

ISRAEL

A HISTORY

PART V



1977–2000

PEACE, WAR, &
INDECISION

17 BEGIN IN POWER



In the run-up to the May 1977 elections, Israeli television adopted the British practice of the exit poll. As voters left the polling station, they were asked to recast their vote in a sample poll. Through statistical analysis of the results, the pollsters could get an indication of the election results shortly after the polling stations closed. When the television executives saw the exit poll results, they could hardly believe their eyes. The Likud (comprising Gahal and some small parties) had won forty-four seats and the Alignment only thirty-two. At first they thought the exit poll results were wrong, but as the real results flowed in it became increasingly clear that the unbelievable had happened. For the first time since the establishment of the state, Mapai, or the Labor Party, would not be the majority party in forming the government. At eleven that evening TV anchorman Chaim Yavin announced, “Ladies and gentlemen, an about-turn!” coining a Hebrew phrase that took its place in Israeli politics and culture.

Likud leader Menachem Begin waited until all the results were in before going with his wife, Aliza, to Likud headquarters, Metzudat Ze’ev (Jabotinsky), where the victory celebrations were already in full swing. Chaim Yavin described the scene, with men in suits and ties replacing the Alignment people and their informal attire; the sloppy style of dress typical of leftists was no more. The building shook to the rhythmic chanting of “Begin, Begin.” Begin put on a yarmulke and intoned the Shehehyanu blessing (used to celebrate special occasions), thanked his wife, children, and grandchildren, and then quoted from President Lincoln’s second inaugural address: “With charity for all; with firmness in the right . . .” The yarmulke, the blessing, the family references, the use of ceremony were previously unknown in Israeli politics. The anchorman hit the nail on the head when he smilingly remarked, “We’ll have to get used to a new style.”

Begin is apparently the only leader in the history of democracies who lost eight elections and won the ninth. When the Etzel was disbanded he founded the Herut party, a fighting opposition to the rule of Mapai and the left. The transition from underground fighter—or, as the international press liked to call him, “terrorist”—to parliamentarian did not gain Begin the public recognition he had hoped for. Until the 1960s his party won fewer than twenty Knesset seats, whereas Mapai won more than forty. Begin had difficulty surmounting the legitimacy obstacle, and Ben-Gurion did everything he could to prevent him from achieving public trust. The Herut platform, which asserted, “The Jordan has two banks, and both

belong to us” (in the words of Jabotinsky, the founding father of Revisionism), aroused fear in Israelis of an irredentist party that would lead the nation into war.

Over the years there was a slow, almost undetectable retreat from this maximalist slogan that reduced the claim to the west bank of the Jordan; even this represented an aspiration that did not mandate action. At the time the 1949 lines were the accepted borders. When Gahal was founded in 1965 (as noted, a union of Herut with the liberals, a centrist middle-class party), Begin refused to stop mentioning the territory of the historical Land of Israel (reaching as far as the Jordan), but the liberals viewed this as saber rattling that was out of line with their moderate foreign policy. As a compromise the issue was mentioned in the introduction to the platform as a commitment solely of Herut, not the united party, to the “integrity of the homeland” doctrine. The slow retreat from commitment to Greater Israel represented an acceptance that, for the vast majority of the Israeli public, Greater Israel was a distant dream, not a political platform. As noted before, Ben-Gurion’s objective was to prevent the man whose militant aspirations and ways of operating he considered a danger to Israel’s very existence from being accepted as a legitimate actor on the political stage. “The man sitting next to Dr. Bader” [in the Knesset] is how Ben-Gurion referred to Begin. Ben-Gurion’s phrase “without Herut and Maki” was aimed at preventing the radical right and left from joining coalitions. For several years the Ministry of Defense refused to recognize that Etzel and Lehi veterans were entitled to pensions and allowances equal to those received by their Haganah counterparts. This unjustifiable but temporary discrimination later became the source of an entire myth of discrimination.

Begin had adopted a political style that was unacceptable in Israel. In a speech he gave at a demonstration against the reparations agreement with West Germany in January 1952, he fired up the audience with expressions vilifying Ben-Gurion and an implied threat of violence. After the speech, as described in earlier chapters, the demonstrators marched to the Knesset building and stoned it, ironically just as Begin himself was addressing the plenum. Begin was penalized with a three-month suspension from the Knesset. After that demonstration he moderated his rhetoric and increasingly stressed his commitment to democracy and the rule of law. He campaigned for the 1959 elections to the Fourth Knesset under the slogan “From Opposition to Government,” holding well-attended public meetings all over the country. On the day before Election Day that year, he toured the poor neighborhoods of Tel Aviv in an open car, escorted by motorcycle outriders. This idea had been introduced by the Herut campaign manager, who got it from the United States, but in Israel it was seen as the exhibitionism of a Mussolini-style right-winger.

Begin infused his speeches with biblical expressions, prophetic spirit, and

high-register rhetoric disconnected from reality. His critics claimed he was pompous, but he aroused enthusiasm among the masses. On all domestic policy issues he was ready to use demagoguery against the government. On foreign policy he was prepared to support every belligerent action by the government but not withdrawals or concessions. More than once his repeated failure to gain the people's trust aroused dissatisfaction in his own party, but each time his leadership was challenged he promptly expelled the challenger from the party. Herut was a "family" party, whose leadership had been forged when the Etzel was underground. There was an intimacy among the veterans, who accepted Begin's leadership unquestioningly. Most of the members came from Poland, and Begin's authoritarian style matched the conventional practice in the nationalist movements of that country between the two World Wars.

Begin and Herut's breakthrough from the wilderness of delegitimization to the center of the political arena took place on the eve of the Six-Day War. As the country's fate seemed to hang in the balance, Begin—in a belated recognition of Ben-Gurion's extraordinary powers of leadership—magnanimously proposed that Ben-Gurion be brought back from retirement in Sdeh Boker and into the government. Ben-Gurion did not return to government, but that was the beginning of a process of conciliation between him and Begin, whose Polish nobleman's mien charmed the old leader's wife, Paula, who had a soft spot for him. In the negotiations over creating a national unity government on the eve of the war, the NRP demanded a place for Gahal, and for the first time Begin was appointed one of its ministers without portfolio. In this way Begin and Herut emerged from the deep freeze and became suitable political partners. When Golda Meir formed her government in 1969, she invited Gahal and Begin to join it, lending real credence to their legitimacy; while the earlier appointment in 1967 could have been construed as an emergency appointment, this was recognition of Begin and his colleagues as worthy members of government.

The Six-Day War transformed the Herut platform from a distant ideal into reality. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip were in Israel's hands. Henceforth Begin worked assiduously to ensure state rule over all of the historical Land of Israel. He was a party to the government decision of June 19, 1967, expressing willingness to concede Sinai and the Golan Heights in return for peace agreements. But he did not agree to a similar arrangement with Jordan regarding the West Bank. In 1970, when the government of Israel informed UN mediator Gunnar Jarring that it was willing to implement UN Security Council Resolution 242, which included the principle of nonannexation of territories occupied in war, he forced Gahal to leave the government by threatening to split the party if his stand was not accepted.

The Yom Kippur War was the momentous event that brought about the demise

of labor movement rule. The public perceived the *mehdal* as an expression of the Labor Party's political ineptitude, and this led to a loss of the faith that was the party's most valuable asset during its years of rule. People viewed it as the natural ruling party, which knew how to steer the ship of state to a safe haven. For the first time the war raised doubts about this image, which until then had not wavered in the face of opposition attacks from left and right alike. The Rabin government began its term of office under the heavy cloud of these doubts. Its weakness, the internal struggles between Peres and Rabin, and the cases of corruption exposed during this period damaged the government further. The media, particularly television—which until the Yom Kippur War had displayed moderation in criticizing the government—now embraced the practices formulated by American television during the Vietnam War and the Watergate affair. Television became a central tool for exposing the government's flaws and weaknesses, and through pithy and even venomous satire it contributed to undermining the Labor Party's image as the party destined to rule. In the 1977 elections voters on the left shifted mainly to Dash, which won fifteen seats and became the third-strongest party. This vote expressed labor voters' disgust but did not represent an essential change in their political worldview—certainly not acceptance of Begin's positions on Greater Israel.

BEGIN'S FIRST TERM AND THE CAMP DAVID ACCORDS

Begin brought to government an authoritarian style unknown in Israel since Ben-Gurion's time. After the previous government's weakness this style seemed like a breath of fresh air, inspiring confidence and restoring the sense that the captain was indeed safely navigating the ship. Begin was a man of opposites, and he was either admired or despised. He was capable of grand gestures yet also of pettiness. A lawyer by profession, he scrupulously respected the courts and the rule of law. But he was also capable of indulging in endless polemics and legal hairsplitting. He was a man of honor who boasted that he always kept his promises, but in fact he had no qualms about breaking them when he considered it necessary. He vowed that no Arab would be dispossessed of his land as a result of Jewish settlement in the occupied territories, and abided by that promise. At the same time, he visited the settlers at Elon Moreh and declared, "There will be many more Elon Morehs." Always conscious of the importance of symbols, Begin insisted that official publications not describe the West Bank as "occupied" or "Israeli-held" territories. Instead they had to use biblical names that consolidated the Jews' connection with these areas from time immemorial: Judea and Samaria.

The coalition Begin formed included the NRP (which won twelve seats) and Agudat Yisrael. Dash joined later. This was the first time since 1952 that an ultra-

Orthodox party was a coalition member. In contrast with the heritage of Jabotinsky, which was essentially secular, Begin observed Jewish tradition. Even when he did not observe the commandments, he adopted a style that projected sympathy and respect for tradition. His speeches were peppered with “God willing” and verses from the prayer book; his head was always covered on occasions that called for it, and also on those that did not. When the ultra-Orthodox requested that El Al not fly on the Sabbath, he quickly acceded to this request as self-evident. He increased allocations to the yeshivas, resulting in the growth of the class of unemployed yeshiva students to a scale previously unknown in the history of Israel. He also canceled the cap on the number of yeshiva students exempt from military service (which Ben-Gurion had set at 400 and Dayan increased to 1,500); since then the number has increased to tens of thousands.

Begin had a far higher level of Holocaust awareness than any prime minister who preceded him. As one who had left Poland with the outbreak of World War Two and whose family perished there, he identified with the annihilation of the Jewish people under Nazi rule with every fiber of his being. As a prime minister committed to the interests of the country, he relinquished his tough stance against relations with Germany—one of the European countries most friendly to Israel—but the images that shaped his psyche were associated with the Jewish trauma of World War Two. After the elections, when he met with American Jewish leaders—mostly liberals concerned about his nationalist militancy—he won them over with his Yiddishkeit, his profound connection to the Jewish past, the Yiddish he sometimes used, and his deep identification with the Jewish people. He spoke not of “Israelis” but of “Jews.” Subjected to international criticism over Israel’s bombardment of Beirut in the 1982 Lebanon War, he evoked Holocaust images. When the media published an image of a wounded Palestinian girl, he placed on his desk the well-known photograph of a Jewish child in Warsaw facing armed, jackbooted German soldiers with his hands raised. He likened Arafat to a new Hitler plotting the annihilation of the Jewish people. During his critical meetings with President Carter, he made use of deep pathos, evoking the memory of his lost family, which cast a deep silence over the room.

Some viewed such behavior as exaggerated theatricality, a cheapening of the Holocaust that vitiated its uniqueness and moral power. But others saw it as an extraordinary adeptness at persuasion that put Begin’s adversaries in their place. The popular 1980s slogan “The whole world is against us” was a reaction to the unbridled, one-sided criticism leveled against Israel by the world media during the first Lebanon War, criticism spiced with genuine antisemitism. But it was also influenced by Begin’s leadership style, which framed Israel and the Jewish people as the constant targets of unfair judgment by the nations of the world, which were resolutely trying to damage Israel. This was a return to traditional

Jewish ways of thinking, in the vein of “It is a given law; it is known that Esau hates Jacob.”

Begin’s rise to power marked more than a change of government. It symbolized a move to center stage of new classes, another culture, a different historical narrative. Begin touched a sensitive spot in all those who saw labor movement Israeliness as arrogant, alienated, and alienating, as an identity contrary to their own. The immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s, particularly those from North Africa, brought with them a heavy load of disadvantages that became yet more burdensome during their absorption difficulties in the ma‘abarot and development towns, as they were required to quickly adopt a modern, secular, Western culture. One component of this shift was the breakup of the patriarchal family, which entailed diminished status and an erosion of respect for the father. For these immigrants Begin, the underdog of Israeli politics, represented the man who had succeeded in turning the tide. He wore a suit, spoke politely, and demanded courteous behavior—accepted practice in elite Mizrahi circles. His authoritarianism was a replacement for the eroded authority of the father. His oratorical ability was unparalleled, and his willingness to stand up to the whole world spoke to them. But what spoke to them even more were his virulent attacks on the Alignment—the source of all their absorption hardships—blaming it for all the real and imagined humiliations they had suffered. Many Mizrahi Jews enthusiastically received Begin’s demonization of the Alignment in his speeches; he was putting into words all their feelings of being discriminated against. His use of religious idioms and respect for religion were aligned with their value system, which contrasted sharply with insolent sabra secularism. Begin’s “Jewishness” and his tendency to emphasize tradition lent him a certain familial intimacy for the Mizrahi Jews, most of whom kept a warm place in their heart for family tradition.

Begin placed the Holocaust firmly at the center of Israeli discourse. Some Holocaust survivors took this as an opportunity to demand their rightful place in the national narrative, recognition of their contribution to the establishment of the state and their participation in the War of Independence. But many others joined the campaign demonizing the old Israeliness. The survivors’ claims covered a wide range. There were allegations that during the World War the Yishuv leadership was not sufficiently aware of what was happening in Europe and did not try to help the European Jews during the Nazi occupation; that in Israel the survivors had faced a rejecting and disdainful attitude, resistance to hearing their stories, and accusations that they had “gone like lambs to the slaughter”; and that the memory of the Holocaust had been suppressed in the first decades after the World War.

This was a political struggle that became a fight for commemoration. As we

have seen, allegations that the Yishuv leadership did not stand up and fight for European Jewry had been made by the Etzel as early as the 1940s. After the fight against the reparations agreement, Herut adopted an image as the party that had cared for the Jews of Europe, unlike hard-hearted Mapai, which was prepared to sacrifice national honor for German money. At the same time, at the Kasztner trial the right-wing attorney Shmuel Tamir presented the survivors as collaborators with the Nazis, the diametrical opposite of the proud sabras. In his telling only the ghetto fighters were worthy of respect. The Eichmann trial transformed these images and turned the Holocaust into a central element of Israeli identity.

Now Begin positioned the Holocaust as a unifying factor with respect to the old Israeli identity, opposing that identity with a new one whose images were far more connected with Diaspora petit bourgeois culture (which he extolled) than with the supposed proletarianism of the labor movement. He sought to build a new genealogy that no longer relied on Petach Tikva and Sejera, à la Ben-Gurion, but on Warsaw, Berdichev, and Casablanca as the sources of Israeli identity. Furthermore, if until then the Etzel and Lehi had been excluded from the story of the establishment of the state, now the record was set straight. According to Begin, without the Etzel's fight against British rule the state would not have come into being; Mapai, he contended, had conceded the integrity of the country out of its weakness and lack of resolve. Begin cast himself as the true patriot who had prevented an internecine war during "the hunting season" and the *Altalena* episode, whereas the left had no qualms about handing over the underground heroes to the British. Begin and his colleagues inculcated this narrative, a combination of truth and lies, hyperbole and self-persuasion, through speeches to an audience of admirers, most of whom had not even been in the country when these episodes took place and accepted this propaganda as though Moses had brought it down from the mountaintop. The extent to which Begin used the battles of the past to ensure legitimacy in the present can be seen in his creation of a commission of inquiry to reexamine the 1933 murder of Chaim Arlosoroff, head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department. The Revisionist narrative described the accusation that members of Betar had committed this crime as a "blood libel."

"The fighting family"—Begin's circle of close Etzel comrades, who had accompanied him down the thirty-year-long road during which he did not rise to power—was an exclusive club that accepted no one who did not have the same background and the same education and worldview formulated in the Etzel. The problem was that in order to become a party of the masses, Herut, and later Gahal, had to open itself to the new immigrants. Some of these immigrants had been members of Betar abroad, raised on the worldview whose foundation was Greater Israel, anti-leftism, national honor, and adulation of Jabotinsky as

founding father. But for most North African immigrants, it was the encounter with Begin that offered the prospect of leadership, an opportunity for advancement and belonging, and a link with the founding myth of the state. The opening of Gahal, and later the Likud, to the activists of the development towns and distressed neighborhoods was not well received by the old Betar elite, which felt rejected by the newcomers, who in addition did not always fit the image of "Hadar," which Jabotinsky had defined as "outward beauty, respect, self-esteem, politeness, faithfulness. . . ." But as the years went by the majority of the old leaders were no longer able to manage the party. Researchers Uri Cohen and Nissim Leon contend that on the eve of the about-turn, the Mizrachim held a large majority in the party central committee. Membership on this committee was a reward for people active in the local party branches. These branches created party loyalty among a young, dynamic elite that rose from the rank and file and was the mobilizing force that brought masses of voters to the polling stations. They were the people who carried Begin to power.

By contrast with the Likud's dynamism, the Labor Party was tired, crumbling from within, lacking authoritative leadership, and suffering from a loss of self-confidence. It did not go on the attack and exploit Likud scandals, such as the Tel Hai Foundation deficits that Begin tried desperately to pay off in the year before the about-turn. To Labor Party supporters Begin's theatricality and rhetoric looked like unconvincing demagoguery, but no one among the party's membership was capable of fighting him with his own weapons. The restrained, matter-of-fact style of the native-son generation, which was now part of the movement's leadership, could not compete with Begin's dramatics, which engaged his audiences' emotions and expressed their desires. The doubts he cast on the labor movement's place in the history of the Yishuv and the state stunned its members.

