

The Religious Component in Israeli Ultra-Nationalism

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Observers of Israeli society are impressed by the growing attraction of ultra-nationalist policies for a significant segment of the population. A great deal of attention has been devoted to ultra-nationalism among religious Israelis. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935) but especially his son Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook (1891–1982) have been identified as the major ideologues and spiritual heroes of ultra-nationalism. Gush Emunim, a predominantly religious movement, has been identified as the major extra-parliamentary force in espousing ultra-nationalist policies. The ultra-nationalism of Gush Emunim and the disciples of Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook pales in comparison to that of Rabbi Meir Kahana, whose Kach party finally succeeded in winning a Knesset seat in the 1984 elections. Many Gush Emunim leaders condemn Kahana. But, what is relevant for our purposes is that Kach also describes itself as a religious party.

This essay is an effort to explore the importance of religion as a component of Israeli ultra-nationalism in both religious and non-religious circles. After all, the fact that some or even most Israelis who define themselves as religious espouse ultra-nationalist policies does not necessarily mean that religious belief is the necessary and sufficient condition to account for their ultra-nationalism. The

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fact that some, even many Israelis who do not define themselves as religious also espouse ultra-nationalist policies does not preclude the possibility that they are influenced by religious formulations.

It is difficult to measure the importance of religion with a degree of precision. The purpose of this essay is to offer a research agenda which I hope others will see fit to examine. Clearly, the exploration of the relationship between religion and Israeli ultra-nationalism requires more knowledge than we have at the present. But this research may, in addition, illuminate aspects of Israeli culture and its political system.

There are three foci – territorial, ethnic and cultural – of Israeli ultra-nationalism. Cultural ultra-nationalism does not command broad allegiance in Israeli society and will not concern us here. An example of territorial ultra-nationalism is the continued decline in the number of Israelis who are willing to surrender most of the as yet unannexed territory captured in the Six-Day War, even in return for a peace agreement with Jordan and security arrangements acceptable to Israel. According to public opinion polls conducted by Dr. Mina Zemach of the Dahaf Research Institute among random samples of Israeli Jews, the percentage of the population expressing such a willingness declined from 40 per cent in March, 1983 to 31.4 per cent in June, 1984.¹ The more religiously traditional the respondent, the less likely he or she was to favor the return.

Ethnic ultra-nationalism refers to policies that would discriminate against Arabs in Israel or attitudes reflecting prejudice and antagonism towards them. In the June, 1984 sample, 66 per cent reported they either justified or related with understanding to a group of Jews accused of conducting terrorist activities, including murder, against Arabs. Once again, the more religious the respondent the more likely he or she was to justify or relate with understanding to the accused terrorists. A random sample of Jewish youth aged 15 to 18 were questioned in August, 1984. Over half (55.1 per cent) felt that Arabs in Israel should not be permitted to criticize the government and almost half (47.6 per cent) felt that Arabs should be prohibited from holding important public office. Again, the more religious the respondent the more likely he or she was to favor denying rights to Arabs. How are we to account for this?

One possible answer is that the Israeli public is becoming increasingly religious and therefore adopting the political or ultra-nationalistic posture of religious Jewry although it has not yet adopted the observance of specific religious practices. This answer does have the virtue of simplicity: but Israeli Jews are not, in fact, becoming more religious.

One way of measuring religion is to ask respondents how they define themselves. Approximately 15 per cent of the Jewish popu-

¹ I am indebted to Dr. Mina Zemach for permission to use this and other sample data reported in this essay.

lation of Israel define themselves as religious (as distinct from traditional or secular) and this proportion has remained fairly constant in the last fifteen years. Another measure of the population's religiosity is to ask whether respondents observe Jewish tradition. Twenty-eight per cent of the adult Jewish population (based on a random sample conducted in July, 1984) reported that they observe Jewish tradition in its entirety or to a large extent. This figure is not very different from that reported ten or fifteen years ago in somewhat comparable surveys. But surveys may be inadequate instruments to ascertain the proportion of religious Jews or the real distribution of attitudes about religion within the population. A measure of shifts in the proportion of religiously observant Jews in the population is a shift in the proportion of Jewish school-age children in religious schools. That proportion has declined in the last fifteen years. Between 1977 and 1984 a representative of the National Religious Party served as Minister of Education and religious schools benefited from particularly favorable conditions. But even then the proportion of children in religious schools in grades one to six fell from 27.6 in 1977 to 25.0 in 1983. The drop may reflect changes in fertility rates among Oriental Jews, who provide most of the religious elementary-school population. But they certainly do not support any thesis of increasing religiosity among Israelis.

A second difficulty in any simple identification of religion and ultra-nationalism is that it leaves unanswered why the religious nationalist public should have suddenly become so extreme. Until 1967, the 'activist' elements within the Labor party, not to mention Herut, the dominant partner within the Likud, advocated a more aggressive nationalist policy than did the National Religious Party, the party of the religious Zionists. If religious commitment accounts for Israeli ultra-nationalism, then religious Jews should always have been the most nationalistic segment of the population.

