

Yoav Peled¹
Tel Aviv University
Israel

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FROM SAFE HAVEN TO MESSIANIC REDEMPTION: THE ASCENDANCE OF RELIGIOUS-ZIONISM

Abstract

On June 13, 2021, Naftali Bennet was sworn in as Israel's first ever Religious-Zionist Prime Minister. Although Bennet's political party, *Yamina* (Rightward), had only seven seats in the Knesset (out of 120), and his coalition government lasted only one year, his election as Prime Minister symbolized the progress made by Religious-Zionism towards achieving a hegemonic position in Israeli society. Historically, Religious-Zionism had been a junior partner in the historic bloc which sustained the hegemony of the Labor Zionist movement over the Zionist settlement project. However, the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 gave the younger generation of Religious-Zionism the opportunity to take over their own movement and aim, as they put it, to move from the back seat to the driver's seat of Israeli society. Labor Zionism's loss of the political initiative regarding the territories occupied in 1967 provided the opening for that move. Religious-Zionism encompasses a whole range of religious and nationalist outlooks, but its most influential and dynamic element is the activist-Messianic tendency associated with Gush Emunim. The core interest and value of this dominant tendency is the permanent incorporation of the West Bank under Israeli sovereignty.

Keywords: Religious-Zionism, hegemony, Gush Emunim, Labor-Zionism, religionization

¹ Yoav Peled is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Tel Aviv University. He is co-author, with Horit Herman Peled, of *The Religionization of Israeli Society* (Routledge, 2019) and co-editor, with John Ehrenberg, of *Israel and Palestine: Alternative Perspectives on Statehood* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2016). His book, co-authored with Gershon Shafir, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (CUP, 2002) won MESA's 2002 Albert Hourani Award for best book in Middle East studies published that year. He is a member of the editorial boards of *Citizenship Studies* and of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. Contact E-mail: poli1@tauex.tau.ac.il

For many years we felt like second class. For many years we wanted to be on the front line with the general public in leading the country, but we never thought or dared imagine that there could be a religious Chief of [the IDF] General Staff or a Prime Minister of our own. We always attached ourselves to others. But ... we need to advance a stage and take a hold of the wheel and sail the ship of state in the right direction ... towards the great horizon of building the Kingdom of Israel in the Land of Israel ... The public has a duty to build the [Third] Temple ... (Rabbi Chaim Retig, 2014).²

Introduction

On June 13, 2021, Naftali Bennet was sworn in as Israel's first ever Religious-Zionist Prime Minister.³ Although Bennet's political party, Yamina (Rightward), had only seven seats in the Knesset (out of 120), and his coalition government lasted only one year, his election as Prime Minister symbolized the progress made by Religious-Zionism towards achieving a hegemonic position in Israeli society.

In *Civil Religion in Israel*, their seminal book published in 1983, Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, two political scientists at the Religious-Zionist university, Bar-Ilan, argued that the history of Zionist settlement in Palestine had known two major shifts of civil religion: from a socialist-Zionist one to a "statist" one in 1948 and from the statist to a "new" civil religion in 1967. The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 was a crucial turning point in that it generated a "legitimacy crisis" among Israeli Jews, a crisis that was to be aggravated by the war of 1973. The predicament was due to two ethical-political dilemmas that had confronted Zionism in Palestine/Israel all along but were heightened by the results of the 1967 and 1973 wars: the Jews' right to the Land of Israel, when exercising that right meant displacing or oppressing the Palestinians, and the justification for the sacrifices demanded of Israeli Jews themselves in order to preserve and defend the Zionist project. Paradoxically, both Israel's success in 1967 and the trauma it experienced in 1973 made statist answers to these

² *Propagating: How the Religious Right Took Control of Values Education in the [Secular] State System*, Jerusalem: Molad – The center for Democratic Renewal, 2017 (in Hebrew). Retig is Chairman of *Zehut* (Identity), an umbrella organization uniting 45 state-funded NGOs that engage in teaching "Jewish identity" in secular state schools.

³ On Bennet see: Ori Goldberg, "Trains on Time: Faith, Political Belonging, and Governability in Israel", in: *Religion, Secularism, and Political Belonging*, Medovoi Leerom, Bentley Elizabeth (eds.), Duke University Press, New York, 2021, pp. 175-190.

dilemmas, based, as they were, on survivalist arguments, unpersuasive, especially for the younger generation.⁴

The process of consolidation of the “new” civil religion is known in Hebrew as *hadata* (religionization).⁵ It encompasses three different phenomena: (1) the growing demographic weight of religious Jews, both *charedim* (ultra-Orthodox) and religious Zionists, due to their higher birth rates; (2) the “return” to religion of formerly more or less secular Israeli Jews; (3) a growing openness in the general culture to religious Jewish motifs. Politically, the most important consequence of *hadata* is the hegemonic status gradually being acquired by Religious-Zionism in Jewish Israeli culture, in the sense that the “givens” of the prevailing worldview are increasingly supplied by a Religious-Zionist outlook, as is becoming evident in all aspects of the public discourse.

It may be argued that this growing religiosity is not unique to Israel and that the explanation for it lies with the long-recognized need of human beings for meaning in a society that has become materialistic, individualistic and devoid of grand secular ideologies. As José Casanova has famously averred, in the 1980s “religion, leaving its assigned place in the private sphere, had thrust itself into the public arena of moral and political contestation.”⁶ My argument, however, is that, over and beyond this general explanation, the changed attitude of mainstream Israeli society towards Jewish religion results from a profound need for religious legitimation. That need was always present in the Zionist project, but is becoming more acute as the chances for peaceful accommodation with the Palestinians are gradually fading away.⁷ Moreover, this process is deliberately and actively led by an activist, Messianic sector that is dominant within Religious-Zionism and determined to become hegemonic over the society as a whole in order to perpetuate Israel’s control over the West Bank and enhance the religious character of Jewish nationalism.

Previous studies of *hadata* have generally followed Liebman and Don-Yehiya in recognizing the need for legitimacy as the motivating power behind it. These studies, however, have tended to treat *hadata* as a spontaneous, “bottom up” process and downplay the active role played by Religious-Zionism in promoting it in

4 Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*, University of California Press, 1983, pp. 128-131.

5 Yoram Pery, Introduction, *Israel Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2012, pp. 1-3; Shlomo Fischer, Yes, Israel is Becoming More religious, *Israel Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2012, pp. 10-15; Hayim Katsman, The Hyphen Cannot Hold: Contemporary Trends in Religious-Zionism, *Israel Studies Review*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2020, pp. 154-174, 169; Amos Zehavi, Religionization from the Bottom Up: Religiosity Trends and Institutional Change Mechanisms in Israeli Public Services, *Politics and Religion*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2017, pp. 489-514.

6 José Casanova, *Public Religion in the Modern World*, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 3.

7 Ian Lustick, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.

order to acquire hegemony over the society.⁸ Omri Maniv and Yuval Benziman have identified a deliberate effort to enhance the religious character of the public sphere in order to promote a *nationalist* agenda, but limited their analysis to Ministry of Education policies under Religious-Zionist ministers.⁹ In what follows I use Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony as a framework for analyzing Religious-Zionism's conscious effort to replace Labor-Zionism as the hegemonic fundamental group in Israeli society, and explore how this effort is manifested in several key areas of the state and of civil society.