The Labor Party of the 1970s, which boasted of its social-democratic leanings, was a party of intellectual elites, liberal professionals, and upper-class salaried workers. It was not a party of the working masses; they voted for the Likud. The Labor Party's socialism involved a high level of state involvement in the economy with the goal of achieving maximum equality. This trend diminished after 1967, but Israel remained one of the world's more egalitarian countries. Although the state provided an impressive social safety net for its citizens, it did not turn this benefit into all-conquering propaganda. The party's ideology centered on the individual's commitment to the state and spoke of the citizen's obligations but not his or her rights. It fostered "the common good" but not the interests of the individual. For his part Begin championed a discourse of individualism, grounded in the question "What does the state give me?" not "What do I give the state?" In his Knesset speech presenting his government, Begin asserted that "much work, perhaps even hard labor, is imposed upon us. We, my colleagues and I, shall do

that work with dedication, loyalty, in good conscience, with a sure heart and in the belief that with God's help we shall ameliorate the lot of our people."¹ This statement contravened the entire ethos of the labor movement, which was based on belief in the masses rising to the challenge—not on a leadership that was their patron.

Begin's first government disappointed the Herut veterans. The major portfolios went to people who had not come up through the party ranks. Ezer Weizmann, architect of the Israeli Air Force and nephew of Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann, who had managed the Likud's successful election campaign, was appointed minister of defense. Minister of Finance Simcha Ehrlich was a bland moderate from the liberals. Ariel Sharon, whose party Shlomzion with its one seat swiftly joined the Likud following its victory, was appointed minister of agriculture. (Begin was quoted as saying that if Sharon were given the defense portfolio, he would surround the Knesset with tanks.) Sharon took upon himself the task of expanding settlement in the occupied territories. When Dash joined the government, Yigael Yadin was appointed deputy prime minister. Begin surprised the Israeli political system by bringing in Moshe Dayan, who had been vilified since the Yom Kippur War, from the political wilderness and appointing him foreign minister. It was a brilliant move designed to lend the government international legitimacy.

The Western countries were stunned by the Israeli election results. Begin was branded a dangerous extremist. *Time* noted that "Begin" rhymes with "Fagin," a blatantly antisemitic remark to which Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek responded, "Time equals slime." A boatload of Vietnamese refugees who had sailed from port to port, since no country would take them in, found safe haven in Israel on Begin's orders; he saw them as a reminder of the Jewish tragedy of World War Two and the world's indifference toward it. This charitable act neutralized Begin's terrorist image in the world press, particularly in Britain. In light of the attacks on him and the fears he aroused in the world media, his moderateness and courtesy were a pleasant surprise. But what mainly worked in his favor was the peace process.

Begin did not believe in partial arrangements with the Arab states and had vehemently opposed the interim agreements Rabin achieved. He wanted a historic breakthrough: a peace agreement with the biggest, most important Arab state—Egypt. Hints that he was willing to compromise on territory can be detected in the platform he dictated to his party in January 1977 before his rise to power. It expressed an intention to compromise on Sinai and the Golan Heights while asserting that west of the River Jordan there would be no foreign rule but rather autonomy for the Arab inhabitants. Dayan's appointment as foreign minister was a signal of Begin's interest in negotiating with the Arab states, above all

Egypt. At his first meeting with President Carter, Begin said that he accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242—to which his opposition in 1970 had caused his resignation from Golda Meir's government. He initiated a meeting with Romanian president Nicolae Ceaușescu, and sent Moshe Dayan to meet with King Hussein, the Shah of Iran, and King Hassan II of Morocco, under whose sponsorship Dayan met with Egyptian deputy prime minister Hassan Tuhami. The cumulative effect of these meetings led to the greatest surprise of the century: Sadat's visit to Jerusalem.

In an address to the Egyptian parliament on November 9, 1977, Sadat laid aside his written text and added two short sentences on negotiations with the Israelis: "I am willing to go to the ends of the earth for peace, even to their house, the Knesset, and talk to them. We have no time to waste."² This declaration was greeted with thunderous applause, which showed that the audience had not fully comprehended its revolutionary significance. Begin understood it himself only when a journalist pressed him for his response, saying that all the news agencies had already circulated the dramatic news. Always at his best when called upon to play a role in a drama, Begin did not disappoint: "I will gladly meet with Sadat anywhere, even in Cairo, and should he want to come here he will be welcomed." These words were construed as an official response and broadcast by Kol Yisrael.

The drama was heightened a few days later when CBS broadcast parallel interviews with the two leaders, presenting the adversaries as partners in negotiations that would take place within a few days. In his interview Begin used the words that became a slogan: "No more war, no more bloodshed." The two protagonists in this performance were aware of the effect of its symbolism, the importance of gestures, the groundbreaking nature of their moves, and the power of their psychological influence. Sadat believed in the need to break down the psychological barrier of the Israelis' lack of trust in Egypt, and his visit to Jerusalem and appearance in the Knesset were aimed at eliminating that barrier. The international media turned the event into a drama of paramount importance that reached every home, making Sadat and Begin familiar cultural heroes in the Western world.

There followed days of sublime intoxication. The Israelis could not believe their eyes. The man who symbolized "not one inch," absolute refusal to compromise, had invited Sadat to Jerusalem—and precisely at this time, when Begin was prime minister, Sadat was willing to accept the invitation. Begin's popularity soared. There were voices, such as that of Chief of the General Staff Mordechai Gur, expressing fears of an Egyptian deceit portending an attack such as that of 1973, but they were quieted by Begin and drowned in the enthusiasm engulfing the Israeli people. On November 19, 1977, Sadat's plane landed in Israel. The entire nation was glued to its television sets, watching the incredible scene of the Egyptian president's plane touching down in Lod, with red carpet and guard of

honor awaiting him, together with government ministers, former prime ministers, leaders of the opposition, and other dignitaries. Israeli and Egyptian flags fluttered in the breeze. The aircraft's door opened and the Egyptian delegation began descending the steps. Last to appear was President Sadat, elegant and erect. Begin welcomed him and escorted him down the red carpet. The citizens of Israel were ecstatic. If Sadat wanted to persuade them of his peaceful intentions, he had won them over in a single dramatic gesture. In the era of television, politics was a drama played out to an audience of millions, and Sadat's visit to Jerusalem was the height of drama. When somebody remarked that the story would end with the two heroes receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Golda Meir quipped, "I don't know about the Nobel Prize, but they certainly deserve an Oscar."

As Israeli journalist Teddy Preuss wrote, the peace process began with a climax—Sadat's visit—and all that followed was somewhat of an anticlimax. And indeed nothing compared with the impact of Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. In an unofficial conversation between Begin and Sadat at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem that same evening, both sides undertook to abandon the path of war and espouse negotiation to resolve problems from then on. Israel would withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula, which would remain demilitarized. This unwitnessed conversation later created controversy. Begin claimed he had spoken of transferring sovereignty only over part of Sinai, since he intended to keep the Israeli airfields and the settlements in northern Sinai and the Rafah Approach, including the town of Yamit. Sadat contended that he had not committed Egypt to demilitarize the whole of Sinai, but only the area east of the Mitla and Giddi passes. These issues emerged once the elation over the historic meeting had died down and the two sides embarked on negotiating the details of the agreement.

The day after Sadat's arrival in Jerusalem, it was already clear that the negotiations would be arduous. Sadat delivered a tough address in the Knesset in which he demanded Israel's withdrawal from all the territories occupied in the Six-Day War and "a just solution of the Palestinian problem"—two demands that were unacceptable to any of the Zionist parties. Begin responded with a vigorous speech reiterating his willingness to work for peace with Egypt. With respect to the demand to restore the Palestinians' rights, he spoke of the rights of the Jews and the lessons of the Holocaust, but still said that for his part "everything is open to negotiation." Both sides clung to what the other wanted to avoid: Sadat insisted on linking peace with Egypt and peace with Syria and Jordan, as well as "the rights of the Palestinians" (which he did not define in detail), and Begin sought a separate peace agreement with Egypt while adhering to the principle of Greater Israel and avoiding foreign rule west of the River Jordan.

If in the initial enthusiasm it seemed an agreement could be reached swiftly,

this possibility dissipated as the discussions went on. Pressure on Sadat from home and abroad increased. The Arab states attacked both him and his peace policy. In Egypt the opposition's voice was raised in a union of young left-wing intellectuals with the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood, and Sadat did not feel he had the freedom to relinquish any of his principles. Begin, for his part, was ensnared in his lifelong loyalty to the Greater Israel ideology. The negotiations became protracted and exhausting, eroding both sides' belief in the peace process. As time went by, what began as a sense that the wings of history were beating wound up with the parties mired in clauses and subclauses, with no sign of a breakthrough.

From a very early stage in the negotiations, Begin tried to circumvent the obstacle of the Egyptian demand to establish a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip, which for him was totally unacceptable. The formulation he brought to the table involved granting autonomy to the Arab inhabitants of the occupied territories, which Israel would not annex. There would be no foreign rule west of the Jordan, but neither would Israel claim what Begin viewed as its historical right to sovereignty over Greater Israel. From Begin's point of view, he was making a tremendous concession. The idea of autonomy was in line with his political outlook, which drew on Jewish experience as a national minority in Eastern Europe, where the Jews had sought autonomy but not sovereignty.

Begin proposed to Carter, and later to Sadat, that Israel would abolish military government in the occupied territories and grant autonomy to their inhabitants. They would be able to manage their lives as they chose, but Israel would reserve the right to purchase land there and settle on it, and would also administer security. This formulation appeared and reappeared in various versions at the negotiating table. President Carter, who was a partner to the negotiations and became more deeply involved once it emerged that the process was bogged down and needed US help to extricate and advance it, supported Palestinian rights to self-determination and backed Sadat in this goal. Begin was entrenched in his positions of not allowing the PLO to gain a foothold in the occupied territories and not committing himself to anything that might be construed as agreeing to a Palestinian state, especially the return of the 1948 refugees to the territories. A main bone of contention was Jewish settlement in the occupied territories. Begin refused to commit himself to stopping settlement, but Sadat would not move forward until agreement was reached on this matter.

A strong protest movement against Begin's policy emerged in Israel, asserting that the country was missing an opportunity for peace with Egypt because of the Greater Israel ideology. The movement appeared in March 1978 when the negotiations were deadlocked. It began with a letter to the prime minister signed by 348 reserve officers, many of whom were combat veterans. The writers expressed

grave concern over the deadlocked negotiations, which could lead to another war in which they would be forced to shed their blood. The letter was published and aroused broad public support. Within a few days a voluntary movement of young people was organized and joined by tens of thousands. Denying any political affiliation, the movement had one demand: Peace Now. Its bumper-sticker slogan, “Better Peace than the Greater Land of Israel,” appeared on thousands of cars all over Israel. Its demonstrations drew tens of thousands. The movement was an expression of the tremendous impact of Sadat’s visit on Israeli public opinion.

As October 1978 approached—marking the date of the renewal of the UNEF mandate in Sinai, and a year since Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem—grave fears emerged in Jerusalem and Washington that Sadat might withdraw from the peace process and undertake a spectacular military action, as he had done in 1973. President Carter decided on a dramatic action of his own. He invited both sides to Camp David for a conference that would take place with the delegations completely isolated from the media, in the hope that the intensive interaction would yield an agreement. “It proved to be the decisive, most difficult and least pleasant stage in the Egypt-Israel peace negotiations,” Moshe Dayan wrote. “All three parties had to resolve agonizing psychological and ideological crises in order to reach an agreed arrangement.”³ The Camp David summit lasted thirteen days, from September 5 to 17. Until the last moment there was no certainty that it would end with an agreement. Each day brought its own crisis, each day the feeling that the two sides had reached an impasse and it would be better to go home. And each day someone called for a little more forbearance, a little more patience, in order to reach a positive conclusion. Both sides feared being accused of causing the failure of the talks, and both sought American support for their positions. This gave President Carter and his aides wiggle room, enabling them to exert pressure on both sides to ultimately make the required fateful decisions. But beyond the tactics and strategies, what tipped the balance was the basic desire of both Begin and Sadat to bring a peace agreement home to their people. This desire enabled them to surmount the obstacles of mistrust, the internal and external pressures, the difficulty of changing their entrenched positions and taking a risk.

Two framework agreements were signed at Camp David, meant to form the basis of the peace treaty whose details were to be agreed upon within three months. Begin agreed to suspend new settlement during the three-month period. This undertaking was later construed by Carter as a total commitment, which Begin ostensibly breached. But it seems that the Egyptians understood the undertaking to be limited.

One framework agreement dealt with the principles of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. With a heavy heart and grave misgivings, Begin agreed to

relinquish the settlements in Sinai and the Rafah Approach, as well as the airfields. As a sort of compromise with himself, Begin stated that the Knesset would have to ratify these concessions. The Americans eased this particular burden by agreeing to build two alternative airfields in the Negev, to be completed before the withdrawal. The American early warning station in Sinai would be dismantled, but UNEF would remain there and be removed only with the agreement of the two sides and the unanimous agreement of the Security Council. Sinai would be only partially demilitarized, to the east of the passes, but the sides would be separated by a wide buffer zone. For their part the Egyptians agreed to begin normalizing relations—which they had initially said would only happen after an Israeli withdrawal from the whole of Sinai—and that when the first stage of the withdrawal was completed (nine months after the signing of the treaty), the sides would exchange ambassadors. The Suez Canal would be opened to Israeli shipping, and Egypt would establish trade relations with Israel, including the sale of oil.

The second framework agreement covered the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Egypt recognized Israel's security needs in both areas. Israel agreed to terms it had never before accepted. It undertook to grant full autonomy to the Palestinians in the occupied territories, while reducing Israeli military government there. Autonomy would last five years, after which negotiations would be held on the future of the territories. Israel reserved the right of veto on security matters there, nor did it waive its right to claim sovereignty over the area. But it was also stated that any solution to the problem of the territories must recognize "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and its rightful claims" and that both inhabitants of the territories and nonresident Palestinians would take part in any negotiations on the area's future.

The Camp David Accords were not greeted with the same enthusiasm as Sadat's visit. In Israel and Egypt alike, the treaty's opponents highlighted the concessions the leaders had made, not their achievements. In Israel the decision to withdraw to the international border and to the dismantling of the settlements and airfields was received with incredulity. Giving up the settlements went against Begin's promises on the eve of the summit and contravened the Tel Hai myth, according to which "One does not give up what has been built." Actually there were settlements that had been abandoned for various reasons and others that Israel had been forced to give up in the War of Independence. But the voluntary surrender of settlements that had been built by government decision was unprecedented.

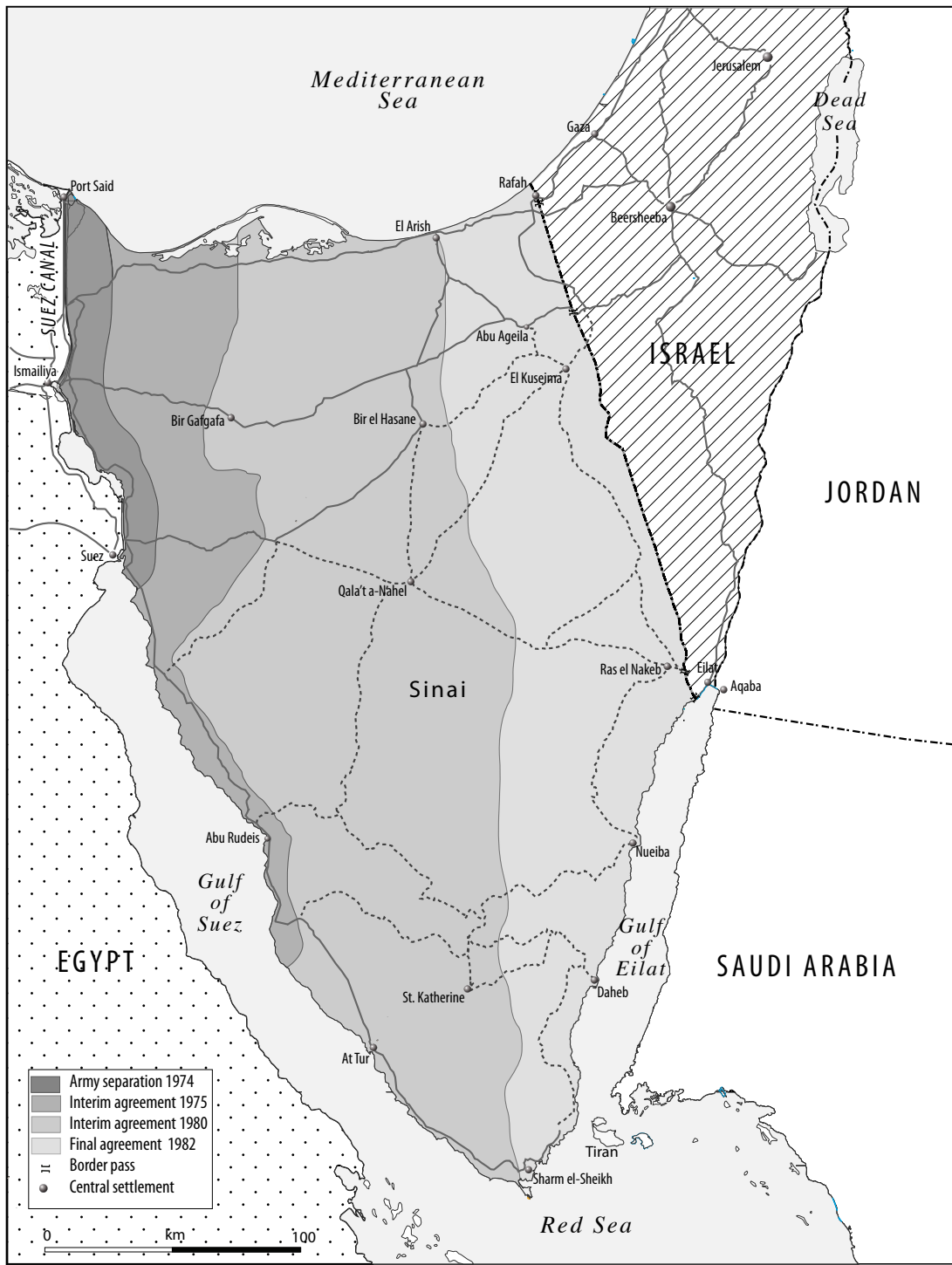
Although Begin would not withdraw from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, it was clear that the withdrawal from the Sinai and Rafah Approach settlements was a portent of what was to come: settlements are not sacred, and just as they can be established, they can be dismantled. The threat to the settlers was ob-

vious, and they wasted no time reacting to it with vehement opposition to the agreements. Moreover, in the twelve years since the 1967 war, Israelis had been hearing about the importance of the strategic depth that Sinai gave the country, and now Israel was conceding it in one fell swoop. It was now Begin's close friends and movement comrades who vigorously attacked him. The achievements of the peace treaty and the normalization of relations with the most important Arab state were overshadowed by the slaughter of Israeli sacred cows that had been nurtured for years. Sadat did not have an easy ride either. His having obtained a promise of a complete Israeli withdrawal from Sinai did not mollify the opponents of peace in Egypt, nor did it lead to moderation of the attacks against Sadat by the other Arab states, including the pro-Western ones.

