped by certain measures, but these, including the allocation of a Sephardi seat in the Supreme Court, had only a symbolic value.

Between the so-called first and second liberation of the Sephardim they developed an independent protest movement. In the early 1970s, the North African Jews in particular spoke out against discrimination in the communities and demanded a fairer distribution of the economic resources. They oriented themselves according to the protests of the Afro-Americans in the United States and created some kind of a 'Black Panther movement' which, however, was unable to influence the Israeli Left, its potential clientele. The Right, on the other hand, succeeded through skillful maneuvering to use this protest potential, which eventually helped to bring Menachem Begin to power. Since the Sephardi protest movement was only an internal issue it was not observed abroad.

Ever since their immigration the Sephardim failed to establish a relationship with the Western-oriented Jewish nationalism. They increasingly questioned the European definition of Zionism and used religious patterns of interpretations. With the election victory and coming to power of Menachem Begin this alternative interpretation of Judaism eventually pervaded. The Sephardim turned away from the Zionism of the Labor Party and towards the revisionist form. Both the Sephardim and Begin's revisionist camp considered themselves victims of the Labor Party. With the election defeat of Labor the second liberation in the history of the Sephardim began and they became the new power basis of the Likud Party. Although the party under Begin's leadership had hardly anything in common with

²² See Sami Smooha, "Mizrahim's Parting of Ways" in *News From Within*, X (1994) 1, p.20.

the Sephardim – whether culturally or socially – it offered itself as their natural domicile. With slogans such as "30 years" they hinted at the legislative period of the Labor Party, which had been a time of humiliation and suppression for the Sephardim, and suggested that the Sephardim 2,000 years after their return were having a second round of good luck.

An incident in the city of Bet Shemesh in which Shimon Peres was welcomed with rotten tomatoes during an election campaign event illustrates how proficiently the Likud under Begin played the Sephardi card. Later it was revealed that the Likud had paid the perpetrators. At another election campaign event in Tel Aviv Begin, up on the stage, himself took on the role of a Sephardi Jew, which left a deep impression. The alliance between these *de facto* antagonistic classes could only endure because it formed a unique combination of religion and nationalism. During this period a new generation of Sephardi politicians emerged, among them Meir Shetreet, Moshe Katzav, David Magan, and David Levy. The latter had been rejected by the Labor Party in his hometown of Bet Shean (Arabic: Bisan) before he turned toward Likud. According to Tom Segev, Begin universalized the Holocaust and made everyone a victim, and even the Sephardim were allowed to become a part of it.²³ The Likud created the impression that the gap between the two population groups had been closed.

In the mid-1980s the Sephardim experienced yet another turn in their history: the foundation of the Shas Party by a group of Sephardim who had studied in the Ultra-Orthodox rabbinical seminaries of the Ashkenazim. They founded Shas on the grounds that all Sephardim had been religious in their home countries but had turned away from religion since arriving in Israel. Moreover, they portrayed their own experience in Israel as a 'spiritual eradication' (*shmad*), whereby they directed their accusations not against the Israeli society in general but against certain institutions such as the kibbutzim. Shas focused on the urban poor. The party explained the bad economic, social and cultural situation of the Sephardim with Israel's turning away from its religious tradition and created a well-functioning system of social and financial support for poor families. Shas succeeded in giving new impetus to the religious way of living.