Thirdly, the ultra-pious, or *haredi* sector, those Jews who are presumably most religious, or most committed to religious observance, are apparently less ultra-nationalist than the more modern, better secularly educated, less devout religious Zionists. Survey research data has not tapped opinions within the *haredi* community. However, we can assume that the positions adopted by their representatives in the Knesset, Agudat Israel and (since 1984) Shas, roughly reflect the opinions of their constituents. The Knesset representatives of these two parties are more reserved on issues of territorial nationalism than are the representatives of religious Zionism. Furthermore, the most religiously extreme or pietistic Jews within the *haredi* sector do not even participate in Israeli elections. They are probably indifferent to nationalist issues. Hence the conclusion that ultra-nationalism is related to religion requires some modification.

An alternative view is that the correlation between religiosity and

ultra-nationalism is spurious. According to opinion polls, Jews of Oriental (Asian or African) origin and young people also favor ultra-nationalist policies. When ethnic and age-group status are combined, they result in especially extreme attitudes. For example, a May, 1985 poll of 15–18-year-olds found that 50 per cent of the Oriental youth compared to 21 per cent of the Ashkenazi youth reported they agreed with the ideas which Rabbi Meir Kahana and his Kach party support, ideas which include expelling all Arabs. It is possible, therefore, that religion does not account for ultra-nationalism or perhaps one set of factors account for ultra-nationalism among the religious Zionists and another set of factors for ultra-nationalism among non-religious segments of the population. But aside from a researcher's affinity for a single set of explanatory factors, we do have to contend with the differences in attitude between Israelis who define themselves as traditionalists and those who define themselves as secularists, or those who report they observe some of the religious traditions and those who report they observe none or almost none of them. A greater proportion of Israelis who define themselves as 'traditionalists' espouse ultra-nationalist policies than the proportion of Israelis who define themselves as secularists. More ultra-nationalists are found among those who observe some of the religious tradition than among those who observe none. This seems to suggest that religion does have something to do with ultra-nationalism.

To summarize our observations to this point:

1. ultra-nationalism among Israeli Jews is related to religious commitment, at least up to a point. Very religious (*haredi*) Jews may be less extreme in their nationalist views than religious Zionists;
2. religious Jews were not always ultra-nationalists, nor were they, prior to 1967, the most nationalist segment in the population;
3. other population groups who favor ultra-nationalist policies are Oriental Jews and young people.

Ideally, any exploration of the relationship between religion and ultra-nationalism ought to account for all these observations. I want to begin by trying to understand what distinguishes *haredi* Jews from religious Zionists.

We know a great deal about differences between the religious Zionist (nationalist) and *haredi* movements and communities. The historical differences stem from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when European religious Jewry was divided between those who favored and those who opposed modern Zionism. Today, two distinguishing characteristics are most relevant for our purposes. The one which has received the least attention is connected to the significance of the present and this-worldly activity; the other is the attitude towards the State of Israel and Israeli society.

Aryeh Fishman has pointed out that religious Zionists not only affirm the modern world, but more significantly, view the present (i.e., the modern world) as a distinct stage in the fulfillment of the divine promise of messianic redemption. The present, therefore, has special meaning in Jewish, indeed, in world history.² It is not simply a seamless web of continuity with the past. This conception confers special meaning to social, political and economic activity which bore no special significance in the past. Such activity is more than an instrument in defense of group interests. Jewish groups always legitimated this-worldly activity in defense of their interests. But religious Zionists view such activity as a mechanism through which redemption can be attained. In the past, the religious Zionist settlers emphasized physical labor which redeemed the individual, social justice which redeemed society, and the creation of a Jewish state and 'ingathering of the exiles' which created the only basis for an authentic Jewish religious life. Emphases changed over time. The importance of physical labor and social justice declined in importance and settlement of the land in Judea and Samaria became a major value. But the principle that this-worldly activity was endowed with intrinsic religious meaning remained the same.

In the *haredi* community, on the other hand, only Torah study is endowed with intrinsic religious meaning. I do not believe that religious nationalist and *haredi* Jews differ about the ideal of Jewish sovereignty over the entire Land of Israel which includes the state of Jordan as well as the West Bank. I suspect the *haredi* community is even less happy than the religious nationalist community to accord political rights to non-Jews.³ But their own religious conceptions render them suspicious of efforts to realize these values. Further, they suspect the religious integrity of the religious Zionists and of those who devote themselves to this-worldly activity rather than the study of sacred texts. They adopt an instrumental and pragmatic attitude towards politics, conditioned by a tradition of

² A. Fishman, 'Tradition and Renewal in the Religious Zionist Experience', in Avraham Rubinstein (ed.), *Bishvilei Hatkhiyah*, Ramat-Gan (Bar-Ilan University Press) 1983, pp. 127-146 (Hebrew).

