Discussion

It is no fairy tale—Israel at 50

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Abstract

This article suggests that Israel, just celebrating its jubilee, represents the success of the Zionist revolution: casting Jewish national identity in the mold of Hebrew culture. The article discusses some of the main features of the cultural construction of Hebrew identity as a nation-building measure. It also elaborates on the emergence of a ‘new Israel’ as an aspect of the end of the foundation phase of the Zionist revolution. Further, the article maintains that the most prominent accomplishment of the Zionist revolution has been the transformation of Zionism from ideology into a self-evident and even obvious aspect of everyday life in Israel. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Israel; Jubilee; Zionist revolution; Identity; Nation-building; Hebrew culture

[T]his country has more often been seen in a projective blur of hope, nostalgia, disappointment—or, as is likely these days, disapproval—than in the terms of its own tangled reality. (Merkin, 1998, p. 75)

This article sets out to examine the ‘tangled reality’ of contemporary Israel as a society in transition. It suggests that the ‘new Israel’ that has emerged does not reflect the end of Zionism but represents the end of the foundation phase of the Zionist revolution. Focusing on the cultural dynamics of nation-building and society-formation, it sheds light on some lesser known aspects of the Zionist revolution and the development of contemporary Jewish society in Israel. Contrary to prevalent assessments that highlight the alleged failure of contemporary Israel to fulfil the ‘original’ Zionist vision or to conform to the stringent moral norms of various Zionist utopias, this article maintains that contemporary Israel represents the ultimate success of the Zionist revolution: casting Jewish collective identity in the mold of Hebrew culture.

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PII: S0962-6298(98)00079-1
culture. It further suggests that the end of the foundation phase of the Zionist revolution paves the way for the next stage, where debating the Jewish character and identity of the Jewish state will feature prominently.

‘Indispensable miracle’

Israel is an indispensable Miracle. Its coming into being, its persistence against military, geopolitical odds, its civic achievements, defy reasoned expectation. (Steiner, 1998, p. 54)

Only five days separated two events that have had a far reaching impact on the history of the 20th century. The Winter Palace in Petrograd, Russia, was stormed on November 7th 1917, but only a few people paid attention to the fact that on November 2nd 1917 Lord Balfour, the British foreign minister, sent a letter wherein he stated that the British Empire supported a Jewish national home in Palestine. Though independent of one another, each event was an aspect of World War I. Beyond that, however, these two events were significant dates in the history of two major revolutions of the 20th century. Notwithstanding the different contexts and circumstances, both revolutions embarked upon an ambitious project of shaping a new society, encapsulated in the myths of the ‘Soviet man’ and the ‘new Jew’ respectively. Embedded into Soviet foundation myth, ‘7th November’ became the national holiday of the Soviet Union. Until the foundation of the independent State of Israel in 1948, ‘2nd November’ was celebrated as a Zionist festival by Jews in British mandate Palestine. In Zionist myth, Balfour’s letter was referred to as the ‘Balfour Declaration’. The label ‘declaration’ was loaded also because it associated the rather vague official British letter of intent with a historical precedent: the ‘Cyrus Declaration’ of the 6th century BCE which ended the Babylonian Exile and allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem and build their Temple there. In Zionist history, the Balfour Declaration marked a significant step towards fulfilling the dream about a Jewish homeland in the land of the forefathers. Palestinian Arabs have commemorated 2nd November as a day of national mourning. In a zero sum game, the gain of one side is the loss of the other.

More than 80 years after November 1917, the Soviet Union has disintegrated into its component states. ‘Soviet man’ has disappeared, together with the make-believe world of Soviet propaganda and iconography. The State of Israel recently celebrated its jubilee. Though it may be inappropriate to draw far-reaching conclusions from temporal coincidences, it seems justified to draw attention to the fact that the revolution that purported to redeem mankind failed miserably, whereas Zionism has succeeded in reformulating Jewish existence in geographical, national and cultural terms. Beyond ideological dispositions, political assessments and personal inclinations, it might be safe to say that the Zionist revolution is a key event in the history of the 20th century. Towards the 21st century, the debates that rage and will continue to
rage about Zionism pertain to a continuous assessment of an on-going project that has transformed the Zionist idea into a Zionist reality.

Zionism and its most obvious political outcome—Israel—aroused curiosity, support, fascination, aversion and hatred. Israel is not a state like any other. Anti-Zionism was a key element of Soviet ideology (though the Soviet Union supported the creation of both a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine in the crucial UN vote on 29th November 1947!). Virulent anti-Zionism is prevalent both in the rhetoric of the radical right and extreme left, as well as among Christians and Muslims. The ‘international community’ has not rendered Israel fully legitimate (even within its pre-1967 borders). Israel is the only member state of the United Nations whose national capital has never been formally recognized. The political geography of illegitimacy and non-recognition is evident on the sea-shore of Tel Aviv, where many foreign embassies are located, among them the American, British and French. And these embassies have been there from the early years of Israeli independence, long before the Occupied Territories became a major pre-occupation of the ‘international community’.

There is a fundamental distinction between places where it is good to live but are awfully dull, and places that are interesting but where life is hard. Israel, no doubt, belongs to the second category. It is a major supplier of international news. Almost every major newspaper and TV station in Europe and North America has a journalist accredited in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. Israel is a small country with a tremendous appeal to news makers; it ranks among the countries with the largest number of accredited foreign journalists: in 1992, 270 news organizations kept a permanent representation in Israel (Peretz and Doron, 1997, p. 2). Israel is an intense and intriguing place, where existential problems such as identity, history, war, and peace are constantly on the public agenda.