For the ruling class of the Ashkenazim, the Sephardim were only political objects; accordingly, they only appear in historiography as footnotes or in a marginalized manner. For example, the mass immigration of the years 1948-1951 and the mass dispersion of the Palestinians in the course and as a result of the War of 1948 are portrayed as mass migration. "The emigration of Arabs, who left the country, and the immigration of Jews, who

²³ See Tom Segev, *Die Siebte Million. Der Holocaust und Israels Politik der Erinnerung*. Hamburg, 1995.

made *aliya* to Israel from Arab states, was comparable to an exchange of populations. Approximately 650,000 Arabs left the country and some 750,000 Jews from Arab states immigrated into the country.²⁴

Here, the darkest chapter in the Zionist-Ashkenazi history mutates into a moving back and forth of population groups. It has been claimed that almost all of the immigration waves of the 1950s were rescue actions. With this a linkage to the fate of the survivors of the Holocaust and that of the Jews in the Arab countries is being made, implying that the Ashkenazim had rescued the Jews of Arab origin. The Sephardim felt they were being discriminated against on racial grounds in Israel; more recently, they have kept pointing to the ongoing corruption trial against their party leader Aryeh Deri, grumbling that all Ashkenazi had been acquitted and only Deri was indicted. Furthermore, Yemenite immigrants, whose children were taken from them 50 years ago on the pretext that they were ill and then given to Ashkenazi Holocaust survivors for adoption, refer to racist motives. These examples show that serious efforts to come to terms with the past are still necessary. This also applies to the 'new historians', who have not yet taken up the Sephardi case as they are primarily concerned with revealing the truth about the historical myths of Zionism.

3. From Zionism to 'Post-Zionism' or Ethnocentric Zionism

In Israel an intensive debate over the original, i.e., secular, Zionism has flared up. Moshe Zimmermann supports the thesis that with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the original Zionism was also buried. For him, the assassination was the result of the taking over of the Zionist ideology by the ethnocentric, orthodox-religious variant of Judaism, with which the original Zionism was de-legitimized.²⁵ Ever since the beginning of the colonization of Palestine secular Zionism has been fought by the representatives of religious Zionism, for whom there was only one option, that is the 'rebirth of the Jewish people' against the background of the Torah. They appeared to have almost reached this goal with the election victory of Netanyahu, which turned the original intentions of secular Zionism into their opposite. Ehud Barak's victory in the recent elections does not imply that this trend is about to change.

Since the 1980s, the historical interpretations of the original form of Zionism, which were oriented at the 'national interest' and the 'ruling class',

²⁴ *From Diaspora to State - Chapters in the History of the People of Israel and the State of Israel, 1881-1951*. Ed. by the Ministry of Education, Curriculum, Jerusalem, 1992.

²⁵ See Zimmermann, op.cit. (footnote 18), p.13; and Zimmermann, "Die Geschichte des Zionismus steht nach 100 Jahren an ihrem Ende" in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 6 September 1996.

have been questioned by the 'new historians'. The publicizing of new documents and the application of new research approaches caused this debate. The 'new historians' are also called 'post-Zionists', a term found inadequate by Zimmermann to characterize the scientists on the left of the academic spectrum. In his opinion, the term would rather suit the supporters of the new religious form of Zionism, while the 'new historians' should call themselves 'radical' or 'original Zionists'. The scientist Uri Ram, who created the term 'post-Zionist' in order to separate the 'new historians' from the 'new sociologists' partly agrees with Zimmermann's point of view. He identifies post-Zionism with the end of an epoch of colonization, settlement and building up of Israel as he explained in *Ha'arets* of 24 June 1994. Ram and Zimmermann both assume an end to a monolithic consciousness. The opinions of the 'new historians' have led to a counter-offensive in the field of established historical science, whose representatives accuse them of being 'anti-national' and anti-Zionist, whereby the latter is equal with being an enemy of the State. The aim of the post-Zionists is to shed light on the darker sides of Zionism. Ilan Pappé proposes that they be called revisionists, having in mind the revisionist school in American historical science during the Cold War period²⁶ - which would bring the confusion about the name of this new perspective of Israeli history to an end. For Pappé, post-Zionism is fed with anti-Zionist reasoning and a postmodern perception of the reality.

