Can Israel Survive Post-Zionism?

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In early December 1998, Israeli television again and again played the video clip of an Israeli soldier surrounded and beaten by a Palestinian mob without his making any attempt to defend himself, followed by his fleeing without his gun. The episode prompted a heated national debate over the soldier's performance. One school of thought found his actions shameful; another celebrated them as the fulfillment of a new spirit in Israel. Typical of the latter viewpoint, Gideon Levy wrote gleefully in Israel's leading newspaper, Ha'aretz, of the soldier's "heroic surrender":

The myth of Israeli courage shatters before our eyes, a public outcry is sounded, and hardly anybody asks whether perhaps the myth itself is unnecessary, anachronistic or even harmful ... [T]his, of course, is not the first picture we have seen of a beaten Israeli soldier. Since the heroic surrender—yes, heroic—of the Mezah outpost during the 1973 Yom Kippur War ... the Israeli ethos has not looked kindly upon those who escape with their lives ...

The recurring question pertains, therefore, to the basic values of Israeli society: Do we really want brave soldiers who risk their lives, merely to satisfy the lust for national honor and maintain the myth of courage? ... In 50-year-old Israeli society, the macho man of the past must no longer be a hero ... . We are better off being a "wimpy" state, whose soldiers survive and do not kill for nothing, than a strong state whose source of power is in soldiers who sometimes shoot indiscriminately.1

Of course, the question was whether the soldier had the right to shoot in self-defense, not whether he should be "shooting indiscriminately." But this is how many Israelis now view their national security—not as an act of self-defense, but as a "macho" myth, indifferent to the value of life and inclined toward indiscriminate aggression.

By itself, this incident could be dismissed as an aberration. But it is one of very many examples; indeed, it is part of a crisis of identity currently plaguing Israel. It is this crisis, its origins, and its likely implications, that we shall look at here.
Israel is today in the midst of a cultural civil war in which one side would like to see their country continue to exist as a Jewish state and the other believes that Zionism, the founding idea of the state, has reached its end. For the latter group, the time has come for Israel to enter its post-Zionist stage; for this reason, it describes itself as "post-Zionist." By their own definition, post-Zionists are anti-Zionist, meaning they believe that the Zionist enterprise has lacked moral validity since its conception and, therefore, must be undermined. Further, post-Zionists also question the moral bases of their religion.

Post-Zionists seek to prove the lack of moral validity of the Zionist dream; they view the current situation in Israel as a phase in which Zionist truths about the moral purpose of Jewish nationalism have mostly collapsed without there being any sign of what will replace them. They claim to be post-modernist, meaning they subscribe to a philosophical school that views everything as relative, that seeks to deconstruct and "transcend" modern reality and values without offering any replacement. Their stated goal is the destruction of the Zionist idea on which the State of Israel is founded. Their intention is wholly negative; not to improve Zionism but to destroy it. Post-Zionist writers openly aspire not to create a new Israeli historiography free of all ideological biases, but rather seek to inject an anti-Israel bias into them. On occasion, they admit that their works are "guided by a post-Zionist ideology and perception." In other words, they are simply replacing one ideological bias—a positive one focused on construction—with another, negative one, focused on destruction.

Post-Zionists consist primarily of left-wing Israeli intellectuals. This way of thinking was first introduced into Israeli life through the works of Israeli academics, particularly historians and sociologists. "New historians" and "new sociologists," as these individuals described themselves, challenged mainstream Zionist historiography as ideologically biased in employing research to prove the moral validity of the Zionist claims.

THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

At its essence, post-Zionism holds that the State of Israel is an immoral phenomenon because it was established on the basis of the destruction of another people—the Palestinians. It presents the problem as transcending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967; hence, its solution does not lie in a simple Israeli withdrawal from those territories. To the contrary, post-Zionists now tend to disparage left-wing Zionist groups for what they refer to as the "Peace Now Syndrome," a cherishing of the period before 1967 as flawless while attributing all of Israel's wrongdoing to the 1967 occupation. Post-Zionists are much more radical: from their perspective, the problem has to do with the very existence of Israel. They deem Zionism a colonialist, racist, and evil phenomenon that stole another people's land by force and continues to oppress them.