Analytic Framework

Cultural hegemony, according to Gramsci, is the "'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group [for Gramsci, a class] enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production".¹⁰ By the same token, however, "The fact of hegemony presupposes that account is taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed – in other words that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporative kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity".¹¹

When successful, a hegemonic project results in the creation of a stable politico-economic "social-historic bloc," rather than merely a shifting political coalition.¹² However, because the historic bloc is made up of a number of social groups, with divergent and shifting interests, "hegemony is not a static concept but a process of continuous creation which, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural

8 See: Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*...

9 Omri Maniv, Yuval Benziman, National-Religionization (and not Religious-Religionization) in Policies of Israel's Ministry of Education, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2020, pp. 115-137.

10 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Hoare Quintin, Nowell Smith Geoffrey (trs.), International Publishers, New York, 1971, p. 12, cited in: Jackson Lears T.J., The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, 1985, pp. 567-593, 568.

11 *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, Forgacs David (ed.), New York University Press, 2000, pp. 211-212.

12 Perry Anderson, The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci, *New Left Review*, No. 100, 1976, pp. 5-78, 19.

expressions to develop.”¹³ In Liebman and Don-Yehiya’s terms, a successful hegemonic project is able to constitute a new “civil religion.”

The socialist-Zionist and statist versions of the civil religion identified by Liebman and Don-Yehiya prevailed during the period of Labor-Zionist hegemony from, roughly, 1935 to 1977. Their “new” civil religion marks the ascendance of Religious-Zionism toward becoming hegemonic in Jewish Israeli society. Whereas the hegemony achieved by the Labor-Zionist movement (LZM) indeed resulted, in part, from “its position and function in the world of production,” Religious-Zionism’s quest for hegemony is based solely on the legitimizing power of its ideology. This does not mean, however, that Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is not applicable in this case. For, as I show below, behind Religious-Zionist ideology there is a clear *material interest*, viz. incorporating the territory of the West Bank into Israel. Moreover, “Gramsci frequently emphasized, that ideology and the superstructure of civil society must be dealt with as objectively as economic considerations.”¹⁴ Or, to put it differently, for Gramsci, “Ideologies, which have their historical roots in civil society, are no longer seen as a posthumous justification of a power which has been formed historically by material conditions, but are seen as forces capable of creating a new history and of collaborating in the formation of a new power, rather than to justify a power which has already been established.”¹⁵ Thus, the idea of hegemony as rooted in ideology, that is in civil society rather than in the sphere of economic production, is not at all foreign to Gramsci’s system of thought.

In line with Gramsci’s assessment, Religious-Zionism indeed acquiesced, though reluctantly, in the loss of less crucial territorial assets – the Sinai Peninsula in 1979-82 and the Gaza Strip in 2005 – in order to maintain the historic bloc which would enable it to incorporate the vitally important West Bank into Israel. Moreover, these territorial concessions reinforced Religious-Zionism’s determination to seize control of the state and ensure that no territorial compromise will ever be worked out in that region.¹⁶

13 Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci’s Political and Cultural Theory*, University of California Press, 1980, p. 174.

14 Valeriano Jr. Ramos, The Concepts of Ideology, Hegemony, and Organic Intellectuals in Gramsci’s Marxism, *Theoretical Review*, No. 27, 1982. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/theoretical-review/1982301.htm> (accessed April 22, 2022).

15 Norberto Bobbio, “Gramsci and the Conception of Civil Society”, in: *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, Chantal Mouffe (ed.), London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 21–47, 36.

16 Efraim Inbar, Fundamentalism in Crisis—The Response of the Gush Emunim Rabbinical Authorities to the Theological Dilemmas Raised by Israel’s Disengagement Plan, *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 49, 2007, pp. 697–717, esp. 712–713; Motti Inbari, “Messianic Religious Zionist Rabbis Cope with the Disengagement Plan: Three Reactions to the Fear of Prophetic Failure”, in: *From the Margins to the Fore? Religious-Zionism and Israeli Society*, Yair Sheleg (ed.), Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem, 2019, pp. 159–190 (in Hebrew); Eliezer Don-Yehiya, Messianism and Politics: The Ideological Transformation of Religious Zionism, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2014, pp. 239–263.

Labor-Zionist Hegemony

The LZM's "prestige and confidence" stemmed from the fact that its goal – founding a Jewish nation-state in Palestine – was shared by the vast majority of Jews living in pre-statehood Palestine and by the world-wide Zionist movement as a whole.¹⁷ The extra-market settlement strategy pursued by the LZM in order to achieve that goal – cooperative agricultural settlement on nationally-owned land financed by public funds and a corporatist economic system¹⁸ – was not as widely shared, but was grudgingly recognized even by its political rivals as the only feasible way to achieve the Zionist goal. As acknowledged by Ephraim Kleiman, a neo-classical Israeli economist: "[I]t was in part because of this correspondence [between their "strong ideological proclivity toward interventionism and the planned economy... and the needs of the time"] that the founding fathers of [the] labor movement ... became also the founding fathers of the country".¹⁹ Last but not least, between 1937 and 1973 it was widely believed that the LZM was the only political body capable of ensuring the physical security of the Zionist project.

The key concept of the LZM's hegemonic "ethico-political" ideational structure, and the foundation of its identification, in the mind of the Zionist movement, with the state-building enterprise, was the ethos of "pioneering" (*chalutziyut*). The "first and foremost" element of pioneering, according to sociologist S.N. Eisenstadt, was "social and personal sacrifice." The pioneer – performing the common "redemptive" tasks of the community – physical labor, agricultural settlement, and military defense – exhibited "lack of interest in direct, immediate rewards of position, wages, material comforts, or even political power."²⁰ Since these ideals were expressed in their fullness in the kibbutz, pioneering was most clearly bound up with that institution. By extension, the LZM leadership thought of itself, and was viewed by its following, as a "service elite," not interested in promoting its own interests but the common interests of the *Yishuv* (Jewish community in pre-statehood Palestine).²¹

The LZM's hegemonic position was consolidated by the Arab Revolt of 1936-39, the most intense Jewish-Palestinian conflict prior to the 1947-49 war. The revolt be-

17 Michael Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy of Israel*, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 81-99.

18 Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, University of California Press, updated edition, 1996.

19 Ephraim Kleiman, *The Waning of Israeli Etatism*, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 2, 1997, pp. 146-171, 159; Yonathan Shapiro, *The Formative Years of the Israeli Labour Party: The Organization of Power, 1919-1930*, Sage, New York, 1976, p. 233.

20 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Israeli Society*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968, pp. 17-18.

21 Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *Origins of the Israeli Polity: Palestine under the Mandate*, Chicago University Press, 1978, pp. 105-110; for a critique see: Shapiro, *Israeli Labour Party*...

gan with a strike by Palestinian Arab producers and workers which paralyzed public services and sections of the Jewish private economy and led to a quick replacement of the strikers with Jewish hands provided by the *Histadrut*, the LZM's peak labor organization. Thus "the Arab Revolt transformed the character of the *yishuv*'s economic development by strengthening the standing of its central institutions." The import of private capital declined and construction, which had been financed largely by private capital, declined rapidly as well, and came to rely on "national capital," also funneled through the *Histadrut*. Private agriculture and industry also turned to national capital for support.²²

Under the new circumstances, the *Histadrut*'s military wing, the *Haganah* militia, evolved into a national body in charge of ensuring the safety of the entire Jewish population. In 1937 the first attempt to establish a standing Jewish military force took place, sponsored by the British Mandatory government. Security now came to be viewed, for the first time, as weightier than economic considerations.²³ A popular song written in 1938 by Nathan Alterman, the LZM's poet laureate, included the line: "Your boys carried the peace of the plow for you, today they carry the peace of the guns".²⁴

However, both the material and the ethico-political aspects of the LZM's hegemony were rife with contradictions. In order to achieve and maintain its hegemony, the LZM had to accommodate to some degree the interests of non-pioneering groups, particularly, for our purposes, Orthodox Jews and the owners of private capital, as well as the Diaspora Jewish middle class, who supplied the funds for the settlement project. The *Histadrut* itself was based on a contradiction that was rooted in its historical role – it was at one and the same time both the largest industrial employer in the country and the sole representative of organized labor. These contradictions all came to a head in the 1960s, as Israel overcame the crises of war and mass migration – which *tripled* its population between 1948 and 1963 – and emerged as a viable concern both economically and militarily. In other words, it was the very success of the LZM that exposed its vulnerabilities and brought its hegemony over Israeli society to an end.