The existence of Israel in Palestine provokes beyond the actual dimensions of the national conflict that has raged in Palestine ever since the British Empire defined it in geographical and political terms after World War I. Moreover, as a Jewish state, Israel seems to defy many of the deep rooted images and roles of the ‘Jew’ that have become cemented in the course of European history. The central idea of Zionism concerned the ‘return’ of the Jews to their ancestral homeland. Herzl’s utopian book was entitled “Altneuland”, namely, “old–new land” (the name Tel Aviv is a poetic translation of this title). The fundamental idea of Israel is that Jews should constitute a majority. It sounds simple, perhaps even simplistic, but is quintessential. In Israel Jews are not ‘tolerated’ but asked to be tolerant of others. Debating ‘who is a Jew?’ (actually the question is ‘who decides who is a Jew’) is not a theological issue but a political matter than can (and does) topple governments. Israel is a place on the fringe of the first world which is persistently at the center of world attention. A car accident involving Jews and Arabs is featured on the global TV networks. A paradox? Not exactly. Just another feature of a place that for many is a strange, even anomalous, phenomenon that does not easily fit into conventional categorizations and contemporary (western) academic theories about states, nations and democracies.

As an aspect of the objectification of historical time, anniversaries and jubilees are laden with the magic of history. They serve as opportunities for celebrations,
but also for retrospection and (re)assessment and of course, for future projections. Israel’s Jubilee combined officially organized national celebrations and critical appraisals of the Jewish state. The officially designed slogan “together with pride, together in hope” did not appeal to the public. Those who felt proud and were hopeful did not need official affirmation; those without pride and lacking hope ridiculed the slogan as a pathetic attempt to induce optimism where none existed. If anything, the Jubilee celebrations displayed contemporary political, social and cultural faults within Israeli society, yet they also revealed Israel as a living community of consensus and conflict.

The Jubilee was the third major Zionist anniversary in a short time span. 1997 was the centenary of the first Zionist congress in Basel, after which the Zionist visionary, Theodor Herzl, proclaimed: “In Basel I founded the Jewish state”. This had been preceded by the centenary of Herzl’s book “The Jewish State”, in which the idea of (modern) Jewish statehood was first placed on the agenda of the Jewish people and the world at large. In this book the best Zionist slogan so far was invented: “If you will, it is no fairy tale”. In 1897 Herzl predicted that the Jewish state he envisioned would be established within 50 years. He was mistaken: it took 51 years before it came about.

Having been born and socialized in Israel, for me the ‘Israeli condition’ is not just an object of academic study but is also inseparable from my biography. Writing about Israel means adopting the role of participant–observer, always a difficult task. I am required to keep a distance, not because I am unconnected but in order to be able to see more accurately the entire picture (at least I would like to hope that this is so). At the same time I am fully aware that my portrayal of Israel and its development reflects my perspective which is not devoid of biases.

Any discussion of ‘Israel at 50’ can only be an interim report. In my view, contemporary Israel is the outcome of the Zionist revolution that set out to re-define and modernize Jewish collective existence in national and mainly secular terms. The Zionist revolution redefined Jewish collective identity in the territorial framework of the historical Jewish homeland (things most readers are familiar with) but also (which is less well known) in terms of the Hebrew revival. The literary critic Binyamin Harshav maintained that the Hebrew revival created a language that in turn shaped a society and, at a later stage a state (Harshav, 1990, p. 14). This is of considerable significance in evaluating contemporary Israel. The remainder of this essay presents the Zionist revolution as a nation-building process that laid the Hebrew foundations of a modern Jewish identity. It further evaluates the emergent ‘new Israel’ as representing a society at the final stages of the foundation phase of its history.

My analysis focuses on the Zionist revolution rather than on the Arab–Israeli conflict as the primary theme of modern Israel. I do not underestimate the importance

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1 The common English rendition of the German original is: “If you will it, it is no dream”. However, the German original refers specifically to a ‘fairy tale’, which is not identical to a ‘dream’, and not necessarily less poetic.
of the Jewish–Arab conflict in the formation of modern Israel. The State of Israel was born in war, and this fact is most evident in Israel’s national mythology and lore. Moreover, the Arab–Israeli conflict is omnipresent in Israel’s consciousness. Issues pertaining to security determine to a large extent the political agenda. In my view, Israel is not an aspect of the conflict; rather the conflict is an aspect of Israel. In this sense, my analysis suggests a different perspective and thematic emphases and accordingly, a different, though not necessarily alternative, version of Israel.

‘A nation like other nations’

As the ideology and movement of Jewish nationalism, Zionism is at the intersection of modern nationalism that emerged in Europe in the 19th century and Jewish history as it had been shaped in the Diaspora. Nationalism is a universal phenomenon, but its fundamental message is particularism and distinctiveness. It represents modernization and is future oriented, while emphasizing a historical or mythical national past. A fundamental question is whether nations are ‘invented’ by nationalism or exist as proto-nations before the appearance of nationalism (Armstrong, 1982; Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1986; Hroch, 1985). This notwithstanding, nationalism is about the idea of self-rule: “Nationalism is the claim that each ethnic (or religious?) group feeling itself to be a nation has the right to independent existence, ruled by its own nationals and its own laws in its own territory” (Finer, 1997, p. 1475).