Post-Zionists view the Arab-Israeli conflict as the essence of Zionism, rather than its unfortunate unintended consequence. They view Israel's very existence—not its territorial disputes with the Arabs—as inherently immoral; accordingly, a solution based on territorial compromise and the signing of peace agreements does nothing to end the crisis of Jewish nationalism. Thus, even as the Arab-Israeli conflict is being addressed through the signing of peace accords, Israel's crisis of identity deepens.
Early expressions of post-Zionist thinking vis-à-vis the Palestinians were voiced in Israeli academic circles following the 1967 war. The late Yesha'yahu Leibovitch, a professor of chemistry, physiology, and the history and philosophy of science at Hebrew University, habitually referred to the "Judeo-Nazi" character of Israel. He claimed that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and the Israeli Arabs constituted a form of Nazification; that the country and its soldiers were Judeo-Nazis; and that soon Israel will setup concentration-camps for the Arabs. (It bears noting that Leibovitch received, but turned down, his country's highest honor, the Israel Prize, in 1992.)

Early post-Zionist research focused on the way Zionists and Israelis have perceived the "Arab." More recently, historian Benny Morris writes that Israel forcibly expelled the Arabs from their houses during the 1948 war. Countering the official Israeli version, according to which the Arabs left Palestine out of their own will or were called on to do so by the leaders of the neighboring Arab states, Morris claims that during the war Israel intentionally and violently encouraged them to leave. Further, he holds that between April and December 1948, Israeli forces destroyed their villages and established new Jewish settlements in their place as a means to block them from returning to their homes. Morris's writings imply that the Jewish state was founded on the basis of an "original sin": the forced and violent expulsion of the Arabs from Israel.

Writing along similar lines, historian Avi Shlaim wrote that during November 1947, King ‘Abdallah of Jordan and Golda Meirson (Meir), head of the political section of the Jewish Agency, reached an agreement whose goal was to destroy all chances of the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank. They agreed that each of their sides, Israel and Jordan, would annex parts of the land allocated to the Palestinians. Shlaim portrayed the Zionist entity as plotting, in cooperation with the Hashemite ruler, to oppress the Palestinians and to prevent them from having an independent state.

Sociologist Uri Ram questioned the moral validity of the Zionist enterprise, finding it a form of colonialism, and concluded that the Jews have no more of a claim to Palestine than do the British to India. Israeli journalist Boas Evron wrote that Zionism fabricated a false connection between the Jews and the land. Many historians have echoed this approach, including Simha Flapan, Ilan Pappe, Uri Bar-Joseph, Michael J. Cohen, and others.

OTHER ISSUES

The post-Zionist critique of Zionism is not limited to the Palestinian question. Concentrating on the manner in which less advantaged segments of Israeli society were treated by the Zionist state, it also focuses on women and Sephardic Jews (Jews who immigrated to Israel in the early 1950s from Middle Eastern countries whom post-Zionists view as Jewish-Arabs; the very idea of grouping of Palestinian Arabs and Sephardic Jews as a single subject of inquiry is revolutionary within Israel). Post-Zionism calls for adopting the "uncivilized" narratives of the subjugated segments of Israeli society. Embracing Edward Said's critique of Western Orientalism, the grouping of Arabs and Sephardic Jews reflects the post-Zionist outlook that the oppression of the Israeli state cuts across national and gender differences.

Post-Zionists do not limit themselves to stirring debate on current social and political matters. They address some of the most sensitive issues facing the Jewish
people. For example, several works pose new moral and ethical questions in their reexamination of the Holocaust, one of the most sensitive nerves in Israeli society. Tom Segev, a historian, wrote that the Zionist movement used the Holocaust to advance its political goals, arguing that political groups in the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine) viewed the destruction of European Jewry as a historic opportunity to further Zionist goals and did little to save the dying Jewish masses. In the state of Israel today, continues Segev, the cynical misuse of the Holocaust continues, because its lessons are framed in terms of a narrow Jewish particularism (the Holocaust as a uniquely Jewish affair) which thereby justifies actions of the nation and strengthens nationalistic feelings, rather than including general humanistic lessons.

Idith Zertal’s *From Catastrophe to Power* deals with the audacious and insensitive attitude of the Sabras (Israeli-born Jews) toward the survivors of the Holocaust who immigrated to Palestine in the years right after 1945. The Sabras charged with saving and absorbing the refugees treated them in such a harsh manner that it left many scars on the souls of people who had already suffered a great deal in their past. Her purpose in the book, writes the author, is to go beyond what she calls the "Zionist rhetoric" of rescue and redemption.