The Knesset debate on the Camp David Accords was raucous. Only Begin, with his authority and standing in his party, could have compelled the majority of Likud members to ratify the accords. "The nation is suffering birth pangs. True, every great venture is born in anguish," Begin responded to the right's attacks. "This is the greatest turning point in the Middle East, which has come with the possibility of signing a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. The anguish does not surprise me. I have no complaints about the demonstrations."⁴ Even the NRP, most of whose members voted in favor of the accords, did so because it trusted that if Begin had decided to withdraw it was because he probably had no alternative. The Labor Party and Dash supported the accords, although with reservations about one clause or another. The chance of peace outweighed the numerous concessions involved.

This was not the end of the chapter. Now the framework agreements had to be formulated into a final peace treaty, and the problems left open by the vague wording of the Camp David Accords came to the surface. Israel insisted that normalization of relations should commence at the time stipulated, irrespective of when the autonomy negotiations with the Palestinians were concluded. Egypt demanded the opposite. This was another version of the basic discussion: was the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt linked to the autonomy agreement, or was there no linkage between the two? Israel demanded removal of the linkage. Egypt insisted that it be kept. Egypt had mutual defense treaties with Arab states in the framework of the Arab League. Israel demanded that priority be given to the peace agreement with it over Egypt's Arab League commitments. Israel was concerned that should it respond militarily to Syrian or Jordanian provocation, Egypt would be duty bound to come to their aid and the peace agreement would collapse. Egypt feared that a commitment to giving the agreement with Israel priority would be seen as betraying the Arab cause.

In addition to these basic issues, there were practical problems such as supplying oil to Israel once the Sinai oil fields were evacuated. The American-mediated



MAP 10. THE POST-CAMP DAVID ACCORDS MAP, 1978. (SEE PLATE 10.)

negotiations, held at Blair House in Washington, ended in stalemate. A further round of talks also ended in failure. It was only when President Carter flew to the Middle East and threw all his weight and prestige onto the scales that he succeeded in facilitating a breakthrough, after the two sides had almost despaired of surmounting the obstacle posed by the final details. The treaty was brought before the Knesset for ratification on March 20, 1979, and provoked one of the most protracted debates in the history of the House, but the treaty was eventually ratified by a decisive majority. In his speech from the podium, Dayan said, "The Egypt-Israel peace treaty . . . is not a pastoral idyll. . . . But it is a realistic peace treaty set in the context of current realities, and designed to bring about relations between two neighboring countries." From the Arab standpoint it was an acceptance of Israel's existence.⁵ On March 26, 1979, about a year and a half after Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, the peace treaty was signed on the White House lawn.

The treaty stipulated dates for a withdrawal in stages from Sinai, with Israel remaining in the eastern part of the peninsula and not vacating settlements and airfields until the completion of a two-year trial period. During this period negotiations on Palestinian autonomy would be held. Normalization of relations commenced immediately after the first stage of the withdrawal, and ambassadors were exchanged. Over the next two years the treaty faced some difficult tests: Sadat's assassination, Israel's war in Lebanon, and the collapse of the autonomy talks. But it held firm and is in force to this day. The majority of Egyptian elites—including intellectuals, media figures, and religious leaders—never became reconciled with Israel. Nor did the peace between the two governments extend to their populations, with cultural exchanges and friendly relations. Yet the Middle East seems different since then, and the peace between Israel and Egypt lies at the basis of its stability.

The peace treaty with Egypt was the zenith of the Begin era. He gained stature both at home and throughout the world. Together with Sadat he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. But within his own bloc he found himself under attack for surrendering the settlements and recognizing the Palestinians' legitimate rights and just demands. He had difficulty facing the settlers, since in his eyes they were the pure, idealistic element of the right. While he dismissed criticism from the left, criticism from the right hurt him; his heart was with Greater Israel and the settlement enterprise. Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon adopted an aggressive settlement policy that included establishing settlements in the heart of Arab-populated areas, in order to thwart the possibility that one day a Palestinian state would be established. In contrast, Minister of Defense Weizmann wanted the settlements built entirely in large blocs without expropriating land. Dayan asserted that although it was permissible for Jews to settle anywhere in the Land of Israel, settlements with no security importance should be avoided. The govern-

ment accepted Sharon's proposal that settlements should be created wherever possible, and Begin was inclined to support him, even when his plans deviated from what the government had approved. The opposition of Yadin, Dayan, and Weizmann, who represented more moderate positions within the government, was not pleasant to him.

Begin appointed Minister of the Interior Yosef Burg to chair the autonomy talks, thus signaling that the West Bank was an internal Israeli matter. It was also a signal to Dayan that his role in the government was over. He resigned six months later. Begin replaced him as foreign minister with the former Lehi leader Yitzhak Shamir. Shamir's extremist positions were evident in his vote on the peace treaty: he abstained. His appointment marked the end of moderation and compromise, and the autonomy talks died a painless death. In the meantime, in May 1980, Weizmann angrily resigned, saying that cuts to the defense budget put Israel at risk, and that Begin's performance was seriously flawed. In addition to his role as prime minister, Begin assumed the defense portfolio, which he held for fourteen months.

Politically the first two years of the Begin government were marked by the peace process, from which it gained both prestige and popularity. But the economic situation was its Achilles' heel. In October 1977 Minister of Finance Simcha Ehrlich presented a new economic plan aimed at introducing sweeping liberalization into the Israeli economy and turning it from a government-planned economy into a free one. The liberal perception was that all the malaises of the Israeli economy sprang from excessive government involvement and that market forces and private enterprise should be given free play, which would ultimately result in economic growth. Subsidies on basic goods were canceled, as were foreign currency restrictions, and for the first time the citizens of Israel were allowed to hold foreign currency and trade in it. A free-floating rate of exchange for the lira was instituted that would self-adjust according to supply and demand. For the first time people who could afford it were able to travel abroad for pleasure without paying travel tax and with no restriction on the amount of US dollars they could legally take out of the country.

Liberalization in the import of commodities should have led to price reductions, but the hope that government revenue would increase accordingly proved premature. Rising demand for consumer goods led to price hikes. Cancellation of the subsidies caused price rises in basic commodities, which hit the poorer sections of the population—the Likud's support base. The dollar rate of exchange rose drastically, leading to price rises in imported products. Linking wages to the cost-of-living index, which was intended to compensate salaried workers for the price rises and which remained in force after liberalization, led to spiraling inflation that the Ministry of Finance had difficulty controlling. Between 1977 and

1980 the rate of inflation rose from 42.8 percent to 132.9 percent. The Ministry of Finance did not take the steps that the transition to a free market required. Government spending was not cut substantially enough. Privatization of public companies, intended to drive private enterprise, was done only on a small scale, for fear of harming the poorer sections of the population.

Begin was not well versed in economics, and he tended to accept his ministers' complaints about the Finance Ministry's attempts to cut their budgets. In the two years that followed the introduction of the new economic plan, his failure to back Finance Ministry policy led to an increased deficit in Israel's balance of payments, from nine hundred million to 3.4 billion dollars. The economy was on the brink of disaster. Ehrlich resigned—the first of several finance ministers to be replaced in the Begin governments. Yigal Horowitz, who had resigned from the government because he opposed the peace treaty, now came back as minister of finance. He adopted a rigorous spending policy and had no qualms about making cuts that might hit the lower classes. But here he encountered opposition from the prime minister, who refused to cancel subsidies and stubbornly insisted on raising certain wages.

One of Horowitz's actions was to replace the lira, whose very name recalled Israel's Mandatory past, with the shekel, the ancient Hebrew coin that appears in the Bible. (The rate was set at ten lirot to one "old shekel." In the second stage the rate was 1,000 old shekels to one "new shekel," so that one new shekel equaled 10,000 lirot.) Horowitz hoped making money more scarce would arrest inflation, but it did not happen. Horowitz left the government in disgust. "The world already sees Israel as an economic cadaver," Dayan asserted.⁶ In January 1981 Begin appointed his third finance minister, Yoram Aridor, who believed that his role was "to ameliorate the lot of our people." Instead of belt-tightening and cutting government expenses, he thought he could fight inflation by loosening the reins. Removing customs duty and tax on consumer goods would lower prices and increase trade, which in turn would hopefully lead to more government revenue. An unparalleled consumer fest ensued. Middle- and lower-class families rushed to buy color TV sets, VCRs, and cars. Galloping inflation continued, and the new Israeli currency kept losing value. But the public mood changed from the gloom of frugality to enjoyment of heightened consumerism, which also increased the state's tax revenues. Before Aridor instituted his economic policy, the Likud seemed likely to lose the election scheduled for summer 1981, but Begin now appeared to have a renewed chance of remaining in power.

Throughout 1980 and in early 1981, Begin seemed to have lost the energy needed to function as prime minister. He suffered a mild stroke and episodes of depression. Nobody dared speak publicly about the state of his health. In April 1981 the Histadrut elections were held in the wake of Aridor's success. To every-

one's surprise the Likud emerged as a force still to be reckoned with. It gained 25 percent of the votes cast in the bastion of the left. Begin recovered overnight and began to campaign energetically. Although public meetings were now considered passé, Begin returned to the city squares and the masses and drew encouragement and energy from the displays of enthusiasm that greeted him all over the country.

Begin had no qualms about releasing the genie of ethnic hostility from the bottle and used it without a second thought as a means of political incitement. The level of incitement against the Alignment and demonization of it in this campaign, with verbal violence that sometimes spilled over into physical violence against Alignment representatives, was unprecedented. The hostile behavior of Likud supporters made it difficult for Alignment activists to hold election meetings in the development towns and city neighborhoods. The climax came at a mass rally held on election eve in Kikar Malkhei Yisrael (now Rabin Square) in Tel Aviv. After describing one movement as a "red" movement that would bring the Soviets into Israel and the terrorists into Judea and Samaria, and the other as "blue and white" and a protector of the homeland, Begin seized upon a silly remark made at an Alignment election rally held at the same place the previous evening. An entertainer had called the Likud supporters "Tshachtshachim" (a derogatory epithet for Moroccans). Coming from Begin's lips the entertainer's words became a symbol of the left's derogatory attitude toward Mizrahi Jews, and he called on his followers to rouse their friends and vote Likud en masse to erase this insult to an entire section of the Israeli population. His words were received with thunderous applause in support of the Likud and hatred of the left.

A few weeks before the elections, in June 1981, the Israeli Air Force destroyed the Iraqi Osirak nuclear reactor. The decision to bomb the reactor, which at the time seemed risky and perhaps even unnecessary, was a courageous one on Begin's part, and in retrospect few would doubt that it served the world well. During the 1977 change of government, Rabin informed Begin of intelligence reports indicating that the Iraqis were building a nuclear reactor with French assistance. Efforts to stop the reactor's construction both diplomatically and by sabotage had been unsuccessful. In the meantime the Iran-Iraq War broke out and the Iranians attempted to bomb the reactor, causing only minor damage. Begin considered nuclear weapons in the hands of an enemy state an existential threat to Israel, which was extremely vulnerable due to its small area. In a confidential letter to Begin, opposition leader Shimon Peres, who had heard about the plan to bomb the reactor, cautioned against it. He viewed it as endangering Israel's relations with the United States and Egypt.

Begin was aware of the risks of attacking the reactor, but contended that the predicted risk to Israel if it did not attack was far greater. He feared that if the

Alignment won the elections, the reactor would remain standing. The decision to attack it was not an easy one, and there were differences of opinion within the Israeli defense establishment. There was also no guarantee that the operation would be successful. In the end the operation did succeed, with no losses. In response the United States delayed the supply of warplanes to Israel, but apart from that relations were not impaired. Sadat, who had been updated by the Israeli ambassador on the operation and Begin's reasons for it, treated it leniently. Nothing succeeds like success, and Saddam Hussein's brutal regime was not well liked in the Middle East. Peres accused Begin of using the attack on the Iraqi reactor as a form of electioneering. Begin responded by revealing Peres's confidential letter and attacking him. Begin did not destroy the reactor in order to get elected, but afterward he used the operation's success as an additional weapon in his election arsenal.

BEGIN'S SECOND TERM: THE LEBANON WAR AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISRAELI SOCIETY

The elections held at the end of June 1981 were close. The Likud retained a one-seat advantage (48–47), enabling Begin to present a government backed by 61 Knesset members (out of a total of 120). This slender victory was evidence that the 1977 about-turn had not been a chance event, but reflected a profound political and social change. Aryeh Naor, secretary of Begin's first government, analyzed the results thus: "Israel's new world of symbols based on the heritage of religion and faith is rooted in the new generation of the state. The secular worldview and the Alignment's ideas of territorial compromise are alien to this generation, a large part of which grew up in the reality of Greater Israel."⁷

Begin's first term in office ended on a positive note. The peace treaty with Egypt cloaked Begin in the mantle of the man of peace, the resolute leader capable of making difficult decisions. The bombing of the Iraqi reactor added further proof of his leadership ability and resolve. To his supporters the expansion of the settlement enterprise was an additional success. Another in his government's list of achievements was a neighborhood rehabilitation project. Before the 1977 elections Begin had promised that if elected he would take action to rehabilitate Israel's deprived neighborhoods. This project was funded not by the state budget but by donations from Diaspora Jewry. Begin's appeal to Jewish communities throughout the world to help defeat poverty in Israel was well received. Instead of turning the project and its funds over to the usual groups, such as the Jewish Agency, direct contact was established between the donors and the neighborhood or development town that would receive the funds. Involving Diaspora Jews in the project helped strengthen ties between the major donors and the Israeli right, but apart from that this enterprise was important in renewing solidarity

between the Diaspora communities and Israel and bringing the Ashkenazi donors and the Mizrachi residents of the neighborhoods closer. The neighborhood rehabilitation project focused on raising the standard of housing and reducing overcrowding. Efforts were also made to enhance the aesthetic aspect of the neighborhoods and build playgrounds and gardens. In many cases the improvement in the environment caused increased awareness among residents, reinforcing their interest and involvement in caring for their neighborhood. From every point of view this was a worthy enterprise.

On the debit side of Begin's first term was the deterioration of the economic situation. The heroic attempt to shift from a government-directed economy to a liberal one in a single leap, without a safety net and the necessary related measures, led the Israeli economy to the edge of the abyss and undermined the country's stability.

The 1981 elections and the composition of the new government reflect the shift from a right-wing government, whose leader sought to be remembered in history as the man who brought peace to Israel, to an extreme right-wing government, whose leader now began to actualize the old worldview he had held before coming to power. The first government included Dayan, Weizmann, and Yadin, who among themselves and with Begin constituted a system of checks and balances. In his second government Begin, whose health was failing, lacked these moderating forces. Ariel Sharon—the man Begin had earlier been reluctant to put at the head of the security establishment—was appointed minister of defense, and Yitzhak Shamir, a dyed-in-the-wool rightist, became foreign minister. The chief of the General Staff was Rafael (Rafal) Eitan, who accepted Sharon's authority. It was a lusterless government without heavyweight figures who could push back against Sharon's influence. Nor were there other military men in the government who could serve as a counterweight. (Minister of Communications Mordechai Zippori came from the military, had served as deputy defense minister in the previous government, and had tried to rein in Sharon, but he did not have equal status in Begin's eyes with the illustrious General Sharon.) The external political arena had also changed. Sadat was assassinated on October 6, 1981, and President Reagan replaced President Carter. If Begin's first term was marked by peace, his second would be marked by war.

As we have seen, after the civil war in Lebanon the PLO and its fighters had relocated to south Lebanon. Israel would retaliate against terror attacks on Israelis by attacking the PLO, who retaliated in turn with Katyusha rocket attacks on the northern border settlements. IDF ground operations against the terrorists brought short-term quiet to the area. Since the mid-1970s Israel had been fostering a Christian militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), in south Lebanon, which helped hold the PLO in check. In Lebanon relations deteriorated between

the Syrians and the Christians, especially the Phalangists, led by the Gemayel family. The Christians sought Israeli aid against the Palestinians in Lebanon, who together with the radical pro-Syrian left tipped the scales in Lebanon's ethnic and religious conflicts against the Christians. As prime minister, Rabin had vigorously refused to be drawn into military action to aid the Christians; the same stance guided Weizmann when he was minister of defense. But when Begin became minister of defense, he decided to aid the Christians—not just indirectly by supplying military equipment but also with direct military action. Begin reasoned that Israel could not allow a minority to be annihilated by a violent majority. But the Christians were not a helpless minority, and certainly not paragons of virtue. Begin's ostensibly moral rationale for Israel's initial military involvement in the Lebanese civil war was aimed at influencing President Reagan, but Reagan was unimpressed. Begin's and Sharon's ally in the American administration was Secretary of State Alexander Haig; Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger had serious reservations about the Israelis' saber rattling.