³ Israel's first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, Isaac Halevi Herzog (1888-1959), father of the current President of the State of Israel, felt it necessary to justify the provisions of religious tolerance in Israeli law. Writing shortly before the state was established and sensitive to *haredi* criticism, he explained that Israel had to grant religious freedom to non-Jews, otherwise the United Nations would not have supported the establishment of a Jewish state. This apologetic tone is also found in the famous letter sent by the Jewish Agency leadership to Agudat Israel in 1947, promising them that basic Jewish religious rights would be safeguarded in the new state. That same letter explained that the United Nations would not tolerate denying religious rights to non-Jews. Among the *haredi* 'doves' one hears the argument that Israeli sovereignty over Judea and Samaria is pointless from a Jewish point of view since Israel dares not act as it is enjoined to act by religious law; that is to expel the non-Jews or at least destroy their places of worship.

caution and suspicion precisely because politics has no intrinsic meaning and because past and present are the same.

The second and related difference between religious Zionist and *haredi* Jews is in their conception of the State of Israel. Among *haredi* Jews attitudes range from hostility to enthusiastic support. But, unlike the religious Zionists, *haredi* Jews refuse to attribute special sanctity to the state. Hence Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank or the rights of Arabs in Israel do not have quite the same meaning for the two groups.

These differences help us to understand why attitudes of *haredi* Jews are less extreme on issues of territorial and ethnic nationalism. They do not explain the shift in attitude among religious Zionists since 1967. To explain this phenomenon it is necessary but not sufficient to note the emergence of new theological formulations within religious Zionist circles.

Jewish ethnocentrism and Jewish claims to sovereignty over the Land of Israel are deeply rooted in the religious tradition. Efforts have been made however, and with justice, to trace the emphasis on these values in recent years to doctrines formulated by the elder Rabbi Kook and applied by his son.

One of the memorable lectures of Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook was delivered on the eve of Israel Independence Day in 1967, several weeks before the outbreak of the Six-Day War, and published under the heading, 'The Sanctity of the Holy People in the Holy Land'.⁴ Rav Zvi Yehudah noted that when the UN agreed to the establishment of the state, he did not share the great joy that swept the country. He could not resign himself to the 'evil tiding' that the Land of Israel had been divided.

Where is our Hebron? And where is our Shechem? And our Jericho where is it? Will we forget it?! And all of the other bank of the Jordan – it is ours, every clump of dirt... which belongs to the land of God – is it our right to concede even one millimeter of it?⁵

He finally consoled himself, he continues, with the thought that this was God's wish.

The establishment of the state, therefore, is not in the first instance an occasion of joy. The state is not an end but an instrument whose purpose, Rav Kook suggests in the same essay, is the conquest of the Land. This, in turn, sanctifies both the state, the army and even its armaments. Later on, however, Rav Kook returns to the significance of the state suggesting that even the rule of Jews over part of the Land, coupled with the end of the exile, represents the fulfillment of an important commandment.

⁴ Z.Y. Kook, 'The Sanctity of the Holy People in the Holy Land', in Yosef Tirosh (ed.), *Religious Zionism: An Anthology*, Jerusalem (World Zionist Organization) 1978, pp. 140–146 (Hebrew).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

The Jews, and the Land of Israel both possess spiritual sanctity. Sanctity, according to Rav Kook, does not derive from what a human being does or does not do. It is a physical quality, created by God, and inheres in both the Jewish people and the Land of Israel because that is the will of God.

God had determined, once and forever, that we are a holy people, a reality of holy souls, holy bodies, part of the soul of the entirety of Israel which is entirely holy. There is a reality of a holy land, a strip of land which God chose – ‘because God chose Zion’. This is a land ‘whose fruit is holy’ and the working of the land is equivalent to the command of putting on phylacteries... Thus have things been determined: This is a holy land and this is a holy people.⁶

The author then cites proof texts to demonstrate that even though the State of Israel is not perfect it is the state which the prophets envisioned. Israel’s two most serious shortcomings are its system of law which is not authentically Jewish but based on foreign codes, and its reluctance to prohibit missionary activity.

The ambiguity about the state, which is sanctified yet imperfect, was particularly troubling to many religious Zionists following the revelation of a Jewish terrorist underground in April, 1984. However, there is no ambiguity about the sanctity of the land and the sanctity of the people. The first provides the basis for territorial ultra-nationalism and the second for ethnic ultra-nationalism. In the relatively moderate formulation of the present leader of Gush Emunim the two aspects of nationalism are expressed in the statement that ‘*shlemut* [perfection, wholeness, totality] of the Jewish people cannot be secured without *shlemut* of the Land of Israel’.⁷ Territorial nationalism in its more extreme formulation strives to turn ‘the Land of Israel into the sole content of Judaism and Judaism into the sole content of the Land of Israel’.⁸ Ethnic nationalism, in its more extreme formulation not only denies that Arabs have any group rights in the Land of Israel but stresses the religious obligation of the Jews to expel them.

Doesn’t granting of ‘autonomy’... to the Arabs of Judea and Samaria contravene a Torah commandment? Is the prohibition ‘they shall not dwell in your land’ no longer a prohibition? Is the Gentile suddenly permitted to reside in Jerusalem? And has the ban already been lifted on Gentiles entering a place whereof it is said: ‘And the stranger who approaches shall be put to death’? And is control of the Temple Mount no longer a duty and an imperative?⁹

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁷ Statement made in a television broadcast in October, 1984.