The question that arises here is why the post-Zionists challenge the history of the last hundred years, during which Zionism experienced considerable success. According to the opinion of Israel Shahak - an anti-Zionist - Zionism would also have to be criticized "if a Jewish state were established on a lonely island without hurting anyone. The reason for this is that a state that is based on the idea of the purity of the religion, the race and the nationality, should be criticized... The reason for my criticism is very simple. I believe that Zionism is a form of racism. I have said for years that it is the mirror image of anti-Semitism. As one perceives anti-Semitism as an expression of the hatred of Jews, Zionism is an expression of the hatred of all non-Jews (*goyim*); not only *vis-à-vis* Arabs but all other *goyim*."²⁷

Are the 'new historians' or the so-called post-Zionists primarily concerned with the criticism of the racist aspects of Zionism or does their criticism go beyond this? The 'new historians' claim that the past - due to reasons of national mobilization - was deliberately interpreted in a one-sided manner. According to them, Zionism fulfilled its task with the foundation of the State of Israel; it was useful during the state-building process but

²⁶ See Ilan Pappé, "Post Zionist Critique on Israel and the Palestinian. Part I: The Academic Debate" in *JPS*, XXVI (Winter 1997) 2, p.33.

²⁷ Shahak, op.cit. (footnote 3), p.16.

later became superfluous and therefore, Israel should have become a normal state, relaxed its connections with the Diaspora Jews, and stopped the admittance of immigrants. They consider the settlements and the concept of the 'redemption of the land' an anachronism and argue that these theses question the truthfulness of the official historiography. In this context, the following aspects are of particular concern:

- the unavoidability of the wars that Israel had led or was forced to lead;
- the justice of the wars and the question of the Palestinian refugee problem;
- the so-called 'Ashkenazi lie', the cultural hegemony and rule of the Ashkenazim over the Sephardim;
- the relation between Zionism and imperialism without which the history of Israel cannot be adequately understood;
- the Zionist claim of being the only answer to the Jewish question;
- the State of Israel as the answer to the Holocaust.

All these areas are of central meaning because they touch on the self-understanding of the Israelis. In their rigorousness the post-Zionists question the old concept of values, which, of course, has consequences for the legitimacy of the State of Israel. They also accuse their established colleagues of using the Holocaust as a 'secret weapon' against any potential criticism of Zionism and reject their scientific approach because it combined elements of positivism with ideology. Thus, their research was 'elitist' and a mixture of ideology, ethnocentrism, and empirical book-keeping, which has left a significant imprint on the national myths and the Israeli self-perception.²⁸

Permanent topics in the center of the debates are the legend concerning the 'flight' of the Palestinians in 1948, the war goals then, the behavior of the Israeli soldiers in the various wars, and the thesis of the Arab's readiness to make peace.

The 'new historians' doubt the testimonies of the official historiography, which maintains that the Jewish community faced eradication on the eve of the War of 1948. The transfiguration of the War of 1948 is countered by Ilan Pappé with the following three arguments: due to the existing military balance of power the yishuv had never been in danger of destruction, the agreement between the Jewish Agency and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan had defused the threat from the Arab armies, and the su-

²⁸ See Pappé, op.cit. (footnote 26), p.31.

perpowers had supported the foundation of Israel. "Generally speaking the Zionists succeeded in persuading large segments of the world public opinion to link the Zionist cause with the Holocaust."²⁹ On 27 August 1993 Ilan Pappé wrote in *Yediot Aharonot* that had he anticipated that the price for Zionism would be the uprooting of another people he would not have wanted the state. According to this viewpoint it is the Israelis rather than the Palestinians who are responsible for the current situation of the latter. Israel is no longer seen as a victim but as a perpetrator. Since the existence of Israel cannot be discussed anymore, the State of Israel should at least become a 'state for all its citizens' and stop the discrimination against the Palestinians.