Modern Zionism has sought to shape a new Jewish collective existence and to normalize the Jewish condition in terms of modern nationhood. The paradox was that the Zionist vision (however formulated) was permeated with the notion of a ‘model society’. The prominence of a vision is not surprising. Revolutionary movements need a vision that provides a picture of the future while at the same time furnishing the energy for and ascribing transcendental meanings to present activities. Labor Zionism, the dominant force in shaping the new Jewish Palestine, raised two banners: national revival and social liberation. ‘Redemption’ was defined on two planes: on a national plane, through the revival of the Jewish people in its historical homeland, and on a universal plane, through the model society that would be built by the Jewish people in its restored homeland. The conflation of these two utopias was represented in the kibbutz as the model of the new society. The kibbutzim, which even in their heydays did not comprise more than 10% of the Jewish population in Palestine, embodied the utopia and served as the dominant image of the emerging new society shaped by Zionism in Jewish Palestine.

The vision of a Jewish state as a model society already appeared in the writings of Herzl, the founding father of modern Zionism and in a different form was later embedded into the rhetoric of Labor Zionism. David Ben-Gurion, the founder of Israel, sought to “design a Hebrew nation in the homeland that will be an example and model for new and old nations”. Israel was born in the shadow of a vision. Ben-Gurion explicitly maintained that the vision was a necessary condition as “the secret of our existence, the secret of our re-birth. Where there is no vision, the people perishes”.
In Israeli folklore the ideal of ‘normalization’ is apparent in an anonymous saying that Jews will have become a nation when Jewish policemen chase Jewish thieves. Yet the fundamental Zionist ideal was about ‘normalization’ in terms of cultural and national distinction and the transformation of the Jewish people into a ‘nation like any other nation’. This involved not only political self-rule but also, and perhaps mainly, the idea of shaping a comprehensive and coherent Jewish culture independent of foreign pressures. Haim Weizman, Israel’s first president, explained: “We did not come here to copy the life of Warsaw, Pinsk, London etc. The content of Zionism is changing all values according to which Jews lived under the pressure of foreign civilizations”. In its foundation phase, Zionism did not see a contradiction between normalizing Jewish collective existence and the demand for national and cultural distinction. These were two sides of the same coin. Zionist visions demanded not only ‘normalization’ but also projected a model-society that, by definition, resists the notion of being ‘normal’. Zionism sought to create a utopia, and contemporary Israel lives in the shadow of this utopia.

Forging a new identity: the Hebraization of Israel

Nation-building is to a substantial degree a cultural-engineering process. The “nationalization of the masses” (Mosse, 1991) means constructing collective identity in terms of a shared sense of history and territorial attachment to a homeland. In order for them to be “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983), nations are experienced on the symbolic level of shared myths and rituals, while the notion of a shared culture, most notably language, reinforces both a sense of belonging and marks distinction. In the Zionist case, the cultural aspect of nation-building involved the ‘Hebraization of Israel’ which, accomplished before political independence, sought to translate modern Jewish nationhood into Hebrew.

The transformation of the ‘Land of Israel’ (Jewish Palestine) from an imagined Jewish homeland that had existed for Jews only in the Jewish liturgy and sacred texts, into an actual one, necessitated both relocation and vast settlement activity. In this sense, Zionism was unique. Another unique element of the Zionist revolution was the comprehensive cultural reinvention of Jewish identity encapsulated in the myth and image of the ‘new Jew’ that emerged in the old–new homeland. Zionism sought to ‘normalize’ collective Jewish existence in terms of a ‘return’ to the ancient homeland and to ‘an authentic’ culture. From a cultural perspective, Zionism set out to ‘nationalize’ the Jews’ by means of creating a new Jewish identity that articulated Jewish continuity in national rather than ethno-religious terms. To a substantial extent, the Zionist revolution was a cultural revolution. It sought to authenticate Jewish existence in terms of Hebrew as the idiom of national revival. The new Hebrew culture and identity that emerged in pre-state Jewish Palestine represented the attempt to replace traditional Jewish identity with a modernized version that articulated the theme of Jewish continuity in terms of restored nationhood and re-formed cultural identity.

Ernest Gellner mentioned the “Arabization” of Algiers as comparable to the “Heb-
raization of Israel” (Gellner, 1994, p.166). Gellner also rightly observed that the Irish were also less successful in their effort to recover their national language. However he failed to mention that the “Arabization of Algiers” was conducted within the political framework of an already independent state. The Zionist case was different. The ‘Hebraization’ was accomplished before Israel’s foundation. In Jewish Palestine, Hebraization created a Jewish society based upon Hebrew as the language of socialization; this society then created a state.

In 1912 a main obstacle facing Hebrew revival was an apparent lack of ‘practical’ words designating domestic objects, women’s jewelry and names of plants, flowers, animals etc. (Saulson, 1979, p. 124). Yet in 1922 the British government of Palestine recognized Hebrew as an official language, alongside English and Arabic. According to a statement from 1931, the “[R]e-establishment of Hebrew as a living and spoken language, extraordinary as it may seem, is already an indisputable fact” (Anon., 1931).

The issue of national language features in almost all nation-building procedures. According to Joshua Fishman (1972) nationalism is about ‘unity and authenticity’. This becomes especially evident when shaping the national language is promoted in the context of nation-building. The issue of language permeates both ethnic and territorial (post-colonial) nationalism. As numerous examples show, the selection and promotion of a particular language as a national language conform with the need for greater unity and authenticity as two fundamental imperatives.