Economically, as soon as it reached its declared goal of full employment for Jews, in the mid-1960s, Labor had to face workers' militancy fueled by full employ-

22 Yoav Gelber, "The Consolidation of Jewish Society in Eretz-Israel, 1936-1947", in: *The History of the Jewish Community in Eretz-Israel Since 1882*, Part Two: "The Period of the British Mandate", Israeli Academy for Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, 1994, pp. 303-463, 377-380 (in Hebrew).

23 Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

24 Hahagana Organization, available at: <https://www.hahagana.org.il/database/song/> (accessed March 6, 2022).

ment just as the unilateral transfers that had sustained its corporatist economic policy up to that point were beginning to dry up. Labor responded by instigating an economic recession that most probably went out of hand and brought about the loss of its credibility as a manager of the economy. This loss of credibility was submerged by the spectacular military victory of 1967, but reappeared after the 1973 war that brought in its wake the oil crisis and another economic recession.²⁵

Territorially, the LZM's strategy in the pre-statehood period was to acquire as much territory as possible, compatible with the maintenance of a Jewish majority. In 1947-49 Israel extended its borders well beyond the area designated as the Jewish state in the 1947 UN Partition Resolution and proceeded to expel the majority of Palestinian Arabs from its territory.²⁶ In 1967, in a war that was the height of its military prowess, Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, among other areas, precisely the locations where most of the 1948 Palestinian refugees had found refuge. Mass expulsion of Palestinians from these areas was no longer possible (although some limited expulsions did take place),²⁷ so the territorial-demographic dilemma came to face the Labor-led government head on.

Labor was internally split with respect to the future of the territories that had been captured: keep them under Israeli rule or return most of them for peace. The split was in large measure generational: the old, foreign-born leadership (Golda Meir was a notable exception) favored withdrawal from most of the territories under certain conditions, primarily out of concern for international public opinion. (However, "Jerusalem," which by the Israeli definition included a large portion of the West Bank as well, was immediately annexed to Israel.) The younger generation of leaders, consisting mostly of retired military technocrats, wanted to keep some or all of the territories, primarily for alleged security reasons.²⁸

Labor's inability to decide on a clear course of action led directly to the disastrous 1973 war and to complete loss of confidence in its ability to safeguard Israel's security among a very large portion of the Jewish public.²⁹ As a result, Labor lost the

25 Lev Louis Grinberg, "Paving the Way to Neoliberalism: The Self-Destruction of the Zionist Labor Movement", in: *Neoliberalism as a State Project: Changing the Political Economy of Israel*, Asa Maron and Shalev Michael (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 29-45, 33-35.

26 Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, Cambridge University Press, 2004; Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oneworld Publications, London, 2006.

27 Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*... pp. 169, 173, 175, 192.

28 Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 1988; Yonathan Shapiro, *The Road to Power: Herut Party in Israel*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY, 1991, pp. 153-159; Arie Naor, *The Security Argument in the Territorial Debate in Israel: Rhetoric and Policy*, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 4, 1999, pp. 150-177.

29 Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security and Foreign Policy*, University of Michigan Press, 2006, pp. 140-170.

political initiative to a reinvigorated Religious-Zionism armed with a mystical-messianic ideology that left no room for hesitation about incorporating the newly acquired territories into Israel. Thus, by the mid-1970s all three components of the LZM's settlement strategy – the territorial, the security, and the economic – seemed to be facing a dead end.

Ian Lustick has listed three conditions as necessary in order “to overthrow an established ideologically hegemonic conception or explain its breakdown”:

- A severe contradiction between the conception advanced as hegemonic and the stubborn realities it purports to describe;
- An appropriately fashioned alternative interpretation of political reality capable of reorganizing competition to the advantage of particular groups;
- Dedicated political-ideological entrepreneurs who can operate successfully where fundamental assumptions of political life have been thrown open to question, and who see better opportunities in competition over basic “rules of the game” than in competition for marginal advantage according to existing rules.³⁰

By the mid-1970s all three conditions listed by Lustick were in place: the LZM's moderate social-democratic economic worldview and its cautious territorial-security outlook both seemed to be incompatible with the post-1967 realities. On both fronts alternative conceptions were offered – the openly expansionist territorial vision of Religious-Zionism and (somewhat more pragmatically) of the new governing party, Likud, and the free-market orthodoxy espoused by Likud and shared by many members of the LZM's own salaried managerial class. And dedicated political-ideological entrepreneurs, committed to bringing about the end of Labor's political and cultural dominance, were also on the scene – in addition to the old-timer Revisionist Zionists of Likud, they were the leaders and activists of the Democratic Movement for Change, a political party dedicated to transforming Israel's political economy in a (neo-)liberal direction, and the young guard of Religious-Zionism, spearheaded by Gush Emunim (see below), determined to ensure Israel's rule over the territories captured in 1967 and working to enhance the prominence of Jewish religion in the public sphere. It is to the latter challenge that we now turn.

30 Ian Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza*, Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 23-24.

The “Historic Partnership”

Since 1935, when the LZM achieved leadership over the World Zionist Organization, Religious-Zionism had been a junior partner in the historic bloc which sustained the LZM's hegemony. This inferiority was not merely a matter of its small numbers. The Religious-Zionist movement was for the most part an urban middle class movement, removed from the spirit and activities of pioneering.³¹ Its petty-bourgeois character and overt religiosity did not comport well with the image of the “new Jew” that Zionism, and especially the LZM, sought to create: “He was to be secular and modern ... draw close to nature, have clean hands and a courageous heart”³². “Negation of the Diaspora” was a constitutive element of Zionist ideology, and the negation included Jewish religious observance as practiced in the *galut* (Diaspora): “Religion was to the pioneers one of numerous outdated conventions that was shed on becoming a pioneer in Palestine.”³³ In their eyes, “adherence to Halakhah [Jewish religious law] retarded both individual and communal development and represented the negative aspect of *galut* society.”³⁴

As a result of their marginalization, “Religious-Zionists were ... self-conscious about their minimal contribution to the leadership and development of Zionism, and to the establishment and maintenance of the state. They felt obliged, therefore, to adopt defensive, segregationist policies to protect themselves from secularism.”³⁵ By the same token, Religious-Zionists, practicing a modern-Orthodox version of Judaism, felt religiously inferior to the ultra-Orthodox, non-Zionist *Charedim*, with their more exacting observance of Jewish religious strictures.³⁶

By the 1960s, however, the young, Israel-born generation of Religious-Zionists began to challenge their elders for their subservience to Labor and for their

31 Dov Schwartz, Religious-Zionism and the Idea of the New Man, *Israel*, No. 16, 2009, p. 143 (in Hebrew); Shlomo Fischer, “Change or Continuity? Torah Regime, Citizenship and the Origins of Radical Religious-Zionism”, in: *Points of Reference: Changing Identities and Social Positioning in Israel*, Zeev Shavit et al. (eds.), Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, pp. 353-354 (in Hebrew); Dror Greenblum, *From the Bravery of the Spirit to the Sanctification of Power: Power and Bravery in Religious-Zionism 1948-1967*, Open University Press, Tel Aviv, 2016, pp. 159-160 (in Hebrew); Avi Sagi, Dov Schwartz, *From Realism to Messianism: Religious-Zionism and the Six-Day War*, Carmel, Jerusalem, 2017, p. 127 (in Hebrew); Moshe Hellinger, Isaac Herschkowitz and Bernard Susser, *Religious-Zionism and the Settlement Project: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Disobedience*, SUNY Press, 2018, p. 15.