**POST-JUDAISM**

As this trend becomes more acute, Israelis question not only their national identity alone, but their cultural and religious identity as well. "Post-Judaism," or the rejection of one's Jewish identity, has emerged in the religious arena, parallel to post-Zionism in the political sphere, deepening the country’s identity crisis and its cultural war. Post-Judaism characterizes an Israeli elite that, out of its own sense of discomfort with itself, tries to replace the national-Zionist Jew with a universal man. It wishes to replace Jewish particularism which it views as unfashionable, dark, and narrow-minded, with a universal Western man who is similar to the "enlightened" European intellectual. This "enlightened" Jew views the Jewish state as a destructive, objectionable, and very outdated phenomenon.

Post-Jewish Israelis declare a sense of revulsion toward their own identity and aspire to a mental, if not a physical, assimilation. Post-Judaism expresses complex feelings of rejection and denial toward one's own Jewish background. It conveys a profound problem in one's sense of self. It relates to the essence of a person, to his view of himself and his environment. Post-Judaism usually goes hand-in-hand with post-Zionism. It is the flip side of the post-Zionist coin. The one is a political and ideological assault on Jewish nationalism; the other is a cultural strike against the Jewish religion.

The attack on Judaism in Israel takes several forms of expression, most notably in an animosity on the part of secular, post-Jewish Israelis toward the religious elements of society. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing religious Jew only deepened these hostile feelings. Israeli negotiations with the Palestinians, and the fact that its most vocal opponents are West Bank religious settlers, further deepen this rejection of Judaism.

The post-Jewish outlook begins from a feeling of weakness in the face of a perceived growing religious attack on secular Israel. Post-Judaism is the weak man's offensive against a perceived attempt by religious elements to turn Israel into an Iran-like theocracy. Because Israel remains a Jewish state, post-Jews feel that they are fighting a losing battle. Their sense of gloom leads them to be both confrontational and uncompromising in their attack on religion. The resulting
disconnect in Israeli society is described by the prominent Israeli writer Amos Oz: "A dividing wall ... passes between those [in Israel] who aspire to Iranian-like theocracy, and the state of Israel—between them and all of us."  

These anti-religious feelings became especially prominent in the central event marking Israel’s fiftieth anniversary celebrations, in which the modern dance company Bat-Sheva was scheduled to appear. The Bat-Sheva dancers decided to perform a dance set to religious music from the Passover service, during which they were to undress on stage. The inclusion of this dance as a central event marking the state’s anniversary offended many in Israel who are, if not religious, somewhat observant. After a major public debate on the issue in the press, a compromise was struck according to which the dancers would wear skin-colored body-suits rather than undress completely. The dancers decided—after their show had already begun—not to surrender to what they viewed as religious censorship; instead, they left the stage in protest. The organizer of the event, who announced on stage that the group had decided to cancel its performance altogether, presented this decision as a brave act against religious darkness.

A new, highly controversial book, Messiah’s Donkey, recently published in Israel, also espouses post-Jewish attitudes. According to the author, Seffi Rachlevsky, the religious-national camp in Israel view the secular majority in Israel, as a “donkey” which builds the state until the religious take power in Israel in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Rachlevsky claims that the word “donkey” (in Hebrew, hamor) comes from the word “material” (in Hebrew, homer), and refers to the way in which the secular segments of Israeli society were to be the ones building the material reality of the state. His analysis is based on false evidence and is largely erroneous; further, it is premised on an animosity toward nationalist-religious Jews. By arguing that a conspiratorial ideology is the defining concept of the national religious camp, the author blames its followers collectively for the Rabin assassination and suspects them of scheming to take over Israel and turn it into a backward-oriented theocracy. Despite its faults, Messiah’s Donkey won a rapturous reception among post-Jews. Nathan Zach, a well-known poet and publicist, wrote that because it warns the reader of the upcoming holocaust, the book needs to be placed on every bookcase in Israel. Dr. Nimrod Aloni, chairman of the State Network for Humanistic Education, praised the book no less enthusiastically:

Maybe after all, not all hope is lost and the enlightened public in Israel started to comprehend the bellicose writing on the wall: the culture war waged by the religious national establishment against the democratic and progressive foundation of sane Zionism

For post-Jews, such views are not just a matter of intellectual stance but also a matter of fashion. They imagine themselves as the sole carriers of the values of modernity and enlightenment who struggle against the clerical attempt to impose on Israel a return to the dark ages. Enlightened Israelis, they imply, must be anti-Jewish.