Natan Sznaider raised grave objections concerning this perspective of the 'new historians' in the *taz* of 22 August 1997. He considers post-Zionism an intellectual ghost and accuses the representatives of this stream of not wanting to be Jews any longer but only Israelis, "citizens without ethnicity." They wanted to be universal and stand on the side of the 'alleged victim'. Israel was anticipated as a Western liberal state with 'good Israelis' but no Jews; the Israeli national identity was based on the territorial principle. "This means equality before the law for all citizens within the State of Israel regardless of ethnic, religious or other identity criteria: constitutional patriotism of the Israeli kind." This critique in regard to the intention of the 'new historians' provokes the question of whether Sznaider justifies and accepts the discriminative acts that are constantly committed against the Palestinian Israelis, which are based on the ethnocentrism of Zionism and its definitions as laid down in the Law of Return. All later legislation refers either directly or indirectly to the Law of Return, which forms the basis for the legal inequality in the treatment of the non-Jewish Israeli.³⁰

In contrast to Sznaider the French journalist Dominique Vidal, in *Le Monde diplomatique* of 12 December 1997, judges the achievements of the 'new historians' as positive and stresses their courage "because their efforts to reveal the truth do not relate to any old episode in history but to the Israeli original sin *per se*. Should the right of the survivors of Hitler's genocide to live in a secure state exclude the right of the daughters and sons of Palestine to live in their state, too? Fifty years afterwards it is about time to finally break with this martial logic and allow the peoples to coexist without continuing to maintain silence concerning what the origins of the tragedy were like."

²⁹ Ibid., p.33.

³⁰ On the discrimination of all non-Jews by the Israeli legislation, see Israël Shahak, "Israeli Discrimination Against Non-Jews" in *From the Hebrew Press*, IX (1997) 11, p.14E.

"The originality of the post-Zionists does not so much lie in the novelty of these ideas, which are all derived from Western political thoughts, rather, that they here think through in great detail for the first time ever what consequences the application of the much disputed term 'normality' to Israel would bring with it."³¹ The status of Israel was always justified with references to the fact that its people were 'chosen by God' and with the latent anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and the 'state of siege.' Since the anti-Semitism was transferred from Europe to the Middle East the life of the Jewish population in the entire world has not become more secure through the existence of Israel but is now in more peril as Moshe Zimmermann sees it. In order to elude a critical self-reflection the representatives of the *status quo* declare the Zionist 'values and visions' still valid instead of analyzing the Israeli peculiarity and exclusivity in a changed environment, and to explain it convincingly. Such an explanation attempt would not turn out to be an easy task since some factors do not exist anymore or have become blurred in the collective memory throughout history.

Besides the 'new historians', the 'new sociologists' play a central role in the critique of the Zionist worldview. Their criticism began with the Yom Kippur War of 1973 when the first cracks in the façade of Israeli self-contentment and moral narrow-mindedness appeared. Protests by the African Jews pointed back then to the contradictions in the multi-cultural composition of Israeli society and the melting-pot-ideology. The viewpoints of the 'new sociologists' were much more homogeneous than those of the historians were. Their most important contribution to the perception of Israeli society was the re-interpretation of Zionism as a colonial movement.

With the post-Zionists two other myths lost their magic: that the Israeli army could never provoke hostilities and that security was more important than everything else was. The scientists rejected the explanation of the government that security considerations were responsible for the marginalization of the Sephardim or for the bad treatment of the Israeli Palestinians. They called the government's policy 'racist' and 'nationalistic', and referred to the dispersion of the Palestinians by the Israeli army.

The attempt to question the essence of Zionism, however, was denounced in Israel as an undertaking of 'Jews who hate themselves in the service of the enemy'. These attacks came not from the Right but from the Zionist Left, which accepts a critique of the Israeli policy after 1967 but forbids any questioning of the policy in the period from 1882 to 1967. The Zionist Left deals primarily with the effects of the occupation policies on its own morality and is not interested in the effects they have had on the Pal-

³¹ Julia Brauchi, "Ein Staat, aller sein Bürger? Die Postzionismus-Debatte in Israel" in *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* (1997), 1, p.43.