⁸ M. Ben-Yosef (Hagar), ‘Gush Emunim May Become a Sect’, *Nekudah*, 71 (March 23, 1984), p. 9 (Hebrew).

⁹ Y. Ariel, ‘Love Disrupts Order’, *Nekudah*, 79 (Nov. 2, 1984), p. 24 (Hebrew).

To note the emergence of extremist formulations, however, is not sufficient to explain their receptivity in religious Zionist circles, particularly when such views did not go unchallenged within these same circles. Others have pointed to the importance of the dramatic victory in the Six-Day War, the conquest of the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank. Sovereignty over the new territories was virtually imposed upon Israel and seemed to promise a new political era confirming messianic expectations. The coming of age of a new generation of *yeshiva* high school graduates influenced by Rav Kook's doctrines and in rebellion against an older generation of religious Zionist leaders is another factor. But I want to add a third factor which, to the best of my knowledge, has not received attention, though Menachem Friedman alludes to it.¹⁰ I am referring to the frustration of religious Zionists surrounding their mode of participation in Israeli society.

Eliezer Don-Yehiya has described the nature of religious Jewry's participation in Israeli society in the first decades of statehood as a form of segmented pluralism.¹¹ Religious and non-religious Jews lived out their lives in separate spheres. One's identity as a religious Jew determined one's school, one's friends, one's cultural and leisure time pursuits. But from the 1920s until 1977, Israeli society was dominated by a secular labor Zionist elite and religious Jews were conscious of their status as outsiders. They were represented in decision-making forums. On occasion they may have been over-represented. But they sat in such forums because the nature of the political arrangements in Israeli society dictated their presence, not because Israel's real leaders or Israeli insiders had any regard for their opinions.

The relative status of religious Jews can be gauged from an invitation Ben-Gurion issued to Israeli cultural and intellectual leaders in 1949, to meet with him to plan 'the shape of the spiritual image of the nation'. Since the meetings were informal, Ben-Gurion saw no need to invite any religious intellectuals. It was a foregone conclusion to those present that religious tradition was an important component in 'shaping the spiritual image of the nation', but that religious Jews had nothing to contribute. In 1952, the interchange between government leaders and the nation's cultural elite was formalized through the creation of a Supreme Council on Culture under the direction of the Minister of Education and Culture. Religious Jews were invited to participate in the Council and in the deliberations of its subcommissions. However, as Dvora Hacohen, who reviewed the minutes of these meetings, observed in private

¹⁰ M. Friedman, 'The NRP in Transition - Behind the Party's Electoral Decline', in Dan Caspi, et al. (edd.), *The Roots of Begin's Success*, London (Croom Helm) 1983, pp. 141-168.

¹¹ E. Don-Yehiya, 'Religion and Coalition: The National Religious Party and Coalition Formation in Israel', in Asher Arian (ed.), *The Elections in Israel, 1973*, Jerusalem (Jerusalem Academic Press) 1975, pp. 255-284.

conversation, the religious representatives sat on the council and its various subcommissions by virtue of the governmental or non-governmental positions which they held. Unlike many other members, they were not invited because of the high regard or esteem in which they were held. When they spoke, little notice was taken of what they said.

This condition was and is quite tolerable to *haredi* Jews but a source of frustration to religious Zionists, the young in particular, for two reasons. First, the latter admired, were even envious of the Zionist labor movement pioneers. They would have liked to have shared more fully, albeit on special terms, in their achievements. They wanted to be integrated into the society and feel part of the establishment, not to be allocated token representation and consigned to the status of outsiders.

Secondly, precisely because they attributed a special sanctity to the State of Israel and even to Israeli Jewish society, it seemed quite inappropriate that secularists should dominate the society. The ensuing frustration helps account for both an element of hostility to Israeli society and the readiness to seize upon issues where religious Zionists could demonstrate their leadership.

Those for whom hostility was the dominant motif joined the ranks of the *haredi* community. Those for whom the desire to participate and lead was the dominant motif had an elective affinity for ultra-nationalist pronouncements phrased in religious terminology. This affinity reflects both an identification with the nominal values of Israeli society, a point to which I shall return, and a critique of Israeli society for inadequate commitment to the very values which it ostensibly affirms. It constitutes, therefore, a claim by religious Zionists to national leadership based upon their greater loyalty to these values.

Yoel Bin-Nun, a founder of Gush Emunim, now a moderate voice among the settlers of the West Bank, tells how he felt growing up in the 1950s under 'the oligarchic and aristocratic rule' of the Labor party (then called Mapai).¹² 'I absorbed a sizeable portion of anti-religious hatred in my youth', he writes. But in the 1970s, he believed, he and his religious peers had risen from the status of a humiliated and outcast minority to a central position in the nation, 'exactly as it later happened to the youth from North African and Oriental origins when the Likud came to power'. He thought 'that the idea of the Land of Israel would unite everybody', he writes, 'and also permit a better understanding of the Torah of Israel'. He mistakenly believed, he confesses, that Gush Emunim's success in its political and settlement activity provided an historical victory. Bin-Nun uses the metaphor of a train to describe Israeli society. The senior religious politicians fought to control 'the dining car' and the

¹² Y. Bin-Nun, *Koteret Rashit*, No. 114/2, 1985, pp. 36-37.