As the language of the Old Testament, Hebrew presented an authentic historical-cultural Jewish option that also provided for the greatest measure of national unity, especially in the context of the diversity of languages spoken by Diaspora Jews. Hebrew was a common cultural denominator for Ashkenazi Jews who spoke Yiddish and Sephardi Jews who spoke Ladino or Arabic. Furthermore, Hebrew provided for and transmitted the secular transformation of Jewish mythology and liturgy that linked Zionism to the ancient Jewish homeland. Based and focused on language, the Hebrew revival was the principal aspect of the new Jewish identity emerging in Palestine (Even-Zohar, 1990). ‘Hebrew’ denoted not only the language itself but also its speakers and served to mark out Zionist society in British Mandate Palestine as a distinct cultural community: “Everything that was created, or everything functioned while thinking in and speaking Hebrew became itself ‘Hebrew’: ‘Hebrew’ settlement, ‘Hebrew’ economy, ‘Hebrew’ transportation, ‘Hebrew’ literature, ‘Hebrew’ education” (Schweid, 1995, p. 300). The first university founded in 1925 in Jerusalem was designated ‘the Hebrew University’. Tel Aviv, the new Jewish city founded in 1909, promoted itself as ‘the first Hebrew city’. Hebrew became the main theme of the Zionist experience. The importance assigned to Hebrew revival in Zionist consciousness was also evident in the fact that major thoroughfares in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were named after Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, who compiled the first comprehensive modern Hebrew dictionary and was celebrated as ‘renewer of the Hebrew language’.

Casting Jewish identity in a Hebrew mold was also manifest in the Hebraization of mainly European family names, which were rejected as foreign, reeking of ‘exile’ and cultural alienation (Toury, 1988). Hebraizing family names articulated the sever-
ing of the biographical, familial and communal linkages impregnated with the notion of ‘exile’. It also signified the will to assimilate into the Hebrew community emerging in Jewish Palestine. In a sense, it was also a symbolic act of individual ‘rebirth’, within the broader framework of national rebirth. Another revolution occurred in the sphere of personal names, with the emergence of a new reservoir of Hebrew names in addition to the traditional Jewish names that were increasingly perceived as ‘diasporic’ and hence inappropriate. This change represented another dimension of cultural transformation that accompanied the emergence of a distinct, native Hebrew identity.

The image of a relevant ‘other’ plays a major role in the construction of most identities. In the case of the Zionist revolution, the (most) relevant other was the galuti (exilic) Jew representing the ‘old Jew’ to be replaced by the ‘new Jew’. The ideal of the new Jew emerging in Jewish Palestine was embodied in the image of the Sabra (Kadish, 1995; for a comprehensive study see Almog, 1997). As a cultural model, the Sabra incarnated the emerging, native Hebrew identity. His mother tongue was Hebrew, he claimed the fields of the kibbutz and the dunes of Tel Aviv as the landscapes of his childhood and carried guns to protect himself. His character and habitus negated the ‘old’ Jew who lived in the ghetto and shtetl. Ironically, the representative image of the Sabra was featured in the successful Hollywood film, Exodus, where Paul Newman played Ari ben-Canaan as the quintessential Sabra and the ultimate ‘new Jew’. As the counter-model of the ‘old Jew’, the Sabra belonged to the Zionist dream of forging a new, native identity. Though operative on the level of stereotype and myth, the Sabra was the model for molding the ‘new Jew’ in stark contrast to the ‘old Jew’.

Hebrew revival was also evident in the ‘Hebraization’ of the traditional Jewish calendar. Jewish festivals and memorial days were re-interpreted in a national–secular framework. Jewish festivals such as Hanukkah and Passover were celebrated as festivals of ‘national liberation’. The traditional Jewish festivals were augmented to include Zionist memorial days commemorating major events of Zionist history. The so-called Hebrew calendar conflated the Jewish and the Zionist elements and created the notion of a coherent national history that was incorporated into the temporal rhythms of the emerging Hebrew identity. Hebrew culture also included landscape images, most prominently of agricultural communities with water towers in their midst and also entailed the recovery of places associated with ancient Jewish history such as Massada, whose myths permeated the imagination of Zionist youth and associated sites of Jewish past in the land with contemporary sights (Zerubavel, 1995; Ben-Yehuda, 1995).

Altogether, the amalgamation of Hebrew language, names, popular songs, national festivals, landscape images and a geography of historical myth produced a relatively coherent pattern of Hebrew cultural identity. A product of the Zionist revolution, the State of Israel was a ‘Hebrew state’ (a term used mainly before its foundation). The founding fathers of Israel, in particular Ben-Gurion, considered the state to be an instrument of nation-building. Accordingly, official immigration policy in the first years of the state was the notion of ‘melting pot’: recasting the new immigrants (mainly Ashkenazi Holocaust survivors and refugees from Islamic states whose num-
ber then doubled the Jewish population) in the mold of Hebrew identity. This ‘fusion of the exiles’, as the policy became officially known, sought to ‘Hebraize’ the new immigrants by unconditionally assimilating them into the already established Hebrew mold of cultural identity.

After 1948, Hebrew culture was institutionalized as the official High Culture of the state. The myth of Zionist foundation was included in the symbolic matrix of nationhood. Independence Day and Remembrance Day for fallen Israeli soldiers were institutionalized in 1949 and 1951 respectively and brought the themes of independence and sacrifice into the national calendar. Herzl was reinterred in Jerusalem in 1949, and the place, officially designated as Mount Herzl, became the national cemetery, combining a military cemetery and the burial place for national leaders (Yitzhak Rabin was buried there in 1995). A sacred geography of war memorials and military cemeteries emerged and the myth of Zionist foundation was thus inscribed in the landscape. This aspect was also important in that it integrated the Arab–Israeli conflict into Israel’s foundation myth and accordingly into important spheres of the developing Hebrew culture. It can even be argued that the ‘culture of remembrance’ that evolved in Israel, evident in a set of distinct commemorative patterns and traditions, is among the most prominent features of Israel’s Hebrew culture.