This secular-religious split encapsulates a paradox. As Israel’s intellectual, cultural, and media elite grow increasingly hostile to Judaism, its society is becoming more Jewish—as evidenced by the growing electoral power of religious parties. Nor is this change limited to the parliament; observant Israelis constitute greater portions of many key national institutions, starting with the military, where the ranks of the
Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have swelled in the last decade with recruits from the national-religious camp and even from the ultra-Orthodox. For example, many members of the ultra-Orthodox Chabad movement now serve in the IDF, and are even beginning to be encouraged in this by their leaders. In fact, skullcap-wearing Israelis now form about half of the nation’s officer corps and elite units, though they still represent less than a third of its population and about a quarter of its parliament.

Post-Judaism, therefore, remains a phenomenon largely confined to the Israeli secular elite. It embodies a schism that has deepened to such an extent that the religious parties' growing political power results in part from the feeling of siege the more observant majority of Israel feels at the hands of the vocal post-Jewish minority. Although this minority still amounts to a narrow segment of the population, it is disproportionately represented in the media, in cultural and artistic circles, in intellectual and educational institutions, and at the highest military ranks. Thus does this minority dominate the voices, the images, and the power that influences the daily lives of Israelis and thereby gains a growing influence on Israel's future generation.

**SPREADING THE MESSAGE**

Post-Zionism has grown impressively over the last fifteen years, spreading from the halls of academia into the broader walks of Israeli life. What began as a notion within the intellectual hothouse today is a cultural phenomenon found ever more frequently in the arts (poetry, theater, film, literature) and is spreading through many of Israel's leading intellectual, cultural, and social institutions.

Post-Zionist currents have taken a particular hold on Israeli literature and poetry. Since the 1970s, but particularly since the Lebanon war of 1982, Israeli writers are more frequently critical of Israel's treatment of its minorities, both Arabs and Sephardic Jews. Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua presents the Arab as the victim of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Meanwhile, Sephardic writers such as Sami Michael or Albert Swissa portray the Sephardic Jew as an Arab-Jew who, like his Arab brothers, suffered under the yoke of white (Ashkenazi) colonialism. A recent book by the well-respected Sephardic writer Yitzhak Gormazano-Goren includes passages such as:

> If an Eastern [heritage] can be considered a linkage-creating criterion, it is not impossible that Jews of the Eastern tradition and Muslim or Christian Arabs will discover the commonalities between them. From here—it's one step to identifying the European Jew with the white imperialist.

The post-Zionist death-sentence on Zionism was clearly reflected in a poem written by the celebrated Israeli poet Aharon Shabtai. It is a reflection of the extent to which post-Zionist currents have gained traction within Israeli society that the leading Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* published this harsh post-Zionist statement:

> Already from the window of the parked airplane one can see that we have returned to the same excrement from which we came.

> But to complain, to lament, to cry,

> Is only a part of the tax-package required of the educated citizen. The
country's corrupt, dishonorable and stuttering rulers want the freezer to be filled with delicate literary meat. Therefore, I propose to shorten the soul to a line that connects between two points:

A. To know that there is no difference between Yitzhak Rabin and Benjamin Netanyahu ...

B. The poet, the intellectual, is not one who reads Kafka or Marcel Proust when liberty and justice are being trampled on in the markets. No, in a forever-young body he stands, lowering his pants, and urinates on the dying bonfire of Zionism ...  

The same message now reverberates in the Israel media. For example, in celebration of the State of Israel's fiftieth anniversary jubilee, the official Israeli television channel made the centerpiece of its effort the broadcast of a special documentary called "Resurrection" (Tkumma), a series in twenty-two segments describing different eras in the history of the state. Despite the occasion and the series' ostensibly Zionist orientation (including its name), many of the segments, and particularly those dealing with the establishment of the state in 1948, criticized Israel for evicting the Palestinians with brute force. "Resurrection" also blamed Israel for systematically massacring Arabs in many villages and for continuing to employ vile and violent methods against the Palestinians during the intifada. Nor were Palestinians the only ones to suffer at the hands of Israel; Sephardic Jews were also victims of what was predominantly an East-European Zionist state. Some segments of the program—for example the one describing Israeli behavior during the intifada—were so hostile to Israel that its main anchorman—the popular Israeli singer Yehoram Gaon—resigned in protest. In other words, official Israeli television presented the creation of the Jewish state not as miraculous event but as a tragic one, not with joy but with sadness. 