'ticket sales' on the train. Bin-Nun's generation, contemptuous of that variety of religious politics, pushed forward to the 'engine'.

Religious ultra-nationalism, I suggest, speaks to an ambivalence which religious Zionists feel towards the Israeli state and society, an ambivalence reflected in Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook's speech discussed above. It is not an ambivalence based on lukewarm sentiments but rather a simultaneous affirmation of two strongly held beliefs and sentiments. First, that Israel is an expression of divine favor and the promise of messianic redemption. This belief leads to a celebration of both the state and society as holy objects. On the other hand, there is a sense in which both state and society are unfaithful to their mandate, must be transformed and cannot in their present state command total allegiance.

This analysis leaves unanswered the question, why values of ethnocentrism and territorialism were emphasized instead of, for example, values of social justice, redistribution of income, or equality for Oriental and Ashkenazic Jews. These are also values to which Israeli society is ostensibly committed. They are also embedded in both the Jewish and Zionist tradition and they might have also served as the basis upon which religious Zionists could criticize Israeli society.

I am not suggesting that anyone deliberately chose ultra-nationalist values rather than values of welfare or social justice. That would oversimplify a process in which religious beliefs, psychological predispositions, economic interests and political pragmatism combine to yield policy preferences. My question is, given the presence of social welfare/social justice values in the religious tradition and the enormous weight granted them by early religious Zionist settlers, why do they generally awaken only muted echoes among the young generation of religious Zionists, who sought national leadership? Albert Hourani's observation with respect to Islam is no less true to Judaism.

...Islam does not provide the exclusive language of politics. To be effective, it needs to be combined with two other languages: that of nationalism, with its appeal to the unity, strength and honour of the nation, however defined, and that of social justice, and specifically an equitable distribution of wealth.¹³

Unless the religious-nationalists can produce 'a convincing blend' of all three languages, not just religion and nationalism, they are unlikely to mobilize sufficient support to make an effective claim to power.

Although this question cannot be answered conclusively, speculation about the answer does suggest areas of research. A part of the

¹³ A. Hourani, 'Conclusion', in James Piscatori (ed.), *Islam in the Political Process*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1984, pp. 228-229.

answer may rest in the association between social welfare/social justice conceptions and religious adaptationist or religious-reformist notions present among the earlier generation of religious Zionists. The older generation tended to be conciliatory rather than rigorous in its *halakhic* (legalistic) orientations; accommodating rather than rejecting the modern world. This is not entirely satisfactory to the younger generation. Perhaps having rejected the older generation's religious ideology, they are reluctant to affirm its social ideology. Secondly, stressing social justice values would have aligned religious Zionists with the extreme left which was the most anti-religious segment of the population, whereas espousing ultra-nationalist values aligned them with the political right which was far more sympathetic to the religious tradition, to the religious hierarchy and to the incorporation of religion in the public sphere.

Let us turn now to the two other groups among whom ultra-nationalist attitudes are most common: Orientals (those who came or whose parents came from Asian or African countries) and the young. What influence, if any, does religion have on their policy preferences?

There is no question about the ultra-nationalism of Oriental Jews. Shamir and Arian conclude that the single most important factor that accounts for their overwhelming support for parties of the Right is their hawkish (i.e., ultra-nationalist) attitudes.¹⁴ Yochanan Peres and Sara Shemer have summarized the reasons behind this orientation.¹⁵ These reasons include the suffering Oriental Jews underwent in Arab countries and the desire of Oriental Jews to distinguish themselves from Israeli Arabs. This argument then could account for the ultra-nationalism of traditional as opposed to secular Jews by concluding that the reason traditional Jews are more ultra-nationalist than secular Jews is because the category of traditional Jews is primarily composed of Orientals. In other words, it is the quality of being an Oriental, i.e., the ethnic characteristic rather than the quality of being traditional or moderately religious that accounts for their ultra-nationalism.

If, however, this were true then we would expect Oriental Jews born abroad to be more ultra-nationalist than children born in Israel of Oriental fathers. After all, the fathers should be more ethnically Oriental, they experienced Arab hostility more directly, they are less distinguishable in speech and style of life from Israeli Arabs. But, in fact, as data gathered by Asher Arian and Michal Shamir in an unpublished study show, Israeli-born children of Oriental fathers are more ethnically nationalistic and almost as territorially nationalist as the foreign-born Orientals.

¹⁴ M. Shamir and A. Arian, 'The Ethnic Vote in Israel's 1981 Elections', in A. Arian (ed.), *The Elections in Israel, 1981*, Tel Aviv (Ramot) 1981, pp. 91-111.

¹⁵ Y. Peres and S. Shemer, 'The Ethnic Factor in the Elections to the Tenth Knesset', *Megamot* 28 (March 1984), pp. 316-331 (Hebrew).