And last but not least: the Hebrew map of Israel was created in the 1950s. In 1949 a special governmental commission was set up with the aim of systematically assigning Hebrew names to landscape features (Azaryahu, forthcoming). With the exception of historical, Biblical place names and the Hebrew names given to Zionist foundations, the official map of Palestine prepared by the British Survey of Palestine in the 1940s featured Arabic as the main language of the landscape. The construction of the Hebrew map of Israel was a major measure of cultural engineering; until 1960, some 5000 new, Hebrew names were affixed. The newly designed Hebrew map integrated the language of the landscape into the sphere of Hebrew culture. The political implications of replacing Arabic with Hebrew place names notwithstanding, the success of the Hebrew map was also in that it became self-evident among Hebrew speakers. In this capacity, the Hebrew map was a crucial contribution to the formation of Israel as a Hebrew homeland.

‘The new Israel’

In an essay dealing with Israel’s Jubilee, Avrahami and Tzur (1998) diagnosed the “state of the State of Israel”. The “outstanding accomplishments of Israel” included absorbing millions of immigrants, developing a flourishing economy, science and academic research. The authors even mentioned that the fears about Israel’s existence that had prevailed in the first years of independence had given way to a (relative) sense of security. Yet the authors also noted that “Despite all these accomplishments, among wide publics there prevails a sense of dissatisfaction with the present situation and a real anxiety about the future. And this mainly because of the radical changes that are taking place in Israel and the changing character of society” (Avrahami and Tzur, 1998, p. 2). Prevalent in evaluations of contemporary Israel is a sense of pro-
found change and a fear that this change is for the worse. The view of Israeli society in crisis figures prominently in various attempts to assess contemporary Israel (see, for example, Grossman, 1998, p. 56).

It could be argued that within a decade Israel has been transformed from a mainly agrarian state to a high-tech society. This is seen in the landscape. Rural landscapes have become suburbia; office and residential towers have changed the skyline of the large cities. The media landscape has also changed. Television was introduced into Israel only in 1968, with a single public network. In 1991 cable TV was introduced, followed in 1993 by commercial TV. In the late 1980s the Israeli market was opened to imports and a process of economic liberalization was launched, culminating in the major privatization of state owned companies and services. By the mid-1990s Israel not only was negotiating with its Arab neighbors, it was also being integrated into the ‘global village’.

From the perspective of popular culture, globalization often amounts to ‘Americanization’ i.e. emulating the American way of life. In Israel Americanization had been manifest in patterns of consumption and popular culture; McDonald’s, Pizza Hut and American sitcoms have enjoyed widespread popularity. These processes of cultural change have also resulted from an improved standard of living and the emergence of a (relatively) affluent society. As a result, the middle-class, the backbone of Israeli society, has increasingly adopted markedly ‘western’ consumption, leisure and recreation patterns (Schoffmann, 1995). This change of character was not abrupt. But by the 1990s it had become apparent that a ‘new Israel’—materialistic, commercialized and affluent—had emerged, radically different from the pioneering, puritan and ascetic society that had been the dominant image of the ‘old Israel’. Tel Aviv, formerly celebrated as the ‘first Hebrew city’ had developed a new image by the 1990s as a ‘round-the-clock’ city. In a sense, this ‘new Israel’ reflects the normalizing of Israeli society, a society that is increasingly compatible with the ‘norm’ defined by contemporary western societies.

Another question is whether the emergent ‘New Israel’ indicates substantial changes of the national ethos. The common view is that a new ethos of individualism has replaced the old, ‘collectivist’ ethos that had characterized the ‘old Israel’. However, a survey of the attitudes of Israeli youth from June 1998 reveals that though professional and economic success and establishing a ‘happy family’ feature prominently among the life goals of Israeli youth, a large majority “identifies with traditional national goals and expresses willingness to contribute in realizing these goals” (Yaar et al., 1998, p. 9). Thus, over 70% of the respondents stated that Israel is the country where they would want to be born and live. Seventy six percent agreed with the contention that Israel is the safest place for Jews to live. Significantly, 83% indicated that giving the maximum during their military service was, for them, an important goal.

These attitudes notwithstanding, for some commentators, this ‘new Israel’ is a ‘post-Zionist’ society, an ambiguous term to say the least. On one level it represents the idea that the Zionist character of Israel as a Jewish nation-state should be abolished. Thus understood, post-Zionism is but an updated form of old-fashioned anti-Zionism. However, on another level the term post-Zionism describes contemporary
Israel as a post-ideological society, where traditional Zionist values have lost their appeal and validity: the ‘new Israel’ as “Zionism in the age of McDonald’s” (Sheleg, 1995).

These socio-economic developments and cultural changes seem to indicate a transition from a mobilized society engaged in nation-building to an open society engaged in negotiating its own cultural character(s) without the pressures from a hegemonic center seeking to cast society in a uniform cultural mold. It’s seems appropriate to say that this dominant collectivist ethos was not a configuration of shared attitudes but the hegemonic discourse of nation-building intolerant of dissenting voices and deviations from the norm.

The emergence of a ‘new Israel’ marks the end of the heroic phase of Zionist foundation. The ‘new Israel’ does not represent the end of (Zionist) ideology. Rather it reflects a substantial decrease in the ideological pressure commonly associated with phases of foundation. In this respect, it is the result of the routinization of the Zionist revolution. It means stabilization and development rather than decline and disintegration. The ‘new Israel’ is self-assured with regard to its Hebrew cultural foundations. The recent wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s meant a major demographic change. Significantly, most of the immigrants were not committed to Zionist ideology or to cultural integration into the dominant Hebrew culture. And yet, the creation of Russian ‘cultural enclaves’ and the blossoming of Russian newspapers in Israel have not been perceived as a threat to the cultural integrity of Israel. Things had been quite different in the 1930s or in the 1950s, when casting new immigrants in a Hebrew mold had been a high priority on the nation-building agenda.