32 Anita Shapira, The Origins of the Myth of the ‘New Jew’: The Zionist Variety, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 31, 1997, p. 264. For the Religious-Zionist conception of the “new Jew” see: Dov Schwartz, Religious-Zionism and the Idea of the New Man ...

33 Shmuel Almog, “The Role of Religious Values in the Second Aliyah”, in: *Zionism and Religion*, Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira (eds.), University Press of New England, Hanover, 1998, p. 239.

34 Israel Kolatt, “Religion, Society and State in the Period of the National Home”, in: *Zionism and Religion*, Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira (eds.) ... p. 277.

35 Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* ... p. 202.

36 Ibidem, p. 203; Motti Inbari, Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook's Conception of Zionism and the Roots of ‘Gush Emunim’, *Iyunim Betkumat Yisrael*, No. 18, p. 38 (in Hebrew); Sagi and Schwartz, *From Realism to Messianism* ... pp. 128-129.

lukewarm religiosity and political moderation. The 1967 and 1973 wars gave that younger generation the opportunity to take over the Religious-Zionist movement and aim, as they put it, to move from the back seat to the driver's seat of Israeli society. Labor's loss of the political initiative regarding the territories occupied in 1967 provided the opening for that move.

The vision motivating this young guard was that of "Torah state," fusing Jewish nationalism and Jewish religion. In addition to "full observance of the Torah of Israel" in everyday life, they were committed to "nationalism and patriotism, dedication to the nation and loyalty to the state, readiness to sacrifice for the sake of the nation."³⁷ As explained by Shlomo Fischer: "[The] concept of [Torah state] includes two separate, yet connected, ideas. The first is that religious value and fulfillment can be realized in the "secular" or mundane realms of politics, settlement, economic production, cultural production and the military, that is realms outside of the narrow sacramental-religious arena of prayer, religious ritual and interpersonal ethics. The second idea is that these realms have to be ordered according to some religious vision, principle or regulations. In other words, the unification of the religious and the national frameworks of collective identity entailed the de-compartmentalization of the religious life. The various institutional arenas of life: political, economic, cultural, military etc. were to be brought within an overall religious meaning and regulative system".³⁸

By implication, initially, and after 1967 explicitly, the vision of "Torah state" included Jewish sovereignty over the entire Land of Israel.³⁹

1967

"The [1967] Six Day War . . . turned the conception of Jewish sovereignty over all the Land into an operational concept. The commitment of so many religious Zionists to this ideology, contrasting with the hesitation and misgiving in most secularist circles, ended their status as political satellites. For the first time in the history of political Zionism, they asserted leadership in political and social fields – in their own settlement of the newly captured territories and in their political defense of Israel's foreign policy".⁴⁰

37 Gideon Aran, From Religious-Zionism to Zionist Religion: The Roots of Gush Emunim, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 2, pp. 116-143.

38 Shlomo Fischer, "Change or Continuity? Torah Regime, Citizenship and the Origins of Radical Religious-Zionism" . . . p. 351.

39 Ibidem, pp. 371-374; Naima Barzel, "Redemption Now": The Beliefs and Activities of the Jewish Settlers in the West Bank and Israeli Society, Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv, 2017, pp. 183-184 (in Hebrew).

40 Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* . . . p. 203.

The war of 1967 gave the young Religious-Zionists the opportunity to launch their move to acquire leadership positions, both in their own movement and in the society as a whole, but to take advantage of that opportunity they needed a much more solid ideological basis than they were capable of developing by themselves. This ideological basis was provided by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, son of the formidable Rabbi A. I. Kook, who in the early 1960s became their spiritual leader. According to Fischer, that move was “the fateful moment ... of Religious-Zionism in its entirety.”⁴¹

On Israel's 19th Independence Day in 1967, three weeks before the outbreak of the war, Rabbi Kook Jr. gave a homily in which he lamented, *inter alia*, the separation from the State of Israel of “our Hebron ... our Nablus ... our Jericho ... our lands on the other side of the Jordan.”⁴² Three weeks later Israel was in control of all those places (except for the east bank of the Jordan), which elevated the rabbi to the status of a prophet in the eyes of his followers. For Kook and his young followers, who had now become hegemonic within Religious-Zionism,⁴³ the victory of 1967 was an incontrovertible sign of a divine plan to return the entire Land of Israel to the People of Israel, as a major step in the process of messianic redemption. And “[a]s the Palestinians were the ones who ‘lost,’ they ... served as a constant vindication of the Israeli state's cosmological and institutional propriety.”⁴⁴ Thus, keeping the occupied Palestinian territories under Jewish sovereignty was a divine commandment not subject to utilitarian considerations of any kind. In the words of Rabbi Kook: “These borders, these kilometers of ours, are sanctified with divine sanctity and we cannot give them up under any circumstances. Besides, we have to remember the simple fact that these kilometers ... are not only ours; we are just small representatives of the People of Israel ... This land belongs not only to the three million Jews who are here but no less than that – to all the millions of Jews in Russia and the United States and the whole world. We have no permission even to consider ... giving up these lands, under any circumstances! This is a positive command [*mitzvat aseh*] from the Torah – not to be transgressed even at the price of one's life and no political calculations and complications, no government arrangements and no ministerial pronouncements of ours will change that.”⁴⁵

41 Fischer, “Change or Continuity?... p. 364; Y.B. Rodick, *Land of Redemption: Ideological Roots of Religious-Zionism, Gush Emunim and the Jewish Underground and their Relations with the Secular World in the State of Israel*, The Institute for Research in Rav Kook's Thought, Jerusalem, 1989 (in Hebrew); Motti Inbari, Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook's Conception of Zionism and the Roots of ‘Gush Emunim’; Ori Goldberg, “Trains on Time: Faith, Political Belonging, and Governability in Israel” ... p. 178.

42 Cited in: Yaron Peleg, *Directed by God: Jewishness in Contemporary Israeli Film and Television*, University of Texas Press, 2016, p. 92.

43 Sagi and Schwartz, *From Realism to Messianism*...

44 Ori Goldberg, “Trains on Time: Faith, Political Belonging, and Governability in Israel” ... p. 176; cf.

Hayim Katsman, *The Hyphen Cannot Hold: Contemporary Trends in Religious-Zionism* ...; Sagi and Schwartz, *From Realism to Messianism*... esp. pp. 61–69, 156.