The post-Zionist outlook is peddled not only by officially-sanctioned media but has worked its way into the political establishment, including those charged with shaping school curricula. Micha Goldman, deputy minister of education during the Rabin government, for example, proposed replacing Israel's national anthem and flag so that they reflect Palestinian nationalism. The leader of the Israeli Labor party, Ehud Barak, said in a television interview that if he was a young Palestinian, he, too, would be a terrorist. Former minister of education Shulamit Aloni called for a stop to all visits of Israeli high-school students to the Nazi concentration camps, because after such trips they become "too nationalist." Yossi Sarid, a member of parliament and head of the Left-wing Meretz Party, wrote an article highly critical of religious Zionism in which he reveals his emerging feelings of hate toward the religious and his unwillingness to search for a compromise with them.

Even the military elite has absorbed some post-Zionist ideas. Shlomo Gazit, a reserve major-general of distinction who currently works as a researcher at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies in Tel-Aviv, compared the skullcaps worn by some religious Israeli soldiers to the swastikas worn by Nazi soldiers during World War II: "The only army I know of where members of a political party were allowed to wear an identifiable, external symbol was in the Nazi army." As a result of the public outcry that resulted from his statement, Gazit was forced publicly to apologize. Even so, his statement reflects a widely-held resentment of religious Zionists: because they now serve in the army, they cannot be derided as freeloaders, but instead presented as dangerous fascists.
The infiltration of anti-nationalist attitudes into the Israeli military—which used to be the stronghold of Israeli and Jewish pride—was also evident in its new ethical code known as "the Spirit of the IDF." This document, officially adopted by the Israeli military in 1994, describes the position of the military leadership regarding the spirit of the IDF, its values and basic rules that are to serve as its canon and are to guide its full scale of activities. Despite its centrality and its lengthy discussion of the moral code of the Israeli military, this document lacks any reference to either Zionism, Judaism, or love of the land. Further, it provides no nationalist reason for young Israelis to fight and sacrifice for their homeland.

Post-Zionism clearly has an impact on the next generation of Israelis as more and more young Israelis receive a post-Zionist education and are raised in a society in which anti-nationalist feelings gain growing legitimacy. These ideas are also seeping into the schools. A recently-published history textbook, prepared for use by Israeli high-school students, includes an article describing Zionism as a "form of colonialism" without any legitimate claims to Israel. In this spirit, it comes as no surprise that a 1993 survey found 30 percent of Israeli secular students said that for them, to be Jewish was "not an important part of life." The numbers would quite certainly be higher today.

WHY POST-ZIONISM?

Though still a phenomenon that characterizes the intellectual elite, post-Zionism and post-Judaism are rapidly spreading throughout Israeli society. Why is this happening? How is it that Jews in Israel, only fifty years after the establishment of a state for which they yearned for 2,000 years in the Diaspora, are so eager to dismantle it?

While there is more than a single answer to these questions, a particularly compelling explanation has to do with the ideology of the Zionist Left that established the State of Israel. Influenced by ideas popular in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, this brand of Zionism was both nationalist and socialist at its core. Zionist leaders of the dominant socialist outlook saw Jewish nationalism only as a necessary stage to prepare Jews to join the ranks of the workers of the world. From the outset, in other words, they viewed the Jewish state as a means to realize the socialist dream. Moses Hess, one of the early Zionist thinkers as well as the father of German social-democracy and one of Karl Marx's closest associates, wrote about Zionism in this light:

A common, native soil is a precondition for introducing healthier relations between capital and labor among Jews ... The Jewish people will participate in the great historical movement of present-day humanity when it will have its own fatherland.

A generation later, other Zionist writers—Nahman Syrkin, Ber Borochov and Berl Katzenelson—expressed similar ideas. Borochov, for example, wrote that "Genuine nationalism in no way obscures class consciousness. It manifests itself only among the progressive elements of oppressed nations."