The end of the ‘nation-building’ phase of the Zionist revolution is also evident in the emphasis on fundamental ‘cleavages’ that purport to represent the structural conflicts within Israeli society. These are usually presented in terms of left vs right (which focuses mainly on how to solve the Middle East conflict); secular vs religious; rich vs poor (the ‘social divide’); Ashkenazi vs Eastern Jews; male vs female (the gender gap)—and last but not least: Jews vs Arabs. Except for the latter, which is an aspect of the broader, Israeli–Arab conflict, other cleavages pertain mainly to Jews. But presenting Israeli society in terms of dichotomous cleavages has the advantage of simplicity. However, these divides are no more than approximations and tend toward over-simplification. Recurrent surveys show that Israeli society is a continuum and not a dipole. The emphasis on binary oppositions also ignores two very important issues: (a) The divides are partially overlapping (for example, ‘Left’ tends to be Ashkenazi, secular and more affluent), and (b) they are dynamic processes rather than static phenomena. Moreover, the significance assigned in the public consciousness to particular cleavages has changed over time. In the 1980s, many Israelis were concerned with the ‘ethnic’ (Ashkenazi–Eastern) cleavage. The survey of Israeli youth noted above reveals that whereas 44% of the Jewish respondents were concerned with the secular–religious conflict, only 5% were concerned about the ‘ethnic’ conflict between Ashkenazi and Eastern (Mizrahi) Jews.

“Social problems are fundamentally products of a process of collective definition” (Blumer, 1971, p. 298). Actually, it seems that what is commonly referred to as the
fundamental cleavages of Israeli society and their reification as scientifically objective by statistical data does also provide a social mechanism for dealing with the ‘problems’ and even for solving them. Here it is important to note that the language of cleavages and the conflicts they purport to represent has replaced the rhetoric of nation-building which had dominated in the 1950s and the 1960s, where ‘fusing the exiles’ in a uniform cultural mold was on the top of the nation-building agenda.

The end of Israel’s nation-building phase was also marked by abandoning the ‘melting pot’ policy and replacing it with the notion of a ‘mosaic’. Basically this meant that the demand for cultural uniformity gave way to the acceptance of cultural diversity. Probably the most important single element in any mosaic is the glue that holds the distinct parts together. Significantly, when the ‘mosaic’ was acknowledged as an appropriate model of contemporary Israel, the ‘glue’ had already been set—in the form of the Hebrew constitution of Israeli society and culture. Thus, even though cultural debates have seemed to feature prominently in the socio-political construction of the ‘new Israel’, these debates did not challenge its Hebrew character and identity.

The end of the foundation phase is directly linked to the decline of the political and cultural hegemony of Labor Zionism. An important aspect of this decline was the gradual transformation of a ‘serving elite’ dedicated to nation-building and identified with pioneering Zionism into a ‘self-serving elite’ committed to sustaining its social, political and economic positions of power. The hegemonic role of Labor Zionism in molding Israeli society in its first years of independence was legitimated by its association with and dedication to the foundation project. With Labor Zionism increasingly identified with positions of power and socio-economic dominance, its legitimacy to lead society and to shape it according to its professed ideological premises and cultural priorities was increasingly challenged.

Subsequently, segments of Jewish society which had previously been excluded from or marginalized in the hegemonic version of Zionist foundation increasingly participated in shaping Israel according to their particular views and concerns. This assumed the form of revivals. The national–religious sector of Zionist society had traditionally been appended to the mainly secular Labor Zionism. The empowerment of this sector was formulated in ‘neo-Zionist’ ideological terms and took the form of the settlement project initiated by national–religious visionaries and activists in the West Bank in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, the national–religious sector of Zionist society asserted itself by emulating the model of Zionist settlement which Labor Zionism had already abandoned; members of the old Labor hegemony condemned the national–religious settlement project as ‘neo-messianic’ and anachronistic. The 1980s witnessed the socio-political empowerment of the immigrants who had arrived in Israel in the 1950s from Middle Eastern countries. In this case, self-assertion was also formulated in the demand to render legitimate particularistic cultural traditions within the framework of mainstream Israeli culture. Though formulated in different ideological terms and hence seemingly unrelated, the revivals of the national–religious and eastern (Mizrahi) sectors of Jewish society were closely related to the decline of the old political and cultural hegemony of Labor Zionism.

The rising political power of religious and, in particular, ultra-orthodox (haredi)
parties represents yet another kind of revival also because of the cultural implications and the theological dimensions of the secular–religious discourse in Israel. The conflict between secular Zionism and haredi Judaism is about fundamental issues such as Jewish identity and collective redemption. Secular Zionism was an ideology of collective Jewish redemption that was formulated in national terms, whereas Jewish religious tradition defined collective redemption in messianic and eschatological terms. The conflict between these two versions of collective Jewish redemption was structured into the relations between secular Zionism and haredi Judaism (cf. Smith, 1986, pp. 204–205).

From the perspective of secular Zionism, Jewish (ultra)orthodoxy was a residue of an old Jewish world that would eventually disappear with the success of the Zionist revolution and the normalization of Jewish existence in terms of nationhood. By the 1980s it had become clear that not only had the ultra-orthodox model of Jewish identity not disappeared in Israel, but that it had even gained prominence in Israeli politics. The old tension between secular Zionism and Jewish ultra-orthodoxy resurfaced, becoming a hot spot of Israeli politics in the 1990s.