Begin and Sharon, who wanted to ensure Israeli control over Judea and Samaria, believed that weakening the PLO in Lebanon, and perhaps even removing its headquarters from the country, would likely also weaken the Palestinians and force them into a formula for autonomy that would guarantee an Israeli presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for generations. In the meantime Israel's security elite reinforced its ties with the Christians, who sought to draw Israel into a war in Lebanon by leading the Israelis to believe that they would be directly involved in the fighting themselves. Opinion was divided in the Israeli security establishment regarding the Christians' trustworthiness. Would they indeed play their part in an Israeli attack and drive the Palestinians out of Beirut? The Christian leadership, including Bashir Gemayel (who unlike his pro-Syrian brother Amin was considered pro-Israeli), did not conceal its reservations about an open alliance with Israel. Even as Israeli military aid flowed into the Christian-held ports in northern Lebanon, these leaders refused to publicly support a partnership with Israel. Even more to the point, they did not want to appear to be fighting at Israel's side. They saw themselves as part of the Arab world, and in the way of Lebanese Christians from time immemorial, they maneuvered between the rival camps, with their primary commitment being to themselves.

Two plans for military action were formulated: "Big Pines," which envisioned the possibility of occupying a large part of Lebanon, reaching the Beirut–Damascus road, and joining up with the Christians; and "Little Pines," which involved occupying a forty-kilometer-deep buffer zone in south Lebanon—that was the range of the rockets deployed by the PLO at the time. Following a massive bombardment of the Galilee panhandle settlements, especially Kiryat Shmona, in the summer of 1981, which led large numbers of residents to evacuate their town, an

American-mediated agreement was reached to ensure quiet along the northern border. Begin and Sharon then began looking for an excuse for an attack in Lebanon that would alter the balance of power. The attempt to obtain government approval for Operation Big Pines failed; Begin remained silent, while Sharon was unable to enlist a massive majority for an all-out war. Sharon realized that in order to get approval, he would have to present the smaller-scale plan. But he concealed his intention to expand that plan in the course of the fighting. The IDF high command was alerted in advance that the plan might be expanded and told to prepare the forces for a “rolling” stage-by-stage operation. Then an assassination attempt on the Israeli ambassador in London by a member of the Abu Nidal organization provided Begin and Sharon with their rationale. The head of the General Security Service tried in vain to explain to the cabinet that Abu Nidal belonged to a breakaway branch of the PLO and did not represent PLO policy. The prime minister cut him short, insisting that this terrorist outrage justified going to war against the PLO.

This was a war Begin had wanted for a long time. “The alternative to this operation is Treblinka, and we have resolved that there will be no more Treblinkas,” he asserted dramatically on June 5, 1982.⁸ In a lecture delivered in August 1982 at the College of National Security, he spoke in favor of “a war of choice.” In Begin’s assessment all Israel’s wars, except for the 1948 war, the War of Attrition, and the 1973 war, had been wars of choice. According to him, every preventive or preemptive strike, or even a war resulting from the crossing of redlines, was a war of choice. With this rationale he put the Lebanon War in the same category as not only the Sinai Campaign—though Ben-Gurion had undertaken it out of fear of Egypt’s intensified armament and then withdrawn as soon as he saw the reaction of the two superpowers—but also the Six-Day War, which all Israelis saw as a war initiated by Egypt. In this expanded definition of the term *war of choice*, Begin sought legitimacy for going to war in Lebanon. He justified a war of choice by saying it obviated a war of no choice later. “There is no moral diktat that a nation must, or is entitled to, fight only when its back is to the sea or it is on the brink of the abyss.”⁹ This concept contradicted a very basic ethos in Israeli society: the defensive ethos, which shaped the worldview of generations of fighters in the Yishuv and the state. For that ethos war must always be a war of necessity, in which the nation stands on the brink. In the end neither Israeli society nor the IDF accepted Begin’s redefinition of this ethos.

To what extent Begin subscribed to Sharon’s concept of a stage-by-stage rolling war is a bone of contention between Begin’s admirers and critics. What is certain is that Begin gave Sharon’s actions his approval, sometimes before an action and on other occasions afterward. When the IDF invaded Lebanon, Begin was convinced the operation would last only a couple of days and cause few

casualties. He was not familiar with either maps or military actions. For example, like other members of his government without a military background, he believed Sharon's prediction that outflanking the Syrian forces in the Bekaa Valley would force them to retreat and not clash with the IDF. But all the IDF officers who saw the plan realized that they were going to war with the Syrians. Sharon explained to Begin and his cabinet members that expanding the war from forty kilometers from the border to Beirut, and from clashes with Palestinians to attacking the Syrians, was necessary to protect IDF troops and avoid losses. Foreign journalists who interviewed Begin during the fighting found it hard to decide whether he was a liar or simply incompetent, for he did not know what was happening on the battlefield. After all his denials, which were based on Sharon's misleading reports, the individual who informed Begin that the IDF was already in Beirut was American mediator Philip Habib.

The war gradually expanded. Instead of being a limited battle with the Palestinian organizations, it became a large-scale war that included fierce armored battles against the Syrians, taking out the Syrian ground-to-air missile array in Lebanon, and bitter fighting in the Sidon refugee camps and later the Beirut camps. The IDF's entry into West Beirut following a two-month siege of the city was intended to exert pressure on Arafat to take his headquarters and fighters out of Lebanon. In the meantime the Palestinian civilian population of West Beirut suffered as a result of heavy bombing and disruption of electricity and water supply until the PLO and the Syrian forces inside the city agreed to evacuate it in August 1982.

In presenting the operation to the government, Sharon had estimated there would be a few dozen Israeli casualties, in complete contradiction of the much higher estimate made by IDF officers, whose view was not brought before the government. The war exacted close to five hundred Israeli casualties by the time just before the PLO evacuated Beirut. This was the first IDF entry into an Arab capital, and it was accomplished almost clandestinely, without the government discussing it.

This was the first time the IDF went to war not to thwart a security threat, but to bring about a new political order in the Middle East through unlimited use of Israel's military might. Sharon's plan was that Bashir Gemayel would be elected president of Lebanon under cover of Israeli tanks, and then Lebanon would be the second Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel. The Syrians would be forced to withdraw from the country, and the Palestinians would have to evacuate to Jordan in large numbers. Sharon's dream was that Jordan would become Palestine, leaving the entire west bank of the River Jordan in the hands of the Jews. Begin shared this dream, which is apparently why he continued to back Sharon, even though his cabinet colleagues rebelled against Sharon's use of

unlimited force, carried out without government approval. When Begin met with Bashir Gemayel in Nahariya during the ceasefire on September 1, 1982, he realized to his chagrin that Gemayel had no intention of changing his relations with Israel from a secret liaison into a legal marriage, and that he would neither make peace with Israel nor openly cooperate with it. The Syrians stated that they had no intention of leaving Lebanon. When Bashir Gemayel was assassinated on September 15, 1982, the IDF entered West Beirut to prevent acts of vengeance, but gave the Phalangists permission to enter the refugee camps. The Phalangists avenged Bashir's death with a massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Hundreds of innocent Palestinians were killed. Although the Israelis were not directly involved in the massacre, the fact that they were in charge made them responsible for the inhabitants' safety—and they never assumed this responsibility. The massacre aroused a furor in Israel and around the world, and opposition to the war reached new heights (discussed later).

After August 1982 the IDF had no real mission in Lebanon, but a way of withdrawing from it that would preserve the forty-kilometer buffer zone in south Lebanon after the retreat could not be found. The longer the IDF remained in Lebanon, the deeper it sank into what came to be called "the Lebanese mire." The wars between ethnic and religious groups in Lebanon did not stop. As an army of occupation the IDF came into close contact with the local population and aroused hostility among various groups. When the IDF invaded Lebanon its columns had been greeted by joyous crowds throwing rice in welcome. Now the troops became sitting ducks for terror attacks and incessant sniper fire. A war that was supposed to last only a few days had become protracted and resulted in heavy losses. Although the PLO had vacated Beirut and south Lebanon, the organization was not broken and its headquarters, now in Tunis, continued to be the political entity representing the Palestinians. While the Syrians had been dealt a heavy blow, they proved themselves a worthy adversary of the IDF. They did not withdraw and remained leading players in the Lebanese theater.

The war in Lebanon, especially the bombing of Beirut, provoked tremendous opposition in Israel and throughout the world, and heightened awareness of the Palestinians' plight. After the war President Reagan demanded that Israel withdraw from the West Bank and that it be returned to Jordan—an issue that had not previously interested him. If Begin and Sharon had hoped the war would strengthen Israel's position in the occupied territories, what transpired was the opposite. The draft peace treaty agreed upon by Israel and Amin Gemayel, who was elected president of Lebanon in May 1983, was thwarted by the Syrians. The draft was clearly not worth the paper it was written on. And it was evident that Sharon's strategic concept never had a leg to stand on. As in the past, Israel could win the war but was incapable of imposing peace.

In September 1983 the IDF began a gradual withdrawal from Lebanon, with local guerilla forces snapping at its heels. Amal, the moderate Shi'ite militia that had been weakened in the war, was now replaced by Hezbollah, a radical Shi'ite militia whose objective was not only to drive the IDF out of Lebanon but also, with Iranian support, to fight Israel incessantly. The IDF withdrawal from Lebanon continued until June 1985, when the force deployed along the international border while continuing to control a narrow buffer zone on the Lebanese side, where the Christian-commanded SLA operated, helping maintain security along the border. Six hundred seventy Israeli soldiers were killed during the war, and between 1982 and 2000 (when the IDF made its final withdrawal to the international border), a total of 1,216 soldiers were killed in Lebanon. Close to 18,000 Arabs were killed in the Lebanon War, of whom at least 10,000 were Syrian troops and Palestinian fighters.

The Lebanon War was a watershed in the history of Israeli society. It was the first war to be prosecuted without a consensus. In the first stage of the fighting, both the public and the media thought the campaign was similar to the 1978 Litani Operation, which had been launched as a reprisal for a terrorist outrage perpetrated on Israel's coastal road. The IDF had crossed the border into Lebanon, carried out a punitive action, and returned to Israel. The thinking this time included the possible establishment of a buffer zone to prevent Katyusha rocket attacks on the northern settlements. As initially presented to the public, the operation had almost wall-to-wall support. Once it emerged that the operation was exceeding its predetermined limits, public and military support eroded. The right was infuriated by criticism of the war in the media. It contended that a government at war should not be criticized, on the model of Begin's own restraint when he was in the opposition. A celebrated article published at the time was titled "Quiet, There's Shooting."

The problem was that until that time, the governments of Israel had been to the left of the opposition, which was militant—always willing to support military operations, but not withdrawals. This time the shoe was on the other foot; the government was to the right of the opposition and went to war without speaking openly and honestly to the opposition about its objectives. As the war progressed, a mutual feedback loop of information and reaction developed between the army and civilians. Armored brigade commander Colonel Eli Geva resigned his command and refused to take part in the assault on Beirut—the first time in the history of Israel's wars that a senior officer refused to obey orders. Geva's action reflected the frustration and unease pervading the army. The troops felt they were fighting for objectives far beyond what was necessary to defend Israel. Soldiers reacted bitterly: "People definitely feel that they gave life and limb not in the defense of Israel, but for a whim."¹⁰ They also felt that there had been manipulation of the

media by the government; what was being reported to the public was not what they were seeing on the ground. By the same token what the public saw on their TV screens at home and in the international media did not jibe with what the commanders were saying.

The IDF is an army built on its reserve soldiers, citizens called to the flag. This means no real distinction exists between civilian and military reality. The sense of phony reports from the top down, from the army to civil society, and from the civilian leadership back to the army severely impaired trust in both directions. The rising number of casualties suffered for objectives that appeared dubious and unacceptable to large sections of the public—and even to the army—aroused opposition to an operation such as the entry into West Beirut, in which urban fighting would certainly exact a high toll in casualties. Apart from that, the brutality of the actions in Beirut and the bombing with its attendant civilian casualties enraged both troops and their officers who saw these actions as abandonment of the intrinsic values of the IDF's principle of "purity of arms" and protecting human life.

The Sabra and Shatila massacres sparked a conflagration among the Israeli public. The possibility that the IDF was even indirectly responsible because it stood aside and did not intervene during the Phalangists' action in the camps subverted the army's image as moral in the eyes of soldiers and civilians alike. Suspecting that a massacre was taking place in the camps, IDF Radio reporter Ron Ben-Yishay had called Sharon to inform him of his fears. Sharon did nothing. The shocked reporter sent a personal letter to Begin:

If you do not take steps, standing on the sidelines while civilians are being massacred will become the norm in the IDF and the State of Israel. The damage to the IDF's morality and self-image will be grave. Should IDF soldiers and citizens of Israel cast doubt on the rightness of our position and the moral validity of our actions, it will erode their motivation. And motivation, Prime Minister, is the rampart standing between my three daughters and millions of Arabs, most of whom seek to erase us from the map.

. . . The curly head of one of the slaughtered girls bore an amazing resemblance to that of my four-year-old daughter, Tamar. It is inconceivable that a Jewish soldier or civilian should not lift a finger while women, old people, and children are being murdered, whatever their identity might be.¹¹

Begin did not reply to Ben-Yishay's letter. But the storm continued to rise. Senior army officers demanded that Sharon accept ministerial responsibility and resign. A huge demonstration in Tel Aviv (the *Ha'aretz* newspaper estimate put the number of participants at 400,000, although government supporters claimed there were only 150,000) called for a commission of inquiry into Israel's respon-

sibility for the massacre. Not only people on the left, but on the right as well, were shocked and joined the demonstration. By and large the media supported the demand. At first Begin responded with the supercilious remark, “Goyim kill goyim and they blame the Jews.” But in the face of the anger inside Israel and mounting world criticism, he gritted his teeth and agreed to establish a state commission of inquiry.

Since the 1981 elections the atmosphere in the Israeli street had taken on a belligerent, violent aspect that became more extreme by the day. The settlers fumed at the government for agreeing to evacuate the Rafah Approach settlements. The government initiated settlement campaigns to demonstrate its resolve on Judea and Samaria. These campaigns were met with opposition from the Peace Now organization, which viewed the settlements as the principal obstacle to peace, since they made any reasonable territorial compromise impossible. Peace Now managed to enlist thousands of demonstrators against settlement in Judea and Samaria. The right retaliated with hate propaganda directed against the left in general and Peace Now in particular, presenting them not only as traitors to the national cause but PLO sympathizers to boot.

The Lebanon War led to cracks in the nation’s unity and raised hostility between right and left to an unprecedented level. As the left became more radical, extremist protest organizations appeared. One was Yesh Gvul (which can be translated as “there is a limit,” “the border exists,” or “enough is enough”), which called for refusing to serve in Lebanon. Another group, Soldiers against Silence, reported to the media on harm inflicted on the Arab civilian population. Strangely enough it was the moderate Peace Now movement—whose members, as patriots, did not wish to cause a split in the army by refusing to serve in Lebanon and continued to serve there—that drew the heaviest fire from the right, probably because of its ability to recruit people. Accusations against it ranged from treason to receiving funds from Saudi Arabia.

In February 1983 the Kahan (aka Cahan) Commission, formally known as the Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut, published its report. It leveled harsh criticism against the prime minister and recommended that Sharon be dismissed as defense minister. The chief of the General Staff escaped punishment since he was about to conclude his period of duty in the post. However, Sharon had no intention of going quietly. Populist support of him soared. His supporters called on Begin to disregard the commission’s recommendations. Meanwhile Peace Now organized a rally that marched through the streets of Jerusalem to the government complex and demanded Sharon’s dismissal. The marchers, many of whom were soldiers recently returned from Lebanon, passed through a hostile mob that attacked and spat at them. The police tried to shield the marchers, but the counter-demonstrators were too

strong. One counter-demonstrator threw a grenade into the column of marchers. Emil Grunzweig, a reserve officer who had fought in Lebanon, was killed and seven others were wounded. This was the first time that a Jew had been killed in the State of Israel by another Jew because of his political beliefs. It was a grim moment for Israeli democracy.

The temperature of the public debate in Israel rose to unheard-of heights. Redlines, which in the past both camps had been careful to observe, were now crossed. Demonstrators from the left massed outside Begin's residence chanting, "Begin, Murderer!" and holding aloft placards listing the number of casualties, which increased from day to day. The Peace Now demonstrations and the counter-demonstrations by government supporters inflamed the Israeli street. Sharon resigned as minister of defense and was appointed minister without portfolio. And in the meantime the bloodshed in Lebanon continued, with seemingly no way out. The distance between the front in Lebanon and the home front seemed greater than ever. A soldier complained:

You come back. You've been dying to come home with lots of stories to tell and stories you don't want to. You cross the border and it seems that the war was in the Falklands. It finishes you. Israel's blooming. Everything's in bloom. Right after the news about what's happening in Lebanon they talk about the drop in share prices because of the war in Lebanon, and the dollar rising. And you're dying to talk to people you're certain think like you, and there's nobody to talk to.¹²

The political, ethnic, cultural, and social schisms in Israel were accentuated during Begin's second government. The public battle raged on several levels: political legitimacy, historical memory, and the appropriate future image of Israeli society. One focus of the struggle was the status of the kibbutz. The kibbutz was the crown jewel of the labor movement's social creativity. It combined a vision of equality, devotion to society, and recruitment for national missions. The values prized by the kibbutz were physical labor, a simple lifestyle, a culture of low-key restraint, and making do with little. There was no other sector in Israeli society whose values so opposed those of Begin and the culture he represented.

Begin realized that if he wished to change the narrative of the state, he would have to undermine the status of the kibbutz as the most important creation of Zionism. He leveled deadly criticism at the kibbutzim: they lived off the fat of the land, and their wealth originated in resources allocated to them by governments of the left, resources that had been kept from the development towns. As with every stereotype there was a grain of truth in this one, but no more than a grain. The kibbutzim had earned their relative financial robustness with hard work, and for many years had endured harsh conditions. However, their pastoral appear-

ance highlighted the contrast between them and the development towns and nearby ma'abarot that had been neglected and whose residents clearly sensed their seemingly modest neighbors' patronizing attitude toward them, so the prime minister's words fell on willing ears. After the 1981 election campaign, in which kibbutz members rallied to help the Alignment, Begin intensified his attacks on them, which were greeted enthusiastically by the majority of Mizrachim. In the minds of the right, the left's protests against the war were interlocked with the kibbutzim's role as bastions of the leftist elite. The fact that the number of kibbutz members among the combat troops exceeded by far their relative proportion in the population did not prevent the incitement against them.