Thus did the brand of Zionism that established the Jewish state carry within it the seeds of its own destruction. It viewed the fulfillment of Jewish national aspirations as but a necessary stage along the way to integrating the Jew into the international socialist movement. Consistent with the socialist world-view from which it borrowed, Left-wing Zionism saw the ultimate goal as the "withering away" of the Jewish state in preparation for the establishment of a completely secular world in
which the "workers of the whole world" would unite. The Jewish state and Jewish nationalism were viewed as a temporary creation that must disappear and be replaced by socialist internationalism.\textsuperscript{48}

These thinkers directly influenced the leaders of the Zionist Labor movement who actually founded the Jewish state. Labor Party leaders remained true to this nationalist ideology that paradoxically also adhered to anti-nationalist socialist notions. They even viewed the Arab-Jewish conflict in socialist class-struggle terms. Labor Zionists, in other words, failed to see the national struggle between two peoples in Palestine but insisted on interpreting it in class terms. As representatives of the Jewish proletariat, they sought to solve the conflict by allying themselves with the Arab workers against their joint oppressors: the Arab and Jewish middle and upper classes. Even David Ben-Gurion, leader of the Israeli Left and the state's first prime minister, fell for this myth, as the historian Walter Laqueur noted:

Ben Gurion maintained that there could be no common language with the effendis [wealthy Arab land owners], in whose eyes Labor Zionists were both the national and class enemy. He criticized ... the Zionist leadership for having tried the "short and easy way" to reach agreement with the effendis and dictators. Jewish Socialism had to choose the longer and more difficult road which would lead them to the Arab workers.\textsuperscript{49}

These anti-nationalist feelings of a socialist nature still echo today in the statements and writings of Labor Party's leaders, and they still serve to guide policy. Describing his vision of the "new Middle East," the raison d'être underlying the Oslo process, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in 1994 attacked the concept of the national state:

National political organizations can no longer fulfill the purpose for which they were established—that is to furnish the fundamental needs of the nation ... . In light of contemporary technological developments—those both for construction and for destruction—a nationwide organization is not sufficient to ensure this security ... . One day, our self-awareness and personal identity will be based on a new reality, and we will find that we have stepped outside the national arena.\textsuperscript{50}

Although today's post-Zionists build on their earlier legacy, they are also critical of it for not going far enough. In the course of examining the founding myths of Israel, Ze'ev Sternhell, a professor at the Hebrew University, concludes that the Jewish state was always too nationalistic and not sufficiently international; he criticizes it for never having had the potential to "overcome the religious substance of Jewish nationalism and thus establish a liberal, secular, and open society, at peace with itself and its neighbors."\textsuperscript{51} In short, Sternhell finds that Zionism failed by being too Zionist and not enough socialist.

The Revisionist Zionists (the Right) challenged the Zionist Left's anti-nationalist outlook, starting as early as the 1920s. Revisionists promoted a single-flag Zionism, or what their leader, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, called "Monism." Jabotinsky wrote that "if Zionism is an ideal, there is no room next to it for an independent aspiration with equal rights."\textsuperscript{52} Monism meant the primacy of the Jewish-nationalist outlook over all other beliefs. Zionists should adhere only to one ideal during the struggle to establish the Jewish state: Zionism.

This answer to the anti-nationalism of the Left had only marginal influence on the
State of Israel. The Labor movement dominated Zionist and Israeli politics from the 1920s straight through to 1977, when Menachem Begin won the prime minister's office. And even after the Right finally came to power in Israel, it failed to educate Israelis about its nationalist vision; not only that, but it itself is slowly abandoning that vision, as can be seen by Likud's incremental acceptance of the Oslo process and its resulting territorial withdrawals, as well as by the party's inability to respond to post-Zionism in a robust fashion.

Thus did the post-nationalist mood in Israel grow on intellectually fertile ground—the combination of an anti-nationalist Left and an ineffective Right.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POST-ZIONISM

The attack by intellectuals on Israeli nationalism and Jewish particularism poses more than a passing threat to the State of Israel. Israel is now facing a crisis of identity and values that strikes at the basic components and elements of the Israeli identity: Judaism and nationalism. Post-Zionism undermines Israel's soul and reduces its will for self-defense. No longer are Israelis regularly subjected to calls just from the outside world to regard surrender, cowardice, and flight in the face of threat as virtuous; now these appeals come also from within. In contrast, honor and defense are viewed as offensive nationalism.

The civil and cultural conflict over the character of Israel is one of the most critical debates in that country's history. The stakes in this battle are very high. Simply put, if the majority of Israelis become post-Zionist and feel shame as Jews, the state of Israel will not survive.

This is not entirely a new dilemma. An identity and values crisis has characterized the modern history of the Jewish people, accompanying them since the beginning of this century. But when such a crisis reappears in Israel fifty years after the creation of the Jewish state that was supposed to provide for its solution, it threatens to wreck the foundations of Israel's very existence.