estiniens. Their desire to make peace with the Palestinians is derived from a desire for final separation rather than a wish to admit historical injustice and end immoral behavior. The post-Zionists or anti-Zionists identify more with the Palestinians as the victims of the occupation policy than with the moral problems of the Israeli soldiers. They are for a secular 'state for all its citizens' whereas the Zionist Left (Peace Now, Meretz Party) pleads for a 'Jewish state'. In the Israeli press, which is still oriented toward Zionism, the positions of the post-Zionists are rarely mentioned.³²

Ultimately, the post-Zionists have succeeded in getting Israelis to discuss the question of the State of Israel's self-understanding anew and whether the future focus should be the 'Diaspora Jewry' or the 'Jewish Israel'. Many intellectuals dissolve the tension by equalizing Judaism with Israelism. From the time of its foundation, Israel maintained a special relation with the Diaspora Jewry. After the security situation relaxed, the economy prospered, and a certain cultural alienation between the Israelis and the Diaspora Jews emerged, an increasing number of Israeli Jews began to ask themselves what still links them with the Jews in other countries. The debate that ensued included the issue of the right of return and revealed the creeping alienation between Israeli Jews and the Diaspora Jewry. A cancellation of the right of return seems very unlikely because there is no doubt in all camps that the gates of the country should be open to any persecuted Jew. The automatic issuance of citizenship however, causes a certain uneasiness, as many believe it should be earned. The chief editor of the *Ha'aretz*, Chanoch Marmari, for example, wrote on 8 February 1996 in the *Jerusalem Report* that although the Israelis would follow any rescue action of threatened Jews with great interest, the Jews in the Diaspora did not matter to them.

The Israeli intellectuals waver between sticking to Zionism as the ideology that guarantees the cohesion of the country and the orientation towards a 'Mediterranean identity', which would dissolve the tensions between East and West as introduced into the debate by Abraham B. Yehoshua in *Ha'aretz* on 29 December 1995. The identity crises will continue as long as Israel is a normal state and behaves as such *vis-à-vis* its neighbors. There is doubt that a Netanyahu government would be able to ensure this. The contents of the originally secular Zionism have been surrendered by the representatives of the ethnocentric variant of Zionism. The post-Zionist understanding of history however, is being displayed as the true Zionism. This ideologically reinterpreted Zionism traces the story back not to 1897 but to ancient times. The forces on which the State of Israel was built have striven since 1977 for a completely new interpretation of Zion-

³² See Ilan Pappé, "Post-Zionist Critique on Israel and the Palestinians. Part II: The Media" in *JPS*, XXVI (Spring 1997) 3, p.41.

ism and are, according to Moshe Zimmermann, the 'real post-Zionists'. In the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 27 August 1997, which was published on the occasion the 100th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress in Basle, he names the following five principles that the 'real post-Zionists' pursue:

- *'Palestinocentrism'*: Eretz Israel is being equated with Zionism, and it forms the fundament and the framework of Jewish life. This 'Palestinocentrism' questions the rights of the Israeli Palestinians and the legitimacy of the Diaspora Jewry.
- *Romantic-territorial nationalism*: While classical Zionism was still content with part of Palestine, the West Bank was declared 'holy land' after the Six-Day War. Nablus, Hebron, the Old City of Jerusalem and the other religious places became the most important content and the 'essence of Zionism.' The secular Zionist ideology, which is symbolized in the kibbutzim, was replaced by a religious-romantic relationship with the 'Land of Israel'.
- *Surrender of the social experiment*: The settlements in Judea and Samaria were built as a contrasting program to the kibbutzim. The idea of the 'new human being' and the 'Zionist society' that accompanied the kibbutz movement was dropped. The striven for 'model society' was replaced with a return to 'traditional values', which were henceforth considered 'Zionist values'.
- *De-Europeanization*: Originally a better Europe on a small scale was supposed to evolve in the Middle East. The Holocaust and the mass immigration of non-European Jews ruined these ideas and put Israel's historical European connection in another light. This is of great significance for the country's present.
- *'Religiosization' of public life*: The central characteristic of ethnocentric Zionism is the identification of Zionism with Jewish-religious orthodoxy. Zionism is no longer understood as a national movement but as the eternal longing of the Jewish people for 'Eretz Israel'. The Jewish State is being interpreted in a religious-orthodox manner. In the case of a conflict of values between democracy and Judaism the latter is given priority. There is only one legitimate kind of Judaism left: the orthodox version, which smoothes the way for a theocracy to emerge.