In the fall of 1982, at the height of the Lebanon War controversy in Israel, author Amos Oz embarked on a journey through the country during which he encountered both the "old" and the "new" Israel. In Beit Shemesh, a development town where Begin's standing bordered on sainthood—"He is our father," one resident said—Oz confronted the pain and insult experienced by people who tried to maintain a traditional culture as they encountered modernity: "Why don't you ask who taught the kids, while they were still in transit camps, to make fun of their parents, to laugh at old people, to ridicule their religion and their leaders? Why don't you ask, first of all, who taught Oriental Jews that money's the most important thing in life? Why don't you ask who invented theft and fraud? Who invented the stock market? But [Kibbutz] Tzora has its image and Beit Shemesh has its image, and that's the fault of the reporters and all those mudslingers from the television, and the professors."¹³ By contrast, a veteran kibbutz member responded to such accusations thus: "Tell them not to believe the agitators. We don't have any castles of gold here, we haven't cheated anyone. They ought to know that, in general, under Begin's government we feel angrier and more insulted even than they felt under our government. Why do they make us out to be monsters? Exploiters? Patronizing? Corrupt? Traitors? . . . Do you really think they believe what Begin puts into their heads?"¹⁴

The old elites felt increasing estrangement and hostility toward the new regime. The Alignment government had been furious over how it was presented on television, but apart from complaining it did nothing to restrict freedom of speech. The same cannot be said for the Begin government. The Israel Broadcasting Authority television staff now worked under government supervision of a kind not seen in the media since the 1950s. They felt like a minority under siege. Intellectuals, media figures, and writers felt that "their" country was disappearing and being replaced by a country that was not theirs. After the War of Attrition, songwriter Ehud Manor had written "I Have No Other Country," which included the words, "I will not stay silent / Because my country has changed her face / I will not give up reminding her / And sing in her ears / Until she opens her eyes." This

song was rereleased in the 1980s and embraced as a protest against the Lebanon War. Journalist Nachum Barnea described the mass grief during Yigal Allon's funeral at Kibbutz Genossar in 1980:

I see a great deal of longing for what is known as the beautiful, sabra Israel, not Begin's mystic Israel or Ehrlich's shopkeeper Israel. The radio played Rachel and Naomi Shemer's Kinneret [Sea of Galilee] songs, and the eyes of an entire generation filled with tears. And it is all sincere and authentic, yet worrying. It is no good thing that thirty- and forty-year-olds mourn the country they live in. They are not weeping for the passing of an important figure, but for themselves, for their feeling that they had a country that was theirs and is no longer.¹⁵

In 1984 Amos Kenan published a surreal novel, *The Road to Ein Harod*, describing Israel under the dictatorial regime of a military junta that takes over the country and expels all the Arabs. The hero attempts to reach the surviving free Israel in Kibbutz Ein Harod. The novel was an expression of the left's angst in the wake of the Lebanon War.

Amos Oz's 1987 novel *Black Box* expressed the literary and poetic regret at the loss of the old sabra culture being replaced by rising Mizrahi nationalism and religiosity. It describes a triangle in which a woman shifts between two men—her first husband, a courageous military man and academic who is dying of cancer, and her second husband, a North African Jew and religious teacher who acquired a basic Hebrew and Jewish education that is displayed in the fragments of verses from which he constructs his language. The first husband, representing the Zionist left, gradually fades away, while the second, representing the new Israel, neither educated nor rooted in the local experience, remains the epitome of vitality. It is he who claims as his own the beautiful woman torn between the two, who symbolizes the country and the Israeli experience. The novel is both a lament for a disappearing world and an acceptance of the new reality, joined with a recognition of the old covenant's loss of vitality.

Another literary work mourning the loss of the old Israel is Meir Shalev's 1988 novel *The Blue Mountain*. This book, which traces the lives of several generations of members of a Jezreel Valley moshav, can be interpreted as an elegy for the Zionist dream whose loss is demonstrated, among other things, by the fact that after all the people fallen in battle and all the idealism, the moshav makes money by selling plots to Diaspora Jews wishing to be buried in the soil of the Holy Land. This novel, too, ends on a note of acceptance. Its protagonist, who shocks the entire moshav with his promiscuity, finds true love with a girl from an ultra-Orthodox family that has come to the moshav, and with it he puts down renewed

roots. But despite the novel's relatively optimistic conclusion, it is a sad book about a reality that is no more.

During 1983 Begin lost his zest and the mental fortitude required of a prime minister. He increasingly withdrew into himself, was not active in cabinet meetings, did not respond to his colleagues, and made no suggestions whatsoever. On August 28, 1983, at the weekly cabinet meeting, Begin announced his decision to resign. "I can't take it anymore," he said, without further comment. Was he in a state of depression because of how the Lebanon War had evolved? Did the casualty numbers hurled at him by the demonstrators outside his residence break his spirit? Or perhaps he was simply tired of carrying the burden of government. Begin gave no explanation. It was the end of an era.

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4. Aryeh Naor, *Begin bashilton: edut ishit* (Begin in Power: A Personal Testimony), Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 1993, pp. 182–183.
5. Dayan, *Breakthrough*, pp. 225–226.
6. Shilon, *Begin*, p. 326.
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14. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
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18 THE STALEMATE YEARS

A CHANGING ISRAELI IDENTITY, 1984–1990



When the Likud won only one seat more than the Alignment (the Labor Party and Mapam) in the 1981 elections, Begin was still able to form a coalition government, while the Alignment could not. In the 1984 elections the Alignment won three seats more than the Likud, but once again it was unable to form a government, since the Likud could muster a majority in the Knesset. In the 1988 elections the stalemate between the two major parties recurred. Throughout the 1980s the Israeli electorate refused to give either party exclusive power. There was no longer a party with a clear majority that constituted the basis of a governmental coalition. Given the election results Labor and the Likud were compelled to reach a compromise and form joint governments. From 1984 to 1990 Israel was led by national unity governments comprising the two major parties together with several satellite parties. (Mapam left the Alignment following the establishment of the first national unity government.)

The first national unity government, established in 1984, tried to create the political conditions that would enable it to withdraw Israeli forces from Lebanon (see the previous chapter) and put Israel's economic house in order. The Israeli economy's malaise had begun in 1973. The heavy security burden that followed the Yom Kippur War, coupled with the global energy crisis, arrested growth, accelerated inflation, and increased the national debt. The years between 1975 and 1985 are considered the Israeli economy's "lost decade," with no significant growth at all. In 1984 inflation soared to an annual 400 percent, the balance of payments deficit worsened, and Israel's foreign currency reserves dwindled. All the measures adopted by the various finance ministers failed to halt rising prices and devaluation of the currency. Banks had recommended that their customers purchase bank shares, and in 1983 the bank shares bubble burst. The shares lost their value overnight, and thousands of households and businesses were left destitute. Despite the trend toward liberalization and a market economy—which meant reducing government involvement in the economy—the government was forced to intervene to prevent a crash and in effect nationalized the banks.

In 1985 the government led by Shimon Peres adopted an emergency plan to stabilize the economy. Government spending was cut, employees were fired, subsidies were canceled, the rate of exchange and wages were frozen, and super-

vision was imposed on the prices of products and numerous services. The link between salaries and the cost-of-living index was temporarily frozen and the real wage value dropped. Additionally an amendment to the Bank of Israel Law prohibited the bank from extending credit lines to the government—i.e., from printing money. For the first time the Arrangement Law (also known as the Economic Policy Law) became part of the State Economy Basic Law, enabling accelerated passage of regulations and reforms in the broad framework of the stability plan. This combination of measures stabilized the currency; toward the end of the year, the rate of inflation dropped to 30 percent and continued to drop. The US administration supported these drastic measures with a special grant aimed at easing the balance of payments problem. The public reacted with understanding and restraint, which led to a slight drop in the standard of living. There was a feeling that fundamental change must come to avoid economic collapse. From then on the economy started to recover and economic growth resumed. In the framework of resumed growth, the government increased its promotion of liberalization and a market economy. The creation of easy terms for private capital investment in the economy and the beginnings of integration into the global economy created opportunities that formed the basis for renewed growth.

Hevrat Ha'ovdim, the Histadrut's economic arm, could not adapt to these economic and political changes. Since statehood the Histadrut had embraced a broadening economic policy, which involved ensuring full employment and relatively high wages, especially in the peripheral areas of the country, and non-dismissal of workers. The Histadrut economic leadership had assumed that it was carrying out a national mission and that its economic capabilities were secondary to its social tasks. This perception was fine before 1977, when the state would bail out failing Histadrut enterprises. But it did not work in an economy managed by a government unsympathetic to the Histadrut economy, which declared its intention of introducing liberalization and a capitalist economy run along lines of profit and loss, managerial efficiency, and competitiveness.

The problem was that after the about-turn, the heads of the Histadrut economy feared confrontation with the workers, most of whom were Likud supporters, and because of this political consideration they did not implement the required efficiency measures in their factories. As a result, the Histadrut economy took upon itself commitments it was unable to fulfill. Instead of closing down failing enterprises, lowering wages where necessary, and letting workers go, the Histadrut leadership transferred profits from its successful enterprises to the failing ones and engaged in financial manipulations that concealed the size of the real deficit. While inflation was at its height, these leaders managed to maneuver between the losses. But once the economy stabilized, the sheer magnitude of the Histadrut economic crisis emerged. As part of the reforms vital to encouraging

growth, the government sought to reduce the scope of the economy under public or government control. It did not extend assistance to Histadrut enterprises, since it wanted to restrict the Histadrut to being a trade union and annul its unique character, dating from the Yishuv period, as both the workers' representative and a major employer. At the end of the 1980s, the Histadrut was forced to sell off many of its enterprises and reduce its involvement in the economy.

The agricultural labor settlements went through a similar process. Many kibbutzim that had taken out loans during the inflationary period could not meet their commitments. The entire kibbutz movement was in danger of collapse. In the 1990s, hoping to improve their efficiency and adapt to the spirit of the times, numerous kibbutzim embarked on a privatization process, dividing their common property and abrogating the principle of equality within the kibbutz. From now on income and expenses were personal, not collective. Still the privatized kibbutzim continued to maintain a social safety net for their members. Collectivism disappeared from more than half of the kibbutzim, and in fact they became community settlements. The moshav movement also suffered crises, and many moshavim faced bankruptcy. The economic collapse that followed the labor movement's political failure added further to the Israeli left's feeling of despair and loss of direction. In the competition between a planned and guided economy and a free market, the collapse of the USSR at the end of the decade lent the decline of the socialist perspective a universal dimension.

The 1981 elections saw the appearance of Tami (an acronym for *Tnu'at Masoret Yisrael*, Movement for the Heritage of Israel), an ethnic Mizrahi party representing mainly Jews of Moroccan origin. Ever since statehood, ethnic parties had attempted to break in to the Israeli political arena. Here and there ethnic lists had managed to gain representation in the Knesset, but until 1981 no ethnic party succeeded in attaining real political influence. Ethnicity was considered contradictory to the national ethos because it perpetuated the division of Jews by country of origin. Zionism sought to meld people from the various diasporas into a single entity with a collective identity expressed in a national culture, symbols and rituals, and a common ethos. It saw ethnicity as a relic of the Diaspora past, counterproductive to the task of building a nation in Israel.

The basic concept was that of the melting pot: bringing all the Jewish diasporas under one cultural roof and having them all adopt the principle of progress, a nonreligious national worldview, and Hebrew language and culture. All Jews from the diasporas were called upon to shed the characteristics of their former culture and unite under the banner of the state and its symbols. An ethnic schism was clearly evident as early as the 1950s (the "second Israel," the Wadi Salib riots, the Black Panthers, recurring debates in the media and government institutions on the subject), but it was hoped that these were fleeting events that

would disappear with time. The constant increase in mixed marriages between Ashkenazim (communities of European origin; as the years passed, Jews from Bulgaria and Greece, whose origins were Sephardi, were considered Ashkenazim because they embraced European culture) and Mizrachim (communities originating in the Islamic countries) was considered by the “first Israel” as proof that the ethnic divide was narrowing. In turn the image of ethnic integration was accepted as proof that a single nation was being formed in Israel and that ethnic schisms were weakening.

One factor in the Likud’s rise to power in 1977 was the “second Israel’s” anger toward the veteran Ashkenazim. This said, the Mizrachim’s choice of the Likud could be construed as adoption of the national principle as dominant, since the Likud was a national party, not an ethnic one. But the de facto legitimacy given the ethnic schism by Begin in the 1981 election campaign, in which he accused the Alignment of insulting and discriminating against the Mizrahi communities, broke a taboo in Israeli politics. It was no longer “un-Israeli” to make ethnic claims. Tami’s breakthrough into the Knesset as an ethnic party heralded a change in the rules of the game. The fact that Tami won three seats at the expense of the NRP was an expression of the discrimination felt by the Mizrachim in the NRP. It proved that the ethnic schism was alive and kicking, more strongly than before. In contrast with the Black Panthers, who used socioeconomic slogans and had no qualms about resorting to violence, Tami’s slogan was “Stand tall!” This phrase represented not only a socioeconomic agenda but also a cultural one: restoration of the Mizrachim’s lost honor and cultural heritage. But Tami did not last long. Organizational and personal problems among its leadership led to its dissolution and absorption into the Likud.

In 1984 Tami’s place as Israel’s ethnic party was taken by Shas (an abbreviation of *Hitahdut Hasefaradim Ha’olamit Shomrei Torah*, the Worldwide Sephardi Association of Torah Guardians). Shas was formed as a coalition of city rabbis, rabbinic authorities, heads of yeshivas, and rabbis from the Mizrahi Repentance Movement, under the leadership of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who was Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel between 1973 and 1983. It was an ultra-Orthodox Mizrahi party that developed under the aegis of the Lithuanian stream of Agudat Yisrael led by Rabbi Eliezer Schach, but it swiftly took on its own character and no longer needed the patronage of that Ashkenazi party, which had discriminated against the Mizrachim, besmirched their honor, and deprived them of allocations.

“Shas stands at the center of three crossroads that divide Israeli society: religious, ethnic, and economic-class,” asserts the scholar Aviezer Ravitzky, “but at the root of all of them there are also basic factors of identity and loyalty, worldviews and beliefs, traditions and ways of thinking, and also deep tensions of diversity vs. uniformity, custom vs. book, Jewish law vs. Kabbalah, community

autonomy vs. halakhic authority, veterans and the ‘well to do’ vs. yeshiva students and ‘people strengthened in belief.’”¹ Although many Israelis tend to view Shas through a political lens as a movement that exploits its electoral power to obtain benefits for the ultra-Orthodox Mizrachi sector, the party is more thoroughly understood as part of a movement of religious awakening and rejuvenation that draws its power from the attraction of masses of Mizrachim—especially those of Moroccan origin—to popular religious tradition. Many Shas voters are not ultra-Orthodox. However, the entire Shas leadership is ultra-Orthodox, although their orthodoxy differs from that of the Ashkenazim. Many ultra-Orthodox Mizrachim serve in the army and consider themselves true Zionists. They believe that non-religious Jews have deviated from the path of true Zionism and should be returned to the fold of religion, which is identical to nationality. On the whole, many Shas voters combine ethnicity, religiosity, and nationalism with low socioeconomic class and level of education.

Nissim Leon, a researcher of ultra-Orthodox Mizrachim, believes that Shas represents a specific model of how Mizrachi Jews deal with modernity. In contrast with modernization processes in Europe, which involved a schism between “religion and life,” the modernization brought to the Middle East and North Africa by the European colonial powers—France or Britain—resulted in decreased observance of the commandments but not loss of faith or formation of a competing religious system (as the Conservative and Reform schools did in the West). Religion remained the principal marker of Jewish identity, and tradition was strictly observed. Zionism in these countries joined forces with religion in the fight against the secularization and assimilation encouraged by the colonial government.

By contrast, the Zionist State of Israel was an agent of secularization that sought to convert nationalism—as opposed to religion—into the key to identity. In the first and even the second generation after their immigration, the Mizrachim tended toward a moderate-traditional religious position: observance of their forebears’ tradition, attending the neighborhood synagogue, studying a chapter of Talmud now and again, and honoring their parents, but without zealotry. Traveling on the Sabbath, going to soccer games, attending a state-religious school, wearing Western attire, and serving in the military were all considered legitimate. Inclinations toward ultra-Orthodoxy appeared between the second and third generations after immigration, after the first generation had passed.

Both internal and external factors gave rise to this trend. Immediately after World War Two, the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael became active in the North African Jewish communities in an effort to replenish its numbers following the death of millions of Ashkenazi believers in the Holocaust. (Zionist activity there had similar motives.) At the same time, Mizrachi ultra-Orthodoxy appeared in

Palestine on the initiative of the Porat Yosef yeshiva in Jerusalem, which was founded early in the Mandatory period. Graduates of the Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox yeshivas and the Porat Yosef yeshiva made up the leadership and educational core that would eventually establish Shas. A former Porat Yosef student, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, an eminent rabbinic authority with great influence in contemporary Mizrachi communities, endowed the movement with prestigious leadership and religious authority. Thus Shas grew as a religious movement striving to curb modernization processes and the move away from tradition that the Israeli reality imposed on the Mizrachim.

The separate framework of Mizrachi ultra-Orthodoxy was created by several factors. First, as the ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi communities rehabilitated themselves after the catastrophe of the Holocaust, grew demographically, and restored their self-confidence, the contrasts between ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazim and Mizrachim became more pronounced. Fewer and fewer Mizrachim could obtain places in the leading Lithuanian yeshivas, and discrimination against them heightened in such areas as arranged marriages (they were considered suitable only for candidates with a defect), the schools, and appointments as religious judges and heads of yeshivas. They were also restricted to an inferior position in the ultra-Orthodox leadership. Although the Mizrachim provided Agudat Yisrael with its electoral power, they were not rewarded for their ability to recruit votes.