To those committed to Israel as a secular Zionist state and society, the political power gained by the ‘religious’ and especially haredi parties threatens the ‘modern’ (secular and liberal-democratic) character of Israel. Another, though implied, fear is that the alleged ‘religious’ revival challenges the Zionist revolution and the model of a modernized Jewish society that it had produced. However, beyond issues pertaining to housing for the haredi population, financial allocations to yeshiva (religious seminary) students and the issue if and to what extent Jewish Halakha (religious law) should shape public life in Israel, the issue at stake was the meaning of Israel as a Jewish state.

In one secular view, the aim of Zionism was to transform the Jew into a goy, in its meaning as both ‘a people’ and ‘a Gentile’ (cf. Schoffmann, 1995). Yet when the secular Jew was recently designated by a senior, (religious) army officer as a ‘Hebrew-speaking goy’, there was intense public debate. The remark provoked angry reactions from secular Israelis, testifying that many secular Israeli Jews, though not committed to Halakha, felt Jewish by virtue of belonging to a Hebrew-speaking national community whose calendar was Jewish-Zionist and whose history was defined in terms of continuity from Biblical times to the present. The expression ‘Hebrew-speaking goy’ was especially provocative because it juxtaposed ‘Hebrew’ and ‘Jewish’ while implying that Hebrew alone was not enough to constitute a legitimate version of Jewish identity. However, this formulation also acknowledged that Hebrew is indeed the self-evident foundation of modern Israel. Ironically, even anti-Zionist views that represent both the ultra-orthodox or ‘post-Zionist’ ideological perspectives are necessarily and self-evidently articulated in Hebrew. This is not a technicality. It demonstrates that the Zionist revolution succeeded in setting up a new Jewish agenda with Hebrew as a shared idiom and cultural expression.

‘New Israel’ has emerged following the end of the foundation phase of Zionist history. A prominent aspect of the cultural dynamics of entering a post-heroic stage of history has been the debunking of significant myths that had belonged to the foundation project and to Zionist tradition. The Sabra lost its popular appeal as the
representative image of the ‘new Jew’ emerging in the old–new homeland. Challenging the validity of contemporary relevance of celebrated Zionist myths such as settlement mythology or the myths of Tel Hai and Massada (on these myths and their transformation see Kellerman, 1996; Zerubavel, 1995; Ben-Yehuda, 1995) indicates a major socio-cultural shift. These myths were prominent as a nation-building measure in the phase of Zionist foundation and were strongly associated with the pioneering ideology of Labor Zionism. Accordingly, their systematic debunking since the 1980s evinced the decline of the foundation ethos associated with Labor Zionism.

However, deconstructing Zionist myths and challenging their historical accuracy, social relevance and moral authority was not the reason for their decline. The opposite is the case: the decline of these myths enabled and legitimated their academic debunking (though they still prevail in Israeli folklore and popular imagination both of which have hardly been touched by academic research). It may be argued that deconstructing traditional Zionist myths pertaining to the foundation era is a necessary condition for progressing beyond the foundation phase, just as removing scaffolding marks the end of construction. The decline of the kibbutz and the Histadrut (trade-union federation), institutions that were symbols of the new Jewish society that Labor Zionism sought to establish, belong to this process too.

‘New Israel’ is still in a transition period where ‘new’ and ‘old’ are invariably entwined and where old images and new realities are conflated to produce dissonance and confusion. What appears to those who adhere to old images as disintegration is actually a reconfiguration of Israeli society that has become possible as the hegemonic foundation discourse declined. Change produces a sense of disorientation, also evident in nostalgic attitudes to the past. Contemporary Israel is imbued with socially shared notions of nostalgia e.g. to the heroic era of foundation or to cultural traditions associated with various countries of origin (cf. Shapira, 1998). Some of those who adhere to the old hegemony of Labor Zionism and its claim to lead society and to represent an ‘enlightened Israel’ have yet to become accustomed to the loss of monopoly over shaping Israeli society and culture. Others have still to come to terms with a ‘new Israel’ that defies the vision of becoming a model society and seeks to be ‘normal’ in the simplest meaning of the term.

For those concerned with the ‘disintegration’ of Israeli society, ‘new Israel’ constitutes ‘variations without a unifying theme’. In reality, it seems that the notion of contemporary Israel as ‘variations on the theme of Jewish continuity’ is more accurate. The idea that Israel articulates (or should articulate) Jewish continuity is shared by the overwhelming majority of Jews in Israel, and in this sense it is the constituent theme (or myth) of Israel as a Jewish state. Of course, what ‘Jewish continuity’ actually means is open to different, sometimes conflicting, views and interpretations. However, as a shared commitment, Jewish continuity produces the foundation of collective solidarity that transcends conflictual interpretations of and disagreements about its actual meaning: the lack of consensus does not exclude the existence of a strong sense of solidarity encapsulated in the ambiguous commitment to Jewish identity and continuity.
After Zionism?

Today (Israel) looks with paradoxical satisfaction to normalcy: to the dosages of crime, corruption, political mediocrity and vulgarities of the everyday which characterizes nations and societies everywhere. Where Jeremiah thundered, there are topless bars. (Steiner, 1998, p. 54)

Paradoxically, the end of Israel’s foundation phase has been apparent in two supposedly opposite ‘messianic’ waves, each of which addressed Zionist foundation as their theme. The first wave, ‘right-wing’ in character, sought to conclude the foundation project in terms of a ‘Greater Israel’ and by returning to the Biblical landscapes of Judaea and Samaria. Strongly associated with religious notions of national redemption, it was in part motivated by a belief in the imminent implementation of a ‘divine plan’. The second, ‘left-wing’ wave, followed the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and celebrated the dawn of a new era when ‘permanent and eternal peace’ would reign. The first messianic wave was permeated with apocalyptic ideas of history, the second resonated with eschatological notions about the ‘end of history’. Despite their obvious differences, on a deeper level, these two messianic waves represented one and the same quest: to bring the Zionist project to a successful conclusion. And they coincided on November 4, 1995, when Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in Tel Aviv.