45 Rabbi Z. Y. Kook, 1974, cited in: Emanuel Atkes, “Contours of the Image of Religious-Zionism”, in: *Milestones: Essays and Studies in the*

Gush Emunim

If the war of 1967 was a necessary condition for radical national-religious activism to take shape, its combination with the war of 1973 was a sufficient one.⁴⁶ Or, to use Gramscian terms, the 1973 war enabled the national-religious activists to move from a war of position to a war of maneuver. In February 1974 *Gush Emunim* (GE; Block of the Faithful) was founded, in the aftermath of the traumatic 1973 war, the loss of Labor's credibility as the guardian of Israel's security, and American pressure to withdraw Israeli forces in the Sinai and Golan Heights in order to separate the hostile armies from each other.⁴⁷ GE vehemently opposed any Israeli withdrawal as part of these disengagement agreements and demanded the removal of all restrictions imposed on settlement in the occupied territories by the by now wholly discredited Labor government. While its successes during the era of the first Yitzhak Rabin government (1974-1977) were scant,⁴⁸ GE displayed a vitality and persistence that had not been encountered in Israeli society since the end of the 1948 war. This vitality and persistence drew a great deal of sympathy even from GE's supposed political opponents, especially against the background of the traumatic 1973 war.

Thus Hanoch Bartov, a non-observant author with left-wing Labor Zionist background, wrote in 1975 that in his heart, "as in the hearts of many, there is sympathy, or better yet, yearning or jealousy, for the enthusiastic youth of Gush Emunim. When you see the other side of our life in this country... the violence, the vulgarity... the gossip columns about the provincial so-called high society... the heart goes out to these young people whose national path is fed by the fire of religious faith".⁴⁹

As GE leader Chanan Porat wrote in March 1975: "The struggle [between GE and the Labor government] results from different worldviews regarding the correct dimensions of Zionism. Does Zionism constitute a safe haven for Jews and we have to exert efforts for providing the certain number of Jews who are found here with a life of security, so they can succeed in holding their own and exist? Or maybe the process of redemption in its concrete sense – the redemption of the people, and the redemption of the land – and in its divine sense – the redemption of the godhead,

History of the People of Israel, Emanuel Atkes et al. (eds.), Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem, 2016, pp. 363-77, 371 (in Hebrew).

46 Gideon Aran, "Jewish Zionist Fundamentalism: The Bloc of the Faithful in Israel (Gush Emunim)", in: *Fundamentalism Observed*, Martin Marty and Scott R. Appleby (eds.), The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 275; Dov Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism: History and Chapters of Ideology*, State of Israel, Ministry of Defense, Tel Aviv, 2003, p. 125 (in Hebrew).

47 Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord*... pp. 42-45; Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security and Foreign Policy*, University of Michigan Press, 2006, pp. 140-170; Motti Inbari, Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook's Conception of Zionism and the Roots of 'Gush Emunim'... pp. 38, 48, 52; Naima Barzel, "Redemption Now": *The Beliefs and Activities of the Jewish Settlers in the West Bank and Israeli Society*... pp. 310-317, 330-374.

48 Gershon Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977*, Times Books, New York, 2006.

49 Cited in: Naima Barzel, "Redemption Now": *The Beliefs and Activities of the Jewish Settlers in the West Bank and Israeli Society*... p. 430.

the redemption of the world – is taking place?”⁵⁰.

These two different worldviews came into sharp relief in the celebrated case of Elon Moreh, adjudicated before the High Court of Justice in 1979. Elon Moreh was a settlement established by GE on private Palestinian land in the Nablus area that had been expropriated for that purpose by the Israeli military, ostensibly for security reasons.⁵¹ The Palestinian owners of the land appealed to the Israeli High Court of Justice against its expropriation. Rafael Eitan, Chief of the IDF General Staff (and later on a prominent ultranationalist politician), defended the expropriation on the grounds of the strategic importance of the area for the security of Israel. GE, however, submitted a brief to the Court arguing that “the settlement itself does not stem from security reasons or physical requirements but from the force of destiny and by virtue of the return of Israel to its land.”⁵² Since the Minister of Defense, Ezer Weitzman, a retired air force general, did not support Gen. Eitan’s argument (but submitted to the Cabinet’s decision to defend the expropriation in court), and since two retired generals, one of them a former Chief of the IDF General Staff himself, contradicted Gen. Eitan’s security arguments, the Court decided that the expropriation could not be justified on security grounds and the land had to be returned to its Palestinian owners. GE’s honest intervention, revealing the true purpose of expropriating the land and settling on it, undoubtedly diminished the credibility of the security argument in the eyes of the Court.⁵³ This tactical setback, however, opened the way for a strategic triumph: the government proceeded to declare about 22% of the West Bank territory state lands, on which settlement did not have to be justified on security grounds, thus de-facto, though not de-jure, annexing the West Bank to Israel.⁵⁴

Aiming to replace the LZM as the core hegemonic group,⁵⁵ GE pointed out, correctly, that the Labor movement was substituting for its own tradition of ethno-republican citizenship a new, liberal orientation. In this comparison the liberal discourse, with its emphasis on individual subjectivity and individual rights, was denigrated as hedonistic. In one of its early publications, GE ridiculed the “phenomena of decadence and retreat, indifference and ignorance ... pursuit of easy and comfortable life, luxuries, and an atmosphere which brings in its wake unwillingness

50 Porat Chanan, *For They Shall See, Eye to Eye, the Lord Returning to Zion, Ptachim*, No. 32, 1975, p. 8 (in Hebrew).

51 Gershon Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977*. . . pp. 180-95; Elona Hornstein and Yossi Goldstein, *Elon Moreh as a Symbol, Israel Affairs*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2017, p. 57.

52 HCJ 390/79, *Dwikat v. Government of Israel*, cited in: Elona Hornstein and Yossi Goldstein, *Elon Moreh as a Symbol*. . . p. 57.

53 HCJ 390/79; Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord*. . . pp. 48-51; Elona Hornstein and Yossi Goldstein, *Elon Moreh as a Symbol*. . . p. 58.

54 Naima Barzel, “Redemption Now”: *The Beliefs and Activities of the Jewish Settlers in the West Bank and Israeli Society*. . . pp. 354-360.

55 Moshe Hellingner, Isaac Herschkowitz and Bernard Susser, *Religious-Zionism and the Settlement Project: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Disobedience*. . . p. 15.

for self-realization, aversion to physical labor, wild strikes and acts of corruption.”⁵⁶ In 1996, Rabbi Elisha Aviner, a rabbi in a West Bank settlement *yeshiva* close to GE, published a textbook on “Jewish democracy” where he castigated liberalism, which he referred to as “democratic culture”, as a system of ultimate values that is designed to *replace* Judaism as a central component of Israeli identity. These values include an extreme individualism that talks exclusively in the language of “rights” and not of duties, and endorses atomizing economic competition and “self-realization.” Secondly, they include an extreme universalism, or cosmopolitanism ... [and do] not recognize the essential importance of national groupings, nor of national history or culture”.⁵⁷

As heir to the Zionist settlement project, GE succeeded in forming an historic bloc that incorporated non-religious groups and individuals as well, such as the Movement for Greater Israel, established in 1967 by “well-known writers, intellectuals, poets, generals, kibbutz leaders, and other personalities prominent in the pre-1948 Zionist struggle.”⁵⁸ These Labor veterans supported GE precisely because it followed the traditional course of settlement, which carried with it an inherent aura of legitimacy, in a society where pioneering had been a core element of nationalism and a major source of prestige and influence.

Likud’s electoral victory in 1977 consolidated the historic bloc that sustained Religious-Zionism’s claim for hegemony over Jewish Israeli society. In spite of some tactical disputes, most importantly over Israel’s withdrawal from the Sinai as part of the peace agreement with Egypt in 1979-82 and the disengagement from Gaza in 2005, the two parties shared the strategic goal of maintaining the West Bank under Israeli sovereignty.⁵⁹ The justification for that policy was no longer just the value of those territories as security assets, but, more importantly, the messianic nationalist-religious worldview espoused by Rabbi Z. Y. Kook and GE.