Second, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, a scion of an Iraqi family, developed the concept of restoring Mizrachi Judaism to its former glory, in the form of a demand that in Israel the prevailing version of religious laws should be that compiled by Rabbi Yosef Caro, who wrote the *Shulhan Arukh* (authoritative code of Jewish laws). This concept embodied a claim that the Sephardi version of the Halakha (and also its form of prayer) was superior to the Ashkenazi version, which in the 1950s and 1960s Mizrachi rabbis had tended to accept as universal. Ovadia's concept also demanded that the diverse versions used by immigrants from various eastern diasporas (Iraqi, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, and Tunisian) be annulled in favor of a single, unifying Sephardi/Mizrachi version. Thus Rabbi Ovadia's claim involved a confrontation not only with the Ashkenazi side of the religious fence but also with Mizrachim who observed those diverse local traditions. Rabbi Ovadia's charismatic power, his renown as a rabbinic authority, his high office as chief rabbi, and the numerous enthusiasts who saw him as the ultimate religious authority of the Mizrachi bloc combined to make him the undisputed leader of Shas.

Third, Shas met the needs of a large group of Mizrachim who sought religious experience, a mystical thrill, spiritual elation. The *Tnu'at Hateshuva* (Repentance Movement), formed under the auspices of Shas, became a broad popular move-

ment that suited a new breed of rabbis whose power lay not in religious scholarship but in renewal of the synagogue as a social center with traditional religious characteristics and community activities. The Tnu‘at Hateshuva rabbis who organized spiritual awakening and “strengthening” events for audiences of thousands appealed mainly to people’s feelings and religious imagination. They promoted popular religious beliefs—which included mystical elements supposedly connected to tradition but that were in fact a modern Israeli invention unknown in their native countries—as opposed to halakhic scholarship and modernism both. These rabbis expressed their audience’s animosity toward Israeli society’s blatant secularism, its modern achievement-oriented life that necessitated a secular education, and Israeli elites’ arrogance toward them.

In the 1984 elections Shas won four seats; in 1988 and 1992, six; ten in 1996; and seventeen in 1999. At its peak it won more seats than the other two religious parties (Agudat Yisrael and the NRP) combined. Shas’s attitude toward the Zionist state was more moderate and cautious than that of Lithuanian ultra-Orthodoxy. It chose to enter government coalitions, even in governments led by the left. It also supported the Chief Rabbinate, an Israeli state institution, which Agudat Yisrael rejected. Shas’s sympathetic attitude toward the state reflected the relatively moderate political attitude of a broad range of voters outside the ultra-Orthodox hard core, who were not strictly observant and whose worldview was nationalistic, as well as Shas’s own ability to exploit its position as the pivotal party between the two major parties in order to obtain economic and political benefits for its supporters. Unlike Agudat Yisrael, which behaved like a sect striving to protect its closed territory, Shas set out with strong missionary objectives, striving—at least in theory—to convert Israeli society in its entirety to an ultra-Orthodox one in its own image. Its participation in governments was aimed at constructing a lever for involvement in the affairs not only of its followers but also of Israeli society in general as the party worked to impose its positions on issues such as “Who Is a Jew,” religious conversion, observance of the Sabbath in public places, and so forth.

The weakening of the Israeli welfare state that followed liberalization and the transition to a free market economy gave Shas an opportunity to widen its influence. It established a network of schools, kindergartens, and charitable and welfare institutions that were funded by the public purse but run in the spirit of Shas, to heighten the religious commitment of a broad population that formed its electoral pool. Inserting itself into the opening created by the retreat of Israeli statism, Shas succeeded in recruiting a following that went far beyond the scope of ultra-Orthodox Mizrachim. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef’s motto of restoring Mizrahi Judaism to its former glory involved granting priority to Rabbi Yosef Caro’s version of religious judgment as embodied in the *Shulhan Arukh*. But the general

public perceived it in a far broader context as a demand to restore the characteristic behavior, tradition, and culture of immigrants from the Islamic countries. This response was an expression of the affront felt by numerous Mizrachim, whose memories of home and childhood had been rejected by the secular Israel, the Zionist-religious NRP, and the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael.

The tolerant, relaxed framework of traditional religiosity, which ultra-Orthodoxy found hard to accept, served as the basis of a broad missionary “campaign of awakening” aimed at bringing Shas closer to the *mithazkim*—people in outlying areas of the country who were returning to religion through the Shas Repentance Movement. A new stratum of popular religion emerged, propagated by its preachers, popular Kabbalists who seemed to call for a return to halakhic observance but actually preached a simple, unadorned religious faith at the expense of halakhic polemics. Broad popular strata of believers who had been unable to find a place in the ultra-Orthodox yeshivas, and were also disinclined to adopt the ultra-Orthodox way of life, were swept up in the waves of the Repentance Movement. Its preachers appealed to the masses, either at events attended by thousands or through videocassettes that conveyed their messages. Together with their religious message, they preached no confidence in the legal system and modern science; giped at the left-wing, veteran, nonreligious Ashkenazi elites; attacked the media that presented the positions of the old elites; and rejected in its entirety everything connected with the old Israeliness. The culture of the Repentance Movement provided Shas supporters with their own narrative, an interpretation of their own reality. The symbiosis between the Shas political system, which obtained public funding for its devotees, and the Repentance Movement, which recruited masses of voters, was the source of Shas’s electoral power.

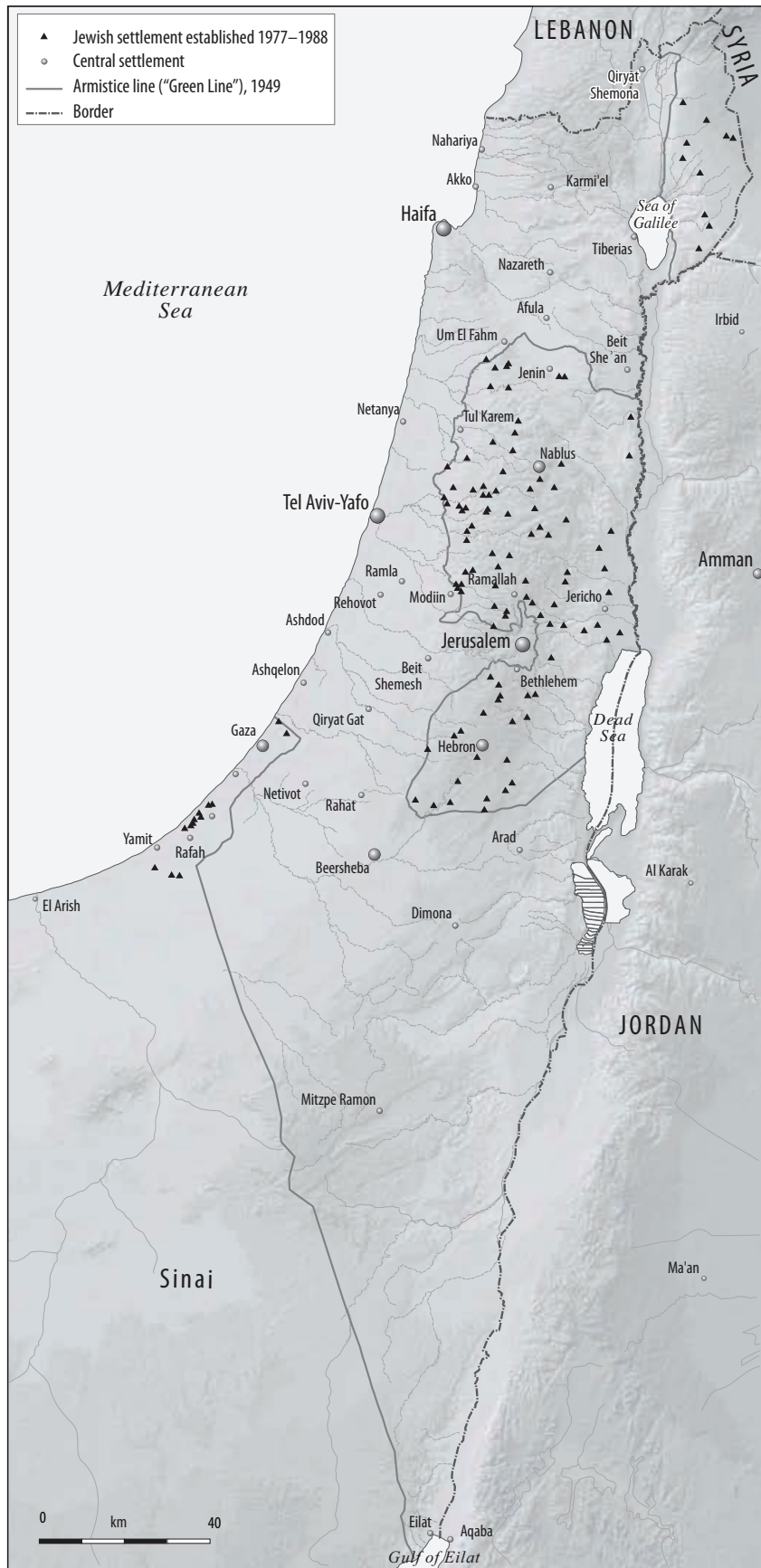
Shas represents the new identity politics that first appeared in Israeli society in 1977. Neo-Marxist researchers view the economic class divide as the main source of Shas’s potency. But for those involved in the movement, the driving force is first and foremost religious, and it is fueled by ethnicity. The appearance of Shas and its growth into Israel’s third-largest party by the end of the twentieth century is an expression of the weakening of the Israeli identity shaped by the statism and melting pot of the 1950s, and the appearance of a multicultural society. In this society a struggle is taking place between various groups that compete to shape the cultural and political agenda of the state. In the 1980s it seemed that the focus of this struggle was between the nonreligious and religious groups in Israeli society. The absence of a single leading party and the stalemate between the two major national parties left room for parties with particular interests, such as the religious parties. The struggles took place in the economic arena over how the national cake would be sliced. The nonreligious public saw the efforts of the ultra-Orthodox, including Shas, to increase budgetary allocations for their own

benefit as raiding the public purse for the sake of elements in the population who demand rights without fulfilling their duties to the state.

The secular-religious schism increasingly appeared in every issue related to the settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. During these years the settlers' messianic tendencies went through ups and downs. Whereas the core of the Yesha (the Hebrew acronym for Judea, Samaria, and Gaza) Council remained loyal to the notion of statism and continued to consider the State of Israel the most important instrument of redemption, on the margins there were signs that the council's authority was weakening. As we have seen, initially Gush Emunim was an extra-parliamentary movement whose activity deviated from established party politics, and it felt justified in imposing its own agenda on the political system by means of mass pressure and breaking the law. Seeds of trouble sprouting from the refusal to accept majority rule were inherent in the ideology of the Gush, which believed it was undertaking a national-religious mission whose importance bestowed upon it the right to act at the margins of Israeli democracy.

Starting at the end of the 1970s, an underground settler group began taking action. It started with a messianic plan to usher in redemption of the Jewish people by blowing up the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. The struggles between Jews and Muslims over ownership of the Temple Mount area sacred to both religions had begun in the Mandatory period. After it occupied the West Bank, Israel appropriated the Western Wall for the Jewish people, evacuated the inhabitants of the Mughrabi Quarter whose homes were in the adjacent alleys, and built the spacious square by the Wall where thousands congregate on Jewish festivals. Moshe Dayan left the Temple Mount area itself under the management of the Muslim *waqf* (religious endowment). Over the years religious influence over the Western Wall area increased. Originally a national-religious symbol, it became a sort of synagogue, with men and women separated, where the Rabbi of the Western Wall ensured appropriate religious observance.

As the Wall area became more Orthodox, its status as a national symbol diminished. Writer A. B. Yehoshua drew a contrast between "The Mount"—Mount Herzl, the secular Israeli national pantheon, the site of the military cemetery and resting place of Zionist thinkers such as Herzl and Jabotinsky, as well as prime ministers and presidents—and "The Wall," the focal point of the alternative, religion-based Jewish identity. This contrast is not only between religion and secularism, tradition and modernity, but also between using the past to shape an agenda for the present and engaging with the future. "The Mount" represents the Israel that strives to be part of the family of nations, whereas "The Wall" symbolizes Jewish particularism, a return to the isolation of the ghetto. Keeping in mind the enthusiasm that gripped the entire country on hearing Colonel Mordechai Gur's announcement in 1967, "Temple Mount is in our hands," the distance felt



MAP 11. SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, 1977–1988. (SEE PLATE 11.)

by secular and intellectual Israel from the Wall symbolized its disillusionment over the receding likelihood of peace, the reality of the occupation, and rising religious forces in Israeli Jewish society whose power was difficult to assess.

The existence of a national-religious group of young people who saw blowing up the Al-Aqsa mosque as “expunging the abomination,” a visionary messianic mission that would bring redemption closer, can be construed as symbolizing the distance in the Zionist camp between religious and nonreligious Jews. It is also an indication of the messianic tension in these extremist groups, which lost sight of Zionism as a political movement firmly rooted in the real world and turned it into one focused on realizing a divine plan. In 1982 Israel vacated the Yamit region in accordance with the peace treaty with Egypt. To the redemption visionaries this was the end of their world; the evacuation was proof that redemption was in retreat and that “the redeeming end” was not on the doorstep. They consequently backed off from readying the Temple Mount for the rebuilding of the Temple, which was the next step in their plan.

The plans to blow up the Temple Mount mosques did not become operational. But they nourished a group of “devotees” for whom the idea of using force to advance Jewish rule in the occupied territories had merit. Starting at the end of the 1970s, this group engaged in vigilante action whose perpetrators were never caught. These settlers believed that the National Guidance Committee of Arab mayors in Judea and Samaria was responsible for organizing resistance and terrorist activities against them and the Israeli authorities. In 1980, following an attack on settlers in Hebron that resulted in several dead and wounded, several members of the group decided to kill Arab mayors in revenge. The action was well planned and involved dozens of people, most of whom did not know exactly what they were part of. Two mayors lost their legs, and an IDF sapper who attempted to defuse an explosive device intended for a third mayor lost his sight.

Revenge actions became a recurring pattern. After the murder of a yeshiva student in Hebron, a shooting took place against students at the Hebron Islamic College that resulted in many dead and wounded. At first the Israeli authorities did not activate the General Security Service (GSS) against “the Jewish underground,” as the assassins were dubbed by the Israeli media. But after the Islamic College incident, Begin ordered the GSS to find the murderers. In 1984 the GSS exposed an “underground” plot to blow up five buses and their passengers and arrested the perpetrators in the nick of time. They were found guilty and given jail sentences.

The escalation in the activities of the “underground”—from the attack on mayors thought to be responsible for terrorist outrages, to the attack on innocent students at a college with anti-Jewish, Islamic leanings, to an attempted attack on innocent bus passengers—was sobering. Following these events the members of

the Yesha Council performed a moral stocktaking that exposed the undercurrents within it. The majority opposed the underground's actions, which they considered counterproductive for most settlers' efforts to coexist with the Palestinians without waiving the right of Jews to settle in Judea and Samaria. But others welcomed the underground's actions. They found support in the person of Rabbi Meir Kahane, who had immigrated to Israel from the United States in 1971 and was elected to the Knesset in 1984 on a ticket supporting radical religious ideology and acts of terrorism against Arabs.

Increasing religious militancy was also evident in a change in the national-religious ideology. If under governments of the left the religious parties had been content with defending substantively Jewish matters such as marital law, "Who Is a Jew," and Sabbath and kashrut observance in public places, now they insisted on becoming central partners in molding the national culture. They had had enough, they declared, of being the kashrut inspectors in the buffet car of the Zionist train. They now wanted to drive the train. The Ministry of Education, which had always been in the hands of a Labor Party minister, now became the domain of national-religious ministers. In practice this had relatively little impact on the secular curricula, but it had cardinal importance symbolically. The secularists saw the religious parties' increasing dominance of the Ministry of Education as a real threat to the secular character of state education.

Among the religious Zionists, particularly the settlers, a trend evolved of stricter observance of Jewish religious law. Bare legs, short sleeves, and joint activities by boys and girls in the national-religious Bnei Akiva youth movement gradually vanished. The "Ani Ma'amin" (I believe) was sung together with the national anthem at military ceremonies in religious IDF units. And sometimes only the religious song was sung. Sometimes female singers had to cancel performances before an audience of religious soldiers, since *Kol be'isha ervva* (a woman's voice is nakedness). Most of the heads of the Zionist *yeshivot hesder* (which, as noted, combine advanced Talmudic studies with military service) came from an ultra-Orthodox background and influenced their students to adopt more stringent religious observance. In some religious-Zionist circles there was a call to obey *da'at Torah* (opinion of the Torah, meaning the rabbis' orders) on worldly matters such as the evacuation of territories—thus blurring the separation that had existed in religious Zionism since the 1920s between the sacred, which was the rabbis' domain, and the profane, the domain of secular leaders, i.e., politicians.

The seeping of ultra-Orthodox modes into religious Zionism heightened the contrasts between religious and nonreligious Jews in the national arena. On the public level, debates were held on "the full cart" of Jewish culture. It was Rabbi Schach, the most eminent "Lithuanian" rabbinic authority, who declared that observers of the commandments had a full cart, while that of secular Jews was

empty. This assertion challenged the entire secular Jewish and Hebrew culture that had been created in the previous century. The nonreligious public felt threatened by the increasing militancy and aggressiveness of the religious sector.

The equilibrium between right and left diminished the power of the political system, since the sides neutralized each other. At the same time that extra-parliamentary activity increased through the activities of Gush Emunim and the settlers, Peace Now, and the Shas-sponsored Repentance Movement, two parallel phenomena emerged. On one hand, people grew inclined to abandon the public sphere and stay at home. This was an expression of public disenchantment with political activity and the possibility of influencing political processes in the country. It was also a consequence of the increasing effect of television, which became the Israeli "tribal bonfire." Until the 1990s Israeli television had only two or three channels. Watching television created a sort of imagined community comprising the majority of the Israeli public. Air-conditioning, which became common in Israel with the rise in the standard of living, made outdoor rallies and gatherings far less attractive than before. Meanwhile radical groups on both left and right rallied their devotees to street theater actions. Television brought every dramatic event in the street into people's homes. Extra-parliamentary and weird events acquired disproportionate importance, and the media reporting on them reinforced the public's sense that the leadership was weak, lacked credibility, and had lost control.