An alternate argument is that Orientals are ultra-nationalist because they are traditionalists. In other words, the distinguishing feature is degree of religiosity rather than ethnicity. If this argument is correct, Orientals who are also secular should be no more ultra-nationalist than secular Ashkenazim. Oriental Jews only appear to be more ultra-nationalist than non-Orientals according to this argument because most Orientals are traditionalists and most non-Orientals secularists. An examination of attitudes towards returning unannexed (occupied) territories supports this argument. Secular Orientals are more dovish than secular Ashkenazim.

There is no doubt that religion is an important factor in accounting for the ultra-nationalism of Oriental Jews but its pattern of influence should not be oversimplified. What I believe we observe is the impact of a culture which, in turn, reflects many religious formulations. In other words, ethnocentrism, hostility to Arabs and rejection of territorial compromise feeds directly off both Oriental and Israeli conceptions of Jew and Arab, off beliefs about the enmity of 'goyim' and permanent threats to Jewish survival. These beliefs and conceptions, in turn, are nourished by religious formulations but they are only indirectly attributable to them.¹⁶ Once they penetrate the political culture, of course, their influence may extend far beyond the circle of those who define themselves as religious, to Israeli youth, in particular. The beliefs and conceptions influence secular Orientals least because, I suspect, the secular Oriental, almost by definition, is rejecting a good part of his culture. He is consciously rebelling against these beliefs and conceptions.

What I want to stress, however, is that it is not only the Oriental-Jewish aspect of culture that accounts for the ultra-nationalism of Oriental Jews but the unique impact of Israeli culture on most of them. My argument is that, like the religious Zionists, Oriental Jews have mixed feelings about Israeli society and respond in the same way as religious Zionists. The political awakening of Oriental Jews in the last two decades is characterized by the conviction that they are victims of Ashkenazi prejudice and discrimination. Like religious Zionists, they too were offered token representation which they resented, not only because they were consistently under-represented, but because tokenism, by definition, implies less than complete integration and acceptance.

The bitterness and frustration of a few Oriental Jews has found expression in the support for ethnic lists which contested every Knesset election. But the vast majority of Oriental Jews never voted for these lists. As Hanna Herzog points out, they rejected appeals to separatist ethnic interests and instead sought to affirm the collective values of Israeli society.¹⁷ My argument is that they have over-

¹⁶ C. Liebman, 'Myth, Tradition and Values in Israeli Society', *Midstream*, 24 (January 1978), pp. 44-53.

¹⁷ H. Herzog, 'Political Ethnicity in Israel', *Megamot*, 28 (March 1984), pp. 332-354 (Hebrew).

identified with and misinterpreted these values, in part because by virtue of their subordinate and outsider status, they were never party to their formulation and did not understand some of the hidden assumptions that rested behind their articulation. In addition, as I indicated in the case of religious Zionists, affirming Israeli nationalism in an extremist formulation provides the most legitimate form of criticism of the political elite and constitutes a claim to acceptance, if not leadership, by virtue of greater loyalty to the nominal values of the society.

This is an appropriate point at which to elaborate what I mean by the nominal values of Israeli society and that requires a brief description of Israel's civil religion. Civil religion is a system of symbols (a set of myths, ceremonials, sacred places, etc.) and values which legitimates the social order, integrates the population and mobilizes its energies towards collective goals. Since the 1950s, and particularly after 1967, Israeli civil religion has pointed to the centrality of the Jewish people and the Jewish tradition. Religious symbols have increasingly penetrated the political culture in which the State of Israel is seen as representing the Jewish people and the Jewish tradition. The Holocaust, the central myth of Israeli society, conveys the message that without a state Jews are victims of non-Jews who are perpetually hostile to them. The tradition, in turn, legitimates Jewish rights to the Land of Israel, the only territory upon which a Jewish state can be built and the only land where Jews can realize their national destiny and assure their security.

It is true that the civil religion has divorced conceptions of the Jewish people and the Holy Land, the foundation stones of ethnic and territorial nationalism, from their religious-metaphysical context. As Don-Yehiya and I have sought to demonstrate in our book, *Civil Religion in Israel*, the Jewish tradition itself has been transformed and transvalued.¹⁸ But the civil religion draws upon many religion constructs and legitimates its claims to Jewish authenticity by pointing to the religious tradition. The image of religion, as we shall see, is a very positive one. Hence, it is not surprising that the closer one feels to the religious tradition the greater the resonance evoked by the civil religion. The more antagonistic one feels towards the religious tradition the more alienated one is from the civil religion, and the less likely one is to internalize ultra-nationalist attitudes. Religious Zionists, on the other hand, undertook their own transformation and transvaluation of the tradition (Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook is a prime example) and arrived at their ultra-nationalist conceptions independently of the civil religion, although they utilized the civil religion for their purposes.

¹⁸ C. Liebman and E. Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Religion and Political Culture in the Jewish State*, Berkeley (University of California Press) 1983.