56 Danny Rubinstein, *On the Lord’s Side: Gush Emunim*, Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv, 1982, p. 129 (in Hebrew).

57 Shlomo Fischer, “The Crises of Liberal Citizenship: Religion and Education in Israel”, in: *Religious Education and the Challenge of Pluralism*, Adam Seligman (ed.), Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 137.

58 Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord*... p. 43; Naima Barzel, “Redemption Now”... pp. 339-340, 416-421.

59 Efraim Inbar, “Fundamentalism in Crisis”...; Avi Rubin, Bifurcated Loyalty and Religious Actors’ Behaviour in Democratic Politics: The Case of Post-1967 Religious-Zionism in Israel, *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2014, pp. 58-59; Motti Inbari, Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook’s Conception of Zionism and the Roots of ‘Gush Emunim’...; Moshe Hellinger, Isaac Herschkowitz and Bernard Susser, *Religious-Zionism and the Settlement Project: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Disobedience*... pp.72-86, 147-212. An intriguing question that can be asked is, why has Likud itself not become culturally hegemonic? This question cannot be treated adequately within the confines of this paper. But the answer has to do with the fact that Likud has had two parallel, sometimes contradictory commitments, and has not been single-minded about keeping the territories occupied in 1967. Thus, after winning the 1977 elections with a promise not to return even a speck of dust of these territories, it immediately agreed to return the entire Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, in order to be able to liberalize the Israeli economy. See: Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

From the Back Seat to the Driver's Seat

Maniv and Benziman have distinguished between three different senses of the term “religionization.” (1) “Naïve religionization,” a spontaneous process resulting from demographic change – higher birth rates among religious families, and/or non-observant individuals becoming more religious. Through this process the religious features of a society are enhanced at the expense of the secular ones. (2) “Religious-religionization—an intentional and organized social process that attempts to turn a secular lifestyle into a more religious one.” (3) “National-religionization—an intentional and organized social process which uses religious symbols, tradition and heritage as a means of advocating and promoting national ideologies.”⁶⁰ All three types of religionization have been taking place in Israel since 1967, as manifested in demography and in a number of areas of social life: education, the military, the mass media, visual arts, all fields that play a vital role in shaping Jewish Israeli identity.

Demographically, in 2018 11% of the Jews in Israel defined themselves as Religious-Zionists (*dati*), 10% as *charedi* and 43% as secular (the rest defined themselves as “traditional,” a category that describes the moderate religiosity mostly associated with Jews originating in the Moslem world). However, among 20–44-year-olds 15% defined themselves as *charedi*, indicating the prevailing demographic trend. In terms of natural increase, in 2018–20 on average a Religious Zionist woman bore 3.92 children, a *charedi* woman bore 6.64, and a secular woman bore 1.96. Thus, the fastest growing group among Jews in Israel is the most religious group, which is expected to constitute about one-third of the total population of Israel by 2065, whereas the share of the least religious group is declining. In addition to their natural increase, the religious groups are augmented by *tshuvah* (repentance), a movement “back” to Jewish religion, currently estimated at about 250,000 people. However, by some accounts the number of people becoming more secular is more or less equal to the number making *tshuvah*.⁶¹

Religious-Zionism, which has its own practically autonomous public educational system,⁶² has succeeded in infusing richer religious content into the *secular*

60 Omri Maniv and Yuval Benziman, National-Religionization (and not Religious-Religionization) in Policies of Israel's Ministry of Education. . . pp. 119–120.

61 *Face of Society in Israel: Religion and Religiosity by Self-Definition*, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Report No. 10, Jerusalem, 2018, pp. 40, 56, 65 (in Hebrew); *Social Survey 2018*, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2020, pp. 25, 131 (in Hebrew); *Press Release: Birth and Fertility in Israel, 2020*, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), February 21, 2022, Jerusalem, p. 11 (in Hebrew); Ariel Finkelstein, *The National-Religious Society in Data*, Ne'eman Torah Va'Avodah, Jerusalem, 2021, pp. 31–71 (in Hebrew). Slight differences in numbers result from the use of different categories of religiosity, different counting methods, etc.

62 Isaac Hershkovitz, “Religious-Zionist Thought in the Curriculum of the State Religious Educational System: Situation Report, 2016”, in: *From the Margins to the Fore? Religious-Zionism and Israeli Society*, Sheleg Yair (ed.), Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem, 2019, pp. 45–64 (in Hebrew); Ariel Finkelstein, *The National-Religious Society in Data*. . . pp. 72–89.

public system as well. In 1991 the Religious-Zionist Minister of Education appointed a committee to investigate the state of Jewish studies in that system and recommend improvements. This was done in the context of economic liberalization, the first *intifada* (Palestinian uprising, 1987-1993), massive immigration from the former Soviet Union, and a prevailing feeling that interest in Jewish studies was declining in Israeli society. (Paradoxically, this was precisely the time when Jewish studies as an academic discipline was flourishing in the US.) The underlying concern which led to the appointment of this committee was articulated by its Chair, Prof. Aliza Shenhar: "The crisis of Jewish identity in the secular space raises doubts among Israeli youths about the justice of Zionism and of the State of Israel and seriously harms the unity of the Jewish-Israeli collective."⁶³ The Committee recommended that Jewish studies in the secular state system be enhanced by incorporating even more elements of the religious tradition. Its recommendations were adopted by the (Labor-led) government in 1994, but implementation has been uneven, subject to political and budgetary calculations, and, in the words of Shnehar, "has raised many questions and discontent."⁶⁴

Overall, however, under several Religious-Zionist Education Ministers (Naftali Bennet among them in 2015-2019), religionization of the secular educational system has proceeded apace and has taken a three-fold shape: (1) Increased Jewish religious content in the curriculum and greater emphasis on the *Jewish* aspect of Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state; (2) Entrusting Orthodox religious organizations with teaching Jewish subjects in the secular state system; (3) expansion of the target population of the (increasingly religious) educational system from the students to their parents and to the community at large.⁶⁵

As the motivation to serve in the military, especially as a career, has declined with liberalization and growing economic prosperity among secular, middle class youth, the role of national religious youngsters in the IDF has steadily become more pronounced. Among men, in 2018 religious Zionists constituted nearly 18% of the new recruits, but 35% of the cadets graduating the infantry branch of the IDF officers' school.⁶⁶ Estimates of the ratio of religious Zionist officers in the combat officer

63 Aliza Shenhar, A Crisis in Judaic Studies – and the Academic World is Silent, *Kivunim Chadashim*, No. 16, 2007, pp. 77-82 (in Hebrew).

64 Ibidem, p. 80.

65 Raz Saker-Barzilay, "By Right: Religionization Processes as a Source of Legitimacy for the Socio-Political System in Israel," MA thesis, Department of Political Science, Tel Aviv University, 2019 (in Hebrew); Omri Maniv and Yuval Benziman, National-Religionization (and not Religious-Religionization) in Policies of Israel's Ministry of Education. . .