The vacuum created by the diminished power of the political system was filled by the judicial system, whose increasing power first became evident in the 1970s. A series of issues was decided not by the government but by the court. Notable examples were the state commissions of inquiry (the Agranat Commission after the Yom Kippur War, and the Cahan Commission after the Sabra and Shatila massacre), whose decisions were binding upon the governments because of public pressure. The Supreme Court became the citizens' recourse for complaints against the arbitrariness of the authorities, not only regarding human rights as in the 1950s but also on matters of culture and policy. It was the Supreme Court that decided to allow television broadcasts on the Sabbath eve, and that the Elon Moreh settlement was illegal and should be evacuated. During the 1980s the Supreme Court stopped automatically approving IDF and GSS petitions regarding administrative detentions and land expropriation in the occupied territories. Although they were not Israeli citizens, the Arab residents of the territories were granted the right to petition the Supreme Court. Institutions such as the IDF, the police, and the GSS lost the right to organizational autonomy and defense against legal action.

One of the turning points in the new era of judicial ascendance was the Bus No. 300 affair of 1986. It began when terrorists made a failed attempt to hijack

the bus. According to the IDF spokesman, the terrorists were killed. However, journalists on the scene reported that they had seen two terrorists being led away by security forces personnel. It later emerged that they had been interrogated and then killed by GSS interrogators. The GSS tried to cover up its involvement. Its operatives' testimony before the court was proved to be false, which undermined the judges' belief in GSS reports. When the affair was exposed, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, his deputy Shimon Peres, and Minister of Defense Rabin did not agree that GSS operatives should stand trial, as the attorney general demanded. The attorney general was consequently forced to resign. His successor agreed to accept a plea bargain in which the state president would pardon the accused before they were brought to trial.

That was the last time that the Israeli government was able to dismiss the attorney general. This particular struggle between the judicial and political systems ended with an ostensible victory by the government, but in reality the affair underscored the fact that government authorities are subject to the law, and also the primacy of the judicial over the political system. Since then the judicial system has not taken the testimony of the IDF, the GSS, and the police for granted, and these organizations are not exempt from judicial review.

The Supreme Court took up a line of judicial activism that ran counter to previous custom in the Israeli justice system. Until the 1980s the Supreme Court considered itself authorized to interpret laws in the framework of legal precedents while remaining loyal to the letter of the law. After that it began adopting an interpretation nourished by what the judges felt were normative values in Israel as a Jewish democratic state, as set out in the Declaration of Independence. It was a shift from judicial formalism to activism: the Supreme Court sought to participate in shaping the character and values of the state. "It is extremely doubtful that there is another judicial institution in the world, with the exception of the Supreme Court of the United States, whose activism and involvement in matters of policy is so great," asserted jurist Amnon Rubinstein.² One manifestation of this judicial activism was to extend the scope of *locus standi*, the right of a citizen or body to plead before the Supreme Court. In the past this right had been granted only to those with an interest in or a direct connection with the petition. Now any matter of public interest could be brought before the Supreme Court by any citizen—which meant that the court could review the executive and even the legislative branch. "Everything is justiciable," stated Justice Aharon Barak, president of the Supreme Court from 1995 to 2006.

This change was clearly influenced by the American justice system. In the early years of the Israeli state, judges came from a continental legal tradition. Now the source of influence was the United States, where many Israeli jurists studied law. The American justice system views the state warily and seeks to restrict its power,

while encouraging individualism at the expense of commitment to the community. The Israeli Supreme Court promoted a similar liberal agenda, whose judicial manifestation was the enactment of two basic laws in 1992: Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty and Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation. Since statehood it had been commonly agreed that instead of a constitution, which stood no chance of being passed, the Knesset would enact a series of basic laws. These laws would have higher status than regular legislation (although this has never been categorically stated) and could only be annulled by a plurality in the Knesset. The Knesset passed these two basic laws a few days before the 1992 elections, almost without public debate. They form the basis of the “legislative revolution” in Israel that was promoted by Justice Barak in the 1990s.

The two basic laws constitute the Israeli “declaration of human rights.” Before they were enacted, basic liberties were protected by the Declaration of Independence, whose legal status is unclear. After their passage these two basic laws became the foundation of justice. Standing above the Knesset’s regular legislation, they grant the Supreme Court the right to annul a law passed by the Knesset if that law infringes equality or individual liberties and rights, according to Justice Barak’s interpretation.

These laws also include the definition of Israel as “a Jewish and democratic state” in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence. These two elements, representing the essence of the State of Israel, were the subject of stormy controversy centering on the balance between them. Justice Barak defined the Jewish character of the state in Zionist terms: the Law of Return, the national anthem, the flag and emblem, the Hebrew language and culture, the Jewish calendar, and the Jewish festivals. Defining Jewish character in these terms was appropriate to the secular perception of the Jewish character of the state, but incompatible with the religious circles’ perception of Judaism, which demanded deepening the state’s Jewish character through halakhic law and tradition. In addition the Israeli Palestinians (as the Arabs of Israel now tended to call themselves), as well as Jewish post-Zionist groups (discussed later), contended that there was an essential contradiction between the character of Israel as a democratic state and its character as a Jewish state, which manifested itself in preferential treatment of Jews—the Law of Return, for example. This issue is still on Israel’s agenda (discussed later).

The increased power of the judicial branch resulted from diminished faith in the political system. Greater judicial power was frequently promoted by the media, which had also become increasingly militant. Investigative journalism scrutinizing the government developed mainly in the 1980s as awe of the authorities gradually dissipated. A new generation of young journalists emerged who were loyal to neither left nor right, but only to freedom of the press and their own

professional advancement. They had a soft spot for the judicial branch, which shielded them from the politicians, and accepted the power of the Supreme Court as both desirable and appropriate. The old party press, which usually expressed its owners' political positions, could barely survive with the advent of economic liberalism. One by one the party newspapers faded, closed, and were replaced by electronic media and local newspapers. The local papers were shallower and had no commitment to national values. What interested them above all was their own media and economic success. Only *Ha'aretz* remained as a privately owned independent paper promoting a patently liberal agenda. There were also two evening papers, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv*. All three, especially *Ha'aretz*, gave unqualified support to the judicial system.

Judicial activism and support by television and the press for liberal trends reflected, among other things, the decline of the republican ethos that had characterized Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, and the rise of a Western liberal, mainly American, ethos. In the republican ethos the citizen has both obligations and rights. It emphasizes the collective, not the individual; public interest, not individual rights. The first Israeli identity was grounded in this ethos. Events as early as the 1950s heralded the decline of collectivist values and the rise of individualism. However, the zeitgeist was still influenced by World War Two and the Cold War, and nationalist winds still blew in the West. In Israel patriotism held great power to shape people's character. Tension over security and the existential anxiety that remained as its near-constant echo in Israeli society slowed the casting off of commitment to the public interest. Thus the population remained willing to enlist in the army and share the burden of reserve duty.

Only after the Six-Day War did fresh winds begin blowing that undermined the ideology of "the besieged and the just," in the words of poet Chaim Gouri, and raised doubts about the justness of the Zionist enterprise. Begin's rise to power, economic liberalism, consumer culture, and the rise in the standard of living shattered the pillars of the old ethos. New elites, both religious and nonreligious, who had never accepted the republican ethos and preferred a religious-Jewish ethos (on one hand) or a liberal-Western one (on the other), now came to the fore. From right and left emerged forces that sought to shape a different Israeli identity. The ultra-Orthodox, the national-religious, the Shas Mizrachim, the liberal intellectuals all strove to ensure their role in shaping the public sphere in Israel and formulating the national agenda. The multiculturalism that grew out of these struggles seemed not only an inevitable fact, part of reality, but also an ideal. In the context of the current diversity, the old Israeli identity seemed too uniform, as though dictated from above and suppressing other forms of identity.

Although the old elites had lost political control, and their role in creating the national ethos was in decline, they still dominated the economy, the army, higher

education, the media, and the judicial system. Yet loss of status, frightening images embodied by political adversaries, concern over the rise of the power of masses influenced by nationalist and religious worldviews all combined in a fear that democracy would be lost in Israel. In the opinion of scholar Menachem Mautner, the 1980s were characterized by anxiety among liberals (that is, the old elites) about an assault by the antidemocratic right on the centers of power in Israeli society. These liberals saw the Supreme Court in particular and the judicial system in general as the defenders of Israeli democracy, the last bastion protecting the character of Israel as a democratic state. Therefore they did not protest against the Supreme Court's judicial activism impairing the Knesset's status as the legislative branch and the executive's autonomy, but supported the judicial system in all its confrontations with the government. The representatives of the ultra-Orthodox and Shas had good reason to complain that the Supreme Court's insistence on equality prevented them from exploiting their political power to obtain economic benefits for their supporters. The court presented itself as an institution anchored in Israel's basic values, which was navigating the state through the populist trends in the Knesset.

Like other intellectual vogues, postmodernism was imported into Israel from the United States in the late 1980s. The concept that there were no hierarchies of either values or culture appealed to those who felt that the old Israeli culture prevented them from giving expression to their memories of home, language, customs, and lifestyle that over the years had been cloaked in a haze of nostalgic romanticism. Multiculturalism combined well with postmodernism. Postmodernism held that there was no cultural canon, and popular and high culture had equal value. Good and evil, sublime and lowly, truth and lies, beautiful and ugly were all relative; such judgments derived from particular value systems and did not represent universal truths. This concept not only fit well with multiculturalism but also with television's increased status as a mold of national culture.

The history of Mizrahi songs and music demonstrates the changes that took place in the Israeli identity. Until the 1980s radio and television were dominated by Land of Israel songs and Hebrew nostalgia. Mizrahi performing artists, who had been shunted away from the center of Israeli culture to the margins of the markets where their cassettes were sold, protested their exclusion in vain; the Israeli media programmers did not provide them with a stage. But now, with the rise of Mizrahi political power, greater public awareness of past discrimination against Mizrachim, and the new openness to extra-Western cultures, Mizrahi music—especially pop music, a mixture of East and West, now defined as “Mediterranean-style music”—conquered the discos, the wedding halls, and, finally, television and radio.

At the same time, the Mizrachim demanded that their cultural tradition be

made part of the historical narrative of the Jewish people, and also of Zionism. The Ministry of Education and the universities rose to the challenge. Initially they made only token attempts, but slowly researchers and studies began appearing that engaged with these issues, and chapters of Jewish history that had previously not been appropriately represented were now unearthed and included in the national narrative. At the same time, the feminist revolution took place in the United States and rapidly reached Israel. Here, too, multiculturalism offered an advantage. Amid the continued existence of patriarchal societies, such as the Arab society and parts of the Jewish one, the women of Israel began demanding their rightful place in the economy and the cultural sphere. The increasing number of women entering the labor market—since increasing the standard of living required that both husband and wife go out to work—and the rise in the standard of education, which opened new types of employment to women, led to changes in family relations and relations between the sexes. In this regard Israel was no different from other Western countries.

A phenomenon that occurred toward the end of the 1980s and reached its peak in the 1990s was the appearance of post-Zionism and the “new historians,” young scholars researching the War of Independence and the early years of the state. Their studies were based on documents pertaining to these years, which were now being released by the Israeli state archives. These scholars, each from a different point of view, challenged the Zionist narrative of the War of Independence and the establishment of the state, emphasizing the catastrophe that had befallen the Arabs of Israel—the Nakba. Some of these studies were significant, and with time their findings were integrated into the new insights on the Israeli past. However, this historical debate was characterized by a tone of sanctimoniousness and rage: “We were misled, they sold us a tissue of lies. The establishment of the State of Israel was grounded in original sin committed against the Palestinians.” These moralizing scholars stressed one segment of the reality and ignored others.

The appearance of the new historians coincided with the appearance of post-modernist thought that challenged the claim of historical writing to be a discipline seeking to get as close as possible to the truth. The translators of postmodernism into Israeli terms were the post-Zionists, who saw writing history as a “narrative,” i.e., a narrative pattern that adapts itself to its consumers and to the present. Every nation, every social group has its own narrative. Therefore there is no Zionist “history” but rather a Zionist “narrative” that bases the righteousness of Zionism on the spirit of the old labor movement ethos, while ignoring the injustice that the fulfillment of Zionism imposed on the Arabs, the Mizrachim, Holocaust survivors, women, and so on and so forth.

Some post-Zionists wanted Israel to discard its “Zionist” character—in other

words, to stop giving preferential treatment to Jews, to be a democratic country like any other, and to stop discriminating against its Arab citizens, who feel like poor relations or second-class citizens in the “Jewish and democratic” state. They contended that the Zionist era had come to an end, and the time had arrived for Israel to become “a state of all its citizens.” Hidden beneath this slogan was the demand that Israel turn away from Europe to the Middle East, sever its special relationship with world Jewry, and abrogate the Law of Return. On the symbolic level this meant changing the national anthem—whose words refer solely to Jews—the flag, and perhaps at a later stage, also the name of the state, since that clearly connects it to the Jewish people.

Other post-Zionists asserted that the whole idea of a Jewish nation-state—or any nation-state—is obsolete, given the supranational trends of the European Union and the trends toward globalization throughout the world. They contended that a Jewish nation-state contravenes Jewish history, since by their very nature the Jewish people are a diaspora people, and the Zionist enterprise perverts their character. Some even claimed that there was no such thing as the Jewish people; there was only a Jewish religion, and Jewish nationality was a modern invention of Zionism. Others highlighted the injustice Zionism caused the Mizrahi Jews, asserting that bringing them to Israel destroyed their Diaspora communities, undermined their patriarchal family structure and cultural tradition, and turned the Mizrachim in Israel into hewers of wood and drawers of water. There were even those who claimed that the Mizrahi Jews were Arabs of the Jewish faith who were uprooted from their own land by Zionism.

Feminists asserted that Zionism suppressed women’s contribution to the national culture, prevented them from being heard, and even sentenced them to a hard fate in a foreign land. Still others claimed that the State of Israel did not do enough to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust and that, until the Eichmann trial in 1961, Israeli culture had not given the Holocaust its appropriate place in the national narrative. The parade of those deprived by Zionism became never-ending. Anyone who felt unfortunate, or victimized by the circumstances of life, swiftly presented his or her wretchedness as the result of discrimination originating in Zionism. “Zionism” became the universal punching bag for all the injustices against individuals and groups alike brought about by modernity, emigration, nationalism, or simply the changing times.

These challenges to Israeli nationality were laid down from the right by Jewish ultra-Orthodoxy, and from the left by universalism supported by liberalism and individualism. But these two extremes encompassed only a minority of the Israeli people. Most Israeli Jews took their Israeli nationality for granted and did not feel that it contradicted the secondary identities within it. A person could be Israeli and national-religious, a Shas voter, a liberal supporter of the Supreme Court, or

any other type of democrat. In public opinion surveys conducted between 1970 and 1990, the vast majority of respondents defined their principal needs as spending time with their family and feeling proud of having a state. Even though the majority said they were nonreligious, the traditional patterns of family life—celebrating the festivals together, Sabbath eve dinner, and rites of passage—continued to construct the Israeli family and create a conservative social pattern. While the importance people ascribed to the needs of the collective at the beginning of the period diminished at its end in favor of personal needs, these two elements—family and nationality—continued to occupy first place on Israelis' list of priorities.

During this period the average Israeli enjoyed three additional years of study and more than an hour of extra leisure time a day, indicating a rise in the standard of living. The lion's share of the extra leisure time was taken up by television, which as we have seen—for better or worse—became the great socialization agent. Israelis ranked hikes in the country as their favorite leisure activity, while young Israelis tended to go on long trips to the Far East or South America after completing their military service. Foreign travel became a sort of Israeli rite of passage, now that it was available. If Petra was the romantic ideal of intrepid youngsters in the 1950s, in the 1980s it was replaced by treks in South America.

Some veteran writers described the decline of the republican ethos with joy, others with something akin to *Schadenfreude*. Ya'akov Shabtai's 1977 novel *Past Continuous* is in essence a grotesque gravestone for the old dogmatic socialist culture, and the reader has difficulty telling whether the author regrets or is happy for its loss. Yehoshua Kenaz's books reflect the transition from nationalist-collectivist values, which often created unendurable pressure on the individual (*Infiltration*), to the postmodernist society in which anything goes, values decay, and a perplexed older generation watches an alien, meaningless reality (*Returning Lost Loves*). As the previous chapter showed, the books of Amoz Oz and Meir Shalev address the loss of the old ethos with painful resignation.

Other writers brought to life corners of Israeli reality, and even Jewish Diaspora reality, that had not previously been illuminated. David Grossman gave a different voice to the memory of the Holocaust and also to the new immigrants who rebuilt their homes in Israel (*See Under: Love, The Book of Intimate Grammar*). Aharon Appelfeld returned to the scenes of his childhood in World War Two Europe and depicted the inner world of a survivor who had never freed himself of that world. Haim Be'er portrayed a childhood in ultra-Orthodox Jerusalem (*Feathers*) and later the confrontation between the religious and secular worlds of 1950s Israel (*Et Hazamir [A time for trimming]*). Writers began to appear whose description of their Israeliness centered on the psychological and cultural worlds of women immigrants from the Islamic countries. Ronit Matalon and Dorit Rabin-

yan described the new Israeliness that does not grieve the passing of the old ethos, but anchors itself in the multiculturalism of the new Israel and gives it both expression and legitimacy.

THE INTIFADA

On December 8, 1987, a truck driver caused a fatal accident in the Gaza Strip. Four people were killed and many injured. The driver was an Israeli Jew and the victims were Palestinian. Within hours a rumor spread throughout the Strip that the driver was a relative of a young Israeli who had been killed by Palestinians a few days previously, and the “accident” was intentional revenge. The rumor had no basis in fact, but it caught like wildfire. Mass rioting on a previously unknown scale erupted in the Gaza Strip. The rioters did not flinch from confrontation with Israeli security forces and ignored a curfew order. The riots quickly consumed the Gaza Strip and within days the West Bank was also inflamed. Thus the Intifada (Ar., literally “shaking off”) began.