When Theodore Herzl published The Jewish State in 1896, he proposed that the core of national strength lies in the idea of the nation as it lives in the minds of its people. It is exactly this idea that is now under assault in Israel. Could it be that the Zionist ideology has reached the point of irrelevance?

Not at all. Rather, the crisis of post-Zionism in Israel demonstrates the need to reinvent Zionism in the spirit of liberal democratic ideals as an old-new answer to the problems that torment Israel today. This does not require the invention of an entirely new form of Zionism for there are early strands of Zionist thought that can now be revived, specifically those initiated by Ze'ev Jabotinsky. His thoughts on nationalism, Jewish pride, and liberalism bear reexamination in light of the Likud's current disintegration. But this will not be easy, for as Israelis increasingly question the moral validity of their national enterprise, new ideas in the public debate justifying the continued existence of the Jewish state are strikingly absent.

3 For a detailed critique making this same argument, see Efraim Karsh, "Benny Morris and the Cult of Error," on pp. 15-28 of this issue.
Ibid., p. 30.
7 Efraim Karsh has presented the most sustained challenge to the "new historians," first in this journal ("Rewriting Israel's History," MEQ, June 1996, pp. 19-29), then in Fabricating Israeli History (London: Frank Cass, 1997). Karsh holds political views similar to those of the post-Zionist historians (as he indicated in an interview with Ha'aretz, Feb. 5, 1997) but finds that the new historians' analysis suffers from distortions as they use historic evidence out of context and ignore evidence that contradicts their views.
8 See, for example, "Yael Dayan's Calumny," Jerusalem Post, May 25, 1995.
20 Idith Zertal, From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
21 I first came across the term "Post-Judaism" in an article discussing the American Jewish community and its complex relations with Judaism by Yosef Dan titled "And Now, Post-Judaism?" Ha'aretz, English edition, Sept. 20, 1998.
23 Ibid.
24 This sort of cultural and religious self-rejection is uncommon. A born-Protestant who does not practice his religion does not become a "post-Protestant," implying a negative view of his heritage, family, and religious background.
26 Seffi Rachlevsky, Hamoro shel Mashiach (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1998) This religious-ideological outlook, claims the author, was developed in the writings of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook, head of the prestigious Merkaz HaravYeshiva in Jerusalem, who after the 1967 war turned toward mysticism and Kabala.
27 The author conveniently ignores important facts, for example that those religious people today constitute the majority of Israel's officer corps in combat
ground forces. For further commentary, see Binyamin Ish-Shalom and Zvulun Orlev in Yediot Ahronot, weekend supplement, Sept. 18, 1998; and Asa Kasher's detailed review in Haaretz, Nov. 11, 1998.


29 Ibid.


33 Albert Swissa, Aqud (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 1985). Also see Sami Michael, Shavim veShavim Yoter (Tel Aviv: Bustan, 1976).


36 This overall tone of sadness was also evident in Israel's observance of its own centennial, the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Zionist movement in 1997. See Yoram Hazony, "The Jewish State at 100," Azure, Spring 1997, pp. 17-18.


43 Ibid.


48 See, for example, Shlomo Avineri, Arlosoroff (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990).


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by Jonathan Cole
Consequently, the Zionist hope is that sectarian-based states become Israel's satellites and, ironically, its source of moral legitimation... This is not a new idea, nor does it surface for the first time in Zionist strategic thinking. Indeed, fragmenting all Arab states into smaller units has been a recurrent theme.” The Zionist policy of displacing the Palestinians from Palestine is very much an active policy, but is pursued more forcefully in times of conflict, such as in the 1947-1948 war and in the 1967 war. An appendix entitled "Israel Talks of a New Exodus" is included in this publication to demonstrate past Zionist dispersals of Palestinians from their homeland and to show, besides the main Zionist document we present, other Zionist planning for the de-Palestinization of Palestine. 6. www.meforum.org/469/can-israel-survive-post-zionism. [14] It was called The Struggle for Israel's Security, and the daily Yediot Aharonot described it as “shattering a number of the most splendid myths on which we were raised,” 4 August 1999. [15] This list is based, with this author's additions and clarifications, on two accounts: Benny Morris, 1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9 The consequences for Israel could be disastrous. If a post-American era evolves, we will have no choice but to find ways to survive. It will be a far less secure, more isolated and poorer existence. Pray that prophecies of the end of the American era, much like the news of Mark Twain's death, are highly premature.