At the heart of these conceptions, whether of the religious Zionists or of the civil religion, lie the seeds of an ethnocentric and chauvinist view of Judaism and the Jewish people. Neither the founders of Israel nor the early religious Zionists shared this view. But Israeli leaders inculcated this view through the mass media, school curricula, army educational programs and elitist rhetoric. Why did Israel's cultural and political elite pay lip service to conceptions and beliefs which were really not their own? The question deserves separate treatment. I will only attempt a brief answer here. Part of the answer stemmed from fears that first arose in the 1950s, that the alternative was a loss of Jewish identity, an absence of national consensus, a weakening of collectivist values among the population and a consequent weakening of resistance to perceived Arab threats. The other part of the answer, as I already suggested, lies in the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of elitist values by population groups such as the Orientals and the young.

The last group to be considered are Israeli youth. They are also among the most extreme in their espousal of territorial and ethnic nationalism. In a May, 1985 survey of 15-18-year-olds, forty-two per cent reported they agreed with the ideas of Kahana and Kach. Now the young are predominantly secular: the majority do not even define themselves as traditional, much less religious. What possible connection, then, can exist between their ultra-nationalism and religion? I am not arguing for a direct causal relationship. However, it seems significant that despite their secular beliefs and behavior, Israeli youth have a positive image of religion.

In a 1984 sample of 15-18-year-olds, only 12.3 per cent of the respondents defined themselves as religious, whereas 27.3 per cent defined themselves as traditional and 59.5 per cent as secular. Many Israelis believe that there has been a significant shift to religion among young Israelis in the last few years. There is no evidence to support this assumption. While 23.9 per cent reported they became 'closer to the tradition or the Jewish religion in the last few years', 55.5 per cent said no change had occurred and 19.6 per cent said they had become more distant from religion.

A major issue in relations between religion and state in 1984 was the opening of movie theaters on the Sabbath. The vast majority of the respondents, 71.3 per cent, favored their operation; 26.8 per cent opposed it. In other words, the overwhelming majority of the respondents appeared to be secular rather than religious in their behavior and attitudes. Respondents were also asked about their attitudes towards a variety of types of behavior. The percentage reporting favorable attitudes was as follows: 'joining sectarian groups such as Hari Krishna, etc.' (11.0 per cent), 'taking drugs' (2.7 per cent), 'sex among non-married couples' (50.9 per cent), 'consuming alcoholic beverages' (17.8 per cent), and finally, 'returning to religion' (61.5 per cent). Among the youth who defined themselves as traditional, 75.8 per cent, and among those who defined

themselves as secular, 47.8 per cent held favorable attitudes towards the return to religion. The phenomenon of a return to religion, comparable to the phenomenon of becoming a born-again Christian in the United States, received a great deal of publicity in the Israeli media during 1984. It was pointed out that the 'born-again Jews' are isolated from their old friends and very often from their families as well, that they did not serve in the army and sometimes adopted neutral and even hostile attitudes towards the State of Israel. But such is the status of religion in Israeli society that the return to religion was still viewed with favor.

Perhaps Israeli youth have not been influenced by religious-nationalist conceptions. But it does seem reasonable to suggest that if they have been successfully socialized to a value that contradicts their own style of life and belief, they will have readily adopted what they perceive as the regnant nationalist values of the civil religion.

Yonathan Shapiro, basing himself on historical data, has demonstrated the remarkable acquiescence of the younger generation of Israelis to the political values of their elders. There are few societies where young people in general and second and third generations of political activists in particular have waited as patiently and obediently while their seniors held the center of the political stage. This acquiescence, obedience and deference stems from the successful socialization of the young to the nominal political values of their elders. While ethnocentrism and territorial nationalism were always components of the elitist value system, they have received special emphasis since 1967.

Shapiro, describing the process of political socialization in the period of modern Jewish settlement, makes an observation that is no less true today; ideology and political values may be formulated by people whose own commitment to these values is ambivalent. He points out, for example, that modern Zionism was formulated by an intellectual stratum 'that arrived at a consciousness that they belonged to a separate nation and a different civilization but couldn't sever their ties to the European civilization they so admired...'¹⁹ Most of these intellectuals never came to Palestine, though they devoted a good part of their intellectual efforts to emphasizing the necessity of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel for the future of the Jewish people. This does not mean they were hypocrites or liars. The public articulation of one's values does not reflect the internal conflict, the reservations and doubts that may precede its formulation. Furthermore, the emphasis and stress given to some values may be an effort to compensate for the private doubts and reservations that are felt about them. But only those

¹⁹ Y. Shapiro, *An Elite Without Successors: Generations of Political Leaders in Israel*, Tel-Aviv (Sifriat Poalim Publishing House) 1984, p. 30 (Hebrew). See now *idem*, 'Jewish Youth Movements in Eretz Israel and the Elite', *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1985), pp. 17-30.

who are part of the ethnic, social, generational or ideological group that articulates these values would know this. Finally, to use an example from the 1930s and 1940s, when the Israeli political elite articulated a set of public values, for example, the necessity to create a new Jew freed from the bonds of the passive tradition, they took for granted other values or sentiments, for example, a warm nostalgic feeling towards religious ceremonial and a feeling of responsibility towards all Jews. They never considered the likelihood that a new generation would internalize the articulated values, not the unstated assumptions and, as a result, misinterpret the value system of their elders.