As in previous instances of spontaneous mass outbursts, the Israeli authorities were taken completely by surprise. Even the PLO leadership in Tunisia was caught off guard. But in retrospect it appears that the Intifada was an eruption foreordained. As we have seen, the first years after the Six-Day War were those of Moshe Dayan’s “enlightened occupation.” The Palestinians, stunned by the defeat and occupation, were surprised by the Israelis’ tolerant attitude toward them, which counteracted the fears fed by horrific anti-Israeli propaganda. The open bridges made possible continued economic activity in the West Bank, and even allowed people loyal to King Hussein to continue receiving Jordanian support. Israeli tourism in the occupied territories, as well as the employment of tens of thousands of Palestinians in “Little Israel” (the western side of the Green Line border), channeled money into the territories and raised the standard of living there.

But this prosperity came to an end. The global energy crisis in the early 1970s and the difficulties experienced by the Israeli economy between 1975 and 1985 led to an economic slowdown in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Employment in Israel decreased relative to the previous decade. The early 1980s saw a drop in world oil prices, and many Palestinians who made their livelihood in the Gulf states stopped sending money to their families. Emigration from the West Bank, which in the 1970s had limited demographic increase, dropped drastically because there was less demand for workers in the oil-producing countries. Thus a situation was created combining population growth (also as a result of the improved health care system) with reduced income and employment.

Israel did not invest in economic development in the territories and blocked attempts to develop local industry for fear of competition with Israeli-made

goods. Israel treated the territories as a closed economy that had to cover its spending with its income. Nor did it invest the taxes it collected for trading permits, work, income, and so on for the benefit of the territories' inhabitants. At the same time that the Israeli standard of living fell in the early 1980s, Jordan enjoyed economic growth, and the people of the territories compared their situation with the higher standard of living across the river. Starting in 1967 seven Arab universities were established in Judea and Samaria that became centers of ideological agitation fomented by the intellectual leadership against the leadership of the notables. A class of young, educated, middle-class people emerged who were unable to find work commensurate with their education and were forced into inferior employment in Israel—yet another cause of bitterness.

The encounter between the Palestinians from the territories and the Israelis engendered neither liking nor admiration. On the contrary, it heightened anger and hatred, which sought an outlet. At checkpoints, the bridges, and major crossroads, the Palestinians faced soldiers who humiliated them with security checks, which they found insulting, and with their manner of address, which included taunts and curses. Officials from the Israeli civil administration (which replaced military government) would send Palestinians back and forth to get licenses and permits for anything they needed to do. And on top of all this, the settlers behaved in a domineering way and exacted collective punishment every time individuals threw stones or Molotov cocktails. The army tried to stop the settlers' vigilante actions, but the settlers responded arrogantly, even publicly insulting senior officers and disregarding their orders.

The Palestinians watched and learned. Those who worked in Israel had hard, low-paid jobs in construction or dish washing in restaurants. The average employer's attitude toward them was a mixture of arrogance and disdain. There were of course employers who behaved differently, but such was the general picture painted by the testimonies of workers who later became Intifada activists. The Palestinians learned to speak Hebrew, but their acquaintance with the Israelis bred hostility, pent-up rage, and hatred.

The increasing nationalist tension resulting from constant friction with Israelis and the sense of insult and oppression, combined with the economic crisis, created what scholar Gad Gilbar termed "the double deprivation syndrome." Until the early 1980s Israeli policy makers took care to avoid a situation in which nationalist frustration was linked to economic hardship. Yet the Israeli governments of the 1980s did not take measures to prevent this explosive situation from developing. The hardships of a broad spectrum of the population in the Gaza Strip, where sources of livelihood were scant and dependence on work in Israel absolute, were the fuse that ignited the conflagration.

Anyone paying attention to the events on the ground could have predicted the

outcome. In the year before the outbreak of the Intifada, breaches of the peace rose by 100 percent compared with the previous year. Many acts of terrorism that year were perpetrated spontaneously by young people without backing from any organization—a reflection of the undercurrents of agitation. When the 1987 rioting broke out, the authorities estimated that it would abate within a few days. For the first ten days of the Intifada, Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin, who was on a visit to Washington and the American Jewish communities, did not return home, at first because he thought there was no urgent need and later because he feared his return would be construed as a victory for the demonstrators. It also took the PLO leadership ten days to realize that what was happening in the territories was a popular uprising that gained momentum by the day.

In those first days the army's response was hesitant. For one thing, its available forces in the territories were very small; until then the Israeli authorities had not needed shows of force in order to rule. For another, they were confronting a new and completely unfamiliar phenomenon: massed demonstrators who had overcome the psychological barrier of fear of the troops, were undeterred by soldiers firing into the air, risked physical injury in clashes, and destroyed installations, telephone lines, and any sign of Israeli rule. The army had no real experience of confrontations with a civilian population. At the beginning women and children were the soldiers of the Intifada, and the stone and Molotov cocktail were the main weapons. The IDF stocks held very few smoke and tear gas grenades, and large quantities had to be urgently ordered from the United States. The army's irresolute response fanned the flames of the demonstrators' passion and self-confidence.

The dominant force in the Gaza Strip, where the rioting broke out, was not the PLO but a new player— Hamas. Hamas was the Palestinian wing of the militant Muslim Brotherhood, which had originated in Egypt and aspired to establish a great Islamic state. Hamas asserted that the rule of all the infidels, Jews and Christians alike, was doomed to extinction. When the day came, rule over all of Palestine would be transferred to the Muslims, and the Jews would be expunged. The Hamas worldview saw no place for Israel in the Middle East, and its propaganda was replete with antisemitic messages. Nevertheless Hamas received support from Israel, which viewed it as an actor in the Palestinian arena that would weaken the PLO-led secular national movement, which to the Israeli policy makers appeared far more dangerous.

Hamas, led by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, avoided terrorist action and devoted its efforts to educating the Palestinian population in the spirit of Islam, to returning young Palestinians attracted by Israeli permissiveness to the religious fold, and to establishing charitable and welfare institutions to provide education and health services. Hamas emphasized integrity and avoiding corruption—a model

the PLO certainly did not follow—as well as avoiding drugs and alcohol. It succeeded in establishing a range of welfare institutions in the Gaza Strip (and to a lesser extent in the West Bank) on which its clients came to be dependent. The Islamic message of an ascetic, egalitarian state that promised redemption found receptive ears in the refugee camps and the poor neighborhoods on the outskirts of the cities, whose inhabitants' lives held no glimmer of hope. Even before the outbreak of the Intifada, Hamas had proved its power in the Strip with a takeover of the Islamic Al-Azhar University, Gaza's institution of higher education. A struggle for the university between Hamas and the PLO ended in a Hamas victory, and although the new administration was not recognized by Israel, the university continued to expand.

Thus Hamas had the benefit not only of mass support from the poorer sections of the population, but also of a cadre of Islamic intelligentsia that served it well in its battle for Palestinian public opinion. Hamas took over the Gaza Strip's *waqf*, which provided the organization with both financial leverage and an instrument of social influence. When the riots broke out, the flags raised in the Gaza Strip were not those of the PLO but the green flags of Islam. The activists in the field convinced Sheikh Yassin that Hamas policy must be changed. The jihad (holy war) to exterminate Israel should not be postponed until after the Islamic nation was fully indoctrinated, as Hamas policy before the Intifada dictated; instead immediate action should be taken. In the Intifada Hamas proved that its terrorist and fighting abilities were on a par with the PLO's, while it used a mixture of nationalist and Islamic slogans. Hamas became a serious rival to the PLO for leadership of the Palestinian national movement.

The Intifada leadership (Unified National Leadership of the Uprising—UNLU) established in the West Bank consisted of unknown young people who took command after the traditional leadership had either been arrested or ceased to act. They were educated people who had grown up under Israeli occupation and were acquainted with the limitations of Israeli military and civil capabilities. These young people attempted to promote civil disobedience through refusing to pay taxes or to accept Israeli civil administration permits or services. But such action proved too difficult for the Palestinian public, and the initiative failed. The rise of this local leadership threatened the status of the PLO leadership in Tunisia. The PLO swiftly took the young people under its authority to protect its position as the exclusive leader of the Palestinian movement. The young people needed both its legitimacy and the funds it provided, and they accepted Arafat's authority as the symbol of Palestinian nationalism.

The Intifada was also a social struggle waged by the proletariat, the inhabitants of the refugee camps and the tin shack neighborhoods, against the emerging Palestinian middle class. The proletariat imposed commercial strikes on the

merchant class and prohibited marketing goods to Israel or purchasing goods from it. The Palestinians stopped working in Israel. This increased economic hardship but assured the Intifada plenty of demonstrators.

In the Intifada's first months the Palestinians avoided using firearms against IDF troops. Although there were numerous attempts to snatch weapons from soldiers, it was only at a later stage that the Palestinians began shooting. As we have seen, the Intifada was mainly a battle fought with stones and Molotov cocktails. This had a strong effect on world public opinion, which saw stone-throwing youths facing well-armed soldiers. The international media depicted Israel as Goliath assailing the Palestinian David. In its first eighteen months the Intifada restored the Palestinians to the Western world's awareness. They were carried on waves of sympathy, and the coverage did damage to Israel's international image.

In the later stage of the Intifada, the conflicts within Palestinian society emerged and the united front deteriorated. Violence perpetrated within Palestinian society against collaborators with Israel—which was also an opportunity for settling personal scores—impaired national unity, just as it had during the Arab Revolt in the Mandatory period. Acts of terrorism began, injuring the movement's international standing. The fact that Arafat did not condemn these acts, even though he had undertaken to stop them as a condition for the dialogue he conducted with the United States starting in 1988, led to the end of that dialogue. The biggest Palestinian mistake of all was to support Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait. What is more, the Palestinian community in Kuwait also supported Saddam and collaborated with him. As a result, some 350,000 Palestinians were expelled from the Gulf states, leaving only 20,000 there. This catastrophe erased the achievements of the Intifada in world public opinion (discussed later).

Israeli right-wing circles, including some Likud ministers, assumed that the popular uprising could be subdued by force—and if moderate amounts of force did not work, greater force was called for. But the IDF high command was aware that both Israeli public opinion and Israeli law imposed restrictions on the army's actions. The IDF could not open fire on a demonstration by women and children; that was immoral and illegal and would contravene everything the army stood for. For the first time in its history, the IDF found itself accused by the political leadership of not carrying out the mission it had been ordered to execute. What was more, for the settlers the army's cautious approach reflected the political views of the IDF's senior officers, who were affiliated with the Alignment. Chief of the General Staff Dan Shomron said it was impossible to subdue the rioting without brutal action against civilians—which the IDF would not engage in—and that the solution must be a political one. The settlers construed this as a call for a political arrangement that would require territorial compromise, or some other arrangement in the territories that they would find unaccept-

able. The settlers, whose travel on the roads of Judea and Samaria made them easy targets for the terrorists, demanded that the army provide them with total security, something the IDF had never promised the citizens of Israel.

The army deployed thousands of troops in the territories. The occupation was no longer inexpensive, as it had been while the forces there were limited. Now, instead of training for the next war, the entire army scurried from house to house in the Arab towns and villages trying to catch stone-throwing children. The orders against the use of firearms required a different tactic, and the army began to use batons. Minister of Defense Rabin was supposed to have said, "Break their bones." It is doubtful that Rabin actually uttered these words, but that was how the troops—frustrated by incessant chasing after Molotov cocktail, stone-throwing Palestinians—understood the use of batons. The television images were difficult to watch. American Jews who saw them were shocked by the sight of soldiers brutalizing Palestinians and began raising doubts about Israel's conduct. Shomron demanded that the IDF stop these brutal acts. In the end Israel would have to live together with the Palestinians and must take care to avoid hatred. For the same reason he did his best to avoid collective punishment. But increasing violence called for a more stringent response. The harshest punishments were demolition of homes and expulsion of Palestinian activists from the country.

The IDF was caught between a rock and a hard place. The settlers and their sympathizers accused it of failing to quell the Intifada; these accusations opened the door to formation of private militias in the territories. Organizations on the radical left such as Yesh Gvul, which called on soldiers to refuse to serve in the territories, accused the IDF of losing its human and ethical bearings. These attitudes toward the IDF reflected the schism that had developed in Israeli society over the occupation and the territories.

The Intifada was not restricted to the territories outside the Green Line. Proudly and anxiously the Arabs of Israel watched the uprising of their brethren in the occupied territories and its suppression by Israel. In December 1987 the Committee of Arab Mayors in Israel, a sort of umbrella organization of Israeli Arabs, organized "Peace Day," during which a general strike in the Arab sector showed its solidarity with the Palestinians over the border. Israeli Arabs also printed posters that the Intifada leadership in the West Bank could not print lest the printing press be discovered by the GSS. When Israel confiscated the bank accounts of associations in the territories that transferred PLO funds, Israeli Arabs transferred money to the Intifada leadership through their own accounts in Israeli banks. In densely Arab-populated areas, such as the Galilee or the Little Triangle, stones and Molotov cocktails were thrown at cars. PLO flags were flown openly in the villages. A Nazareth police station was attacked in full daylight. On several occasions the intercity highway that passed through the Arab-populated

area of Wadi ‘Ara was blocked by local residents. These violent incidents and demonstrations occurred in the first three months of the Intifada. The leaders of the Arab community in Israel then condemned the violence and acted quickly to restore calm.

The Israeli Arabs’ defiance was a protest encompassing two issues: the ongoing occupation and lack of recognition of Palestinian identity, and discrimination against them. This discrimination took the form of low budgetary allocations to the Arab local councils, compared with those given Jewish councils, the low standard of education, and the lack of educational and recreational facilities. The exclusion of Arabs from Israeli government jobs and the lack of channels for their voices to be heard regarding national issues heightened their sense of alienation from the state. Nationalist feelings strengthened as the population of Israeli Palestinians increased. At the end of 1987 they numbered 750,000 (including 130,000 in East Jerusalem), approximately 17 percent of the population. Demographic growth increased their self-confidence, and contact with the West Bank Palestinians sharpened their sense of identity and national pride. However, for Israeli Palestinians it was enough to express solidarity with their brethren. They did not accept the aspiration of the Sons of the Village, a radical, extra-parliamentary movement, to bring the Intifada into Israeli territory.

However, the geographic concentration of the Israeli Arabs in two areas where they constituted the majority and had their own national leadership, coupled with the antagonistic behavior of some toward the Jewish majority, created suspicion among that majority that they intended to demand that their areas be annexed to a Palestinian entity in the West Bank.

Before the outbreak of the Intifada, the right felt that the status quo could be maintained; settlement building could continue without granting representation to the Palestinians. At the same time, the left believed that the solution was to return the territories to King Hussein, with territorial adjustments based on security needs, while keeping Jerusalem for Israel. For a time both sides saw no problem in maintaining the status quo. But the Intifada proved that there was no longer such a thing as an inexpensive occupation and that the status quo could not be maintained, since the Palestinians would no longer accept repression and the loss of their land, water, and self-respect. Repression was too expensive, costing Israel not only money and loss of life, but also serious damage to its international standing.

The radicalization of young people in the West Bank during the Intifada, plus the Islamization of the Palestinian proletariat, alarmed King Hussein, who saw a prospect of uprising crossing the River Jordan into his own kingdom. In 1987 he had signed the London Agreement with Foreign Minister Peres, which proposed an international conference aimed at opening the way to “the Jordanian option,”

an agreement between Israel and Jordan on the fate of the Palestinians. But Prime Minister Shamir, adhering to the principle of Greater Israel, rejected this agreement. About a year later King Hussein announced a disengagement from the western bank of the River Jordan. On July 31, 1988, he relinquished the West Bank, abrogating its connection to the Hashemite Kingdom, thus pulling the rug out from under the Alignment and its proposals for territorial compromise with Jordan.

With Hussein's disengagement, and Israel's refusal to recognize the Palestinians as partners to a discussion on their future, Israel was now left face to face with them, lacking the Jordanians as another partner with which to negotiate. Three months later, in November 1988, Arafat declared Palestinian independence, and King Hussein recognized the virtual Palestinian state. The PLO announced that it accepted UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which recognized the Palestinians' right to self-determination and their right to a state side by side with Israel, as the basis for its participation in an international conference to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. The PLO's acceptance of the UN resolutions and its announcement that it would renounce terror opened the door to a dialogue between it and the United States. This indirect PLO recognition of Israel's right to exist side by side with a Palestinian state was an expression of the "stages theory" developed by the PLO: at this point, for pragmatic reasons, it was able to accept Israel's existence without abandoning the distant vision of Greater Palestine. This maximalist outlook led many Israelis to view the PLO with suspicion. For their part Palestinians suspected that the stages theory would eventually lead to acceptance of what to them was only a partial achievement—a state in part of Palestine and abandonment of the ultimate objective. In this respect there was a certain similarity between Israeli and Palestinian thinking. Both sides wanted the whole country. Given the reality, both were prepared to accept less, but without relinquishing their great vision.

After the mid-1980s the demographic problem became more acute due to the drastic reduction in Palestinian immigration to the Gulf states. The need to safeguard the character of Israel as a Jewish state over the long term clashed with the Greater Israel vision. Some right-wing circles began proposing the "transfer" idea—deportation of Arabs—but this idea was entirely unacceptable to the great majority and lacked mainstream support. Israel therefore faced two choices: grant Israeli citizenship to all Palestinian Arabs, which within twenty years would make the Jews a minority in their homeland, or return to the partition solution and establishment of two states in the historical Land of Israel. The late 1980s and early 1990s were years of reformulating Israel's political priorities.

NOTES

1. Aviezer Ravitzky (ed.), *Shas: hebetim tarbutim vera'ayoniim* (Shas: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives), Am Oved and the Yitzhak Rabin Center, Tel Aviv, 2006, p. 9.
2. Amnon Rubinstein, "Hamishpatizatzia shel Yisrael" (The Judicialization of Israel), *Ha'aretz*, 5.6.1987, cited in Menachem Mautner, "Shnot hashmonim—shnot haharada" (The 1980s—The Anxiety Years), *Iyunei mishpat* (Legal Studies) 2, 2 (November 2002), p. 653.

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