The end of the foundation phase of the Zionist project is also the end of the heroic stage of Zionism. According to Jewish wisdom, after the destruction of the Temple, the gift of prophecy was rendered to fools only. Yet it does not seem far-fetched to project that the future of Israel will be less laden with the heroic meanings attached to phases of foundation and to a mystique of national rebirth. At the same time, the impending establishment of an Arab–Palestinian entity (or state) alongside Israel in the area of historical Palestine will promote further discussion on the Jewish character of Israel. Specifically, the juxtaposition of an Arab and a Jewish state will likely direct attention to the ‘Jewishness’ of the Jewish state. This will not be limited to redefining the relations between the religious establishment and the secular state but will also address the meaning of Israel as a state and society expressing the idea of Jewish continuity. The new interest among secular Israelis in Jewish cultural tradition appears to indicate this future development (cf. Klein Halevi, 1996).

The decline of messianic and eschatological notions is a necessary condition for fulfilling the old Zionist dream about ‘normalization’. At 50, Israel is no fairy tale. The critique directed by Israelis at the ‘new Israel’ may also reflect a sense of discomfort about the fact that the ‘model society’ celebrated in numerous Zionist visions failed to materialize. For some, the ‘new Israel’ and the terms of normal existence it embodies represent a distortion of old and cherished Zionist ideals. The feeling that Israel is hopelessly fragmented also reflects nostalgia to what had become a mythical era of nation-building, when a strong sense of purpose prevailed and society was united in selfless service to the national cause. It may be true that “Fifty is a dangerous age” (Grossman, 1998); however, one should not forget that for many
Israelis, the history of Zionism and personal biography are entwined, and looking back in nostalgia or fury, as the case may be, tends to refract biographical and national accounts of the past.

On the occasion of Israel’s jubilee, the prestigious British weekly, *The Economist*, dedicated a special issue to an analysis of contemporary Israel. Significantly, the issue was entitled “After Zionism”. A different view is that on the verge of the 21st century, the Zionist revolution is a “mid-way heroic success” (Dror, 1997, p. 23). These two views are not necessarily contradictory, since both agree that Israel has changed and that contemporary Israel is beyond its foundation phase. Whether or not it means the ‘end of Zionism’ is another matter. Actually, what is commonly referred to as the end of Zionism is no more than the end of the first stage of the Zionist revolution, where the cultural and political foundations of Hebrew nationhood had been laid. Accordingly, the most prominent accomplishment the Zionist revolution has been the transformation of Zionism from ideology into a self-evident and even obvious aspect of everyday life in Israel. In the case of Zionism, the end of ideology has proven itself to be the ultimate success of the ideology.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Renate Schein, Stanley Waterman, Amnon Lord, Stephen Tree and Udi Lebel for their comments, criticisms and insights which proved essential for formulating the theses elaborated in this article.

References

See more ideas about fairy tales, fairytale illustration, illustrators. We can always count on our friends over at 50 Watts to introduce us to gorgeous vintage illustration from around the world, so it's no surprise that we stumbled over the subtext Artwork Fantasy Art Illustration Fairy Vintage Fairies Fairy Book Painting Art Art Inspiration. by H.J. Ford (1860-1940), from "The Olive Fairy Book". Fairytale Art Faeries Fantasy Art Beautiful Art Illustration Vintage Illustration Artist Art Art Inspiration. The Art of Narrative. Rie Cramer ~ The Goose Girl at the Well ~ Grimm's Fairy Tales ~ 1927 ~ via When the gray mask fell off, her golden hair brok But this isn't a fairy tale - it really exists. Where quaint meets quirky But last Tuesday there were no customers. Not one. Which led the shop to put out this forlorn tweet. Someone from California wants to donate $50 and it's just the love for books. In a shop where weird meets words, new customers have been arriving all day. Customer A second-hand bookshop, an antiquarian bookshop like this is a treasure trove of amazing things. A fairy tale, fairytale, wonder tale, magic tale, fairy story or Märchen is an instance of a folklore genre that takes the form of a short story. Such stories typically feature mythical entities such as dwarfs, dragons, elves, fairies, giants, gnomes, goblins, griffins, mermaids, talking animals, trolls, unicorns, or witches, and usually magic or enchantments. In most cultures, there is no clear line separating myth from folk or fairy tale; all these together form the literature of preliterate Display Israel/Palestine submissions. Filter Israel / Palestine. Display all submissions. Filter all dominant topics. Not more than there is fairy-tale ending in a far far away galaxy. Let us enjoy a movie for what it is: A fucking movie. permalink. I do tend to get a little excited at times, but the article is about how there are no fairy tale endings for most of India's street kids. Film has a history of being political, whether overtly or covertly. Slumdog has a theme that says, "Sure things are bad. They are beautiful fairy tales. Let kids be kids and have their childhood memories." What exactly does the Respectful Relationships curriculum teach? Students are asked to take on the role of a "fairy tale detective" and consider, for instance, what would happen if the characters swapped roles. Dr Rosewarne says no, because what we think of as "traditional" fairy tales are actually recent inventions anyway. "The fairy tales so common in storybooks and cartoons are actually already heavily sanitised versions of the stories original circulated by the Grimm brothers," she said.