66 Yagil Levy, *Trial and Error: Israel's Route from War to De-Escalation*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1997, p. 178; Efraim Inbar, Contours of Israel's New Strategic Thinking, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 111, 1996, pp. 41-64; Stuart Cohen, Towards a New Portrait of the (New) Israeli Soldier, *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 3, 1997, pp. 77-114; Elisheva Rosman-Stollman, "The Place of Religious-Zionism in the Israel Defense Forces: A Look from the Inside", in: *From the Margins to the Fore? Religious-Zionism and Israeli Society*, Sheleg Yair (ed.), Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem, 2019, pp. 215-237 (in Hebrew); Ariel Finkelstein, *The National-Religious Society in Data*. . . pp. 276-280.

corps vary, but there is no question that it is a significant ratio; that it is disproportionate to their share of the Jewish population – approximately 11%; and that it is increasing.⁶⁷ It is generally agreed that currently national-religious officers comprise about 40% of the junior officer ranks (up to company commander) in combat units. Their presence in the upper echelons is no less impressive. Clearly, the national-religious sector has replaced the labor settlement sector as provider of quality manpower to the Israeli military, turning the Israel Defense Forces increasingly into *Jewish* defense forces.⁶⁸ Thus, during Israel's military operation in Gaza in the summer of 2014 the commanding officer of the Givati infantry brigade, Col. Ofer Vinter, called on his troops to fight "the terrorists who defame the God of Israel."⁶⁹ This unprecedented call for religious war by a senior IDF commander caused an uproar among Israel's "enlightened public,"⁷⁰ but Col. Vinter was not reprimanded and has since been promoted.

The prominence of religious Zionist officers and enlisted men in the infantry brigades has caused concern that under certain circumstances they may obey their rabbis and defy military orders, to dismantle West Bank settlements, for example. This fear has not come to the test yet, because, as mentioned above, in the 2005 disengagement from Gaza most Religious-Zionist rabbis preferred to maintain their alliance with the ruling Likud party at the price of giving up a relatively minor piece of territory, over an all-out, ultimately futile effort to try and keep that territory and alienate themselves from the government.⁷¹

In 1987 Uri Orbach, an influential Religious-Zionist journalist, politician, and public intellectual, published an article in the settlers' periodical, *Nekuda*, in which he called upon Religious-Zionist youngsters to enlist in the military radio station, an important training ground for future journalists, rather than serving in IDF combat units. The tenor of the article was that the mass media was now the most important frontier for Religious-Zionism to conquer.⁷² In line with this call, in 1989 a Religious-Zionist film and television school was established, and over the past few years there

67 Ibidem, p. 32; CBS, 2018.

68 Yagil Levy, *The Divine Commander: The Theocratization of the Israeli Military*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 2015 (in Hebrew); Moshe Hellinger, Isaac Herschkowitz and Bernard Susser, *Religious-Zionism and the Settlement Project: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Disobedience*. . . p. 15.

69 Yoav Peled and Horit Herman Peled, *The Religionization of Israeli Society*, Routledge, London, 2019, Appendix.

70 Yoav Peled, "From Oslo to Gaza: The Remilitarization of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", in: *Militarism and International Relations: Political Economy, Security, Theory*, Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby (eds.), Routledge, London, 2012, pp. 103-122.

71 Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Messianism and Politics: The Ideological Transformation of Religious Zionism*. . . p. 57; Yagil Levy, *The Divine Commander: The Theocratization of the Israeli Military*. . . ; Moshe Hellinger, Isaac Herschkowitz and Bernard Susser, *Religious-Zionism and the Settlement Project: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Disobedience*. . . pp. 202-212; Efraim Inbar, *Fundamentalism in Crisis—The Response of the Gush Emunim Rabbinical Authorities to the Theological Dilemmas Raised by Israel's Disengagement Plan*. . . ; Motti Inbari, "Messianic Religious Zionist Rabbis Cope with the Disengagement Plan: Three Reactions to the Fear of Prophetic Failure".

72 Uri Orbach, "The Best to the Media", *Nekuda*, No. 106, 1987 (in Hebrew).

has been a marked increase in the presence of religious reporters, commentators and anchor people, as well as religious themes, on Israeli television channels and other media outlets. Moreover, while in the 1990s religious issues were discussed primarily as current affairs, in the 2000s such issues have been treated primarily in original dramatic programs and religiously oriented talk shows.⁷³

One novel area of cultural production where Religious-Zionism has become very influential is visual arts. As late as 2008, when Israel's six major art museums hosted a multiple-site exhibition to celebrate the country's 60th anniversary, Gideon Ofrat, the prominent art critic who curated one of these shows, could state: "When the religious aspect merges with the national aspect the result is illustrative didacticism, whose sophistication is extremely poor. Most [religiously] observant artists [who are] very popular among the religious Jewish public, affirm art whose faith-based, ideological content sinks it into a shallow swamp that has nothing to do with the complex form-content synthesis of the 150 years of modern (not to mention post-modern) art ... [T]hese artists have no interest in integrating into this modern/post-modern fabric, believing, naively, in a proud Jewish alternative".⁷⁴

However, since the 1990s impressively wide-ranging and thoroughgoing religious art production and art discourse had begun to emerge, with the opening of art courses, art workshops and art majors in state religious high schools and in religious colleges. With the encouragement of the Ministry of Education, this new creative field did aim to integrate into the mainstream of the Israeli art world. For that purpose, religious artistic entrepreneurs incorporated non-observant, even left-wing teachers, curators, galleries, etc., into their projects. In the words of Solomon Porat, Director of the religious art college, Pardes: Our "dream is not to create a separatist, alternative art world, but on the contrary – to create an art community that will enter the [currently hegemonic] art world, that will succeed in generating conversation within the art world."⁷⁵ That conversation has increasingly become attuned with Religious-Zionist themes and concerns, as non-observant agents in the field have been adjusting themselves to the newly-gained stature of the religious ones.

In 2012 the important art museum at kibbutz Ein Harod, hosted an exhibi-

73 Yaron Peleg, *Directed by God: Jewishness in Contemporary Israeli Film and Television*. . . p. 19; Ines Gebel, "The National-Religious Public and the Media – A New Love story?" in: *From the Margins to the Fore? Religious-Zionism and Israeli Society*, Sheleg Yair (ed.), Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem, 2019, pp. 269-290 (in Hebrew).

74 Gideon Ofrat, Is there a 'Cultural Revolution' Among the Knitted Skullcaps?, *Kivunum Chadashim*, No. 17, 2008, pp. 164-176 (in Hebrew).

75 Racheli Rief, "Art has an Opportunity to Revive Judaism," *Shabat: Makor Rishon Supplement for Torah, Thought, Culture and Art*, February 15, 2013, available: <http://musafshabbat.com/> (in Hebrew; accessed November 7, 2014).

tion, *Matronita*, that presented the work of feminist religious artists committed to the world of *halacha* while seeking to reform it by emphasizing its more tolerant, inclusive, and women-respecting elements. The museum director, Galia Bar-Or, observed that “[f]or many years now, the two essential aspects of the ‘Matronita’ project – art created in Israel in a distinctively feminist context, and art created from within the religious Jewish world – seem to have been absent from the canon of Israeli art.” The latter aspect, however, is no longer absent from the mainstream of the Israeli art world.⁷⁶

In response to the inroads made by Religious-Zionism into these and many other areas of social life, a supposedly different kind of Judaism has been promoted by the Movement for Jewish Renewal. Launched right after the 1967 war, that movement engages in studying traditional Jewish texts and performing traditional rituals in a network of “secular” religious institutions, encompassing synagogues, rabbis, and “learning communities.” The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in 1995 by Yigal Amir, a law student at the Religious-Zionist university, Bar-Ilan, provided the movement with a major impetus, in an effort to bridge the gap between the secular and national-religious sectors of Jewish Israeli society.⁷⁷

The rationale underlying this movement, estimated at about half a million Israeli Jews,⁷⁸ is stated clearly in a document written by “the coordination unit for the promotion of Jewish secularism in Israel: “In the last 20 years one can diagnose clear patterns of an identity ... crisis among the secular public in the Jewish context ... The issue of Jewish identity in the secular space has a direct bearing on the deterioration of the elements of national resilience of the society and state in Israel in two major areas:

- a. Doubts about the justice of the Zionist project and the State of Israel;
- b. Serious impairment of the cohesion of the Jewish collectivity – polarization to the point of tearing apart different groups in the [Jewish] people.”⁷⁹

76 Galia Bar-Or, “Foreword”, in *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art*, Ein Harod Museum of Art, 2012, pp. 7-9; David Sperber, “Feminist Art in the Sphere of Traditional and Religious Judaism,” in: *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art*, Ein Harod Museum of Art, 2012, pp. 117-164 (in Hebrew); Yoav Peled and Horit Herman Peled, *The Religionization of Israeli Society*, Ch. 7.