While the post-Zionists are still preoccupied with the critique of the historical legends of the original form of Zionism the 'real post-Zionists' are establishing a new ideology for Israel, which will be less tolerant than that of secular Zionism. If democracy cannot guarantee a 'Jewish majority' anymore, then democracy must be 'sick' – this is the argumentation of the religious.

The character of the State of Israel will undoubtedly change. Zimmermann describes how the re-interpretation of history takes place in concrete terms, taking the example of the controversy between the former Minister of Education, Amon Rubinstein, and the Rabbi Yoel Ben Nun, who attacks the curriculum and especially the understanding of its history in its fundamentals.³³ According to Ben Nun, Zionism is 2,000 not 100 years old as the 'longing for Zion' was Zionism. Herzl's Zionism was thus an intermezzo. Common opponents of the defendants of the original form of Zionism and of the ethnocentric variant of Zionism are the post-Zionists. The secular Zionists like Rubinstein should not enter into this 'unholy alliance' with the opponents of secularism. Their natural allies are the 'new historians' who were right in questioning certain historical myths pertaining to the original Zionism.

A prime minister who meets with rabbis such as Eliahu Khaduri and uses the occasion to accuse the Left in Israel of not knowing what 'being Jewish' means points to the direction in which the country is heading. The first signs of the forced retreat of Liberal Judaism also appeared in Tel Aviv, when in one of the suburbs, Ramat Aviv, a new shopping center was opened. The Orthodox owner, diamond dealer Lev Leviev, demanded that shop-owners should close on Saturdays although the contracts stipulated that they could open. Despite the protests of the residents the court ruled in favor of Leviev.

The following could be filed under 'curious things', were it not for the fact that it is so symptomatic of a development that seems unstoppable in Israel: on educational excursions to Jerusalem religious Israeli soldiers are forbidden to visit mosques and churches. When the Knesset Members Moshe Gafni from the Yahadut Hatorah Party and Aryeh Deri from the Shas Party complained about such visits, the General Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak issued a corresponding order. The reason Lipkin-Shahak gave was that otherwise the comradeship among the Jewish soldiers would be at risk. Instantly, he ruled it was a sin for any religious soldier to visit a non-Jewish holy site. (In order to be precise, the visit to a Christian site is a deadly sin and the visit to a Moslem site a venial one, according to Israel Shahak). Akiva Eldar concludes his article in *Ha'aretz* of 13 March 1997 with the slightly ironic comment: "It is probably uncomfortable for them [the religious soldiers] to think, while they are waiting, how their comrades could be harmed by the Christian and Moslem influence."

The increase in power of the Orthodox also became visible when Bar Ilan Street in Jerusalem, which connects the northern and southern parts of the

³³ See Moshe Zimmermann, "Geschichte umschreiben: Was ist Zionismus?" in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 14/98, p.11-18.

city, was partially closed on the Sabbath after weeks-long street battles with the police and secular Jews. When the conflict was brought before the Supreme Court it was unable to make a decision, and recommended instead the establishment of a committee to solve the disputes in Jerusalem within an all-Israeli context. The subsequently formed Zamaret Committee consisted of eight members: four non-religious traditional Jews, two Orthodox, and two national-religious representatives. Israeli-Palestinians were not part of it. The result was a document that stipulated that Bar Ilan Street would be closed for traffic on the Sabbath and holidays but only on condition that the municipality would find traffic alternatives for the non-religious population. The Orthodox members refused on religious grounds to sign the document; the street was closed and the recommendations of the Committee ignored.