This helps explain the Jewish indifference of Israeli youth in the 1930s and 1940s. The same process explains the reversal of these feelings, their ethnocentrism and their chauvinism today. Since the 1950s, and with growing intensity since 1967, they have heard, at home, in school, in the army, the message that the whole world is against us; if we are not strong our enemies will destroy us; the world owes us a moral debt; no one has a moral right to criticize Israel; the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people; racism is a crime against Jews, not a crime Jews are capable of inflicting upon others. World indifference during the Holocaust is something Jews experienced, not a lesson to Jews about the immorality of indifference. The political and cultural elite who created these formulas as early as the 1950s also believed in a universalistic ethic, in the necessity for Israel to live among the family of nations, in justice and mercy as equally important values, in the possibility of peace in the Middle East, but these values were assumed rather than articulated for reasons suggested in the previous section. No less important, Israeli leaders preached Jewish indifference to world opinion although they behaved otherwise. The fact that those who created the ethnic and territorial conceptions of the civil religion may have had some ambivalence about them or that they were formulated in extreme terms to counter an atmosphere of indifference to Judaism and Diaspora Jewry is not understood. The fact that the Israeli construction of the meaning of the Holocaust may have been formulated in response to guilt feelings is certainly never conveyed.

This argument can be reformulated in similar terms. Zionists have always spoken about a Jewish state. Israel represents herself, both at home and abroad, as a Jewish state. There is probably no notion which generates greater support in Israeli society than the notion that Israel is and must remain a Jewish state. But what does a Jewish state mean? The simplest and most obvious interpretation is a society ruled by Jews, on behalf of Jews, in *Eretz Yisrael* which Jews believe is their land. Non-Jews, by definition, are a tolerated minority with rights which Jews see fit to confer upon them. Of course, this is not the way Israel's founders envisioned their state. The baggage of values which they bore included assumptions about civil equality, the brotherhood of man, and a host of liberal-

humanist-universalist commitments. What they failed to do, perhaps because they thought it unnecessary, perhaps because they found it impossible, was to elaborate their liberal-humanist-universalist values and explain how they were reconcilable with a Jewish state. As the Jewish content of the civil religion resonated in louder terms after 1967, the liberal-humanist-universalist values receded.

We can add to this the propensity of young people for unambiguous resolutions and a willingness to adopt extreme solutions. Hence the appeal of ethnic and territorial ultra-nationalism which, in the eyes of youth, is entirely consistent with the notion of a Jewish state. The survey of 15–18-year-old Israeli youth demonstrates that the most nationalistic of them are neither rebellious nor do they view themselves as part of a counterculture. Rather they are those who report they are most ready to serve their country, and least likely to report a willingness to leave it.

Misunderstanding and selective absorption may have also occurred among the religious Zionists. The Jewish tradition understood through the formulations of Rabbi Abraham Kook and his son Zvi Yehudah, seem to provide proof texts for ultra-nationalist formulations. Notions of an inherent sanctity of Jews is a basis for racist doctrines. The attribution of sanctity to a land and the suggestion of a mystical tie between a particular group of people and a particular land, provides a foundation for the grossest form of chauvinism. Yet it was Rabbi Abraham Kook who believed that 'the fear of God must never overwhelm the natural morality of man' and love of all men and all nations 'from the depths of one's heart and soul' prepares the spirit of the Messiah to descend upon Israel.²⁰ It was his son who wrote a letter of protest to a school principal when he saw students bullying Arabs.²¹ I prefer to believe that neither the father nor the son foresaw the interpretation many of their admirers would give to their message.

To summarize my central thesis: religion certainly is an important factor in accounting for Israeli ultra-nationalism but it alone is insufficient to explain the phenomenon. A moderate nationalist interpretation of Judaism is possible, as the existence of such dovish religious groups as Oz VeShalom or Netivot Shalom demonstrates. Secondly, religious conceptions and values, even when they appear to support ultra-nationalist orientations can be moderated by considerations of pragmatism or by values of compassion and natural morality.

I explain the affinity of religious Zionists and Oriental Jews for ultra-nationalist policies by their desire to legitimate themselves, enhance their integration into Israeli society and even claim lead-

²⁰ D. Henshkeh, 'What Happened to the "Lights" of Rav Kook', *Nekudah*, 79 (Nov. 2, 1984), p. 12 (Hebrew).

²¹ A. Sugarman, 'Attitudes Toward Minorities in the State of Israel', *Niv Hamid-rashia*, 18–19 (1984), Tel Aviv (Midrashiyat Noam), p. 267 (Hebrew).

ership by overidentifying with the nominal values of the civil religion. Secondly, I argue that these values were not the real or exclusive values of the political and cultural elite who originally generated them. In part, the values of the elite were misunderstood. In part, and related to this, they were formulated with a particular set of assumptions in mind and in order to meet a particular set of conditions. They continued to be applied when these assumptions and conditions no longer held.

This second factor also helps account for the ultra-nationalism of Israeli youth. Their attitudes are presumably unrelated to any religious convictions. But they are best understood in light of the impact of socialization processes in a culture that bears the influence of religious conceptions.