77 Cf. Yair Tzaban, “Foreword”, in: *New Jewish Time: Jewish Culture in a Secular Age – Encyclopedic View*, Yermiyahu Yovel (ed.), Keter, Jerusalem, 2007, pp. xi-xii (in Hebrew); Yuval Jobani, Three Basic Models of Secular Jewish Culture, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2008, pp. 160-169; Guy Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 42-43.

78 Naama Azulai, “Jewish Renewal in the Secular Space in Israel – 2006 – Lecture Summary,” *Panim for Jewish Renaissance*, available at: <http://www.panim.org.il/p-120/> (in Hebrew; accessed November 7, 2014); Gideon Katz, Secularism and the Imaginary Polemic of Israeli Intellectuals, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2008, pp. 43-63; Reut Hochman, “Rabbis Who Do Not Believe in God? Description of a Secular Humanist Rabbi in Israel – An Exploratory Study,” MA thesis, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Haifa University, 2009 (in Hebrew); Yair Ettinger, “Who’s Afraid of Ruth Calderon?” *Haaretz*, March 2, 2013 (in Hebrew).

79 Uzi Arad and Meir Yaffe, “The Place, Contribution and Role of NGO’s in the Area of Education for Judaism as Culture in the General State Educational System and its Community Space”, *Panim: Everyone Deserve Jewish Culture*, 2006, p. 2, available at: <http://www.panim.org.il/p120> (in Hebrew; accessed October 25, 2013).

Clearly, then, at least according to the authors of this document, the aim of the Jewish renewal movement in Israel is not only to provide spiritual sustenance to individuals, but rather to reinforce the national resilience of the Jewish collectivity. This aim is perfectly consonant with the Religious-Zionist credo, where “resilience” means withstanding pressures to withdraw from occupied Palestinian territories. Thus, Jewish renewal is a major element in the constitution of Religious-Zionism’s historic bloc, an important contributor to the new civil religion, a vehicle for easing the tension between secular and religious Jews, and a way for Israeli Jews who see themselves as secular to adopt a more religious outlook.⁸⁰

Conclusion

“Israel is standing today in a fateful junction in front of the strategic move of the new Religious-Zionism. As against a well-organized Religious-Zionist establishment, permeated with a feeling of historic deprivation, motivated by overbearing revolutionary zeal, and suspicious of the legal authorities of the state, stand the powers of the Zionism that had founded the state in a position of weakness, while the Zionist idea that had motivated the establishment of the state is today in a state of crisis.”⁸¹

With all its efforts to present itself as a “revolution” against traditional Jewish life in the Diaspora, including its religiosity, Zionism could never really divorce itself from Judaism, for two obvious reasons: the only cultural marker shared by all members of the nation that Zionism claimed to represent was Jewish religion, and the connection between that nation and its “homeland” was a religious connection. In that sense Zionism has always been a case of religious nationalism,⁸² but for much of its history, under Labor-Zionism, the religious element was subdued in the interest of constructing a viable modern nation-state. Since 1967 Religious-Zionism has been moving to replace Labor-Zionism as the hegemonic fundamental group in Israeli society and enhance the religious character of Jewish nationalism.

80 On the problematic nature of Jewish Israeli secularism see, e.g., Uri Ram, *Why Secularism Fails? Secular Nationalism and Religious Revivalism in Israel*, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2008, pp. 57–73; Guy Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel*, Cambridge University Press, 2013; Denis Charbit, “Israel’s Self-Restrained Secularism from the 1947 Status Quo Letter to the Present”, in: *Secularism on the Edge: Rethinking Church–State Relations in the United States, France, and Israel*, Jacques Berlinerblau, Sarah Fainberg and Aurora Nou (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2014, pp. 157–171; On the tension between secular and religious Jews see: Yochanan Peres and Eliezer Ben-Rafael, *Closeness and Conflict: Cleavages in Israeli Society*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 2006, pp. 95–137 (in Hebrew).

81 Hillel Ben-Sasson, “With Uplifted Eyes: The New Agenda of the National-Religious Leadership,” *Molad: The Center for Democratic Renewal*, 2015, p. 6, available at: <http://www.molad.org/articles/%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%A8%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA> (in Hebrew; accessed September 30, 2017).

82 Uriel Abulof, *The Roles of Religion in National Legitimation: Judaism and Zionism’s Elusive Quest for Legitimacy*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 53, 2014, pp. 515–533.

Cultural hegemony is the ability to define the boundaries of public discourse, the self-evident which need not and cannot be questioned. According to Gramsci, in order to achieve cultural hegemony a group needs to form an “historic bloc” around itself, and in order to do so it must compromise, to some extent, with the interests and values of the other members of the bloc. But the essential interests and values of the core group can never be compromised.

Religious-Zionism encompasses a whole range of religious and nationalist outlooks, but its most influential and dynamic element is the activist-Messianic tendency associated with Rabbi Kook and GE. The core interest and value of this dominant tendency is the permanent incorporation of the occupied West Bank under Israeli sovereignty. In order to achieve that goal some Religious-Zionists, not all, have been willing to compromise on secondary issues, such as territorial concessions in the Sinai and in the Gaza Strip, allowing women to serve in the military, a degree of tolerance of LGBT lifestyles, etc.⁸³ This willingness to compromise reflects the progress Religious-Zionism has already made towards a position of cultural hegemony: survey research indicates that the number of Israeli Jews who identify with Religious-Zionism is at least as large as the number belonging to the core group itself (about 11% of the Jewish population each).⁸⁴ More importantly, the future of the West Bank is no longer an issue in the political debate in Israel, and the term “peace” has disappeared from the public discourse.⁸⁵ Although Bennet could not hold on to his position as Israel’s Prime Minister for more than a year, Religious-Zionism has already become the mainstay of Jewish Israeli society’s worldview.

83 Observant Jewish women can be exempted from mandatory military service and have the option of doing civilian service instead. Currently about 25% of Religious-Zionist women choose to do military service, to the chagrin of many Religious-Zionist rabbis. From: Ariel Finkelstein, *The National-Religious Society in Data*. . . p. 260.

84 Hermann Tamar et al., *The National-Religious Sector in Israel 2014*, Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem, 2014 (in Hebrew); Moshe Hellinger, Isaac Herschkowitz and Bernard Susser, *Religious-Zionism and the Settlement Project: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Disobedience*. . . p. 15; Hayim Katsman, *The Hyphen Cannot Hold: Contemporary Trends in Religious-Zionism*. . . p. 154; Ariel Finkelstein, *The National-Religious Society in Data*. . . pp. 36–37.

85 Ian Lustick, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State*. . . ; Shlomo Ben-Ami Shlomo, *Prophets Without Honor: The 2000 Camp David Summit and the End of the Two-State Solution*, Oxford University Press, 2022.

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