Another bastion the religious fundamentalists want to influence is the transfer of the football games on Saturdays; for religious reasons, the character of the State-ordered day of rest is to be changed. Moshe Zimmermann believes that if this, "an inviolable considered bastion falls" the debate on the history curriculum would become superfluous.³⁴ *Ha'aretz* reported that the Football Union had been urged by the three Orthodox parties not to permit league games on Saturdays. A study commissioned by the Football Union shall now prove that a transfer would cause the clubs no financial losses. Besides this agreement it is said that the clubs received financial pledges from the Shas Party and Agudat Israel.

The crucial conflict in Israel is not about who wants to give the Palestinians a few more square meters of land but about the fundamental understanding of the state. Which law will determine life in Israel in the future: the secular or the religious-*Halachic* one? This is by no means a rhetorical question – after all, the racist viewpoints of Meir Kahane are finding favor amongst a continuously increasing part of the political class in Israel. Kahane's main aspiration was to turn Israel into a theocratic state in which the *Halacha* was the valid law, and the forced dispersion of the Palestinians was only a side effect of his project. The religious groups in Israel have not rejected Kahane's messages in principle, but for tactical reasons. For instance, the Orthodox have basically accepted the principles but want to leave their implementation to heaven. The majority of the right-nationalists has not denied the righteousness of the ideas but has referred to the psychological climate and the unsuitable timing. The Gush Enumim itself believes that it is possible to turn Israel into a *Halachic* God-state but wants to employ other strategies and another kind of rhetoric.

³⁴ Ibid, p.17.

The confrontation concerning nation and religion will determine the future of Israel. Whether the ethnocentric or the secular form of Zionism will emerge as the victor of this struggle has not yet been decided. For the time being, the representatives of an Israel that is oriented by Western standards hold the central power positions but whether they will be able to face the attacks of the Right and of the religious-nationalists in the long run remains to be seen. Which one of the fanatic religious parties will maintain the upper hand and how the defeated ones will cope with this is something else for which there is currently no answer. The secular sector of the society will despite the increase in religious power not vanish completely; after all, between 60 to 70 percent of the Israelis consider themselves non-religious. However, the liberals should be warned about interpreting the relative restraint of the Right and of the religious fundamentalists after Rabin's assassination as weakness. The threat on the life of Supreme Judge Aaron Barak by some Orthodox rabbis after his decision regarding Bar Ilan Street is another sign of the decay of the political etiquette in Israel.

The question is whether a liberalization of the Israeli society could offer a way out of the advance of fundamentalism. A poll conducted by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem give little reason for optimism. According to the survey, 30 percent of Israeli high school students categorize themselves as 'racists'; of these, 33 percent are religious and 28 percent secular. Only 50 percent agreed that Arabs are citizens with equal rights, and 72 of those questioned were against Arabs running for the Knesset, because they pose a security risk. This increase in racism was confirmed in another survey conducted by Deborah Karnil from Haifa University. According to her findings, 61.7 percent of Israeli youth are against equal rights for the Israeli Palestinians, and 73.5 percent consider Arab representation in the Knesset a danger for Israel. One wonders why five years of a 'peace process' does not show other results than these.

Although the achievements of Israeli democracy with regard to the building up and integration of the country are certainly something to be proud of, the indicators for the future of this democracy according to the Western-liberal understanding are rather bad. The danger posed to the continuation of a secular Israel stems – paradoxically – not from the Palestinians in general or the Israeli Palestinians in particular but from the extreme nationalists and the religious fundamentalists in the country, who undermine the State order from within and turn the secular ideology around. These forces had formed part of the government until May 1999, which was the most frightening aspect. Prime Minister Ehud Barak has also accepted these parties as coalition partners.